

A Jealous God

John 16: 31, 32

W. H. Westcott.

Bethany appears to be one of the very few places in the whole of Palestine where the Lord could make Himself at home. It was a spot where He found an ear for what He had to say with regard to the Father and where His human affections were drawn out; for we are told: "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus".

But a great sorrow had come into the household. The very spot on earth which seemed the nearest to heaven was allowed to feel the withering blast of death. When Lazarus fell sick, they sent to the Lord in the hope that He would come at once, and arrest the case and prevent it reaching such a sorrowful climax but no, though the Lord received their message, knew their desire, entered into all their sorrow and pressure, He allowed matters to go on to their dreaded end. Lazarus died, and the consequence was that His action was very unintelligible to those who surrounded the household. "Could not this Man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?"

They wondered, as we sometimes wonder, why it is that the Lord allows distressful sorrow and crushing bereavement; why He does not come in and deliver. We go to the Lord, and it seems as though He neither heeds nor hears.

Nor is the loss of loved ones our only trial. Many sorrows press upon the saints in a world where it is becoming increasingly difficult to live; what business disappointments and worries there are. We cry to the Lord, we say "We have told Him about it, surely He will deliver"; and somehow or other, it has not been His way to deliver. The blow that we feared has fallen; we wonder, and think how can it be that no deliverance has come?

We think also of the sorrows of the beloved church of God, of the place she has in the affections of Christ, of the love of the Father who has given her to Christ, and the fact that each individual saint is the subject of divine affections. Yet if we look at her actual state we are tempted to exclaim, Does God love the church? Does Christ care for His saints? We have seen troubles impending, afflictions looming, sorrows pressing and when we have cried to Him He has not arrested the disaster. Why did He not prevent the catastrophe? The breach has come, the sorrow is here, and all the pressure of it, as though it were the pressure and the bitterness of death itself.

The Jews who came to comfort Mary, seeing her rise up hastily, said, "She goeth to the grave, to weep there", to weep in hopeless sorrow. Perhaps some of us are inclined to think all hope is gone, and have allowed despair to seize us, since our loved ones have been snatched from us, our business shattered, our earthly hopes dashed to the ground, and, worst of all, our expectations with regard to the saints have received a bitter check; and here we are scattered, cleft, broken, with the bitterness of death upon our spirits. It may appear as though we have nothing to do now but to sit down and mourn and weep over all the sorrow, just as the Jews thought that Mary went to the grave to weep there. But instead of going to the grave with all the pressure of hopeless sorrow, *she went to the feet of Jesus*.

That is where God wants us to go, no matter by what means the end is reached; only let us accept the pressure from Him, and just get right to the feet of Jesus with it; this is His aim with all His ways with us.

I was rather struck in our reading this morning in the last chapter of Luke. You will remember how the Lord led His disciples out as far as Bethany, and then lifted up His hands and blessed them, and was parted from them and carried up into heaven. Why, surely, if there were a place which might have detained Him, it would have been Bethany, the one spot on earth nearest heaven to His spirit. Worship, service, adoration were all there; but Bethany was not the Father's home, so He says, "I cannot leave your spirits even here; I must have you right away from this world in every shape or form it may assume to you. I do not want you to linger even in Bethany; I want you to go clean out of it all to where I go". Their spirits might have hoped to rest at Bethany, but He leads them further still, up to the right hand of God.

It may be we have thought that if I join this or that company, I may find a Bethany for my spirit, and I may settle down, and I may really go on with a free and happy spirit, without any hindrance to serve my Lord. Well, it is all right to find Bethanys here, but, brethren, if our hearts stay in Bethany the Lord will smash it up for us; He will roll death in; He will break up everything, if thereby He may get our affection for Himself.

Do not you desire this? Is it worthwhile that He should detach our affections from even the best things down here, from what sight and sense would build upon, and just draw us up to Himself alone in the glory? Yes, the Lord has such an affection for us that it is akin to jealousy. I have been reading in Exodus a little bit lately, and I thought the nearest revelation to the christian revelation comes out where it says, "The Lord thy God is a jealous God". Do you not see, love takes the form of jealousy if there is the smallest rival to it? The nearest revelation to the christian one of love that could be given in Old Testament times is that God is a jealous God. You remember Solomon's Song says that love is as strong as death. Do you know what follows? It is that jealousy is as cruel as the grave. Jealousy is the form love takes the moment there is a rival, and if the Lord sees we are going to set our hearts on anything down here, building up some little system for ourselves, clear of this error and the other error, He will smash it all up, because it would very soon be an object to us and draw us away from Himself. What He claims and what He wants is that we should be wholly and entirely for Himself. He draws us up by one method or another. Yes, there is death, there is the pressure, there is the breakup, but what is it all for? Well, I think that He is knocking at the door in the breakup. In the third chapter of Revelation He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock"; and that is what He is doing by the bereavement, by the pressure, by the breakup. He is knocking. "And if any man hear My voice, and open the door. I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." I will take My last meal with the man who has got a heart for Me.

May the Lord just write the desire in our hearts to respond with undivided affection to the true and undivided affection He has for us, and trust Him to order our pathway according to the love of His heart and the skillfulness of His hands.

(This article was written about 1911 by W. H. Westcott. To those who have enquired the article "Man Dwelling in God, and God in Man" which appeared in the May/June issue, was from the pen of the same contributor and was written in the Congo Mission field also about 1911. Editor.)