

## Gathering or Scattering

Luke 11: 23.

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"He that is not with me is against me and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." It is always an important question for the servant of Christ to put to himself, if not next to others, Am I doing the will of my Master? The first manifestation of the divine life in the heart of Saul of Tarsus, was to put him in the place of obedience through faith in Christ, and to subject the once stern self-righteous Pharisee to the will of another. Hitherto his own thoughts had been a sufficient guide to him for persecuting the disciples of the Lord Jesus. He verily thought that he was doing God service; as Naaman had been governed by his own thoughts in regard to his desired cleansing from his leprosy (2 Kings 5: 11). Now it was, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And the answer, "It shall be told thee," left no room for the exercise of his own will in service to his new Master.

As neutrality is impossible in the things of God, so independence cannot be allowed in the servant of Christ. It necessarily follows that a spiritual discernment of the Lord's mind is of the last importance. To have an understanding of the divine objects brings increased responsibility to the one who knows and a heavier judgment if disobedient; while a faithful exercise of the gift bestowed brings increased blessing. "To him that hath shall more be given." If we could divest ourselves of conventionalism and of the natural and traditional thoughts of men about God and Christianity, or what men call religion, we should find it far easier to understand the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Luke than we do. It is God Himself visiting His people in grace, and Christ the minister of grace to us in the spirit of lowliness and constant dependence upon God, which so well becomes a true man of God. A multitude of the heavenly host are presented to us, giving expression to their unbounded delight in the hearing of the shepherds (Luke 2: 8-14), as the world can find no room for the First-born Son of God and Son of Man; while Imperialism only takes official record of the child's birth as of any other. The world's ignorance of, and complete indifference to, the purposes of God are thus fully manifested. Thus it is made clear that man is guilty, lost, and dead, yet all the while religious; and this last condition prevents him from profiting by grace, as Luke 15 demonstrates. The Lord Jesus, God's faithful Messenger of grace, finds difficulties accumulate in His pathway, so casting Him upon God in prayer, as in the beginning of this chapter. For man's religious position cannot be acknowledged; it is a false one for a sinner till born of God.

Even the disciples themselves confess their ignorance as to the right and suitable way of approach to God, and the Lord graciously instructs them; for they at least by grace believed and were upright (vers. 1-14). But this is not all: we may not stop at the supply of our own need; we are encouraged to go to God about others. The prayer "Give us" has been answered, one's personal need has been satisfied, but the circumstances of "a friend of mine in his journey" together with my own poverty and incapacity to help him, are pressing heavily upon my spirit, inducing earnestness, importunity, continuing instant in prayer, and the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man is answered. There may be apparent indifference, as Elijah experienced on Mount Carmel ("Go again seven times"); but it is only apparent. Human friendship may indeed break down when too much strain is put upon it. God is honoured when thus counted upon, although indeed in infinite wisdom far beyond that of any earthly parent (vers. 9-13). But in truth a dumb spirit has taken possession of the heart of man: he has no voice for God either for prayer or praise (ver. 14). God was in Christ in power for man's deliverance from bondage to the

"strong man armed," as well as in a fulness of grace which could bless abundantly. But pride and hatred closed up every avenue to the heart of man that he might not receive the love which Christ brought, and sealed his lips against the confession of need or praise for good received. It was here that the religious man showed how fully he was under the power of Satan by openly blaspheming the Holy Ghost, for, then as now, manifestly the Spirit was the only power which could make the grace of God effectual for man's blessing.

The Lord Jesus in His ministry used every argument calculated to impress sinners with a sense of the reality of that grace of which He was the fulness and channel; and to move them by faith to profit by it, telling them that "they ought always to pray and not to faint." There was the fullest encouragement to do so; but man was disinclined for this, and would rather take the place of a worshipper, however false, thanking God for something as to his condition which was really a denial of the truth ("God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men"). Such being the case, Christ's real work was gathering saints and not dispensing the blessings of grace that man might continue to claim them in his natural condition.

Many have thought and said that if only they had sufficient wealth, and authority, they could make the world a paradise and every creature happy, by dealing with the circumstances which are the fruit of sin. But this would leave God's nature, His holiness, His righteousness, and His love, unknown, the conscience untouched and unpurged, and would not truly draw the sinner to God. Had the fulness of the Father's house only been intellectually conveyed to the prodigal in the far country, he would never have thought of returning. Of course man has lost much, everything in fact; but God has concerned Himself about His own loss of the world, and especially of man in it. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; and He will, with the necessarily awful but revealed exception of the lake of fire, eventually re-establish God's authority and judgment of evil, "that God may be all in all."

What He is doing in the meantime is calling and receiving sinners and by His Spirit gathering to His name. This is far better than effecting an outward reformation, yet leaving the sinner in his old place of distance in the far country. The Lord Jesus was "minister of circumcision," sent unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel, that they might be gathered; as it had been the object of prophetic testimony in the O.T. dispensation. The presentation of Christ to the people and His utter rejection proved that unbelieving Israel would not be gathered ("How often would I have gathered thy children together. . . and ye would not" (Matt. 23: 37)! The failure of Messiah's mission God foreknew; and it is fully acknowledged from Isaiah 49: 4, and onward. But Jehovah's answer discloses those counsels and purposes which are having their full accomplishment in the calling out from Jews and Gentiles into the church in this acceptable time; only for this, the heavenly glory of Christ is necessary. "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of Jehovah." This remarkable prophecy shows us the exact order of events as recorded in the N.T. *i.e.* the temporary failure of Christ's mission to Israel; a suffering and rejected Messiah, received and glorified in heaven, made to be God's salvation unto the ends of the earth. Here then is the divine centre for all. "I, if I be lifted up (rejected) from the earth, will draw all unto Me" (John 12: 32).

We see this gathering to Christ Himself in many places in the four Gospels, but especially in the Gospel of John where the necessary presentation of Christ to the earthly people is shown to be a failure from the first. "He came unto His own things and His own people received Him not." But from the time that Christ took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, the Holy Spirit was given to effectuate this. There is nothing else in the mind of God as to blessing for man, but this gathering to Christ. If He were not God, it would derogate from God; yet is He man also there, as here, in wondrous grace and truth. He alone is God's centre of unity, Head to the church over all things. The Holy Spirit

sent by the Father and the Son is now occupying Himself upon earth, not only for the gospel, but to accomplish the Father's purpose for the glory of the Son; viz., "that for the dispensation of the fulness of the seasons He might gather together in one all things in the Christ " (Eph. 1: 10). At His coming it will be in displayed glory before all creation; now it is only He exalted above as "head over all things to the church," and here known only to faith.

In a day of religious activity, when many schemes are afloat for the promotion of revivals and the awakening of religious enthusiasm, this divine purpose may be easily lost sight of, and christian workers may become quite satisfied with creature blessing, for spiritual and social reformation, On the other hand where the truth is known and professed and its importance recognized, there may be a sad and inexcusable deficiency of love to Christ and to those that are His, as well as of evangelistic zeal, so that the privilege attaching to the servant of gathering with Christ is grievously if not idly surrendered. True knowledge of revealed truth may degenerate into doctrinal pride and self-complacency nauseous to Christ (Rev. 3: 16), while zeal without knowledge will make the sinner's blessing the end and object of our service instead of Christ's glory. No company of Christians, however gifted and intelligent, could rightly say "He that gathereth not with 'us' scattereth" — which was John's thought in Luke 9: 49, 50. But this word of the Lord Jesus challenges every one of His servants today, "He that gathereth not with Me scattereth."