

Christ Manifesting Himself to His Disciples.

THREE IMPORTANT LESSONS IN SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE.

Luke xxiv. 13-36.

II. "Following on to know the Lord."

REV. JAMES MIDDLEMISS, D.D., ELORA.

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In our former paper, we remarked upon the important subject of Divine manifestations. While, in respect of His essence, God is equally and wholly present everywhere, and while His agency is universal and increasing, neither His presence nor His agency can be directly discerned by any of our powers of observation. But He does manifest Himself. He gives, that is, such indications of His presence and agency, that those to whom He gives them are fully assured of His interest in them and His care of them. These manifestations, however, are not given to all indiscriminately; the general principle, according to which they are given, being that which is involved in the all pervading assurance of Scripture, that He is found of those who seek Him. In other words, they are given to those who prove their anxiety to obtain them.

We have already considered the case of the two perplexed and desponding disciples, as illustrative of the value of Christian intercourse as a means of securing the presence of Christ. We propose now to illustrate another lesson of very great importance—that, namely, suggested by the use which the two disciples made of the comfort that Christ's presence brought to them, before He gave them the joy of the actual recognition of Him. Having joined them for the purpose of relieving their minds and cheering their hearts He did so, it will be noted, by leading them rightly to understand and truly to believe His teachings of Scripture. The narrative indicates that, while yet they have not the least thought that Jesus Himself is the expounder, Scripture light is cast by His exposition upon the circumstances that have filled them with perplexing thoughts. Under the instructions of the unknown expounder, they begin to see in the light of Scripture, the things that are perplexing them; and before long, "their hearts burn within them." This language indicates no less than their experience of intense pleasure, in being made to apprehend the truth concerning Jesus, as taught in Scripture and fulfilled in all that has taken place. As yet, as we said, they have no thought that the stranger, whose words have so enlightened their minds and warmed their hearts, is Jesus Himself. But they have made a great advance towards the recognition of Him or towards His manifestation of Himself to them. They are actually experiencing the gracious influences which His presence brings, though they do not think of ascribing their experience to Him. Nor will they, till a test of their interest has been applied so as to prove it. For mark well what follows.

As they approached their destination, Jesus, it is said, "made as though He would have gone further." And, no doubt, He would have passed on and left them, had they not invited Him to continue with them. He was willing and ready to stay with them. He gave them opportunity to invite Him to remain, after having given them good reason why they should invite Him. But His remaining depended on their inviting Him. And thus, let it be noted, He puts their interest to the test. If their interest is such that they are anxious to continue their intercourse with Him, He will stay. But, if it is not,—if they are willing that the subject of their converse with Him should be dropped, and their attention occupied with something else, then, He will leave them and pass on. Right well do they stand the test. For not merely do they invite Him, but they constrain Him to "abide with them." Like Jacob, they "will not let Him go." If they had had any suspicion that Jesus Himself was their companion, they would doubtless have invited Him to stay, even had their interest been but slight. But knowing their companion only as an intelligent and pious stranger, it is altogether likely (or should we not say quite certain?) that they would not have been very urgent, unless they had become very greatly interested in the subject of His discourse. Being thus interested, they could not consent to the termination of their intercourse, if it was possible to prolong it.

Thus their interest was fully proved; and their urgency was rewarded by His remaining with them till they recognized Him. Though He disappeared immediately on their recognition of Him, what a fullness of joy was experienced in the momentary glimpse

they had of Him! It sufficed to assure them that it was no other than their risen Lord, who had enlightened their minds and made "their hearts burn within them, while He talked with them by the way, and while He opened to them the Scriptures."

This experience of the two disciples is full of instruction in relation to the subject of these articles. A state of perplexity or of despondency, or both together, is not uncommon. The general providence of God, and our own condition in the world, are full of material for uneasy, anxious thought. The predominance of moral evil, and the want of correspondence between man's character and their outward condition; afflictions of various kinds, dreaded or experienced; the unpromising spiritual condition of others, in whose welfare our own happiness is bound up; unfavorable indications in the matter of our own relation to God:—in these things and the like, there is much that is fitted, at any time, to produce perplexity of mind. And, as a matter of fact, Christians are often greatly perplexed in reference to God's dealings with themselves and others, and greatly troubled in mind, about their own and others relation to God, and prospects for eternity. Such experience may be, indeed, no small part of a Christian believer's spiritual conflict, which is largely a conflict between *faith* and *sight*, and in which, but for our misapprehensions and mistakes, faith would ever be victorious. See Pa. lxxiii.

When, as often happens, the teaching of the Word of God, in relation to what occasions perplexity or despondency, is not rightly apprehended or not "mixed with faith," when perhaps there is an inward tumult of perplexity and anxiety, and yet the soul is clinging to God, though, it may be, all but despairingly, then our gracious and compassionate Lord, who "knoweth our frame," and who sees the sore trouble we are in, draws near, and puts forth an influence that allays the tumult. He opens the mind to the truth, so that what perplexes it is seen in the light of Scripture. In the sanctuary, in the retirement of the closet, or in our intercourse with others who are perhaps in our own perplexity, we begin to see in the light of Scripture, the things that disturb and perplex us, we begin to see that these things are no other than what the Word, if we had given heed to it, would have led us to expect. And seeing these things as we had not done before, our hearts begin to "burn within us."

It may not occur to us, at the time, that all this is the doing of Jesus by His Spirit. But in reality it is nothing less and nothing else. And in giving us such experience, He is preparing us for such manifestations of Himself to us, as shall leave us in no doubt that it is to Him that we owe our experience. But He will first put our interest to the test. Having drawn near to us and enlightened us, and made "our hearts burn within us," He gives us the alternative of *detaining* Him or allowing Him to *withdraw*. It is our wisdom to be careful to detain the heavenly visitant, or, in other words, to follow up our advantage, by not slackening in the use of the means by which we have obtained it. Let us remember that, "Then we shall know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Let us be like Him who, when hunted in the wilderness, composed the psalm we so often sing, in which he says, "My soul followeth hard after thee." Pa. lxxiii. If we "will not let Him go," He will, not go, but will remain and will give us, as it were, such a glimpse of Himself, as shall cast a flood of light on the experience through which we have been passing.

Now it is just here that we are all so apt to miscarry, in the matter of our spirited experience. We fail to obtain those manifestations of the Saviour's gracious presence and operation, which would be, in the highest degree, satisfying to our minds, because, after a measure of enlightenment, accompanied perhaps with some degree of pleasure or comfort, we do not follow up our advantage. Christ has approached us, and has relieved and comforted us; but we make no serious effort to *detain* Him. What would have happened in the case of the two disciples, if they had allowed Jesus to pass on, often happens in the experience of Christian men. Jesus draws nigh to them. In their observance of ordinances, in the house of prayer, or in their solitary devotions, their interest is awakened, new light breaks in on their minds and their hearts are warmed. But they do not follow up their advantage. They do not constrain Christ to abide with them. Enlightened and gratified as they have been, they are not so interested as to make any serious endeavor to keep their minds directed in the way that has led to their being stirred, enlightened, and encouraged. And what follows? Alas! Alas! not only do they fail to obtain the full satisfaction which they are on the very verge of obtaining; but in all likelihood, they lose all the good of their past experience.