

We Would See Jesus

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit"—John 12:24

JOHN CHAPTERS 12 & 13

IN John 12:21 we find that "certain Greeks" came among the people who came up to worship at the Feast. Who those Greeks were we have no record. They must have heard of Jesus, his wisdom, and his miracles.

It is obvious that their request started a train of thought in the Master. He must have been deeply moved and stirred. He knew of the nearness of the storm, and that the Pharisees were planning his death. Grief must have filled his heart, knowing that the people did not understand.

But Jesus had found something far greater—to love the Father, to do His will, and to be obedient to His purpose.

To these Greeks, we give this thought: they had come from the West to see Jesus as his life was near its ending. The wise men came from the East to see Jesus at the beginning of his life. The wise men came to the manger; the Greeks came to the cross.

Consider Jesus' answer—

"The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified" (John 12:23).

Jesus gave no direct answer to the petition. Rather he alludes to his death by saying—

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.

"But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (v. 24).

By these words Jesus illustrated his teaching about giving oneself, and losing one's life for something worthwhile. A grain of wheat is alone and quite useless. But let it be planted in the earth and it will die and spring forth into newness of life, and bring forth abundant fruit.

Jesus said that life was like that. Let a man selfishly love his life and keep it all to himself, and he will lose it. But let him in faith cast it freely forth, and let it be lost among his fellows and even die in the losing—and in due time he will find life eternal springing forth.

So Jesus interpreted his own death, when he faced the choice of escaping the cross, or accepting it. And as he looked down the great avenue of time, he could see the multitude who would have life renewed and redeemed if he laid down his.

And thus he put it down as an everlasting truth for men to learn—that if we are to escape a life of futility and frustration and failure, we must give wholly of ourselves to the Divine purpose. Like the grain of wheat, if we abide alone we shall lose the happiness of being with the servants of God.

The worldly philosophers who write learned books say that the first instinct of human nature is self-preservation.

To some extent it may be true. But Jesus taught there was something infinitely greater than sterile self-preservation. He taught us to use our lives for the purpose of doing something good while we may.

Such is good for the mind and good for the heart. The most unhappy people are those who are most concerned with themselves. But we all need courage and strength to keep our daily lives from despair and futility. Jesus said (v. 26)—

"If any man serve me, let him follow me: and where I am, there shall also my servant be.

"If any man serve me, him will my Father honor."

By reference to the grain of wheat Jesus expresses the necessity for his own death. But at v. 27 he says—

"Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour!"

He had just said that it would be the hour of his glory. To die on a cross would no doubt be a dreadful thought to him, but to shrink from doing the will of the Father would be worse. So he asks himself—

"What shall I say?"

He answers it immediately by saying (v. 27)—

"But for this cause came I unto this hour."

Whatever may have been his thoughts, he said (v. 28)—

"Father, glorify Thy Name!"

And a voice answered him from heaven, saying—

"I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."

Jesus continues by saying to the people (v. 32)—

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

Who but the Son of God could use such words? He could draw whosoever will come unto him, that they might be with him in his future Kingdom.

But the eyes of the people were blinded that they could not see, and their hearts were hardened that they could not understand, even as Isaiah had said they would be (v. 40). Why?—

"They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

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"WE would see Jesus," these Gentiles had come to ask. And these words express the light of life. Can we ever read enough of him? Can we ever think enough of him? How true that we need all the knowledge of him as day by day we must make our choice in so many things, whether we will follow him or the way of the world.

In Matt. 16:21, just a little before this time, but leading up to the same events, we find he begins to tell his disciples:

"How that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes,

"And be killed, and be raised again the third day."

And Peter, wanting to be of comfort to Jesus, insisted such a thing must not happen. In his love and loyalty he said—

"Be it far from thee, Lord! This shall not be unto thee!"

Peter wanted so much to express his love and devotion. But Jesus, who knew what was before him, must have startled Peter with his stern rebuke—

"Get thee behind me, Satan! Thou art an offence unto me, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Peter, though so earnest and well-meaning, was not talking according to God's view, but the natural view of the flesh. What a lesson to distrust our own thinking!

Here we have one of the incidents that give us a deeper insight into the life of Jesus, his purpose in life, and for what he was dedicated. It also shows us how easily and subtly temptation can come from a friend.

Jesus had been preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. He had been telling them of things which they did not seem to understand, telling them plainly that he must be killed and rise again. And here was his best friend suggesting that he go some other way than to Jerusalem and to his death.

Peter did not comprehend the purpose of God in the death of Christ. He had to be rebuked. In doing so, Jesus identifies him with Satan, the adversary—tempting Jesus to seek the easy way rather than the way for which he came into the world.

The Scriptures show several ways in which the adversary may approach. Jesus warned his disciples that the adversary may come as a "wolf in sheep's clothing." Peter himself later exhorts in his epistle to—

"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour."

The adversary may come in many disguises. Soft and alluring words from a friend can sometimes change the firm purpose one may have in mind. The worldly-minded can keep one from his duty by a professed love that can smother and quench the enthusiasm and crush the faith.

We have heard it subtly suggested that if one is not careful one can be an "extremist." Can one be an extremist in their zeal for God and work for His Kingdom? He is being condemned for trying to keep alive the flame of Faith!

Such critics can be stumbling-blocks. They are adversaries—satans—not having the eager love or desire to "Arise and build!" They are content to pull down those who are more zealous and keen, forgetting the words of Paul (Phil. 2:2-5)—

"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ."

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COMING back to John 13, it is interesting to note that John makes no mention of the last supper. He passes over the breaking of the bread and giving of the cup.

Instead, he records the washing of the disciples' feet, which none of the other Gospels mention. He relates the story of the disciples as they come together in the upper room. There had been differences among them as to who was the greatest, and it is evident that relations were not as cordial among them as they should have been.

We notice none of them had volunteered to do the usual courtesy of washing the dusty feet of the others, as was the common custom. Each was too much concerned with his own importance. Everyone waited for someone else to do it. The flesh seeks; the Spirit serves.

But Jesus their Master did what none of the others would do, and he did it in a way they would not forget. John relates the story in detail: it conveys the impression that it impressed him more than anything else that took place that evening.

Jesus, the Son of God, made of this simple menial task a sacrifice of service, humility and love. He gave to the task a dignity and glory that will never be forgotten.

John says (v. 3) that Jesus was well aware of 2 things at that time. He knew that the Father had delivered ALL THINGS into his hands, and he knew that he had come from God and would go to God. Jesus knew of his divine origin and destiny. And knowing this, he took water and a towel and gave an unforgettable lesson of how his followers should do unto one another.

Jesus did not rebuke. He did not scold or find fault. He did not say anything. He just silently took a towel and a basin of water, adding immeasurably to the impressiveness of the lesson by setting aside his garments and girding himself merely with the towel he used to wipe their feet.

How it must have shamed the disciples! The Master stooped and did what the others felt too self-important to do. They were absorbed in seeking for greatness and pre-eminence.

John, looking on and being himself a participant, sees in it a meaning concerning the true greatness of humble, lowly, joyful service to others.

The glory of Jesus is that he did not choose to rest or presume on the glory of his parentage or position, but took upon himself the form of a servant. His was the glory of perfect obedience, perfect submission, perfect self-emptying.

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus entered the world through the gates of lowliness, and departed from it in cheerfully-accepted rejection, abuse and shame. His mother wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger in a stable, for there was no room for him elsewhere. And he died in public ignominy as a common criminal.

He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

The great horizon of eternity that surrounded him called for this humble service, that he might be an example to his followers—that they might have a better conception of themselves and might strive for the real victory of giving self for others. And that we might, learning the lessons, strive in wisdom to fill the time before eternity with the greatness of doing the humble tasks that serve God and our brethren.

Even the common, humdrum tasks of everyday life can have an eternal glory when they are consciously and thankfully and lovingly done "As unto the Lord." Such things can give zeal and vigor because of the knowledge that God in mercy has granted us.

When we are tempted to think highly of ourselves, or when we may become obsessed with our importance or our own affairs, or when we think of ourselves first and neglect to think of those who are more in need than we, then let us quietly envision in our minds Jesus, the Son of God, kneeling before his disciples girded with a towel and with a basin in his hand.

Jesus, who came to be the Saviour of the world, kneeled down even to Judas to try to win him away from the great evil that was in his heart.

Peter, too, was there, confident of his own strength but—all unknowingly—on the verge of his greatest failure. Peter characteristically objected when Jesus began to wash his feet, then swung immediately to the other extreme.

Let us try to stop, and think, and meditate, and learn: and THEN to speak. Writing later, Peter said (and these events would be vivid in his memory)—

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Peter is writing these words a generation after the resurrection of Jesus. He is reflecting on what happened that day when Jesus came forth triumphant from the tomb.

To Peter it meant a new beginning of life. It was also the time when new life began for Jesus. It was the starting point of hope for all believers in Christ Jesus.

At his death, it looked like the end for him and for all. When the great stone was rolled in place to close the tomb, even the closest friends of Jesus must have felt that the end was come to all their joys and hopes and expectations.

No wonder they were stricken with grief. Their best friend was gone—put to death by evil men. It must have seemed to them as though hate and wickedness had triumphed. Until the 3rd day they were together in their stunned grief, overcome by their shattered hopes. The Master with whom they had walked, with whom they had talked and prayed, on whom all their hopes rested, was in the cold, dark, silent tomb of the dead.

But on the first day of the new week the women came early, and behold the stone was rolled away, and the tomb was empty but for angels who said—

"Why seek ye the living among the dead?

"He is not here: he is risen, as he said."

Now they were filled with new life. They were confident and assured, for they now believed the Master was indeed a living Saviour. The resurrection of Jesus was God's signature of approval on what had been done for them by Christ.

They now realized the Truth, and proclaimed it, that the same Power which had raised up Jesus from the dead could raise up others also. Hate and evil may triumph for a time, but it is love and faith that will have the future. God can and will bring victory out of defeat, and life out of death—

"For our labor is NOT in vain in the Lord!"

Therefore we both labor cheerfully, and suffer reproach patiently, because we trust in the Living God Who is the Saviour of those who will believe. To this end we strive, because we have our hope fixed in God and in His Christ.

By the resurrection of Jesus, God has made it manifest that death and life are in His hand. Let nothing separate us from the love of God, Who is in Christ our Redeemer, reconciling the world unto Himself.

—C.H.T.
