

BACK TO BETHEL

Separation from Sin, and Fellowship with GOD

by

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"Old Testament Heroes," "Meet for the Master's Use," etc.

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CHAPTER NINE

THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED

There is nothing arbitrary or capricious in GOD's dealings with the soul. If one man has more of GOD than another, it is simply because he has learned the holy art of taking more of GOD into his life. On the same stream one man may get more water power to drive his engine than another, not because there is any arbitrariness in the water, but because the one man has learned how to utilize the water power better than the other.

The same mighty power of GOD is flowing by every one of us, and if you would have the most power in your own life and work, you have simply to comply most absolutely with the conditions on which GOD gives Himself to you.

I am thankful to say that those conditions are not conditions of emotion, but that, irrespective of your emotional temperament, you may come into intimate and powerful relationship with the eternal GOD, who works according to law.

All you have to do is to bring yourself into such an attitude towards GOD that you may receive from Him everything that He has to give the human soul. Most men think that they must receive GOD's gifts through some man's ministry. They are living on GOD at second or third hand. There is no reason why you should not live at first-hand.

The Lord had said that His disciples must forgive seven times a day if necessary. The disciples replied: "You are expecting too much; but if it ought to be done you must give us much more faith."

CHRIST said: "You make a great mistake; you do not need more faith. Use the faith you have, though it be no larger than the smallest seed. **'If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.'**" (Luke 17:5, 6).

It is not the quantity of faith, but the quality, which is important. A grain of mustard seed and a pellet of dust may appear at a distance to be much the same, but the difference between the two is immense, because the one has no life burning at the heart of it, whilst the other contains life as GOD has kindled it. The one thing that you need is to have faith, as small as you like, but faith which has in it the principle of life, namely, faith with GOD in it. That is enough to remove mountains of difficulty, and to uproot sycamine trees and plant them in the sea. That will be sufficient.

The one thing that shows whether or not your faith is of the right quality is whether it is directed towards the right object, which is JESUS CHRIST.

If your faith be infinitesimal, if it be full of changeful emotion, if it be groping in the dark, if it be unable to see closely the face of CHRIST, if for long months you have no conscious enjoyment of the presence of CHRIST, yet, if your faith is reaching out its trembling hands towards CHRIST, that movement proves your faith to be the faith that binds you to CHRIST, and you are a child of GOD.

People say that it is presumptuous to say that you are saved. But is it presumptuous to say that GOD is true? And if GOD says that the soul which believes in CHRIST has eternal life, is it not presumptuous on your part to say that you have not, and refuse to say you have if you believe? That would make GOD a liar. If you want to affirm that GOD is true, then dare to say:

"I am a sinful lost man by nature, but I simply trust in JESUS CHRIST. Therefore I dare to say that I have the eternal life that GOD has promised."

The object of faith, therefore, is not the Bible, but the CHRIST of whom the Bible speaks; not the creed, but the CHRIST of whom the creed is true; not the Cross, but the CHRIST who died on it and lives forevermore.

If today, with much ignorance and imperfection, you are holding to the living CHRIST, the faith that you have towards Him will save you, and I would rather have a little faith in the right object than have any amount of faith in the wrong object.

If a man holds with one hand a life buoy, it will save him; whereas he might hold a block of iron with both hands and he would drown. I have met a good many people in the world who talk about their great faith, and they have had great faith in their great faith; but it is a better thing to have a little faith in CHRIST than to have a great faith in your great faith.

A great many are always looking at their faith until they can see nothing else, like a girl when she is first in love she is always looking at her love and wondering whether it is good enough for her lover, and the more she thinks about it the less she thinks she has. The only way to make her love grow is not to think about it, but to think about the person she loves.

The man who is always muffling up his throat will catch cold. The man who is always wondering whether he is ill or not will make himself ill. And the man who is always worrying about his faith will have no faith left to worry about. The only hope for the soul is to look at

CHRIST!

But CHRIST says, Faith as a grain of mustard seed can move mountains and trees. What did He mean?

The mustard seed grows to a height of some twenty feet, almost a tree. There lies the tiny seed, saying:

"I cannot. I am sure I can never produce a growth of twenty feet."

Ah, wait! Thou wilt say something else presently. Away there is rich, deep soil saying to itself:

"O that I had some means by which to give vent to my slumbering strength, but I have no opportunity of pouring it forth."

Ah! if we could only bring these two together: this tiny seed that sighs its inability, and that soil that is conscious of all ability. If only that seed may abide in that soil, and that soil may pour itself through the tiny aperture of that seed, it will bear much fruit, it will realize its furthest possibilities.

Your faith is like the tiny grain. You think you will never be able to produce a holy and useful life. But the great GOD is there, nearer than words can tell, and if only your soul can come into living union with the eternal GOD, there is nothing that He will not be able to effect by your instrumentality.

There are five processes. First, there must be contact; second, solitude; third, death; fourth, reception; and fifth, individuality.

CONTACT

First, there must be contact.

As long as that seed is isolated from the soil in the barn, on the shelf, or in the sack it abides by itself alone. Only when it is brought into contact with the soil can there be any fruit. And as long as your life is apart from GOD, as long as you are trying to justify yourself, to sanctify yourself, or to work for GOD, the true fruit of your life is impossible.

I do not say you are not a good man, or that you are not trying to do good, but you have not learned yet that apart from GOD you can do nothing; that all the fussy activity of your life running hither and thither, putting out startling advertisements of sermons, preaching brilliant essays, organizing your church shuts GOD out and amounts to nothing. It fills the newspapers, it attracts the attention of men; but it is of wood, hay or stubble, for the only thing which is permanent in a man's life is that of GOD which goes into it. As long as you are apart from GOD, though trying to serve GOD in a strange anomaly, you are missing the true power of your life.

There must be more than ever contact between your soul and GOD a perpetual and unbroken

contact, the life hidden with CHRIST in GOD, as the seed is hidden in the soil.

Get out of sight! This perpetual publicity, this living for the eye of man, this trying to please men, there is too much of you in it all. Be buried in the soil, and there will be some chance that you will do work which will live.

SOLITUDE

Second, there must be solitude. The little seed falls in to the earth to be wholly isolated from its companions, lying there month after month beneath the envelope of frost and snow. In silence and solitude it waits.

This comes to a man very often in a sick chamber, or when people turn against him. How many a man or woman has felt this sense of loneliness with GOD! Sometimes the church has turned from its pastor, and acquaintance or friend has looked shyly upon the soul which has given itself up to GOD.

The little seed drops alone into its tiny grave, and lies in contact with the soil; and so the soul full often, being stripped of every human help and comfort, is brought face to face for the first time in its life with GOD in CHRIST, and the one deep thought of the soul is that henceforth GOD shall fill its vision, and be its Alpha and Omega. When GOD is all in all, there is the promise of marvelous results.

DEATH

Third, there must be death.

Every tree grows out of a grave, and every stalk of wheat springs from a grave.

When you walk over the autumn fields you are walking over a graveyard. Beneath your feet hundreds of tiny grains lie entombed. It might seem as if the grain has sacrificed its power to bless men with bread by lying there in a lonely grave of isolation and seclusion, while the very heart of it is being torn out of it by the insidious work of death and corruption. Ah, that is so often the necessary step and condition of the coming harvest!

Sometimes GOD takes a man into the chamber of death where he sees his little child or beloved wife fading from him. Sometimes He strips a man of his reliance upon his rhetorical eloquence, upon his brilliant gifts, or upon all those habits and associations and reinforcements in his own life upon which he had been accustomed to rely, and he has to die to all.

The story is told of Tauler, the great preacher, that before the days of Luther he filled the cathedral at Strasburg with an enthusiastic audience. Across the hills there came Nicholas, a simple Swiss, who was deeply versed in the Word of GOD. He said to him:

"I want to confess to you."

While listening to the confession of the peasant, Tauler found himself confessing - confessing that after all his life had been a failure. Through the peasant he heard the voice of GOD saying to him:

"Tauler, great preacher, thou must die; thou must die before thou canst truly bear fruit."

He tore himself away and went alone for a year into his monastery cell, and there GOD stripped him of his reliance upon his eloquence and brilliance, and upon his force and power as a man.

At the end of twelve months he came out of that cell and stood again in his pulpit. The church was crowded with the elite of the city. But half way through the sermon he broke utterly down, and the congregation dispersed, saying:

"Ah, our great preacher is spoiled."

A week after he began to speak to a few humble people that gathered still in the church, and to pour out the sermons which are still blessing hundreds and thousands of readers.

In the early part of our life we feel strong, and say that we will prevail by our thinking, our learning, our eloquence, that we are going to carry the world before us; but there comes a time in life when we find that all that doesn't really count, and we bow down before GOD, saying: "Lord GOD, I have done with it."

That moment we lay hold upon resources of divine power that begin to flood our lives. The minister may no longer produce brilliant sermons, but he gives messages he no longer works for GOD, but GOD works through him. That is death to self.

RECEPTIVITY

The fourth stage is very beautiful receptivity.

Away down in its little grave, as the spring comes, there is a gentle knock at the door of the little seed, which has torn its waterproof coat. It is the knock of Mother Nature, which is GOD. She says:

"May I come in?"

The seed, from within, cries; "I have nothing to give thee. I am broken, helpless, torn, and at the end of myself."

But Mother Nature says, "May I come in?"

"Thou canst if thou wilt."

The door is opened, and Mother Nature pours a tiny, trickling stream of her wonderful energy into the perforated, lacerated, broken mustard seed; and the pulse of life is felt within, forcing

down the rootlet into the soil, and forcing up a green spire which makes its way through the heavy clay that conceals it, until at last the little green shoot raises its head above the surface of the field, and looks around and says:

"Perhaps I can after all! If Mother Nature goes on pouring her energy into me, there is nothing that I can't do."

So the root gets deeper, and the spire grows higher. It is not the seed; it is Mother Nature in the seed. It is not you, but GOD in you. It is no longer the fussy, active, restless running hither and thither, imitating this man or that, and searching for all the brilliant things that other people have said and then linking them together into one patchwork and holding up before your people, like Joseph's coat of many colors; but it is GOD who speaks through you. GOD is working in you to will and to do His good pleasure, and you working out all the good works that GOD works in, and energizing, according to the working of Him that energizeth within you mightily.

If you apprehend it, this truth may revolutionize your life as it did mine; because there will never more be anything impossible to you. A mountain in front of you does not matter if GOD works through you; it is moved into the sea. There is simply nothing impossible to the man who has learned the art of being a channel for GOD.

INDIVIDUALITY

The fifth point is individuality.

The mustard seed produces mustard growth; the grain of wheat, wheat growth; the acorn, oak growth.

- George Müller lets GOD into his soul, and Ashley Down is covered with orphan houses.
- Spurgeon lets GOD into his soul, and you have the Tabernacle, and volumes of sermons, and the orphan house, and Pastors' College.
- Moody lets GOD into his soul, and Northfield and Chicago, books distributed through the world, hundreds and thousands of souls won for GOD, are the result of a life that towers over the continents.

CO-OPERATION WITH CHRIST

Did you ever notice that there is scarcely a miracle that JESUS did apart from somebody's faith? CHRIST on earth always needed the seed of somebody's faith through which to produce the growth of miracle. You think the eleventh of John is the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, but I am not sure. I think it is the story of the resurrection of Martha. The Lord JESUS comes to Bethany and finds Lazarus is dead. He must have sympathizing faith through which to work, as a pivot for Him to work on. The disciples are no good, they are too panic stricken. Mary is at home in the house.

So He sets to work on Martha, and is going to discover her nature. Faith lives on promises, so CHRIST put in the promise:

"Your brother shall rise again."

"Oh, yes," says Martha, "of course he will rise at the last day!"

That is what we are always doing we think that wonderful things happen before we are born and after we are dead; that heaven touches the earth at the horizon, but is so far above us where we stand; But CHRIST says to Martha:

"Talk about the last day! Wait for the last day! I AM the resurrection!"

Martha had to think about that for a time.

After a while they got to the grave. CHRIST must have sympathizing faith to work with, and so He said:

"Martha, didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

I suppose she answered Him with a gleam of returning faith, and as soon as He saw that He was able to use her, working with her as His collaborator, so to speak, and Lazarus came forth.

Think no more about your faith, but about CHRIST. Be quiet before GOD. Open your whole soul to Him that He may sweep through your life, and work through you. Everything in life depends on whether we work for GOD, or allow GOD to work through us. Yield then your members as instruments of righteousness unto GOD. Keep your will adjusted with GOD's will, and your heart open to Him, and expect GOD to work through you for the removal of mountains or sycamine trees.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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