

THE SPIRITUAL VALUE OF DIVINE OMNISCIENCE

(An Address on Psalm cxxxix. 1—7 ; 23, 24 ;
Job xi. 3—5 ; xlii. 1—6 ; John xxi. 15—17)

A SUBJECT of scripture, very important in the spiritual life, is the constant necessity of recognising God's omniscience of oneself, personally, individually. This must be of the utmost importance to a life of godliness because it runs throughout the whole of scripture. We may say that the personal knowledge and continual scrutiny of the individual soul by God Himself is a truth inseparable from both his redemption and his communion, and from a walk consistent therewith.

I do not speak now of our own knowledge of God. This is of practical importance also, but I am speaking of God's knowledge of us, of the perfect way in which God investigates the hidden depths within us, laying bare our secret motives, and of our own consciousness that God's eyes in heaven are ever looking upon us, and not only upon our outward appearance, which man also sees, but upon the heart which man does not see. The man whose heart is thus kept right before the heart-knowing God is the man who receives the maximum of blessing from God, and who communicates to others the maximum share of his own blessing.

The soul and the heart and the mind must be right before our Omniscient God, and this audience will surely agree with me that this attitude is necessary for a walk of faith and godliness. How is it with you, my brother, my sister ? We all need to know how we each stand before God in the light of His knowledge of us, and how we each stand in our relationships to one another in the assembly of God. Nothing we do can be acceptable to God but that which is first approved of Him, and therefore it is of the utmost importance that each

one of us should open our hearts before God to be searched by Him ; and this beautiful and well-known Psalm brings before us the subject of divine examination.

The psalmist begins with the confession that Jehovah had already searched him and known him, acknowledging what He had found in him. Jehovah had seen David in the wilderness, facing the lion and the bear with the confidence of a young man, yet relying, not on his own strength and skill, but on Jehovah Who was above him and with him. David went boldly forward to meet the lion and the bear in the full knowledge of what God was to him, a shepherd lad in the wilderness. Then, in that lonely place, Jehovah had searched him and had known him and had found him a stripling who could trust his God with all his heart in the face of great odds when there was no human arm to help nor eye to see.

Afterwards, we may trace the son of Jesse on the mountains of Judea, fleeing from Saul, his enemy ; we may trace him in dark passages of his life, as when he feigned to be a madman in the Philistine city ; and we may also see him in circumstances not to be mentioned in an audience like this ; but in this Psalm David lifts up his eyes, and says, " O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me . . . and art acquainted with all my ways." He is consciously before the Lord, rejoicing in His full knowledge of himself and his ways, and making it the theme of his song to Jehovah. To David, this intimate inspection was a matter for praise to God, the omniscient and the omnipotent One, Who had searched him and known him.

Can we say what David did ? We learned, perhaps in the Sunday School, the fact that God has a perfect knowledge of us and of all things, but it is another thing to be alone with God in the darkness of the night, and to be conscious that the eyes of God are upon us, that even then He is searching the heart, dividing asunder the soul and the spirit. There in the stillness of the night-shadows the all-seeing eyes of God are felt to be upon us, and we are consciously unveiled before Him.

The lesson that at such times we learn under God's eyes of our own unworthiness and weakness becomes a secret means of power and peace and joy. Nothing in the world is like learning that our feebleness on earth is yoked with almighty power on high. We know then that God's infinite heart of love is ever round about us, and that if no one but God be

for us, we can stand with the fullest courage and confidence in the face of the whole world arrayed against us.

The knowledge of God's omniscience brings us to this full assurance of faith. It is a great gain to the spiritual life to have this experience for oneself, and it is the burden upon my spirit to-night to tell you that the power needed by every one of us, the youngest and the oldest, in order to walk with God lies in being absolutely sure of our communion by the Holy Spirit with God the Father and with His Son ; for we walk in the light even as God is in the light, where there is no darkness at all, and where everything is exposed to that light.

The psalmist stated the fact : Jehovah has " searched me and known me." It was to him an event of the past. We know that God does search and know persons everywhere without their asking Him, and He does so unawares to themselves. The thoughtless multitudes that throng our streets are all known to God, individually, just as fully as every believer is known by Him. But the believer knows that God knows him, and this makes all the difference. The child of God welcomes such a knowledge ; he knows it is good for him. Therefore, David, at the conclusion of this psalm, desired further heart-searching by God ; he had learned the value of it for his soul.

David's earnest outcry to God is " Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me, and know my thoughts." The fact is, of course, that God knows all about me at all times, whether I am sleeping or waking, whether I am conscious that His eyes are upon me or not. But when I apprehend the truth of God's omniscience in the way that the psalmist had done, I shall, like him, desire to walk in the consciousness of it continually. My heart will cry out to God that day by day I may ever walk with the light of His face shining upon me. Then I shall have the happy assurance, in all I do and say, that God Himself is before me and round about me every step of the way I am taking.

Beloved friends, do not let us imagine that the practical importance of this truth of our psalm is now passed away through the lapse of time since David's day, or is even diminished in value. It is still essential for the personal piety of the individual soul. Each one of us must abide in touch with God. Thousands of my brethren on the right

hand and the left may fall or fail, but my own personal link with Him remains intact. The blessing of divine inspection and communion is mine, and exists between my own soul and God to be realised by faith.

If the individual soul is right before God in this respect, the effect for good will be found in the assembly also. Assemblies are made up of units, and so far as the units are walking in truth and grace before the Lord, and are guided by the Holy Spirit, so far there will be corporate worship in spirit to God and acceptable personal service to His name.

The theme of this psalm runs throughout scripture, and is distinctly set forth in many places by both example and precept. In the Old Testament, for instance, we read of one man who was selected to be a notable example for all time of God's searching ways ; Job was that man. God's searchlight was directed upon him in a special manner for the good of his soul. A whole book of the Bible is occupied with the dealings of God with this one man. Job's history shows the particular interest God takes in one man's piety.

Simon Peter in the New Testament is a case analogous to Job. His history is not, like that of Job, confined to a single book of the Bible ; but if you trace the details given in the Gospels, you will observe the personal dealings of God in our Lord Jesus Christ with that man, bringing out most unexpectedly what was in his heart, so that now even the world may know what was concealed there.

As with Job, so with Peter, they both stand in the scripture naked and opened before our eyes. They were men of like passions with ourselves, and God has put them there as examples, so that we may know, not from sad and bitter experiences of our own, but by the recorded experiences of Job and Peter what is in my heart and in yours. Thus we may learn the truth about our nature without enduring a similar course of discipline.

Each of the two narratives has its distinct features. The history of the searching of Job's heart ended with his confession to the Lord, " Behold, I am vile." But the history of Simon Peter revealed not only the sin that was lurking in his heart, unknown and undreamt of by him as by Job, but in the end the deep love that Peter had for the Lord was also revealed under the Master's own questioning.

Let us now look very briefly at one or two points in the histories of these two men. They will teach us what are the definite heart-searchings that we also need for the profit of our souls.

First of all, let me make a remark which may prevent any misunderstanding. Heart-searching may take place in two ways. I may search my own heart, or God may search my heart. If I search my heart myself, I shall end in spiritual failure, and may even become a proud Pharisee. A man who searches his own heart in a light of his own kindling is exposed to the subtle deceitfulness of his own heart.

Your own heart is deceitful above all things. It will deceive you, and cause you to believe everything that is good about yourself, even the very reverse of what is true. Some persons profess to search their own hearts, and are bold enough to say in public, "I have not sinned for (perhaps) three months." They have been searching their hearts for sin without knowing what sin is according to scripture. The light of God is not shining upon their hearts, and they do not know the truth about themselves. The Lord said, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. vi. 23). "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John i. 8).

But let God have to do with my heart, and then I shall learn the real truth about it. Then, too, great blessing will be mine. This was the experience of Job. The patriarch Job did not belong to the chosen people of Israel, the seed of Abraham. He lived, however, in those early days, and was contemporary probably with Isaac. Though he was not in the line of faith and promise marked out in scripture, he was a man who had the knowledge of the true God and who lived a perfect and upright life among men. He sought to do what was right and to please God in the doing of it, and in this task he was successful to an exceptional degree.

Job's character and ways were so exceptional that they were the subject of conversation in heaven. God looked down upon him with approval. Satan also saw the patriarch, and sought to destroy him. The more pious a man is, the more determined the enemy is to overcome him if he possibly can. And Satan's enmity is shown in a striking manner in Job's case.

You know Job's remarkable history. The beginning of it shows that he was overwhelmed with sorrow ; all his possessions were torn from him in a day, with the loss of his family also. Yet Satan had to own, and all the angels of heaven, that Job in the face of this flood of calamities exhibited a patience that was marvellous. It is written, " In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." And the patience of Job has passed into a proverb for all time.

Who else would have stood, like Job, unmoved, staunch, amid such fiery trials ? The most cherished objects of his heart were snatched from him, he himself became a mass of festering sores, but Job meekly bowed his head before God. The wife of his bosom had no more to say to him than to tell him to curse God and die. He had not a friend in the world, for what sort of friends were those three who came in their critical fashion, sitting before him in silence until they accused him of secret sin ?

What an experience this was for a perfect and upright man to endure ! What was the object of it ? Why did all these troubles come upon him ? By means of them God was about to teach Job a most difficult lesson. The very fact of his habitual sincerity and integrity was a stumbling-block in the way of his obtaining real happiness and the deepest of joys before God.

Whilst it was true of Job that he was prepared to trust God though He should slay him, and that he clung to God as the One in Whom he must continue to trust, still Job could not see why all these afflictions had come upon him. According to his own conscience, he had done nothing wrong. With all his heart, he had sought to please God and to do what was right and good. Now all his possessions were suddenly taken from him, even his health ; why had such severe trials come ? As Job considered his ways, he saw nothing wrong to confess before God, nothing to account for his misery.

But God did not leave the patriarch in this state of self-satisfaction. God had purposes of further blessing for him, even while he was on earth. But before this blessing was bestowed, Job must learn something about himself ; what was this ? An evil disposition was secreted within him, beyond his own gaze as yet, but open to the eyes of God.

What in his heart was so abominable in the eyes of God ?

Job was trusting in his own integrity. He said, "I mean to hold fast to my own righteousness, and cling to what I have done and what I have been. Who can find fault with me? I have been a father to the poor, the widows have been made to rejoice by me, and the orphans bless me. I have continually done good to the needy all around me. Now all I have is taken away, and these great troubles have come upon me. Yet I have done nothing wrong." This was pride in self.

But the omniscient God looked into Job's heart, and He saw there also a secret disbelief in Himself. His heart, though outwardly patient, was really doubting the wisdom and goodness of God in sending these sorrowful things upon him. The patriarch, therefore, was inwardly cherishing false thoughts about God and about himself also. He must learn how wrong he was.

Job said, as many persons in the world to-day are saying, Why is it that so many terrible things are allowed to happen to some men? Why is there so much suffering and misery? and why is it that the best people are often the greatest sufferers? Not merely the "down-and-outs," who have squandered their very lives in riot and pleasure, but good persons, pious people, servants of God, are full of afflictions. Many do not know even a day's freedom from anxiety and pain.

The question arises continually now as then, How and why is there in the world so much grief and sorrow? Such thoughts breed discontent and distrust. Some here to-night perhaps find such misgivings creeping into their souls like poisonous serpents. They think within themselves, Surely God does not know the burdens of the human heart. If God is love, why are the righteous afflicted, and why do the innocent suffer? Such questionings spring from a secret distrust of God.

By the searchings of His discipline, God showed that such doubts were dwelling deep in Job's heart. Eventually God Himself spoke to the afflicted man, not in the soft, tender tones we hear in the New Testament (the time had not yet come for that), but Jehovah spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, not once only, but twice, and with a thunderous voice, telling of His power, His majesty, His providence. He spread out before Job the evidences of His sovereign wisdom and might in creation.

Had Job been thinking that God did not consider his welfare? What little creature was there, or what mighty one, the leviathan of the water-floods, or the sparrow on the house-top, for which Jehovah did not care? He cared for every creature of His in its need; and would not God care for him, the highest creature on earth, who had also a life beyond the grave?

By the words of the Almighty to him, Job's conscience was struck as with a thunderbolt, and he was convicted of his sin. In self-accusation, he said, "I have distrusted Him, the omnipotent One, the omniscient One. I have been arguing with God Who searches the heart, and filling my mouth with idle words in His presence." Job felt his sinfulness in justifying himself and discrediting God. He confessed his sin, saying, "Behold, I am vile." He repented in dust and ashes (xlii. 6). Of what did he repent? His outward failure, and his inward distrust of God.

I am anxious to make clear this error into which Job fell, because it is easy for us also to slip into unworthy doubts of God. Mistrust creeps unsuspectedly into our hearts, our homes, and our assemblies. Oftentimes we are apt to think that we are impoverished like Job, that spiritually we have lost everything, that the very foundation of truth is undermined, and that the whole edifice of the Christian profession is about to collapse.

It may be that some man whom we have trusted and believed in with all our heart as a pillar in the church has disappointed us and disappeared. We feel, perhaps, that in spiritual matters we cannot trust anyone any more. Our hearts are like Job's full of feelings of doubt and distrust of God. Let each one ask, Is this not true in my case?

There are around us many examples and forms of the prevailing spirit of doubt. Some have their doubts about this Book of God, the Bible. Take a case. Young men in the City offices come out into the streets to look at the bookshops. Many of the books displayed are attractive in appearance and cheap in price. But they are written to suggest that the Bible is but a myth, full of old-world legends, containing nothing really trustworthy in fact, nor of real ethical value to modern man. By this means, doubt is instilled into the minds of the readers, until they, too, lose all trust in their Bible and their

Saviour. In this manner doubt in divine things is being rapidly propagated in our day.

It is a serious feature of the times that the element of distrust in the wisdom and love of God is everywhere around us, in the very air, so to speak. All are more or less in danger of contamination, but the person who is wrapped up in himself and his own mental and moral attainments, who thinks himself somebody and fully qualified to judge for himself, even in divine things, is perhaps in the greatest danger of imbibing this scepticism that destroys the soul. Such a one may be just out of the higher schools, come out of his examinations with flying colours, and is at the top of the educational tree. When he is directed to the Bible, he will not receive it as the word of God. He learned the scriptures in his nursery days, but now he refuses it as the voice of God to his soul. He is a victim of the rationalistic unbelief that poisons the faith for so many to-day, and pride of intellect has caused his destruction.

As we profess belief in God, for us to doubt God is a "vile" thing. Such suspicion is prompted by the devil, tempting our old nature. Doubt of the love and wisdom of God in Christ was the very sin that crucified the Lord of glory. Let us beware of it. I may be outwardly a pious man, loving God, and may be a means of blessing to others; but if there is in my soul a secret want of confidence in God, I have something within me which Job described as filthy and vile.

If then I am in fault like Job, am I prepared like Job to confess my fault? To allow doubt and misgiving to creep into our hearts is an affront to God Who has saved us, sending His Son to die for us. God did not end His dealings with Job until he confessed this sin. But when he acknowledged his sin, he was blessed sevenfold more than he had been at the beginning.

Here then is the highroad to increased blessing from God—confession of sin, of my own sin, not of someone's else's. Are you prepared to do this, owning your sin to God, not to others sinful like yourself? With all frankness, Job said, "Behold I am vile. I take my place in dust and ashes before Thee, not because of my boils, but because of my sin." God had searched and tried Job, and shown him the wicked way that was in him.

Let us now look at Simon Peter for a little. Peter was in a

different atmosphere from Job, because then God had come down to earth in the person of His Son, and in the pages of the Gospels is seen that pathway upon which and from which heavenly light shone with never a shadow. Wherever Jesus went on earth, there was the presence of God. And when in that presence, a man confessed himself to be what he truly was. The Light of the world revealed to him his right place.

When a man had wrong thoughts about the Lord Jesus, he was never right about himself; but if he was right about Christ, he was right, or soon became right, about everything else as well as himself. We shall see this exemplified in the history of Simon.

I daresay you have been a little puzzled at that incident in the life of Simon Peter, when the Lord, in His preaching beside the lake of Galilee, asked him for the loan of his boat. Peter pushed out upon the lake, and the Lord, sitting in the boat, taught the people as they were gathered on the seashore. Then, at the close, the Lord said to Peter, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught" (Luke v. 1-11).

Peter had been listening to the gospel of the coming kingdom, to the Lord's sweet and wonderful words about heavenly love and about God's purposes of blessing for the earth, and about the fulfilment of the prophecies of old. He felt that Jesus knew all about these doctrines, but now He spoke about fishes, a draught of fishes! Who was Jesus to speak about catching fish?

In his surprise and incredulity, he said, "Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing! nevertheless at Thy word *I* will let down *the net*." Now the Lord had said to him, "Let down your *nets*, all the nets you have." But Peter was dubious, and thought, "We shall not catch many, if any, fish; I will let down one net only; that will be sufficient." Accordingly, he let down the net, and a great multitude of fishes were enclosed, so many that it broke. They drew the fish into the boat, which soon was filling fast, and sinking.

But Simon forgot the abundance of the fish. Fisherman though he was, he did not first attend to the catch. His uppermost thought was how he had wronged the Lord, and doubted His love and wisdom. It had never crossed his mind

that the Lord all the time knew that he had spent the previous night in useless labour. He had never thought that the Lord knew where the fish were and was able to bring them to the side of the boat. In his heart he had doubted and misjudged Him.

Simon fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." This confession corresponds with the penitent language of Job, "Behold, I am vile." Simon found himself in the presence of the Lord Jesus exercising His authority over the creatures of the sea, and felt in his heart that he had not put his trust in Him. He had not believed that the Lord could do such a marvellous thing.

Have you ever found yourself doubting the Lord as Peter did? Yet the Lord has been good to you, and He has not answered to your need, according to your little faith, but according to the great love of His own heart. He has made His bounty to overflow towards you. Then, when you saw His goodness to you, did you not feel how sinful you were to have doubted such a loving Master?

This experience was the beginning of Simon Peter's training ; not exactly the very beginning, because Simon had met the Lord before, when the Lord told him he should have a new name, Cephas or Peter, a stone. But it was the beginning of the moral training, which fitted him to be, as the Lord said, a fisher of men. God sends saved sinners to preach the gospel to unsaved sinners. This is His way. Simon Peter who learned something of the iniquity of his own heart was the one who afterwards magnified the grace of the Saviour before his guilty nation.

Simon Peter had to learn another important lesson on the sea, but first of all the Lord taught him that He, the Lord, could command even the denizens of the deep, and they obeyed His will. How needful that every servant should know the power of his Master !

Another time, when a storm was raging, the disciples were at their wits' end, for everything seemed to be against them. Then they saw Jesus walking on the angry waves, and coming to them. At once Peter's heart went out to the Lord he loved. He thought, "The Lord is coming over the waves to us in our distress. I would like to be the first to meet Him.

I cannot wait for Him to come up to the boat. I must go to Him."

Then Peter said, " Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water." His fellow-disciples may have thought him mad, but Peter trusted himself fully to the One Who had before proved Himself to be the Lord of the sea. The Lord replied, " Come," and Peter stepped out of the boat and walked on the water, just as if he was on dry land (Matt. xiv. 25-33).

For those in the boat this work of faith was a great testimony to the power of the Lord Jesus as Simon Peter walked to Him on the stormy sea. He walked well and firmly so long as his eye was on the Lord. But when he saw the waves furious and threatening, he began to sink ; and faith lost its victory.

So the divine searchlight shone once more into Simon Peter's heart to show him what was hidden there. Something there was wrong, or he would not have sunk. In the presence of the Lord on the waves he learned that his faith, strong as it was to bring him out of the boat to walk on the sea, was not strong enough to keep him there, contrary to nature.

Peter was taught that he must believe not only at first, but all the time. True faith is continuous, not intermittent. Simon Peter left the boat and walked on the water well, like his Master, so long as his eye of faith was on Christ, but when he began to consider the waves he began to sink.

Is not our experience similar to that of Peter ? We, too, have left our brethren, and gone out upon the sea to the Lord Jesus. The sea has no landmarks, no defined territories ; it is not firm and settled and organised by man, which is the character of land. The pathway on the sea is no place for a man in the flesh. Only faith can walk where everything yields to the feet of the natural man.

Some of us have left human organisations and gone out at the bidding of the Lord, to that place and condition of things amongst God's people where simple faith triumphs, but where doubt discourages and destroys. So long as faith looks continuously upon the Lord Jesus Christ, all things are right and happy, and the name of the Lord is magnified in us. We are walking upon the waves, and the Lord is with us.

If, however, we turn from Him and look around upon

empty seats, and think of the persons who are not there and the sort of persons who are there, we then feel we are beginning to sink. Yet we know that when we are in our little room with perhaps only two or three gathered there, so long as the eye is upon the Lord Who is in the midst, all is well. The waves are forgotten. The minutes fly while we are looking to the Lord, but directly we begin to think of the poor condition of things, of the persons present and absent, of what they have done or are likely to do, then we begin to sink beneath the waves.

We are, beloved, in the last times, and the searchlight of God's truth is upon us. Christendom is in the wildest confusion, and everything is tossing like the turbulent sea. If we look at the waves, we shall sink beneath them. Let us not look around or within, but at the Lord. Has He left us? He will never leave nor forsake the two or three gathered unto His name.

Is He not sufficient to save us to the uttermost? Is not the presence of the Lord always sufficient? So long as we realise this, His power lifts us above our circumstances, personal and ecclesiastical, and His love warms our hearts and renews our faith. We feel neither sadness nor loneliness, but are filled with joy because of His presence as He takes us by the hand.

So Simon Peter had another lesson upon the sea. He learned the weakness of his own heart in trusting the Lord, and the strength of the Lord's right hand to save him when he began to sink.

Let us now refer to another incident in the life of Simon Peter. When the Lord asked the disciples what the people were saying about Him, they answered, "People vary; some say one thing, some another." Then He said, "What do you say?" Peter speaks, and, out of the fullness of a heart charged with love and devotion towards his Lord, said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." He was taught of God, for the Lord answered him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xvi. 13-23).

Simon's confession was a remarkable one, was it not? What an honour put upon a Galilean fisherman to receive

from the Father in heaven a special revelation of the glory of the Messiah ! Then the Lord said further, " Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church." So the Lord Jesus also gave him a revelation. In a very short time Simon Peter had received two very special revelations. He was thus exceptionally distinguished and honoured among the disciples of the Lord.

Peter was taught, not only that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, but that Christ would build for Himself a church. But then the Lord began to unfold what was needful to bring about this building. First of all, He must go up to Jerusalem, be maltreated at the hands of man, and be slain. At once Peter remonstrated, and in the foolishness of his flesh said, " Be it far from Thee, Lord : this shall not be unto Thee."

For this utterance, the Lord rebuked him, saying, " Get thee behind Me, Satan . . . for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Peter was looking in a human fashion upon the sufferings at Jerusalem of which the Lord spoke. He was regarding them purely from the standpoint of a kind man who would wish to screen his friend from the malice and injury of his fellows.

Could we unmoved hear that a dear one of ours would be trodden down by injustice, and abused and crucified ? We should naturally, involuntarily, shrink from the very thought. But there was another side, which Peter forgot or overlooked. The coming sufferings of Christ were the will of God. It was fore-ordained that Messiah's sufferings should precede His glories. Knowing this, the Lord Himself said, " Not My will, but Thine be done."

But when Peter heard of the sufferings at Jerusalem, he said to the Lord in effect, " No, Thou shalt not go. I do not want Thee to go." He thus became a stumbling-block in the way of the Lord to the cross, in His pathway of obedience unto death. Simon Peter's saying was after the flesh, and not of faith. Faith always submits to the will of God, but Peter spoke without faith, and showed the unreliability and failure of man in the flesh, even though such marvellous revelations had been made to him.

Next, we find that the Lord takes Peter up into the high mountain, and shows him His own glory and the glory of the

kingdom. There in the midnight the wonderful glory and majesty of the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ shone out before the three apostles. Was it worth while that such a grand display should be given to these three, Peter, James, and John? We perhaps might not have thought it was, but God did, and the Lord Jesus did.

And blundering Peter was one of the three privileged witnesses who went up and saw that great sight. It was but a few days after Satan had spoken through him to cast a stumbling-block in the way of the Lord. But the Lord Himself had searched His servant, and had known what was in him. Down beneath the rags of self, behind the hasty tongue, was a disciple's heart of love, beating true to his Master. In the bottom of his soul, Peter was prepared to lay down his life for his Master, and this the Lord knew. He had searched Simon Peter, discerning in him what was of the new nature, and what was of the old.

The Lord then took his erring apostle up into the mount with the two sons of Zebedee, but there the old Simon again spoke out. Moses and Elias were there with the transfigured Christ, and, not knowing truly what he said, Peter said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here : . . . let us make here three tabernacles ; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."

Here was failure again. A great revelation concerning Jesus had been entrusted to him, but this was a complete breakdown in the application of it. Peter had been taught by the Father that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, yet he puts Him on a level with Moses the mediator and Elijah the restorer of the law.

Though the chosen recipient of the Father's favour, Simon Peter degrades His beloved Son. Such is man ! Such is your heart and mine. Such is the heart of some about us to-day who, in a flagrant way, bring down God's Son to the level of a leader and prophet, regarding Him as One entrusted with the official dignity of Mediator. When Peter sought to class the Eternal Son with the servants of God, the voice from the Shekinah of God vindicated the personal glory of Him Who was about to suffer, and afterwards to enter into the glories of His kingdom. The Father declared, " This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased : hear ye Him."

If time permitted, it would be interesting and helpful to consider Peter's denials of his Master as another episode in the discipline of his soul. But we must pass on to the concluding scene of which we read in John xxi., though the public restoration of Peter recounted there is closely connected with those denials.

It is very sad to reflect that Peter, that great and honoured apostle, should have so demeaned himself on that eventful night, but the Spirit of God does not leave us ignorant of the cause of his sinful failure.

The Lord told Peter what he would do that very night—that he would deny Him three times—and He bade him, in view of this coming temptation, to watch and pray. The Lord led Peter to the prayer-meeting, to the place where prayer was wont to be made. And there in Gethsemane the Lord bade him watch with Him in the spirit of prayer, while He Himself went and prayed alone.

Alas, Peter did not watch nor pray. "Peter, do you not remember how the Lord spoke of the immediate fulfilment of the prophecy, 'I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered'? Do you not remember how He spoke to you of His imminent suffering, and of your denial of Him"? But Peter did not remember, did not watch, did not pray; he went to sleep.

The Lord came and roused him from his untimely sleep, telling him emphatically to watch and pray lest he entered into temptation. Then his Master went away to pray again, while Peter fell asleep again. And so the third time. Thus the apostle came into the place of his temptation, not having by prayer sought that grace and strength which his oft-proved infirmities so sorely needed.

Do you wonder Peter failed in his confession of Christ? And if you track your own failures to their source, you will find the same underlying cause. As you remember your faults, ask yourself in the presence of the Lord, Why did I do this or that last week or this week or to-day? Was it not because you did not pray, nor seek strength from on high?

When challenged as a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, Peter kept on denying his Master, adding oaths and curses in sinful confirmation, until he remembered the prophetic word of the

Lord about himself. Then the word of truth pierced his conscience, and he went out and wept bitterly. He was sinking lower and lower as a confessor of Christ, but the Lord looked at him, and he broke down. His self-confidence was dissolved into tearful penitence.

What a contrast Peter by his unfaithfulness was to his Master ! The Lord Jesus was the perfect One, and when He was challenged, " Art Thou the Son of God ? " He answered, " Thou sayest it." The Lord alone is the Faithful and True Witness. Peter, in the same building, was with oaths and curses denying the Master Whom he loved, and Whom he had blessedly confessed as the Christ, the Son of the living God !

Alas, such shameful words may, apart from prayer and help from God, fall from our lips also. Peter was searched most surely in the high priest's palace, and the wicked way in him was brought to the surface. He had rushed unprepared into that place, the assembly of the wicked, where the light of God was shining upon His own Son, and revealing Him as the spotless and unblemished Son of man. Peter came into that light, and it revealed what a reptile he was ! It is a terrible thing for any man to lie ; but how much worse for a disciple of Him Who is the Truth to keep on lying ! and to seek to bolster up his lies with oaths and curses, taking the name of God in vain !

But, oh, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ! Who can measure it, or tell it ? When He rose from the dead, He came early in the day to Peter ; " The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." The interview was private, and over it the curtain of silence is thrown. What the Lord said to Peter then, and what Peter said to the Lord, we do not know. But if Peter wept bitterly that night when he went out of the palace after seeing the look of the Lord, what did he do at the feet of the risen Lord Who had come to him in tender love to restore his soul ?

But here, in John, is the account of Simon's public restoration, the point from which the Lord sends him out on a new mission (John xxi.).

They are together on the shore of the lake, in the locality of former incidents in the life of Peter, some also connected with the sea and fishes. The Lord treats Peter like an

honoured guest. Food is provided, and they have a meal together. There is communion between them. They had eaten together in the upper room ; now they are eating together by the lake. There is a season of peace and joy before the examination and manifestation commence.

Then, before his fellow-disciples, the Lord speaks to Peter, not of power but of love, not of faith but of love, not of hope but of love, not of service but of love. He says, " Simon, son of Jonas." He does not address him as Peter, the rock-man ; for he had not shown himself a rock in the palace, but sinking sand.

" Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these ? " The question was a simple one, but it had a dagger point. " More than these ! " What had Peter said to the Lord when He forewarned him ? Trusting in his own love and fidelity, Peter had boasted, " Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee ; " " Though all shall be offended, because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." Now the Lord asks him, " Lovest thou Me more than these ? " The boastful one had denied the Lord ; they had not !

The Lord did not forget Peter's boastful words, lifting himself above his brethren. He brought them back to his remembrance, very gently, with consummate skill and power, with such loving tenderness. Yet the keen knife entered, searching the reins, dividing between soul and spirit ; " Lovest thou Me more than these ? "

Peter boasts of a superior fidelity no more, and he has not a word to say about " these." He answers, " ' Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee.' Thou hast searched me and known me, my down-sitting and up-rising, and all my past ways, the things I have said and done, the denials of that awful night. Thou knowest all these things ; and in spite of them all Thou knowest that I love Thee." He feels himself without excuse, yet affirms his love for the Lord.

Again, the Lord said to him, " Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me ? " But this time the Lord did not say, " more than these." One reminder of his empty boast was sufficient. Peter responds again, reasserting his love in the presence of Him Who knew his heart so thoroughly.

We must not overlook that by this dialogue Peter was gaining inward experience of the Lord's searching power. He

had known all about him when He was warning him of what he would do before the cock crew. Like the psalmist, and like Job, Peter was realising that he was naked and opened before the eyes of the Lord with Whom he had to do, and that He had known beforehand the wicked way that was in him.

Now the Lord was probing Peter's heart to get to the very bottom and expose what was there. "Simon, after those denials, is thine a real love for Me? canst thou say without boasting foolishly that thine is a true love, not to be set aside by any foe? Supposing the high priest took thee, wilt thou now go with Me to prison and to death? Lovest thou Me?" Peter's reply was not, "I will go; I do indeed love Thee," but "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee."

Then the Lord put the same question the third time. Peter was grieved that the Lord asked three times. Why three? The enemies of the Lord had asked Peter three times if he was a follower of Jesus, and three times he had denied the truth. So Simon knew that the Lord was searching and trying him. He felt the point of the knife in his heart, and that he deserved its exposure. His only resource was in the omniscience of the Lord: "Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Now the restoration of the fallen apostle was completed, and Peter was given his new commission, "Feed My lambs, feed My sheep."

It is very necessary for us to bear in mind these experiences of Simon Peter. Are we not likely to boast of our attainment beyond others in love to our Lord? But the Lord measures our love by our faith, by our works, by our ways. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." "If ye love Me, keep My word." Do what I say, what I will. In that way we must display our love for the Lord, and not in boastful talk.

If the Lord questioned us as He did Simon, son of Jonas, what should we say? If you were shut up alone with the Lord, and if He said, "Do you really love Me in these days?" what would you say? When you are in your little meeting-room, at the prayer-meeting and the Bible reading, at the worship-meeting and the breaking of bread, what would you say if the Lord should ask, "Why are you here? Is it because you really love Me?" Are you sure that you are giving the

Lord all your heart ? or do you try to love the Lord a little, and the world a little as well ?

Beloved friends, we ought to feel continually that we have to do with One Who knows us altogether. And if we really feel that this is so, we shall take up the language of the last two verses of this psalm, " Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me, and know my thoughts ; and see if there be any wicked way in me." Is there anything within that would grieve Thee, anything contrary to Thee ? Perhaps I am hugging something selfish, something may be deceiving me, I may have wrong thoughts about myself, therefore I need that God should search me and try me, " and lead me in the way everlasting ".

I am sure that as a matter of abstract knowledge you are all familiar with the subject of God's omniscience, but I do feel that we are living in such difficult times that nothing but real communion between ourselves and the heart-knowing God and His Son in the power of the Holy Spirit will keep us faithful to His word and our hearts true to His love.

Things in the world about us are getting worse and worse day by day. Things of Christian association with which we are more intimately connected are in a state of corruption and decay. But One abides faithful, and He is the One Who is in the midst of the assemblies, and Who searches the reins and the hearts (Rev. ii. 23). To those who confess their sins and whom He has cleansed from all unrighteousness, He will say, as He did to Peter, " Feed My lambs, feed My sheep." Tend them, care for them. If you love Me, love also those that I love.

May God give us to feel the necessity of being continually and consciously under the scrutiny of His omniscient eye. He searches our hearts and tries our ways, and we cannot deceive Him. Let our hearts and consciences be right with Him and in accord with His will, Who said, " I will guide thee with Mine eye " (Psalms xxxii. 8).

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