

John - Commentaries by William John Hocking, Editor

The Believer's Monthly Magazine: Volume 3, "If the Lord Will." (15:14)

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS, — It is the mark of a comely and pious spirit to own the will of the Lord in all your purposes and plans. As surely as you belong to Him, so surely ought you to obey Him. "Ye are my friends," He says, "if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). And I am sure you are anxious to be obedient to all that the Lord has spoken. This is a simple matter where the Lord has definitely expressed His command; but in other cases you need to wait directly upon Him for His guidance. To illustrate my meaning, I may refer to the breaking of bread. "This do in remembrance of me," is a distinct and unmistakable expression of the Lord's will on that particular point; and you may have it on your heart to obey His word in eating His supper next Lord's day. Illness, however, may intervene to prevent you carrying out your intention. In that case you would not doubt that the will of the Lord would be done, even though you were unable to conform to His written command.

In view of this possibility it becomes you to say, "If the Lord will, I mean to break bread next Lord's day." And James shows that exactly the same principle applies in business affairs (James 4:13-15). You make a plan of where you will go and what you will do, which may not at all correspond with what the Lord's will is concerning you. As He looks down upon you, He knows what is the best place for you to visit, and what is the best thing for you to do. And what is more, He will guide you aright, if only, when you see your plan is wrong, you are prepared to abandon it. Now when you qualify your intentions by the phrase, "If the Lord will," you practically express your readiness to do so.

I draw attention to this very simple point because I fear that we sometimes mean, "If I can," when we say "If the Lord will." This is a different spirit, and not at all a proper one. Let us examine it and see. You tell me, or anyone else, "I want to learn to play chess, if I can." This means that if you have time and opportunity, and if you also find you have the ability to master the intricacies of the game, you will do so. If you fail, well—many others have done the same before you. Observe that in this case there is no reference whatever to the will of the Lord on such a question; you consider it entirely from your own point of view. If you can do it, you will. But supposing you had said, and meant, "If the Lord will, I want to learn to play chess," how different the significance would be. This implies that whatever your desires may be, and even though you know you are quite competent to become, with practice, a skillful player, directly you see that such a pursuit is not consonant with your heavenly calling, and that there are many far more useful occupations to engage your time and attention, you will forsake the idea at once. Your desire to please the Lord far surpasses any desire you have to learn the game of chess.

The expression we are now considering is a beautiful one, and you would find it a profitable, exercise to study its occurrences in scripture. But I do desire for you that you should not fall into a slovenly habit of using this phrase in a canting way. By "canting" I mean using words of sacred meaning without bearing in mind their solemn significance. If the Israelite was commanded not to take the name of Jehovah his God in vain, you may be sure that the Christian ought not to be less reverent than he.

Do, my dear young friends, habitually commit all your ways to the Lord. Remember the word of promise, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:6).

I am, Yours faithfully, "Yod."

The Believer's Monthly Magazine: Volume 3, Put Christ First. (12)

IN John's Gospel we have a blessed example of Christ having the first place. Jesus Who had visited Bethany (John 11), and accomplished what He declared (John 5:21), again visits Bethany six days before the Passover (John 12). He is in company with Lazarus whom He raised from the dead, and his two sisters, Martha and Mary.

At the close of His testimony to the world, being rejected by His own (John 1:11; 8:59), and outside all the pride and religion of Jerusalem, He is with a few whose hearts have been touched by Him, graciously receiving from them the love that His own love had won (1 John 4:19). "They made him a supper." All is in perfect harmony, the Lord having the first place in each of their hearts. Martha served, but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him. We see united love in their actions toward the Lord, and His grace in receiving the service of Martha. Lazarus, being raised from the dead, having had the graveclothes taken off, in life and liberty is now feasting with the Lord. This is the blessed privilege of each one who has life in Christ. What rest and peace Lazarus and the others experienced in His presence, finding all their joy and comfort in the Lord Who was "as a root out of a dry ground" to the Jews.

"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 odor of the ointment" (verse 3). She who previously sat at His feet and heard His word (Luke 10:39), is now pouring out her heart's affection upon the person of Jesus anointing His feet and wiping them with her hair, casting herself and her glory down at His blessed feet. How real was the person of Christ to them, at home as they were in His presence.

Such a portion is ours, saved reader, in Christ; He Who has conquered death and delivered us from its cruel bondage (Heb. 2:15) and brought us into liberty through the knowledge of the truth (John 8:32) in which we are exhorted to stand fast (Gal. 5:1)— He is our life; He has made us free; He is our food; He has brought us home to the Father, fitted for His presence, to feast with Him upon the fatted calf. Nothing short of what gives the greatest delight to the Father, is our portion at His own table.

The characteristics of the three at Bethany are true of saved individuals. Martha is named first in service: not “cumbered” about it, as in Luke 10. In Lazarus we have life; and in Mary, communion. True service for Him is the outcome of the life we have in Him and of communion by the Holy Ghost, Who leads out in worship to God the Father, and in true service, to His own praise and glory.

Is He not worthy of the first place in our hearts? We notice the enemy was not silent then any more than he is at the present time. That which the Lord values is accounted waste by him. What a contrast between the heart of Mary and the heart of Judas! Has this state of things improved? No; the enemy still has a professed love for the poor, but it is always at the expense of the Lord. “This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag” (verse 6). He aimed at what was being done to the Lord. Mary said nothing of what the cost was to her. It would be nothing to her when compared with the object of her heart. But Judas valued it at three hundred pence. Nothing is too great for love to give Him, but anything is too great for self. If the enemy can only turn the eye away from Christ, he will allow us to be occupied with great things in the world, which gain the admiration of men, but which rob Christ of His glory, and ourselves of much blessing. Though he can never touch the life we have in Christ, he ever seeks to hinder our enjoyment of our blessings.

To be faithful to the Lord will bring suffering as we learn from verse 10. The silent testimony of Lazarus brought out the enemy in his true colors. The hatred of the chief priests against the Lord is now manifested against Lazarus, who was a standing witness for the Lord. “Because that by reason of him, many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus” (ver. 11). So the apostle Paul wrote, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Phil. 1:29).

Dear young believer, let Christ always have the first place in your heart, that your life may speak of Him and for Him, Who is your life, your food, your all. W.J. F.

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