

Letter 171.

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing God's tender guidance in our spiritual journey and the necessity of producing good fruit in our lives.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Isaiah 5:1, John 15:4, 2 Timothy 3:16, James 1:22

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Holy Spirit"

Description

James Bourne delivers a heartfelt message to Mrs. F., highlighting the tender and gentle ways in which God has been leading her through spiritual revelations and struggles. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing the work of the Spirit in her life, guiding her to seek reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ and to earnestly pray for mercy. Bourne draws attention to the need for discernment between bearing good fruit or wild grapes, indicating that a genuine response to God's leading will result in spiritual growth and a deepening desire for His word.

Transcript

London, 22 November 1839.

Dear Mrs. F.,

I have been anxiously watching the various changes that I have heard have passed upon your mind since your first attack in this illness. God does nothing by chance, nor in vain; but he often deals in very peculiar tenderness with some, and I think with none more so than with you. How gently he led you through various secret cogitations, till he brought you to a fuller discovery of the dangerous state of your soul, and of the souls of all mankind by nature! O how gently he instructed you in the nature of sin and its consequences when you lay fainting at the Lodge! Death at your heels, sin all round about you, and guilt unpurged and unatoned. All this the Lord showed you at that time, and by the sight taught you to pray in earnest for mercy. There you saw in a measure the vanity of all created things. Nothing then seemed so suitable to your wishes as for God to be reconciled in the face of Jesus Christ. This led you to be very serious in your desires and inquiries after the word of the Lord, and you could then have hazarded much if you might but be permitted to hear the word. You thought, and thought justly, that something by it might be made known to you respecting the way. In all this appeared to be spiritual life and sensibility; and moreover you found it was not in vain, but this apparent life manifested itself in various ways; sometimes with deep exercises and conflicts of fear and dismay in the night, and a feeling that you must be among the people of God, for it is only "out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." Then the Lord spoke to you by that

Psalm you named to me, which contained much encouragement for you; and about the same time you had some answer to your prayers respecting leave to hear the word, and you did hear it, with a power with which you had never heard before.

All these things are the secret tender leadings of the Spirit of God, and denote that you are of that vineyard spoken of in Isa. v. It is said "he fenced it" - that is, the Lord gave you those secret checks, and little discoveries of his mind and will, to keep you and fence you from the path of the destroyer; "and gathered out the stones thereof" - that is, all the rubbish of carnal reason, natural affection when clashing with God's word, pride, vanity, conceit of knowledge, hardness of heart, and many more such things; "and planted it with the choicest vine" - that is, "Christ in you, the hope of glory;" "and built a tower in the midst of it" - that is, upon all the glory he put a defence, according to his promise [chap. iv.]; "and also made a winepress therein" - that is, all the furnace-work and sanctified afflictions which his people go through; and then comes the issue, "and he looked that it should bring forth grapes" - that is, fruit unto eternal life; but alas! we find the charge against us is - "It brought forth wild grapes."

This is the point I would by all means draw your attention to - "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" What gentleness, what pity, what tenderness! And where is the return? I have always watched this - that where there has been a peculiar stir or exercise of the mind, such as you have lately gone through, it always is, sooner or later, brought to this issue - it bringer forth either good grapes, or wild grapes.

You will naturally ask, How shall I know which? If good, the glory I spoke of will be defended by the power of God against all temptation, and there will be a growth of tenderness and anxiety in hearing the word of the Lord, and a walking more or less in the daily exercise of watching the coming and going of the Lord. If wild grapes, an outward show of quietness, and a usual appearance at our appointed places, but a terrible death within, with many secret suspicions that all is not right, and a seeking after the flesh to put that straight which God will (under such circumstances) make and keep crooked. This last is generally attended with repeated blows of God's sensible displeasure, and a legal striving to mend that which Christ alone can mend; and this brings on "the sorrow of the world," that "worketh death." But he that hearkens to the word of the Lord, either in his dispensations or in any other way or means by which he is pleased to show his mind and will, will find a defence upon his measures that shall keep him safe from all his enemies; "his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he forth shall prosper."

May the Lord encourage you to watch and pray, and fear; for happy is that man that trembles at his word. God bless you, is the prayer of

Your unworthy but faithful friend, J. B.

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