

"If I May But Touch Him"

"Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber!"—Luke 7:34

We are apt, in our fancy, as we read the story of Jesus, to envision a quiet, majestic figure slowly traveling about Judea and Galilee with respectful throngs following him, a person at least of general respect, if not of wholehearted general approval. *But this is not the true picture.* Multitudes thronged him, truly. But they were not the 'respectable' people. The respectable people, unless they were of exceptional courage, came secretly at night, like Nicodemus, if they came at all. The respectable people whispered, as they viewed his simple followers—

"Behold a glutton and a winebibber: a friend of publicans and sinners!" (Luke 7:34).

The "respectable" were afraid to be associated with him, for—

"The Jews had agreed already that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue."

And because the man who was born blind confessed him, they *did* cast him out. The respectable people could say, with triumphant contempt (John 7:48-49)—

*"Have **any** of the **rulers** or the **Pharisees** believed on him? but this people who knoweth not the Law are accursed."*

And it is further recorded (John 12:42),

*"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees **they did not confess him**, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."*

It is clear that to confess him meant ostracism from respectable society. As Isaiah tells us (55:3), he was not only rejected, but *despised*—

*"A reproach of men, and **despised** of the people" (Psa. 22:60). "Him whom man **despiset**h, him whom the nation abhorreth."*

He, no less than Paul (1 Cor. 4:12-13), was—

"Reviled, defamed, made as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things."

And those that followed him were told to expect the same—

"If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?"

"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you for my sake."

But—

"WOE unto you when all men shall speak well of you!"

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In Mark 4, we have first the parable of the sower, emphasizing the three great dangers to faith. First, the fowls of the air, *organized opposition*, the spacious falsehoods of men, the deceits of the adversary who snatch away the seed before it has time to take root. Then the *poor, thin, shallow ground*—no depth, no real grip on the truth, no stability or constancy. And lastly, the *cares of this world*, the deceitfulness of riches, the thousand and one little things that can, almost unnoticed, steal away, piece by piece and day by day, our precious time and opportunities, until at last we look up in dismay and find ourselves far from our goal and the

day nearly spent.

Then the storm on the sea, and the fear of the disciples—

"Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark 4:38).

They had many lessons to learn by experience, and experience is usually hard. Yet each experience, whether we fail or succeed, can be a stepping stone forward, *if we are rightly exercised by it*. Even if we fail still our failure can be profitable and useful: subsequent reflection can tell us why, and can also impress us with the unsatisfactory and depressing character of a past whose milestones are instances of weakness—thus giving added incentive to overcome. So even here—

"All things work together for good to them that love God."

Then when he stilled the storm with a word, they feared even the more, because of the powers which they saw and did not understand.

"What manner of man is this?"

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"He was asleep, in the hinder part of the ship" (Mark 4:38).

This tells us many things. It speaks first of his perfect peace of mind. He had many troubles, but no worries; countless sorrows, but no anxiety.

Then it speaks of the fatigue that would make sleep possible upon such an occasion, tossed about in a small boat on a rough sea. And it gives us a glimpse of the life he led—unsettled and wandering—no fixed dwellingplace, or mode of existence—spending long nights in prayer—sleeping when the opportunity afforded. He enjoyed none of the external elements of rest and peace, but was the greatest example of them inwardly.

"My peace I give unto you" (John 14:27).

"Come unto me and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28).

Then he adds, lest we should harbor an illusion,

"Not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27).

The world would not call it rest, nor would they recognize his peace. He, even more truly and deeply than Paul, could say,

"I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content."

A perfect mastery of the mind over external circumstances. His peace did not consist in *ignoring* the circumstances, or excluding the facts from his consciousness, or not caring about them. It consisted in *the confidence that whatever came, he was ready, with God's help, to face it*, and make the best of it; and in knowing that in all things he conducted himself in perfect harmony with the will of God. He said (John 8:29)—

"I do always those things that please the Father."

That was his peace. Consider the whole statement—

*"He that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; **for** I do always those things that please Him."*

Many times he said that: *"I am not alone."* That was his anchor and confidence through every storm. "I am not alone." God said in the beginning, *"It is not good for man to be alone."* For the first Adam, the natural man, He made one provision, but it remained for the

Second Adam to demonstrate the full truth and depth of the statement. "I am not alone." Though all the world was against him, he was still in the majority: though all his companions forsook him, he was not alone. As the last hour approached, he said (John 16:32),

*"Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet **I am not alone**, because the Father is with me. These things have I spoken to you that in me ye might have peace."*

When the ship reached the eastern side of the sea, the country of the Gadarenes, the incident of the swine occurred, in connection with the curing of the maniac.

"And they were afraid . . . and they began to pray to him to depart out of their coasts" (Mark 5:17).

It seems incredible that any should *beg him to depart*, after seeing a demonstration of his healing power. But they were afraid—afraid of the implications that that power carried with it. For it worked both ways. He not only healed the maniac, but he destroyed the swine; therefore, knowing themselves, they wanted him to leave them alone. With such a power among them, there was no knowing where it would stop, or what it would search out. *The works of darkness could not live within the circle of his light.* Wherever he went, the issue of right and wrong—righteousness and evil—was joined and could not be evaded. He would not let it rest.

He came proclaiming righteousness and the power of God; the loving and perfect and self-sacrificing way of the spiritual mind. All the specious arguments and attempt to confound the issue and justify the flesh that were put forward were gently but relentlessly exposed. The common people heard him gladly—though few comprehended the depth of his teaching. But those who began to perceive the full implication of his words, and did not want to face it, begged him to *go away and leave them alone*. And the vested interests and ruling classes persistently sought to discredit and destroy him, because in quiet, everyday words he preached a revolution that was deeper, more fundamental and more searching than man has ever conceived.

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He returned again to the other side of the lake, and among the throng that followed him was the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25). Consider this woman's faith. She felt that, though she knew not how, if she could only *get close enough to Christ*, the evil would of itself disappear. *"If I may but touch him!"* And that indeed is true, and is the simple, universal solution to all our problems. Other solutions may be quite logical and convincing, but they are *lifeless*, and we find when the issue comes that they lack the power to carry us through. We are convinced, and confess it, but we are not moved, transformed and regenerated. As Paul says, law merely convinces us of sin, and leads to the exclamation,

"O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24).

We must have the personal impetus that comes of a vivid loving perception of and close proximity to Christ, as a living person. Otherwise the *path of right*, as opposed to the *path of pleasure*, is an intolerable and seemingly meaningless burden. Paul found his incentive in his affection for Christ, and his desire to approach him (Phil. 3:8)—

*"I count all things but loss that I may **win Christ** . . . I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."*

He expressed unlimited confidence in this power—more than equal to all circumstances

(Rom. 8:35-6)—

*"Who shall separate us from the **love of Christ**? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?—Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors **through him that loved us** . . . As it is written, **For thy sake we are killed all the day long.**"*

That is the keynote—"For thy sake." We must have a living, *personal* reason; someone we love and are striving to please. We are constituted that way.

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"God, *for Christ's sake*, hath forgiven you," says Paul (Eph. 4:32). Christ *for our sakes*, laid down his life, John records, (1 John 3:16). And we, *for his sake*, serve God. And it is in doing things for his sake that gives them efficacy and meaning.

*"He that loses his life **for my sake** shall find it"* (Matt. 10:39).

*"Everyone that hath forsaken all in this life **for my sake** shall inherit everlasting life."* (Matt. 19:28).

The incentive throughout is personal, and Paul, impressed by the transforming nature of this incentive, always bases his appeals upon it. And of himself he says,

*"I **take pleasure** in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, **for Christ's sake**"* (2 Cor. 12:10).

*"Unto you it is given—it is granted, you have the honor, pleasure and privilege in the behalf of Christ—not only to believe on him, but also to suffer **for his sake**"* (Phil. 1:29).

This is not just an extravagant flight of rhetoric. Paul literally meant what he said. In the primitive and pure ecstasy of the early church, it is recorded (Acts 5:41)—

*"They **rejoiced** that they were counted worthy to suffer for his Name."*

We have all, in some small measure (and many doubtless in larger measure), experienced the pleasure of pain for another's sake, and the joy of the bond that it creates.

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So she felt that if she could get close enough to Christ, all would be well. His power would envelope her, and evil would flee from his glorious, healing presence. He would take her problem upon himself, if she would but carry it to him. *"If I can but touch him, I shall be whole."* And so it was. Jesus said,

"I am the true vine. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit in itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me . . .without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:1-5).

Without him we can do nothing. We strive mightily and get nowhere. Like the disciples, we row all night and accomplish nothing, unless he is in the ship. Unless we actually establish a vital connection between him and ourselves, we remain just ordinary people, living in an ordinary way, and finally dying the common death. The connection must be personal and actual—not just apparent, or mechanical, or superficial.

It is through the recorded Word that the contact is made and maintained. That is the medium of intercourse and communion:

*"If ye abide in me, and **my words** abide in you, ye shall bear much fruit"* (John 15:7).

"My words." We have the recorded Word before us That is something real and tangible

that we can hold in our hands, and any advance into the spiritual realm must be through that. We cannot sit and commune with God on our own terms. We must seek His presence where *He* chooses to be found, and through the medium *He* provides. That is why the Psalms contain so much on the theme—

"O, how love I Thy Law! How sweet are Thy words to my taste!"

That is the frame of mind to which we must educate ourselves—by prayer, and study, and meditation. And we must never rest content until it takes complete hold of us.

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A little later (ch. 6) in the course of his traveling, he came to his native city Nazareth. Their reaction to him is strange. They did not deny his wisdom and power. Rather it was that very wisdom and power that annoyed them!

"From whence hath this man these things? And what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? . . . And they were offended at him" (Mark 6:12).

How utterly illogical! But how typically human!

"And he marveled because of their unbelief" (v. 6).

Even he, who knew all men, and knew what was in man—he marveled because of the unyielding hardness of their unbelief. The evidence which was forced upon them only infuriated them, and the only solution they could think of to relieve themselves of the problem he presented was to destroy him.

He marveled that hearts could be so bitter and obstinate in the very presence of the power and goodness of God—that the flesh could be so unreasonable, and so blind to itself. But such is the material with which we each have to work in ourselves. The Spirit through Solomon declared—

"He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." (Prov. 28:26).

—and we must admit that once a man has been enlightened to the destructive deceptiveness of the desires of the flesh, this verdict is so true.

How easy it is to be blind to ourselves! How necessary is a constant, prayerful searching of the Word, and unsparing self-examination in the light of it! How natural to be obsessed with the faults of others!

Isaiah—at the beginning of his prophecy, when he speaks of the glorious day of the Lord when all human things shall come into judgment, and all that is out of harmony with the Truth shall be destroyed—says that in the great day of judgment they shall cast their idols "to the *moles* and to the *bats*."

Why especially *moles and bats*? Considering the scriptural evaluation of the flesh, we can see why such are chosen. These two are the most outstanding examples in the animal kingdom of the flesh's primary characteristic—they love darkness rather than light.

That principle goes far deeper than we self-righteously realize. *Anything foreign to the pure and gentle Spirit mind is darkness*. The mole spends his time in darkness, burrowing in the dirt, undermining, digging away in secret, and he is content. He literally has eyes but cannot see. Bats, too, have a strong aversion to light. They hide away in the daytime and confine their activities to the night. And both are classed as unclean creatures.

Such is the flesh, but the picture would not be complete without presenting another angle.

There is no cause for despair, or even regret, that we are made so. All is for a good purpose—

*"The creation was made subject to vanity by reason of Him Who hath subjected the same **in hope**, because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the **glorious liberty** of the children of God."*

And continuing the same line of thought, Paul says—

*"And we **know** that ALL things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:20-28).*

Our present state is a necessary step in the eternal purpose. It is *not a gloomy picture*, but rather one of bright promise and hope. The only danger is *refusal to face and admit the facts*—running *from* the light—drawing back fearfully into the darkness—hesitating to concede the miserable deceptiveness of the flesh—excusing it and glorifying it—calling its vicious traits by fair and flattering names. Paul flatly declares (Rom. 7:18)—

*"In me—that is, in my flesh—dwelleth **no good thing**."*

Frankly and honestly admit that to ourselves, and at least we are off to a good start.

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A little later in ch. 6 the death of John the Baptist is recorded—him of whom Jesus said (Matt. 11:11)—

"There hath not risen a greater prophet among men."

He was a voice crying in the wilderness—a voice that the powers of Israel refused to accept, but dared not deny. They asked Jesus, "Who sent you, and gave you your authority?" And he answered, "*Who sent John, and gave him his authority?*" That answered their question, but they would not face it.

John did no miracles, but his pure voice from the wilderness pierced the consciences of the people. For fearlessly testifying to corruption in high places, he was shut up in prison, and finally murdered. When Jesus heard of it, he departed into a desert place apart, deeply affected by the news of John's death, and desirous of being alone. To his disciples he said (Matt. 17:12)—

"Elias is come, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spoke unto them of John the Baptist."

But when they reached the desert place, they found that the multitude had guessed their destination and were there waiting for them. Seeing them, he had compassion on them, and, foregoing his own privacy and rest, he set himself to teach them about his Father. Afterwards, by a miracle, he feeds them, and v. 40 (Mark 6) gives an interesting thought—

"They sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties."

Not as a haphazard crowd, but an orderly assembly. There is always beauty and dignity in orderliness and arrangement.

All God's works are marvels of order and precision. Nothing, however minute or unimportant, is slipshod or carelessly done. And this characteristic struck observers in regard to Jesus. In the next chapter, Mark 7, we read that they exclaimed—

"Behold, he doeth all things well!"

That was the stamp of God dwelling in him. Even in this incident of feeding the multitude,

he arranges it with a pleasing orderliness. No crowding, no confusion, but—

"He commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds and by fifties" (Mark 6:39-40).

If he was to be a party to the transaction, it would have to be done with becoming decorum. And the multitudes, finding themselves part of quiet and orderly assembly, would be impressed with the meaning and dignity that is possible to human nature when it is controlled and directed by the wisdom of God.

There was nothing slipshod or haphazard in Jesus' life. Though he wandered homeless, taking no thought for the morrow, his was actually the most intensely purposeful life ever lived. We must not judge by appearances, or common standards. The priest and Levite, hurrying between Jerusalem and Jericho, were following a schedule, but it was the Samaritan who had a real purpose in life.

But there is a distinction between true dignity and false. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the whole multitude of the disciples began spontaneously to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice (Luke 19:37). And some of the Pharisees said—

"Master, rebuke thy disciples."

According to their standards of etiquette, that was not a fitting way for people to act. They were completely unmoved by the significance of the occasion. They said the same thing when the children praised him in the Temple.

The Pharisees were always there to cavil over trifles, and to throw an ugly, jealous shadow over the pure joy of the occasion. Going a little further, we find them criticizing the disciples for eating with unwashed hands. This attitude finally brought upon them the most scathing denunciation that is recorded in the Scriptures, filling 26 burning verses in Matthew 23—

"Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, HYPOCRITES!"

Primarily following Mark's record, but with reference to the others, we have traveled briefly with Jesus. It is remarkable how the four gospels supplement each other and afford a depth and interest that one continuous narrative could not give. There have been many attempts to fuse the four accounts into one story, but the results are always disappointing.

When a colored picture is printed, four layers of color are superimposed upon each other, each supplying its own appropriate tints and details. In singing, four types of voice are combined to give depth and body and completeness to the tone. And to carry the comparison further, the Psalms, like a soft, instrumental accompaniment, supply the theme and undertone, and reveal much that would otherwise be hidden.

So, each contributing its own part, we are given a complete picture of the perfect life—the life of Jesus. Not that the outward circumstances of his life were perfect, that would mean nothing. But, regardless of the circumstances, in spite of the bitterest experiences, his *reaction* to them all was perfect, and his inner peace, the peace of a complete faith and a righteous conscience, like an impregnable fortress, though constantly assailed, was never broken into.

—G.V.Growcott