

"Bring me a minstrel."

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(Extracted from Truth for the Last Days, Vol. 4, 1905, page 124.)

Ever since sin came in, the children of faith have found the present scene an uncongenial one to the spiritual life that divine grace has implanted within them. The moral atmosphere around the godly is not conducive to heavenly-mindedness; communion with God is not helped thereby, but the reverse. Hence the soul that should really enjoy those unseen and eternal things that are properly its own must abstract itself; it must put itself outside of its existing environment (as far as that is possible "while in the body pent.")

In 2 Kings 3, the Spirit of God puts before us an instructive lesson as to this. 'the King of Israel — Jehoram, son of the wicked Ahab — was setting forth on an expedition to subdue the King of Moab who had revolted against him. He sought the co-operation of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, who, accompanied by his vassal, the King of Edom, consented to go with him to the war. Alas for Jehoshaphat! True servant of God though he was, it was the third time he had suffered himself to be ensnared into fellowship with the ungodly (1 Kings 22: 10; 2 Chron. 20: 35-37). As on a former occasion, so now also, he had qualms of conscience about what he had undertaken, and so proposed to seek the mind of Jehovah at the hand of one of His prophets. Accordingly the three kings waited on Elisha in Samaria. To the king of Israel the prophet said severely, "What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother;" adding, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee nor see thee." The prophet of Jehovah thus drew a sharp distinction between Jehoram and Jehoshaphat, even though the latter was pursuing a path of disobedience at that time.

"But now bring me a minstrel." Why was this? "And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of Jehovah came upon him." The presence of Israel's ungodly king was an offence to Elisha's spirit. He felt restrained and hindered by reason of it. The holy atmosphere of communion with God which the prophet was accustomed to breathe was, as it were, polluted by the very fact that Jehoram was before him. The "still small voice," which was the express symbol of Elisha's ministry of grace, could not be heard amid the clamour of the wicked (1 Kings 19: 12). Hence he felt it necessary to abstract himself; he judged it incumbent upon him to get in spirit outside of his surroundings before he could ascertain the mind of Jehovah, in order to give it forth to the only really godly man who would value it. "When the minstrel played the hand of the Lord came upon him. And he said, Thus saith the Lord," etc.

Balaam never knew such an experience as this. Though he -gave expression to some of the divinest thoughts contained in Holy Scripture, he did it merely as the instrument of a power superior to his own. His own affections and sympathies were by no means engaged in the service; indeed he would most willingly have said the opposite of what he did say about the people of God, if God had permitted him to do so. Hence the presence of the ungodly was no affliction to him; he experienced no godly restraint of spirit by reason of it, and he felt no need to abstract himself from the influence of evil surroundings in order to get into the mind of God.

Our sympathies are with Elisha. We all prove experimentally day by day the many hindrances to communion with God with which this world is full. "The cares of this life" affect some, and the

deceitfulness of riches affect others, even amongst the true saints of God. They clog our steps, they dim our eyes, they weigh down our spirits, and keep us on a low spiritual plane, *if we allow them to do so*. But faith does well to spread its wings and soar above all surrounding influences, that its delight in the things of the unseen Christ may be full and complete. 2 Cor. 12 presents us with a wonderful experience once granted to the honoured apostle of the Gentiles. He does not name himself, but tells us of "a man in Christ," who was caught up to the third heaven, there to listen to words which could not possibly be communicated to men in a merely earthly condition. So completely abstracted was he, that he affirms twice that he could not tell whether he was in the body or out of the body at the time. While recognising fully the miraculous element in the apostle's happy experience, is there not a voice to our souls in it? Is it not among the things that are written for our learning?

The life that is ours in Christ is an essentially heavenly thing. Full understanding and enjoyment of it cannot be until God's full thought concerning us is realised, and we find ourselves in the Father's house, with our bodies fashioned like unto the body of the First-born Son, all that is mortal being swallowed up of life (2 Cor. 5: 10). But eternal life is really ours now, many a divine statement assuring us of it, yet it is an exotic in this world, and we need to live in spirit outside of this world if we would enjoy in any measure the rich spiritual portion that God has given to us in His Son.

The apostle's words in 1 Corinthians 7: 35, have often powerfully impressed me: "that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction." What do we know of this? The language supposes the soul living by faith within the precincts of the heavenly sanctuary, holding communion with the Lord without a burden and without a care. This is the Spirit's desire for us all. He is the ever-present divine link between our souls here and Christ there, and it is His deepest delight to make good to faith now those things which will only be entered upon as an actual possession when the Lord returns.

Will any suggest that these remarks are impractical? The reverse is the truth. It is in occupation with the unseen that our souls gather strength for all the circumstances of the way; it is this, and this alone, which renders our hearts buoyant in the midst of all that of necessity comes upon us in an evil world and a fallen Church.