

‘Get Thee Behind Me, Satan’

It seems the consensus of the disciples concerning the Saviour’s true identity as Messiah, or Christ, the Anointed One, supplied an occasion for the Lord to speak clearly for the first time about His suffering, death and resurrection. But Peter is not happy. He presumes to rebuke the Lord for this declaration, and the Lord replies to His friend sharply, rebuking in turn the very one who recently was called ‘blessed’ of God for the gospel revelations given to him. This forms the substance of our thoughts in this week’s sermon.

‘For this cause came I’

This short passage reveals much to us about the Lord’s commitment and dedication to the work of our salvation. How He loved us! How eagerly He anticipated His own suffering and death for the glory that should follow. Our Saviour came into the world to take our place, be our Substitute, shed His blood for our deliverance, and ransom us from the power of sin and death. It was time for this great work of redemption to be openly declared to the disciples and discussed, so the Lord ‘began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again’.

Peter contradicts his Lord

But Peter’s reaction was contrary. He was opposed to such talk and told Jesus so. He took the Master aside and explained with some warmth that Jesus was wrong and nothing of the sort would happen. Matthew in a parallel passage provides us with Peter’s words saying, ‘Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee’. No doubt Peter’s intentions were good and seemed in his own view appropriate to the moment. After all, the Messiah they all expected would not be dying, He would be living, and reigning, and vanquishing His foes. If Jesus was the Messiah, as they all believed Him to be, Peter and the others had a lot to gain from the Lord’s ascendancy; so what’s all this talk of suffering and death!

A blessing and a reproof

Jesus’ rebuke of Peter was swift. It was also public and forceful; ‘Get thee behind me, Satan’. The only other use of this phrase was against the devil during Jesus’ wilderness temptation, yet here it was levelled at a believer, a disciple and follower of the Lord. Peter had only just been blessed with a divine revelation from God and a promise from the Saviour of a role of leadership and authority in the Kingdom of God. What a difference in a short time.

A lesson to learn

There is in the Lord’s upbraiding of Peter a strong instructive element in line with the Master’s purpose of preparing these men for their apostolic role. The Lord is neither angry nor annoyed, but He is firm and stern in His reprimand. There are things that be of God, and things that be of men, and by his words Peter revealed his affections were not prompted by heavenly desires but by worldly motives.

Merely flesh at best

This shows us how Peter, so highly blessed of God, at once reverted back to fleshy ambition and thinking when spiritual truth clashed with his human reasoning. How fickle we are as men and women. How prone we are to lose our sight of heavenly truth when the scent of worldly success catches our attention. Like Peter, we too confirm the truth of the Lord’s parable of the sower; heart-sown blessings are quickly snatched away when we do not savour the things of God.

Savoury delights

Brothers and sisters, what do we savour? What are its delights and gratifies our heart? Is it the gospel? Is it things that be of God and things that be of heaven? Is it things of a spiritual nature and things that are eternal? Our Lord savoured the things of God. He was motivated by covenant purpose; love for His people, the accomplishment of their salvation. He longed to see His lost sheep brought to salvation and reconciled to God by the things that He suffered. This is savouring the things of God.

A humbling experience

The Lord would have no interference in His pathway to the cross. ‘Get thee behind me, Satan’, puts the distractions of

the world in their proper place and confines out of sight what inhibits us from focussing on the things of value and the things of God. Sometimes a sharp rebuke from the Lord is just the jolt we need to shake our self-contentment and reset our attention on higher things.