Mark - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

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The mind of Peter on the hill was very much that of Jacob at Bethel. In one sense it was delight to him beyond expression, so that he might have said, “There was no more spirit in him.” “Master, it is good for us to be here,” tells the unforced necessary joy and satisfaction which the spot and occasion inspired. But then the occasion was a little too much for him. He feared, just as Jacob at Bethel, feeling that he was at the gate of heaven, and yet saying, “How dreadful is this place!” This may imply a serious state of soul in some sense; but it is a necessary state, while man is as he is. Even John in Patmos was overreached by the glory, though that was rather the judicial glory of Christ. This on the hill was the millennial, and in that a difference of experience may be accounted for. But still glory has ever proved itself too much for man, and a freeness was needed to give him ease in the presence of it, as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others show us.

Paul in the third heavens had no alarms. He had visions and audiences which he could not communicate to others; but they did not alarm or overpower him at all. And this distinction is simple as well as manifest; for Paul was not as Peter. Peter on the hill was still flesh and blood. Paul in Paradise was simply “a man in Christ,” whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell; the body may have been no help to him, neither was it any hindrance to him. If he enjoyed all these blessed communications both in seeing and hearing, he did so without the sense of his being like Peter in the body, and therefore is he the more sure witness of the state of a spirit having enjoyment incommunicable to others, but unalloyed with any fear or other exception to himself. Thus, however, it was with Peter and his brethren on the hill. The place was glorious, and they could have remained there forever; but still they were not altogether prepared for it. The joy of the place itself spake in them and through them when they said, “It is good for us to be here.” The necessary unpreparedness of flesh and blood for the vision told of itself in the fear that accompanied this.

But mark the operation of this glory further. When the Lord reached the foot of the hill, the multitudes on seeing Him “were greatly amazed, and”—some of them at least— “running to Him saluted Him.” This is very remarkable; but, meditated on a little, it is full of beautiful and interesting meaning. I have no doubt that the Lord bore on His person the reflection or shine of the glory unto which He had just been transfigured on the top of the hill. The word “amazed” here is the same as “affrighted” in chapter 16:5; and there it distinctly expresses that sentiment of the soul which is awakened by the vision of a glorious heavenly emotion. So that I doubt not the Lord was here seen under some shine or reflection of the glory.

But what does all this tell us? I believe it is designed to bear us on to the day when the glorified family in heaven will visit the earth, and be recognized and enjoyed in their peculiar heavenly persons. They will be known by the people in the footstool that they belong to a scene above, and surpassing their own. “The glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.” They will be recognized in such a character. The throne will be known to be theirs, while the footstool is the place of those whom they occasionally visit. But this sentiment of the soul, while felt and owned, and in its beautiful and perfect measure acted on, will not be overwhelming. They salute Jesus, though amazed.

J. G. B.

Paul's Apostleship and Epistles, Mark 16:15 – New Ministries Called Forth

And here I may observe in connection with this, that at the times of calling out new ministries, there have commonly been characteristic exhibitions of Christ. Thus, when Moses was called forth at Horeb, he saw a burning, but yet unconsumed bush, out of the midst of which Jehovah spoke to him. And the ministry which he then received was according to this vision, to go and deliver Israel from the affliction of Egypt, in the midst of which God had been with them, preserving them in spite of it all. When he and the people afterward stood under Sinai, the mountain was altogether in a smoke, so that even Moses himself exceedingly feared and quaked. But all this was so, because there was about to proceed from it, that law which poor fallen man can never answer, and which therefore is but the ministry of death and condemnation to him, though he be such a one as Moses himself. When Moses afterward drew towards God, standing between Him and the people, he receives (in accordance with the mediate place which he thus occupied) his commission to deliver, as the national mediator, the laws and ordinances of the King. But when in the last place, he goes up to the top of the hill, far beyond both the region of horrible fire and the mediate place which he occupied as the mediator of the nation, and where all was calm and the presence of the Lord around him, he receives the tokens of grace, the types of Christ, the Saviour and Priest, and is from thence made to minister to Israel, “the shadows of good things to come.” In all these we see much that was expressive of the ministry about to be appointed.

So afterward, though in a more limited way. When Joshua was about to receive a commission to compass Jericho with men of war, the Lord appears to him as a man of war with a sword drawn in His hand.

When Isaiah was called to go forth as the prophet of judgment against Israel, the Lord was seen in His temple in such terrible majesty, that the very posts of the door moved at His voice, and the house was filled with smoke (Isa. 6).

When our Lord stood in the land of Israel the minister of the circumcision, according to this place and character, He appoints twelve to go forth to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But after the resurrection, when He stood on the earth in a larger character, all power in heaven and earth being then His, He commissions His Apostles accordingly, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” And so now, ascended into heaven, and having there received the Church to Himself, He appears to Saul from that glory; and in him appoints a

ministry formed upon the principle of this manifestation. Heaven was the birth-place of Paul's Apostleship; and according to this, he was sent forth to gather out and raise up a people from earth to heaven.

Thus, from the place from whence his call into office came, we at the beginning might be prepared for something new and heavenly. But his Apostleship was out of due time, as well as out of due place (1. Cor. 15:8). It not only did not come from Jerusalem, but it arose after the Apostleship there had been perfected. Judas' forfeited bishopric had been filled up by Matthias, and thus the body of twelve, as ordered by the Lord at the beginning, was again complete; and Paul's Apostleship is thus a thing born “out of due time.”

But though in this respect, “out of due time,” yet not so in every respect. The times and seasons which the Lord has taken for the unfolding of His counsels are, doubtless, all due and rightly ordered; and having “the mind of Christ” (the present inheritance, through grace, of every spiritual man), we may seek to know this; remembering first of all, Whose counsels we are searching into, and how it becomes us to walk before Him with unshod feet. May He keep us, brethren, thus treading His course, and may the haste of inquirers never take us out of the place and attitude of worshippers. Let us remember, that it is in His temple we must inquire (Psa. 27:4).

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