

Warning and Rebuke

Luke 22: 31-34; Luke 10: 38-42.

From Notes of an Address by F. B. Hole.

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It is a matter of deep interest to trace in the Gospels how the Lord dealt with one and another of His disciples in His perfect love and wisdom. We have often dwelt upon the remarkable words He spoke to Mary when He revealed Himself to her on the resurrection day. She was just in a condition to receive those very exalted communications from His lips. But I am afraid we are not always in a condition that suits such communications, and if your experience is anything like mine you would say that all too frequently what we really need is a communication of another kind; more like, perhaps, the words spoken by the Lord to Peter and to Martha, which we have just read.

When the Lord repeated the name of anyone, He intended it to impart urgency to what He had to say. So there was something very urgent and emphatic in what He said to these two disciples, Simon Peter on the one hand, and Martha on the other. We sing sometimes — perhaps without sufficient thought and care — a verse which begins:

"Our hearts by Thee are set,
On brighter things above."

But they are not **always** set in that direction, are they? Mine is not, I must sorrowfully confess. It gets sadly deflected. Instead of remaining true, as the needle of the compass is true to the pole, I find my heart is like the compass when it gets violently jerked about and the needle vibrates in all directions. Counter-attractions come upon the scene and instead of the heart turning steadily upward it begins to turn world-ward. Then we find ourselves in need of a word of warning. How very good it is of our Lord to give us just that word of warning when it is needed.

Simon Peter was a great Apostle, but it was this that he needed — **a word of warning against self-confidence**. The trouble with him was that he was unconscious of his own self-confidence. He thought that he really was very devoted and very courageous indeed. He forgot that though he might be very impulsive, and withal keen and devoted, yet there was a spiritual foe a great deal keener and sharper than he, and if once he got into the hands of the devil he would stand no chance. Hence the Lord's word of warning, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat."

We do well, I am sure, to recognise that the spiritual forces arrayed against us are very great. Realizing this, we shall never speak lightly or slightly of the devil. The very archangel, Michael, would not do that, and he is evidently the greatest of the heavenly dignities. I suppose the reason of it was that the devil, though now a fallen potentate, was in his original condition one step higher than Michael himself. It is generally believed that in Ezekiel 28: 11-17, under the type of the king of Tyre, there is an allusion to the devil in his unfallen condition. If he was "the anointed cherub that covereth," he was in the very nearest position to God Himself. He aspired to be as God, and then he fell. In the presence of such power as this, what was Simon Peter?

The Lord knew all this, and that nothing but His more powerful intercession would prevail to save him. Hence He added, " But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Faith is the link between the soul and God, and if that is maintained the situation is saved. Faith was what the devil struck at in the

Garden of Eden. His object was to shake the creature's confidence in his Creator, and he succeeded. Hence the exceeding fitness of what we have in the Gospel — that you and I **by faith** get put into right relations with God. When God recovers the faith of His creature for Himself, blessing ensues; and faith being maintained the blessing abides.

We know what happened to Peter. Satan went forth and by a skilful combination of circumstances, adroitly led Peter into a position for which he had no real grace nor grit nor anything else. We know how he fell; denied his Master, got angry, prevaricated, cursed and swore. If it had not been that his Master was faithful and prayed for him, what would have happened to Simon? It was the intercession and action of the Lord that kept him from an end like that of Judas Iscariot.

So let **us also** accept this warning. Let us remember that the power of Satan is very great; and let us earnestly beware of self-confidence, which I suspect has something to do with nine-tenths of the falls that we suffer. Does someone say, "I do not think I am self-confident"? Wait a bit: do not settle that too quickly. If you are a young believer there is nothing that is more likely to be a snare. The very fact that you are earnest and enthusiastic after a bright conversion may lead you to feel you have a bright future, carrying all before you. But the Lord in His holy government, and in His kindness which teaches us lessons, removes His hand from us for a moment, and down we go! Self confidence is at the bottom of the mischief.

If we are older, let us not think that we are done with this terrible tendency of our hearts. We greatly need the warning still. There is nothing more easy than to be like those Jews, to whom the Apostle speaks in Romans 2. They took it for granted that they were, "A guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes." In our case the "babes" might be other Christians who do not know as much of the truth as in God's mercy we happen to know. How very easily we get self-confident as to our abilities and knowledge and the position we hold. If we do not walk in humility, and faith is not in active exercise, the devil can make fools of us. Indeed we know only too well how he has done it in times past, in the midst of Christendom. So I want this warning to ring in your ears as well as mine; but coupled with it the assurance of the intercession and power of our Lord.

The case of Martha was very different, for she was doing what was right. The house was hers and the Lord was her Guest, so had she not bustled about in the service of her house she would have failed in what was plainly her duty. The trouble was her getting burdened and distracted by "**much** serving." And what lay at the root of this? Evidently a self-centred spirit. She began to be annoyed with her sister, Mary, because she did not join in this excess of preparation, but rather sat at the feet of Jesus, enraptured with His word. Appealing to the Lord against her sister, the answer came, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." This was most clearly **a word of rebuke because of self-centredness.**

Being self-centred, Martha misjudged her sister. This was bad, but it was even worse that she misjudged her Lord. What did she say? "Lord, **dost Thou not care?**" Evidently there was a veiled complaint, just as when the disciples *in the ship* said, "Master, **carest Thou not** that we perish?" It was really an insult to suppose that He did not care. It was doubting His affection, His sympathy, His grace. No wonder that the Lord repeated her name, thus making His reply one of extreme urgency.

We do well to take this Scripture very much to heart. When people become self-centred they make their service, because it is **their** service, the centre of their thoughts. A great many of the troubles we find among the saints and servants of God are caused in this way. We say, "This is **my** service, **my**

work. I want my work to prosper." I begin to think this good brother does not give sufficient consideration to **me** and **my** work. Self in a very subtle way is the bottom of it all, and then I get querulous and quarrelsome, inclined to complain about other folk. Then, like Martha, I get careful and troubled about many things. Defects and difficulties seem to spring up in all directions. What is the cure for such a state of things?

Well, we must not miss the contrast between the "many things" and the "one thing." In this world we are bound to be confronted by many troublesome things. The real trouble is not that, but in the inward disposition that leads us to be troubled by the many troublesome things. We get anxious and troubled about many things because we are so self-centred. What is the desirable thing? To be Christ-centred. If Christ is the great Object before our hearts, if He is the Centre of all our thoughts and projects and undertakings and expectations, the many things become simplified and lose their power to worry. We should of course be prayerful and diligent, but having His will as our objective and His word for our guidance, we should have but **one thing** before us.

Mary realized that He had much more to give her by His word than she could possibly give Him by her service, so she chose the good part and sat at His feet. It does not say, as so often mix-quoted, "the better part." A comparison is not instituted here; it is just "that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." By hearing His word we get to know Himself, and that intimacy with Him and His mind will abide to eternity. It is a thing which may be known on earth, but which will only extend and deepen and ripen in heaven. That is the one thing needful, and the Christ-centred spirit will deliver us from Martha's failing.

There is another place in Luke where you find the Lord repeating a name. He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I . . . and ye would not!" (Luke 13: 34). As to this, I only say in closing that here we see the spirit of our Master, when at the end of that dispensation He had to predict the doom of those who refused Him. Into this spirit we need to drink. Our lot is cast in the closing days of another dispensation. The world-system is dying. We need to keep very clear of the world which is under judgment. We shall not stay its doom by mixing ourselves in its pursuits and politics. Our business is to win out of the world, and that we shall not accomplish unless we begin by keeping ourselves clear of it and its spirit, and go on to acquire the beautiful spirit of compassion, which shone to perfection in our Master.

Let us remember these things. I do want to sound this note of warning, so that we may be delivered from self-confidence, and be free from self-occupation which leads to the living of a self-centred life, and then enter more into the spirit and mind of our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.