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SERMON BY ELDER J. MCKIERNAN,

At Logan, Iowa, October 10, 1892.

Subject, GOD MANIFEST IN THE FLESH.

IN Paul's First Epistle to Timothy will be found the basis of our remarks this afternoon. I do not take this text with the expectation of confining myself to and sermonizing from it, but simply as a starting point for what I may be able to say. In 1 Timothy 3:16 the apostle makes this statement: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." We shall call your attention more particularly to the statement, "God was manifest in the flesh." As it would be impossible for us, in the time at our disposal, to take up all these various mysteries named by the apostle, it will be sufficient for us to give our attention to this one, "God manifest in the flesh." The word "mystery" does not necessarily mean something inexplicable or unknowable, but something hitherto concealed; and if we in the investigation of this mystery of godliness shall be enabled to simplify and bring to your attention some of its features that you may better understand it, we shall have fully accomplished all that we expect upon the present occasion.

I know not better how to simplify this question of God manifest in the flesh and the necessities for such manifestation than to personify and present myself as a representative of the human race. Finding ourselves placed in this world subject to trials and disappointments, and death manifested to us on every hand, and the fact that the human race is not what we think it ought to be, we look about us to discover some reason why humanity does not come up to our ideal of perfection, to

our conception of what humanity should be. As has been said by many of the speakers who have preceded me, we discover that the human race in its entirety is not in that perfect condition that our knowledge of what humanity should be leads us to expect of it. We look about us for answer to this concealed problem as to why we are thus sinful in our nature, in our dispositions, in our practices; and when we come to consider the gospel of Christ we wonder why it was necessary that God should be manifest in the flesh in order to our redemption.

We seek answer to this question from whatever source we may, and are eventually driven back upon ourselves and to the conclusion, that though we delve in the depths of the earth and search out the geological reasons for man's being, we are returned back to ourselves with our minds unsatisfied with the answer it brings; or if with telescope of most powerful lens we search the ethereal depths of the heavens and read the most distant stars, we still mentally return to this mundane sphere with the longings of our souls unsatisfied. If we turn to human experience and ask of our fellow mortals and ourselves why it is that we are living in as gross darkness relative to our being as we were when we started in the search, we receive for answer uncertainty only. Then when in all the realms of nature surrounding us we fail to find answer to these questions, we turn back to that which comes to us claiming to be the word of God, as the only adequate authority to which we may appeal that shall answer these questions that arise in our minds and hearts; and we turn to the first page of that record and find there set before

us: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and all things that in them are.

We read along until we come to the creation of man, and there is solved for us the problem of our origin. We further read the page and there discover that man, though created holy, and pure, and perfect before God, does not retain his state and standing before him for any great length of time. There appears upon the arena another personage who comes and says to him, "Obey me." He tells him of these things that God has commanded him not to do that he should do them; and as it is written, "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," he says, "thou shalt not surely die." Man has here placed before him life and death, light and darkness, right and wrong, with the privilege of choosing between these extremes. In an evil hour I put forth my hand and partake of that of which God has said I should not, and as a consequence sin enters into my being and into this world of ours. The Omnipotent has given unto me this law, and I have chosen to disobey it. Now as I find myself thus, a transgressor in the sight of God, I become ashamed of myself and seek to hide from his face; but God in his unsearchable wisdom, in his knowledge of all things that are, with his all-seeing eyes searches me out; and with guilt upon my conscience, with a stain upon my soul, I desire not to meet with him as I had formerly done. This evidence of my guilt is indisputable. We at once discover that the fact of guilt so works upon the conscience of humanity that they are conscious of the fact and know that they have been guilty of doing that that was not right in the sight of God.

Finding myself in this condition I cast about me for a remedy as I discover that I am undone. I am lost; the sentence of death has been passed upon me; I await the execution of that sentence.

The question with me now is, How shall I redeem myself from the effects of the transgression I have committed? I look about me. Here is the world that God has given into my possession and commanded me that I should subdue and replenish it; but in an evil hour I have given over my dominion to this personage who has appeared and who has deceived the human race in this early period of its history; for it is written, that "To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." I have yielded myself a servant of sin. I desire to be reinstated in the presence of my Father and my God, and in casting about me for a ransom I look upon this earth that God at one time gave to me as my possession and inheritance, and I think, "I will bring all of this that God has given me and will lay it at the feet of the throne of mercy and ask God to take that as a ransom for my soul and my transgressions against him." Ah, I think again upon this matter. This is God's by creation; it is his by proprietary right and not mine to give; consequently I am thrown back again upon my own resources, and I must seek for another means to appease the wrath of God and furnish a ransom for my soul. I look upon the fruits of the field and desire to bring them as a peace offering before my God to recompense and reconcile me to him, but again, these are those things that are equally his by right of creation, and all that I can see around me is God's; so I cannot find a ransom for myself in the vegetable world.

Then I look to the animal creation as being next in standing before God, next in standing to man; and I think I can bring some of the animal creation and present to him and that will appease his wrath and displeasure upon me in consequence of my transgression; but ah! here the same difficulty confronts me that I

have before met at every hand, and I must conclude that none of these are adequate as a sacrifice to place me aright before my heavenly Father and to make propitiation for my sins; so last of all I think upon myself and say, I will give myself to God and give my service to him throughout the residue of my days, I will devote my life to his service, and this certainly will appease the anger of God and bring me to proper condition and standing before him. But again as I reason upon these things and think, Will this answer the demands of divine justice? I am forced to the conclusion that I robbed God of his heritage in me when I transgressed his laws; I have taken from him and delivered over to Satan that which properly belonged to his service from the earliest period of my creation down to the present time, and by this transgression I have taken from God that which rightly belonged unto him, and consequently I cannot even bring myself as a ransom though I should give to him all my service from that on; there remains against me that uncanceled debt to God for my former transgressions.

Then with this condition of things confronting me, what is to be done under the circumstances? We find ourselves helpless, undone, completely at the mercy of God, with no eye to pity and no arm to save. But blessed be the Lord, that God so loved us when we were in this condition that he laid help upon one who was strong to deliver and mighty to save. That one is the one who is revealed to us in the Bible as God manifest in the flesh. We discover there something of the reason why it was necessary that God should be manifest in the flesh for the redemption of the human family. The offering that must come as a ransom must be one that has never taken part in this transgression, in this fall, in this degradation to which the human race has been reduced; one who owed allegiance to no other forces or power in the universe than God himself; one who had stood ever pure, righteous, and holy before him.

Now let us look where we will, search where we may for an offering of this character, one that is commensurate with the demands of infinite justice, that is able to make propitiation for the sins of the human family; and nowhere in all

the vast creations of God can we find such a ransom for the human race aside from God's dear Son, one who was from the bosom of God; he that is the ransom of the race, not only a ransom for the sins that are past, but a strength for the present, a surety for the future. Then may we lift up our heads and rejoice in the fact that God was manifest in the flesh, in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for us that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. Then as we glance over these facts of the past and hurriedly pass along over these mighty problems that have required the inspiration of God to work out, and to which human reason was inadequate, we discover that in the very organization of our being there arises the necessity, the absolute necessity, for just such a sacrifice for the salvation of the human race, because the sins of the past can never be obliterated by human sacrifice nor by anything that we may bring to God as a ransom for our trespasses.

Now that Jesus Christ is manifest in the flesh, "God manifest in the flesh," it is necessary that he shall give to the human race knowledge and understanding of this plan of salvation that he has wrought out for them, because if mankind is ignorant of the fact that Jesus has wrought out a plan of salvation for them, that plan will be inoperative, so far as they are individually concerned, it will be of no benefit, but the knowledge of it must be brought to the human race. How has he designated that this is to be brought? By the preaching of the word. But we are told that the preaching of this word simply requires belief upon our part, and that we are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves, but it is the gift of God. Ah, how much of force and truthfulness there is in this quotation of Scripture when it is properly understood and properly applied! We may see with this understanding of the word of God how it is that the plan of salvation is by grace, and that the apostle may truthfully say, "By grace are ye saved." Under what obligation was God to offer a ransom for me when I had transgressed his laws? You can see at once that so far as obligation was concerned, God was not by any means bound to offer a ransom for me, but in accordance with his own good pleasure, through

his great grace or favor, he did this work for me; hence it may thus be truthfully stated that it was not by works of righteousness which we have done, that back there it was all free grace. And here, I think, is where many err in their interpretation of Scripture relative to grace; they make that grace apply down here to you and me in our obedience to the gospel of God's dear Son, when that grace applies away back where we first trespassed against the laws of God, and he gives us of his own free grace this gospel of his, by which, through obedience to its principles, we may be saved in his kingdom. And so it may be said also truthfully, that we are saved by hope, as the apostle declares in the eighth chapter of Romans.

Now we can return here to ourselves with this understanding as to why it was needful that God should be manifest in the flesh, believed on in the world; why we must believe on this offering that he has made. And the very fact of our claiming this belief makes it obligatory upon us to observe the things that he has commanded. In regard to the sacrifice that he made in manifesting himself in the flesh to the human race, whatever God has spoken to us through Jesus Christ, "God manifest in the flesh," is the same to you and me as though God himself had said it, when he introduced the plan of redemption, as he certainly had a perfect right to do; and it is not for you or me to ask why he could not have instituted some other measures or some other plan of salvation that would be more easily accomplished than the one recorded in the gospel. We might pertinently ask the question, Why is not this plan as feasible, as practical, as divine as any plan that might be instituted by high heaven? I imagine I perceive some thinking that this is all *imputed* righteousness that comes to us in the gospel, and that therefore there is nothing required at the hands of the human family in order to attain unto this salvation. But how is it imputed unto us for righteousness? How frequently are we cited to the instance of Abraham that he believed God and it was accounted unto him for righteousness. We have no objections whatever to that statement of the word of God, but if you will read the statements made in the history of God's dealings with Abraham (Gen. 26:5), you

will discover that Abraham had a commandment from God, that he had ordinances, statutes, and law from God, and that it was said of him that he would command his children after him. Now bear in mind this was before he offered up his Son Isaac as a sacrifice upon the altar, and before circumcision was introduced, and he moved forward in the keeping of these commandments of God. It was because of the commandments that he had received from God that he went forward and did the things that God commanded him, and in the doing of all these things his belief in God was accounted unto him for righteousness. The same is applicable to you and me to-day. If we move forward in doing the commandments of God and the ordinances of God up to the full surrender of ourselves and all that we have in this life to his service because we believe in God, it will be accounted unto us for righteousness upon the same principle.

And so there are requirements in the gospel of Jesus Christ that demand our obedience. Persons sometimes question why it should be done in this manner. It seems to me it is the most reasonable, the most in accord with the wants of the human family and the interests of the race of any plan that human ingenuity, at least, by any possibility, could devise. Why? Because though it finds man a sinner in the sight of God; it offers to each that which shall remove sin from him, just what he stands in need of. It comes to him and says that he must repent of his sins; that is just what every one recognizes that the human family needs when we look at it simply from a human point of view. It comes to him with the promise, that after repenting of his sins and having those sins pardoned, he may have power given him to overcome that which tends to evil which remains inherited by man, and that power he receives through the Holy Spirit of God which is promised to those who yield obedience to the gospel. We find a necessity for this in the very constitution and disposition of the human race.

Again, man looks about him and discovers that a person's life is not satisfactory to the longings of his being, not satisfactory to the aspirations of his soul; that it is a disappointment to him from beginning to end so far as his ideal of human perfec-

tion is concerned; and so far as man's intellectual capacities for advancement extend, he discovers that this world is seemingly but the primary department in advancement, to which man here enters, and that from the very necessities of his being, there must be a life beyond of eternal advancement and improvement for him in order that he may but reach only the human ideal of perfection. Recognizing this faculty in the human soul, the gospel comes to us and holds out to the human family the promise of that very condition and state of existence that the soul hungers and thirsts after, hence when we look at this plan of salvation that God has revealed unto us in his word, in the fact of "God manifest in the flesh" in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, it seems to us to come forth in the utmost degree of harmony that we could desire, offering to the human race all that its utmost expectations may demand, all that its highest aspirations may reach after, all that the necessities of being seem to render desirable at the period of mortal existence.

Then as we glance over these various features of the gospel of Christ and see, as these brethren have laid before you from time to time, the fundamental principles of that gospel of Christ, and that the necessities for it are inwrought into the very soul and nature of man, can we not see that God in his infinite wisdom and mercy has revealed to us just such a plan as we need? As we have been told that Jesus Christ has paid a debt for the human family, and as we so frequently hear it sung, "Jesus paid it all," we are sometimes led to ask the question, What *all* did he pay? He only paid that "all" that man himself could not pay; and when we have relegated the question of man's salvation back on to imputed righteousness—Jesus Christ doing for us that which we could not do for ourselves—we have but worked out that which is in perfect harmony the other works that God has instituted in the gospel. Now let us see. I ask, Is there anything of absolute righteousness in and of itself contained in our believing in God? Why, that is our bounden duty to do; we ought to have done that if sin had never entered into the world; consequently there is nothing of absolute righteousness in that in and of itself. We ask, Is there not absolute righteousness in our repenting of

our sins? It is right for us to repent, but take repentance in and of itself and is there anything of a righteous nature in that in and of itself, if we would stop sinning right now, aside from its being a commandment of God? No, it would leave us just where it found us. We inquire relative to baptism for the remission of sins, Is there absolute righteousness in the performance of that act, aside from its being a commandment of God? We see there is no merit in that act of itself to attach to the individual whatever; and so we may go through the "laying on of hands" and all that man can do in the gospel, and yet when it is all taken together there is no righteousness in it in the absolute sense of the term. Then what is it? Why, God has revealed that he accepts of that which we can do as proxy for that which we cannot do, just as he accepts the offering of Christ that we could not by any possibility make for ourselves; he accepts of that offering as a proxy for us, and then gives to us the gospel, that which we can do, in place of that which we could not do by any other possibility, and imputes it unto us for righteousness.

Then we discover that in the revelation of God to us in his word and in the gospel that he has so simplified the plan of redemption and the mysteries of godliness that we can solve the problem of eternal life for ourselves and work it out in accordance with the revealments made unto us in God's word; hence it is that in revealing to us the gospel of his dear Son he has supplied all the wants of our being, or given unto us the means by which these wants may be supplied in his own way. The duty that devolves upon you and me to-day is that we shall accept of and obey the commandments of God that he has given in the gospel of Christ as implicitly as we in looking over the vista of the past years think that our forefather, Adam, should have obeyed God in the garden of Eden and have refrained from partaking of the forbidden fruit. All outside of or not in harmony with the gospel of Christ is forbidden fruit to you and me; all within the gospel of Christ is the tree of life to you and me. Now which of these privileges shall we lay hold upon? Shall we partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as it stands outside of the gospel of Christ, or shall we lay hold upon the fruits of

eternal life that are within the pales of the gospel, and live by it? We read that we should live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then, whatsoever we find commanded us of God in the gospel is just as obligatory upon us to-day as was the observance of the commandment given of God to our forefather in the garden of Eden. Then let us as we search after the thoughts that

he may give us relative to the mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh," try to discover in his teachings all our duties as revealed in the word; ask for grace and strength to comply with them, and so live that we may have the power of God and his Spirit to attend us, and his peace to be with us to help us to appreciate the great offering of salvation he has given.

Reported by Belle B. Robinson.

THE CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Condensed for the Literary Digest from a paper in London Quarterly Review, July.

NO QUESTIONS are more keenly debated in England to-day than those which relate to the literary genesis and historical transmission of the books of the Old Testament. The scientific determination of the controversies that have arisen will require the continued and most strenuous effort of perhaps generations of scholars. The accumulating volume of monumental testimony in the history of Egypt, Assyria, and Palestine has been only partially deciphered; the multiplied studies of the philologist must be extended in order to be simplified; and various enlargements of the critical apparatus which seem to have no end can only delay the final result. At the present moment the historical character and substantial truth of the sacred records are not in danger. Suspense respecting details, however important, may have some inconveniences; but even they will be lightened by the persuasion that the things most surely to be believed will eventually have the support, not only of tradition, but of historical and verifiable evidence.

The Canon of the New Testament, on the other hand, has not excited so much controversy, nor nearly so much interest. The theories of Tübingen never appealed successfully to English common sense; and, except in the case of some already disposed to skeptical theories, have gained

no welcome. Objections to the Epistle of James and the Second Epistle of Peter, such as were freely advanced among the first reformers, have found few recent echoes. Doubts about the Pastoral Epistles, which orthodox writers of Germany have expressed, have not been encouraged here. The labors of critical scholars in England—as Westcott, Lightfoot, and Sanday—have largely aided the defense of the later Epistles of Paul, and of the Fourth Gospel. So complete has been the vindication of the latter that the more advanced German critics allow that its date cannot be brought down below the end of the first Christian century.

An important work on the subject appeared last year written by Prof. Theod. Zahn, of Erlangen. He belongs to the conservative school, which has by no means died out in Germany, but, indeed, shows many signs of rejuvenescence. The destructive tendency has expended itself, and the process of reëdification is making good progress. The modern builder can select his site and materials; he can avoid the false positions which have betrayed his predecessors; while critical explanations have revealed original foundations which can still be used, and have furnished a wealth of material almost too vast to be manipulated.

As a wise master-builder, Dr. Zahn has

measured the length and breadth of the situation, and has made an estimate of every document and patristic statement relating to it. His first volume surveys the general question of the Canon. Almost all admit that the principal parts of the New Testament were received as inspired and authoritative at the close of the Second Century. He then proceeds to search for the traces of their use in the earliest periods. Here the lack of information suggests caution at every step. The first Christians were in general a poor and persecuted people. They had no public institutions; neither churches, nor schools, nor libraries. Yet it can be shown from such records as remain, that the conception of a collection of Christian Scriptures did not originate at the end of the Second Century, when it becomes a clear, historical fact, but goes back to the post-Apostolic age.

The results to which the labors of Professor Zahn lead may be summed up as follows:—

1. The churches were in possession of all the canonical books before the time of Jerome, but circumstances had not permitted a full agreement upon all the items of the Canon. In the time of Jerome, the great Latin translator and editor (A. D. 380-420), the New Testament consisted of the same books which we now find in our English Bibles.

2. The idea of canonical Scriptures is a primitive fact in the history of the church. After the departure of the

apostles their writings were read in the churches; those writings which claimed to be apostolical were alone admitted to this position.

3. The first Bible of the church was, as in the synagogue, the Old Testament. The gospel was first received orally, though, no doubt, this spoken testimony would soon attain a new form. Apostolical epistles were read to the faithful, and, since the apostles were regarded as men filled with the Holy Spirit, their communications were received as inspired.

4. It is probable that the Epistles of Paul were the first to be collected in the gentile churches. When the apostles had passed away, the four Gospels written by them or under their patronage, were formed into a Canon. The Gospels and thirteen of the Epistles of Paul first attained the full position of authoritative Scriptures. But the Acts, the Catholic Epistles, Hebrews, and the Apocalypse, were known and were gradually received by recognition in particular churches. Other writings, as the Epistle of Clement, the Shepherd, and the Epistle of Barnabas, because of their quasi-Apostolic origin, were included in the sacred collection by some churches.

5. It can, therefore, be shown historically that since the Apostolic Age the church has not been without its standard of sacred writings as the ground of its authority.

CHARACTER AND GENIUS.

If one were asked suddenly and without previous intimation to name the best and highest gift in the power of nature to bestow on man, he would probably reply on the spur of the moment that genius is, by all odds, the best, the highest, and the most desirable of natural gifts. No doubt it is the highest, but on further reflection one might hesitate, if intelligently and thoughtfully considering the matter, to pronounce it either the best or the most desirable. The man most fitted to make a success of his own life and to permanently influence that of others is not so much the man of genius as the man of character. For to character belongs a natural superiority—a natural leadership—with which no other mental attribute can compete. Identified or allied with genius character reaches the acme of its influence, but it is sufficiently potent to act alone. The union is not always or even often a fact; the world has possessed men of the highest mental caliber intellectually who yet were weak and deficient in character and too easily influenced on their moral and emotional sides. Their convictions were strong, but not so their power of carrying them out; their mental sight was wonderfully clear to see, but their will power was weak to execute. They could teach men, but they could not lead them.

It may be by the law of compensation and of balance that nature concentrates her force, and that where this force in one is concentrated in the intellectual organization, in another it is entrenched in that mysterious administrative ability of himself, his actions, and its aggressive influence on his fellow-creatures and his surroundings that in a man we call character. A man or woman of ordinary intellect but of superior character will accomplish more than one of great

mental ability without character. In the former are the qualifications which not only deserve success but which also command it—determination, force of will, and perseverance. It is on character that the world instinctively depends for its advisers, its guides, and its leaders, and in which it puts its trust. The faculty of knowing one's mind, of keeping to resolution unmoved by any influence that seeks to change it, of seeing the practical, past and through theory, and of pressing on to action undeterred by obstacle or opposition—that is the faculty that is needed in ordinary life, and that even the greatest genius must call to its aid to realize its loftiest ideals.

One of the main objects of all education, and particularly of all educators, should be the development and training of character in children. In those in whom it is naturally weak it is often repressed to the point of destruction, and in those of stronger bias it is driven, by the ignorant force employed to keep it in check as a sort of dangerous mental explosion, into vicious channels, where it loses in moral power but not in vital strength. One often hears an ignorant parent or guardian announce as the best method to pursue with a self-willed child a system of force to "break its will," whereas a broken will is the most serious of wrongs to a young human creature. One has exactly the same right to break its neck. The will is not to be broken but to be trained. A child's obstinate determination to gain its point is often an indication of character that, if rightly developed, will, in after life, prove the greatest of blessings. Ignorant, careless, or lazy educators "break" character; wise, conscientious, and intelligent teachers make it.—*Baltimore American.*