



DEVOTEDNESS.

2 SAMUEL. XXIII. 13-17.

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THE present condition of things around us is bewildering and embarrassing in the extreme. It is a day of poverty and weakness. Boasting or assumption ill becomes those who have but "a little strength." One has said, "If I look within I am miserable; if I look around, I am confounded; but if I look *up*, all is bright and beautiful;" is it then not worse than useless to waste the moments that are passing in looking whence nothing can come but disappointment and vexation?

But some one may say: That is a beautiful theory, but have we no responsibilities in the directions expressed in the words "within" and "around"? and is it a matter of no importance that these should be answered? The reply is, yes. And they are best sustained and met by setting the "mind

on things above, not on things on the earth;" that is, occupation with Christ, where He is, is the way to the possession of that which nothing can cloud, dim, or take away; and when it is so, these responsibilities I have spoken of are fulfilled according to the thoughts and mind of Christ—a matter of primary importance to a true heart.

He that has Christ before him, as the One to be pleased, as the One whose interests are to be consulted, is the very one who will do the best for all under Christ, according to His mind and His thoughts; and this, let it be observed, is not each one, according to his own thoughts or judgment, doing what he thinks will suit Christ, but *first* learning from nearness to, and intimacy with the Lord, what He would desire, and then going forth, undaunted by either difficulties or dangers, to accomplish that desire.

It is clear that before the desires of a person can command me, the *person himself* must stand out before me as an object. The desires of one whom I neither know nor value, I should not care to make myself

acquainted with ; not so of one I valued and loved ; how much more of One who has eclipsed and superseded everything else in my heart, and has no rival there ! And this, I should say in starting, characterises devotedness. The one who is devoted is abstracted from all else by an object which has so completely engrossed the affection, and occupied the heart, that all thought of self-interest, or any other interest, is buried in the One who is my object. For example, look at Mary, in John xx. What does she care for all else but Christ ? Nothing. The early dawn, while it was yet dark, found her on her way to the only spot on earth that had now an interest for her—the tomb of Jesus. And when she comes to find *Him* not there, how inconsolably does she tell her tale of sorrow to Peter and John ! “ They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre ; and I know not where they have laid Him.” And what a contrast their ways to hers ! each satisfies himself of the accuracy of her report, and then they return to the circle of their interests on earth—“ their

own home." Oh, what a picture! Not so Mary: she return home? without Him she has no home, nothing. She has a true heart—very ignorant, no doubt; ignorant too, where she ought not—yet, for all that, she is devoted; see how she lingers about that empty tomb! Is she not here, like another Ruth, saying, "Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried"?

But there is even more than this, for, if she is inconsolable without Him, and weeps as if her heart would break, see how she never calculates or measures for a moment; poor, weak feeble woman as she is in body, such is her love, that if she only knew where He is she is prepared to come and take Him away. Him, Him, Him! is the sum-total of her thoughts; difficulties or hindrances she thinks not of. What a picture! Prudence ever calculates; devotedness never! But there is even more, and a striking characteristic too, of one who is devoted; for when she finds Him—alive, too, as He was, and not dead—the love that was inconsolable without Him, is prepared now that she has

seen Him, to do whatever He desires, though she never see Him again. (Vers. 16–18.) Beautiful picture of its kind it is ; presenting these two marked features of a devoted heart ; first, and above all, the object Himself, and all else as nothing compared with Him. Second, and next to Himself, His wishes—His desires.

Let us look at another instance ; is not John (John i.) a man devoted to an object ? “Sent to bear witness of that light ;” in himself, what was he ? Not (what many would be now-a-days) something because of Christ. John is nothing. What is a voice crying in the wilderness ? They come out from Jerusalem, Judea, and the region round about Jordan, to one who has himself found an object in Christ that has abstracted him from all else, and made him a stranger and a lonely man in the midst of a crowd ; and not only this, but whose own soul so dwells in delight and satisfaction in this One Himself, that, looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, “Behold the Lamb of God !”

But perfect and admirable as all this is

in its way, it is not the brightest scene in the devotedness of John; for we find in chapter iii. that he takes occasion by the question which had arisen between some of his disciples and the Jews, to let out what the governing object of his heart was. What was he? He was but a voice, but he was the friend of the Bridegroom; it was the Bridegroom he wanted to hear; it was His voice delighted John; yet not this only, but so satisfying was this blessed Bridegroom, Him who is not only above all, but Him who has all things given Him by the Father who loved Him, that self fades away, is dead; and that which announces it, proclaims most blessedly the superiority of Christ. "He must increase, but I must decrease." John seems to me here like another Queen of Sheba. Such tidings of the fame of Solomon reached her in her own land, that she determined to see it for herself; great as was the report which created longings and yearnings in her heart, it was as nothing to the reality, namely, Solomon's wisdom, the house that he had

built, the meat of his table, the attendance of his ministers, his ascent by which he went up to the house of the Lord, which when she had seen with her eyes, there was no more spirit in her ; the magnificence of this sight paled all else before her. Yet great as was the effect thus produced in her, it is a glory of a higher order that commands John here ; he stands, as it were, on another mount of transfiguration, and sees no man save "Jesus only ;" and as that one object abstracts him away from all besides, do you not in those words, "He must increase, but I must decrease," hear old Simeon joyfully say, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

So far we have looked only at the power of an object which possesses and occupies ; and we have looked at it, too, in illustrations, which, however remarkable and striking in themselves, are feeble to give any idea of the *reality* of Christ as an object ; even the incident related in this history of David. With what power does that Blessed One

in glory occupy my heart, when I am in the consciousness of being with Himself, where He is, as well as in the consciousness of how completely He was for me here. Just think, He gave Himself, allowed the shroud of judgment which encircled me to be wrapped around Himself; in His death closed volume i. of my history, and in Himself, risen from the dead and in glory, opened volume ii. How the greatness and magnificence of it passes all conception! He, that blessed One, who is in the bosom of the Father, came down here on earth to tell out the secrets of that bosom. He it was who became the Deliverer in the hour of our extremity and hopelessness, in the day of our dismay and despair, when we were absolutely intolerable to ourselves, when we had lost all self-respect, because we could not do what was right, and the dark garment of helplessness envelopes us in its folds, like Jonah in the depths of the sea; when the floods compassed us about; the waters compassed us about, the depth closed us round about; the weeds were

wrapped about our head; we went down to the bottom of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about us for ever; our night was setting in, and we were rapidly settling down in the darkness of death. Such was our condition when *He* entered the scene. He, the perfect, spotless Lamb of God, is born into the world He had made; is refused His own place among His own people (Israel), and in His own creation; glorifies His Father, where He had been dishonoured and despised; and, finally, bears the judgment which rested on all; vindicates and establishes the righteousness of God, by closing for ever in His death the history of the man that offended against God, and at the same time yielded up His own life, in all its personal excellency; is raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, and in Himself, so risen and in glory, becomes the Head of the new creation: and not only this, but by the Holy Ghost sent down, in answer to the glory of His person and work, we who believe are now united to Him where He is.

The second characteristic of a devoted heart is, that it makes itself acquainted with the *desires* of its object, and then unflinchingly sets itself to accomplish them. If Christ be my object, I seek to know His mind, His desires, and learning them, I allow nothing to stand in the way of my fulfilling them; and this is a solemn subject at this present moment, when it is remembered that there are multitudes of saints who *act* as if there were no expressed mind or desire of Christ, and multitudes besides, from whom better things might be expected, who defiantly ask for a *command*, which indicates, to say the very least of it, a distance from the heart of Christ, and an absence of that waiting on Him, as well as of that intimacy with Him, that carries not for a command, but seeks earnestly His mind, and makes haste to accomplish His desire at all cost. It is not by this meant that there are no New Testament precepts, but we mean to point out that low, wretched condition which satisfies itself with an indifference to the heart-yearnings or desires

of Christ, by pleading the absence of a command.

The history in our passage furnishes abundant illustrations of what I seek to convey:—David was in the cave of Adullam, rejected and disowned at this time, the conqueror of Goliath and deliverer of Israel though he be. There are a few, and only a few, who care so much for David that they will link their destiny with his, and *that* at a moment when, to sight at least, all is as dark as dark can be. How do they expect this? Why, where he is, *there* will they be. “And three of the thirty chiefs went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam.” David is *the* one they are thinking of; they want to be near him. Near him, did I say?—they want to be with him: they refuse all else but that which connects them with him. If they are to be sharers with him in his triumphs and honours by-and-by, they will be partakers of his reproach and shame now. That which links them to it is the joy of their hearts, they will be with him; and

while all around outside is dark, they within will company with him, and pass the hours of their vigil in waiting on the desires of his heart. They are in the place to know his wishes. Had they not been in the cave with David, they never would have heard his longing for water from the well of Bethlehem, and they never would have been in Adullam, if David had not himself eclipsed all else in their affections.

Then, see how they set themselves to meet the desires of David, how they were undaunted by the dangers and difficulties in the way, how they were carried by their devotedness to David over all the hindrances, and allowed nothing to stand in the way of their carrying out his desires; and so we read—"And the three mighty men brake through the *host of the Philistines*, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David." They did not calculate or hesitate. David's desire once known, the only thing thought of is meeting it. There might have been objectors; there might have been

some who would say, "Wherefore is this waste?" It matters not to them; to fulfil David's desire is their only thought. I feel as if the application of all this were self-evident; and yet when one looks around and asks, "Where do I see it?" one is confounded; and more so, as too many, if not most saints, are *mere benefactors* of men; the desires of Christ they neither know, nor seek to know: they are not *where* they could know them; they are thinking of man and his good, not of Christ and His glory. Do you reply, "But can you separate them?" I answer, "No," provided you seek what suits Christ. He who consults what is due to Christ is the only one who really benefits man according to God's mind: to human eyes it may be otherwise; but in the thoughts of God, the one who is true, faithful, and devoted to Christ, is the one who is most used to help, as well as most helpful to man.

To sum up, then: true devotedness consists in knowing Christ as the object that eclipses all others; in finding that it is Him-

self that alone satisfies my heart, so that the circle of His interests and desires becomes the circle of mine: where He is, there I must be, and being where He is—that is, near enough to Him to know His desires and mind—I set myself to accomplish them, and in so doing I take no account of difficulties, dangers, hindrances; even as David's mighty men, who undismayed, broke through the hosts of the Philistines, that they might meet the desires of their captain.

The one who is devoted is carried in a love that rises superior to everything in its way, and breaks through every host that stands to hinder or oppose. The Lord give His people in these last days so to know and love His blessed Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up His own precious life to put aside and end before God the history of that which grieved His love, that entire devotedness to Him may be the character of those who know Himself, and have tasted of His love.