

Peter in John 21

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Article 41 of 47 **Short Meditations**

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It is not so much the sense of what we were, when in our sins and unconverted, as the recollection of what we have been since we knew the Lord, our coldness and short-comings, and ways of selfishness since then, that interferes with that full, hearty welcome of His presence and of the hope of being soon with Him, which we ought to carry. But all this is legal. It belongs to nature. The Divine argument in Romans 5 is opposed to this. (verses 8, 9) And Peter in this chapter illustrates a rebuke of it.

Very much in his recollection, as a saint, might well have made him a coward, dreading the presence of the Lord. But he was not a coward. As soon as he heard that his Master, denied though He had been by his lying and profane lips, stood on the shore, he tucked his fisher's coat about him, and got overboard into the water, to reach Him as fast as he could. For if he had recollections of himself, he had also knowledge of his Lord — and this was the secret of his soul, and the spring of his courage.

Had Peter been *ignorant* of Christ, or known Him simply after the dictates of nature, of flesh and blood, he would have run away in fear — had he been but partial in acquaintance with Him, he would have had his fears and suspicions, and allowed his companions in the boat to reach the Lord before him, so that they might be a kind of veil to break the force of His presence upon his spirit. But Peter *knew Him well*. He knew Him in love — and therefore he neither ran away, nor did he hide himself behind his companions, but met His presence singly.*

*Such was Adam's knowledge of the Lord God, when he came forth from his guilty covert in, Genesis 3 — with this difference; Adam did so as a sinner, under a revelation of the Gospel; Peter, as a saint, under acquaintance with the Lord.

Peter knew the Lord. That was everything to him. To be sure it was. And he, being dead, yet speaketh to us. He says, "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace," as all Scripture does.

And so, I may say, the Mary Magdalene of the preceding chapter, John 20, acted from like knowledge of her Lord. For sinner as she was, she had been introduced to Him in her sins, yea, and by her sins, having had seven devils cast out of her by Him; and now she speaks as though she were entitled to claim Him and take Him *entirely to herself*. "Tell me," said she, as to the gardener, "where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." *He was all her own*.

What precious affection! What a sense of our title to Him! How should it be thus with each one of us; each of us knowing our own personal, individual claim and right to a whole Christ in all His fulness, our title to *Himself*!

And it is faith, and faith only, that does this. For, faith acquaints us with conscience with ourselves. This latter makes us cowards — rightly so — the other gives us happy, holy boldness. Conscience had already set Peter on a journey, when he went from the palace of the high priest, and there outside in shame and loneliness, wept bitterly. Faith set him on this present journey, when he left the boat to reach his Lord on the shore. Neither the moral sense of man, nor his religious *mind*, nor a general thought of mercy, would have been capable of setting him on such a road. It was faith — knowledge of Christ in love — and that is faith. Faith in God, not as a Judge, but as a Saviour, is faith

— faith in Him as giving, not as enjoining or demanding. Conscience may act, and does act, as the security of communion with God — for we cannot, dare not, walk with Him, save in company with its testimony — but it is never the power or the measure of it. Communion must be the fruit of faith, which takes knowledge of God according to His revelation of Himself in grace and salvation.

And, oh, what a thing it is, to know God in love! to have communion with Christ as the lover of our souls! to dwell in love and thus to dwell in God! to know and believe the love that God has to us! How blessed! And this is the dear and precious result of the Gospel in the heart — peace is the result of it in the *conscience*. To introduce heart and conscience to these their rights, through grace, in the Gospel, is one of the fruits and purposes of the revelation which God has made of Himself.

And in this case of Peter in John 21, according to this, the Lord, in a further stage of the action, puts Himself in company with both the *conscience* and the *faith* of His saint. He acts with Peter's conscience, by putting him through a bitter exercise of soul by three challenges, and thus letting him know, that he had indeed sinned in his renewed denials of Him. But He puts Himself also in company with Peter's faith, by giving him the rich and abundant fruit of that faith, bringing him again into near and full fellowship with Himself, (as faith in Peter had already done,) and putting on him the favour of being the one, among them all, for specially feeding and guiding His flock.

Grace surely always after this manner, warrants and seals the conclusions of faith. The Lord does not again put Peter through the process of taking the sentence of death into himself as a sinner, as He had done with him in Luke 5, where they had been together for the first time at the sea of Galilee with a miraculous draught of fishes. No. He simply restores his soul, or washes his feet, and then gives him his precious place of nearness to Himself, and more than faith itself would have reckoned on.

And let me just add, it is this communion of Peter with his Lord we need more abundantly, if one may speak for others. It is not taking knowledge of Him in judgment and righteousness — it is not dealing with Him in His counsels and revelations, or the things that concern Him. These will be right, and are not to be neglected. But to know Him in His love, that is faith. And that is of God, of the inworking and witnessing of the Spirit. It is above nature. Yea, it is further away from communion with Him in judgment and in righteousness, than that is from a state of carelessness and unbelief. Conscience, the moral sense, the religious mind, the general thought of our need of His mercy, as

I have said already, may give us place before Him in judgment, and we may be rightly humbled by that; but that is not far removed from nature. But to know Him in love, with a sense' of our title to *Himself*, this is of God, and far away from nature. Peter in the fifth of Luke was not Peter in the twenty-first of John — though I surely know that the drawing of the Spirit, through Divine conviction, was with him then.

Ruth was open-hearted and self-surrendering in the first chapter, when she cast in her lot with her afflicted mother-in-law. She was duly obedient to her when, in the second chapter, she went as a Gleaner in the rich man's field; and there beautifully, as under the hand of God, she carried herself before him, accepting his bounty humbly and thankfully. But she was far more than all this in the third chapter, when she consented to lay herself at his feet on the threshing-floor, and claim him for her husband. This was faith. A soul may be kind-hearted to others, and humble and reverent before God, and still in nature — but to count upon the love of Christ, to claim it, to know one's title to it, to use and enjoy it, to find an object in Him and to receive it as a fact that He has found an object in us, this is above nature. This is blessedness of the very highest order, given us of the Spirit; glorifying of God, and heaven to ourselves.

For Ruth to pass from the threshing-floor at the feet of Boaz, to his house and his table and the

place of mistress of his servants and sharer of his wealth and of himself, was easy, natural, and necessary — but to pass from the gleaning-field to the threshing-floor was a journey that could have been taken (like this of Peter in John 21) only under conduct of the Holy Ghost drawing by the cords of love. To call the Lord no more "Baali," but "Ishi," this is faith indeed.