

On His Breast

by C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when He had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.”—John 13:23-26

Picture the Lord and his apostles at the holy Supper. A world of interest centers here. Two figures strangely different met in this scene—met, shortly afterwards to part, and never to meet again. To look upon them, they seemed equally disciples of Jesus, and from the position which one of them occupied, as leaning on the Lord’s bosom, and the other as the treasurer of the Master’s little store, they seemed to be equally trusted and honoured followers of the great Lord. You might not have known, by mere sight, which was the better man of the two—John or Judas. Most probably you would have preferred the gentle manners of John; but I should suppose—for our Lord never chose a man to an office unless he had some qualification—you would also have admired the calm prudence of Judas, and his quiet business tact. No doubt you would have thought that he made an excellent treasurer, and you would have been glad that your Master, with so little to spare, had lighted upon so vigilant a guard and so prudent a manager. They sat at the same table, engaged in the same exercises, and looked much the same kind of men. None of us would have guessed that one of them was John the divine, and the other was Judas the devil. One of them was the seer of the Apocalypse, the other was the son of perdition.

No doubt there are strange mixtures of character in this very house tonight. There will come to this table the disciple whom Jesus loves. Him we will welcome, saying, “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord.” Alas! there may come here a son of perdition. Him we cannot chase away, for we cannot read his heart. For a time both may act and even feel alike; they may even wear well for years. Apparently they may be equally sincere; and yet the day will come when to the right’ in his love and his integrity, the faithful disciple will wend his way up to his Master’s bosom for ever; and to the left, the hypocrite will go to his dreadful end, and to that hell which must receive such traitors as he. There is something very solemn about this meeting of such strangely different characters in one common act, and in the society of the same divine Lord. John is here; is Judas here? Let the question be started and passed round, “Lord, is it I?” He is the least likely to be the traitor who is nearest to his Lord’s heart. He who occupies such a place as John did is not the betrayer. Oh that we might be fired with a loving ambition to be the disciple whom Jesus loved, leaning on Jesus’ bosom! for then, though we ask the question, “Lord, is it I?” it will not linger long upon our hearts; for his love, shed abroad within them, shall answer every question of self-examination, and we shall cry, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” Let that stand as an introduction. Glance at yourself and your brethren at the table, and say—How far shall *we* be like our Lord and the twelve? Will Peter, and James, and John, and Judas all live over again in the assembly of to-night for the breaking of bread?

And now our remarks will be very simple.

I. And the first is this—SOME DISCIPLES ARE SPECIALLY LOVED OF THEIR LORD. We believe in the doctrine of election, but the principle of election goes to be carried farther than some suppose. There is an election in the midst of the election, and another within that. The wider circle contains the inner, and a still more select circlet forms the innermost ring of all. The Lord had a people around him who were his disciples. Within them he had twelve. Within the twelve he had three. Within the three he had one disciple whom he loved. And I suppose that what took place around his blessed person on earth takes place on a larger scale around his adorable person which is the center of his church both militant and triumphant. Probably our Lord’s attachment to John was partly a human one; and so far as it was human, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now after the flesh know we him no more. Any merely human affection which our Lord Jesus bore for John may have passed away. There may, also, have been such affection in Jesus toward John as there would be in any eminent Christian towards another Christly believer—in anyone whom the Lord made to be a leader of his church, towards such and such a member of that church in whom he could see most of the lovely characteristics of Christ. I cannot but think that it was so. But it strikes me that our Lord Jesus loved John in some measure more than the rest, in the entirety of his character, as Jesus Christ, the Son of God as well as the Son of man. We know that he

loved all his disciples; for when my brother read the chapter just now, how like music did those words sound, "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end"! He loved not some of his own; but all of them. He loved all his own then, and he loves all his own now. There is infinite love in the heart of Jesus towards all his people; and if there be any degrees in that love, yet the lowest degree is inconceivably great. The very least member of the divine family may say, "He loved me, and gave himself for me." He loves us beyond all human expression, because beyond all human conception. The great heart of the eternal Father, the great heart of the eternal Son, the great heart of the everblessed Spirit, the great heart of the Trinity in unity, beats with love, with love to all the elect, to all the redeemed, to all the called, to all the sanctified people of God. We are quite sure of this. Yet that love has this difference about it, that it is more enjoyed by some on earth than by others.

It is clear, as a matter of fact, that the divine love is manifested to some more clearly than to others. My beloved brethren, you must know this to be the case; for there are those among us who walk with God, who enjoy the light of Jehovah's countenance at all times, who, if depressed, have the art of rolling their burden upon the Lord, and soon are delivered from it. You know them, they are the brethren who feel like singing all the while, for Jesus is their friend, and they rejoice in him. There was one in the Old Testament who was called "a man greatly beloved," and there are Daniels on earth even now. Christ has among women still his Marys, whom he loves. He loved Martha, too; but still there was a special place for Mary. Jesus has still his Johns, whom he peculiarly loves. He loves Peter and Nicodemus, and Nathanael, and all of them; but still there are some who know his love more than others, live in it more than others, drink into it more than others, reflect it more than others, and become more conformed to it, and saturated with it, and perfumed with it, than others are. There are first as well as last. All may be of Israel, but all the tribes are not Judah, and in Judah all the men are not Davids. Who shall deny that there are degrees in grace? Have we not among us babes, and young men, and fathers? Have we not first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear? It is so; and though I will not argue for degrees in glory, and, indeed, deprecate the spirit in which the doctrine of degrees in glory is often set forth; yet we are sure, for we see it with our eyes, that there are degrees of grace, and especially degrees in the enjoyment of the love of Jesus. Amongst those who do really love their Lord, and are really loved by him, one star differeth from another in the glory of that love.

Why was John made "that disciple whom Jesus loved"? Certainly it was not because he was naturally higher in rank than the others, for he was a fisherman, like the most of them; and James was certainly equal in birth, for he was his brother. Our blessed Lord did not love John because of any excess of talent; for albeit that John's Apocalypse and his Gospel are, in some respects, the highest parts of revealed Scripture, being both the simplest and the most mysterious portions of Holy Writ; yet we should not say that John betrayed evidence of so great a mind in itself, naturally, or by education, as Paul had. He had as much talent as his Lord gave him, but there was nothing about him so special that he should for that cause have been loved; and to dismiss the thought with a word, Jesus never loves men on account of talent, and we should be unwise if we ourselves did so. These things are external to the man. Our Lord loved John, specially, for a better reason than that.

Why did our blessed Lord love John better than others? I can only reply that he exercises a sovereignty of choice, and it is not for us to ask the why and wherefore of the movements of the sacred heart. Surely, nothing should be left so free as the love of the Son of God. Let him love whom he wills; he has an unquestionable right to do so.

But if we venture reverently to look into the familiar love of Jesus, we shall not fail to see that there was about John, through grace, a most loving spirit. Men love those that are like them, and Jesus, as man, loved John because the processes of grace had developed in John the image of Jesus. John, like his Lord, had much love. He may have lacked some qualities in which Peter, and James, and others excelled, but he towered above them all in love. He was full of tenderness, and therefore his Master at once selected him to be his choicest companion and his dearest friend. You know the way, then, to the heart of Christ. Let your own heart be full of love, and you will know his love. He loves you, you know, altogether apart from anything that is in you, of his own rich and sovereign grace; but for the special manifestation of that love, for your personal enjoyment of it, to fit you for such enjoyment, you must have much love to him. You greatly need, not a great head, but a great heart. You must have, not more knowledge, but more affection; not a higher rank in society, but a higher rank in the power to love Jesus and to love your fellow-men. Less of self, and more of Jesus, and then you shall enjoy more of his love.

This being the case, that John had this loving spirit, and our Lord Jesus Christ loved him more than others, it led on to the fact that John was the recipient of confidences from Christ which others had not. I will show you that farther on; but certainly it seems to me that John was made by Jesus his executor, and he left him in his will all his earthly possessions. You will say to me, "And pray what possessions had the Master?" Well, he had one possession of which he was very fond, and he could not die until he had disposed by his last will and testament of that one earthly possession. It was his mother. He loved her, and must care for her; and there passed a little word, a kind of sign, between him and John at the last moment. Do not think that John would have understood what Jesus meant when he said: "Woman, behold thy son," and, "Son, behold thy mother!" if there had not been a quiet talk about that matter some time before. But Jesus, I doubt not, had told John that the only earthly care he had, as man, was that while he was away slumbering in the grave he would have his mother cared for still, and so he left her in John's charge. If you love Jesus Christ very much, he will leave something in your charge, depend upon that; and the more you love him, the more will he trust you with some loving commission which he would not trust with anybody else.

I have known him leave a dear child of his, some dear old saint, for a favoured believer to look after, whom he never would have had to look after if Jesus had not said: "I love this dear old saint, and I shall commit him—I shall commit her—to the custody of such a one, because he loves me, and he will take care of this poor one for my sake." Some of you have nobody to care for. Little know you of Christ's trustfulness towards you: he has not trusted you with anything. Do you not grieve to think that you lack this token of his special love? *As sure as ever there is any intimate love between Jesus and any soul, he trusts that soul with something to be done, to be endured, to be guarded, to be mourned over, or in some way to become a sacred trust.* Thus love has occupation, proof, and expression, and this she over longs for. I know my Master loves me, and I rejoice in his love; and sometimes, when I think of all this great church, and the College, and the Orphanage, and the many cares the whole service brings into my heart, I have said, "Have I begotten all this multitude, that I should carry all of them in my bosom, and bear their griefs, and be troubled with their troubles?" and the answer has always seemed to come to me, "Thou lovest me, and I trust thee to look after these souls, to help them, and care for them, for my sake." It is so with you that have classes to look after, or families to care for: attend to them, for Jesus' sake. If it be only one little one, hear Jesus say, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages." You have a charge, each one; and if you have none, I should be afraid you may be Judas, for I cannot think you are John. Had there been the love between you and the Lord which existed between John and Jesus, Jesus would have whispered into your ear about somebody of whom he would say, "Care for him; care for him for my sake"; and you would have answered, "Lord, that I will: the more thou givest to me to do for thee, the more happy will I be, because I love thee, and because this trust proves that thou dost love me."

There is the first head: we perceive Jesus loves some of his disciples more than others.

II. Now, secondly, we note that THE BELOVED ONES COUNT THIS TO BE THEIR GREATEST HONOUR. This is evidently in the text; for John, who wrote these words, called himself "one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved", and I think three times besides he speaks of himself as "that disciple whom Jesus loved." He took his name from his Lord's love, which he evidently counted to be his greatest honour. This was John's most notable title. As a servant of the Queen, having distinguished himself in the service of Her Majesty, becomes the lord of such and such a town, and he takes the name of the place as a name of honour, so John drops his own birth-given name, as it were, and takes this title instead of it—"that disciple whom Jesus loves." He wears it as a Knight of the Garter, or of the Golden Fleece, wears the mark of his sovereign's esteem. He took it for his honour; and yet, beloved, there was not a grain of boasting in it, nor even an approach to glorying in the flesh. A sense of love makes us happy, but not haughty. How can I proudly boast that Jesus loves me? If you are loved of him, you will feel that you so little merit it—indeed, that you so altogether demerit it—that you will be amazed to think that he loves you, and it will never enter into your head that his love is your due. You will take the title of love, but you will give the honour back to Jesus, and often you will say,

"And when I shall die,
'Receive me,' I'll cry,
For Jesus has loved me,

I cannot tell why.”

You will not be able to tell why the Lord loves you so specially. This will be the wonder of eternity. But there will be no pride in the experience of being dear to the Lord, nor anything to excite self-laudation. You will feel that it would be a wicked thing to deny his matchless love, but yet you will not carnally triumph over others because of it. There would be pride in the affectation of a modesty which would doubt the love of Jesus, but there is no pride in the reception of that love, since you yourself are so evidently, so conspicuously undeserving, that no one will dream that Jesus could have loved you because there was anything good in you.

Now, had John been proud he would have altered the title thus. He would have said, “That disciple who loved Jesus.” This would have been true, though not modest. There was, as far as his heart was capable of it, a reciprocity of love between John and Jesus. If Jesus loved him, he loved Jesus; but John never called himself “That disciple who loved Jesus.” No, for he felt as if his own love was altogether unworthy of mention in the presence of the love of Jesus.

Then notice also, as if to show us that there was no pride in taking the title, that he does not say, “John was the disciple whom Jesus loved.” We gather from other facts that it was John. All the traditions and beliefs of the early church went to testify that it was John. We have not, any of us, any doubt about the fact that it was John. It has, as it were, leaked out; but John nowhere says that he was the man. All that he has said is, “That disciple whom Jesus loved”; and thus he makes the love more conspicuous than the person who received it. We know that it must have been John, for many reasons; but still he does not say so. He hides John behind the love of Jesus, which proves that John gloried in the love of Christ, but did not boast of it egotistically. Bengel tells us, that John’s name means “the love of Jehovah.” If you look at Cruden’s translation, in the list of the meanings of names in the Concordance, he puts it “the grace of God,” the grace of Jehovah. Bengel reads it “the love of the Lord”: so John just altered the name a little, and paraphrased it when he wrote, “whom Jesus loved.” It would go into shorter compass if he put it in the Hebrew, and would need but little alteration. Sometimes when men succeed to estates, it is a condition that they shall change their names: in this case the name was very little altered from “the loved one of God” into the “loved one of Jesus Christ”; and there is no alteration (is there?) in the real meaning of it. When he said, “That disciple whom Jesus loved,” it was John “writ large.” That is all. It was John a little altered under the New Testament dispensation, the old name sweetened and perfumed by bringing it near to the sweeter name of Jesus Christ his Lord. So precious has its nearness to Jesus made it, that perhaps next to the name of Jesus no name is sweeter than that of John. As Ivan, or Evan, it has a most evangelical, gospel sound. It is common in many forms throughout Christendom, and many of the noblest disciples have worn it, from John Chrysostom to John Calvin, and from John Bunyan to John Wesley, and John Newton. In any case the honour of being loved by Jesus is greater than the name John; and happy are they who can claim it!

There are some, then, whom Jesus loves more than others, and these men always count that love to be their highest honour.

III. A step farther. A third remark—that THIS SPECIAL LOVE BRINGS SUCH MEN SPECIAL PRIVILEGES. It brought to John the first privilege of *being very near to Jesus, his Lord*. At that supper he was nearest to the place which Jesus occupied. You know they lay along at the supper somewhat in this fashion—leaning upon the left arm, so as to have the right with which to help themselves to each dish. Now, John lay here, and Jesus Christ lay just there; so that, when John turned a little backward there was the bosom of Jesus for him to put his head upon; and I suppose that when John asked the question, “Lord, who is it?” he turned his head over, and said into his very ear, “Lord, who is it?” Nobody heard what he said. It was just whispered into the ear of his Lord when his head was in that sacred bosom; and the answer was not heard by anybody except John. But his position of being nearest was brought about by his being best loved. He was nearest in fellowship because dearest in love. *Now, beloved, if you are best loved by Christ, you live nearest to him*. I am sure of it. If you love him best, and he loves you best, you will be more in prayer than others; you will spend more time alone with Jesus than other Christians do. You will abound in petition and praise. You will read his Word with greater diligence; you will drink it in with greater delight. You will live for him, too, with greater consecration. Your whole time will be spent in his company. When you are at your work in the house, or the field, or the shop, you will still be with him. If you are better loved than others, your daily song will be—

“The day is dark, the night is long,
Unblest with thoughts of thee,
And dull to me the sweetest song,
Unless its theme thou be.”

“He feedeth among the lilies,” and keeps near the pure in heart. Our Well-beloved’s delights are with those who delight in him. You will be close to Jesus if you are dear to him. The two things go together. If you are living far away in the cold regions of broken fellowship, then I am sure you have but very little conscious enjoyment of the love of Jesus Christ your Lord. The dearest must be the nearest. That is the first privilege.

The second was the privilege of using *and receiving tokens of endearment*. He leaned his head on Jesus’ bosom, looking up into his face; and Jesus looked down on him. There was mutual endearment, for Jesus loved him, and he loved Jesus; and that night, when the blessed Master was in trouble, he wanted his friend with him, and felt a need for John, though he could not help him much. Jesus felt a need of John’s society and sympathy, and it made Christ’s bosom all the easier to have John’s beloved head in it. As for John, it must have been a heaven below to be thus in the bosom of his Lord. He mentions it three times, you see; twice in this passage, and once in the last chapter of his gospel, where there was no necessity for mentioning it. He had such a recollection of his head having once been laid on his Lord’s breast, that he must put it in when he is speaking about Peter and himself. He says, “The disciple which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?” He must needs repeat the charming fact, for it was such a delight to him. O beloved, we cannot now touch the bosom of Jesus after the flesh, for he is gone up on high; but there are still most sweet endearments of spirit between the Lord Jesus and his loving disciples. I must not tell abroad the secrets of love, for these things are for those that know them, and not for all comers. Choice passages between true hearts are not to be published in the street, lest they become the theme of ridicule. Pearls are not to be cast before swine. But believe me, at this moment we have, or at least we can have, such intimate enjoyment of the love of Jesus, that even if he were here, and we could lean our heads upon his bosom, the endearment could not be more certain, more sweet, or more ravishing to our delighted souls. In very truth we have fellowship with Jesus, and that fellowship is no dream or fancy. We speak no fiction, neither do we retail at secondhand what others have experienced, but we speak of things which we have personally enjoyed; and we know that there is an intimate communion which is one of the private privileges of those whom Jesus loves much for it has been our privilege. I hope very many of you know this choice blessing of living in the immediate enjoyment of your Saviour’s love. May you never lose it!

Then is there a third boon, not only of nearness and endearment, but of *confidence towards the Lord*; for it was a bold thing surely, for John to lean his head on Christ’s bosom. Our Lord did not say, “Nay, John; nay. I am thy Master, and thy Lord. Dost thou do this to me as if I were thine equal?” No. The meaning of that blessed text, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,” runs in other directions besides that which we generally think of. If you come to Jesus in the most intense manner, he will not repulse you. If your head shall come into his bosom, he will not cast your head out. If you can get your very heart into his heart and come closer to him than even John dared to do—if you carry that coming beyond all previous comings, yet Jesus neither will nor can resent the nearest approaches of any one of his believing people. We lose a great deal of Christ’s loving fellowship because we are so formal and distant towards him. We seem to think that he came among men to show them their distance from God, and not to be as a brother to them, to reveal God to them. Jesus seeks to reach our hearts, he stoops to our littleness, let us pluck up courage to draw near to him. Well does our hymn put it—

“Let us be simple with him, then,
Not backward, stiff, or cold;
As though our Bethlehem could be
What Sinai was of old.”

Lean on him. Lean on the bosom of the Christ of God, who loveth us, and hath given himself for us. Make a confidant as well as a confidence of your Lord. Put all the weight of your care, all the weight of your whole self

and all that concerns you upon him, and then recline with delight upon his bosom. There was a gracious confidence given to John, which he rightly used towards his Lord.

Surely there was a *great liberty* given to him. Some would have said he took a liberty in thus leaning where no head of king or emperor might aspire to rise. He was the most honoured of all human beings; but surely he took great liberties. No, he did not, for the Lord himself gave him access with boldness. Great love has privileges which make her boldest advances no intrusion. Love has the key of all the rooms of the Father's house. Love has the range of Paradise. Love may read the very heart of God. Love may come where she wills, and go unchallenged. John said to our Saviour, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus looked down at him and said, as if he did not want the others to know at all, "He it is to whom I shall give a sop." He had just to watch a little while. I do not know but it is not improbable, that Judas was next at the table—John here, then Jesus, and then Judas. Very likely Judas was pretty close to the Lord; for if a man has your purse you want him near you, so as to tell him what you wish to have done with the money. So, when Jesus just turned over and gave a sop to Judas, John knew the meaning of the act. Judas had had his conscience disturbed, I should think, by the utterance of the Saviour, when he said, "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me," and by the question of each of the others, "Lord, is it I?" Judas himself asked that question for a time; but he grew calm again, and became reassured, and thought he should not be found out, until the Lord dipped a piece of meat, according to the Oriental custom, in the sauce of the dish, and passed it to him. Even then Judas possibly thought, "This is an act of great friendship. He evidently has the utmost confidence in me, and has not found me out." Little did he know that the sop was the token of the discovered traitor. Then Judas said, "Lord, is it I?" thinking he should get a pleasant answer, but Jesus answered that it was even he, and added, "What thou doest, do quickly." There that matter ended. But John was thus the recipient of friendly confidence on the part of Christ: he told to Jesus his heart, and Jesus told him his heart. He had liberty to go to Christ. Ah, brethren! do you never feel in prayer as if you were tied up and could not pray? The best of saints will be bound about some things. People come and ask you to pray for this, and pray for that; but you cannot so pray unless you have liberty from the throne. If God gives the prayer of faith, you can pray it; but you cannot pray that prayer at your own will. He that can most often pray the prayer of faith, he that can see farthest into Christ's mysteries, he that can read the riddles of this divine Samson, is the man whose heart loves Jesus best, and whose head lies most in the bosom of his Lord. Be you sure of this, that if you love much, you shall know the secret of the Lord, for it is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant.

Now a step farther, and a very little more, and we have done. This creates *special knowledge*. I merely give it as a head to help your memories, for I have already dwelt upon it as a matter of fact. The special privileges of love lead on to a special knowledge of Christ. I do not think that any other evangelist notices Christ's emotion at the supper in the matter of his spirit as John has done. He writes, "When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit," and so on. John was so close to the Lord, with his head on his breast, that he could tell, by the heaving of his bosom, that he was troubled. The mind of God is not so revealed to any man now that he can set up to foretell the future like a prophet; but, mark you, the choice ones amongst the saints have intimations of the mind of God about many things. Those who live at court can often foresee the king's movements when others cannot. It is my firm conviction that favoured believers have tokens, warnings, and hints from above. Did not the Lord say, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" Even the choicest spirits may not understand the Lord's meaning all at once; but if any man can read anything of the future, it is he that puts his head where all eyes grow clear, and all hearts become pure, even upon the breast of Jesus. Oh, to know Christ! The day will come when the saints of God who are great classics, mathematicians, or astronomers—and there have been godly men skilled in all the sciences—the day, I say, shall come when these will count all they know of science to be of little worth compared with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord. Brethren, we value knowledge, culture, science; but when we put them at their highest market price, what are they as compared with the knowledge of Jesus? This is my one ambition—that I may know him, and may comprehend with all saints what are the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths, and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. If you love your Lord, you shall know of his doctrine. If you live near him, you shall understand his feelings. If his secret be with you, you shall know what prophets and kings desired to know, and what angels desire to look into. The Lord bless you, and bring each one of you who are his people into this happy condition.

I have done, when I notice two things. The first is this—that *the favoured position which John occupied did not screen him from the necessity of asking the question, “Lord, is it I?”* There really was no suspicion of him, nor any reason for such suspicion; but his heart was in a right state, and, therefore, he felt it necessary to say, “Lord, is it I?” as well as any of the rest. And I make this remark because the very persons who do not say, “Lord, is it I?” are those who ought to say it. If you are enjoying more of God’s love to-night than ever you did in your life, yet do not profess to have climbed above the need of self-examination. When the question comes, “Art thou really one of his?” do not chase it away, as if it were an impertinence. Entertain the enquiry till you can satisfy it with a sufficient answer. Some professors can afford to sneer at holy anxiety. May I never be of their number! I have heard them ridicule the question—

“Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his, or am I not?”

Now, I do not hesitate to say that every man who loves the Lord has had to ask that question; and has had to ask it all the more because the truth and fervency of his love have made him jealous of himself. He has such an overwhelming sense of what his love ought to be, and he has such a consciousness of shortcoming, that he is quite sure to say, “Do I love the Lord?” It is not your bold talker that is your true lover after all. There is a confidence which is fatal.

“He who doubted of his state,
He may—perhaps he may too late.”

If thou sayest, “I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing,” whilst thou art naked, and poor, and miserable, it will be a sad deception, and the awakening out of it will be sadder still.

But if thou sayest, “Oh that I loved my Redeemer more! Oh that I served him better! But I do love him. My heart is his, and he does love me,” then thou hast answered the question of, “Lord, is it I?” and thou mayest go thy way contented.

The other remark, with which I finish, is this: *that John’s nearness to Christ did not authorize him to make answer to his fellow disciples, nor to judge any one of them.* Time was when John might have sat in judgment over them. Did he not desire to sit upon a throne judging the twelve tribes of Israel with his brother James? But now that he has his head in his Lord’s bosom, he is not anxious to judge, but far otherwise. His brethren keep asking, “Lord, is it I?” Peter makes signs to him. Fishermen have ways of their own of talking to one another. Peter seems to say, without the use of words, “Pray ask the Master.” John does not presume to make a guess as to the traitor’s name, but he softly says, “Lord, who is it?” He asked that question of his Lord; but he did not himself pitch upon Judas. No, he might, perhaps, have laid his suspicions upon someone else who would have been innocent. It was wise to refer the matter to the Lord. Some say that they live very near to Jesus. It is an evil sign when men speak of their own attainments. These are the people who, in the next breath, begin to condemn others. But this is not after the manner of the beloved John. Some professors affirm that they are going to have a particularly fine place in the glory, all by themselves. I do not quite understand their theory, but I am sure I do not grudge any of my Master’s servants any special honour they may desire. As far as I understand them, there is to be a separate place in the kingdom for them, and we poor, ordinary Christians are to be saved; but we must take a lower room. So let it be. We will rejoice in the promotion of our brethren. As for myself, if it should ever come to pass that I should have the privilege of living in some first avenue in heaven among the aristocracy of the skies, I think I should prefer another quarter. I have kept company on earth with such a poor lot of brethren, and I have learned to love them so well, that I would rather abide with them in their inferior heaven than rise with the cream of the cream into the upper places. I like to be with God’s people of the poorer class, and of the more struggling and afflicted sort. I like to be with God’s people who wrestle hard with sins, and doubts, and fears. If I get spoken to by my very superior brethren, I find that I have very little pleasant fellowship with them, for I know nothing about their wonderful experience of freedom from conflict, and complete deliverance from every evil tendency. I have never won an inch of the way to heaven without fighting for it. I have never lived a day but I have had to sorrow over my imperfections. I sometimes get near to God, but at that time I weep most about my faults and

failings. Although I have thus spoken after the manner of men, I do not believe in these superior beings, nor in their superior heaven: but even if I did, I would sooner follow with the flock than run ahead with the greyhounds. These brethren judge us, and condemn us. They say that we do not understand “the mystery of the kingdom,” or something or other. We know Jesus Christ, however—both theirs and ours. We will not deny their piety and grace, but bless God that they have so much of them. We hope, however, to get to heaven the same as they, and into the glory the same as they; and we will be glad if so the Lord will enable us. Do you find the spirit of self-exaltation, and of condemning others, coming over you at times? Conquer it at once by the Holy Spirit’s power. Let us cease to judge where we are forbidden to do so. Let us contend earnestly for the truth; but as to the hearts of men, let us leave these to Jesus.

I close by saying—you remember what Jesus said to Peter. Peter was always a little too fast, and he therefore ventured to peer into things which did not concern him, and so he said to Jesus, as he looked at John, “Lord, and what shall this man do?” He did not think badly of brother John: I should have been ashamed of Peter if he had done so. But still he said, “What shall this man do?” Our blessed Lord replied to him, “What is that to thee? Follow thou me.” So, when you feel inclined, because you are growing in grace and becoming somebody, to say, “Lord, and what shall this poor member do? And what shall this imperfect brother be? What shall that poor, blundering new convert do?”—remember the words of Jesus: “What is that to thee? Follow thou me.” Mind your Master, and mind yourself, and let your brethren stand or fall to their own Lord, as you must. Now, come and lay your head in your Lord’s bosom, and never mind Peter. May God bless you, for Christ’s sake!

Taken from: the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Vol 34 Sermon #2052