

The Expediency of the Spirit's Coming

Andrew Murray:

‘I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come ; but if I go, I will send Him unto YOU.’-JOHN 16: 7.

As our Lord is leaving this world, He promises the disciples here that His departure will be their gain ; the Comforter will take His place, and be to them far better than He ever had been or could be in His bodily presence. This very specially in two aspects. His intercourse with them had never been unbroken, but liable to interruption; now it would even be broken off by death, and they would see Him no more. The Spirit would abide with them for ever. His own intercourse had been very much external, and, in consequence of this, had not resulted in what might have been expected. The Spirit would be in them; His coming would be as an Indwelling Presence, in the power of which they should have Jesus too in them as their Life and their Strength.

During the life of our Lord on earth, each of His disciples was dealt with by Him in accordance with his peculiar character, and the special circumstances in which he might be placed. The intercourse was an intensely personal one: in every thing He proved that He knew His sheep by name. For each there was a thoughtfulness and a wisdom that met just what was required. Would the Spirit supply this need too, and give back that tenderness of personal interest and that special individual dealing which had made the guidance of Jesus so precious ? We cannot doubt it. All that Christ had been to them, the Spirit was to restore in greater power, and in a blessedness that should know no break. They were to be far happier and safer and stronger with Jesus in heaven, than they ever could have been with Him on earth. This, the chief beauty and blessedness of their discipleship of such a Master, that He was so wise and patient to give to each one just what he needed and to make each one feel that he had in Him his best friend, could never be left out. The indwelling of the Spirit was meant to restore Christ's most personal intercourse and guidance, His direct personal friendship.

It is to many a matter of great difficulty to conceive of this or to believe it; much less do they experience it. The thought of Christ walking with men on earth, living and guiding them, is so clear; the thought of a Spirit hiding Himself within us, and speaking, not in distinct thoughts, but only in the secret depths of the life, makes His guidance so much more difficult.

And yet just what constitutes the greater difficulty of the new, the spiritual intercourse and guidance, is what gives it its greater worth and blessedness. It is the same principle we see in daily life: difficulty calls out the powers, strengthens the will, develops character, and makes the man. In a child's first lessons he has to be helped and encouraged ; as he goes on to what is more difficult, the teacher leaves him to his own resources. A youth leaves his parents' roof to have the principles that have been instilled tested and strengthened. In each case it is expedient that the outward presence and help be withdrawn, and the soul be thrown upon itself to apply and assimilate the lessons it had been taught. God wants to educate us, indeed, to a perfect manhood, not ruled by an outward law, but by the inner life. As long as Jesus was with the disciples on earth, He had to work from without inward, and yet could never effectually reach or master the inmost parts. When He went away He sent the Spirit to be in them, that now their growth might be from within outward. Taking possession first by His Spirit of the inmost secret recesses of their being, He would have them, in the voluntary consent and surrender to His inspiration and guidance, personally become what He Himself is, through His Spirit in them. So they would have the framing of their life, the forming of their character, in their own hands, in the power of the Divine Spirit, who really had become their spirit. So they would grow up to that true self-standingness, that true independence of the outward, in which they should become like Himself, a true, separate person, having life in himself, and yet only living in the Father.

As long as the Christian only asks what is easy and pleasant, he will never understand that it is expedient, really better for us, that Christ should not be on earth. But as soon as the thoughts of difficulty and sacrifice are set aside, in the honest desire to become a truly God-like man, bearing the full image of the first-born Son, and in all things living well pleasing to the Father, the thought of Jesus' departure that His Spirit may now become our very own, and we be exercised and disciplined in the life of faith, will be welcomed with gladness and gratitude. If to follow the leading of the Spirit, and experience the personal friendship and guidance of Jesus in it, be a much more difficult and dangerous path than it would have been to follow Him on earth, we must remember the privilege we enjoy, the nobility we attain, the intimacy of fellowship with God we enter into, - all these are infinitely greater. To have the Holy Spirit of God coming through the human nature of our Lord, entering, into our spirits, identifying Himself with us, and becoming our very own just as He was the Spirit of Christ Jesus on earth, surely this is a blessedness worth any sacrifice, for it is the beginning of the indwelling of God Himself.

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But to see that it is such a privilege and to desire it very earnestly does not remove the difficulty. And so the question comes again: the intercourse of Jesus with His disciples on earth, so condescending in its tenderness, so particular and minute in its interest, so consciously personal in its love, how can this be ours in the same degree now that He is absent, and the Spirit is to be our guide? The first answer here, is, as through the whole Christian life, by faith. With Jesus on earth, the disciples, when once they had believed, walked by sight, We walk by faith. In faith, we must accept and rejoice in the word of Jesus: 'It is expedient for you that I go away.' We must take time distinctly to believe it, to approve of it, to rejoice that He is gone to the Father. We must learn to thank and praise Him that He has called us to this life in the Spirit. We must believe that in this gift of the Spirit the presence and intercourse of our Lord are fully secured to us most certainly and effectually. It may indeed be in a way we do not yet understand, because we have so little believed and rejoiced in the gift of the Holy Spirit. But faith must believe and praise for what it does not yet understand; let us believe assuredly and joyfully that the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Himself through Him, will teach us how the intercourse and guidance are to be enjoyed.

Will teach us. Beware of misunderstanding these words. We always connect teaching with thoughts. We want the Spirit to suggest to us certain conceptions of how Jesus will be with us and in us. And this is not what He does. The Spirit does not dwell in the mind, but in the life. Not in what we know, but in what we are does the Spirit begin His work. Do not let us seek or expect at once a clear apprehension, a new insight, into this or any Divine truth. Knowledge, thought, feeling, action, all this is a part of that external religion which the external presence of Jesus had also wrought in the disciples. The Spirit was now to come, and, deeper down than all these, He was to be the Hidden Presence of Jesus within the depths of their personality. The Divine Life was in a newness of power to become their life. And the teaching of the Spirit would begin, not in word or thought, but in Power. In the Power of a Life working in them secretly, but with Divine energy; in the Power of a Faith that rejoiced that Jesus was really near, was really taking charge of the whole life and every circumstance of it; the Spirit would inspire them with the faith of the Indwelling Jesus. This would be the beginning and the blessedness of His teaching. They would have the Life of Jesus within them, and they would by faith know that it was Jesus: their faith would be at once cause and effect of the Presence of the Lord in the Spirit.

It is by such a faith--a faith which the Spirit breathes, which comes from His being and living in us--that the Presence of Jesus is to be as real and all-sufficient as when He was on earth. But why then is it that believers who have the Spirit do not experience it more consciously and fully! The answer is very simple: they know and honour the Spirit who is in them so little. They have much faith in Jesus who died, or who reigns in heaven, but little faith in Jesus who dwells in them by His Spirit. It is this we need: faith in Jesus as the fulfiller of the promise, 'He that believeth in me, rivers of living water shall flow out of him.' We must believe that the Holy Spirit is within us as the Presence of our Lord Jesus. And we must not only believe this with the faith of the understanding as it seeks to persuade itself of the truth of what Christ says. We must believe with the heart, a heart in which the Holy Spirit dwells. The whole gift of the Spirit, the whole teaching of Jesus concerning the Spirit, is to enforce the word: 'The Kingdom of God is within you.' If we would have the true faith of the heart, let us turn inward, and very gently and humbly yield to the Holy Spirit to do His work in us.

To receive this teaching and this faith, which standeth in the Life and Power of the Spirit, let us above all fear that which hinders Him most, -- will and the wisdom of man. We are still surrounded by a life of self, of the flesh; in the service of God, even in the effort to exercise faith, it is ever putting itself forward, and putting forth its strength. Every thought, not only every evil thought, but every thought, however good, in which our mind runs before the Spirit, must be brought into captivity. Let us lay our own will and our own wisdom captive at the feet of Jesus, and wait in faith and holy stillness of soul there. The deep, consciousness will grow strong that the Spirit is within us, and that His Divine Life is living and growing within us. As we thus honour Him, and give up to Him, as we bring our fleshly activity into subjection and wait on Him, He will not put us to shame, but do His work within us. He will strengthen our inner life; He will quicken our faith; He will reveal Jesus; and we shall, step by step, learn that the Presence and Personal Intercourse and Guidance of Jesus are ours as clearly and sweetly, yea, more truly and mightily, than if He were with us on earth.'

Blessed Lord Jesus! I do rejoice that Thou art no longer here on earth. I do bless Thee that in a fellowship more real, more near, more tender, more effectual than if Thou wert still here on earth, Thou dost manifest Thyself to Thy disciples. I do bless Thee that Thy Holy Spirit dwells within me, and gives me to know what that fellowship is, and what the realness of Thy holy indwelling.

Most Holy Lord! forgive that I have not known Thy Spirit sooner and better, that I have not praised and loved Thee aright for this most wonderful gift of Thine and the Father's love. And do teach me in the fulness of faith to believe in Thee, from whom, day by day, the fresh anointing flows and fills the life.

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And hear me, Lord, when I cry to Thee on behalf of so many of Thy redeemed ones, who do not yet even see what it is to give up and lose the mixed life after the flesh, to receive in its stead the life that is in the power of the Spirit. With many of Thy saints, I do beseech Thee, oh, grant that the Church may be wakened to know how the one mark of her election, the one secret of her enjoyment of Thy Presence, the one power for fulfilling her calling, is that each believer be led to know that the Spirit dwelleth within him, and that the abiding Presence of his Lord with him as Keeper, and Guide, and Friend is indeed his sure portion. Grant it, Lord, for Thy name's sake. Amen.