

Letter 164.

by James Bourne

The sermon tells the story of Mr. Oakley's transformation from a profligate character to a believer in Jesus Christ, highlighting the power of prayer and the Lord's presence in his life.

Scripture: Psalm 34:17, Psalm 119:105, Isaiah 41:10, Luke 15:7, Romans 8:38, 2 Corinthians 12:9

Topics: "Gods Mercy", "Faith Assurance"

Description

James Bourne shares a touching account of a man, Mr. Oakley, who struggled with despair and feelings of unworthiness due to his past sins. Despite his doubts, Mr. Oakley experienced a transformative encounter with God's mercy and grace, leading to a profound change in his outlook and faith. Bourne reflects on his own journey of ups and downs, from moments of assurance to deep despondency, yet ultimately finding comfort in God's presence and guidance. Through his experiences, Bourne emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's mercy and seeking His counsel, even in the midst of uncertainties and fears.

Transcript

[To Mr. Nunn.] Stapleton, Shropshire, 21 July 1839.

My dear Friend,

We had, by the Messing of God, a favourable journey. Our friends were ready to receive us, and glad of our arrival. Poor Mr. Oakley (in whose house we lodge) is in a most distressing state; his faculties are very weak, but not so bad in that respect as I expected. He tells me he has been almost in despair for nearly two years together - 'O Sir, I am the vilest sinner that ever was on the earth; there can be no hope for such a sinner.' I asked, Do you pray for mercy? 'Yes, Sir, but I am too great a sinner to hope; there is none like me.' I said, The Lord came to save sinners, not the righteous; it was only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel that he was sent. He seemed to pause, and I asked him if he ever had hope? He replied, 'Now and then a little transient hope;' and then burst out crying, 'O that I could but be saved! There is nothing I want but mercy.' He is a farmer, seventy-three years of age. In conversation with his wife he said, 'I do think I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.' She said, Can you pray? He then prayed, 'O Lord, show me the light of thy countenance, and thy salvation.' After this there seemed a gleam of light upon his soul, and for a little while he saw the way, and Christ the living head directing him.*

* The following account of this afflicted man (nearly as related by his widow) will explain some allusions in several of the subsequent letters:

In the former part of his life he had been a profligate character, and while going on in that course was seized with dreadful despair, attended with derangement of mind, in which he continued for twenty-four years, with only short intervals of relief. He would cry out in an agony that he was going to hell - others might have hope, but there was none for him. Yet he did not altogether give up crying for mercy, and would sometimes say, 'O Lord, I would give thousands and thousands of pounds to know thee!

Hast thou not all power both in heaven and in earth? Be pleased to have mercy on my poor benighted soul.' When he recovered a little in mind, he used to be led away by worldly and lightminded companions, who endeavoured to divert him from these gloomy subjects; but they could never long succeed. Mr. Bourne's ministry was the means of conveying a spiritual blessing to his soul. The truths he heard seemed to take a deep hold, and he often referred to them afterwards. Yet his case for several months appeared as desperate as ever, until a month before his death, when an evident and effectual change took place.

His mind was restored; he became calm, resigned, and cheerful, though serious and thoughtful, and bore with patience very acute pain. He seemed constantly engaged in earnest prayer, and would frequently say, 'I know I shall never recover from this illness, but NOW I believe the holy Jesus will save EVEN ME.' Once especially he said, 'I always believed he was able; none could believe that more firmly than I did; but now I believe he is WILLING. I shall join you in kneeling before the throne of God to praise him for ever and ever.

I shall not be long here, and you will not be long after me. Make haste to follow me there.' He was often heard recommending the Holy Jesus, and triumphantly saying that though he was a great sinner, he had a great Saviour. The last day of his life he said to the clergyman, who called to see him, 'I want the Holy JESUS, and Him ONLY. May you, Sir, know more of this Holy Jesus than you have ever yet known. If I had all the realms of the Queen now, it would do me no good; for I want the Holy Jesus, and him only.

Here is my poor arm, of which I have had no use for many years; but, Sir, the Lord's arm is not shortened. No, Sir, the Lord's arm is not shortened.' Afterwards he said, 'Shut the door, while I endeavour to pray, if the Lord will teach me;' and after praying for a blessing on them all, he cried, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come;' and then, in an extacy, sung 'HOLY, HOLY, HOLY,' raising his voice higher and higher, till one said, 'Hush, father, they will hear you;' to which he replied, 'O!

I shall have cause to shout in heaven, if I am in the lowest place there.' Mrs. Oakley said she had never expected to witness on earth such a scene, as when the poor dying man, in the most serious manner, joined with holy rapture, uttered that sacred song. All through the night he continued praying and praising God, and then became unconscious, and after a few hours expired, 26 March 1840.

I never spent such a sixteen months as the last have been; the first six or seven in sweet assurances of the Lord's presence and help; the winter in one continued scene of changes, in the deepest despondency and fear, and now and then very comforting promises of help. Many terrible fears respecting my coming here, but some of the kindest assurances of the Lord's approbation and presence. Much of all this again quickly covered with clouds, so that I felt fears about acting upon what I had been assured came from the Lord. Yet I ventured, and am now sensible of the Lord's great mercy to me hitherto. All my desponding fears and misgiving apprehensions of danger the Lord has been pleased to remove; and he gives me sweet liberty in his word in the family worship, so that I am satisfied the Lord is my Guardian and

Counsellor, and I hope my visit here may not be in vain to the people I converse with. Mrs. Oakley has just been telling me how profitable she has found our morning readings, and how she feels that it is the Lord who is instructing her by his servant.

Yours &c. J. B.

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