

## 2 Samuel 23:15 (Percy Francis Hall) 71972

Bible Treasury: Volume N10, Waters of Bethlehem, The (23:15)

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How mighty and effective a principle is love! How sustaining in difficulty, how cheering in enterprise! It is true that all natural love takes its circuit round the creature and never rises above that level to God; and therefore the more it is seen in natural life, the more does it mark the creature's. shame that not one throb should be given to Him that made the heart and gave it its sweetest feelings. But love is love still, when all that God' is, and all that God has, become the unbounded circuit in which it finds its home. Love is the same but the object different, nor does it cease to include the narrower circle of human affections, but takes them into one full object—God. But what can produce our love, what can give boldness to our hearts to love Him whom we have offended but His grace in Jesus? Here we learn His love, as it is written, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him." And in that service to the Father's love for us, do we learn all the love of Jesus, fulfilling the word of truth— "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."

This was the power that carried Jesus through all that tried Him in the days of His flesh—love, first to the Father, and then to us, nay, uniting both in one service, and always in suffering. He could ever say with joy, "I do always those things which please him," and, when going to death, "That the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, so I do." Again, in the agony of His soul, "Not my will, but thine be done." This was in no way a work of mere righteousness, it was no question of His personal answer to the righteousness of God, but one of willing service unto others, in self-sacrifice to please the Father—and it was love which the floods that poured into His soul could not drown. So also to us, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end—even to shame and death. "Hereby perceive we love because he laid down his life for us."

Now it is the knowledge of this that subjects the soul in love to God and puts the believer into the position not of righteousness only, which is true, but something beyond it—the desire of doing all things which will please Him in the circumstances in which we may be placed. It is not a question of duty merely, but of love; we ought to walk even as He walked, not only fulfilling righteousness, but going forth in the Spirit in happy service to do the will of Him who is love, in the sorrowful circumstances of this sin darkened world, giving ourselves up in obedient service to what love would direct in a world of sorrow. The bearing of this upon our conduct towards one another is clearly shown, "He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." He who is Lord and Master, having washed His disciples' feet, said, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." This is far beyond righteousness which if alone would hurry us away from a sinning world and erring brethren.

Oh! if there is a dreary thought in these difficult days it is this, that there is so little perception in us of our standing in love. What would Christ's personal righteousness have availed us had He not loved us and suffered for us? It would have entitled Him to all glory, having humbled Himself, but it would have given us no claim. He became a servant to our wretchedness and the Father's love. This satisfied the desire of His own heart and pleased the Father, so that He could say, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again"; while the sorrowful word, "Now is my soul troubled," told the depth of the sacrifice that heart could make.

Let us see how this truth is illustrated in the narrative of the mutual love of David and his warriors (2 Sam. 23). The whole history of David, the beloved, chosen and anointed of God, is a beautiful drama of typical events; and his conduct in them, imperfect indeed, yet in every scene gives some glimpse of that perfect grace that we have learned in Christ. His election to the throne, his anointing, his victory over Goliath, his outcast state, his devotedness in it to Israel who were hating him, his submission to Saul, his lowliness and trust, his tender heartedness to his enemies when in his power, his true sorrow over even Saul and Abner, and, at last, his triumph, and the putting of all his enemies under his feet, are surely the Spirit's living prediction of the history and character of Jesus from His baptism in Jordan and the opening of the love and glory of heaven on His blessed head, till He comes forth as the crowned King with His vesture dipped in blood to obey that word, "Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies."

During the continuance of Saul in power many were separated in faith to David. Day by day some were added "until it became a great host, like the host of God." They gave up present power and rest with Saul in the faith of David's anointing taking part with him whom, hunted like a partridge on the mountains, they nevertheless knew to be the chosen of God and that his kingdom would come, while God's judgment was pronounced on the kingdom of Saul, of which the anointing and choice of David were full proof.

Here then, surely, we have the part of those who are now called to be saints. They are separated to the true David, His interests and hopes, separated from present things to future, all of which are dependent on the Person of God's choice. They are bound up, therefore, with Him who is now rejected in hope. Need I say there is but one thing that gives to those whose true character is that they are "in distress, and discontent, and debt," boldness to go to Christ, even simple trust in that love that brought Him to seek and save those that are lost. And surely, nothing less than trust in that blood, which He shed to give them His own holy title to the kingdom and glory, can identify them with Him in hope.

But when thus separated from the world to Christ and to Christ's glory, to partake of the fellowship of His sufferings, to be wanderers with Him in hope, to go in and out with Him, following Him whithersoever He goeth, in learning all His grace and all HIS beauty—oh! how will the heart learn to! Are Him in the depths of His exquisite grace.

Trial brought out David's attachment to Israel amidst such provocation; his refusal to resist evil against himself, his patient endurance, his trust in God. Surely it was no wonder that his followers loved and wondered, and that all their prowess was brought out as it were by this principle. They constantly erred, but their love seldom failed; they said indeed, in ignorance, when in the cave with helpless Saul, "Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand." And so also Peter, "This be far from thee, Lord," said he, when Jesus spoke of suffering and death: and when they came to take Him, Peter, in the same misjudging but true love, in the spirit of Abishai, smote off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Personal attachment to their Lord was there, however they failed in judgment. But oh! where is this attachment to-day?

I do not say that it is not far better if love abounds that it should be in knowledge and in all judgment; but—where is the love? How straight would many a crooked path be made! How clear much that is now involved in the obscurity of doublemindedness if all things were tried by love in the Spirit. It would not then be said or thought, 'How little may I sacrifice for Jesus, and yet be saved? How much of Saul's kingdom may I retain, and yet have part in David's?'

Nor should we so often hear, 'Surely there is no harm in this! It is not right to be so ascetic.' Let us hearken to the word of Jesus, "He that is not with me is against me, he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad," and there is nothing too little to be gathered with Him, and to give us an opportunity of proving our love, 'Is this becoming for a follower of Jesus? Is this suited to the glory and character of His kingdom? Will this please or displease our Lord and Savior?' These, these are the questions of love; and; surely, all clever advocacy of evil or the toleration of it, all the skilful alchemy of the unloving heart to divide the World into what is allowed and not allowed, all the power of heresy which detracts from the glory of Christ's Person, all the wiles of the enemy in substituting a prospering church in the world for the personal presence of its Lord and the glory of His kingdom—all are put to flight by the simple power of that love, which is of God. Nay, yet further, it is "love" that writes in full and clear characters. "Ichabod," on all that is so boasted in. If there is brotherly love brought to pass; and sustained by self sacrifice—if Christians are the servants of one another, each seeking to be the lowliest, heavenly-minded, and acting on principles that get no recompense here save the Spirit's assurance that they are pleasing Christ—if faith which will sacrifice all present things and be stranger and pilgrim because of the brightness of its future crown—if these are the things that characterize the church now, then indeed the solemn warnings of Scripture, when applied to it, are nothing but the querulous murmurings of discontented spirits! But if not, and the commandments of Jesus are not kept, and the dishonor of His sacred Name unwept and unregarded, then will love to that Name weep, and in sorrow of soul go on to utter its mournful cry amid the merriment of idolatry, "Ichabod, Ichabod."

"If we are beside ourselves it is to God; if we are sober, it is for your cause, for the love of Christ constraineth us," says the Apostle. "Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; no man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." "To him that overcometh will I give a white stone, and on it a new name written that no man knoweth but he that receiveth it." Love to Jesus made the Apostle beside himself, love to man made him sober; but it was all love—a love so like his Master's that he could say to them, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you the less I be loved!" seeking always to please Him as He had pleased the Father, that no perils could check or quench it. And in the midst of all endurance from the world without, and the misjudging hearts of brethren within, where did he look for recompense but to that day and to that hour when the voice he loved would say, "Well done good and faithful servant"? and the hand he loved would give him the white stone and the crown of glory which would not fade away, because he had pleased Him who had so called him to be a soldier, and then he would reign with Christ as he had suffered with Him.

It was in warring against Israel's unfailling enemy the Philistine, that David was in the hold and thirsted for the waters of Bethlehem. The war of the true David and His men is not indeed as yet with flesh and blood, but with the mightier Philistine, the ruler of the darkness of this world; and surely as they are expecting, so is He, and as they are warring, so is He, in them. David longed and said, "Oh that one would give me water of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate." No command was uttered, duty was not called upon. Need so expressed never could have found its way to the cold heart of duty, and if it had, there were many suggestions at once to keep it still. The Philistines garrisoned Bethlehem and the well was within the guarded gate, and there was much hazard in the way. The thirst of David could not be quenched without much risk and why quench it? It would please him indeed but it would not advance his people or kingdom, and indeed could further no object but that of pleasing him. It is enough, too, if a soldier strictly performs his duty, and diligently attends to all directions given to him, more cannot be required of him. David has not told us to attack Bethlehem, it is his personal need only, and why should we hazard our lives to meet that? Is not this the language of duty? But—is it the language of love? Has our Lord no need now, is He not thirsting now for that which is only to be obtained by the self-sacrifice of His people? This is the place of the loving believer, seeking to please at an costs the Lord of his heart and life, and learning by communion with Him to know not only His general commands, but what will give an answer to the present desire of His soul. "Filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the, knowledge of God." This it is for which He looks.

Let us judge by His word to the churches, "I know thy works." What are they? Surely not keeping "the sabbath," and refraining from the pleasures of the world; not mere uprightness and integrity of conduct, or attention to what are called ordinances and acts of occasional benevolence! These are not the works that gladden His heart as the fruit of that faith that worketh by love; nay, "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil, and hast borne and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted." Surely it is for this and more that He thirsts, and if His desire is unsatisfied does He not add, "Nevertheless I have this against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Again, how this is seen in the message to Pergamos, "Thou holdest fast my name and hast not denied my faith even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth," (as though within the hosts of the Philistines)! How does His love appear to tell its gladness in those words, "My faithful martyr"! He had died for Antipas, and Antipas was, through His grace, faithful; he had held fast the name of Jesus, and in death had given the waters of Bethlehem to meet the desire of his Master's soul. And again, how sweet to hear Him say to Philadelphia, when love was fast receding from the church, "I know thy works... thou hast a little strength and hast kept my word and hast not denied my name."! and, as though He would give the fullest recompense to this, He adds "my" to every promise, "temple of my God," "name of my God," "city of my God and my new name."

These then are the waters of Bethlehem, labor, patience, service, love, faith, holding fast the name and word of Jesus. Faithfulness in suffering and death; works, the fruit of faith in all the past love and coming glory of Jesus. Works, not of obedience to the law of Moses but

accordant with the grace of Christ. Works, that were in Him to the glory of the Father, love, service, faith, patience, in life and death. Love which seeks to please and satisfy, love which looks onward to approval, the spring and life of it all. Love which, when David said, "Oh, that one would give me to drink of the waters of the well of Bethlehem," answered thus, "Then the three mighty men broke through the host of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was in the city, and brought it to David." How keen the hearing of love, how strong and skilful the arm of love, how undaunted how resolute the heart! David longed for the waters, and the waters were won; and as the hazard and peril were great, so the joy of the warriors' hearts that their love could be so proved. The greater the jeopardy the stronger the love; and these were the waters to meet David's thirst, as the willing offering of tried love. They had given up their lives for his sake, to satisfy his thirst and win his smile; and the waters so won were too precious for their gracious and loving master to drink. "Isaiah not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? Therefore he would not drink it, but poured it out unto the Lord." He calls it their blood or their life, for they had not counted this dear unto themselves, and the waters were as their life to him. And as in the days of His flesh it was ever the delight of Jesus to satisfy the Father's desires by His own faithful and loving obedience, even now what is His joy but that those that are His should glorify the Father too; and how, but by owning the glory of Jesus, being constrained by the love of Jesus to give themselves through Him to the Father? "He poured it out unto the Lord." All that is given to Him by self-sacrifice is by Him accounted so precious, that He gives it to the Father, as it is written, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples "; And, "being filled with the fruit of righteousness which is by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." All coming from the Father, through Jesus by the Spirit, and ascending up again through Jesus to the Father. Jesus is the winner of the fruit, for love to Him, personal attachment to Him is the intelligent principle that must work every deed of holy chivalry. The Spirit is the life of every deed as teaching the heart the love of Jesus, and working thus the will of God in us; and the Father receives the fruit through the blessed Son, for, "He poured it out unto the Lord." And shall we be careless about these things? Surely our gracious Master thirsts; the hosts of the uncircumcised garrison are this evil world, but yet the waters of Bethlehem are in it. The greater the danger, the more sweet the water to Him who thirsts; and the day is at hand when a loud voice will be heard saying in heaven, "Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ, for the accuser of our brethren is cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto death." (Rev. 12).

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