

A HEAVENLY
CONFERENCE

A HEAVENLY CONFERENCE

*between Christ and Mary after his resurrection,
wherein the intimate familiarity and near relation
between Christ and a believer is discovered*

Richard Sibbes

*Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and said to him,
Rabboni; that is to say, Master. And Jesus said to her, Touch
me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my
brethren, and say to them, I ascend to my Father, and your
Father; to my God, and your God.— John 20:16, 17.*



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Foreword

ON the first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene had the first encounter with the risen Christ. They exchanged only a few words, but Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) saw in that meeting the gospel in a nutshell. For in that moment in the garden he saw how the risen Saviour deals with a believer.

A Heavenly Conference is Sibbes' exposition of both that moment and the broader truth it captures: our union with Christ. His intent was that we should enjoy the comfort that comes from knowing God as our God and Father, and knowing Christ as our brother. For, when we are united to Christ we can know we share the secure standing of our firstborn brother before God our Father. As Sibbes argues, God

can as soon cease to love his Son, as cease to love us. For with the same love he loveth all Christ mystical, head and members. There is not the least finger of Christ, the least despised member of Christ, but God looketh on him with that sweet eternal tenderness with which he looketh upon his Son, preserving the prerogative of the head. Oh, this is a sweet comfort, that now all the excellent privileges of a Christian are set on Christ and

then on us and therefore we should not lose them, for Christ will lose nothing.

A key moment in that garden-meeting is when Jesus speaks of returning ‘to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’ (John 20:17). This, Sibbes believed,

is the most fundamental comfort that we have. For from this, that God is our God, cometh all that we have that is good in nature and grace. Whatsoever is comfortable cometh from this spring, that God in Christ is our God, our reconciled God.

Without such assurance, we simply cannot live Christian lives as God would have us. God would have us thankful, cheerful, rejoicing and strong in faith: but we will be none of these things unless we are sure that God and Christ are ours for good. Here, then, are pastorally vital truths that Sibbes seeks to work into us.

But there is something about Sibbes – both here and in all his works – that goes beyond the content. Writers in his day would have called it a ‘tincture’: an atmosphere or tone about the man. For there is more to Sibbes than theological correctness or even pastoral wisdom: he exudes an irresistible delight in Christ.

That helps to explain a shrewd observation made by the authors of the original preface to this work: Sibbes, they suggest, consciously sought to undo the sort of dead orthodoxy where doctrines get treated as mere balls in a game of theological ping-pong. They called it ‘that itch of questions and disputings, like a noxious humour’, and wrote of Sibbes remedying it by captivating people ‘with

the inward beauty and glory of Christ'. That, surely, is as necessary today as ever: Christians today need not only the truth and comfort Sibbes offers here; they need his heartfelt delight so that they live for no other end than the very glory of God.

MICHAEL REEVES

Oxford

June 2015

To the Reader

The scope and business of this epistle is not so much to commend the workman—whose name is a sweet savour in the church—as to give thee a short summary-view of the generals handled in this treatise. Though much might be said of this eminent saint, if either detraction had fastened her venomous nails in his precious name, or the testimony of the subscribers of this epistle might give the book a freer admission into thy hands. This only we shall crave leave to mind the reader of, that this bright star, who sometimes with his light refreshed the souls of God's people while he shone in the horizon of our church, set, as we may say, between the evening of many shadows and the morning of a bright hoped-for Reformation; which, though it be for the present overcast, yet being so agreeable to the mind of Jesus Christ, and ushered in with the groans and prayers of so many of his saints, we doubt not but will in God's own time break forth gloriously, to the dissipating of those clouds and fogs which at the present do eclipse and darken it.

Now, as it is the wisdom of God, in bringing about his own designs, to raise up fit and suitable instruments for the work of every generation, so it is also the gracious dispensation of God to put seasonable words into the mouths of

those his servants, who by faith do fix their eyes on him for the guidance of his blessed Spirit; as every judicious reader may observe in the works of this reverend divine, who foreseeing, as it were, what a degeneracy of spirit professors¹ in his time were falling apace into, that itch of questions and disputings, like a noxious humour, beginning then to break forth among professors,² like a skilful physician, applied himself to preserve the vitals and essentials of religion, that the souls of his hearers, being captivated with the inward beauty and glory of Christ, and being led into an experimental knowledge of heavenly truths, their spirits might not evaporate and discharge themselves in endless, gainless, soul-unedifying, and conscience-perplexing questions. For as it is in nature, a man that hath tasted the sweetness of honey will not easily be persuaded that honey is bitter, but he that hath only taken it up upon credit may soon be baffled out of it, because no act can go higher than its principles; and so it is in religion. For those good souls that have embraced the truths of Jesus Christ upon a supernatural principle, and experimented not only the truth, but the goodness of them in their own souls, they are the clinched Christians, the good hold-fast men, as Mr Fox styles some Christians in his days; they are the even and steady walkers. Whereas those that have only a ‘form of godliness’ (2 Tim. 3:5), a slight tincture – who have only out of novelty and curiosity, or pride and ambition, or other self ends, professed religion – will prove giddy and unconstant, ‘like clouds carried about with every blast’

¹ That is, ‘professing Christians’. — P.

² In margin here, *Pruritus disputandi scabies ecclesiae* [The itch of disputation is the scab or tetter of the church]. — Sir H. Wotton. — G.

(Eph. 4:14), and while they promise themselves liberty, be a prey to the net of every fancy and opinion.

To the sound and practical Christian that is not queesy-stomached,¹ will the truths in this treatise be grateful. Supposing therefore and desiring, if thou art not, thou mayest be such a one, here is offered to thy consideration a divine and heavenly discourse betwixt Christ and Mary, between a soul-burdened sinner and a burden-removing Saviour.

That thou mayest here see how diligent Mary is to seek, how ready Christ is to be found. Mary hath her heart brimful of sorrow; Christ comes, as it were, 'leaping over the mountains' (Song of Sol. 2:8), with comfort and bowels² of compassion. Mary was in a strong pang of affection, nay, her affections were wound so high that her expressions seem broken; and her actions might seem to savour of irregularity, were it not that the excellency of the object did warrant the height of her affection, and the compassion of Christ was large enough, not only to interpret for the best, but also to pardon and cover all her infirmities. The woman was better at her affections than expressions. 'They have taken away my Lord.' She speaks at random, names nobody, whether Jews, or disciples, or soldiers. But see the strength of her faith. She is not ashamed to call him 'Lord', even in the lowest state of humiliation. Though Christ be reproached, persecuted, despised, rejected, dead, buried, yet he shall be Mary's Lord. Again, 'I know not where

¹ That is, 'queezy', 'squeamish', = rising on the stomach.—G.

² Used in the sense of the heart, denoting pity and tenderness (the emotions being supposed to be seated in the bowels).—P.

they have laid him.’ She dreams of a bodily asportation¹ and resting of Christ somewhere, and speaks with indignation, as if she looked upon it as an indignity or incivility, nay, of cruelty—*Saevitum est in cadavera, saevitum est in ossa, saevitum est in cineres*² (Cyprian)—of the Roman emperors’ cruelty, to remove a dead body. What was done to Christ, Mary takes it as done to her; and, good heart, she thinks she hath so much right to him, that he should not be stirred without her knowledge. And ‘I know not where’, *etc.*

Now while Mary is seeking Christ – who is never far absent from a seeking soul – he stands at her back. Christ is nearer to us many times than we think of. Sometimes a poor soul wants the sight of comfort more than matter of comfort, and is, like Hagar, weeping for water when the well is hard by. Seeking of Christ is the soul’s duty; but Christ manifesting himself is the soul’s comfort. Mary turned herself, and she saw Jesus. Gerson saith, the angels rose up at the presence of Christ, which Mary seeing, made her turn about.³ But omitting that conjecture, the original word στρεφεισθαι [*strephesthai*] is sometimes used for a turning of the face, but most frequently for a turning of the whole body. But to put it out of doubt here, it is said

¹ That is, ‘a carrying away’. Cf. Richardson, *sub voce*.—G.

² Latin: ‘An act of cruelty towards corpses, towards bones and towards ashes.’ This Father has many eloquent passages on the reverence due to the ‘body’ of the believer, as formerly a ‘temple’ of the Holy Ghost; and the present is a reminiscence of one of them.—P.

³ In margin here, ‘*Ideo conversa est quia angeli assurrexerunt presentiae Christi.*’—Gerson. Latin: ‘She turned because the angels rose at the presence of Christ.’—P.

exegetically, ἐστραφη εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω [*estraphē eis ta opiso*], ‘she turned herself back’—the same phrase the Septuagint uses of Lot’s wife looking back.¹ Many times Christ hath his face towards us, when we have our backs upon him; and therefore if thou wouldst find Christ, turn thyself to him.

Again, here thou mayest see the true Joseph. He knows Mary when she knows not him, but takes him for the gardener. Christ is always beforehand with us in his grace. He loves us before we love him, and calls us before we call him. Mary travails with desires to find Christ, and Christ is full of yearnings towards her. Like Joseph, he could restrain no longer, and because the general manifestations of Christ wrought little, he calls her by her name, ‘Mary’; and she being a sheep of Christ, ‘knows his voice’, and answers him with a title of dignity, *Rabboni*; that is to say, ‘My Master.’

We may see here that discoveries of grace are not fruitless. They stir up believers’ reverence and obedience. ‘Let us sin because grace abounds’, is the devil’s application of Christ’s doctrine (Rom. 6:1).

These and several other particulars are with much brevity, spirituality, and perspicuity handled in this treatise, and with that liveliness that they show they come from one whose own heart savoured what he taught to others. The largest part of this book is spent upon that sweet doctrine, viz., *a believer’s interest in God as a Father, and the comforts that flow from that sweet relation.* The

¹ Gen. 19:26 in the LXX is as follows: Καὶ ἐπέβλεψεν ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω [*Kai epeblepsen he gune autou eis ta opiso*] i.e., *se domum versa praeter virum suum qui subsequabatur ipsam.*—Junius in anal, in Gen.—G. Latin: ‘turning towards her home beyond her husband who was following her.’—P.

foundation of our relation to God is here handled, and how God is first a Father to Christ, and in him to us. What can be more comfortable in this earthly, interest-shaking, disjointing, confounding age, than to clear up our soul's interest in God? *Tolle meum, et tolle deum*, as he said.¹ It were better for me there were no God, than that he should not be my God. This will be thy comfort, that when thou canst not say, 'My state, my liberty, my house, my land, my friend, my trade', thou mayest be able to say, 'My Father, my God'. If therefore thou savourest the things of God, this subject will be acceptable and grateful to thee; and if this treatise may be any ways instrumental for putting thee upon study how to get it, or upon practice how to improve it, or in case thy soul sits in darkness, how to endear and clear thy interest, the publishers shall have much of their aim, and thou wilt have no cause to repent thy cost in buying, or thy pains in reading. We shall add no more than this. Blessed is that man or woman that hath an interest in him who is the Father of Jesus Christ by eternal generation, and of all believers in Christ by adoption and regeneration; in which inheritance and portion, that thou mayest have a share, shall be the prayer of

Thy soul's and thy faith's servants in the work of
the ministry for Jesus' sake,

Simon Ash
James Nalton
Joseph Church

¹ Latin: 'Take away that word *my*, and take away that word *God*.'
Qu. Bernard?—G.

A Heavenly Discourse between Christ and Mary, after His Resurrection

Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and said to him, Rabboni; that is to say, Master. And Jesus said to her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God.— John 20:16, 17.

The same love of Christ that drew him from heaven to the womb of the virgin, from the womb of the virgin to the cross, and from the cross to the grave, the same love of Christ moved him to discover himself after he was risen from the grave to them that he knew did entirely and wonderfully love him. And therefore, before he would ascend to heaven, he did vouchsafe many apparitions¹ and discoveries of himself, partly to instruct them in the certainty of his resurrection, and partly, but especially, to comfort them: those that he knew did love him.

His first apparition of all was made to Mary, the woman out of whom he had cast seven devils (Luke 8:2). She was much beholding to him, and therefore

¹ That is, ‘appearances’.—G.

loved much (Luke 7:47). No sex may discourage any sinner from Christ. She expresseth her love of Christ by her desire of finding him, by her seeking and weeping, notwithstanding all impediments, before she found him.

The ministry of angels

As she wept, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, and there saw two angels in white: a colour of glory, purity, and joy, because it was a time of joy. They were one at the head, and the other at the feet. As in the law, when the mercy-seat was made, two cherubims were also framed, and placed one at the one end, and the other at the other end thereof, with their faces looking one towards another (Exod. 25:20). And when Christ was risen, there were two angels, one at the head, another at the feet, to show that peace was to be expected in the true propitiatory, Jesus Christ.

One at the head, the other at the feet of the body of Jesus. And they sat there. It was a time of peace. Peace was made between heaven and earth, God and man; and here is a posture of peace, 'They sat quietly.' In Christ, angels and we are at one; God, and we, and all. There is a recapitulation and gathering of all things in heaven and earth (Col. 1:20).

The angels, they attended on Christ in all the passages of his life and death till they brought him to heaven.¹

¹ In margin here, 'Ministry of angels towards Christ. Luke 2:9, 10; Luke 22:43; John 12:29; Acts 1:10; Heb. 1:14; Psa. 34:7; Luke 16:22; Matt. 24:31.'—G.

They brought news of his birth, comforted him in his agony; they were at his resurrection, and you see here they attend. At his ascension they accompany him. And as they did to the Head, so they will to the members. In our infancy, they take charge of our tender years; in our dangers, they pitch their tents about us; in our deaths, they carry our souls to Abraham's bosom, a place of happiness. At our resurrection, their office is to gather our bodies together. That service and attendance they afforded the Head they afford to the members; to mystical Christ as well as natural. Therefore let us comfort ourselves in the service they did to Christ.

Now, besides the apparition of the angels, here is the speech of the angels: 'Woman, why weepest thou?' They knew she had no cause of weeping, for Christ whom she sought was risen again.

She answereth, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.' If it had been as she supposed, there had been cause enough of her weeping, if her Lord had been taken away; for when the Lord is taken away, what remaineth that is comfortable? And if the Lord be not taken away, it matters not what is taken away. For he is all in all. Carnal people, so they have their wealth, and friends, and comforts in the world, they care not what is taken away. But she is of another mind. 'They have taken away my Lord', and what comfort can I have if my Lord be taken away?

But it was but the speech of an opinion; she did but think it. And there were two things might lead her, truth

and probability, which is the foundation of opinion. *Probability*: he is not here, therefore he is taken away. *Truth*: Christ promised he would rise again, therefore he would take away himself. There was certain truth to ground faith, and weak probability to ground opinion. Yet such is the nature of weak persons in distress. If there be probability and certain truth, yet they will be sure to cleave to their probabilities. Oh, theirs be great sin! Ay, but there is greater mercy for faith to lay hold upon. So the presumptuous sinner saith, ‘God is merciful.’ Ay, but God hath excluded thee from heaven; thou art an adulterer, a swearer, a filthy person; thy opinion is grounded scarce upon probability. ‘God is merciful’, but not to such sinners as live in sins against reconciliation as thou dost (1 Cor. 6:9). Therefore, when one hath but probability to ground opinion, and the other certain truth to ground faith, be so wise for our souls as to take the best and leave the other. If she had remembered his promise to raise himself out of the grave, she needed not to have doubted.

‘They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.’ ‘*They* have taken away.’ She instanceth none. And when she had thus said, she turneth her back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. The angels hold their peace when Christ speaks, and it is their place so to do.

The apprehension of Christ

But she knew not that it was Jesus in respect of her

passion.¹ Her senses were held partly by the power of God, and partly by a kind of passion that was a cloud between her and Jesus, that she knew him not at that time.

What doth Jesus say to her?

‘Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?’ The first words that ever Christ spake after his resurrection to them he appeared to, is, ‘Woman, why weepest thou?’ It is a good question after Christ’s resurrection. What cause of weeping when Christ is risen? Our sins are forgiven, because he, our head and surety, hath suffered death for us; and if Christ be risen again, why weep we? If we be broken-hearted, humbled sinners, that have interest in his death and resurrection, we have no cause to grieve. It is therefore a good question to them that believe, ‘Why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?’ They were questions, not for satisfaction to him – he knew it well enough – but to draw out her mind, and to draw out by confession what God had hid in her heart, that he might comfort her afterwards.

‘But she, supposing him to be the gardener, said, Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me’, *etc.*

She had a misconceit of Christ, as if he had been the gardener. Beloved, so it is with a sinner, especially in times of desolation of spirit and disconsolate condition. They present Christ to themselves as an enemy. She

¹ strong feeling of sorrow or sorrowful agitation of mind.—P.

in passion thinks Christ the gardener. Do not many, when they be melancholy of body and troubled in mind, conceive of Christ as an austere judge, that will undoubtedly damn such wretches as they are, who present Christ to themselves in that fashion, that the Scripture doth not? Doth not he bid all that be weary and heavy laden come to him? (Matt. 11:28). And yet they, out of passion, will present Christ to be an austere judge, that will take them at their disadvantage, observe all their ways, and will surely damn them.

It is a great violence that passion and opinion offers to truth, and to saving truth, and the hardest matter in the world for a distressed conscience to apprehend God aright, and to apprehend Christ aright. Secure persons apprehend God under a false notion. They apprehend God as a God all of mercy, and Christ as if he were not a judge of the world; as if he observed them not, nor their sinful courses; and therefore they care not whether they serve him or no (Acts 17:31). And Satan presenteth Christ all of mercy, and Satan and their hearts meeting together, the mistake is dangerous. It is a great art of faith, and an excellent skill, to apprehend Christ suitable to our condition that we are in. When we be in any sin, then think him a judge; then think of Moses rather than of Christ; then think of Christ as one that will judge both quick and dead for their hard and wicked actions. But when we be humble and broken-hearted, and touched with sense of sin, present him as a sweet Saviour, inviting and alluring

all to come to him: 'Come to me, all ye', *etc.*, (Matt. 11:28); present him as a gentle shepherd; present him in all the sweet relations he names himself by in the Scriptures, lest otherwise we do Christ dishonour, and ourselves wrong (Isa. 40:11).

'If thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.'

She was a likely woman indeed to take Christ away; for a weak woman to take a heavy body away! But love thinks nothing impossible. Faith and love agree in this, nothing is impossible. 'Love is strong as death' (Song of Sol. 8:6). Neither love nor faith care for difficulties; they arm the soul to break through all.

'Tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.'

One would think the dead body might have frightened the woman, and the heavy body might have been above her strength. But she was in such an ecstasy of love and desire, and grief for want of desire, that she considered not well what she said.

They be words of passion; and, indeed, if you observe the story of Mary Magdalene, she was a woman of extremity in all conditions. Like Jonah, when he grieves, he grieves exceedingly; when he rejoices, his joy is wound to the highest pitch. So she was full of love when she loved, and full of grief when she grieved, and full of joy when she joyed. She had large affections. All were in the highest measure, and strained to the highest pin in her; and that made her say, 'If thou hast', *etc.*

One word from Christ; one word from Mary

Jesus could not endure [to keep] her longer in this perplexed condition. He was too merciful; and therefore saith, 'Mary'. She turned to him, and saith, 'Rabboni', which is to say, Master.

And Jesus said to her, 'Mary'.

The words are a sweet and loving intercourse between Christ and Mary. In a seasonable time, when she was in all her perplexity and depth of sorrow for loss of her Lord, Christ seasonably at length, as not being able to hold any longer, but must needs discover himself, saith to her, 'Mary'.

You see, first of all, Christ beginneth, and saith, 'Mary'; she answereth, in the second place, and saith, 'Rabboni'; and till Christ begins, no voice in the world can do any good. The angels they spake to her, but till Christ spake nothing could comfort her. Christ began, and till Christ began nothing would comfort Mary. Christ began himself, and used but one word. It is a word, and but one word. Nothing will comfort but the word of Christ. The word that comforted her when he spake, and it was but one word, and yet enough, there was such fulness of spirit and comfort in that one word. And she answereth with one word again.

You may ask why they spake but one word. Beloved, he was full of affection, and she was full of affection also, too full to express themselves in many words. As it is in grief, grief sometimes may be so great that scarce any words are able to express it: *ingentes dolores*

stupent;¹ and if any words, then broken words, which show fulness of affection rather than any distinct sense. Christ was so full, and she so full, that a word discovers. And indeed there was so much sense, and so much love, so much contained in these little words ‘Mary’ and ‘Rabboni’, that it is impossible to express them shorter; and her passion would not stay any longer discourse. It was by words, and by one word, ‘Mary’. It was by a word which showeth he took notice of her. Christ knows the names of the stars; he knows everything by name. He knows everything of a man, to the very hair. He knows their parts, and their very excrements² of their parts. He knew her, and acknowledged her too: ‘Mary’.

1. It is a word of knowledge, and familiar acquaintance, and acknowledgment.

2. It is a word of compassion; because he had held her long, and now could not longer. He pitieth the state she was in. He saw her ready to sink for grief and melt for sorrow, and therefore he said, ‘Mary’.

3. As it is a word of compassion, so it is a word full of exceeding love.

4. And it is a word of peculiar appropriation, ‘Mary’, whom I have so much respected heretofore. And a word of satisfaction on his part, out of his pity, and out of his love, and former familiarity and acquaintance. ‘Mary’, I am the man that thou seekest;

¹ Latin: ‘great griefs stupefy.’—P.

² *i.e.*, outgrowths, *e.g.*, the hairs that grow out of one’s head.—P.

I know what all thy seekings tend to. Thou wantest him whom thou lovest; thou wantest me; I am he whom thou seekest.

She answered him again, 'Rabboni', which is interpreted, Master. She returned him an answer again; she spake to him. He first began, then she follows. She found the virtue of his speech in her heart. There was an influence of it to her heart; and his love witnessing to her heart, raised her love to him again. So it was an answer of Christ's speech, and from the same affection: an answer of love, and an answer of exceeding large affection and satisfaction to her soul. O my 'Rabboni', the soul of my soul, the life of my life, my joy, my rock, my all that can be dear to me. 'Rabboni', I have enough. As he desired to give her satisfaction, so she takes satisfaction in the word. And yet it was not full satisfaction; for after she clasps about him, and would not let him go. It was an affection that stirred up much desire more and more to have communion with him, so that he was fain to check her afterward: 'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father.' She had not enough; as indeed a believing, affectionate soul hath never enough till it be in heaven.

And thus you see the sweet intercourse upon the apparition and first discovery of Christ to Mary. He spake to her, and she answered him again with the same affection. And it is a word of dependence, as it is fit, 'Rabboni, my Master'. It is not only a word of honour, not any superior, but a superior in way of teaching.

There was submission of conscience to the ‘Rabboni’, as the ‘Rabboni’, labouring to sit in the consciences of people. It is a Syriac word, which signifieth in the original, ‘multiplication of knowledge’ in him that speaketh, and that laboureth to breed much knowledge in him that is spoken to; and therefore it is a word of great respect and dependence.¹

She might well call him ‘Rabboni’, for he was ‘Master of masters’, ‘Rabboni of rabbonis’, the angel of the covenant, the great doctor of the church, the great ‘Gamaliel’, at whose feet all must sit and be taught. So you see what sense and affections are in these little words. The fulness of heart that was in this couple cannot be expressed, were it possible to say all that could be said.

Application

And therefore we leave the hypothesis, and come to make application of it to ourselves.

Obs. 1. First, *We may learn here, that till Christ himself discovers himself, no teaching will serve the turn.* No. The teaching of angels will not serve the turn, till Christ himself by his Holy Spirit discovers himself. When Christ doth it, it is done. And therefore it should teach us so to attend upon the ministry as to look up to the great doctor that hath his chair in heaven, and

¹ By Syriac, Sibbes means Hebrew, a common use of the term by him and his contemporaries.—G.

teacheth the heart.¹ If he teach, it is no matter how dull the scholar is. He is able to make any scholar, if he instruct. I will not enlarge the point, because there be particular places wherein they will be enlarged.

Obs. 2. The second thing I will observe is this, *that Christ, when he teacheth, he doth it by words, not by crucifixes, not by sights.* We lost our salvation and all our happiness by the ear, and we must come to it by the ear again. Adam, by hearkening to Eve, and Eve to the serpent, lost all; and we must recover salvation therefore by the ear. As we have heard, so we shall see. We must first hear, and then see. Life cometh in at the ear as well as death. Faith, you know, is the quickening of a Christian, the spiritual life of a Christian. Now, faith comes by hearing; and therefore I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, set aside prejudice, and meekly attend God's ordinances. Do not consider who we are; we are but poor ministers, frail men as yourselves. But consider the Lord, that is pleased to convey life, and salvation, and grace, and whatsoever is fit to bring to heaven, this way. Therefore they that despise this way, set light by salvation; as the apostle saith (Acts 13:46), 'They judge themselves unworthy of the kingdom of heaven.' They can read at home, but is that the way God hath sanctified? Did not the manna stink when

¹ In margin here, '*Cathedram habet in cælis qui corda docet,*'—G. Latin: 'He has his pulpit in heaven who teaches the heart.'—P.

gathered on the Sabbath day? There is a curse upon all private industry and devotion when it is with neglect of public ordinances. She could have no comfort till Christ spake. Nay, the very sight of Christ could not comfort her. Let this, I pray you, be enough, that I may not enlarge the point any further. This is the way for comfort. We must hear him in his ministers here, if we will hear him comfortably speaking to us hereafter, ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father’, *etc.* (Matt. 25:34).

Obs. 3. It was but one word, ‘Mary’; and is there so much force in one word? Yea, when it is uttered by Christ. One word coming from Christ, and set on the heart by the Spirit of Christ, hath a mighty efficacy. The word hath an efficacy in creating all things, *fiat, fuit*. Let it be done: it was done; ‘Let there be light: there was light.’ So let there be light in the understanding, and there it shall be presently. So in all Christ’s cures, he said the word, and it was done. So in all spiritual cures, let him say the word, it is done. Nay, a very look of Christ, if the Spirit go along with it, is able to convert the soul. *Respexit Christus, flevit Petrus amarè*: Christ looked on Peter, he wept bitterly. What will his word do, when his look will do so much? It was but a word, and but one word: ‘Say but the word’, saith he in the gospel, ‘and my servant shall be healed’ (Matt. 8:8). This should make us desire that Christ would speak though but few words to the soul; that he would clothe the words of men mightily with his word and with his

Spirit; and then they will be mighty in operation and works. One word, but it was a pregnant word. It was full of affection. She knew it well enough: ‘Mary’. What! to call her so familiarly, so sweetly, by her accustomed name? It wrought on her bowels¹ presently.

Obs. 4. But to go on. You see here again, *that Christ must begin to us before we can answer him*. He began to ‘Mary’, and then she said ‘Rabboni’. All the passages of salvation are done by way of covenant, by way of commerce and intercourse between God and man, but God begins first. In election, indeed, we choose him; but he chooseth us first. And he knoweth who are his, and we know him; but he knows us first. And in calling, we answer, Ay; but he calleth first, and we do but echo to his call. In justification, forgiveness of sins, we accept of justification, and submit to the righteousness of Christ, and God’s purpose of saving man that way; but he giveth faith first, for faith is the gift of God. We glorify him here on earth, but it is from a result of God’s glorifying us in heaven. Some earnest² we have, but they are of God’s giving. All we do is but reflection of his love first, or his knowledge first.

The Christian soul saith, ‘Thou art my God’; ay, but he saith first, ‘I am thy salvation’ (Psa. 35:3). As Augustine saith, *Non frustra dicit anima, Deus salus tua*:³

¹ on her heart, or emotions.—P.

² Earnests: payments given in token of an agreement or covenant.—P.

³ Latin: ‘The soul is not wasting its time when it says, “God,

when God saith, 'I am thy salvation', it is easy for the soul to say, 'Thou art my God'. And this may teach us in our devotions, when we are to deal with God, when we are to bring to him any request, to desire him first to reveal himself to us, desire Christ to reveal himself by his Spirit to us. It is an error in the case of men's devotions. They think to bring something of their own strength, and to break in, as it were, upon God, without his discovery first. But Paul saith (Gal. 4:9), 'We know God, or rather, are known of him.' We must desire that he would make known his heart to us first, and then we shall know him again; that he would speak to us by his Spirit, and then we shall answer to him again. That he would say to our souls, he 'is our salvation'; and then we may lay claim to him, 'he is our God'. Desire the 'Spirit of revelation', to reveal his bowels and love to us in Christ by his Holy Spirit; for certainly, in every return of ours to Christ, God begins to us, all in all, though not sensibly. But we ought to pray, every day more and more, for a sensible¹ revelation, that God would reveal his love to us in Christ. And we cannot but answer. If Christ saith, 'Mary', Mary cannot but answer, 'Rabboni'.

Obj. But you will say then, It is not our fault, but Christ's fault, if he must begin. If God begins, we shall answer.

you are my salvation."—P.

¹ *i.e.*, a revelation perceived or felt by the senses.—P.

Ans. I answer briefly, that God doth always begin to us, and is beforehand with us in all dealings with ourselves. He giveth us many motions, and never withdraweth himself from us, but when he is despised and slighted first; therefore, let us take heed that we labour to answer Christ's call when he doth call. If we slight it, then in a judicious¹ course he ceaseth to speak further to us, if we slight his beginnings of revelations. There be many degrees and passages to faith and assurance. If we do not observe the beginning, how God begins to reveal himself to us by little and little, speaking to us by his Spirit in our hearts when he begins, then in a spiritual judgment sometimes he leaves us to ourselves. And therefore let us regard all the motions of the Spirit, and all the speeches of the Spirit of Christ, for he begins by little and little, else our consciences will say afterward, we are not saved, because we would not be saved. We would not yield to all the passages of salvation; but when he was beforehand with us, and offered many sweet motions, yet we loved our sins better than our souls, and so repelled all. Therefore, I beseech you, do not refuse the sweet messages from heaven, the gracious and sweet motions of the Spirit of Christ.² Make much of them. God hath begun to you, be sure to answer. Learn it of Mary. When Christ began, she set not her heart and infidelity against it,

¹ Qu. 'judicial'?—G.

² In margin here, '*Alloquenti Christo fideles respondent.*'—G. Latin: 'When Christ speaks the believers respond.'—P.

but she opened her heart, and said, ‘Rabboni’; learn, therefore, the duty of spiritual obedience. When God speaks, ‘Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth’ (1 Sam. 3:10). Do not shut your ears to the motions of God’s blessed Spirit; do not harden your hearts against his voice, but open your hearts as she did: ‘Rabboni’.

Our Saviour Christ here saith, ‘Mary’; but when? After he had concealed himself from her a long time. It is not presently ‘Mary’, nor ‘Rabboni’. He had concealed himself a great while. Christ doth not usually open himself fully at first, though at first he doth in some degree; but he observeth degrees, as in the church in general. You see how that he discovers himself in his gracious promises by little and little; darkly at first, and at last the Sun of righteousness ariseth clearly. So the day-star ariseth in our hearts by degrees. It is a great while before Mary heareth the satisfying speech of Christ, ‘Mary.’

Quest. But why doth Christ thus conceal himself in regard of his fuller manifestation?

It is partly to try and exercise our faith and other graces; and therefore God doth seem to withdraw himself in the sense of his love.

1. *To see whether we can live by faith*, or whether we be altogether addicted to sense, as the world is, who live altogether by sense, and not by faith.

2. *He would have our patience tried to the utmost*. He would have ‘patience have its perfect work’ (James 1:4).

She had much patience to endure all this. But her patience had not a perfect work till Christ spake.

3. *Christ will stir up and quicken zeal and fervency in his children;* and therefore he seemed to deny the woman of Canaan (Matt. 15:21, *seq.*, and Mark 7:27, 28); first, he giveth no answer but an harsh answer, ‘A dog’. And she works upon it: ‘Though I am a dog, yet dogs have crumbs.’ All which denial was only to stir up zeal and earnestness. And therefore though Christ doth not manifest himself to us at first, yet it is to stir up zeal and affection to seek after him more earnestly. A notable passage there is of this (Song of Sol. 3:1-4). The soul sought Christ, and sought long, and sought in the use of all means; but at length she waited, and in waiting she found him.

4. *Christ doth this to set a better price upon his presence when he comes;* to make his presence highly valued when he doth discover himself. *Desiderata diu magis placent:* things long desired please more sweetly. And things, when wanted, are ingratiated to us, as warmth after cold, and meat after hunger; and so in every particular of this life. And therefore God, to set a greater price on his presence, and that he would be held more strongly when he doth reveal himself, he defers a long time. That is one reason why he did defer revealing himself to Mary, that she might have the more sweet contentment in him when he did reveal himself, as indeed she had. Long deferring of a thing doth but enlarge the soul. Want enlargeth the desire and capacity

of the soul, so doth love. Now, when we want that we love, that emptieth the soul marvellously much; it mortifieth affection. When God keeps off a long time, and we see it is God only must do it, then the affection is taken off from earthly things, and the heart enlarged to God by love, and the want of the thing we love. And therefore we set a price on the thing, so that we are wonderfully pleasing to God. It is very beneficial to ourselves. What lost Mary by it? So shall we lose nothing. We have it at last more abundantly. We have it as a mighty favour. Mary taketh this as a new blessing altogether. When things are kept long from us, and God only must discover, when the heart is kept from second causes, the heart is enlarged. Certainly this comes from God, and God should have all the glory of it. God is wise; and therefore makes us to stay a long time for that we do desire.

Communion with Christ

We all of us are in Mary's case in a spiritual sense. Sometimes or other we miss Christ, I mean the sweet sense of Christ. Lay this down for a rule, that Christians ought to walk in sweet communion with God and Christ, and that it ought to be the life of a Christian to maintain the communion that Christ hath vouchsafed between us and himself. Then, certainly, we lose Christ wonderfully; and not against our minds, but willingly, by our own slighting of him, and by our own undervaluing of him, or by our negligence or presumption.

Christ, though he be low, yet he is great, and he will have us to know his greatness. There must be communion with due respect. One way or other we deprive ourselves of the sense and sweetness of communion with Christ. What must we do, then? We must do as the woman did: turn over every stone; use all kind of means; leave not one till we find him; and when all means are used, wait still. Persevere in waiting, as Peter speaks. Believers, wait; hold out in waiting, for Christ in his time will come. He cannot hold long. As Joseph did suppress his love and affection for politic ends a great while (Gen. 45:3), but his pity towards his brethren was such that his bowels would not suffer him to conceal himself longer; his passion was above his policy: 'I am Joseph.' And so let us in the use of all things seek Christ and the sweet sense of his love, which is better than life itself. And, indeed, what is all without Christ? Christ is so full of compassion, he will not long suffer us to be prolonged, but will at length satisfy the hungry soul (Psa. 63:5). How many promises have we to this end!

Beware of apathy

Take heed of such a temper of soul, as cares not whether we find Christ or no. Oh take heed of that! If we will seek him, seek him as Mary. She sought him early in the morning; she brake her sleep and sought him with tears. If anything be to be sought with tears, it is Christ and communion with him. She sought him instantly and constantly. She sought him so, that no