

## Nearness to Christ

Gen. 45: 4; John 1: 38, 39; Luke 15: 1.

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Nearness to Christ! Not a theory, nor yet a mere doctrine, but a positive blessed reality! Indications of God's desire that man should be near to Him abound in the Old Testament, and the New Testament overflows with this wondrous truth. Precious indeed to learn, in the Gospels, something of the depths of love in the Saviour's heart as He invites to *Himself*. "Come unto Me, *all ye* that labour and are heavy laden;" "If *any* man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." Infinite tenderness marks His words to the disciples — "Suffer little children to come unto Me" (Luke 18: 16). Matthew and Mark also record these precious words from the lips of One who was the lonely "Man of sorrows," yet whose heart went out to *all* (Cf. Matthew 4: 23-25). In His presence the sin-sick soul found peace (Luke 7); the weary heart was relieved of its burden and made to drink the living stream of divine love (John 4); the blind were made to see (Matthew 20); hearts broken by the inroads of death saw the glory of the Son of God (Mark 5; Luke 7; John 11; Cf. Romans 1: 4). Blessed indeed to be near to Christ!

In the typical record of Genesis Joseph had been despised and cast out by his brethren, falsely accused and cast into prison — but is exalted and made the administrator of blessing to those in need. Such need *drove* his brethren to him, but in the verse we have drawn attention to his affection for them *drew them to him* — "Come near to me, I pray you." Joseph had been given the name of "Zaphnath-Paaneah" (Genesis 41: 45) which may be translated as "The Saviour of the world" and "The Sustainer of life." Doubtless our need drove us to Christ — "dead in trespasses and sins" we needed a *living Saviour*, and thank God we have found such a One in Christ! He who "is able also to save them *to the uttermost* that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7: 25). This, of course, goes far beyond the type of Genesis 45.

Drawing thus near to Christ in *our need*, we find that divine love had brought Him *near to us*. We can say (with the men of John 4) "We . . . know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world," but we learn in His presence "that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world" (1 John 4: 14 New Trans.); and if in faith *we have moved towards Him*, and "believing . . . have life through His Name," we find, as near to Him, that *He has drawn near to us*, saying, "I am come that they (His sheep) might have life, and might have it more abundantly" (John 10: 10 New Trans.). What holy, precious secrets of love the divine presence yields!

Thus we arrive at the further translation of the *exalted* Joseph's name — "The Revealer of Secrets." John Baptist's disciples, moved by his exclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God," follow Jesus, asking in answer to the Lord's question, "Master, where dwellest Thou?" "Come and see" is the gracious invitation, and they "abode *with Him*" that day — a day of nearness to Christ, in an atmosphere of holy intimacy and love, a day which so endeared Him to them that one of them, Andrew, must immediately commence his happy personal service of bringing others to Christ! As drawing us in nearness to Himself it is the joy of the Saviour's heart to reveal to us the secrets and wonder of divine love, the Father's love in which He Himself ever dwelt. The Gospel of John is outstanding in its presentation of this delightful theme, John 17 in particular dwelling upon the intimate revelations which Christ's love has made to those He delights to have in nearness to Himself. The gift of eternal life; the knowledge of the only true God; the manifestation of the Father's name; the knowledge that all things given to Christ in Manhood and which He shares with His own, are from the Father; divine

communications (v. 8); His own joy (v. 13); the word of God in testimony (v. 14); the constant care of the Father Himself (v. 15); the sharing of His own glory (v. 22); His desire that they should be with Him to behold the glory peculiar to Himself, and as knowing the Father's Name to enjoy the same precious love which He Himself knew in intimacy with His Father.

Love that found its full expression  
In Thy gift unspeakable.  
Him — who dwelling in Thy bosom,  
Could alone its secrets tell.

How choice are the results of responding to His gracious word "Come near to Me" — the knowledge of His precious Saviourship, His sustaining power, and above all else the ability to appreciate in holy nearness something of His glory as the Son of the Father's love.

How often the Gospels record the experiences of those who enjoyed nearness to Christ. Mary at His feet *listening* to His word; the disciples on the Mount, and again in the intimacy of "the house" (Matthew 13: 36) — apart from the multitudes — being initiated into the bearing of those important parables; Mary Magdalene in the garden; the "Upper Room" ministry; the manifestations of the forty days of resurrection, are but a few of the occasions when His own enjoyed the unspeakable preciousness of nearness to Himself. In tender grace He walked with two despondent disciples for something like seven miles, shewing to them the hitherto unrealized "things concerning Himself" in the Scriptures, and then, in the intimacy of the home, making Himself known to them "in the breaking of bread." How well known these incidents are, but beloved brethren, let us cherish the opportunity of meditating upon the Scriptures *in the company of our precious Lord*. Will He not delight to draw near to us? As "they that feared the Lord" in Malachi 3 "spake often one to another," the Lord "observed it and heard." Were they not morally in nearness to Himself as they "thought upon His Name"? The incident was "written before Him," but they *themselves* were His own "peculiar treasure." This expression could be rendered "My own possession" — the very words applied by God to His people (see Exodus 19: 5) if they would but hear His voice and keep His covenant. We do not wonder that the heart of God found joy and pleasure in a day of general departure, as He took account of the movements of these saints as they drew near to Himself — a precious remnant indeed!

Luke 15 is a beautiful setting forth of the blessedness of drawing near to Christ. The word used in verse 1 suggests a *continuous coming* to Him — the outcasts and those burdened in heart and conscience *ever* found a Friend in Jesus! The Pharisees and Scribes may murmur — but the movement towards Himself provided the blessed Lord with the opportunity of shewing so unmistakeably the joy which divine Persons have as moving in compassion and love. The sheep and the silver were found, but the hearts of the Searchers were filled with joy; the prodigal held in the clasp of unchanging love, and the Father's heart and house filled with holy unending joy. Eternity will disclose the full blessedness of such a scene — divine love satisfied in the company of unnumbered hosts who, through infinite mercy, have been *drawn to Christ*.

How often we have derived comfort (as the Scripture in Thessalonians indicates) in anticipating the moment when the precious Saviour will rapture His saints to Himself, but perhaps the choicest thought connected with that wonderful moment is contained in the expression "and so shall we *ever be with the Lord*". Happy, holy uninterrupted nearness to *Himself*. Rapturous joy our eternal portion, and His own great heart of love satisfied in having His own near to Himself for ever.

Shall we not, in this the day of His absence and rejection, contribute to His joy in happily

responding to His most precious invitation, "Come near to Me, I pray you."

Close to Thy trusted side,

In fellowship divine;

No cloud, no distance, e'er shall hide

Glories that then shall shine.