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HOW GOD TOLD THE STORY OF GOODNESS IN EDEN



Among the many orbs that are moving to and fro throughout the silent heavens, there is one on which God has bestowed peculiar care, as if in connection with it he had some vast design to unfold. From the pains that he took upon its construction, and the delight he expressed at the completion of its adornment, it is plain that in it he was laying the foundation of some mighty fabric, fixing the centre of some stupendous system, preparing his plans and models for the ordering of the universe throughout the everlasting future.

That planet we call earth and speak of it as our native star. It is there that we had our birth, and it is there that we receive our better birth. It is there that we live and love; it is there that we sorrow and rejoice. It is there that we lie down in dust; and it is there that we await the sound

of the resurrection-trumpet, when He who is our life shall appear.

Let us try, then, to read the history of our native planet, and listen to the story which it has been telling since it arose in beauty from the hand of God. As the dwellers upon its surface, we hear and see all things near, not afar off. We are not like men receiving imperfect tidings from some distant region; we stand in the very centre of the wondrous scene. We can search into the roots and beginnings of all that we behold; we can trace the stream, through its strange windings, backwards to its clear source in the lonely mountain glen, where the sunbeams are freshest, and the turf spreads out around us its fringe of purest green.

This earth, as it came out of the mould of the former, was altogether goodly. He who made it has told us how much He was satisfied with its beauty. It was good, very good. Nought but blessedness breathed through its atmosphere or shone in its light. It was a world in which God could entirely delight, for there was not a stain on its face to offend His holy eye.

No blight was preying upon its verdure or consuming its flowers. There was health in its sunshine, and balm in its fresh soft air. No clouds were blackening its firmament, and treasuring up the wasteful lightnings. No storms were rending its forests or ruffling the ocean that girt in its happy shores. All was comeliness and perfection. In each sight and sound there were repose and joy.

Man, too, was holy. He knew not what it was to sin, nor how such a thing as evil could find its way into a world so fair. He saw it excellent, and how it could lose its excellence, or become less perfect, he could not conceive. Paradise was for him, and he for paradise; the dweller and the dwelling suited each other completely; the outer and the inner circle of being fitting in to each other in all their parts, proportions, and motions. God, too, was with him—the maker of this wondrous earth and these infinite heavens—conversing with him, instructing him, blessing him with light and love. He had rested from His work and came down to hold fellowship with man. The seventh day's dawn brought with it peace, the very peace of God. The calm of the Sabbath was there, a Sabbath like that which angels keep in heaven, a Sabbath such as earth has never since been gladdened with, but which we know it is yet to taste when the second Adam comes to make all things new.

It was then and thus that God began to tell the story of his *goodness* upon earth. 'How great is His goodness!' was the living utterance coming forth from everything created. He had been telling that story in heaven from the time that there were any creatures to tell it to; that is, from the time that He populated heaven with the blessed angels. In what way He had been telling it there, we know not; through how many ages it had been running, no record is given. But He had a purpose to tell it elsewhere, and to other beings besides the angels. For this end He gave birth to the earth, that He might tell it there; that

He might have another circle which it should traverse in a new form, and that thus He might make known more widely how glorious in *goodness* He was.

For each happy scene on earth spoke aloud of this goodness. Each pure star above, and each rich flower below, told the story of this goodness. It was written over the whole earth in letters that all could see; it was spoken over earth in tones that all could hear. Each scene distinctly breathed it; the sounds of sweet harmony, that went and came over the face of creation, had each a voice that articulately made known the story of this goodness. 'Day unto day uttered speech, and night unto night showed knowledge' (Ps. 19:2). What a story! How full, how vast, how varied! Each hour, each moment, God was telling it to man, that man might rejoice more abundantly in Himself, and find what a portion for his soul is the favour of that Infinite Being, out of whom all this goodness was pouring itself. And each hour, each moment, man might have been singing, 'O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens' (Ps. 8:1). 'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created' (Rev. 4:11). 'Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty' (Rev. 15:3).

In all this it was not merely wisdom and power that God was displaying. It was *goodness*. It was His heart that God was opening up to man, for it was the knowledge of that, that alone, which could make him blessed. Man

might know much of God, but if he knew not this, he could have no enjoyment. Everything depended upon his knowing that the heart of Him who made him beat lovingly towards Him. This was life, and, without it, life could not be. This was the charm of being, and, without it, existence could not but be a blank, nay, something more terrible—a curse!

It is not the works of God that can gladden us, however perfect, if separated from His heart. It is not the knowledge of His wisdom, or His greatness, or His majesty, that can fill our souls with peace. If these are disjoined from His paternal feelings, they can only amaze or terrify us. It is God himself, the Father of our spirits, that is our real portion. He only can fill us; and with His fulness set our hearts at rest. His largest gifts are nought to us without Himself. They are precious in themselves, but, apart from Him, they cannot satisfy nor bless. It is the love of the Giver, not the beauty of His gift, that meets the cravings of the human spirit. Let us clear up this a little more fully.

I look up at that blue sky which bends so brightly over me. It is without a stain. From the horizon to the zenith, it is perfect in its beauty; there is no flaw in the whole stretch of its azure circle. I cannot but admire it, and still more the mind that planned, as well as the hand that painted it. But is this all that it awakens in me? If so, then I am like one admiring the fair-written characters of a language which I have no skill to interpret. Nay, but it is not all. There is much more than this to be discovered there. That radiant arch is not only the indication of an infinite mind, but

it is also the utterance of an infinite heart. It is effulgent with love; it glistens with parental smiles. I dare not separate between the beneficence of God's works and the benevolence of His heart. In the former I cannot but read the latter. These heavens most plainly tell me what is the heart of Him who made me. They show me how it beats towards me, and how it yearns over me with an intensity of affection and interest which it is impossible for me to overestimate or overprize. And it is this that makes me glad; it is this that is the warmth of my spirit, the very pulse of my being. That blue arch that encompasses me about seems like the infolding pressure of the everlasting arms. Every gleam of it sends a thrill to my heart more joyous and satisfying than does the conscious possession of the tenderest love of earth.

Or, again, I walk forth by that mountainside, where the wildflowers blossom, without a hand to sow them, and scarce an eye to see them. I take up that tuft of heath that buds as gaily as if a thousand eyes were on it. How beautiful, how perfect! But of what does it tell me? Of the wisdom of God. And is that all? No, surely. It speaks of something more than the mind of Him who clothed and coloured it so richly. Does it not speak of His *heart*? We do not merely say, as we look upon its purple clusters, 'If this be so passing beautiful, what must He be who is the fountainhead of all beauty?' We say, also: What must be the *heart* of Him who has taken such pains upon that world which He made for us, so that even its very wastes are fair and fragrant! In all that He has been doing, He

seems to have been thinking of us, of our comfort, of our happiness! In every leaf, in every blossom, in every odour, in every colour, He seems to have been consulting always for us, thinking how He could make us happiest, how He could continue to pour out most of His heart upon those scenes in the midst of which He meant us to dwell.

When thus looking at His works as laying open His heart, we get at their real meaning. We understand the story which they were meant to tell—a story about the heart of God. They are God's revelation of Himself. And they are just such a revelation of His character as is fitted to bring glory to Him and joy to us.

It was this story of divine goodness, as told upon earth by God, that made man so blessed. The happiness of the creature came directly from what he knew of this loving creator. It was not Eden, but the God whom Eden spoke of, that was his joy. It was not the fair sky of an unfallen earth that made his eye glisten as he looked up into its depths; it was the God whose goodness he saw shining there so richly. Each object made him happy, by showing him God, and drawing him into fellowship with Him. Acquaintanceship with God was all he needed for his blessedness. This acquaintanceship each scene around was fitted to increase.

Nor did he find his joy in thinking of himself or contemplating his own excellencies. He did not say, 'I am a holy being, I never sinned, I always obey God; surely I am entitled to be happy.' No, his joy lay in God alone, and it was in thinking about God that this joy flowed into