

Letter 99

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon 'Letter 99' explores the necessity of genuine faith and the transformative power of affliction in the journey toward salvation.

Scripture: Psalm 66:3-18, Acts 14:22, 1 Peter 1:7

Topics: "True Repentance", "Humility Before God"

Description

James Bourne emphasizes the prevalence of superficial religious professions and the need for true humility and repentance before God. He highlights the importance of recognizing our own sinfulness and inadequacy, acknowledging that salvation comes through enduring hardships and afflictions in the path of God's saving grace. Bourne encourages sincere prayer and the abandonment of pride and rebellion in order to experience the true wealth and blessings that God offers to those who seek Him wholeheartedly.

Transcript

[To Mrs. B.] London, November 1835.

Madam,

How universal is the profession of religion, and how general and frivolous is that universal profession! It appears chiefly to consist of - I think so and so - My, sentiments are these, and I don't agree in this or that - without the least regard to such words as those of Psalm lxvi. - "How terrible art thou in thy works" (thy work of conversion); "through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee."

The Lord's eyes behold the general hypocrisy that rules in men's hearts. Though we make many enquiries after religion, yet when the only true and right way is set before us, it is often manifest that in our pride and rebellion we exalt ourselves against it. But if spiritual life is in us, our feet are not removed by the discipline he brings us into, by which he proves and tries us, as silver is tried; and then we do not cry out, I believe the Methodists are right, The Baptists are right, or, The Evangelical clergy are right; but we stand deeply convicted that WE ARE WRONG, and here we cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The Lord brings us into the Gospel net, and lays "affliction upon our loins" and thus weakens our strength by the way, so that all sorts of vain professors "ride over our heads;" and we are made to take the lowest place, being defiled with ignorance and sin, so that our very clothes abhor us. The sentence of death is in our consciences, and destruction round about us. This is passing (in some measure) through the the of God's law, and

through the waters of affliction, by which means the soul is humbled to come in God's way of saving sinners; and in the end we are made acquainted with the "wealthy place." This sort of experience will open our mouths to sing the high praises of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Then, and then alone shall we cry, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God" (none else), "and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." This truth has power, efficacy, and light in it, by which we shall see our way, and make it manifest that we are his sheep by turning from all false ways, and hearing his voice and following it.

Perhaps you will say, O that I knew how to get at these things! Surely this verse in Hart's hymns is beyond a doubt true,

"Prayer is appointed to convey

The blessings God designs to give;

Long as they live should christians pray,

For only while they pray, they live"

and I would further add (from the same Psalm lxvi.), "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

I believe I have set before you the way the Lord has dealt with me, and most of the people I know here; and though it may appear hard, yet the hardships are well worth enduring for the wealthy place that follows, which all that seek in God's way are sure to find. Salvation is a great thing, and we are saved "so as by fire." Much tribulation, much affliction, and joy in the Holy Ghost; and such as talk of an easy way, and being drawn by love, and tell you that all are not called to go through the same troubles - such, I say may be suspected, that as yet they have known but little. But if by the grace of God we are enabled to leave all this, and say,

"How harsh so'er the way,

Dear Saviour still lead on"

we shall manifest the work to be of God, and that it will endure to eternal life. That this may be your happy lot is the prayer of

Your unworthy servant in the Lord, J. B.

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