

# Disappointment and its Cure

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Disappointment is one of the most fruitful causes of discouragement amongst Christians, with the attendant consequences of soul-declension and drifting into the world; and it is to be feared that it is operating powerfully today in many directions.

In times of revival, when the Spirit of God is very manifestly working, it is a comparatively easy matter for the believer to travel happily in the right direction. He finds himself borne along on the current of spiritual enthusiasm and encouraged by every contact with his fellow-believers; but, on the other hand, when, as is always the case, the revival season begins to wane, when the power of evil again becomes painfully manifest, and the flood-tide of prosperity is succeeded by the ebbtide of adversity, then depression often sets in, rendered all the more acute by great and frequently unwarranted expectations begotten by the previous success.

At the present moment a season of very acute depression has set in, embracing practically all the Protestant countries and specially the English-speaking lands. The declension is widely recognized, for it has reduced congregations in all directions, and piled up big missionary deficits both in men and money. Its roots, however, lie deeper, being found in that loss of faith-contact with Christ which has let loose upon us a flood of false and fatal teachings connected with utter worldliness. As a result, disappointment and sad defections are being witnessed in many directions.

We live in the dispensation of the Holy Ghost, *indwelling*, upon earth. It was preceded by the brief dispensation of the Son of God, *incarnate*, upon earth. Into those brief years were crowded the most memorable public events of this world's history. They excited in some hearts the liveliest expectations, and subsequently overwhelmed them in the deepest disappointment. We are furnished in Luke 24: 13-25 with, a touching story illustrating the inward experiences of two such individuals, revealing the causes of their disappointment, and showing the cure. Let us learn a few lessons from their history.

The two disciples going to Emmaus were evidently drifting away from the centre of divine operations at that moment — Jerusalem. They were drifting because discouraged, and discouraged because disappointed in the deepest possible way. We can but little imagine, perhaps, the expectations kindled in their breasts by the advent of Israel's Messiah. Visions of emancipation from the Roman yoke, of a national revival, and of glory and splendour under David's Son, in which they expected to share in no inconsiderable measure, filled their eyes. "We trusted," said they, "that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." Now, however, the vision had been rudely dispelled, for instead of ascending David's throne to the overthrow of Caesar, He had been lifted up by Caesar's soldiers on the cross of Barabbas, and the whole people had rivetted Caesar's yoke upon their necks more firmly

than ever, and publicly, too, saying, "We have no king but Caesar." Sick at heart and unable to solve the riddle presented by His claims which they accepted on the one hand, and His sudden and dramatic eclipse on the other, Cleopas and his companion were in the act of abandoning their discipleship and returning to their home.

"Jesus Himself drew near and went with them." At first He asked but two questions which served to draw out from them the story of their disappointment and woe; but that told, also, how unerringly He was able to put His finger upon the root of their trouble, saying, "O fools, and slow of heart, to believe all that the prophets have spoken."

Here let us observe two facts:

First, that disappointment amongst believers is caused by their cherishing mistaken expectations not warranted by the Word of God.

Second, that such unwarranted expectations *are* entertained by believers because they base them upon a partial view of Scripture rather than "ALL that the prophets have spoken."

Were there no Scriptures which would warrant the belief in a Messiah who would come in power and glory for Israel's deliverance from every yoke? Certainly there were. Multitudes of such passages could be adduced; but there were others which spoke of a humbled Messiah, despised and rejected of men, cut off for the iniquities of God's people, and these they overlooked. Dazzled with the passages speaking of His glory, the others would doubtless seem to them indistinct, mysterious, obscure, and be speedily ignored on the plea that they were difficult to explain and of no particular interest or profit. Hence it never occurred to them that the Christ might *first* "suffer these things," and *then* "enter into His glory."

Nearly two millenniums have passed since Cleopas and his friend pursued their sorrow-stricken way, but the main outlines of their history are being retraced still by multitudes of disappointed Christians.

"Soon after my conversion," says one, "I sought and, as I thought, obtained 'entire satisfaction.' I claimed the action of the 'cleansing fire' and believed that sin within me was totally eradicated. However, as time proceeded I found to my unspeakable sorrow that still it was alive and active within me; and from the hour of that discovery my hold on God has been of the feeblest sort. I hardly know whether I am saved or not."

"I used to be an earnest Christian. worker, with great zeal for missions," says another. "I fully believed in the coming of a millennium such as the Bible depicts, and the idea of the gospel triumphing and advancing from conquest to conquest until that end was reached filled me with enthusiasm. Of late, however, it has been forced upon me that the actual number of *professed* converts, to say nothing of the *real* ones, is not keeping pace with the increase in the world's population; and worse, that the real triumphs of the gospel in heathen lands are much more than offset by the triumphs of the leaven of rationalism and ritualism in the home lands of Christianity. I cannot describe my disillusionment. I have lost heart entirely."

"Years ago," says a third, "I connected myself with a religious movement which I thought was going to effect a real deliverance within Christendom. My soul was greatly blessed as truth recovered from God's Word after long oblivion was presented to me; and I thought I had indeed found 'the model church' instituted upon primitive and apostolic foundations, which would prove a rallying centre for Christians everywhere. But to-day, how has the fine gold become dim I Where is my model church? Ecclesiastical confusion seems to be complete, and every attempt at displaying church unity and order

has ended in a mess and failure. I am sick at heart and very depressed."

Many other such sorrowful complaints could be instanced, but one and all they would only illustrate, as do those quoted above, the disastrous effects of cherishing expectations not warranted by Scripture *as a whole*.

Do we not read in Scripture of deliverance from sin as well as from its penalty? Does it not speak of "the refiner's fire," and is not the promise that we shall be baptized with fire, as well as the Holy Ghost? Is it not said "sin shall not have dominion over you"?

All these things we read — and more besides. Yet let us not overlook that "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves," and that even the Apostle Paul, after a sojourn in the third heaven, needed a thorn in the flesh to prevent the flesh within him being "puffed up." Taking all Scripture into consideration we learn that it is indeed God's thought that a believer may in this world be delivered from the *power of sin*, and we are saved from the ruinous mistake that we are already delivered from the very *presence* of sin, — with its resultant disillusionment and shipwreck!

Again, the prophetic Scriptures are undoubtedly very full of predictions concerning a wonderful time of blessing for this earth, commonly called the millennium. Christ *will* extend His sway over all nations. Mighty spiritual movements *will* take place. A nation shall be "born in a day." The people of Israel shall be "all righteous," and throughout the wide world righteousness and peace will flourish.

But let us not overlook the significant statement that "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26: 9). Or that of Peter in the council of Jerusalem to the effect that the divine programme for this age is the gathering out of the Gentile nations a people for Christ's name (see Acts 15: 9).

And what shall be said to the multitude of Christians so sadly distressed because of their own failure and the failure of their fellow-believers in regard to association in service or Christian fellowship? What earnest lover of the Lord Jesus is there who does not find himself standing amidst the wreckage either of "denominations" or "assemblies" or "fellowships" or "societies" or other associations of a sacred sort? — whether originally constructed on scriptural lines or not. In some cases visible disintegration has produced nothing but fragments; in other cases, which is even worse, outward *unity* has been preserved at the expense of *purity*. Rottenness and corruption are rampant within. What about the bright anticipations formed, so ruthlessly dispelled? What *can* be said?

From the lips of Cleopas, in our story, there fell one tell-tale sentence. "We trusted," said he, "that it had been He which should have redeemed ISRAEL." Evidently the redemption and glory of his beloved nation held the supreme place in his thoughts. He read the Scriptures and *Israel* was to him the great theme, with Messiah as the God-given servant of Israel's greatness. This was the order of their relative importance in his thoughts: Israel, *first*, Messiah second. A great mistake, fruitful of keen distress!

Is it possible that many of us have been guilty of the same error, in principle? Have "causes" absorbed too much of our attention, until we have insensibly set up little "Israels" of our own manufacture, the prosperity of which has become more dear to us than all beside? There have been many distinct movements of the Spirit of God, heaven-born in their origin, since Pentecost; and into the current of one such we may have been drawn. Many a time have saints become over-occupied with a movement till they are left clinging to *it*, with its vital force spent and gone. The *movement* has eclipsed the *Master!* Has it been so with us?

There is, however, thank God, A REMEDY, plainly indicated in the scripture before us. In our

analysis it seems to be composed of three ingredients, which we will consider separately.

### 1. ALL SCRIPTURE.

This is of deep importance, for no less than three times is it emphasised within the compass of a few verses (25-27). "All that the prophets have spoken," "All the prophets," "All the scriptures" are the expressions used. We need to avoid favouritism in our reading of Scripture — the constant reading of certain passages the almost or entire ignoring of others.

We equally need to avoid partiality in our interpretations of Scripture. "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1: 20) — *i.e.* it is not to be interpreted as an isolated passage, but in reference to the whole body of Scripture testimony, just as the exact meaning of a small figure inserted in the corner of a great painting by a famous master may best be ascertained by a knowledge of the central idea of the picture and the picture itself as a whole.

More important even than all Scripture is,

### 2. CHRIST

*as the theme and centre of all Scripture*, for "He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Not "concerning *Israel*," mark, but "concerning HIMSELF." What revelations were made to their wondering hearts during the remainder of that walk! No wonder that their hearts burned within them!

So after all, everything was not gone, even if Israel's redemption seemed to be indefinitely postponed. Christ, not Israel, is the glorious centre of all God's purposes. In the course of that marvellous exposition of all Scripture, Isaiah 49: 5, 6, must have been considered. "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. And He said, It is a light thing that thou shouldst be My Servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." The theme of any discourse founded upon that scripture must necessarily be, "Not Israel, but Christ."

One thing more was needed by Cleopas and his companion ere the cure of their disappointment was complete. The walk ended in the quiet home in Emmaus, and at the evening meal when the invited guest suddenly **assumed the place of host and** broke the bread their eyes were opened and they *knew Him* as He vanished from their sight. Here we find, most important of all —

### 3. CHRIST RISEN, *known by faith as the rallying centre of His people.*

They had indeed lost their Messiah as formerly known amongst them in flesh and blood; they now had their first glimpse of Him in the new resurrection conditions into which He had entered, and that first glimpse entirely transformed them. Under His teaching they had just seen that He Himself was the theme of all Scripture; but even while they listened and their hearts as a result burned within them, they only saw Him with their natural eyes and did not *know* Him. Now He vanishes from sight, and they do know Him *by faith*. What an exchange!

Then it was that their disappointment was changed into delight. Instead of everything being gone, everything was secure. Their night of weeping was over; their souls were bathed in the light that shone from the risen One. Their Sun had not set amid storm-clouds never again to rise, as they had imagined;

He had but suffered a momentary eclipse for their sakes, and had now emerged from the shadow, never to enter it again! They were transformed by their discovery. Their disappointment being cured, they did not pursue their course of drifting for another hour.

"They rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together . . . and they told what things were done in the way, and how He was known of them in breaking of bread. And as they thus spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them."

The rest and joy that filled their hearts at that moment may be the portion of every disappointed believer today, but — *only in the same way*. Christ, and Christ alone, is the Object before the mind of God. Consequently His object is not to make saints *consciously* holy and satisfied with themselves, but *consciously* weak in themselves and *satisfied with Christ*. His object in the world is not mere philanthropy in wholesale conversion movements, but the election from among the nations of *a people for Christ*. He is not occupied to-day in constructing ecclesiastical unity — seeing it has once for all collapsed — but in *elevating Christ* as the rallying point before His people's faith and love, so that becoming an intense reality to them, He may be magnified amongst them, whether by life or by death. As this is produced, a large measure of unity — the unity of the Spirit — will be realized, though perhaps badly expressed in due ecclesiastical form, since the breakdown in that continues in the government of God.

Let us then, dear Christian reader, carefully form our expectations in the light of *all* Scripture, and let Christ, His glory, His fame, His interests, and, above all, the excellency of the knowledge of Himself be our satisfying portion. Then shall we go forward through circumstances the most distressing with courage and with joy until the bright goal is reached, when —

"All taint of sin shall be removed,  
All evil done away;  
And we shall dwell with God's Beloved  
Through God's eternal day."