

Letter 74

by James Bourne

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility and the need for God's judgment to destroy our pride and vain confidence, making us vessels meet for the Master's use.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Psalm 66:5, Isaiah 40:31, Jeremiah 30:7, Zechariah 9:9, Luke 18:13, Hebrews 4:16, James 4:8, 1 Peter 1:7

Topics: "Refining Fire", "Gods Mercy"

Description

James Bourne preaches about the refining fire of God's work in the lives of believers, using the analogy of cedar work consumed by fire to represent the destruction of vain confidence and pride. He emphasizes the humbling process of recognizing sinfulness and the need for God's mercy, leading to a genuine cry for salvation. Bourne encourages believers to embrace the cleansing work of God, allowing hidden sins and motives to be exposed, and to find hope and strength in Christ during times of trial and despair.

Transcript

[To C. G.] London, Jan. 1835.

My dear Friend,

How greatly am I made to stand in awe, while in spirit I am made to look on the wondrous work the Lord is carrying on amongst you! You, and your sister too, will now believe "He is terrible in his doing toward the children of men;" and you with us are now called to come and see this mighty work of God. [Psalm lxxvi. 5.]

My reading this morning was in Zech. xi., which begins, "Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars." I could not help remarking what a beautiful temple we raise with our own hands, and how finely we decorate it with all manner of cedar work; but when God comes in terrible majesty, as he has done to your sister, how the fire consumes all that ornamental work in which we trusted, and the very best of our confidences do not stand that fire. This I, as well as your sister, have found to be a terrible place. Here we learn what an evil and bitter thing it is to sin against God. Here also we have some sight of the filthiness of our own righteousness, and the foolish and empty means by which we adorn ourselves; the very remembrance of which covers us with shame. This fire destroys all vain confidence, and we sink into nothing.

Your sister now knows some little of the meaning of this - "The Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." It is not - I have nothing to, fear; I never doubt the mercy of God; with many other such words: O no! but now it is - Wilt thou, canst thou, have mercy upon me? O how the language changes when the fire has taken hold of the poor soul, and has begun with a most vehement flame to burn up much pride, vain conceit, and frivolous profession, that would never bring any glory to God!

If ever we are vessels meet for the Master's use, we shall have need of sharp work and much cleansing for that honourable purpose. A bad servant will leave the dirtiest corners; but in this fire, as your sister says, How are the hidden things sought out, as well as counsels of the heart, which we in false liberty seek deeply to hide "The candle of the Lord" is little understood till this takes place; we imagine we can stand any trial, wade through the valley of the shadow of death, and fear no evil; but we are not aware that in this confidence we are like "a king against whom there is no rising up." Satan will not oppose his own kingdom, nor does he mind how many of his disciples are laid with seeming peace in the grave, for this will deceive more than anything. But if it please God to make a discovery of his wiles and snares, then he will seek to counteract the work another way, even by tempting to despair. His unceasing labour is if possible not to suffer us to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ; and sometimes the Lord suffers us to be put into Satan's sieve, yet though at such times the Lord is covered with a cloud, he is watching that we shall not be tempted above that we are able to bear.

I must confess I always find that when the trial has had its due effect, he makes a way for my escape; and I believe the time will come when this word shall be fulfilled, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, thy King cometh unto thee, he is just" (in all that terrible work thou hast gone through) "and having salvation." Therefore it is said, "Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope." Under your present difficulties you have need of this stronghold; and I am sure he is nearer than you are aware of, and you will find "double" for all the sorrow you have had. [Zech. ix. 9-12.]

Your casting down is that you may long remember the wormwood and the gall - your soul have them still in remembrance and be humbled within you; that there may be no trampling on the blood of Christ, nor lightly esteeming the Rock of our Salvation; no flourishing profession covered with a double deceit, but transparency and godly simplicity; no kings and lords, but little children, whom Christ can take up in his arms and bless.

There is nothing in all the account you have sent but what I have been acquainted with. I cannot, so I beseech you will not, think it strange concerning the fiery trial which you now are in. I believe as you say, "It is even the time of Jacob's trouble," therefore you "shall be delivered out of it" [Jer. xxx. 7]. And my prayer, is that you may be kept in a low place all the days of your life as a guilty sinner saved by free and sovereign grace. We have all neglected this for years, and yet some of us have been partakers of it at last; and even restored after we have treacherously departed from him, because "He hateth putting away."

From your sincere friend in the Lord, J. B.

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