

"I have loved you"

While it is becoming increasingly apparent that the night is far spent, it is also gloriously true that salvation is now nearer to us than when we first believed. Soon shall the day dawn and the shadows flee away. Then faith shall give place to sight and we shall know even also as we have been known. Our days of service here will forever be over and our works shall be made manifest.

At the close of the last dispensation, despite much declension, God spoke clearly to His people by the prophets. It is fitting that we recall these precious words which rang down through well-nigh half a millennium of silence, "I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" (Malachi 1:2). How sure His love to Israel had been!

Of old time, their fathers had dwelt beyond the River, and they had served other gods (Joshua 24:2), yet in His sovereignty the God of glory appeared unto Abraham and brought him from heathen obscurity to the land of His appointing, giving to him the promise, "in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed". For long centuries the Almighty cared for them as they were evil entreated in Egypt until the time of the promise drew nigh and then in mighty power He delivered them from bondage. Despite failure in large measure, theirs it was to know divine guidance when the LORD alone did lead them: and when at last the land was conquered, and the house of Israel possessed much of their possessions, they could look back and declare assuredly that His banner over them was love. How true the prophet's words were, "The LORD appeared of old unto me, saying, ... I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee" (Jeremiah 31:3). Yet they said, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?".

Israel failed in their day, and there ever is the danger that we, upon whom the ends of the ages have come, may similarly err, for our hearts too are deceitful above all things and incurable. Which of us has never, at some stage in his Christian experience, heard the voice of the Tempter whispering, "Wherein has He loved you?" Hear again the words of our God, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). If ever we doubt the infinite, eternal love of God, we need only to turn our eyes afresh to Calvary. We shall then surely recall the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though He was rich for our sakes became poor.

He ever dwelt in light unapproachable. With Him was there any variableness or shadow that is cast by turning, yet one day He came into this dark world. Light shone in the darkness and the darkness could not put it out ! Having loved His own that were in the world, He loved them, even in the very hour of darkness, unto the end – to the uttermost.

What wonderful love He displayed when "He descended" ! From all eternity out of ivory palaces stringed instruments had made Him glad, but one glorious day He laid aside the fragrant garments with which He had been eternally bedecked, knowing that so soon from the shadows beyond the old city, Joseph of Arimathaea would pour over His sacred, marred form a mixture of myrrh and aloes.

Surely as we consider again the death of the Cross to which the Saviour became obedient, we shall not repeat Israel's folly, and ask, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" but shall rather cry with the early disciples, "We love, because He first loved us". Such love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit will engender a deep longing in each one of us to sanctify, in word and deed, Christ as Lord of our lives, and motivate us to take the word of the Cross to earth's utmost bounds. When His love constrains us then we shall "preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, ... seeing it is God, that said, "Light shall shine out of darkness, who shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:5-6).

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