

Liberation

John 20: 16-18; Luke 19: 28-36; John 11: 41-44; Acts 4: 23-31.

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DEC. 1963

One of the most blessed things we can contemplate is that divine love would so operate as to set us free for its own pleasure. There are many things from which we need to be liberated; the Scriptures speak of the bondage of sin and death, and the bondage of corruption. These are matters we need to be delivered *from*, but what is important is not only what we are delivered from, but what we are delivered *for*. God in His movements of love and power would liberate us from every hindering element in order that we might be available for His service, and marked by intelligent response to Himself.

Speaking of His earthly people God said, "Let My son go, *that he may serve Me*," (Exodus 4: 23). We may be content to be set free from the bondage in which we were held, and that is a great matter, involving the death of Christ Himself. In writing to the Thessalonians Paul says, "Jesus, our Deliverer *from the coming wrath*", and to the Galatians he writes, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us *from this present evil world*, according to the will of God and our Father." We would all surely desire to have a deepening appreciation of the precious love of Jesus as the One who died to set us free, but we should desire also a clearer apprehension of the great motives which activated divine love in liberating us for its own joy and pleasure.

It is apparent from Scripture that men do not always find their bonds irksome, indeed some alas! are almost unnoticed by them. When the Lord Jesus spoke of this matter to the Pharisees they had the temerity to assert that they were Abraham's children and had never been in bondage to any, and as they said that the shackles of Rome hung upon them. On the other hand God Himself places restrictions upon men, and when God so acts men begin to say, "Let us break Their bands asunder, and cast away Their cords from us." Yet how thankful we should be for the restraining hand of God! "He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment," (Proverbs 8: 29); "The remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain," (Psalm 76: 10). In the sphere of creation and in that which is moral we owe much to the restrictions imposed by God in His power and His wisdom.

God desires that we should be set free from everything that would hinder us from full response to His love, and this feature is seen in the Scriptures before us. Mary Magdalene had known bondage in a way beyond the experience of many, seven demons had possessed her. In John 20 however she is brought before us as one whom love has liberated for its own joy. She had stood by the tomb of Jesus; before that she had stood by the cross of Jesus, and none of us will know the liberation that love has in view for us unless we too have some appreciation of what the cross and the tomb of Jesus involved. We owe all in the way of liberty to the vicarious work and glorious resurrection of Christ.

Referring again to the children of Israel, God said "I am come down to deliver them." Although they groaned under the lashes of Egypt's taskmasters they do not appear to have asked God to intervene on their behalf. He came to their help uninvited. The love of God is not causative, God loves because *He is love*, and in love He came down to deliver His people. In Luke's gospel as the Lord Jesus stood in Nazareth's synagogue He applied to Himself the Scripture, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me . . . to preach deliverance to the captives, and . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised." Further we read of the Holy Spirit that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Thus the whole Godhead is actively interested in this great matter of liberation.

The fact that we today move in a circle of religious profession does not in itself ensure that we have been set at liberty. The woman in Luke 13, had been bound for eighteen years in full view of the synagogue, and no one realized that it was Satan's work until the Lord Jesus, the One who was manifested to undo the works of the devil, set her free.

We have referred to Mary's standing by the cross and by the tomb of Jesus, now in John 20: 16 she is seen as standing *expectantly*; love would ever have us thus! The realm of divine love is infinite, and a fresh sense of its glory and blessedness is ever available to us. Mary Magdalene came of Naphtali's lineage, she is thus one of whom it is said, "Satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the Lord." What immensity of blessing has reached *us* through the death and resurrection of Christ! We often sing, "He died that we might live." Life is a vibrant matter, marked by a response of affections to the blessed God. We read in Isaiah 38 "For the grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee; . . . the living, the living he shall praise Thee as I do this day." Again we read that "Naphtali is a hind *let loose*; he giveth goodly words." What "goodly words" Mary carried to the disciples! The Lord looks upon her with love saying, "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" Revealing Himself to her, satisfying her every desire, He made known to her that He was ascending to a sphere where He would associate His own with Himself before His Father and His God. Moving as He did *descendingly* in love, He moved alone, for no one could tread such a path but He. As moving *ascendingly* He would carry the affections of those His love had liberated into a realm where He would make known to His own the glories that are hidden in that Name of grace, that in association with Himself we might know the joy and the liberty of the Father's presence. The prerogative to move is with love itself (Song of Solomon 3: 5), but divine love as known in Jesus would have us to be where He Himself is.

In Luke 19, the Lord liberates that which can be of service to Himself, for it is said that the Lord "had need." The chapter is all of a piece, which is the way Luke writes. It starts with a man who is said to be a "sinner," but who has desires to see Jesus "who He is." That is a very fine desire, and we may depend upon it that if any have such desires they are on the high road to liberty, because the One who sets free is *the Son*. The Lord Himself said, "the truth shall make you free," but He also said, "If the Son shall set you free, ye shall be really free" — it is an emphatic word. Zacchaeus did not really find who Jesus was until he had a personal link with Him; then he found that Jesus had brought with Him just that which could make him free — the salvation of God.

At the close of this incident the Lord is said to add, which would indicate that what He was about to say stood connected with what had gone before. He spoke of servants and their service. To each was given a pound. In another Scripture different amounts were give, but here all receive the same. Evidently it does not refer to special gift, but something common to all, something which we can each use in the interests of Christ. Now that precedes what the Lord does in verses 28-36. This incident is given to us in each of the gospels, hence a special importance attaches to it. Luke tells us that the colt was that of which the Lord had need, and the disciples are instructed to go and loose it, and more than that, to bring it to Jesus. That is a word which those who are older and those who seek to serve the Lord should take to heart. Are we able, as under the command of the Lord, to bring in a ministry which results in affections being liberated for His service? The Spirit of God has been careful to tell us that the disciples did exactly what the Lord told them to do, and the result was the liberation of the colt for the purpose for which the Lord required it. The Lord has gone from the scene personally, but His Name and His interests are here, and we need to be concerned that all we do and say might have the effect of liberating affections and attaching them in loyalty to an absent Christ. We do well to note that whilst this incident took place as the Lord was "ascending up to Jerusalem," at the end of the chapter he "wept

over" the city. The cry of "Hosanna" was soon to be replaced by the cry of "Away with this man . . . crucify Him." Our Lord is still rejected, but the knowledge of His love would liberate our affections from the scene which has no place for Him , and give to us the desire to serve Him faithfully in whatever way He may "have need" of us.

In John 11, we see hearts filled with sorrow and dismay because of the presence of death and corruption. The joy and liberty of Martha and Mary in John 12 is in sharp contrast to the bondage of John 11, and magnifies the skill of divine love in the way it set them free. In a day yet to come the whole creation will be set free from this bondage of corruption, but divine love would set us free from it in *spirit* now. Sometimes this may involve a painful process. Doubtless the person prominent in the affections of the sisters in chapter 11 was Lazarus, and with them, as with us, it was a bitter lesson to learn that the flesh at its best is subject to corruption. How skilfully the Lord enters into Bethany, bringing these dear women into an appreciation of what its name signifies, for it is He alone who leads to liberty and victory. At the end of Luke's gospel He leads His own "out as far as to Bethany," to the place where the shadow of death and corruption is lifted from the spirit. Thus in John 12 we see portrayed an atmosphere of perfect liberty; Martha serving happily, Mary filling the house with the odour of the ointment, and Lazarus, not now having the prominent place in the affections of the sisters, but "one of them that sat at table *with Him*". Christ Himself now has the supreme place, and in the liberation that love has wrought each one is found responding to that love, and the fragrance of such responsive affection fills the house.

In the 4th chapter of the Acts we see how the apostles, as set free, moved in relation to the sphere in which the Spirit of God was operating. "Being let go, they went to their own company." In chapter 2 the Holy Spirit filled the place "where they were sitting." That would indicate that there is a realm in which the Holy Spirit is operating in relation to the great thoughts of God. All around us today we see combinations of evil and organized opposition to the testimony of God and to Christ. But we can thank God that "Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world," (1 John 4: 4). The believers in Acts were able to look upon all the threatenings of men, and to know that their actions could only result in bringing to pass what God had already predetermined should be done. They had the assurance in their hearts that God was in control, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only He who now letteth (restrains) will let (restrain), until He be taken out of the way."

As moving in the power of the Holy Spirit, ungrieved and unhindered, we in this day may know the blessedness of being liberated in spirit from the scene of strife and lawlessness around us, finding ourselves free to respond to God as our Father, and to serve the Lord Jesus in faithfulness until He comes again.