

Divine Manifestations

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Article 35 of 47 **Short Meditations**

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The Lord addressed His people of old in visions. The eye then, of course, realized the revelation; for it was a sensible form of one sort or another which conveyed the revelation.

Now, it is *faith* that is addressed. But faith realizes its object as surely as sight or hearing, of old, did. Faith "is the evidence of things not seen."

And like fruit waits on this, let the realization be accomplished whether by the eye or by faith.

There was a vision of the Throne and the Seraphim in the Temple filled with smoke, to Isaiah; and he was convicted and overwhelmed. Then there was the application to his lips of the purging coal from the altar; and he was restored to peace. (Isa. 6)

We may see the like process, though by other instruments, in the persons of Ezekiel and Daniel. (Ezek. 1; Dan. 10)

We have the same under the ministry of the Lord Jesus, as here under ancient visions. To Peter in Luke 5 the Lord was manifested, through the draught of fishes, in a way that overwhelmed him. He was convinced of being a sinner then, as the prophets, of whom I have spoken, had been. But the words of Jesus restored him to peace; as different instruments applied to them, restored the prophets. And so, the Samaritan. The word of the Lord first convicted her, as much disclosed to her, her condition as a sinner, as the sight of the Glory had convicted Isaiah. But the further words of the Lord, in like manner, restored her.

And still further, we have the same effects under the preaching of the Apostles.

Peter's word in Acts 2 draws out the cry, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" and then, his further word imparted joy and peace in believing.

The same effect from simple, intelligible speaking in the assembly of the saints, without anything marvellous or miraculous, is contemplated in 1 Cor. 14: 23-25.

Thus, the like effects are wrought, though the circumstances change from palpable visions or touches, to the Lord's personal ministry, or from that to simple testimony or preaching.

All that is needed is, the realization of the thing revealed — and faith does that under the Word, as the eye would do it in presence of a vision. Of course, the Spirit, we know, must give the faith.

Another illustration of this occurs to me. — Elisha followed Elijah along the road that was leading Elijah to his translation. Temptations beset the path. Difficulties crowded there, and hindrances were repeated. But the purpose of Elisha's soul was fixed and single. He purposed to be with his master all along the way to the very end. He would hear of nothing else; and therefore hindrances and difficulties and temptations got a ready answer from him. (2 Kings 2)

The saints at Thessalonica had nothing but a report to lean on. They had no vision, no miracle. They had no master, as Elisha had, in their company, who they knew was to be taken "from their head," no sensible sign to feed the expectations of their hearts. But the objects of faith were as real to them, as the sensible things were to Elisha; and the like fruit and effect was wrought in them. In the spirit of

victory they disposed of hindrances, as he had done. They turned from dumb idols. Faith had its work in them, love its labour, hope its patience. They served the living God, and waited for the Son from heaven.

Was all this anything less than Elisha following Elijah all the way from Gilgal to the other side of Jordan, round by Bethel? The Thessalonians, as surely as the Prophet, had their loins girded and their lights burning, and were as servants that waited for their Lord. Faith in a divine report wrought as effectually in them, as the palpable presence of his master did in him. And the like fruit was borne. All we want is to *realize* our object, and faith does that as well as sight or touch or hearing.

But the effect of a manifestation of God, while it does not necessarily depend on something palpable, as a vision or a miracle, *will have to be measured by the condition of the soul to which it is made*. This is so; and this is an important moral truth. And this, Scripture illustrates for us also.

Jacob had been greatly wrong at his father's bed-side; (Gen. 27); and at Bethel he was tasting the bitterness of his doings, a wanderer then from his father's house, unfriended and unsheltered. In the glory of goodness, God is manifested to him. The opened heavens, the ladder, and the angels, afforded a wondrous answer from the grace of God to such an one as Jacob then was. But so it was. The Lord is wonderful to His saints, while *suffering* under His rebukes for their naughtinesses.

Jacob had been, after this, very unbelieving at Peniel. (Gen. 32) He had dreaded Esau's host in the presence of God's host. He had turned his eye from the Lord to the creature; and had trembled and calculated and prayed, as though He that was for him were not more than he that was against him; though the One was God, and the other man. The Lord rebukes this — surely He does. He withstands Jacob. But Jacob holding up under this rebuke, his faith reviving, and grasping the Lord, the Lord gives him a wondrous manifestation of His grace, allowing him to prevail over Him, and then giving him a new name and a fresh blessing.

Such were the materials in Jacob's history, on these two great occasions, at Bethel and at Peniel. But the experience of this saint of God on each occasion was different.

At Bethel, Jacob's experience was of a mixed nature. He said the place was "dreadful," and yet "the gate of heaven." He was encouraged by the vision, but we can scarcely say, he was gladdened by it. But at Peniel, all was joy to him. He has a boast, a holy triumph, on his lips, and addresses himself to his journey as in the light of the face of God.

Here is a difference; and a difference to be accounted for by the condition of the saint himself — not by the manifestation — for that at Bethel exceeded.

There was in him no exercise of spirit at Bethel, as there was at Peniel. He was *asleep* there, he was *awake* here. He was simply acted on there, he recovered and stirred himself here. There were moral differences in the same soul; and consequently different experiences. Peniel was more to Jacob, than Bethel had been; a manifestation of God is more to a waking than to a sleeping saint. It is found to be so at this day, as it is thus seen to have been in the early days of the Patriarchs.

And here let me contrast Moses at the vision in the cleft Rock, with Jacob at either Bethel or Peniel. See Exodus 33, 34.

Moses pleads with the Lord, and prays that he may be shown "His way." What he had as yet heard of Him would not do for him. He had already seen Him as the Lawgiver, and as the Lord of the conditional covenant, even eating and drinking in His presence, together with seventy of the elders of Israel. (Ex. 19 and Ex. 24) But such manifestations of God would not do. Moses was not satisfied. And

rightly so; for Israel was at that moment lying under his eye, in moral ruins — all was over with them on the terms of Law, or under their own covenant; and Moses, therefore, must see God in His own way. He must know *Himself*, as he now tells Him — know Him in sovereign grace.

The Lord promises to do as His servant thus craved. He will let His glory pass before him, "all His goodness," His sovereign grace, that grace which, as in the Gospel, aboundeth. And He does so.

Moses is deeply, fully satisfied. He bows and worships. He asks no more — no more manifestations of God — only desires that He who had now descended and stood with him, and passed by in His own proper glory, might go along the way with him and with Israel.

This was a blessed experience indeed. It was as an overflowing and pouring down in a living and life-giving stream." And why this rich enjoyment? Moses had sought this. He was not asleep under the vision, as Jacob was at Bethel; nor had he simply recovered himself under it, as Jacob did at Peniel; he had himself sought it. It was exercise of spirit that had led him to the vision, and thus he was prepared for the full power of it; and the full power of it he got.