

Man's Dislike and Dread of Christ

by Horatius Bonar

The people of the city asked Jesus to leave because they were afraid of His power, demonstrating their unbelief and guilt.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:3, Matthew 8:34, Matthew 16:2, Mark 10:21, Luke 8:37, John 1:11, John 6:66, 2 Corinthians 6:2, Hebrews 2:3, Revelation 3:20

Topics: "Rejection of Christ", "Missed Salvation"

Description

Horatius Bonar reflects on the tragic scene in Matthew 8:34, where the whole city comes out to meet Jesus but ultimately begs Him to leave their region. This stark contrast between their initial enthusiasm and their subsequent rejection of Christ highlights a deep-seated fear and misunderstanding of His true purpose. Bonar emphasizes that the people were drawn to Jesus for His miracles but repelled by the implications of His power over sin and their own lives. Their request for Jesus to depart symbolizes a missed opportunity for salvation and a profound wronging of both the Savior and themselves. The sermon serves as a poignant reminder of how often we, too, may reject the very help and healing we need.

Transcript

"And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts."

--Matthew 8:34.

I scarcely know a verse of Scripture where there is such a melancholy contrast between the beginning and the close. The first part is so hopeful, the second so disastrous. The first seems to lift us to heaven, the second to cast us down to hell. The whole city flocks to Jesus; but its multitudes have scarcely reached him when they ask Him to quit their coasts; not their city merely, but their region; as if the farther off the better. They do not turn their back on Him, but worse: they ask Him to turn his back on them. Yet the scene was not an uncommon one in our Lord's history. It was much the same as in the synagogue of Nazareth; and in Capernaum after the miracle of the loaves (John 6:24-66); and afterwards at Jerusalem when one day they shouted "hosanna," the next, "crucify." Alas, that it should be still the same in our own day!

Let us mark,--

I. The coming; "The whole city came out to meet Jesus." Not some,--not the city,--but the whole city! It was a universal movement; and a most interesting one. A whole city flocking out to meet Jesus! Surely this would make angels glad. It was one of the most marvelous and blessed sights that had been seen. Ah, how seldom had such a thing been seen, or is seen now! They had heard that He had done a miracle, that He had cast out devils, and they flocked to Him. The report of those who kept the swine had moved the city! A swineherd's tale had made all the city turn out to meet Him! O wondrous spectacle!

II. The seeing; It would appear that Jesus was on his way to their city ;--so they soon met Him,--saw Him,--heard Him. They did not remain afar off, but came nigh. So that their feelings towards Him, and treatment of Him, were not founded on mere report. They heard what others had to say; but they also saw for themselves. And it is this seeing that so aggravates their guilt. What they did and said, they said and did in the full knowledge of what He was.

III. The refusing. They besought Him to depart out of their coasts. An awful request, in many ways. They had sick among them, did they not want them to be healed? They had others, perhaps, possessed with devils, did they not want them to be delivered? The sick beseeching the physician not to visit them! The famished city entreating the benevolent storekeeper not to bring them bread! The thirsty traveler filling up the one well in the desert! The shipwrecked sailor's requesting the lifeboat to keep away from them! Was there ever a request so sad, so fatal? Why was this? There was something in Jesus that drew them; but there was more that they disliked. What they heard about the devils and the swine made them afraid. If He came, He would drive out their herds of swine; He would not spare their sins. They would like Him as the physician of the body, but not of the soul. His company seemed dangerous and terrible. The destruction of that herd of swine was his doing, no doubt; and He who could send the devils into the swine could send them into themselves. It was terrible to be near one who had such power over spirits. So they besought Him to depart. And it would appear that He departed. He took ship immediately, and sailed to the other side; and as they saw Him departing, and the white sail vanishing out of sight, they would be relieved as by the retreat of some fearful enemy. The departure of the Son of God was matter of mutual congratulation to these Gadarenes! The scene is a fearful one; the lessons most impressive. Their "depart from us" is a foreboding of his "depart from me" (Matthew 15:41)

(1.) How near salvation they were. It was on its way to them. It would soon have entered their gates. They were going to meet it, and it was coming to meet them. How blessed! Was salvation ever nearer! It seemed now as if nothing could hinder their being blest. Yet it passed away; and they were the cause. They would not have it. Thus near is salvation to us every hour; yet we put it away. "I would," and "ye would not" are still the words of awful truth. Nay, they themselves at first seemed bent on having it; a whole city bent on being saved,--rushing in one multitude to the Saviour! But it turned out to be not the kind of salvation which they wanted; and He not the kind of Saviour they cared for. So they would have none of Him! Thus we neglect the great salvation though so near, and despise the Saviour though coming to meet us; nay, standing at our side!

(2.) How they wronged the Saviour. "They were taken with great fear" (Luke 8:37). What had He done to alarm them or to create distrust? He had healed their sick, cast out devils, restored the lunatic to his right mind; ought these to have raised hard thoughts of Him? Especially, should not the sight of Him have proved attractive? Yet it was when they saw Him that they besought Him to depart. Or was the destruction of their swine enough to outweigh these miracles of mercy? Yes; He smote their covetousness, and reproved them for their unlawful gains. And this they could not bear. But how grievously did they wrong Him in this, putting false constructions on His works of mercy and of righteousness. They wronged his

love, his interest in their welfare, his desire to break the power of hell among them. Do we not thus wrong Him constantly? Is not all unbelief a wronging of Christ, a repetition of the sin of the Gadarenes, and with less excuse than theirs?

(3.) How they wronged themselves. When beseeching Him to depart out of their coasts, they were sending away their one friend and physician, quenching their one light. The word "besought" implies that he was bent on remaining; and they desisted not in their entreaties till they had constrained Him to depart. O awful importunity of sin and unbelief! And is not this still the attitude of unbelief? Does it not say, Depart from me? Is not its meaning just,--O Jesus I beseech thee do not convert me; do not save me, do not cast out Satan,--let me alone,--what have I to do with thee or thou with me? And Jesus yields at length. He sails away; and with Him all heaven; with Him salvation, and life, and joy.

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