

Bethany

John 11 - 12.

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Part 1

Turn with us to John 11 and John 12 — and if we mistake not, you will find therein a very rare spiritual treat. In chapter 11, we see what the Lord Jesus was to the family of Bethany; and in chapter 12 we see what the family of Bethany was to Him. The entire passage is full of the most precious instruction.

In chapter 11 we have three great subjects presented to us, namely, first, our Lord's own path with the Father; secondly, His profound sympathy with His people; and, thirdly, His grace in associating us with Himself in His work, in so far as that is possible.

"Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto Him, saying, Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

The sisters, in their time of trouble, turned to their divine Friend: Jesus was a sure resource for them, as He is for all His tried ones wherever, however, or whoever they are. "Call upon Me in the time of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." We make a most serious mistake when, in any time of need or pressure, we turn to the creature for help or sympathy. We are sure to be disappointed. Creature streams are dry. Creature-props give way. Our God will make us prove the vanity and folly of all creature-confidences, human hopes, and earthly expectations. And on the other hand, He will prove to us, in the most touching and forcible manner, the truth and blessedness of His own Word, "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me."

No, never! He, blessed be His name, never fails a trusting heart. He cannot deny Himself. He delights to take occasion from our wants, our woes and weaknesses, to express and illustrate His tender care and loving-kindness, in a thousand ways. But He will teach us the utter barrenness of all human resources. "Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited."

Thus it must ever be. Disappointment, barrenness and desolation are the sure and certain results of trusting in man. But, on the other hand — and mark the contrast, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is: for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit" (Jer. 17: 5-8).

Such is the unvarying teaching of Scripture on both sides of this great practical question. It is a fatal mistake to look even to the very best of men, to betake ourselves, directly or indirectly, to poor human cisterns. But the true secret of blessing, strength and comfort is to look to Jesus — to betake ourselves at once, in simple faith, to the living God whose delight ever is to help the needy, to strengthen the feeble, and lift up those that are cast down.

Hence, the sisters of Bethany did the right thing, when in the hour of need and pressure they turned to Jesus. He was both able and willing to help them: yet that blessed One did not at once respond to their call. He did not see fit at once to fly to their relief, much as He loved them. He fully entered into their sorrow and anxiety. He took it all in and measured it perfectly. He was thoroughly with them in it. There was no lack of sympathy, as we shall see in the sequel. Yet He paused; and the enemy might cast in all sorts of suggestions; and their own hearts might conceive all sorts of reasonings. It might seem as though "The Master" had forgotten them. Perhaps their loving Lord and Friend was changed toward them. Something may have occurred to bring a cloud between them. We all know how the poor heart reasons and tortures itself at such times. But there is a divine remedy for all the heart's reasonings, and a triumphant answer to all the enemy's dark and horrible suggestions. What is it? Unshaken confidence in the eternal stability of the love of Christ.

Here lies the true secret of the whole matter. Let nothing shake your confidence in the unalterable love of your Lord. Come what may — let the furnace be ever so hot; let the waters be ever so deep; let the shadows be ever so dark; let the path be ever so rough; let the pressure be ever so great — still hold fast your confidence in the perfect love and sympathy of the One who has proved His love by going down into the dust of death — down under the dark and heavy billows and waves of the wrath of God, in order to save your soul from everlasting burnings. Be not afraid to trust Him fully — to commit yourself, without a shadow of reserve or misgiving, to Him. Do not measure His love by your circumstances. If you do, you must, of necessity, reach a false conclusion. Judge not according to the outward appearance. Never reason from your surroundings. Get to the heart of Christ, and reason out from that blessed centre. Never interpret His love by your circumstances; but always interpret your circumstances by His love. Let the beams of His everlasting favour shine upon your darkest surroundings, and then you will be able to answer every infidel thought, no matter whence it comes. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace: Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.

It is a grand thing to be able, ever to vindicate God; even if we can do nothing more, to stand as a monument of His unfailing faithfulness to all who put their trust in Him. What though the horizon around be dark and depressing — though the heavy clouds gather and the storm rage, God is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will, with the temptation, make a way of escape, that we may be able to bear it.

Besides, we must not measure divine love by the mode of its manifestation. We are all prone to do so; but it is a great mistake. The love of God clothes itself in varied forms, and not infrequently the form seems to us, in our shallowness and short-sightedness, mysterious and incomprehensible. But, if only we wait patiently and in artless confidence, divine light will shine upon the dispensation of divine providence, and our hearts shall be filled with wonder, love, and praise.

We leave it to Himself,
To choose and to command:
With wonder filled, we soon shall see
How wise, how strong, His hand.
We comprehend Him not;
Yet earth and heaven tell,
God sits as Sovereign on the throne

And ruleth all things well.

God's thoughts are not as our thoughts; nor His ways as our ways; nor His love as our love, If we hear of a friend in distress or difficulty of any kind, our first impulse is to fly to his help and relieve him of his trial, if possible. But this might be a great mistake. In place of rendering help, it might be doing serious mischief. We might actually be running athwart the purpose of God, and taking our friend out of a position in which divine government had placed him for his ultimate and permanent profit. The love of God is a wise and faithful love. It abounds toward us in all wisdom and prudence.

We, on the contrary, make the gravest mistakes, even when most sincerely desiring to do what is right and good. We are not competent to take in all the bearings of things, or scan the windings and workings of providence, or weigh the ultimate results of the divine dealings. Hence, the urgent need of waiting much on God; and, above all things, of holding fast our confidence in His unchanging, unfailing, unerring love. He will make all plain. He will bring light out of darkness, life out of death, victory out of seeming defeat. He will cause the deepest and darkest distress to yield the very richest harvest of blessing. He will make all things work together for good.

But He is never in a hurry. He has His own wise ends in view, and He will reach them in His own time and way; and, moreover, out of what may seem to us to be a dark, tangled, inexplicable maze of providence, light will spring forth and fill our souls with praise and adoration.

The foregoing line of thought may help us to understand and appreciate our Lord's bearing towards the sisters of Bethany on hearing of their trouble. He felt there was much more involved in the case than the mere matter of relieving those whom He, nevertheless, deeply loved. The glory of God had to be considered. Hence, He says, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." He saw in this case an occasion for the display of the divine glory, and not merely for the exhibition of personal affection, however deep and real that might be — and with Him, surely, it was both deep and real, for we read, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."

But, in the judgement of our blessed and adorable Lord, the glory of God took precedence of every other consideration. Neither personal affection nor personal fear had the smallest sway over His movements. He was ruled, in all things, by the glory of God. From the manger to the cross, in life and in death, in all His words, and all His works, and all His ways, His devoted heart was set, with firm and unalterable purpose, upon the glory of God. Hence, though it might be a good thing to relieve a friend in distress, it was far better and higher to glorify God; and we may be sure, that the beloved family of Bethany sustained no loss by a delay which only made room for the brighter out-shining of the divine glory.

Let us all remember this in seasons of trial and pressure. It is an all-important point, and when fully apprehended, will prove a very deep and blessed source of consolation. It will help us marvellously to bear up under sickness, pain, death, bereavement, sorrow, and poverty. How blessed to be able to stand beside the sick bed of a friend and say, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God!" And this is faith's privilege. Yea, not only in the sick chamber, but by the open grave, the true believer may see the beams of the divine glory shining forth over all.

No doubt the sceptic might cavil at the statement that "The sickness is not unto death." He might object and reason and argue on the ground of the apparent fact that Lazarus did die. But faith reasons not from appearances: it bring God in, and there finds a divine solution for all difficulties. Such is the moral elevation — the reality of a life of faith. It sees God above and beyond all circumstances. It reasons from God downward — not from circumstances upward. Sickness and death are nothing in the

presence of divine power. All difficulties disappear from the pathway of faith. They are, as Joshua and Caleb assured their unbelieving brethren, simply bread for the true believer.

Nor is this all. Faith can wait God's time, knowing that His time is the best. It staggers not, even though He may seem to linger. It rests with calmness in the assurance of His unchanging love and unerring wisdom. It fills the heart with the sweetest confidence that if there be delay — if the relief be not sent all at once — it is all for the best, inasmuch as "all things work together for good to them that love God," and all must in the long run redound to the glory of God. Faith enables its happy possessor to vindicate God amid the greatest pressure, and to know and confess that divine love always does the very best for its object.

Part 2

It gives great rest to the heart to know that the One who has undertaken for us, in all our weakness, our need, and the exigencies of our path from first to last, has first of all secured, in every respect, the glory of God. That was His primary object in all things. In the work of redemption, and in all our history, the glory of God has the first place in the heart of that blessed One with whom we have to do. At all cost to Himself He vindicated and maintained the divine glory. To that end He gave up everything. He laid aside His own glory, humbled, emptied Himself. He surrendered Himself and yielded up His life, in order to lay the imperishable foundation of that glory which now fills all Heaven — and shall soon cover the earth, and shine through the wide universe for ever.

The knowledge and abiding sense of this must give profound repose to the spirit in reference to everything that concerns us, whether it be the salvation of the soul, the forgiveness of sins, or the needs for the daily path. All that could possibly be a matter of exercise to us, for time or for eternity, has been provided for, all secured on the selfsame basis that sustains the divine glory. We are saved and provided for; but the salvation and provision — all praise to our glorious Saviour and Provider! — are inseparably bound up with the glory of God. In all that our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us, in all that He is doing, in all that He will do, the glory of God is fully maintained.

And, further, we may add that in our trials, difficulties, sorrows, and exercises, if instant relief be not afforded, we have to remember there is some deep reason connected with the glory of God and our real good, why the desired relief is withheld. In seasons of pressure we are apt to think only of the one thing, namely, relief. But there is very much more than this to be considered. We should think of the glory of God. We should seek to know His object in putting us under the pressure. We should earnestly desire that His end might be gained, and His glory promoted. This would be for our fullest and deepest blessing, while the relief which we so eagerly desire might be the worst thing we could get. We must always remember that, through the marvellous grace of God, His glory and our true blessing are so inseparably bound up together, that when the former is maintained, the latter must be perfectly secured.

This is a most precious consideration, and one eminently calculated to sustain the heart in all seasons of affliction. All things must ultimately redound to the glory of God, and "all things work together for good to those that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." It may not, perhaps, be so easy to see this when the pressure is upon us. When anxiously watching by the sick-bed of a beloved friend; or when treading the chamber of sorrow; or when laid on a bed of pain and languishing ourselves; or when overwhelmed by sudden tidings of the loss of our earthly all: under such circumstances it may not be so easy to see the glory of God maintained, and our blessing secured; but faith can see it for all that; and as for "blind unbelief," it is always "sure to err."

If those beloved sisters of Bethany had judged by the sight of their eyes, they would have been sorely tried during those weary days and nights spent at the bedside of their much loved brother. And

not only so, but when the terrible moment arrived, and they were called to witness the closing scene, many dark reasonings might have sprung up in their crushed and desolate hearts.

But Jesus was looking on. His heart was with them. He was watching the whole process, and that, too, from the very highest standpoint — the glory of God. He took in the entire scene, in all its bearings, its influences and its issues. He felt for those afflicted sisters — felt with them — felt as only a perfect human heart could feel. Though absent in person, He was with them in spirit, as they travelled through the deep waters. His loving heart perfectly entered into all their sorrow, and He only waited for "God's due time" to come to their aid, and light up the darkness of death and the grave with the bright beams of resurrection glory.

"When He had heard that Lazarus was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Things were allowed to take their course as we say; death was allowed to enter the much loved dwelling; but all this was for the glory of God. The enemy might seem to have it all his own way, but it was only in appearance; in reality death itself was but preparing a platform on which the glory of God was to be displayed. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

Such, then, was the path of our blessed Lord — His path with the Father. His every step, His every act, His every utterance, had direct reference to the claims of the Father's glory. Much as He loved the family of Bethany, His personal affection led Him not into the scene of their sorrow till the moment was come for the display of the divine glory, and then no personal fear could keep Him away. "Then after that He saith to His disciples, Let us go into Judea again. His disciples say unto Him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee, and goest Thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night he stumbleth, because there is no light in him."

Thus that blessed One walked, in the full blaze of the glory of God. His springs of action were all divine — all heavenly. He was a perfect stranger to all the motives and objects of the men of this world, who are stumbling along in the thick moral darkness that enwraps them — whose motives are all selfish, whose objects are earthly and sensual. He never did a single thing to please Himself. His Father's will, His Father's glory, ruled Him in all things. The stirrings of deep personal affection took Him not to Bethany, and no personal fear could keep Him away. In all He did, and in all He did not do, He found His motive in the glory of God.

Precious Saviour! teach us to walk in Thy heavenly footsteps! Give us to drink more into Thy spirit! This, truly, is what we need. We are so sadly prone to self-seeking and self-pleasing, even when apparently doing right things and ostensibly engaging in the Lord's work. We run hither and thither, do this and that, travel and preach and write, and all the while we may be pleasing ourselves, and not really seeking to do the will of God and promote His glory. May we study more profoundly our divine Exemplar! May He be ever before our hearts as the One to whom we are predestinated to be conformed! Thank God for the sweet and soul-sustaining assurance that we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. It is but a little while and we shall be done forever with all that now hinders our progress and interrupts our communion. Till then may the blessed Spirit work in our hearts, and keep us so occupied with Christ, so feeding by faith on His preciousness, that our practical ways may be a more living expression of Himself, and that we may bring forth more abundantly the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Part 3

We may now meditate for a few moments on the deeply interesting theme of Christ's sympathy

with His people, so touchingly illustrated in His dealings with the beloved family of Bethany. He allowed them to go through the exercise, to wade through the deep waters, to be thoroughly tested, in order that "the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory. Looked at from nature's standpoint, it might seem as though all hope was gone and every ray of light faded away from the horizon. Lazarus was dead and buried. All was over. And yet the Lord had said, "This sickness is not unto death." How was this? What could He mean?

Thus nature might reason; but we must not listen to the reasonings of nature, which are sure to carry us down into the regions of the shadow of death. We must listen to the voice of Jesus; we must harken to His living, cheering, strengthening, encouraging accents. In this way we shall be able to vindicate and glorify God, not only at the sick-bed, but in the chamber of death, and at the very grave itself. Death is not death if Christ be there. The grave itself is but the sphere in which the glory of God shines out in all its power. It is when all that belongs to the creature is gone from the scene — when the platform is thoroughly cleared of all that is merely of man, it is then that the beams of the divine glory can be seen in all their brightness. It is when all is gone, or seems to be, that Christ can come in and fill the scene.

This is a grand point for the soul to get hold of and understand. It is only faith that can really enter into it. We are all so terribly prone to lean on some creature-prop, to sit beside some creature-stream, to trust in an arm of flesh, to cling to what we can see, to rest in the palpable and tangible. "The things that are seen and temporal" have oftentimes more weight with us than "the things which are unseen and eternal." Hence it is our ever-faithful Lord sees it right and good to sweep away our creature-props, and dry up our creature-streams, in order that we may lean on Himself, the eternal Rock of our salvation, and find all our springs in Himself, the living and exhaustless Fountain of all blessing. He is jealous of our love and confidence, and He will clear the scene of everything that might divide our hearts with Himself. He knows it is for our souls' full blessing to be wholly cast upon Himself, and hence He seeks to purify our hearts from every hateful idol.

And should we not praise Him for all this? Yes, truly; and not only so, but we should welcome whatever means He is pleased to use for the accomplishment of His wise and gracious end, even though, to nature's view, it may seem harsh and severe. He may often have to say to us as He said to Peter, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

Yes, beloved reader, by and by we shall know and appreciate all His dealings. We shall look back upon the whole course from the light of His own blessed presence, and see and own that "the very heaviest stroke of His hand was the very strongest expression of His love at the time." Martha and Mary might wonder why death had been allowed to enter their dwelling. Doubtless they looked day after day, hour after hour, moment after moment, for their beloved Friend to enter; but instead of that He kept away, and death entered, and all seemed gone.

Why was this? Let Himself reply. "These things said He: and after that He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." What touching affection! What gracious intimacy! What a tender linking of Himself with the family of Bethany on the one hand, and His disciples on the other! "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." It was but a gentle sleep. Death is not death in the presence of the Prince of life. The grave is but a sleeping place. "I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." Such words could not have been uttered had Lazarus been raised from a sick-bed. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity"; and we can see without difficulty that the grave afforded God a far better opportunity than a sick-bed.

This, then, was the reason why Jesus kept away from His beloved friends. He waited for the

fitting moment, and that moment was when Lazarus had lain in the grave four days already; when every human hope had vanished; when all human agency was powerless and valueless. "I go" — not to raise him from a sick-bed, but "that I may awake him out of sleep." The platform was cleared of the creature in order that the glory of God might shine out in all its brightness.

And is it not well to have the scene thus cleared of the creature? is it not a mercy — not in disguise, as some people say, but a plain, positive, palpable mercy — to have every human prop gone? Faith says, "Yes" — unhesitatingly and emphatically. Nature says, "No!" The poor heart craves something of the creature to lean upon, something that the eye can see. But faith — that most precious, priceless, divinely-wrought principle — find its true sphere in being called to lean absolutely and abidingly upon the living God.

But it must be a real thing. It is of little use talking about faith if the heart be a stranger to its power. Mere profession is perfectly worthless. God deals in moral realities. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he have faith?" He does not say, "What doth it profit though a man have faith?" Blessed be God, those who through grace have it, know that it profits much every way. By faith the sinner is brought in living relationship with God, is justified, and lives unto Him.

Faith glorifies God as nothing else can. It lifts the soul above the depressing influences of things seen and temporal. It tranquillises the spirit in a most blessed manner. It enlarges the heart, by leading us out of our own narrow circle of personal interests, Sympathies, cares and burdens, and connecting us livingly with the eternal, exhaustless spring of goodness. It works by love, and draws us out in gracious activity toward every object of need, but especially toward those who are of the household of faith.

It is faith alone that can move along the path where Jesus leads. To mere nature that path is dreadful. It is rough, dark, and lonely. Even those who surrounded our blessed Lord on the occasion of the death of Lazarus seemed wholly unable to comprehend His thoughts or follow intelligently in His footsteps. When He said, "Let us go into Judea again," they could think only of the Jews stoning Him. When He said, "I go, that I may awake him out of sleep," they replied, "If he sleep, he shall do well." When He spoke of his death, they thought that He had spoken of taking rest in sleep. When "He said unto them plainly, "Lazarus is dead: and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe," poor unbelieving nature, speaking through the lips of Thomas Didymus, said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

In a word, we see total inability to take in the true bearing of the case, as viewed from a divine standpoint. Nature sees nothing but death and darkness, where faith basks in the sunlight of the divine presence. "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." Alas, was this all that even a disciple had to say? How absurd are the conclusions of unbelief! Let us go with the Prince of life, that — what? "we may die with Him"! What blindness even while attached to the Lord! Should not Thomas have said: "Let us go, that we may behold His glory; that we may see His marvellous doings in the very region of the shadow of death; that we may share in His triumphs; that we may shout, at the very gates of the grave, our hallelujahs to His deathless name?"

Part 4

We have already noticed the three prominent subjects presented to us in John 11, namely, our Lord's own path with the Father; secondly, His profound sympathy with us; thirdly, His grace in linking us with Himself, in so far as that is possible, in all His blessed work. He ever walked with God, in calm, unbroken communion. He walked in the most implicit obedience to the will of God, and was ruled in all things by His glory. He walked in the day, and stumbled not. The will of God was the light in which the perfect workman ever carried on His work. He found His only motive for action in the

divine will — His only object in the divine glory. He came down from Heaven, not to do His own will, but the will of the Father, in which He ever found His meat and drink.

But His great, loving heart flowed out in perfect sympathy with human sorrow. This we see attested in the most touching manner as He moved, in company with the afflicted sisters, to the tomb of their brother. If any question had arisen in their hearts during the season of trial, in the absence of their Lord, it was abundantly answered, yea, we may add, completely demolished, by the manifestation of His deep and tender affection as He moved toward the spot where the beams of the divine glory were so soon to shine out over the dreary region of death.

We do not here dwell upon the interesting interview between the two sisters and their beloved Lord, so full of teaching, so illustrative of His perfect mode of dealing with His people in their varied measures of intelligence and communion. We pass at once to the inspired statement in verse 33 of our chapter. "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto Him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept."

How wonderful! The Son of God groaned and wept. Let us never forget it. He, though God over all, blessed forever; though the Resurrection and the Life; though the Quickener of the dead; though the Conqueror of the grave; though on His way to deliver the body of His friend from the grasp of the enemy — sample of what He will soon do for all who belong to Him — yet, so perfectly did He enter into human sorrow, and take in all the terrible consequences of sin, all the misery and desolation of this sin-stricken world, that He groaned and wept! And those tears and groans emanated from the depths of a perfect human heart that felt as only a perfect human heart could feel — felt according to God — for every form of human sorrow and misery. Though perfectly exempt, in His own divine person, from sin and all its consequences — yea, because exempt — He could in perfect grace enter into it all and make it His own as only He could do.

"Jesus wept"! Wondrous, significant fact! He wept not for Himself, but for others. He wept with them. Mary wept. The Jews wept. All this is easily grasped and understood. But that Jesus should weep reveals a mystery which we cannot fathom. It was divine compassion weeping through human eyes over the desolation which sin had caused in this poor world, weeping in sympathy with those whose hearts had been crushed by the inexorable hand of death.

Let all who are in sorrow remember this. Jesus is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. His circumstances are changed, but His heart is not. His position is different, but His sympathy is the same. "We have not a high priest that can not be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, apart from sin." There is a perfect human heart on the throne of the Majesty of the heavens, and that heart sympathises with us in all our sorrows, in all our trials, in all our infirmities, in all our pressure and exercise. He perfectly enters into it all. Yea, He gives Himself to each one of His beloved members here upon earth as though He had only that one to look after.

How sweet and soothing to think of this! It is worth having a sorrow to be allowed to taste the preciousness of Christ's sympathy. The sisters of Bethany might say, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." But if their brother had not died, they would not have seen Jesus weeping, or heard His deep groan of sympathy with them in their sorrow. And who would not say that it is better to have the sympathy of His heart with us in our sorrow than the power of His hand in keeping or taking us out of it? Was it not much better, much higher, much more blessed, for the three witnesses in Dan. 3 to have the Son of God walking with them in the furnace than to have escaped the furnace by the power of His hand? Unquestionably.

And thus it is in every case. We have ever to remember that this is not the day for the display of Christ's power. By and by He will take to Himself His great power, and reign. Then all our sufferings, our trials, our tribulations, will be over forever. The night of weeping will give place to the morning of joy — the morning without clouds — the morning that shall never know an evening. But now it is the time of Christ's patience, the time of His precious sympathy; and the sense of this is most blessedly calculated to sustain the heart in passing through the deep waters of affliction.

And there are deep waters of affliction. There are trials, sorrows, tribulations, and difficulties. And not only so, but our God means that we should feel them. His hand is in them for our real good, and for His glory. And it is our privilege to be able to say, "We glory in tribulation also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us."

The Lord be praised for all this! But it were folly to deny that there are trials, sorrows and tribulations of all sorts. Nor would our God have us insensible to them. Insensibility to them is folly; glorying in them is faith. The consciousness of Christ's sympathy, and the intelligence of God's object in all our afflictions, will enable us to rejoice in them; but to deny the afflictions, or that we ought to feel them, is simply absurd. God would not have us to be stoics; He leads us into deep waters to walk with us through them; and when His end is reached, He delivers us out of them, to our joy and His own everlasting praise.

"He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak then I am strong." At the first, Paul longed to be rid of the thorn in the flesh, whatever it was. He besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him. But the thorn in the flesh was better than pride in the heart. It was better far to be afflicted than puffed up — better to have Christ's sympathy with him in his temptation than the power of His hand in delivering him out of it.

Part 5

It is deeply touching to mark the two groans of our Lord, as He moved toward the tomb of His friend. The first groan was called forth by the sight of the weeping mourners around Him. "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." The margin reads, "He troubled Himself."

How precious is the thought of this to the crushed and sorrowing heart! The sight of human tears drew forth a groan from the loving, sympathising heart of the Son of God. Let all mourners remember this. Jesus did not rebuke Mary for weeping. He did not rally her on account of her sorrow. He did not tell her she ought not to feel; that she ought to be above everything of that sort. Ah, no! this would not be like Him. Some heartless folk may talk in this style; but He knew better. He, though Son of God, was a real man; and hence, He felt as a man ought to feel, and He knew what man must feel, while passing through the dark vale of tears.

Some of us talk largely and loftily about being above nature, and not feeling the snapping of tender links, and much in that strain. But in this we are not wise. We are not in sympathy with the heart of the Man, Christ Jesus. It is one thing to put forth, in heartless flippancy, our transcendental theories, and it is quite another to pass through the deep waters of grief and desolation with a heart exercised according to God. It will generally be found that those of us who declaim the loudest against nature,

prove ourselves to be just like other people, when called to meet bodily sickness, sorrow of heart, mental pressure, or pecuniary loss.

The great point is to be real, and to go through the stern realities of actual life with theories will not stand the test of real sorrow trial, and difficulty; and nothing can be more absurd than to talk to people, with human hearts, about not feeling things. God means us to feel; and — precious, soothing, consolatory thought! — Jesus feels with us.

Let all the sons and daughters of sorrow remember these things for the consolation of their sorrowing hearts. "God comforts those that are cast down." If we were never cast down, we should not know His precious ministry. A stoic does not need the comfort of God. It is worth having a broken heart to have it bound up by our most merciful High Priest.

"Jesus groaned" — "Jesus wept." What power, what divine sweetness in these words! What a blank there would be were these words erased from the page of inspiration! Surely we could not do without them, and therefore our own most gracious God has, by His Spirit, penned these unspeakably precious words for the comfort and consolation of all who are called to tread the chamber of sorrow, or to stand at the grave of a friend.

But there was another groan evoked from the heart of our blessed Lord. Some of the Jews, when they heard His groan, and saw His tears, could not help exclaiming, "Behold how He loved him!" But alas! others only found, in such affecting proofs of true and profound sympathy, occasion for the display of heartless scepticism — and scepticism is always heartless. "Some of them said, could not this man, that opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?"

Here the poor human heart lets itself out in its ignorant reasonings. How little did these sceptics understand either the person or the path of the Son of God! How could they appreciate the motives that actuated Him either in what He did, or in what He did not do? He opened the eyes of the blind, in order that "the works of God might be made manifest in him." And He did not prevent the death of Lazarus, that God might be glorified thereby.

But what did they know about all this? Absolutely nothing. The Blessed One moved at far too high an elevation to be within the ken of worldly religionists and sceptical reasoners. "The world knew Him not." God understood and appreciated Him perfectly. This was enough. What were the thoughts of men to One who ever walked in calm communion with the Father? They were utterly incapable of forming a correct judgement either of Himself or of His ways. They carried on their reasonings in that thick moral darkness in which they dwelt.

Thus it is still. Human reasonings are begun, continued, and ended in darkness. Man reasons about God; reasons about Christ; reasons about Scripture; reasons about Heaven, about hell, about eternity; about all sorts of things. But all his reasonings are worse, far worse, than worthless. Men are no more capable of understanding or appreciating the written Word now, than they were of understanding or appreciating the living Word, when He was amongst them. Indeed, the two things must go together.

As the living Word and the written Word are one, so to know the one we must know the other; but the natural, the unrenewed, the unconverted man knows neither. He is totally blind, in utter darkness, dead; and when, without reality, he made a religious profession, he is "twice dead" — dead in nature and dead in his religion. What are his thoughts, his reasonings, his conclusions worth? They are baseless, false, ruinous.

Nor is there the slightest use in arguing with unconverted people. It only tends to deceive them by

leading them to suppose that they can argue. It is always the best way to deal solemnly with them as to their own moral condition before God. We do not find our Lord taking any notice of the unbelieving reasonings of those around Him. He only again groans and goes on His way. "Jesus *therefore*, again groaning in Himself, cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it."

This second groan is deeply affecting. He groaned, at first, in sympathy with the mourners around Him. He groaned again over the hardness and dark unbelief of the human heart, and of the heart of Israel in particular. But, be it carefully noted, He does not attempt to explain His reasons for not having hindered the death of His friend, although He had opened the eyes of the blind.

Blessed, perfect Servant! It was no part of His business to explain or apologise. He had to work on in the current of the divine counsels, and for the promotion of the divine glory. He had to do the Father's will, not explain Himself to those who could not possibly understand the explanation.

This is a weighty point for us all. Some of us lose a quantity of time in argument, apology, and explanation, in cases where such things are not the least understood. We really do mischief. Better far pursue, in holy calmness of spirit, singleness of eye, and decision of purpose, the path of duty. That is what we have got to do, not to explain or defend ourselves, which is sorry work at best for any one.

But let us look a moment at the tomb of Lazarus, and there see with what lovely grace our adorable Lord and Master sought to associate His servants with Himself in His work, in so far as that was possible; though, even here, too, He is sadly intruded upon by the dark unbelief of the human heart. "Jesus said, Take ye away the stone." This they could do, and hence He graciously calls upon them to do it. It was all they could do, so far. But here unbelief breaks in and casts its dark shadows over the heart. "Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days."

And what of that? Could the humiliating process of decomposition, even if completed, stand for one moment in the way of Him who is the resurrection and the life? Impossible! Bring Him in, and all is clear and simple; leave Him out, and all is dark and impracticable. Let but the voice of the Son of God be heard, and death and corruption must vanish like the darkness of night before the beams of the rising sun.

"Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

How magnificent! What are death, the grave and decomposition in the presence of such power as this? Talk of being dead four days as a difficulty! Millions that have been mouldering in the dust for thousands of years, shall spring up in a moment into life, immortality, and eternal glory, at the voice of that blessed One to whom Martha ventured to offer her unbelieving and irrational suggestion.

Part 6

In our Lord's reply to Martha we have one of the most blessed utterances that ever fell on the human ear. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" What living depth, what divine power, what freshness and comfort in these words! They present to us the very gist and marrow, the essential principle of the divine life. It is only the eye of faith that can see

the glory of God. Unbelief sees only difficulties, darkness, and death. Faith looks above and beyond all these, and ever basks in the blessed beams of the divine glory. Poor Martha saw nothing but a decomposed human body, simply because she was under a spirit of dark and depressing unbelief. Had she been swayed by an artless faith she would have walked to the tomb in company with Him who is the resurrection and the life, assured that, instead of death and decomposition, she should see the glory of God.

This is a grand principle for the soul to grasp. It is utterly impossible for human language to overstate its value and importance. Faith never looks at difficulties, except indeed it be to feed on them. It looks not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are unseen. It endures as seeing Him who is invisible. It takes hold of the living God. It leans on His arm; it makes use of His strength; it draws on His exhaustless treasury; it walks in the light of His blessed countenance, and sees His glory shining forth over the darkest scenes of human life.

The inspired volume abounds in striking illustrations of the contrast between faith and unbelief. Let us glance at one or two of them. Look, for example, at Caleb and Joshua, in contrast with their unbelieving brethren, in Num. 13. These latter saw only the difficulties which stood in their way "Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land" — not stronger than Jehovah, surely — "and the cities are walled, and very great" — not greater than the living God: — "and moreover we saw the children of Anak there."

It is very clear that they did not see the glory of God; indeed, they saw anything and everything but that. They were wholly governed by a spirit of unbelief, and hence they could only "bring up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and *all* the people that *we saw* in it are men of *great statutes* they did not *see* a single small man: they looked at everything through the magnifying-glass of unbelief. "There *we saw* the giants" — no doubt! — "the sons of Anak which come of the giants." Anything more? Ah, God was shut out; they could not see Him at all through the glasses they used. They could only see the terrible giants and towering walls: "and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so were we in their sight."

But what of Jehovah? Alas, He was left out! Unbelief invariably leaves God out of its calculations. It can take a very full account of the difficulties, the hindrances, the hostile influences; but as for the living God, it sees Him not. There is a melancholy consistency in the utterances of unbelief, whether we listen to them in the wilderness of Kadesh, or, fourteen hundred years afterwards, at the tomb of Lazarus. Unbelief is always and everywhere the same; it begins, continues and ends with the absolute exclusion of the one living and true God. It can do naught save to cast dark shadows over the pathway of every one who will listen to its voice.

How different are the accents of faith Harken to Joshua and Caleb, as they seek to stem the rising tide of unbelief. "And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: and they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. *If the Lord delight in us*" — here lies the secret — "then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land — for *they are bread for us*" — faith actually feeds on the difficulties which terrify unbelief: — "their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not."

Glorious words! It does the heart good to transcribe them. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Thus it is always. If there is a melancholy

consistency in the utterances of unbelief, there is a glorious consistency in the accents of faith, wherever we harken to them. Caleb and Joshua saw the glory of God, and in the light of that glory what were giants and high walls? Simply nothing. If anything, they were bread for the nourishment of faith. Faith brings in God, and He dispels all difficulties. What walls or giants could stand before the Almighty God? "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Such is ever the artless but powerful reasoning of faith. It conducts its arguments and reaches its conclusions in the blessed light of the divine presence. It sees the glory of God. It looks above and beyond the heavy clouds which at times gather upon the horizon, and finds in God its sure and never failing resource. Precious faith! — the only thing in the world that really glorifies God and makes the heart of the Christian truly bright and happy.

Take another illustration. Turn to 1 Kings 17, and contrast the widow of Sarepta with Elijah the Tishbite. What was the difference between them? Just the difference that ever exists between unbelief and faith. Listen again to the utterances of unbelief. "And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may *eat of it, and die.*"

Here, truly, is a gloomy picture. An empty barrel, an exhausted cruse, and death! Was that all? That was all for blind unbelief. It is the old story of the giants and lofty walls over again. God is shut out, though she could say, "As the Lord thy God liveth." In reality she was out of His presence, and had lost the sense of His all-sufficiency to meet her need and that of her house. Her circumstances excluded God from the vision of her soul. She looked at things that were seen, not at the things which were unseen. She saw not the invisible One; she saw nothing but famine and death. As the ten unbelieving spies saw nothing but the difficulties; as Martha saw nothing but the grave and its humiliating results; so the poor Sareptan saw nothing but starvation and death.

Not so the man of faith. He looked beyond the barrel and the cruse. He had no thought of dying of hunger. He rested on the word of the Lord. Here was his precious resource. God had said, "I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." This was quite enough for him. He knew that God could multiply the meal and the oil to sustain him and her. Like Caleb and Joshua, he brought God into the scene, and found in Him the happy solution of every difficulty. They saw God above and beyond the walls and the giants. They rested on His eternal word. He had promised to bring His people into the a land, and hence, though there were nothing but walls and giants from Dan to Beersheba He would most surely fulfil His word.

And so with Elijah the Tishbite. He saw the living and almighty God above and beyond the barrel and the cruse. He rested upon that word which is settled forever in Heaven, and which never can fail a trusting heart. This tranquillised his spirit, and with this he sought to tranquillise the widow too. "And he said unto her, *Fear not*" precious, soul-stirring utterance of faith! — "go, and do as thou hast said.... For *thus saith the Lord God of Israel*, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

Here was the solid ground on which the man of God rested when he ventured to offer a word of encouragement to the poor, desponding widow of Sarepta. It was not in the light-heartedness, or blind recklessness, of nature that he spoke to her. He did not deny that the barrel and cruse were almost empty, as the woman had said. This could have given her no comfort, inasmuch as she knew too well the facts of her case. But he brought the living God and His faithful Word before her aching heart; and hence he could say, "Fear not." He sought to lead her soul to the true resting-place where he himself had found repose, namely, the *Word of the living God* — blessed, unfailing, divine resting-place for

every anxious soul!

Thus it was with Caleb and Joshua. They did not deny that there were giants and high walls: they brought God in, and sought to place Him between the hearts of their desponding brethren and the dreaded difficulties. This is what faith always does, and thus gives glory to God and keeps the soul in peace, let the difficulties be ever so great. It would be folly to deny there are obstacles and hostile influences in the way: and there is a certain style of speaking of such things which cannot possibly minister comfort or encouragement to a poor, troubled heart. Faith accurately weights the difficulties and trials, but, knowing that the power of God outweighs them all, it rests in holy calmness on His word, and in His perfect wisdom and everlasting love.

The reader's mind will no doubt recur to many other instances in which the Lord's people have been cast down by looking at circumstances, instead of looking at God. David, in a dark moment, could say, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." What a sad mistake! — the mistake of unbelief. What should he have said? Denied that the unrelenting hand of Saul was against him? Surely not. What comfort would that have given him, inasmuch as he knew too well that it was really so. But he should have remembered that the hand of God was with him, and that hand was stronger than ten thousand Sauls.

So with Jacob in his day of darkness and depression. "All these things," said he, "are against me." What should he have added? "But God is for me." Faith has its "*buts*" and "*ifs*" as well as unbelief; but faith's butts and ifs are all bright because they express the passage of the soul — its rapid passage — from the difficulties to God Himself. "*But* God who is rich," etc. And again, "*If* God be for us, who can be against us?" Thus faith ever reasons. It begins with God, it places Him between the soul and all its surroundings, and thus imparts a peace which passeth all understanding, a peace which nothing can disturb.

But we must, ere closing this paper, return for a moment to the tomb of Lazarus. The rapid glance we have taken through the inspired volume will enable us to appreciate more fully those most precious words of our Lord to Martha, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Men tell us that seeing is believing; but we can say that believing is seeing. Yes, reader, get hold of this grand truth. It will carry you through and bear you above the darkest and most trying scenes of this dark and trying world. "Have faith in God." This is the mainspring of the divine life. "The life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Faith knows, and is persuaded, that there is nothing too hard, nothing too great — yea, and nothing too small — for God. It can count on Him for everything. It basks in the very sunlight of His presence, and exults in the manifestations of His goodness, His faithfulness, and His power. It ever delights to see the platform cleared of the creature, that the glory of God may shine forth in all its lustre. It turns away from creature streams and creature props, and finds all its resources in the one living and true God.

Only see how the divine glory displays itself at the grave of Lazarus, even spite of the unbelieving suggestion of Martha's heart

for God, blessed be His name, delights at times to rebuke our fears as well as to answer our faith. "Then they took away the stone where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And when He thus had spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth! And he that was dead came forth, bound hand

and foot with grave clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go."

Glorious scene! displaying our Jesus as the Son of God with power, by resurrection of the dead. Gracious scene! in which the Son of God condescends to use man in rolling away the stone and removing the grave clothes. How good of Him to use us in any little way! May it be our joy to be ever ready — in a holy readiness to be used, that God in all things may be glorified!

PART 7.

The opening paragraph of John 12 brings before us a scene of deepest interest, and full of most precious instruction. We feel we cannot do better than quote at full length the lovely record, for the spiritual benefit of the reader. There is nothing, after all, like the veritable language of holy scripture.

"Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper, and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. 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 odour of the ointment."

Here we have illustrated, in the most striking and forcible manner, the three grand features which ought to characterise every Christian and every Christian assembly, namely, calm, intelligent *communion*, as seen in Lazarus seated at the table; holy *worship*, as seen in Mary at the feet of her Lord; and loving *service*, as seen in Martha, in her activities about the house. All three go to make up the Christian character, and all three should be exhibited in every Christian assembly. We consider it a very great moral mistake to set any one of these features in opposition to the others, inasmuch as each, in its proper place, is lovely; and, we may add, each should find its place in all. We should all of us know what it is to sit at table with our blessed Lord, in sweet communion. This will most assuredly lead to profound homage and adoration; and we may rest assured that, where there is the communion and the worship, there will not be lacking the loving activities of true service.

The reader will observe that, in the above beautiful scene, there is no record of any collision between Martha and Mary, Each had her place to fill. There was room for both. "Jesus loved Martha and her sister." Here Martha is put first. In verse 1, we read of "Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha." Looked at from a divine standpoint, there is no need why any one should in the smallest degree collide with another. And further, we may add, there is no necessity whatever for comparing the sphere of one with that of another. If Christ be our one absorbing object, there will be lovely harmony in action, though our line of things may vary.

Thus it was at Bethany. Lazarus was at the table, Mary at the Master's feet, and Martha was about the house. All was in beautiful order, because Christ was the object of each. Lazarus would have been entirely out of his place had he set about preparing the supper; and if Martha had sat at the table, there would have been no supper prepared. But both were in their right places, and we may rest assured that both would rejoice in the odour of Mary's ointment as she poured it on the feet of their ever-loving and beloved Lord.

Is not all this conveyed to us in that one sentence, "There *they* made him a supper?" It was not one more than another. All had part in the precious privilege of making a supper for the one peerless object Of their heart's affections; and, having Him in their midst, each fell naturally, simply, and effectively, into his and her proper place. Provided the beloved Master's heart was refreshed, it mattered not who did this, or who did that. Christ was the centre and each moved round Him.

Thus it should be always in the assembly of Christians, and thus it would be, if odious self were judged and set aside, and each heart simply occupied with Christ Himself. But, alas! here is just where we so sadly fail. We are occupied with ourselves, and our little doings, and sayings, and thinkings. We attach importance to work, not in proportion to its bearing upon the glory of Christ, but its bearing upon our own reputation. If Christ were our one object — as He surely will be throughout eternity, and ought to be now — we should not care the least who did the work, or who rendered the service, provided His name was glorified, and His heart refreshed. Harken to the utterance of a truly devoted heart in reference to the very subject before us. "Do all things without murmurings and disputings; that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world: holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered [or poured out] upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me." (Phil. 2: 14-18.)

This is uncommonly fine. The blessed apostle presents in this exquisite passage a true sample of self — forgetting devotedness. He expresses Himself as ready to be poured out as a drink-offering upon the sacrifice and service of his beloved Philippians, utterly regardless of himself. It mattered not to him who contributed the component parts of the sacrifice, provided only that the sacrifice was presented as a sweet odour to Christ. There was none of that contemptible littleness and self-occupation about that beloved servant of Christ which so often, alas! appear in us, and prevent our appreciation of another's service. We are all alive when any little service of our own happens to be on the tapes. We listen with intense interest to any one speaking or writing about our usefulness, or the result of our preachings or writings; but we hear with cold apathy and marked indifference the record of a brother's success. We are by no means ready to be poured out as a drink-offering upon the sacrifice and service of another's faith. We like to provide both meat-offering and drink-offering ourselves. In a word, we are deplorably selfish, and assuredly never is self more thoroughly contemptible than when it dares to mix itself up with the service of God.

Bustling self-importance in the work of Christ, or in the church of God, is about the most hideously ugly thing in all this world. Self-occupation is the death-blow to fellowship and to all true service. Nor this only; it is also the fruitful source of strife and division in the church of God. Hence the deep need of those faithful and most wholesome words of the blessed apostle, "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every one on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Here lies the grand remedy for the terrible malady of self-occupation in all its phases. It is having Christ before our hearts, and His lowly mind formed in us by the Holy Ghost. It is utterly impossible to drink into the spirit of Jesus, to breathe the atmosphere of His presence, and be occupied with self in any shape or form. The two things are in direct opposition. In proportion as Christ fills the heart, self

and its belongings must be excluded; and if Christ occupies the heart, we shall rejoice to see His name magnified, His cause prospering, His people blessed, His gospel spread abroad, no matter who may be used as His instrument. We may rest assured that wherever there is envy, or jealousy, or strife, there self is uppermost in the heart. The blessed apostle could rejoice if Christ was preached, even though it was of contention.

But to return to the family of Bethany. We wish the reader to notice particularly the three distinct phases of Christian life exemplified in Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, namely, communion, worship and service. Should we not, each one of us, seek to realise and exemplify all the three? Is it not interesting and important to observe that in John 12. there is no question raised between Martha and Mary? Is not this accounted for by the fact that in this beautiful passage we have the divine and heavenly side of the subject?

In Luke 10 we have the human side. Here, alas! there is collision. Let us read the passage. "Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman, named Martha, received him into her house" — it was Martha's house, and of course she had to manage it. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word" — blessed, privileged place!" But Martha was numbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Here we find that Martha's self-occupation marred her service, and drew forth words of reproof from the lips of her loving, yet faithful, Lord — words, we may safely say, which would never have fallen upon her ear had she not interfered with her sister Mary. Her service had its place and its value, and her Lord knew well how to appreciate it; but, blessed be His name, He will not allow any one to interfere with another. Each had her own place, her own line of things. Jesus loved Martha and her sister, but if Martha will complain of her sister, she must learn that there is something more to be thought of than preparing a supper. Had Martha gone quietly on with her work, having Christ as her object in all that she was doing, she would not have had a rebuff; but she was evidently in a wrong spirit. She was not in communion with the mind of Christ; had she been so, she never could have used such words to her Lord, as "*Dost thou not care?*" Surely He does care about us, and He is interested in all our works and ways. The smallest service done to Him is precious to His loving heart, and will never be forgotten.

But we must not interfere with another's service, or intrude in any way upon his domain. Our blessed Lord will not suffer it. Whatever He gives us to do, let it be done simply to Him. This is the grand point. There is not the slightest necessity for jostling one another. There is ample space for all, and the very highest sphere is open to all. We may all enjoy intimate communion; we may all worship; we may all serve; we may all be acceptable. But the moment we set about making invidious comparisons, we are clearly out of the current of the Master's mind. Martha, no doubt, thought her sister rather deficient in action. She was mistaken. The best preparation for action is sitting at the Master's feet to hear His word. Had Martha understood this, she would not have complained of her sister; but, inasmuch as she herself raised the question, and gave occasion for any comparison, she had to learn that a hearing ear, and a worshipping heart, are more precious by far than busy hands. Alas! our hands may be very busy, while the ear is heavy, and the heart far away! but if the heart be right, then the ear, the hands, the feet, yea, all will be right. "My son, give me thine heart."

We do not mean to imply that Martha's heart was not right in the main. Far from it. We feel

assured it was. But there was an element which needed correction, as there is in all of us. She was a little occupied with her service. "Carest thou not that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she come and help me." This was all wrong. She ought to have known that service was not confined to cooking — that there was something higher than meat and drink. Ten thousand might be got to prepare a supper for one that would break an alabaster box. Not that our Lord undervalued the supper; but what would that supper have been to Him without the ointment, the tears, the hair? What is any act of service without the deep and true devotion of the heart? Nothing. But, on the other hand, where the heart is really engaged with Christ, the smallest act is precious to Him. "If there be *first* a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath."

Here lies the root of the whole matter. It is an easy thing to bustle about in so-called service, to run from house to house, and place to place, visiting and talking, and after all there may not be a single spark of genuine affection for Christ, but the mere worthless activity of a self-occupied mind, all unbroken will, the workings of a heart that has never known the constraining power of the love of Christ. The grand point is to find our place at the feet of our gracious Lord, in worship and adoration, and then we shall be ready for any sphere of action which He may see fit to open for us. If we make service our object, our service will become a snare and a hindrance. If Christ be our object, we shall be sure to do the right thing, without thinking about ourselves or our work.

Thus it was with Mary. She was occupied with her Lord, and not with herself or her alabaster box. She sought not to interfere with any one else. She complained not of Lazarus at the table, nor of Martha with her household cares. She was absorbed with Christ and His position at the moment. The true instincts of love led her to see what was fitting for the occasion, and grateful to His heart, and she did that — did it with all her heart.

Yes, and her Lord appreciated her act. And not only so, but when Martha complained of her, He very soon taught her her mistake; and when Judas, with ill-concealed covetousness, talked of her act as being a waste, he too got his answer, Heartless man! hiding his covetousness under the cloak of caring for the poor. No one can have a true heart for the poor who does not love Christ. Judas — professor, and apostle, and all, as he was — loved money: alas! no uncommon love. He had no heart for Christ, although he may have preached and cast out devils in His blessed name. He could talk of selling the ointment for three hundred pence, and giving it to the poor; but, oh! the Holy Ghost, who measures everything by the one standard of the glory of Christ, lets us see the roots of things, and He it is who tells the full truth as to Judas. "This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein."

How truly awful! To be outwardly so near the Lord; to profess His name; to be an apostle; to talk about giving to the poor; and all the while to be a thief, and the betrayer of the Son of God!

Dear Christian reader, let us ponder these things. Let us seek to live very near to Christ, not in mere profession, but in reality. May we find our place ever in the moral shelter of His holy presence, there to find our delight in Him, and thus be fitted to serve Him, and witness for His name!