

## The Three Witnesses

By Horatius Bonar, 1867

"This is the one who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth." 1 John 5:6

The world is not for us, but against us. It lies in wickedness, and must be our enemy. It is Satan's kingdom, and can afford us neither home nor friendly shelter. It was Christ's foe, and it is ours no less; seeking our ruin both by force and craft. It has always hated the Church; it does so still. It hated the Master, and it hates the servant too. The seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, must be at variance with each other.

It is to be fought against; not yielded to. There can only be warfare between it and us; not friendship, not peace, not truce, not alliance, not compromise. In this warfare, it is faith alone, which can give us the victory--faith which shows us the shadowy vanity of things seen and temporal, and the abiding glory of things unseen and eternal. The BELIEVING MAN is the only conqueror. It is as a believing man that he fights and overcomes. Mere earnestness will not do; nothing but faith. "For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith." 1 John 5:4

In what, then, or in whom is it, that he believes? In Jesus as the Son of God. It is not faith in ideas, or principles, or opinions, or doctrines, that gives the victory. It is faith in Christ Jesus, the Son of the living God.

But what does this imply? And who is this Son of God? And how do we know that Jesus is the Son of God? To this the apostle answers, He "came by water and by blood;" that is, he was marked out by these two things--and so proved to be "the coming one," the Messiah, the Son of God. These showed him to be the Christ, and sealed him as such. Both of these things were needed, and both were given; the one at his baptism, the other at his crucifixion.

The Christ, revealed to Adam, was one who was to be truly the Son of man and the Son of God; who, as the seed of the woman, was to be bruised in his heel, when consummating his victory over the serpent. The Christ revealed to the patriarchs and prophets was the same. The Christ of type and sacrifice was the same. The Christ of the prophets was still the same. He was such a Christ as could have a twofold testimony borne to him; a testimony by water and a testimony by blood; so that, had either of these been lacking when he came, the evidence of his being the very Christ, the Son of God, would have been incomplete. To these two God adds a third witness, confirming the testimony of the previous two--the Holy Spirit. He also comes in as a witness-bearer, uniting his testimony to the others, and proclaiming the same truth--giving his evidence to the same facts. So that thus we have a threefold testimony on earth, a testimony directed to one great point--that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Two witnesses under the law were sufficient to attest a matter; and God gives two witnesses, who are both most explicit in their testimony; but to make assurance yet surer, he adds a third, the Holy Spirit. And thus there are three that bear witness upon earth, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one; or, literally, "are towards this one thing," or, are directed to, or converge in this one point, that is, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

This, then, is the way in which God lays the foundation for faith to rest upon. He not only sends his Son—but he accompanies his mission with convincing evidence as to who and what he is. He places a basis for faith, so sure and satisfactory, that a man, understanding it, can at once say, "Now I know of a truth that this is the Christ, the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Seed of David, the Son of Mary, the Son of God." It is in this way that God produces faith in us; not by calling on us to put forth some vast effort to accomplish an act which we call faith; but by turning our eyes to the Person of the Messiah, and opening them to see it, and to see, at the same time, the evidence for Jesus of Nazareth being the Christ, the Son of the living God. You who complain of weak faith or no faith, and who are all the day crying, "Help my unbelief," yet turning your eye away from the object of faith, look here; look at God's testimony to his Son. Mark the divine evidence given, the threefold proof that Jesus is the Christ. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Let us look at this threefold evidence.

I. The WATER says Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That baptismal scene at Jordan means much. Not only by it did Jesus fulfill all righteousness—but by it he was declared to be the Son of God. In it we see the Father and the Spirit uniting in their testimony to that mighty fact, or truth, on which our faith rests—that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the living God. As the voice from heaven did audibly, as the descending Spirit, in his dove-like form, did visibly, so did the waters of baptism, sensibly and palpably, proclaim to us that Jesus was the Son of God. The announcement coming forth from that baptismal symbol, of which the one John made use, and of which the other John here reminds us, was most intelligible and explicit. It was neither ambiguous nor uncertain. It pointed out the person, while it proclaimed his character and office. And it came not from earth—but from heaven. It came from him who cannot be mistaken, and who will mislead no man; from him whose witness-bearing is the surest of all testimonies. Unbelief can no longer cavil or mis-doubt; faith need no longer hesitate; here is God's own proclamation, that puts uncertainty aside, and sets all misgivings at rest. God himself, in that water, speaks to man, and says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." What farther need have we of witnesses?

II. The BLOOD says Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. On four occasions was the blood poured forth, at his circumcision; in Gethsemane; in Pilate's hall, when he was scourged and crowned with thorns; and on the cross. But it is to the testimony of the cross that the apostle here refers. That testimony was given both before and after death. The nails of the cross drew forth his blood before death, and the soldier's spear drew out the remainder after death; thus completely pouring out the "blood which was the life," and announcing that he had thoroughly died, and that the evidence of that death was as complete as it was visible.

The blood is God's testimony that he is in very deed "the Christ;" the Seed of the woman; the Man with the bruised heel; the Messiah of the prophets; the Sin-offering of Israel; the Fulfiller of all types and promises. While the water says, "Unto us a Child is born;" the blood says, "He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, the chastisement of our peace was on him, and by his stripes we are healed." His baptism said to us, "The Word has been made flesh;" the cross proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world."

As, without the sacrificial life-taking on the cross, he would have been but half a Christ, no, no Christ at all to us; so God has taken special pains to let us see that that life was really taken, and that he is in very deed the Messiah. Hence the stress which John lays on the piercing of his side, and the issuing of the blood and water; "He who saw it bore record; and his record is true; and he knows that he says true; THAT YOU MIGHT BELIEVE" (John 19:34, 35). And then he adds afterwards, "These are written that you might BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST, the Son of God; and that believing, you might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

On this testimony, then, let our faith rest. The witness is divine, for it is "the blood of God;" and he who speaks to us in that blood is Jehovah himself. The blood is the proof which God has given us, that this Jesus of Nazareth is in very deed the Christ of God. False religion and vain philosophy gather round a Christ of their own fashioning; a golden calf of their own molding; a Christ whose blood was never shed. But that which is true and divine, acknowledges as its alpha and omega, a Christ who died as well as lived; a Christ who took upon him our curse; a Christ whose person, however glorious in itself, is nothing to us sinners, without the blood shedding of his sacrificial work.

III. The SPIRIT says Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It was the Spirit who bore witness to Christ at his baptism, when he descended on him like a dove; and it was the same Spirit who, at Pentecost, came down in such mighty power to sum up the testimony. As the Dove at Jordan, and as the tongue of fire in the upper chamber, he bore witness to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. And still he carries on his testimony, though no longer by visible form, or audible sound. He testifies of Christ; he glorifies Christ. He points at once to his person and his cross; he takes us to his cradle at Bethlehem, and to his tomb at Golgotha. All that he now is doing bears reference to the Son of God. He tells us what the water means, and confirms its testimony. Thus is the evidence completed; no, more than completed; for though two witnesses would have sufficed, according to the law, God has added this third one—one in all respects divine—to confirm the truth beyond the possibility of doubt. And now we know of a truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the sacrifice for sin, the Savior of the world.

Now we know that the Son of God is come; and this is the resting-place of faith. The water says, "He is come;" the blood says, "He is come;" the Spirit says, "He is come." Here faith rests; and, resting here, it "overcomes the world." No other faith can give us the victory save that which roots itself in the truth, that Jesus is the Son of God, and in the evidence of this, supplied to us by these three witnesses. "A faithful witness will not lie;" and here are three faithful witnesses, furnished by God himself. A "true witness delivers souls;" and here we have three true witnesses, on whose testimony we rest for the deliverance of our souls.

If, then, we would be conquerors, let us cast ourselves more absolutely on this threefold testimony, and drink in its spirit and meaning. It is only in proportion as we do so that we shall prove victorious. Nothing else can give victory but faith; and no faith can do this save that which leans on divine testimony. Every other will give way or break down. This only will stand, and, in standing, prove itself an "overcoming" faith; a world-overcoming faith, because a faith in Him who has overcome the world for us. The more that we know of him who lived that he might do battle with the world, and

died that he might vanquish it, the more shall we ourselves prove conquerors, "more than conquerors, through him who loved us."

The reason why so many are weak and sickly among us, so unable either to fight or to stand, is that they do not believe that which these three witnesses testify, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; or, if they believe it, they do not think it enough. They must have something added to this great truth before it will yield them either confidence or strength! But if God be true, it is, of itself, enough. If what the water says be true; if what the blood says be true; if what the Spirit says is true--we are provided with all we need, for the warfare and the victory. "Who is he who overcomes the world--but he who believes that Jesus is the Christ?" In all our battles let us take this as our watchword, the mighty, the divine spell, with which we overcome the enemy. There is nothing like it. And just as it is written, "Who is he who overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Christ," so it is also written, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." Can words be more explicit? If this great fact be true; if there be enough of evidence for it, and if it be, in its own large fullness, sufficient to bring you blessing, as God says it is--then why should we doubt, or why refuse, to take the gladness which this fact of facts embodies and presents? Most assuredly it does contain, as in a golden urn, all the peace, and the hope, and the joy, which a human soul can possess; and he who has not received this joy and peace, has not yet understood the meaning of this mighty fact.

Is Jesus really the Christ? Is this proved and established beyond a doubt? Do you receive it as true, not upon the report of men--but upon the testimony of these three witnesses? Then is it not written that "whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God?" and what, then, should shake your peace or your confidence, but that which shakes the evidence of this blessed fact--the evidence that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, and that this Christ of God died and rose from the dead?

Is this truth, this event, which God accounts so excellent and so momentous, a dubious thing? Or, even though certain, is it a small thing in your eyes--a trivial and subordinate piece of knowledge which a man may accept, and yet not be the better for it, or reject, and yet be none the worse? No; it is no poor, no common thing. It is the greatest fact which our earth has yet witnessed; it is the most powerful, the most pregnant, the most vital, the most transforming of all. Take it gladly in. Bid it welcome. Let it have free course throughout your whole being, unchecked by any wretched surmises, as to its not being sufficient to do such great things for you. Take it in all its rich and boundless meaning, as at once the vindication of God's righteousness, and the exposition of his love; and you will find what peace, what life, what healing it can diffuse throughout your whole being. Like a goodly vessel, laden with the riches, the fruit, the fragrance, of a hundred climates--no, with the very glory of the heaven of heavens--it will enter your port and unload its divine freight, filling your soul--were you the most sorrowful of earth's sons--with the joy unspeakable and full of glory.