Luke - Commentaries by R. Beacon

Bible Treasury: Volume N3, At the Feet of Jesus

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Luke 8:35

There is no other place of repose. It is not necessary to have been the victims of demoniacal possession to realize this; it is sufficient to have known the “plague of our own hearts.” Undoubtedly the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit is necessary to bring any of us to our “right mind,” whether the germs of evil, that are innate in fallen humanity, have borne much or little fruit. But the contrast is all the more striking when the sweet and divine peace found at the feet of the Savior succeeds a state of wildest tumult and unrest, as in the case of the Gadarene demoniac. Singular that those who witnessed this blessed change in his condition should have felt an alarm of which we read nothing in connection with his previous ravings and violence. It is true that a feeble realization of divine power may very probably have mingled with less worthy feelings; still it stands written that not lawlessness but grace alarmed them most.

The two non-apostolic evangelists give a very vivid picture of the incident, Luke being in this case no less graphic than Mark. In Matthew there are two demoniacs mentioned because two was adequate testimony. The story however is more compressed, though each narrator tells of the fear that fell on the people of the place, and how they were so blind as to beseech the divine and beneficent Healer to depart out of their coasts. What a strange thing is the heart of man!

It has been surmised that moral depravity may have left the spiritual being of the unhappy man open to this terrible possession by evil spirits. The weakening of the will, that usually accompanies excess, would make him all the easier prey. There may be analogous cases now, though in a less marked degree. For no doubt when the grace of God was being manifested in an outward sort, such that even the natural mind could appreciate it, the corresponding power of evil would make a more desperate effort. Such Satanic agency was, at least in its more violent exhibitions, of short duration.

The heathen oracles also are understood after the incarnation to have sunk into ignoble silence, as if they were compelled to hide abashed from that great and holy Presence. No doubt there had been a mixture of chicanery and deception in it all, and sometimes the priests took refuge in the ambiguities of syntax in framing their replies in order to cover their ignorance. Still it cannot be doubted that there was more involved than human cunning and craftiness. The true Light came to destroy these and all the works of the devil, and the darkness was already passing, as it is still passing—at least from the eyes of those who believe. Alas! in some it seems increasing. This must be where Christianity is rejected, as it characterizes the abodes of the heathen. Happily it is also true that there never were so many real Christians probably as are now on this earth. If it be sadly true that, where Christ works, Satan works, the converse is also blessedly true. In the story of the Gadarene demoniac we have a most striking exemplification of this. The man was seated, who had been wildly rushing to and fro, clothed after being naked, in his right mind after his wretched body had been the tool of a legion of demons. What a change the blessed Lord had wrought! The devil is always contrasted with the Son, as the world and the flesh with the Father and the Holy Spirit. R. B.

Bible Treasury: Volume N6, Luke 7:36-50, Thoughts on

ONE hardly expects to say anything new in meditating on this most touching incident. As so often in this Gospel, and as the aged Simeon predicted (2:35), the thoughts of many hearts are revealed here, as they come in contact with Him who was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel. We mark the contrition and devotion of the woman that was a sinner, the supercilious insolence of Simon, the coarse unbelief of his guests. But the believer marks the grave and gracious attitude of the Savior; His thoughts too, thoughts of love and pity, are revealed as He reveals God and man. And how vividly the whole picture stands out, characterized as it is by matchless simplicity and directness. Every word tells, none is superfluous. It was such trials as these, so numerous in this Gospel, that led the apostate French professor to call it (in words I have recently quoted, but may be pardoned for quoting again) “the most beautiful book in existence.” He should have asked himself, how it came about, if this book was written by man's mind and skill, that it so transcends all that was ever written by the greatest masters of style. Other learned critics have been similarly eulogistic over the Epistle to Philemon. How comes it, that, judged thereby as a noble specimen of epistolary composition, this letter is placed by men with no bias in favor of Christianity above all that the Platos and Ciceros Plinys and Senecas ever wrote? The Christian has a ready and satisfactory answer. The Gospel of Luke and the Epistle to Philemon were written by men, not only born of God, as are all true believers, and bringing forth the “fruit of the Spirit;” but they were (how precisely brought about man does not comprehend—the fact is the great thing) guided and controlled by the Holy Ghost. It was so with the O. T. Scriptures; (2 Peter 1:21), surely not less with the N. T. And we may rest assured that there was a gracious guidance as to what should be received into, what excluded from, the sacred canon. Hence the spiritual mind feels no surprise—at least not in this sense, though we may well be filled with praise, when we contemplate the grace of the Son of God. For no less was He whom the proud Pharisee had received so churlishly, giving him no water for His feet, no oil for His head, nor the kiss that in those days was the token of cordial welcome.

And the Lord, at the due moment, does not fail to bring home to Simon his gross incivility. The thrice repeated contrast that He draws between the Pharisee's neglect and the woman's loving service is strikingly emphasized by the “but she,” “but this woman” (twice said) of the Savior's dignified and searching reply. No making light of what she had been; nay, the Lord speaks of “her sins, her many sins” (for such is the more literal rendering). But she loved much, because she repented deeply, and so she hears the precious words of absolute forgiveness. O highly favored woman, thou also, to whom was granted to hear such comfortable words from the lips of the Incarnate God the True Light! Yet all who believe without seeing are still more blessed.

Remark next that the Lord does not add, as elsewhere He did the warning," Go and sin no more,"

In the case of her who ventured into Simon's house the work in her soul was real and profound. Hence contrariwise she is bidden to "go in peace." We can recollect other cases, where there was little or no spiritual exercise, when the word of warning was needed. How suitable to the occasion ever were the words of our Lord! Now the Spirit of Jehovah was upon Him to heal the brokenhearted; but what of Simon? He was not even of those who love little. Self-satisfied and self-righteous, he doubtless regarded himself as having little or nothing to confess—certainly nothing to the Teacher from despised Galilee, whom for some fancy of his own he had patronizingly desired to eat with him. We can imagine the loathing with which he would shrink from the woman who had been such a disreputable character—he who, like his fraternity, affected to regard all women with contempt. No, he did not love even a little; but probably hated a great deal. True it is that every repentant soul should love much, and will love in proportion to the sense of God's holiness and his own sins. No doubt that sense is deeper in some than in others; perhaps deeper in ardent natures that have gone far astray; but which, realizing their terrible guilt, love with more fervent and passionate love. But deepest of all in such a one as Saul of Tarsus, so conscientious whilst unconverted, so deeply self-judging and devoted when he heard the Lord's voice, saw His glory and believed in His grace.

Yet, self-satisfied and proud and dark as he was, Simon, we may note, uses the courteous appellative "Master," or rather "Teacher." There must have been something in our Lord's manner that compelled respect, and that from the indifferent as well as from His friends. Compare "The Master is come, and calleth for thee" (John 11:28). It is not necessary with Jerome to suppose that there was "something starry" in the blessed Lord's aspect, but still less do I sympathize with those, who, giving a too external meaning to certain passages in the prophets, would infer there was something—the reverse. But that indefinable effluence that men habitually feel in the presence of such as are not spiritually, but even intellectually and morally (I say not intellectually alone) above the mass, must, a fortiori, have been found in the Savior. And so we learn that while Simon used the term "Teacher," Christ addresses him as "Simon." To address people by their simple name, indeed was the universal custom even between men of diverse social position; even slaves so addressed their masters. People were more simple then in many ways. At any rate Simon's outward courtesy in this respect (though in this only) is noticeable.

I suppose few now would contend for an identification of this scene with that recorded in Matt. 26, Mark 14, and John 12. The fact is, that while there are close points of resemblance, others are quite incompatible with identity; that this incident in Luke 7 took place early in the Lord's ministry is corroborated by the probability that later on no Pharisee would have cared to incur the censure of his fellows by inviting One against whom they had become so bitter. Also on the latter occasion our Lord was evidently among friends; here He was in the presence of thinly disguised hostility in all, save the woman in whom the Holy Spirit had so wonderfully wrought. And, as has been well said, the same grace that saved her drew a veil over her name. It was enough to record that one who had sinned greatly had been made a signal monument of God's grace.

R. B.

Bible Treasury: Volume N6, Great Joy

Luke 2:10

Joy is as characteristic of God's people, as its absence is marked in human systems. Oriental reveries, platonic dialogs, and in short all philosophies, ancient or modern, know nothing of this coveted emotion. Yet moderns know less of it than ancients. This would be but natural, seeing that now there is a turning away from the One True Light; whereas of old there was but the warning of conscience, and that often dimmed. Vain then to turn to ancient literature for holy overflowing joy, although much of sweet and pathetic is to be found, clad too with a perfection of form that few moderns have attained, and none have surpassed. So likewise may there not be somewhat of sweetness to be found in literature of our day, such as hovers on the border-land of night and day, beautiful twilight lines, when it is open to the weavers of these fancies to emerge into the clear light of Christian truth? But, however it be as to this, by positive statement as to scripture, as by negative inference from non-Christian writers, there is abundant ground for saying that joy is a distinctive mark of Christianity, as it will be of restored Israel. Do we not often forget this?

"Great joy" —How fittingly these words are found thus early in this most delightful Gospel wherein the thoughts of so many hearts stand revealed, thoughts gladdened and renewed by holy joy. How different the experience of Anna and Simeon, of the woman that was a sinner, of the prodigal (though doubtless the joy of the father "exceeded"), of the converted robber on the cross, of the two favored ones, with whom the Lord companied on the wonderful journey to Emmaus—how different the experience of each and all of these from the sad misgivings and perplexities and confessions of heathen sages! I speak with some little knowledge, and am bold to say nothing any of them ever said could comfort the heart, let alone give such joy. How could they? For divine comfort and joy we must go to the word of God, to the Psalms of David pre-eminently in the O.T., to the N.T. generally. Nor anywhere in the later oracles shall we find more gladness than in this exquisite Evangel, which a brilliant writer of the last century, but an apostate from the Faith, called "the most beautiful book in existence."1

Are we not too much afraid of joy? There is much to sadden in life, our failures as believers, the state of the world, the confusion of the church, the comparative fewness of believers, the myriads who are indifferent—all this should be deeply felt. Then there is the necessary solemnity when we dwell on the sufferings of the Savior, and seek to form, however inadequately, as it cannot but be, some conception of what it must have been to a Being of infinite holiness to be "made sin," and to bear the wrath of God against our own sins: all this is not only becoming but indispensable. Still the angel's words abide and proclaim "great joy to all the people." Let Christians more blessed not begrudge it, for here it is the joy of the Messiah for the Jewish people. "For unto you is born this day."

In truth what satisfies the heart must of necessity be fraught with joy. Such is Christ and Christianity. Everything else now is a mere will-of-the-wisp, be it coarse or refined. But the believer joins even here, along with faith and hope and love, the peace of God; he joys or boasts in God, and if the joy be too fitful here, it is lasting beyond the veil. R. B.

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