

The Manner of the Love of Jesus

Matt. 9; Mark 2; Luke 5.

J. G. Bellett.

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God was showing His rich and various mercy in the old times; but this was done after a peculiar manner. He forgave sin, He healed disease, He fed His people. But all this was done after a peculiar manner. There was a certain distance and reserve, as it were, a remaining still in His own sanctuary — still in the heavens, though He was thus gracious. He met the need of a sinner; but He was in the temple, withdrawn to the holiest place, and the sinner had to come through a consecrated path to get the virtue of the mercy-seat. He met the need of His camp in the desert; but it was by remaining still in heaven, and sending from thence the angels' food, the mighty's meat, and giving them water, after His mystic rod had opened the rock. He met the disease of a poor leper; but it was after such a leper had been separated outside the camp, every eye and hand — all interference and inspection of man — withdrawn and removed. There He was God, acting in His own due love and power; but there was a style in the action that bespoke distance from the object of His love and goodness. Whether He pardoned, fed, or healed, this manner was preserved.

The Lord Jesus, God manifest in the flesh, is seen doing the same works of divine love and power. He pardons, feeds, and heals; and He does so in full assertion of His divine right or glory, thinking it no robbery to be equal with God. But there is altogether another style in those same actions when in His hand. The reserve, the distance, is gone. It is God we see, not withdrawn into the holiest, but abroad in the prisons, the hospitals, and the poorhouses, of this ruined world. He pardons; but He stands beside the sinner to do this, saying, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or Neither do I condemn thee. He feeds; but He is at the very table with the fed. He heals; but He puts forth His hands in the crowd on as many as were diseased, or stands at their sick beds. He thus comes down to the needy ones — with pardon, food, and healing. He goes among them, letting them know and see that He is supplied with various virtue to be used by them without reserve. And there is in this a glory that excelleth; so that the former has no glory by reason of it.

How should we bless Him for this display of Himself! It is the same God of love and power in both; but He has increased in the brightness of His manifestations.

The religious rulers found this way of Jesus to interfere with them. Their interest was to keep God and the people separate; for then they had hopes of being used themselves. Thus they were angry when the Lord said to the man, Thy sins be forgiven thee. It was a great interference with them. It trespassed on their places. "Who can forgive sins but God only?" — and God was in heaven. The Son of man forgiving sins on earth was a sad disturbance of that by which they lived in credit and plenty in the world. But whether they received it or not, this was the way of the Son on earth. He dwelt with our necessities in such wise as encouraged the happy, near, and confident approach of all needy ones to Him. He did all to show that He was a cheerful giver — nay more — that He gave Himself with His gift. For with His own hand, we have seen, He brought the blessing home to every man's door.

It was therefore only the happy confidence of faith which fully met and refreshed His spirit — that faith which knew the title of a needy one to come right up to Him, the faith of a Bartimaeus which was not to be silenced by the mistaken scrupulousness even of disciples. And little children are to be in His arms, though the same mistake would forbid them.

This was His mind: He came into the world to be used by sick and needy sinners; and the faith that understood and used Him accordingly was its due answer. Such answers we see recorded by the Evangelists here in the action of the faithful little band, who, breaking up the roof, let down the bed whereon the sick of the palsy lay "into the midst before Jesus." There was no ceremoniousness in this, nothing of the ancient reserve of the temple, no waiting for introduction. This little company felt their necessity, knew the virtues of the Son of God, and believed that these suited each other — nay, that the Lord carried the one, because necessitous sinners were bearing the other. It was a strong expression of faith, and I believe the strength of it was according to the mind of Jesus; so that, on seeing their faith, as we read, without further to do or more words, His heart and the grace that it carried uttered itself in an expression as full and strong: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."

Here was sympathy. Jesus was rending all veils between God and sinners; and so was the faith of this happy little company. His blood was soon to rend from top to bottom the veil of the temple, which kept God from poor sinners; and now their faith was rending that which kept them from Jesus. This surely was meeting and entertaining the Son of God in character; and His spirit deeply owns it: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."

Happy faith which can thus break down partition walls! O this faith which takes knowledge of Jesus, the Saviour of the world, as the mighty render of all veils "Join thou, my soul, for thou canst tell" etc. In the lively happy impression of this truth through the Spirit the soul tastes something of heaven. What blessedness to know that this is the way of God our Saviour! Grace and glory are both brought to us: we have not to ascend to heaven to seek them there, nor descend to the depths to search after them there. "Behold I come: and my reward is with me," will Jesus say when He brings the glory; as we have already seen Him with His grace standing at the door, or by the bedside, or in the crowd of needy sinners.

This is of God indeed. It is only divine love that can account for it. But the rulers did not like it. Their interest and credit in the world would keep the forgiveness of sins still in the hand of Him who was in heaven; for then, as the consecrated path, they hoped and judged that they themselves would still be used.

And so it is to this day. Forgiveness is brought near and sure to the soul — the word of faith to the heart and to the mouth. This shortens the path; but it does not suit those who transact (as themselves and others judge) the interests of the soul.

Nothing appears more simple than all this on the principles of nature. The Pharisees, in the Lord's time, represented it. They were the religious rulers; and the more God was kept in the distance, reserve being thus maintained between Him and the people, the more they were likely to be venerated, used, and enriched. Jesus, God in flesh, the Son of man forgiving sins on *the earth*, was a sad trespasser on their place and plan of action. How, alas! is this principle still alive, still dominant, and the "people love to have it so;" it suits the religiousness of man's nature too well to be lightly refused. The simplicity that is in Christ is sadly thus "corrupted;" and our souls, beloved, should be grieved, deeply grieved, because of it.

But we may also say that much occasion, in our day, has been given for this principle to live and act as vigorously as it seems to be doing. For there has not been the meeting of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, this pardoning, feeding, healing, love and power of Him who has come down to walk amid our ruins, in the spirit which alone was due to it. There has been the assertion of grace, and the denial that God in this dispensation is to be sought for as at a distance, under the hiding of ceremonies or within the cloisters of temples. There has been the producing of the blessed Saviour, and giving Him

to walk abroad among our necessities according to the place He has Himself taken in the Gospels. There has been the presenting of the marvellous condescending grace of the dispensation; but those who have asserted it have not carried themselves towards it, and in the presence of it, with that reverence, that holiness of confidence, which alone became them. And this has given man's religiousness (which would keep God still in heaven) occasion to revive, and be listened to, and learnt again.

But is this religiousness the due corrective of abused grace? Is this the divine remedy? — is this God's way of rectifying evil? — or is it not simple human reaction? Many are doing what they can to Withdraw the Lord to that place which He has most advisedly and for ever abandoned. They are making Him appear to build again the things which He had destroyed. They are putting Him back into the holiest place, there to be sought unto by the old aisles and vistas of the "worldly sanctuary" — to cover Him with veils and cast up the long consecrated path by which of old the sinner came to Him. It were well to be righteously angry at Jesus and His grace being treated with so indelicate and untender a hand; but these correct the error by a worse. While they would protect the holiness of Christ, they obscure His grace. They are seeking to do a service for Him that grieves Him the most deeply. They are teaching man that He is an austere Master; they withdraw Him to the place where it is felt to be a fearful thing to plant one's foot.

Indeed this is a service He did not ask for. "Who hath required this at your hands," is, I am assured in my soul, the voice of the Son of God to those who withdraw Him from the nearest and most assured approach of the poor sinner. They have been doing, what they could to change HIS place and attitudes, instead of MAN'S. Correction was needed surely. It is ever needed. Man will be spoiling or abusing everything. There has been an intellectual arrogance and carnal freedom with Christ and His truth, which may well have grieved the righteous. But it was man that ought to have been challenged to change his place and bearing, and not the Lord. He has not repented of having come on earth to forgive sins, of having visited the poor Samaritan at the well or Levi or Zacchaeus in their houses, or Peter's wife's mother on her bed of sickness. He is still the same Lord, and He purposes to be so. He has not retired Within the veil again, nor bound up that which was rent from top to bottom. He has not built again that which He had destroyed. It is not a worldly sanctuary that He fills and furnishes again, nor ceremonies and observances, and rites and practices, under which He is again concealing Himself. He has descended from heaven to earth; He is abroad among men, in the ministry of His precious gospel and by His Spirit, beseeching sinners to be reconciled.

What then alas! is the character of that effort that would force Him back to the thick darkness? (2 Chr. 6: 43). It is an attempt made in the strength and with the subtlety of the devil upon the Son of God, as of old. It is a taking Him, as it were, to the pinnacle of the temple, to some withdrawn and proud elevation, where the multitude may gaze at Him. But His purpose is, blessed be His name, to stand in the midst of them, that they may use Him.

We should change our place; that is equally true. We should learn to pass and repass with the unshod foot before this gracious, blessed, Son of man. It is for us to change our attitude, and not to seek to make Him change His.

We have still to see Him in all the grace of this dispensation; we have to read "the gospel of the blessed God" (1 Tim. 1), as they read it of old who knew and felt that the Son of man had power on earth to forgive sins. But we have to read all this more in their spirit also. We are to wonder at the strange sight, as they did — to tell Jesus, with the centurion, that we are not worthy that He should come under our roof, while we still use His immediate presence and grace — to stand before Him like

Zacchaeus, and call Him "Lord," though, like Him, receiving Him to our house; and to follow Him in the way with adoring thankful gaze, though having refused, as Bartimaeus, to be put at a distance by the vain religious scruples of even His own disciples.

Ah! this is what should have been done. This would have been the divine corrective of the mischief that has come in. But this was not so easy; for this would have been spiritual: the thing that has been done is carnal. Elements of the world are revived and multiplied. Jesus has been forced back at a distance from the sinner. He has been put into "the thick darkness," under cover of fleshly observances and rites, and at the end of a long path through the aisles of a sanctuary, where He waits to receive the homage of a fearing and bonded people. This is the place and attitude which many teachers (who are daily rising in the esteem of the people) make the blessed Saviour to fill and take.

The Lord Jesus is kept at a distance; religious observances are brought near; and the people (for they have ever been so minded) like the feelings that come from all that which is acted before them. Their eye and ear are engaged, a certain sacred sense of God is awakened; but the precious immediate confidence of the heart and conscience is refused. Ah! shall any one who loves the Lord thus sink down again into man, when the Spirit would have him up with Christ?

"O foolish Galatians; who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? . . . Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? . . . Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." (Gal. 3, 4)

Thus speaks the aggrieved Spirit in the apostle over those who once had been eminently his joy but were now his sorrow, because they were turning again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto they were desiring again to be in bondage. Indeed they were deserting faith for religiousness, "the simplicity that is in Christ" and in which the "virgin" or "uncorrupted" mind ever walks, for the ceremonies and observances of "a worldly sanctuary."

But religiousness is neither faith nor righteousness. With the Pharisees it was adopted as a relief for a bad conscience, or a cover for evil; in them it was, therefore, opposed to faith. The Galatians cannot properly be said to have been Pharisees, it is true; but the Spirit of God had a serious question with both.

And I may just further observe, that in our passages (Matt. 9: 6; Mark 2: 2; Luke 5: 24) the Lord seeks to lead man away from His own reasonings and calculations to Himself and His works. He perceived that the Scribes were "reasoning among themselves," and then proposed to them what He was doing — "that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins (He said unto the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise and take up thy couch, and go into thine house."

How simple, how precious! And on this hangs the grand distinction between faith and religiousness of which I have just been speaking. Religiousness, or man's religion, gives the soul many a serious thought about itself, and many a devout thought about God. But faith, or God's religion, gives the soul Jesus, and the works and words of Jesus.

And yet it is faith, and faith only, secures the end which is valued of God. Faith "worketh by love"; faith "overcometh the world;" faith "purifies the heart." By faith "the elders obtained a good report." Religiousness does not this. It ever "works" by fear, not by love. It does not "overcome the world," but oftentimes takes it within to some recess or hiding-place. It does not "purify the heart" by giving it an object to detach it from self, but keeps self in a religious attire ever before it, and leaves the conscience unpurged. And in God's record it gets no "good report." From the beginning to the end of

that record, it is the people of religion, the devout observers of carnal ceremonies, those who would not "defile themselves" with a judgment-hall, that have stood most cruel in the resistance of the truth. But it is the men of faith, the lovers of the truth, the poor broken-hearted believers who have found their relief in Jesus "forgiving sins," who have stood and laboured and conquered; and they have their happy memorial with Him and in the records of Him whom they trusted, in whom by faith they found eternal life and their sure and full salvation.