

Day of Visitation — Bethsaida

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Article 31 of 47 **Short Meditations**

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Scripture contemplates a day or time of visitation. (Jer. 8: 12; Luke 19: 44; 1 Peter 2: 12)

Such a day may come on an individual, (1 Peter 2); or on a city, (Luke 19); or on a nation. (Jer. 8)

It is either in mercy, (Luke 19; 1 Peter 2); or in judgment. (Jer. 8)

And again; it may either be used, so as to glorify God by it, (1 Peter 2); or it may be slighted. (Luke 19)

The visitation in mercy goes before the visitation in judgment — and the interval may be long or short. We see this in the moral history of different nations — such as Egypt, Israel, and the world itself.

As to Egypt; Joseph was given to that land in mercy, and by him God made it the head of the nations, and the granary of the whole earth. But Joseph was forgotten, mercy was slighted, and then Moses and the plagues were sent.

As to Israel; Jesus was given, Messiah was sent, and healing was dispensed, and covenant blessings were brought to the door. But Jesus was rejected, and now desolation and captivity have succeeded.

As to the world; the death of Christ is now preached in its saving virtue, as that which has for ever and fully satisfied for sin. But that being slighted, the same death of Christ shall be visited in judgment upon the world, that is guilty of it.

What simple consistency may be found in God's ways! What moral perfection! What a relief to discover it, in the midst of all human, earthly confusions!

The visitation in judgment may not follow, as I already noticed, till after a long interval — as in the last case I have noticed, the moral history of the world — for the present day of grace tarries long indeed, and judgment is slumbering century after century. But again, the interval may be short; and we see this, on two distinguished occasions in the moral dealings of God with His people. The Spirit was poured out largely *just before* the captivity of the Ten Tribes by the Assyrian as on the Prophets Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, and others. He was again still more largely poured out *just before* the captivity of Judah by the Chaldean; as on Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and others.

These things are so. — But I must add, that such a day, a day of visitation, leaves the place or the person, if that day be slighted, in a worse condition than it found them.

Bethsaida, in the history of the Gospel, I believe, illustrates this.

That city had a day of visitation. It had been greatly favoured. The Lord's mighty works had been done there, beyond the common measure — and Andrew, Peter, and Philip, three of the Lord's Apostles, had belonged to that town. (See John 1: 44)

But such favour, such a day of merciful, gracious visitation, had been slighted. The place had not turned to Him that had blessed it. It had not repented. (Matt. 11: 20) Still, it is not altogether beyond the reach of the abounding, though slighted grace of Christ. The Lord visits it, after all this — and when He

visits it, He has the resources of His grace and power with Him.

The way, however, in which those resources are now brought forth, after they had been, as we have seen, slighted and unused, is full of meaning, and has a great moral or lesson for us. (Mark 8: 22-26)

A blind man of Bethsaida (or at Bethsaida) is brought to the Lord, and they beseech Him to touch him.

Surely a touch or a word would have been enough. The healing, obedient to the Lord of Life, would have followed, and followed at once. But it is not so. There is reserve and delay, a more gradual process than the power of Christ (had it felt itself fully free to act) would have demanded, or than it had ever demanded on any former occasion. We have to mark it carefully.

He takes the blind man by the hand, and leads him out of the town. This was significant. Bethsaida had, at this time, lost title to see the works of Christ. For He had called, and that place had not answered. He had done His works there already, and they had not repented. He now takes the blind man out of the town; as of old Moses had taken the tabernacle of the Lord out of the camp. (Ex. 33) Both of these acts were judicial. They spoke of a distance which the Lord had now, in righteousness, taken, whether from the camp or from the town.

But this reserve or distance left each individual Israelite at liberty to seek the Lord at the tabernacle outside the camp — and here this blind man of Bethsaida may meet the healing power of Christ outside the town.

What consistency in the ways of God! How bright they shine! How Divine glory is stamped on the great material or substance of Scripture, and how it glows in the very tone or style of Scripture!

But while this man of Bethsaida shall meet the healing virtue of the Lord, it must be after a manner that shall eminently distinguish itself.

He spit on his eyes, and put His hands on him, and then asked him, "if he saw aught." This was strange and peculiar. Had the Lord ever before questioned His power? Had He ever hesitated about the perfection of His acts? No — nor does He now, though His words may sound, that way. He did not question His power, nor was He ignorant of the present condition of this poor man. But He must and will give character to this occasion. It was a special moment, and He must let it distinguish itself. He would have it now be known, that slighted mercy is sensitive. It ought to be so. It is so with us, ourselves being judges. Would we go and repeat our kindnesses and services to those who had already despised and disregarded them, without at least letting it be known that we felt something? Let the goodness be exercised surely, but it is morally fitting that some expressions should accompany it. And if it be thus with us, so is it thus with God. The whole current of the Book of Judges lets us know that. Each succeeding Deliverer is raised up in the behalf of Israel, with *increased reserve*, because Israel had been sinning against the previous, earlier mercies. And so is it thus with the Lord Jesus in these His doings with this town of Galilee.

The healing proceeds slowly. To the inquiry, if he saw aught, the man has to reply, "I see men as trees walking."

Still strange this is! How every thing signalises this case! It was not thus with the blind man at Jericho, or with the blind beggar in the ninth of John. One of them has but to say, "I went and washed, and came seeing." And of the others it is written, "Jesus had compassion, and touched their eyes, *immediately* they received sight, and followed Him." But here the healing is tardy and laboured. Jesus

has still to work. He put His hands a second time upon him, and then made him look up. And then, but not till then, not till the end of this lengthened process, was he restored. That is — he was not fully brought under the grace and power of the Son of God; for *that* is our restoration, becoming nothing less than what that grace and power would have us and make us. "He saw every man clearly."

Valuable, serious, weighty narrative! How do all His acts, in the days of His flesh here among us, illustrate some secret of the Divine grace and wisdom! Oh, the marvellous moral variety and fulness that are found in Scripture! Bethsaida was not a *fresh* material in the hand of Christ. It had been untrue to Him, and it must know, that this is felt by Him, though His grace abounds.

And when the mercy is perfected, and the blind man sees every man clearly, the Lord closes the scene by saying to him, "Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town." And this is still of a character with all the rest. As a town, Bethsaida's day was past. "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! — but now they are hid from thine eyes." Its condition was sealed. Judgment because of slighted mercy was before it — as the Lord had already distinctly told of it, in Matthew 11: 22. Therefore is it now said, "Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town."

Thus it is — but in contrast with this case, I may say, Oh, what comfort is to be found oftentimes, in a *fresh* material. The Lord Himself found it so; the Spirit still finds it so; and we, the saints of God, find it so — as surely many a sample of Divine workmanship in this present day of revival or visitation, may remind us.

The Lord Himself found it so. This He did in Samaria. How free and happy was He there, whether at the well of Jacob, or in the village of Sychar. He was there, as at home, for two days; for the ground had been freshly ploughed up and visited. Sinners were learning salvation, and their faith spread a feast for Him. He had meat to eat there, which was not to be supplied Him even by the diligence of those who were constantly with Him.

The Spirit still finds it so. He would have us always "as new born babes" — coming with freshness of taste and desire, to the milk of the Word which He Himself has prepared and provided for us. (1 Peter 2: 2)

And we ourselves find it so — as I have instanced, in our experience of this present day, through which we are passing, in the grace of God.

The Lord Jesus invited Himself to the house and hospitality of Zaccheus, who was then in his freshness, with the bloom of early affection upon him — but "He made as though He would have gone further," when He reached the house of those who had been for a long while walking with Him, but who had just been reasoning with thoughts arising in their hearts.

Surely again I may say, Oh, the wondrous moral variety that is to be found in the Book of God! And what expressions of Divine secrets, the secrets of grace and of wisdom, what indications of Divine sympathies and sensibilities, do we get in the pathway of the Lord's Spirit through the circumstances of life, as He went through them day by day!