

John 21:15-22 (William George Turner) 72149

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John 21:15-22

This is a very touching narrative, and comes closely home to our hearts. There is a background to this lakeside picture which heightens the moral beauty of the scene.

The upper room at the last supper, where the self-confidence of the apostle vaunted itself in a boastfulness and a depreciation of others by his saying, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise," throws into relief the deep probing questions of the morning by the lake. The crowded hall of the high priest's house at night with its fire of coals, its weakness and threefold denial, contrast vividly with the quiet lakeside and the threefold confession of loving attachment to his Master.

But one great Figure is the same; one strong tender Heart is common to both pictures; through all the lights and shadows of the terrible tragedy of that dark night in which He was betrayed by one, denied by another, and forsaken by all, the atmosphere of the gentleness of Christ pervades the whole. To Judas the traitor, the reproof and dismissal from the apostolate are given in such gentle terms that none at the table knew for what intent He spake; to Peter, ignorant of his own weakness and boastful of his ability, "Simon, Simon, I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, and when thou art converted (or, restored), strengthen thy brethren," is the utterance of the Lord who knew him fully.

At the high priest's house, when the recreant apostle has thrice denied with oaths and curses that he ever knew his Master, then the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. No upbraiding, no reproaches, no scathing denunciation, but a look, one well believes, of such infinite pity and sorrow for His poor, craven-hearted follower, that Peter went out and wept bitterly. Who amongst the followers of the Lord Jesus does not know something of this—the gentleness of Christ?

Now, on this calm, peaceful morning, the same holy Master awaits His follower, and, thoroughly dealing with him, restores and re-instates him to office.

But note the gentleness of the Lord as He trusts the restored man again, and entrusts to him a yet greater share of His interests. This gentleness made Peter great, and in after days we find this apostle teaching the lessons learned that day. Cf. 1 Peter 2:21; 5:2-4.

It is interesting to observe that the inquiry of the Lord is not "Lovest thou My sheep?" but "Lovest thou ME?" Then, "Feed my lambs"; "Shepherd my sheep," "Feed my sheep" incidentally reminding us that no amount of affection for the sheep will guarantee sufficient impetus to maintain a course of unwearied service to them. The people of the Lord are sometimes difficult to get on with; they have moods and opinions and are sometimes apt to be very viewy and trying; likewise the pastors or shepherds, being human, may magnify themselves and not their office, or cease to be ensamples to the flock of God, and so the relationship fails of its divine intention.

But the Unchanging One to Whom Peter realized his eternal indebtedness, Whose love had entirely won him, Whose gentleness had made him great, with unerring wisdom touches the vital question of all true service, whether towards the people of God or to sinners needing salvation, "Lovest thou Me?" thus presenting Himself as the sole object for the heart of the servant, and the sufficient motive for the most arduous, unwearied, patient, willing service to man.

One further thing calls for notice in this incident, namely, no sooner is Peter restored and re-instated to office, than a hint of the old disposition appears. The final words of commission have been spoken by the Lord, and the emphatic injunction, "Follow Me" has been placed upon him, when he, turning about, began to be occupied with another disciple.

An eye off the Master, and on a fellow disciple leads to an outburst of curiosity. The turning about, and the occupation with some other one than the One he was called to follow was and is the cause of the mischief. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was probably morally and spiritually the best of the apostolic band, but anyone or anything that diverts the gaze of the believer from his Lord is a hindrance to the close following of His steps.

So the Lord in His tenderness rebukes the incipient wandering of this one, who once before "had followed afar off," with, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me."

There is but one Lord, and He the sufficient object for the heart of the saint; and the Lord here briefly indicates what is the life-long occupation for Peter, and for ourselves, "Follow thou Me."

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