



*If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. (Exodus 33:15)*

NOTE: This is the third part of a three part series by Bishop Ryle (May 10, 1816 to June 10, 1900) on the Presence of Christ to the Christian. Bishop Ryle was one of the greatest biblical teachers to come out of the Reformation Church of England and one from whom I have learned much of encouraging truth. (J. Ogles)

The last point which I propose to consider is the *real bodily presence of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Where is it? What ought we to think about it? What ought we to reject, and what ought we to hold fast?

This is a branch of my subject on which it is most important to have clear and well-defined views. There are rock around it on which many are making shipwreck. No doubt there are deep things and difficulties connected with it. But this must not prevent our examining it as far as possible by the light of Scripture. Whatever the Bible teaches plainly about Christ's bodily presence, it is our duty to hold and believe. To shrink from holding it because we cannot reconcile it with some human tradition, some minister's teaching, or some early prejudice imbibed in youth, is presumption, and not humility. To the law and to the testimony! What says the Scripture about Christ's bodily presence? Let us examine the matter step by step.

- (a) There was a bodily presence of our Lord Jesus Christ during the time that He was upon earth at His first advent. For thirty-three years, at least, between His birth and His ascension, He was present in a body in this world. In infinite mercy to our souls, the eternal Son of God was pleased to take our nature on Him, and to be miraculously born of a woman, with a body just like our own. He was made like unto us in all things, sin only excepted. Like us He grew from infancy to boyhood, and from boyhood to youth, and from youth to manhood. Like us He ate, and drank, and slept, and hungered, and thirsted, and wept, and felt fatigue and pain.

He had a body which was subject to all the conditions of a material body. While, as God, He was in heaven and earth at the same time; as man, His body was only in one place at one time. When He was in Galilee He was not in Judea, and when He was in Capernaum He was not in Jerusalem. In a real, true human body He lived; in a real, true human body He kept the law, and fulfilled all righteousness; and in a real, true human body He bore our sins on the cross, and made satisfaction for us by His atoning blood. He that died for us on Calvary was perfect man, while at the same time He was perfect God. This was the first real bodily presence of Jesus Christ.

The truth before us is full of unspeakable comfort to all who have an awakened conscience, and know the value of their souls. It is a heart-cheering thought that the *"one Mediator between God and man is the man Jesus Christ;"* real man, and so able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; Almighty God, and so able to save to the uttermost all who come to the Father by Him. The Saviour in whom the labouring and heavy-laden are invited to trust, is One who had a real body when He was working out our redemption on earth. It was no angel, nor spirit, nor ghost, that stood in our place and became our Substitute, that finished the work of redemption, and did what Adam failed to do. No: it was one who was real man! *"By man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead"* (1 Cor. xv. 21). The battle was fought for us, and the victory was won by the eternal Word made flesh,—by the real bodily presence among us of Jesus Christ. For ever let us praise God that Christ did not remain in heaven, but came into the world and was made flesh to save sinners; that in the body, He was born for us, lived for us, died for us, and rose again. Whether men know it or not, our whole hope of eternal life hinges on the simple fact, that nineteen hundred years ago there was a real bodily presence of the Son of God for us on the earth.

- (b) Let us now go a step further. There is a real bodily presence of Jesus Christ in heaven at the right hand of God. This is a deep and mysterious subject, beyond question. What God the Father is, and where He dwells, what the nature of His dwelling-place who is a Spirit,—these are high things which we have no minds to take in. But where the Bible speaks plainly it is our duty and our wisdom to believe. When our Lord rose again from the dead, He rose with a real human body,—a body which could not be in two places at once,—a body of which the angels said, *"He is not here, but is risen"* (Luke xxiv. 6). In that body, having finished His redeeming work on earth, He ascended visibly into heaven. He took His body with Him, and did not leave it behind, like Elijah's mantle. It was not laid in the grave at last, and did not become dust and ashes in some Syrian village, like the bodies of saints and martyrs. The same body which walked in the streets of Capernaum, and sat in the house of Mary and Martha, and was crucified on Golgotha, and was laid in Joseph's tomb,—that same body,—after the resurrection glorified undoubtedly, but still real and material,—was taken up into heaven, and is there at this very moment. To use the inspired words of the Acts, *"While they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight"* (Acts i. 9). To use the words of St. Luke's Gospel, *"While He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven"* (Luke xxiv. 51). To use the words of St. Mark, *"After the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God"* (Mark xvi. 19). The fourth Article of the Church of England states the whole matter fully and accurately: *"Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again His body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature wherewith He ascended into heaven,*

and there sitteth, until He return to judge all men at the last day." And thus, to come round to the point with which we started, there is in heaven a real bodily presence of Jesus Christ.

The doctrine before us is singularly rich in comfort and consolation to all true Christians. That Divine Saviour in heaven, on whom the Gospel tells us to cast the burden of our sinful souls, is not a Being who is Spirit only, but a Being who is man as well as God. He is One who has taken up to heaven a body like our own; and in that body sits at the right hand of God, to be our Priest and our Advocate, our Representative and our Friend. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, because He has suffered Himself in the body being tempted. He knows by experience all that the body is liable to from pain, and weariness, and hunger, and thirst, and work; and has taken to heaven that very body which endured the contradiction of sinners and was nailed to the tree. Who can doubt that that body in heaven is a continual plea for believers, and renders them ever acceptable in the Father's sight? It is a perpetual remembrance of the perfect propitiation made for us upon the cross. God will not forget that our debts are paid for, so long as the body which paid for them with life-blood is in heaven before His eyes.. Who can doubt that when we pour out our petitions and prayers before the throne of grace, we put them in the hand of One whose sympathy passes knowledge? None can feel for poor believers wrestling here in the body, like Him who in the body sits pleading for them in heaven. For ever let us bless God that there is a real bodily presence of Christ in heaven.

- (c) Let us now go a step further. There is no real bodily presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or in the consecrated elements of bread and wine.

This is a point which it is peculiarly painful to discuss, because it has long divided Christians into two parties, and defiled a very solemn subject with sharp controversy. Nevertheless, it is one which cannot possibly be avoided in handling the question we are considering. Moreover, it is a point of vast importance, and demands very plain speaking. Those amiable and well-meaning persons who imagine that it signifies little what opinion people hold about Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper,—that it is a matter of indifference, and that it all comes to the same thing at last, are totally and entirely mistaken. They have yet to learn that an unscriptural view of the subject may land them at length in a very dangerous heresy. Let us search and see.

My reason for saying that there is no bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper or in the consecrated bread and wine, is simply this: there is no such presence taught anywhere in Holy Scripture. It is a presence that can never be honestly and fairly got out of the Bible. Let the three accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper, in the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, and the one given by St. Paul to the Corinthians, be weighed and examined impartially, and I have no doubt as to the result. They teach that the Lord Jesus, in the same night that He was betrayed, took bread, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take, eat: this is My body; *and also took the cup of wine, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of this: this is My blood."* But there is nothing in the simple narrative, or in the verses which follow it, which shows that the disciples thought their Master's body and blood were really present in the bread and wine which they received. There is not a word in the epistles to show that after our Lord's ascension into heaven the

Christians believed that His body and blood were present in an ordinance celebrated on earth, or that the bread in the Lord's Supper, after consecration, was not truly and literally bread, and the wine truly and literally wine.

Some persons, I am aware, suppose that such texts as "This is My body," and "This is My blood," are proofs that Christ's body and blood, in some mysterious manner, are locally present in the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper, after their consecration. But a man must be easily satisfied if such texts content him. The quotation of a single isolated phrase is a mode of arguing which would establish Arianism or Socinianism. The context of these famous expressions shows clearly that those who heard the words used, and were accustomed to our Lord's mode of speaking, understood them to mean "This represents My body," and "This represents my blood."

The comparison of other places proves that there is nothing unfair in this interpretation. It is certain that the words "is" and "are" frequently mean represent in Scripture. The disciples, no doubt, remembered their Master saying such things as "The field *is* the world the good seed *are* the children of the kingdom" (Matt. xiii. 38). St. Paul, in writing on the Sacrament, confirms this interpretation by expressly calling the consecrated bread, "*bread*," and not the body of Christ, no less than three times (1 Cor. xi. 26-28).

Some persons, again, regard the sixth chapter of St. John, where our Lord speaks of "eating His flesh and drinking His blood," as a proof that there is a literal bodily presence of Christ in the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper. But there is an utter absence of conclusive proof that this chapter refers to the Lord's Supper at all! The Lord's Supper had not been instituted, and did not exist, till at least a year after these words were spoken. Enough to say that the great majority of Protestant commentators altogether deny that the chapter refers to the Lord's Supper, and that even some Romish commentators on this point agree with them. The eating and drinking here spoken of are the eating and drinking of faith, and not a bodily action.

Some people fancy that St. Paul's words to the Corinthians, "*The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*" (1 Cor. x. 16), are enough to prove a bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. But unfortunately for their argument, St. Paul does not say, "The bread is the body," but the "*communion of the body*." And the obvious sense of the words is this: "The bread that a worthy communicant eats in the Lord's Supper is a means whereby his soul holds communion with the body of Christ." Nor do I believe that more than this can be got out of the words.

Above all, there remains the unanswerable argument that if our Lord was actually holding His own body in His hands, when He said of the bread, "*This is My body*," His body must have been a different body to that of ordinary men. Of course if His body was not a body like ours, His real and proper "humanity" is at an end. At this rate the blessed and comfortable doctrine of Christ's entire sympathy with His people, arising from the fact that He is really and truly man, would be completely overthrown and fall to the ground.

Finally, if the body with which our blessed Lord ascended up into heaven can be in heaven, and on earth, and on ten thousand communion-tables at one and the

same time, it cannot be a real human body at all. Yet that He did ascend with a real human body, although a glorified body, is one of the prime articles of the Christian faith, and one that we ought never to let go! Once admit that a body can be present in two places at once, and you cannot prove that it is a body at all. Once admit that Christ's body can be present at God's right hand and on the communion-table at the same moment, and it cannot be the body which was born of the Virgin Mary and crucified upon the cross. From such a conclusion we may well draw back with horror and dismay. Well says the Prayer-book of the Church of England: "The sacramental bread and wine remain still in their very natural substances, and therefore may not be adored (for that were idolatry, to be abhorred of all faithful Christians); and the natural body and blood of our Saviour Christ are in heaven, and not here; it being against the truth of Christ's natural body to be at one time in more places than one." This is sound speech that cannot be condemned. Well would it be for the Church of England if all Churchmen would read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest what the Prayer-book teaches about Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper.

If we love our souls and desire their prosperity, let us be very jealous over our doctrine about the Lord's Supper. Let us stand fast on the simple teaching of Scripture, and let no one drive us from it under the pretence of increased reverence for the ordinance of Christ. Let us take heed, lest under confused and mystical notions of some inexplicable presence of Christ's body and blood under the form of bread and wine, we find ourselves unawares heretics about Christ's human nature. Next to the doctrine that Christ is not God, but only man, there is nothing more dangerous than the doctrine that Christ is not man, but only God. If we would not fall into that pit, we must hold firmly that there can be no literal presence of Christ's body in the Lord's Supper; because His body is in heaven, and not on earth, though as God He is everywhere.<sup>2</sup>

- (d) Let us now go one step further, and bring our whole subject to a conclusion. There will be a real bodily presence of Christ when He comes again the second time to judge the world. This is a point about which the Bible speaks so plainly that there is no room left for dispute or doubt. When our Lord had ascended up before the eyes of His disciples, the angels said to them, "*This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven*" (Acts i. 11). There can be no mistake about the meaning of these words. Visibly and bodily our Lord left the world, and visibly and bodily He will return in the day which is emphatically called the day of "*His appearing*" (1 Peter i. 7).

The world has not yet done with Christ. Myriads talk and think of Him as of One who did His work in the world and passed on to His own place, like some statesman or philosopher, leaving nothing but His memory behind Him. The world will be fearfully undeceived one day. That same Jesus who came nineteen centuries ago in lowliness and poverty, to be despised and crucified, shall come again one day in power and glory, to raise the dead and change the living, and to reward every man according to his works. The wicked shall see that Saviour whom they despised, but too late, and shall call on the rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of the Lamb. Those solemn words which Jesus addressed to the High Priest the night before His crucifixion shall at length be fulfilled: "*Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven*" (Matt. xxvi. 64). The godly shall see the Saviour whom they have read of, heard of, and believed, and find, like the Queen of Sheba, that the half of His goodness

had not been known. They shall find that sight is far better than faith, and that in Christ's actual presence is fulness of joy.

This is the real bodily presence of Christ, for which every true-hearted Christian ought daily to long and pray. Happy are those who make it an article of their faith, and live in the constant expectation of a second personal advent of Christ. Then, and then only, will the devil be bound, the curse be taken off the earth, the world be restored to its original purity, sickness and death be taken away, tears be wiped from all eyes, and the redemption of the saint, in body as well as soul, be completed. *"It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is"* (1 John iii. 2). The highest style of Christian is the man who desires the real presence of his Master, and *"loves His appearing"* (2 Tim. iv. 8).

I have now unfolded, as far as I can in a short paper, the truth about the presence of God and His Christ. I have shown (1) the general doctrine of God's presence everywhere; (2) the Scriptural doctrine of Christ's real, spiritual presence; (3) the Scriptural doctrine of Christ's real, bodily presence. I now leave the whole subject with a parting word of application, and commend it to serious attention. In an age of hurry and bustle about secular things, in an age of wretched strife and controversy about religion, I entreat men not to neglect the great truths which these pages contain.

- (1) What do we know of Christ ourselves? We have heard of Him thousands of times. We call ourselves Christians. But what do we know of Christ experimentally, as our own personal Saviour, our own Priest, our own Friend, the Healer of our conscience, the comfort of our heart, the Pardoner of our sins, the Foundation of our hope, the confidence of our souls? How is it?
- (2) Let us not rest till we feel Christ "present" in our own hearts, and know what it is to be one with Christ and Christ in us. This is real religion. To live in the habit of looking backward to Christ on the cross, upward to Christ at God's right hand, and forward to Christ coming again,—this is the only Christianity which gives comfort in life and good hope in death. Let us remember this.
- (3) Let us beware of holding erroneous views about the Lord's Supper, and especially about the real nature of Christ's "presence" in it. Let us not so mistake that blessed ordinance, which was meant to be our soul's meat, as to turn it into our soul's poison. There is no sacrifice in the Lord's Supper, no sacrificing priest, no altar, no bodily "presence" of Christ in the bread and wine. These things are not in the Bible, and are dangerous inventions of man, leading on to superstition. Let us take care.
- (4) Let us keep continually before our minds the second advent of Christ, and that real "presence" which is yet to come. Let our loins be girded, and our lamps burning, and ourselves like men daily waiting for their Master's return. Then, and then only, shall we have all the desires of our souls satisfied. Till then the less we expect from this world the better. Let our daily cry be, *"Come, Lord Jesus."*