

Letter 1

by James Bourne

The sermon emphasizes the dangers of self-righteousness and the importance of relying on God's strength through faith, which is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Psalm 34:18, Proverbs 3:5, Romans 5:8, James 4:6

Topics: "Faith Alone", "Heart Transformation"

Description

James Bourne reflects on his journey from self-righteousness and reliance on his own strength to a place of surrender and reliance on God's grace. He acknowledges the futility of seeking approval and recognition from others, and the emptiness of outward displays of piety without true transformation of the heart. Through trials and despair, he comes to a point of complete dependence on God, realizing that only through faith in Jesus Christ can true hope and salvation be found.

Transcript

[To his sister E.] - 1807.

Dear Sister,

I was permitted for years to go on in my own strength, to let me see what mighty acts I could perform. A self-righteous spirit will lead us to make such a patch work garment as will for awhile conceal the filthy imaginations of the heart; and thus we carefully preserve our reputation and honour, and get the name of devout Christians; the chief of our food is the applause of those about us. If we are disposed to exercise our bowels of compassion, we take care to blow the trumpet, lest we should not be seen of men; and leave nothing undone but the weightier matters of the law.

But as God had purposes of grace towards me, I was not suffered to go on in this spirit to the end; for all my fair and fond hopes of keeping everything straight, shunning the cross, and appearing outwardly devout, were brought down, being founded on any own strength and on my own wisdom. I was permitted to raise this airy tower till it reached nearly to heaven but the Lord looked down and scattered all my lofty thoughts, and I was obliged to acknowledge that the wisdom of man is foolishness with God, and I was so hemmed in on every side as to be made to cry for quarter "Lord, save, or I perish."

In this frame of mind I was suffered to continue for some time, till I was filled with my own devices [Prov. i. 30]. I felt much pity for myself and much enmity against God, and thought I was dealt hardly by; and began

to look for nothing but the fiery indignation of the Lord. Every refuge seemed to fail me, every false confidence was destroyed; my life hung in perpetual doubt, and every outward providence untoward. But underneath all this there certainly was an almighty arm of mercy, so that though exceedingly perplexed, I was not in utter despair; and it was in the midst of the darkest outward providences that the Lord was pleased to raise my soul to a hope that Jesus would reveal himself to me as my friend; and in the strength of this I was enabled to go many days. For faith, though "as a grain of mustard seed," yet being of the operation of the Holy Spirit, will enable us to creep along fearful of our own strength, looking to Christ for strength, hoping and despairing. So it was with me, till at length he revealed himself to me as the sinner's all in all; and then I knew the Lord by this most glorious name "I AM THAT I AM."

Yours affectionately, J. B.

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