

Thoughts of Jesus

The Gentle Jesus

WE HAVE talked much about the majesty of the Lord, His miraculous power, His triumph over the tomb. We like to think of Him as He rebuked the waves and commanded the winds to be still, and again as He called forth Lazarus from the tomb, or when He denounced the Pharisees, or drove the merchants from the Temple courts. We feel that at such times He revealed His full stature. But are we right about that?

Isaiah portrays Jesus in different terms. This is what he says: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delights. . . . He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth." Isaiah 42:1-4.

This is not a picture of a spectacular personality, one who moved about to be seen of men, or to curry favor with the great of earth. He would shun fame and praise. His eye would be upon the weak and helpless. And even the outcast would feel the persistent ministrations of One who would not be discouraged in His efforts to bless the needy.

Again the prophet said of Him, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Isaiah 40:11.

How gently the Lord dealt with the wayward Mary. How patient He was with impetuous Peter, intolerant James and John, the sons of thunder, and yes, the treacherous Judas. He knew how to discriminate between the weak, the proud, the arrogant, the deceptive, and the sincere ones. His touch was gentle, except on special occasions when He had to rebuke the hardened hypocrites. Even then, we are told, "tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes." - *The Desire of Ages*, page 353.

The gentleness of Jesus is beautifully illustrated in the phrase "the smoking flax shall he not quench." He turns not aside when His overtures are first rejected. He comes again and again to awaken one's lagging interest in spiritual things.

Many a time in the Orient I have watched while the dying embers of a charcoal fire were fanned into flame. This is a delicate task. One must be careful not to scatter the coals, for they must gather warmth from those nearest them. And one must not be in a hurry. Impatience and rough handling may destroy whatever spark is left in the embers.

How delicate is the task of dealing with erring souls: Listen to Jesus as He says to the wayward woman, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." John 8:11. And as the masses followed Him mostly out of curiosity, and desire, perhaps, for some material gain, leaving Him no time for rest, it is said of Him that when He saw the multitude He "was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd." Mark 6:34.

David, writing of Christ in the immortal twenty-third psalm, presents this same picture of the Shepherd of Bethlehem. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters.... I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. . . . Thou anoints my head with oil; my cup runs over."

Here we find the tender solicitation and attention of a shepherd beautifully portrayed. There is guidance but not rebuke. Even the rod in his hand brings comfort. The wanderer is retrieved and given something

more precious than the thing he sought. The shepherd is near in sickness or in want. His goodness and mercy follow his charges all their days.

Paul tells us that it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance, and not His denunciations. (Romans 2:4.) We need to think of Jesus in this light and seek to emulate this outstanding virtue of His character.

All too often those who are zealous for the Lord show little of this gentle touch. It is too easy for one who has strong convictions in religious belief to strike sledge-hammer blows when he needs to use the delicate touch of the watchmaker. We are told: "With tender compassion should brother deal with brother. Delicately should he deal with feelings. It is the nicest and most important work that ever yet was done to touch the wrongs of another."

To win a soul for Christ is not a project that one dare begin thoughtlessly. The method of approach is as important as the message to be delivered. There must be a keen sense of discrimination. All cannot be dealt with alike. Many a man has stopped his ears to the truth because he felt that he had been misjudged or that his sensibilities had been disregarded. Heavy dogmatic strokes, condemnatory words, dire warnings, and tactless aggressiveness turn many a sensitive, sincere soul away.

This is all true in winning men to Christ. It is likewise true in our seeking to keep them in the Christian way. How often someone will rise in the church and, with careless denunciations, endeavor to bring about some needed reform. This is the very thing that will hinder the work of the Spirit of God on hearts sorely in need of His blessed ministrations.

"Whenever you see or hear something that needs to be corrected, seek the Lord for wisdom and grace, that in trying to be faithful you may not be severe. It is always humiliating to have one's errors pointed out. Do not make the experience more bitter by needless censure. Unkind criticism brings discouragement, making life sunless and unhappy.

"My brethren, prevail by love rather than by severity. When one at fault becomes conscious of his error, be careful not to destroy his self-respect. Do not seek to bruise and wound, but rather to bind up and heal." Gospel Workers, page 496.

Would you be great in the eyes of God? Great in the work of reclaiming men and women from the error of their ways? Then consider this word of David written in a day of triumph over his enemies: "Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation; and thy gentleness hath made me great." 2 Samuel 22:36.