

Being With the Lord

My Loved Brother,—I think I have had my mind more occupied of late than ever with the subject which your letter suggests—the being with the Lord. I am sure it is deeper, happier, fuller acquaintance with Himself that our hearts need; and then we should long and desire and pant after Him in such a way as nothing but His presence could satisfy. I know souls in this state; and yet it is not knowledge that gives it to them, but personal acquaintance with the blessed Savior, through the Holy Ghost.

I alighted, as by chance, the other day on some fervent thoughts of an old writer, in connection with this dear and precious subject. In substance they were as follows, and almost so in terms, only I have somewhat condensed them: "It is strange that we, who have such continual use of God, and His bounties and mercies, and are so perpetually beholden to Him, should, after all, be so little acquainted with Him. And from hence it comes that we are so loth to think of our dissolution, and of our going to God. For naturally, where we are not acquainted, we like not to hazard our welcome. We would rather spend our money at an inn, than turn in for a free lodging to an unknown host; whereas to an entire friend, whom we elsewhere have familiarly conversed with, we go as boldly and willingly as to our home, knowing that no hour can be unseasonable to such an one. I will not live upon God, and His daily bounties without His acquaintance. By His grace I will not let one day pass without renewing my acquaintance with Him, giving him some testimony of my love to Him, and getting from Him some sweet pledge of His constant favor towards me."

This is a beautiful utterance. It expresses a character of mind which, in this day of busy inquiry after knowledge, we all need—personal longings after Christ. May the blessed Spirit in us give that direction to our hearts. It is a hard lesson for some of us to learn, to reach enjoyments which lie beyond and above the provisions of nature. We are still prone to know Christ himself "after the flesh," and to desire to find Him in the midst of the relations and circumstances of human life, and there only.

But this is not our calling—this is not the risen, heavenly life. It is hard to get beyond this, I know, but our calling calls us beyond it. We like the home, and the respect, and the security, and all the delights of our human relationships and circumstances, and would have Christ in the midst of them; but to know Him, and to have Him in such a way as

tells us that He is a stranger on earth, and that we are to be strangers with Him, "this is a hard saying" to our poor fond hearts.

In John's Gospel, I may say, among other things, the Lord sets Himself to teach us this lesson.

The disciples were sorry at the thought of losing Him in the flesh, losing Him as in their daily walk and conversation with Him. But He lets them know that it was expedient for them that they should lose Him in that character, in order that they might know Him through the Holy Ghost, and ere long be with Him in heavenly places (chap. 16.)

And this is again perceived in chap. 20. Mary Magdalene would have known the Lord again, as she had already known Him; but this must not be—this must be denied her. "Touch me not," the Lord says to her. This was painful, but it was expedient—good for her then (just as it has been already good for the disciples in chap. 16.),

Mary is now taught that she was to have fellowship to know that she was to lose Christ in the flesh. For with Him in the more blessed place of His ascension.

So the company at Jerusalem, in the same chapter. " They were glad when they saw the Lord." But this gladness was human. It was the joy of having recovered, as they judged, the One whom they had lost, Christ in the flesh. But their Lord at once calls them away from that communion and knowledge of Him, to the peace which His death had now made for them, and the life which His resurrection had now gained for them.

All this it is healthful for our souls to ponder, for we are prone to be satisfied with another order of things. The "sorrow that filled the hearts of the disciples" at the thought of their Lord going away-the " Rabboni " of Mary Magdalene-the disciples being " glad when they saw the Lord," show the disposedness of the heart to remain with Christ in the midst of human relationships and circumstances, and not to go with a risen Christ to heavenly places.

How slow some of us are to learn this, dear brother! And yet our readiness of heart to learn it and to practice it is very much the measure of our readiness and desire to depart and be with Christ.

But all this I say to you as one that suggests a thought -would that it were the experience of the soul! But I desire to have it so.

-From Unpublished Letters of J. G. B.