

# The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

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Every true believer loves the Lord. Peter, speaking of the Lord to believers, can say, "Whom having not seen ye love." In the presence of the proud Pharisee, the Lord can say of the woman who kissed His feet, "She loved much." Thus Scripture recognizes this love and the Lord delights in it. Moreover, love to the Lord carries with it the promise of many blessings, not the least being the special realization of the presence of the Lord and of the Father (John 14: 21-24).

Yet Scripture recognizes that love to the Lord may be found in very varied measures in different disciples on different occasions. The love of Mary of Bethany, who anointed the Lord with "the very precious ointment," was surely greater than that of the indignant disciples who said, "To what purpose is this waste?" The love of Mary of Magdala, who "stood without at the sepulchre weeping," exceeded, on that occasion, the love of the disciples who "went away again to their own home."

Moreover, our love may wax and wane. Under pressure the love of many may "wax cold." In the presence of the allurements of the world, this love may become dim, as in the case of a believer of whom the Apostle Paul can say, he "hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."

Thus while love to the Lord is very precious in His sight and to be cherished and desired by the believer, yet, it is clear, we cannot trust in a love that is so liable to change. The love that we alone can rest in must be the love that knows no change — the love that abides - the love of Christ for His own.

"Our souls thro' many changes go:  
His love no change can ever know."

It is the realization and enjoyment of the love of Christ that awakens our love to Him. "We love Him," says the apostle, "because He first loved us." Hence our love to Christ will be according to the measure in which we realize His love to us. Would we then love the Lord with more singleness of heart, let us not turn in upon our own hearts and think of our love to Him, but seek to delight our souls in His love to us.

The effect of the soul thus delighting itself in the love of Christ is blessedly set forth in

connection with the Apostle John, in the closing scenes of the Lord's life. While, in contrast, the same scenes depict the sorrowful effects of confidence in our love to the Lord, in the case of the Apostle Peter. Both disciples loved the Lord with a true and deep affection beyond that of most, for it led them to leave all and follow Him. One disciple; however, trusted in his love to the Lord, while the other rested in the Lord's love to him. This is the outstanding difference between these two men, so often found in close association in these last scenes.

When the Lord, in His wonderful grace, washes the disciples' feet, Peter can ask, "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" And when he learns that without the feet-washing there can be no part with Christ, immediately he exclaims with a glow of ardent love, "Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." A little later, with genuine love to the Lord, he can say, "I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death": and again, "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." Then at the betrayal scene, Peter, in his ardent love for the Lord, drew his sword in defence of his Master. Thus, both by words and deeds, he seems to say, "I am the man that loves the Lord." In contrast to Peter, the Apostle John says, as it were, "I am the man that the Lord loves," for five times, in these last scenes, he describes himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Blessed, indeed, that His love should have so wrought with us that we should love Him, but far more wonderful that He should love us. In this wonderful love John delighted, and on this boundless love he rested.

## **THE UPPER ROOM.**

### **John 13: 21-25.**

The first occasion on which John is called "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is in the Upper Room, as described in John 13. What a scene it is for the heart to contemplate! Jesus is there with a love that can never break down, for "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." John is there delighting himself in the love of Christ, resting his head on the bosom of Jesus, and describing himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Peter is there with real and ardent love for the Lord, but trusting in his own love to the Lord rather than resting in the Lord's love to him. Lastly, Judas is there, with no love to the Lord — with the bag at his side and the devil in his heart, ready to betray the Lord and pass into the long dark night.

In Jesus we see how very near His love has brought Him to men like ourselves, inasmuch as John can rest his head on the bosom of the One who dwelt in the bosom of the Father. In John we see what the heart of the Saviour can do for a sinner, bringing him to perfect rest in perfect love. In Judas we see what the heart of the sinner can do with the Saviour — betray Him, with every profession of love, for thirty pieces of silver.

The feet washing is over and the time has come for the Lord to utter His farewell words; but for the moment His spirit is troubled by the presence of the betrayer. The Lord unburdens His heart to His disciples, saying, "One of you shall betray Me." Immediately the disciples look one on another, doubting of whom He spake. Looking one on another will never solve difficulties that arise amongst believers. We must look to the Lord, but looking to the Lord demands nearness to the Lord, and in the circle of the Upper Room, the disciple who was nearest to the Lord, was the one whose feet had been in the hands of the Lord, whose head was resting on the bosom of the Lord, and whose heart was delighting in the love of the Lord, who can describe himself as "one of His disciples whom Jesus loved." Peter, the man who was trusting in his love to the Lord, was not near enough to the Lord to learn His mind, he must needs beckon to John.

Thus we learn that nearness to the Lord and intimacy with the Lord, is the happy portion of the one who is resting upon the Lord's love.

## **THE CROSS.**

### **John 19: 25-27.**

The second occasion on which John is described as the disciple whom Jesus loved, brings us to the cross. The mother of Jesus is present with other devoted women, and one disciple is there — the disciple whom Jesus loved. Where is now the disciple that rested in his love to Christ? Alas, away in some lonely spot with a broken heart, weeping tears of bitter shame. Where is the disciple who rests in the love of Christ? As at the Upper Room, so now at the cross, as near to Christ as he can be. And what is the result? He becomes a vessel fit and meet for the Master's use. The mother of Jesus is committed to his care. Resting in the Lord's love fits for service.

## **THE RESURRECTION.**

### **John 20: 1-4.**

For the third time, John is presented as the disciple whom Jesus loved on the resurrection morning, and again is found in association with Peter. The two disciples, learning from the women that the sepulchre is empty, hasten to the tomb. Then follows the record of what might appear to be insignificant detail, namely that Peter starts first, that both disciples run together, and finally that the disciple whom Jesus loved did outrun Peter. Nothing that the Spirit of God has recorded can be unimportant, though, as in this case, it may be difficult to seize the import of a particular incident. Yet, if we may be allowed to spiritualize this scene, we may learn, what is surely true, that while the man of ardent nature may often take the lead in some spiritual enterprise, it is the man who is leaning on the love of the Lord that finally takes the lead.

## **THE SEA OF TIBERIAS.**

### **John 21: 1-7.**

In this instructive scene Peter and John again have a prominent place, and for the fourth time John is referred to as the disciple whom Jesus loved (verse 7). As usual the energetic and impulsive Peter takes the lead. He goes back to his old occupation. He does not ask others to do so, but simply says, "I go a fishing." However, under the influence of his dominating personality, "They say unto him, we also go with thee." They went forth, therefore, and toiled all night, and for their pains caught nothing.

When the morning came, "Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus." Having by a question shown them the uselessness of efforts put forth *without His direction*, He proceeds to show how rich the results when acting under His control. Immediately the disciple whom Jesus loved perceives, "It is the Lord." The one who is trusting in the Lord's love is the one who has quick spiritual perception.

## "WHEN THEY HAD DINED."

### John 21: 15-22.

Following upon the scene at the lake side, the disciples find when they come to land, a fire of coals, fish laid thereon and bread, and an invitation to come and dine. Rich provision had been made for their needs, apart from all their efforts.

When they had dined we have the closing scene in which again Peter and John have a special place, and for the fifth time John is described as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (verse 20). First we have the Lord's tender dealings with the man that trusted in his own love. Peter, who had said he was ready to go with the Lord to prison and death, had found that he was not ready to stand before the simple question of a serving maid. But of the actual denial, no word is said in this touching scene. The solemn breakdown had been dealt with between the Lord and His servant in an interview with which no stranger shall intermeddle. All we know of that interview is the statement of the Eleven, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon," confirmed long after by the Apostle Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians that the risen Christ "was seen of Cephas *then* of the twelve." Wonderful love that with tender mercy gave the first interview to the most failing disciple.

If, however, in the first interview his conscience was relieved, in this scene his heart is restored. There the Lord had dealt with the outward failure, here He deals with the inward root that caused the failure. The root was confidence in his love to Christ, and the threefold question thoroughly exposes this root. It is as if the Lord said, "After all that has happened, do you still maintain, Peter, that you love Me *more than these*?" With the second question, the Lord says nothing of the other disciples: it is simply now, "Lovest thou Me?" With the third question, the Lord, using a different word, asks, "Art thou attached to Me?" (N. Tr.). By his third answer Peter puts himself entirely into the Lord's hands, saying, " Lord, thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I am attached to Thee." It is as if Peter said, "I cannot trust my love, or talk of my love, or what I will do, but Lord, You know all things, and You know my heart, I will leave You to estimate my love, and tell me what to do."

No longer is Peter telling the Lord in self-confidence what he is ready to do, but it is the Lord, in infinite grace, telling his restored disciple what He will enable him to do. The Lord as it were, says, "You no longer trust in your love to do great things for Me, you have left it to *Me*; then go forth and "Feed My sheep" (verse 17), "Glorify God" (verse 19), and "Follow Me" (verse 19).

The Lord seems to say, "Time was when you thought you loved Me more than these other disciples, now go forth and show your love by feeding my sheep that I love. You thought to glorify yourself above others by prison and death, now go forth to prison and death to glorify God, and when all is over down here, still *follow Me* far into the depths of glory where I am going." May we not say that not the least wonderful of all the wonders of the Lord's life, is the way He takes with a failing disciple?

But what of John? "Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved *following*." The man who trusted in his own love and had broken down, needed restoring grace, and the exhortation, "Follow Me." Not so the man who was resting in the love of the Lord, for he was "following."

Thus, in the disciple whom Jesus loved, we see set forth the blessed results that follow for those who rest in the love of the Lord; such

Dwell in nearness to, and intimacy with, the Lord;

Are ready to be used in the service of the Lord;  
Will make spiritual progress;  
Will have spiritual discernment ; and  
Will follow close to the Lord.

May it be our happy portion, like the bride of the Song, to say, "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me." If we can say little of our love to Him, we can safely boast of His love to us. It is the privilege of the youngest believer to say, "I am a disciple that Jesus loves," and the oldest and most advanced disciple can say nothing greater, for all blessing is found in His all-embracing love, that led Him to die for us that we too might go forth, in our small way, and feed His sheep, glorify God, and follow Him into the glory where He has gone.