

A Confessed Disciple

John 19: 38-42; John 20: 11-22.

N. Anderson

It is indescribably blessed for any believer to be in a condition where the thoughts of God are his thoughts, and where there is conformity to divine ways. That, of course, is the fruit of a divine operation in the soul. How good it is for us to enter appreciatively and intelligently into God's thoughts, for as we do so there is a consequent forming of our ways. Paul could refer to "My ways which be in Christ" (1 Corinthians 4: 17). Those were ways ordered according to the mind of God.

We have been reminded that God is *doing something*, and in John 19 we have an example of a man in whom God was working. That work was to fruition in the case of Joseph of Arimathea when he came to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. The death of our Lord had made a powerful impact upon his spirit, and consequently had affected his ways. It was no small thing for him to go to Pontius Pilate beseeching him for the body of Jesus. Notice what the Spirit of God says of him in verse 38, "Being a disciple of Jesus, but *secretly* for fear of the Jews." How much are we marked by secrecy in relation to the things of Christ? Does secrecy colour our Christian profession? Or have we taken our stand in identification with Him as the refused, unwanted and crucified One? It is surely no small matter for us to take such a stand.

There had undoubtedly been a work in Joseph's soul. He was "a disciple of Jesus, but secretly," and the time had now arrived when his discipleship must be brought into the light of day. This was effected by the power of the truth of his Lord's rejection and crucifixion which had laid hold of him, making him aware that thus a moral line was drawn between the true disciple and the world.

Separation from evil is a moral necessity; it is a component feature of the faith, for our Lord has said, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17: 16). Whilst this is *positionally* true of all believers, the Holy Spirit presents it to us in the Word of God that we might be affected by it *practically*.

Joseph came under the impact of the knowledge that his Lord had been crucified, and abandoning his secrecy, he took his stand for Christ. The moment of decision had arrived for him; not a decision to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, for that he had already done, but a decision to take his place as a follower of the crucified Christ.

What is there in this crucified Saviour that would lead a man possessing status and honour in this world to take a step which might involve losing it all? We often sing, 'Jesus thou art enough, the mind and heart to fill'; we like to sing such words, but the Spirit of God, in our quiet moments, raises the question with us as to how far we are really in the truth of them. Joseph had come under the spell of the attraction of Christ, and although the pathway of Christ had apparently ended at the cross, his heart was so touched by the sense of His worth that he took his stand with Him. It is a miracle of the grace of God when anyone takes such a stand in a world where all the streams are flowing *against* the truth of God. May He grant that everyone of us may similarly take that stand, and as having done so, may we be helped to an increasing appreciation of the attractiveness of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we be helped to *continue* to stand in faithfulness for Him.

The death of Christ is a reality; the apostle Paul used the truth of the crucifixion as a basis for the doctrine of the Galatian epistle. We have referred to a verse already in which he said, "I am crucified with Christ." The cross was not the end of the Saviour but Paul said, in effect, that it was the end of

himself in the sight of God. He endorsed the judgment of God upon all that he was, and took his stand alongside the crucified Christ.

He further said in that epistle, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6: 14). The truth of the cross cuts across everything here. We are used to these expressions; we have heard them so often in ministry, and they may have formed our way of thinking. What is needed is the practical answer in our everyday lives to what is ministered. This truth takes us all in; for men, who in self-will exalts himself against God, is brought into judgment in the cross of Christ; the world too, which allows the self-exaltation of man, meets its judgment there. The Lord Jesus, speaking in view of His impending death, said, "Now is the judgment of this world" (John 12: 31).

How then can we rub shoulders with a judged world, as though we were one with it?

The truth of the attractiveness of Christ is not limited to what it separates *from*, important as this is, but we are separated *to* Himself where He is at God's right hand. In the conscious enjoyment of communion with Him in that blessed circle of affection, a new relationship is made known to us. Relationship with Himself and with the Father is ours in virtue of His death and resurrection, in the power of a new life.

In Mary Magdalene we see one to whom the world had become an empty place; indeed her hopes seemed blighted now that her Lord had died. If there has been with us, as with her, true association with our Lord Jesus Christ in His rejection, He will lead us into the light and joy of the blessed fact that death could not hold Him. Mary had "stood by the cross;" she had also "stood without at the sepulchre," and now she hears His voice in resurrection — the voice that she had thought was forever hushed in death — calling her by name, "Mary." He reaches her affections and she recognizes Him, seeking, apparently, to embrace Him, but he says, "Touch Me not; for *I am not yet ascended to My Father.*" Notice He did not say only "Touch me not," but "Touch Me not *for I am not yet ascended*". Implicit in this is the truth that she could not have Him back in the conditions which existed before he went to the cross, but she was to know Him in ascension, in entirely new conditions.

Then He says, "Go to My brethren;" that is very blessed! He did not say, "Go to *the* brethren" but "Go to *My* brethren." This was impossible until the work of the cross had been completed and He had risen from the dead. There was no change as to His own divine and heavenly relationships, for these are eternal, but there is now a new relationship formed for those upon whom His love is set. "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God."

Has the power of this really gripped us? Does it not involve our entering into divine thoughts and into divine ways? If it does grip us our souls will be thrilled with the sweetness of the Father's love — "Love, well known, yet passing human thought."

Association with the Son of God means that the path which He has trodden is the path for us. He ever moved here in obedience to the will of God, and if His God is our God, then obedience is incumbent upon us. It is possible only as we continue in communion with Him.

As the result of the message that He was risen, the disciples gathered together. The blessedness of brethren dwelling together in unity is likened by the Psalmist to that holy anointing oil which came upon the head of Aaron, running down to his beard, and descending to the skirts of his garments; and the Spirit of God connects with that the blessedness of eternal life. This life is known and enjoyed in the midst of those who have come under the power of the attractiveness of the risen Christ who is today in the Father's presence.

One feature of the administration of our anointed Head is that, as the power of the anointing flows down to us, we judge ourselves and our own wills. We are brought to appreciate the will of God and the mind of Christ — and that mind will form us in true lowliness.

What causes divisions? Not the truth of God, or the attractive grace of our risen Saviour. These things only unify. May God help everyone of us to come under the power of Christ's attraction — that One whose love took Him into death; who has risen in triumph; who is ascended to the Father. He would attract, command, and direct us, until that looked-for moment when we shall hear His voice and see His face. Until then may we be decided in our confession, and true in our discipleship.