

Luke 24:50 (R. E.) 53533

Christian Truth: Volume 22, Memories of Bethany: He Led Them Out as Far as Bethany (24:50)

"He led them out as far as to Bethany." Luke 24:50.

Bethany is not, so far as we know, once referred to in the Old Testament. It is not linked up, therefore, in any special way with the history of Israel, like Bethel or Bethlehem. All the interest that attaches to it is derived solely from association connected with the life of the Lord Jesus. His name and Bethany are inseparably entwined and encircled with the most hallowed memories. It was there He often found a home; it was there He appears always to have been welcome. It was the abode of "Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." Here He resorted when He would not pass the night in Jerusalem. It was here they made Him a supper just before His betrayal and crucifixion.

All this helps us to understand why He led His disciples out as far as to Bethany. He leads them to the place where they valued Him. [It was there He retired when His testimony to the Jews was ended, that His heart might rest for a few moments among those whom He loved, who, through grace, loved Him.] It had no other recommendation. No special vision, no famous battle, no remarkable deliverance cast a halo of glory around it. It was enough that hearts beat there in which He was enshrined. To such a place, ere He went up to heaven, Jesus led His disciples.

Has this incident no special lesson for us? Does it not seem to say that what the Lord specially prized were hearts that valued Him? Can anything else atone for the lack of this? Can fine speaking, intellectual discourses, ornate services, priestly pretensions, claims to infallibility, and what not, or even correct scriptural form, make up for the absence of love to Him?

The first event connected with Bethany is Martha receiving Jesus into her house (Luke 10:38). Just previously (see Luke 9) He had been refused hospitality in a village of the Samaritans. How very sweet, therefore, must the hospitality afforded by the home at Bethany have been to Him. Thus Bethany is first of all distinctly connected with offering Christ a welcome to our innermost circle. And it is surprising how much Christianity is always connected with the home. If we are not right there, we cannot be right anywhere. That is, if Christ has not His rightful place at our hearth, He certainly has not in our heart.

Next, we find Mary sitting at Jesus' feet and hearing His word. It is the attitude of one who has learned how Christ has served her, as set forth in the parable of the good Samaritan. Martha was occupied with service to Him. Both are right. But His service to us must be learned first; otherwise we shall never know the true rest which sitting at His feet so perfectly expresses. It was there Mary learned to know the One who had served her.

Do we know anything of Bethany? Have we welcomed Christ into the home and found our place at His feet? Have we reached that spot? Are we sitting at His feet, learning all that He has been to us in death, what He is to us in life, and ever will be? "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

It was from Bethany that Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Thus Bethany becomes associated with Christ's glory as Son of David. It was also associated with His glory as Son of God. Referring to Lazarus, Jesus said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." Are we at Bethany? Are these glories constantly before our eyes?

This was the place too that afforded the Lord a temporary haven from the storm that was gathering at Jerusalem—"Now the eventide was come, He went out unto Bethany with the twelve."

It was to the same place the Lord came six days before the last Passover. There they made Him a supper. The scene at supper is depicted by at least three of the evangelists, but to John we are indebted for the fullest particulars. The picture is altogether lovely, the prominent feature about it being that Christ is made much of. "There they made HIM a supper." "She hath wrought a good work upon ME." This, as we have said, is characteristic of Bethany; and this, we believe, is the reason why the Lord led His disciples there. Are we there? Have we the same spirit? The PERSON was everything to their hearts. The miracle lately performed at Bethany had assured them that He was indeed the Son of God. It is everything to know Him. And the three parts taken by Martha, Mary, and Lazarus all flow from that knowledge. Martha serves, but as knowing the One she serves. She would not now say, "Dost Thou not care?" Had He not raised her brother and given back to her one as dear as her own life? Lazarus sits at the table with Him, for he knew the Lord in a way no one else did—One whose voice had reached him in the silence and distance of death. He well knew the response that voice awakens, and he enjoys as a consequence the fullest communion. And Mary—she proves how well she knew Him, and also how well she knew what the occasion demanded. Her whole course tells how she had been impressed with Christ's glory and greatness. She sat at His feet to hear His word; she fell down at His feet when He came to raise her brother; now she is permitted to anoint His feet. It is this fine sensibility that so often seems lacking in us.

"Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment." This is Bethany. Need we be astonished that Jesus led His own back to it, where there was a heart that would cheerfully bestow upon Him the very best she had, and that fully recognized His glory by the act of wiping His feet with her hair? "The house was filled with the odor of the ointment." Do we keep it filled? Alas! have we not often filled it with strife and bitterness and jealousy, and with anything but the fragrance of Christ Himself?

There were some—they exist still—who could not appreciate such attention to Christ. They call it waste, or venture to declare there are other objects more worthy. But such is not the mind of Bethany, nor is it the mind of the One who loved its society. "Let her alone," said Jesus; "the

poor always ye have with you; but ME ye have not always." How much does that one word "ME" mean to us?

"He led them out as far as to Bethany." "He led them out." He did not conduct them to the temple, and leave them within the only divinely recognized shrine on earth. He did not forever re-consecrate that sacred building—as perhaps one might have thought He would—by taking His stand upon the pinnacle and ascending to heaven from thence. No! He led them out from all such surroundings and associations. He had been with them in Jerusalem. But by His own act He now sets all that order aside—all that appears to mere sight and sense—and leads them away to what was of infinitely more worth, and incomparably more precious to Him—the associations of Bethany. What are these? The knowledge and appreciation of Himself. Alas, that so many should have made the return journey and have settled once more at Jerusalem! It will be said, But is not this just what the apostles themselves did? They did as to the place. But we are not speaking of a mere place, but of the tone of it. The tone of Jerusalem, as far as Christ was concerned, was either indifference or deadly hostility; that of Bethany, the truest loyalty, devotedness, and love. To which place are we attached? We may be at Jerusalem without being necessarily hostile. Christendom has reared its solemn temples and ordained its priesthood in imitation of Jerusalem; but it is mainly—though done in the name of Christ—a proof of its ignorance of Him, and for its own glorification. Bethany had nothing of this sort of thing to show, but it had something far greater. It was the scene of the glory of the only begotten Son when He raised the dead; it was where His love was known, for "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus"; it was where His sympathy had been fully displayed. "Jesus wept"—and considering who He was, more wonderful than His power were His tears—and it was there they made Him a supper, and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment.

"He led them out as far as to Bethany"—His last journey. Again we ask, Has it no significance for us? There is no record that the Lord was seen by any but His own after His resurrection; and therefore, presumably, no one saw Him on this occasion, or the group that followed Him; and yet, even at this distance of time, it is possible to join that company, at least in heart. Can we hold back? Surely not, when we know who it is that leads. He is the Son of God, the King of glory, the Lord of all, the crucified and risen One. Behind Him the dark grave, the scene of crucifixion, the frowns and scoffs of priests and populace; before Him, glory and the Father's throne, and the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, and already the light of that supernal glory reflected on His brow. And that little band—were they afraid to follow? They had been once, but now all was changed. His mission and death and even His departure so near at hand were all explained, and they followed Him without hesitation or reluctance.

This was no mere excursion, but of momentous import, and to convey a lesson to every succeeding generation of believers. At what hour it occurred we know not. Whether the morning light was fringing the hilltops, or the evening shadows were hastening on, we are not told. At all events, it was the last day on earth for Christ until His return. And His last act was to lead them out—out from all they valued most, but into all He valued most. "When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them." And how far did He lead them? He led them out as far as to Bethany. Is it not the character of things associated with that place we want today? May we not easily test ourselves by what occurred there, and find out whether or not we are in it?

Finally, it is the place of truest blessing. They did not go there to get blessing; they went because He led them. But we cannot be in His company without being blessed. "And He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them." He left them there at Bethany—the place connected with His glory and the affections of His people. It is to Bethany He will return. "His feet shall stand... upon the mount of Olives." "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." What have we to do in the meantime but remain in spirit at Bethany?

Is there a Bethany today? Yes, to those who know and value the Son of God. This was the secret of all we find there; and though everything else may have failed, He abides the same forever. "God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of His Son."

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