

Malvern Mashal Number 29

Yearning and Rebuke



I well remember an occasion fifteen or twenty years ago when we were in our favourite Trysting Place in the Lake District. It had been a particular busy time for Ros and she was catching up on her time with the Lord when He touched her heart with a simple but striking word: “I’ve been missing you!”

The word came back to me this morning and I reflected for a moment on some of the implications it contained. At one level, you might say that it was a rebuke, but what we discerned more strongly was a feeling of longing. The Lord so longs to be close to us that it grieves Him when we put anyone or anything in His place.

In absolute terms we are indulging in idolatry when we do such things, in which case there are sure to be penalties to pay. Don’t be fooled because we are under the New Covenant: we still reap what we sow when we put other things or people first, and so miss the finer edges of God’s leading.

There are certainly times when the Lord rebukes His people in Scripture for not paying Him proper attention. Jesus marvels, too, that only *one* of the ten lepers who had been healed returns to say thank you. When you think of the scale of what they have been set free from, their ingratitude appears astonishing.

The great thing is that this principle works in reverse. As we deliberately seek to put the Lord’s interests first, we gradually overcome the constant gravitational pull our self-centredness – and the Lord goes to enormous lengths to plan opportunities for service, and encounters with Himself. We might say that He is prepared to go a long way out of His way to meet with us!

A passage that has always meant a lot to me is the Lord’s lament in the opening chapters of Jeremiah. As we see people forsaking the Lord in favour of broken cisterns, it’s hard not to think, “What a poor choice. How stupid can you get?” There are many verses in the second and third chapter of Jeremiah which provide us with a rare insight into how the Lord Himself looks back, yearning for the time when His people were walk-

ing more closely with Himself. With no gratitude for God's many gifts to them, the people were instead applying all their considerable charm and skill to making themselves attractive to lovers who had not the slightest desire to live in the fear of the Lord. Listen to the longing in the Lord's heart in this verse, and then read on:

I remember the devotion of your youth,
how as a bride you loved Me
and followed Me through the desert,
through a land not sown. (Jeremiah 2:1)

When we are reminded in Proverbs that a wise man heeds a rebuke more than a fool does a hundred lashes (Pvbs. 17:10), it is important to remember that the ability to *heed* such rebukes depends on the extent to which we have developed our spiritual and emotional intelligence. Have we learned to read between the lines when the Lord speaks, whether directly or obliquely through another person? Do we realise when He is (discreetly) trying to convey something important to us?

May the Lord help us to be prepared to look at areas which may feel somewhat far removed from our calling, but which are actually very important for our character, and the success (or otherwise) of our relationships with others. If we do not heed his gentle breeze, He is left with no choice but to send a stronger wind.

It is good to lift situations to the Lord as they come along, arrow prayer style, but it is also important just to sit for prolonged times in the Lord's presence until issues become clearer. Real prayer and reflection takes time. I know I quickly get off balance when I lose that contemplative base which fuels and informs the more active aspects of my ministry. I wrote in *Intimacy and Eternity* that if, for a period, busyness compels us for a season to "feed on the wing" the Lord understands and undertakes for us. But it *blesses* the Lord so much when we make more time to be close to Him.

Ros often gets a nudge from the Lord to go and thank people for the sacrifices they are making in seeking Him – sacrifices that only they and the Lord know about. We pray that your yearning will draw, or even drive you closer to the Lord in these coming days, to receive more of His love and wisdom. And if you are feeling under great pressure at the moment, then maybe the words of two of the prayers Robert wrote for *Connections* – our forthcoming compilation of prayers and music – will speak to you. We are in the process of editing the material at the moment; it is going to be a really special CD!

Robert For those who have felt the pull of too many pressures
and the trip of too many falls,
let the presence of the Lord restore
the sharpness that was slipping away.

ROS: For those who giftings have been laid aside,
less in dry dock than simply out of use,
we ask You to give them grace to overcome
their reluctance to draw close

Robert Where the heart has lost its heat
and is walking in defeat,
may the longing arise once more
to let the companionable presence of the Lord revive,
and so to enter that stillness of soul where they know
both the exaltation and the agony
of feeling as You feel,
and of seeing as You see.

You seek lovers after truth

ROS Lord, I am working so hard for You –
desiring just to play my part,
striding out beneath Your banner
and longing to be true.

ROBERT Come apart, my child;
Come apart and rest awhile.
You're in this for the long haul,
and I desire Your humble all.

ROS Lord, I need time out from the maul,
so I will seek to heed this call;
but can I rest within Your grace and learn more of your peace?

ROBERT Come aside, My holy bride,
You have not missed My grace,
or lost the right to seek My face,
For a contrite broken heart
Will surely be
one that beats in time with Mine.

ROS Dayspring from on high,
draw Your presence nigh.
To You goes all my longing,
my treasured home and deep belonging.

Take command and full control.
Sweep the dross from my soul
and draw me deep beneath Your wing
in fresh encounters with the King.

ROBERT Press on, my child, into My heart.
Let Christ be milestone, guide and chart.
Resist the siren sound of disappointment's chords;
the guilt and envy that have cut you with their swords;
allow yourself to doubt your doubts
and set your face towards the coming King.

ROS Jesus, Lover of my soul,
I open wide my heart
to embrace this intense adoring passion.
for which Your blood was poured.
Water the seeds I plant
and grow them for Your glory,
but let all You see in me
be a contrite broken heart
that beats in time with Yours.