

THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST—RECEIVED!

“And of His fullness have all we received.”

John 1:16

THERE is no occasion to inform the Christian heart who the Person is to whom reference is here made. The name of Jesus is to you a household word. No, it is the word which will be found written upon your hearts when you die. That immortal word shall be the keynote of your eternal song when you shall enter into the immortality which remains for God’s people. Jesus! How sweet is Your name to Your people. It is a sonnet of itself. It is the sum of all music summed up in two syllables. It is a hallelujah and the groundwork of an eternal hosanna in five letters. Jesus! We defy earth to equal it and Heaven itself to excel it. Jesus is Heaven’s highest melody—as it is earth’s sweetest delight.

The text informs us that there is a fullness in Christ. There is a fullness of essential Deity, for “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead.” There is a fullness of perfect Manhood, for in Him bodily, that Godhead was revealed. Partaker of flesh and blood, made in all things like unto His brethren, there was nothing lacking that was necessary to the perfection of humankind in Him. There is a fullness of atoning efficacy in His blood, for “the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleans us from all sin.” There is a fullness of justifying righteousness in His life, for “there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”

There is a fullness of divine Providence in His plea, for “He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him; seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them.” There is a fullness of victory in His death, for through death He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil. There is a fullness of efficacy in His resurrection from the dead, for by it “are begotten again to a lively hope.” There is a fullness of triumph in His ascension, for “when He ascended up on high He led captivity captive and received gifts for men.” There is a fullness of blessings unspeakable, unknown. A fullness of grace to pardon, of grace to regenerate, of grace to sanctify, of grace to preserve and of grace to perfect.

There is a fullness at all times. A fullness by day and a fullness by night. A fullness of comfort in affliction, a fullness of guidance in prosperity, a fullness of every Divine attribute, of wisdom, of power, of love. A fullness which it were impossible to survey, much less to explore. There is everything summed up in a total—“the gathering together of all things in One” in Jesus. “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell.” In vain we strive to recount the holy wonder. It were a theme which would exhaust an angel’s tongue to tell—the fullness which resides in Jesus our Head and ever abides to answer our need.

And now what shall we say to these things? “Of His fullness have all we received.” The text seems to me to suggest four reflections. First, an appeal to our gratitude. “Glory be to Christ! For of His fullness have all we received.” Secondly, a notion of character, “Thus may you know the people of God, for of His fullness have they all received.” Thirdly, a sentence of admonition to believers, “Be wise, oh you people of God, be grateful and be humble, for it is of His fullness you have received.” And in the last place here is to the sinner a word of sweet encouragement, “Come, all the saints invite you, for of His fullness have all they received.”

To begin with the first the text constrains us to say, “GLORY BE UNTO CHRIST FOR HIS FULLNESS, for of it have all the saints received.”

Appeal to those who died before the flood. Ask those who trod in the steps of Enoch. Go forward to Noah, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Put the question to David and Samuel—come on through the Prophets, to Isaiah and Jeremy—ask them all, “From where came your faith? From where your power to suffer and your strength to conquer?” With united breath they answer, “Of His fullness who as yet had not come in the flesh we by faith received.” Ask the saints in later times. I summon you, oh you bright Apostles of the Lamb, “From where came your noble testimony and your unwavering constancy?” They reply with the voice of John, their leader, “Of His fullness have all we received.”

Appeal to the martyrs on their racks, on their blood-stained gibbets, on their stakes and glowing fires. In their dungeons and damp dying places—ask the tenants of ten thousand graves, “From where came your triumph?” And they reply at once, “We have overcome through the blood of the Lamb.” “Of His fullness have all we received.” You should go through the list of the Reformers. You should ask Luther and Calvin and Zwingli and Melancthon and Wickliffe and Huss and Jerome and Knox. And there is not one of them who will dare to say that he had anything of his own.

You should turn over the list of the great preachers and summoning them one by one, you should say to Augustine, to Chrysostom, to Bernard and to those in later days, such as Latimer, Tindal and Hooper and to later still the men with Whitfield and with Wesley preached the Word, “From where came your boldness in confession? From where your strength to bear the calumny of the age and to be the butt of human scorn and yet never to flinch, much less to withdraw your testimony.” And they all reply, “Of His fullness have all we received.”

Brethren, what a fullness must this be—when you think that a multitude which no man can number—a company beyond all human count have all received Him! And there is not one of them that has received too little—they are all, as Rutherford has it—“drowned debtors to His grace.” Or, as we put it, “over head and ears” in debt to Him. They are so indebted that they will never know how much they owe but they feel that an eternal song will not be too long to utter their grateful praise. Fullness, indeed, must there be in Him when all these streams have been continually flowing and yet He is not dry—when all these mouths have been filled and yet the granary is not empty. When all these thirsty ones have had their drink and yet the well springs up as free, as rich, as full as ever.

But you must note again, to the praise of Christ, not only did they all receive of His sense, they all received all that they had. They had not, any of them, a part of their own. No Apostle could say, “So far I am a debtor. But here I stand and claim the honor for myself.” With sin begins and ends the whole story of man. But where good appears, there grace begins. Or, rather, the grace began before the good. For every good desire, for every holy thought, for every well-spoken word, for every deed of daring, for every act of self-sacrifice let Christ be honored—for everything has come of Him. If there is any virtue, any praise—anything that is lovely or of good report—go and cast it at His feet, for from Him it came. He sowed the seed out of which it grew. He created the nature out of which these good things sprung.

Oh what must the fullness be from which all the saints received all that they have! But there is another way of estimating the fullness—by remembering that, albeit, all the saints have received all these things, yet it remains undiminished—a fullness still. There is not a drop less in Christ though oceans have been taken away. There is not a spark less in that furnace though many fires have been kindled therefrom. There is not a farthing less in that treasury though millions of souls have been enriched. There is not a grain less in that granary nor shall there be a grain less even when the whole world shall be sown—and all these sheaves shall come to the harvest.

It is always blessed for the child of God to know that in Christ there is enough for all the saints, enough for each, enough for evermore. And when they have had all and everything that they can have still there is as much left as when they began. I noticed in Venice at the wells that the people came to them early in the morning because very soon afterward they were almost dry and it needed some two or three hours for the well to spring up again. Ah, but it is never so with Christ. Come early in the morning, O you thousands of seekers and that well is full—come you at hot noon

tide, O you thirsty ones and the well is full—come when the sun is going down, you that are wearied with your day of toil, for the well is ever full.

Ah, come at midnight, you whose sun is set, who are lost in the darkness of despair, for still you shall find that the well is full—never exhausted. No, never diminished—always springing up, always overflowing. So long as there shall be souls found who need to drink of His fullness, the supply shall be abundant.

Though there are many things to say on each division of my subject, you must excuse me if I say but little. You must take the text home and think of it for yourselves. Spirits around the Throne, I hear you sing tonight, “Of His fullness have all we received.” Saints on earth, speeding your way to the eternal triumphs, join their song and say, “Of His fullness have all we received.” Let no voice be silent, let no tongue be dumb, but let every soul say, “Of His fullness, too, have I received and glory be unto His name.”

II. Now for our second point. The text also teaches us HOW TO KNOW WHO IS THE CHRISTIAN, for it says, “Of His fullness have all we received.”

There are some in this world who obtain their religion from their fathers and mothers. They go to church, or perhaps to chapel, because there is a family pew there and all their family used to go. They speak about “our church” and “our denomination” as though their grandfather had left his religion in his last will and testament for a legacy to them. Let such know that religion is not to be inherited. It is a personal matter. No man can stand sponsor for another. One of the most ridiculous and pestilent of human inventions is the idea of making one man stand representative for another, or an adult for a child—everyone must appear before God and be judged for ourselves.

Jesus Christ is the only Surety. Verily, we should have enough to do to answer for ourselves at the last, without attempting to make a reply for other people. To our own Master we must stand or fall. We have a divinely appointed Substitute. Therefore we shall all gather around the judgment seat of Christ. But you have received your grace, you say, from your parent. If you have got it anywhere but from Christ then please remember you do not belong to the family of Christ. Others there are who have a religion of their own—they have got it by good works. They have always acted uprightly. They have shut their shops on a Sunday. They do not cheat—at least not often, not more than other people. They speak the truth and they endeavor to do their best.

They would not mind helping a poor neighbor. Or if they are in richer circumstances, their guinea is always ready whenever the subscription list is placed before them. And they say, “Well, if it does not go well with me, it will be hard with a great many people.” That is quite correct—indeed it will go very hard with a great many people. But this religion of theirs is of their own making. Then sometimes when men get rich they think they will, as it were, put the finest fruit on the top of the bushel and they leave a donation to some society. A very good plan, indeed, by the way—but a pitiful thing if it is left with the view of getting merit by it. So now they say, “It will all be well—there will be two or three alms-houses built. I have been a good fellow while I have lived and it will surely be well with me at the end.”

You do not belong to the same company as the saints who have gone before. You have evidently nothing to do with the Apostle John—for his fullness came from Christ. It is quite apparent you can never share his Heaven. You can never enjoy his bliss. You can never enter into his rest. What he had he owed to grace divine. But it seems what you have is of your own earning. Your robes are of your own spinning, your fire of your own kindling, your coin of your own minting, your merits of your own merchandise. Oh, be not deceived, these things will fail you at the last and you will find them as a dream when one awakes. All your fine righteousness shall disappear as a shadow when your conscience is aroused upon your dying bed.

But others have a better sort of religion than this. They do not believe the Calvinistic doctrine—that without Christ we can do nothing. They acknowledge that without Him we cannot do much—still they pretend that with Him they can do just a little. If we cannot save ourselves yet we can

believe in our own strength. So they take the first step. They begin the good work in themselves. And then their divines teach them that they must persevere—yes, if they do not, if they will not do their part, God will leave them. The grace of God is dependent upon their good behavior—so they try to behave themselves to keep the grace of God.

They “use the grace of God” as they call it. They try to hold on to the end of themselves. And what does it all come to? To which I say, it is very obvious that you do not belong to those old-fashioned saints who lived in the Bible times—for all they had they received from Christ. They did not get the beginning from themselves—He was Alpha—they did not get the ending—He was Omega. They did not get anything from self. They sought and they found Christ for us. If you had asked an old saint his opinion about salvation he would have replied in the language of Jonah, “Salvation is of the Lord.”

Free will doctrines, creature power and human strength, were unknown in Bible times. They were the invention of one Pelagius. They were new vamped and made a little tidy by Van Harmin, called Arminius. There are some who to this day have adopted “these old shoes and clouted upon their feet and old garments upon them and all the bread of their provision is dry and moldy.” And they appear like Gibeonites in the Lord’s hosts. I do not say but what many of them shall be saved—but they shall be hewers of wood and drawers of water in the midst of the congregation in their days—for they never can come into the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free while they believe those adulterated doctrines, those traditions of men, instead of the doctrine and revelation of Christ Jesus the Lord.

Now, let us try to find out the true Christian—the enlightened Christian. The true Christian has all from Christ. The Heaven-taught Christian feels it is so. You remember that the Apostle Paul said of himself that he was the chief of sinners. A little while before he says he was the least of all the saints and last of all he says, “Though I am nothing.” John Newton says, “Young Christians think themselves little—growing Christians think themselves nothing—full-grown Christians think themselves less than nothing.” So as we grow up we grow down. As Christ increases we must decrease. As He is glorified, the flesh gets dishonored in our esteem.

Now, what do you say, Brothers and Sisters? Did you receive all the grace you have from Christ? Is He All in All to you? Are you resting wholly and simply and only on Him? Can you say as poor Jack did in that story I once told you—

“I’m a poor sinner and nothing at all,

But Jesus Christ is my All in All!”

Have you learned to depend on Him for all things and on self for nothing? Have you seen the rottenness and emptiness of all human merit? Have you learned the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of all human trust? If so, rejoice, for you belong to that company who can say, “Of His fullness have all we received.”

Sometimes the devil will say to us, “Well, you do a great deal in the cause of Christ. You do not have a moment’s rest from the moment you wake in the morning to the time you go to sleep at night—always thinking of something for Christ and doing something for Him.” And, then, proud flesh says, “Ah, you have labored more abundantly than they all.” No, no, my Brethren. When we come to look upon all our works, those of us who have toiled the most for Christ—I am sure we cannot find any satisfaction in them. In reviewing all that I have attempted to do, I can only say, so far as my own personal experience goes, I am as heartily sick of my own righteousness as I am of my sins.

I feel as much reason to have God’s grace over the best deeds as over the worst. I often lie down in the very dust of self-abasement feeling that I have not anything—no, not a rag of my own—no, not a grain of merit, not an atom whereon I can trust. As abject a sinner as there is out of Hell—if I look into myself—it is my only satisfaction that I am enabled to look to Christ and to Christ alone. All that is of Nature’s spinning must be unraveled. All that is of Nature’s manufacture must be broken in pieces. We must unhoof the horses and burn the chariots of human strength in the fire,

for thus says the Spirit, "I will stain the pride of all glory and bring into contempt all the excellent of the earth." "Yes, doubtless and we count all things His for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord." Here is our struggle—"that we may win Christ and be found in Him, not having our own righteousness which is of the Law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith."

III. Thirdly, we draw from the text A SENTENCE OF ADMONITION TO THE BELIEVER—"Of His fullness have all we received."

Should not the believer be of all men the most honorable? I have heard sometimes of a man being a Christian and yet being proud. Now a proud Christian is a singular contradiction. Yet you do know some—you would not say they were not godly people—but then, their coat is made of the best broad cloth and they think it would be a little going down if they were to speak to those who wear fustian or white coats during the week. They are a little better off in the world and so they do not receive their poorer Brethren. This is the most silly pride in the world. I have not a word to say about it. It is too mean to be worth a man's words spent upon it.

But there is some pride which a Christian man will entertain and almost think it is humility. It is a pride about his experience—a pride of having grown wise at last. He thinks he has learned too much ever to be proud, which proves that he is puffed up beyond measure. He says, "Well, those young people are very self-conceited." He looks down on beginners and says, "Their greatest danger is to be lifted up with pride." While as for himself—good sober man, so old and experienced—it is not possible that he should be proud—yet proud all the while. To such we say, "What have you that you have not received?" I know people say it is more respectable to owe thirty thousand pounds than it is to break for three. But if I must be in debt, methinks I would rather be the smaller debtor.

Yet how many there are because they have received more from God than others—that is they are greater debtors than others—they are proud. You have more gifts than I have. Well, it only means you have got twice as much work to do as I have. So you have got more wealth than I. That means you are more in debt to God than I and are you proud of being in debt? Let the Christian be a humble-minded man. We talk of humility. What a lump of pride we are—fussy, stuck-up, wanting to have respect paid to us. If somebody comes between the wind and our nobility, we are upset. If somebody abuses us, what a state we are in. And oh, if anybody calls us ill-names, how harshly we consider ourselves treated.

If we thought less of ourselves we should not be quite so sensitive. Where should dust go but on the dunghill? And where should they put the man who knows himself to be vile but in the worst place? Yes, let them put us there—they will not give us worse than we deserve if we come to know ourselves in the sight of God. Yes, we may say of the slanderer, "Man, you have not hit it, you have not found out my fault. If you knew me better you could hit me harder." Yes, we might sometimes say to some cruel enemy, "You have made some mistake there, for I am innocent of that before God. But if you had read my heart and known how false I have been to my Lord and how unbelieving, you might have exposed me and hit me in a sore place and smitten me under the fifth rib."

I think we ought always to say, "Well, we do not deserve it for that, but we deserve it for something else, so we will take it patiently and be willing that men should wipe their shoes on us if it will but glorify Christ." Yes, let them call us devils if we may but help to do angel's work in redeeming men. Let them scout us, hiss at us and say, "Yah! there goes a hypocrite!" or anything else they like, if we may but magnify Christ while living and enjoy Him when we shall come to die. Be humble Christian, for what have you that you have not received?

Next, let us be grateful. All that we have we have received from Christ. Let us love Him. When our friends give us love we give them love in return. But what is that which we owe mother, father, husband, wife, or friend compared with what we owe to Christ? Let your hearts burn, let your love be inflamed. Fall at His dear feet—embrace them with affection. Spend and be spent for Him. Live unto Him and be ready to die for Him. For all you have you have received of His fullness. I think that what we want as a Church is more recognition of the gifts we have as coming from Christ. I

do not think we have the gratitude we ought to have to Him. We do not make sacrifices for Him. We give, it is true, to this cause and to that, but are there half-a-dozen Christians here that have ever made a sacrifice for Christ?

He gives us blood and we give Him a few tears. He gives us sweat and we give Him cold services. He gives us groans and we give Him languishing hymns. He gives us life and death, body, soul and spirit and we give Him only what we can spare after we have first looked to ourselves—and not all that in most cases. Let us feel, O God, let us feel gratitude to Christ—a fire within our bones and a flame within our hearts and a sevenfold strength in our spirits—not only to believe in His name, but also to suffer for His sake. Let gratitude be the inspiration of our lives.

IV. I have not time nor strength to enlarge further upon these points. Therefore the last and not the least important. The text seems to me to be A MOST SWEET INVITATION—A MOST BLESSED ENCOURAGEMENT TO POOR NEEDY SINNERS.

So, Sinner, you need tonight a new heart. You will never be able to make your heart new yourself—He must give it to you. So, Sinner, you need repentance—you can never repent of yourself. He is exalted on high to give repentance. So you need a sense of your own sin and sinfulness—He can make you feel it, for He felt it all Himself. So you do feel your sin, you say and you want to have it pardoned—He can pardon it and without exception He has power to forgive sins on earth. Tell me not how vile you have been—He can pardon you. Say you are guilty of aggravated crimes—He can forgive you. Tell me not, even, that you have stained your hands with blood—He is able to wash out that stain and make you whiter than snow.

Sinner, Sinner, Sinner! Do you need tonight to have your aching heart filled with peace?—He can do it. Of His fullness have all the host in Heaven received. Of His fullness have all the saints on earth received. And you, poor weeping Sinner, you may, you shall receive, too. They had nothing to bring to Him any more than you have. They came to Him black in sin—as black as you and He washed them. They came to Him lost—lost as you can possibly be—He saved them and He can save you. He asks you to do nothing of yourself, but to trust Him and Him alone. He is God. Oh, trust the Omnipotent One. He is perfect Man. Oh, trust the Meritorious One. He died. Oh, trust His dying sacrifice.

He lives. Oh, trust His authoritative plea. Sinner, if we asked you to trust a man, we should think it right that you should object. If he pretended to be a priest and asked you to trust him, you might turn upon your heel with a sneer. But I bid you trust in no mere man but in Him that died upon the Cross. And He is worthy of your trust. Yonder millions redeemed from death and Hell will tell you, “Worthy is the Lamb!”—and thousands here below will tell you, too, “That He is worthy of all your confidence.” May the Spirit of God graciously lead you out of self into Christ and enable you once for all to put your trust in Him.

I will tell you, tonight, an anecdote which I think I have repeated before, but not in this house. There was a poor man who had been a long while burdened in spirit—one night he had a dream. To dreams we attach no importance. But this dream happens to be an allegory. He dreamed that he stood at the gates of Heaven, longing to enter but he dared not and could not, for sin had shut him out. He was longing to come but he dared not. At length he saw approaching the pearly gates a company of men who came on singing. They were goodly to look upon, dressed in white robes.

So he stepped up to one of them and he said to them, “Who are you?” And they replied, “We are the goodly fellowship of the Prophets.” He said, “Alas! I cannot enter with you.” And he watched them until they had passed the gates and he heard from outside the voice of song as they were received with welcome. Cast down and troubled, he watched until he saw another company approach and they came with music and rejoicing. He said to them, “Who are you?” They were great hosts who had washed their robes and they replied, “We are the noble army of martyrs.” He said, “I cannot go with you.” And when he heard the shouts a second time ascending from within the gates, his heart was heavy within him at the thought that it was not possible for him to enter there.

Then came a third company and he detected in the main the Apostles and after them there came mighty preachers and confessors of the Word. He said in his heart, "Alas! I cannot go with you, for I am no preacher and I have done nothing for my Master." His heart was ready to break, for they entered and were lost to his sight. And he heard the triumphant acclamations as the Master said, "Well done, enter into the joy of your Lord." But as he waited, he saw a greater company approaching. He marked in the forefront Saul of Tarsus, Mary Magdalene, the thief that died upon the Cross. And they came streaming on.

So he said to one of them, "Who are you?" And they replied, "We are a company of sinners whom no man can number. We are saved by blood—through the rich, free, sovereign grace of God." Indeed, all the companies might have said the same and the dream would have been more complete. But as this poor man, with the tears in his eyes heard this word, he said, "Thank God, I can go with you, for I am a sinner like you and like you I trust in the merit of Him that died on Calvary." So he joined their ranks and was about to enter but he said in his heart, "When we come, there shall be no songs. They will admit us, but it will be in silence, for we bring no honor to God. We have done nothing for Him—there will be no voices of music when we come in."

But to his surprise the acclaim was louder, the music was more melodious and the shouts of acclamation were louder far, while they said, "Here are they who come to complete the number of the host whom Jesus bought with His blood."

Now, Sinner, let your ear be attentive and let your heart bow down to listen while I admonish you. What? Though you are a poor sinner—if you believe in Christ, you can come in as a poor sinner! Indeed, this is the way we all must come, for there are not, after all—though our imagination, like the dream, may suggest it—there are not two ways of entrance. We all come to Him empty—to be filled—naked, to be clothed—lost to be saved. Let me, then, just put the way of salvation plainly to you all.

"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." So said Christ. This was the commission which He gave to His Apostles. What is it to believe? To believe is to trust Christ. To put it as the Negro said, "Massa, I fall flat down on de promise." That is to believe—to fall flat on the finished work and sure promise of Christ.

The Lord enable you to be rid of self and self-confidence and to trust Christ. Then let Hell roar, let earth rage, let the Law thunder, let the precept threaten, let condolence accuse. But oh, let the Son of God arise. Bound by His Word, He will display a strength proportioned to your day. He will never suffer you to perish, neither shall any pluck you out of His hand. Amen.