The King's Face

"What profit is it that we dwell in Jerusalem if we do not see the King's face?"

I thought this was a quote from the Bible, but was unable to find it. In fact it is a quote from,

The Hidden Life of Prayer by David McIntyre. He was the principal of the Bible Training Institute (BTI) in Glasgow from 1913 to 1938. [In 1998 this college (re-named Glasgow Bible College in 1991) amalgamated with another Bible school and is now known as the International Christian College.]

The above sentence sums up a great deal of the heart of effectiveness in Christian ministry. We know we should bear much fruit through our lives. We tend to focus on methodology – the science of fruit bearing. Yet as you read the accounts of those rare workers whose lives are marked out by a fragrance that pulls at our heartstrings and creates a pain of longing in our hearts for effectiveness like theirs, it is not so much what they did and how they did it, but the fact that they experienced a marvellous friendship with God. While he was in a dark prison cell, Samuel Rutherford said, "The smile of Christ's face is to me now the Kingdom!"

My trouble is that so often I am content just to dwell in Jerusalem – busy in the Lord's work, hours rushing by, full days that barely leave time to give a thought to the Lover of all that I am who is longing for my friendship. When I do go and see the King in His audience chamber, I am burdened with requests, business that must be done, guidance needed, petitions on behalf of many. These are all important, all worthy, but in reality just "business in Jerusalem" after all.

Amidst the swirl of pleasure that engulfs believers in many countries, my longing is that we would be like God's seven thousand: ***"All seven thousand … all knees that have not bowed to Ba'al and every mouth that has not kissed him."*** (1 Kings 19:18)

They are men and women whose faith and zeal burn brighter as the world's darkness deepens. They are passionate for the truth. They are like Paul who expressed it in these words: ***"For me to live is Christ."*** (Phil 1:21)

Our intellectual arguments often leave people cold. Our sharing of the Gospel doesn't come over as really good news. As we talk about the Cross with dry eyes – after all it is theology – there is no ring of personal shock and grief and love for the one from "Whose head and hands and feet, sorrow and love flow mingling down".

Now and then you meet someone like Paul who has looked up into the wonderful face of the Lord Jesus and now cannot take his or her eyes away. There is a radiance about such a person – a glory, a shining forth, a wonderful quality. There is a fragrance that is unmistakable, ***"The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon"***. (Song of Songs 4:11) These are the people that stay with their 'Beloved'. Where, as Solomon's Song says, ***"There is a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters and streams of Lebanon".*** (4:15)

So what makes us effective in sharing 'the Good News'?

It isn't knowledge. ***"Knowledge puffs up …."*** (1 Cor. 8:1) It is true that in the last 50 years we have learned a huge amount and access to information is so much easier than before. God has taught us a great deal. Some of us are asked for our advice on this or that. A very few of us can say like the writer of the Psalms: ***"I have more knowledge than all my teachers"***. (Ps. 119:99) But so often this knowledge is ***"a form of godliness"***. (2 Tim. 3:5) We deny the power because we don't possess it! No, it isn't knowledge that makes a difference nor is it our theology, nor zeal nor any amount of good works.

What made Moses ***"the friend of God"***? (Ex. 33:11) I think it was because he had a deep longing to be in the presence of God and this longing was greater than all his own personal ambitions.

When God offered Moses something perfectly legitimate – a new people of God – he turned it down. To Moses, God's good name meant more than anything else. Moses' refusal to go on without God is really sublime. The Lord said to Moses, ***"I will send an angel before you …."*** (Ex 33:2) But this wasn't nearly good enough for Moses. It was unthinkable to Moses that God's wondrous presence was to be withdrawn. So Moses began with a skilful argument, point by point, until he dared to say "no" to God! ***"If Your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here ….."***

I don't know if God was grieved that sad day, but if so, how glad God must have been to find one man who, at all cost to himself, wanted the best and how gladly He must have said, ***"Moses, My presence will go with you and I will give you rest"***. (Ex. 33:14) God didn't consider angelic help and leadership good enough that day for a man who would have nothing less than God Himself.

David possessed a similar attitude. His flesh and his heart cried out for the Living God with singing (Ps 84:2). There are some very bloodthirsty psalms. I can think of one explanation. David hated those who hated God. To him, sin – his own and that of others – had a truly horrible sharp sting because it was done, ***"Against you, you only"***. Only when we dwell in the presence of God's holiness will we understand the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

In the New Testament Paul is our great model. His deep love of God's presence was probably born in those three sightless days when he was, ***"Beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"***. (2 Cor. 4:6) He was sightless but full of radiance. Through all his hardships and the controversy that could have made him critical and bitter, there was a homesickness to depart and to be with Christ which is far better!

I think it was that time in the presence of the King that gave Paul that tender heart of love and made him like a nursing mother to the newborn churches. To Paul this all absorbing concern to be in the presence of Jesus, to know and love Him and to know the breadth and length and depth and height of His great love was to be filled with all the fullness of God.

There are other lovers of Jesus: Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene. They knew something of a priceless intimate love for the Lord Jesus. Remember Mary's devotion to the Lord Jesus that caused her instinctively to pour out a costly perfume. The disciples would have been satisfied if it had been sold and the money given to the poor. Almsgiving, according to the Pharisees, was a major element in gaining righteousness. Mary comforted the Lord Jesus in the days when, ***"His soul began to be sorrowful even unto death"***.

Mary Magdalene wept by the empty tomb, staying there when the other disciples had gone away. She was wonderfully rewarded not by a vision of angels, but by the Lord Jesus Himself. He gladdened her heart and dried her tears. It is written, ***"He appeared first to Mary Magdalene."***

In our zeal to do better are we missing the best? The word of our Lord Jesus is still, ***"He that loves me will be loved by My Father and I will love him and will manifest myself to him."*** (Jn. 14:21)
In heaven, ***"His servants will worship Him. They will see His face …."*** (Rev. 22:3-4)

But it is also partially true that we can have a foretaste of that, for it is true that He will show Himself to those who love and serve Him now. There is a reward for an obedient disciple. There is power and authority in the life of a faithful disciple. There is the glory of achievement for the zealous disciple. But above all there is the whisper of His love, the joy of His presence and the shining of His face for those who love Him for Himself alone. This is ultimately what God has called us to.

So, **"What profit is it if we dwell in Jerusalem, if we do not see the King's face?"**