

"They Feared to Ask Him"

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it"—Luke 9:23-24.

There are some Scriptures which require time for us to adjust ourselves to them. They embody the essence of a multitude of minor precepts and require a multitude of minor adjustments. We must return to them again and again to check our course and our progress by them.

Such are these words of Christ. It requires time even to find out all that they mean—in fact, it seems that this process of fathoming their full implications is endless—and it takes further time to adjust ourselves to these implications as they unfold. No one could ever feel within himself that he had completely exhausted their meaning and satisfied their requirements.

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"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected and slain" (Luke 9:22).

"Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not . . . and they feared to ask him" (vs. 44-45).

Why were they afraid to ask further light? Because these things that Jesus was saying were disturbing and did not fit in with their conception of what lay before them. They did not want to face the implications of his words. Their minds were full of his coming glory, and their respective ranks of honor around his throne—see the next verse, where they contended among themselves who should be greatest.

It would have been better for them to have faced their fears, and asked him what he meant. They would have been better prepared for the ordeal to come, and braced against the hopeless despair that engulfed them at his crucifixion.

"Fools and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have written!"

How natural to close our eyes to unpleasant truths, but how comforting on the other hand to be fortified in a time of trouble by a clear perception beforehand that all is in harmony with a glorious divine plan!

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As they continue on their journey they come to the village where the Samaritans refuse to receive them, and the disciples say,

"Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?"

Our minds go back a little way: "*And they said, Lord, teach us to pray. And he said, Pray ye on this wise: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.*" How quickly this beautiful lesson of love was forgotten!

"*Even as Elias did.*" How glibly we justify our natural desires by some eagerly-grasped Scripture that suits our end!—"Abraham was rich" . . . "Daniel had great authority" . . . "Solomon lived in splendor" . . . "Moses led an army." The whole life and teaching of Jesus was of the spirit of lowly gentleness and kindness, but it is this fiery instance in the life of Elijah that immediately comes to their mind—*because it fitted in with their feelings.*

They little realized the exalted nobility of the purpose that centered in Christ. There was no room there for petty personal resentment. He saw men broadly as sheep without a shepherd, seeking rest and finding none. *Even in their blind abuse of him, he pitied them*, for they but vented on him the bitterness of their own frustration and futility.

This instance illustrates how difficult it is to seek scriptural guidance with an open mind, and how easy it is to find just what we are looking for. What assurance then have we ever that we are not self-deceived? Narrow is the way, he said, and few there be that find it. *Few there be that even FIND it!* But still the unchanging promise is—

"Ye shall find Me—when ye **seek** for Me with **all** your heart."

Millions are seeking with varying degrees of earnestness and effort, *but few put their whole heart and soul into it, to the exclusion of all else.*

This is the only guarantee of success. This is the only possible hope of success. One sole and all-exclusive purpose.

"If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

"A doubleminded man is unstable in all his ways" (Jam. 1:8).

Divided interests and affections lead only to endless mental turmoil. Lukewarmness is an abomination to both God and man. God gives us a positive guarantee of failure before we start if we do not throw ourselves into His service with wholehearted zeal. Those who attempt to serve two masters lose any real enjoyment and satisfaction that they might have derived from either service.

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In the last few verses of the chapter, Jesus speaks to three men. Here again, the words of Jesus are of the type to which we must keep returning, seeking to adjust our outlook and our lives. They are not what we would naturally expect Jesus to say in the circumstances. They must be slowly digested. They are lessons in a type of thought and viewpoint directly opposite to the natural.

Natural man's thoughts are based on maudlin sentimentality that has no solid framework of reason and which a slight irritation soon exposes as superficial. Natural man is all for goodwill and fellowship—until his little personal interests are jeopardized or his touchy sensibilities are affronted. To the natural man the words of Jesus were often very hard.

"This is an hard saying—who can receive it?"

He was always seeking to drive them deeper—force them to think down through the common shallow veneer—shake them out of the rut of paralyzing habit and unthinking conformity with an unthinking brute existence. Consider what he says to these three men, especially the second. The man asked:

"Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father."

Jesus replied to him,

"Let the dead bury their dead."

What a thing to say at such a time! A hard saying, indeed. Of course, human commentators explain it away. They say that the man meant, "Let me stay with my aged father until he dies." Instead of letting it "sink down into their ears," and seeking to extract divine wisdom from it, they attempt to water it down and thus escape its searching, transforming power.

"Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the Kingdom of God."

Would he stop to bury his father if a flood or tornado were sweeping down on him? Would he stop to care for the *dead* if his *living friends* were in dire and immediate need of his help? It is all a question of relative values.

He took his call too lightly. Men had been living and dying for thousands of years and were to do so for thousands more. Many had been buried and many had not, it was all the same in the end. *But here was the turning point in God's plan of the Ages, that would triumphantly sweep death from the earth.*

In the fulness of time God had sent forth His Son, and this very moment he was saying personally to him, "*I need you NOW, follow me!*" The words still rang in the air. And the man said, "I can't make it right away, I have something else to do first." And so his great moment passed.

He did not realize—and how *hard* it is to realize—the utter insignificance of natural things. He was not ready when the call came. He hesitated. He had other things on his mind. Suddenly confronted with a decision, he failed. How important to be ready beforehand—to have laid the right foundation during the time of opportunity!

The lesson and the type is clear. "*See that that day come not upon you unawares.*" Be ready. Keep your lamps trimmed and full of oil. Get mentally adjusted to the relative values of natural and spiritual things, so that when He once more shakes not the earth only, but heaven also, and many things that seemed well-grounded begin to rock and sway, and a decision is suddenly thrust upon us, we shall have the discernment to distinguish what to hold fast to—and what to let go.

(Taken from "Be Ye Transformed" Volume 4 pages 213-216 by Bro. G. Growcott)