

THE LONESOMENESS OF HOLINESS

Rev. Joseph H. Smith

True, we are to treat of a paradox here; for saints are promised the companionship of God. Fenelon wrote:

"Never less alone,
Than when thus alone:
Alone with God."

And the beloved apostle John declares that "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." So that as far back as to Enoch who "walked with God," and as far forward as to where Paul reminds us that for us all "it is written, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" and to where he himself bore witness that no man stood with him at his trial, but all forsook him, "notwithstanding the Lord above was with me and strengthened me." (II. Tim. 4:15, 16). We are assured of God's company in the way of Faith, and may go along singing:

"No never alone, no never alone,
He has promised never to leave me,
Never to leave me alone."

Yet upon the human side there is a

Lonesomeness to Holiness

In a beautiful mansion I can point to yonder, there lives a holy mother, whose early years of frugality and love helped husband to acquire that home and the means behind it. There live there also, two worldly daughters. Nice they are, and chaste and correct in their lives, up to date in what stands for style and culture and modern literature and progress. There is not anything too dear to buy, if it is good for mother to eat. They will take her in their auto to the holiness church door, and be back in time to bring her home again. They will see that her room is warm, and the holiness paper is on her table. But they leave her alone, even when they are with her. They have neither any abuse or any use for her religion. They can attend to the domestic matters and the business affairs; and they have lots of company in the front of the house. She has none. They are as far apart in their sympathies and pleasures and interests as if there was an ocean or continent between them, with neither cable nor radio to communicate. Nor is it the difference of age simply. It is the distance of spirits. Mother, like John, is banished upon the Isle of Patmos because of her witness for Jesus. But, like John on the Isle of Patmos, she may have visions of the Holy City and be likened unto what the Spirit saith unto the churches. There is a wondrous wealth of opportunity in the lonesomeness of Holiness.

The pain of it is felt and deep pangs of it must be borne when in the church, and in the fellowship of the ministry. Even the sanctified soul finds no concord with either its own spiritual realizations or aspirations. Our language sometimes sounds like a strange tongue to them, and they look blank, or courteously try to change the subject. Their talk, with which they think to entertain us, is at best about the material or social or official things of the church, the new scandal, the latest wedding, the biggest collection, the finest anthem, or the coming concert, etc. None of which is of major interest to the sanctified child of God, and that of which he would speak of the conversion of their children, the awakening of the sinners about us, the Holy Ghost anointing of their preacher, the need of

a revival, and the kind that is needed, and of the blessed experience of Holiness itself. All this seems a dead language to many—"deader" than the Greek or even the Hebrew. And, if indeed it does not meet ridicule or rebuke, it rarely meets any response; and the faithful few seem isolated even in the church of God. Is it any wonder, beloved, they cluster together a bit, till they be charged with clan-nishness? Or, is it altogether strange that they sometimes swarm?

The missionary in far off lands is a notable subject of this lonesomeness. The more particularly if he (or she) is truly a sanctified missionary. For then, not only does the environment of heathendom rob him of the geniality of friendly fellowship as of the homeland; but, average modern churchdom in Mission-field has no more opportunity for holiness testimony and the holiness movements than in the homeland church. And the ground of Mission consolidation and the ban, even, of the missionaries' own union meetings, is not a pure type of the "unity of the Spirit," and is often bought at the cost of sacrifice of something essential in truth and testimony of Christian experience. The out-and-out witness to heart purity and perfect love, there, as here, is a speckled bird in the flock—sometimes a target to shoot at—and often shunned and avoided. The un-sanctified missionary, though likewise to some measure lonesome, in distance from native home and amidst surroundings of heathen civilization, is not apt to be so great a sufferer from lonesomeness as the other. He prides himself on being a "good mixer," and he hob-nobs more with the men from his own country who are there for commercial purposes, educational, and pleasure-seeking ends, rather than for Jesus Christ. Not only so, but he, in his own Mission compound, spends time and money and thought and talk and strength on games, and songs, and sometimes even in dances; and like the still more worldly church man at home, he seeks a good measure of companionship on natural, social and worldly lines. But the holy man and woman of God is abroad under commission of the Holy Ghost, and supported with the consecrated funds of saints in the homeland, gives himself wholly to that work, goes about his Master's business, preaches and proves that deadness to this world is a necessary evidence of the life and love of Christ in the soul, such one is left much to himself. Alone! Alone with God!

There are two kinds of lonesomeness allotted to classes of God's children. There is the lonesomeness of the exile. And the lonesomeness of the pilgrim. Babylonian captivity, though different from Egyptian bondage, is not without its spiritual suggestion and significance. Some, who are not strangers to the pleasures and the plenty of their homeland in Canaan, have nevertheless lapsed in a measure towards worldly idolatry and made entanglements which have not altogether alienated nor banished them from Israel, but have caused them to hang up their harps in a strange land. They are forced to plant their vineyards in a strange country, for which they have neither identity of affinity; and they are for the time excluded from the companionship and comforts of the promised land. This must be painful lonesomeness. Thank God, it may have an ending. The exile may be welcomed home at the end of his seventy years of chastening. One who has once enjoyed the holy fellowship and bountiful de-

lights can never feel at home anywhere else.

But pilgrim lonesomeness is normal. The man of God has voluntarily "come out from among them to be separate." The world has taken cognizance of them and will give him a "severe letting alone" after a while. And this is truly "severe" when it comes from the worldly-minded of our own homes or our churches, or our conferences even. But he remembers that God has said, (in fact he has it in writing from home) "I will receive you."

This pilgrim has truly turned his back upon the world, and renounced its honor as well as its holdings. He has counted that even the "afflictions of Christ were greater riches than the treasures of Egypt," and he has started off singing:

"A tent or a cottage,
Why should I care?
They are building a palace
For me over there."

And now he sees the proud made happy. The folks that "looked out for themselves" getting ahead. They pass him in their fine autos as he plods on afoot. They build their mansions as he puts another goat skin patch on his tent, and "sojourns" as in a strange country. And he does experience a strange double lonesomeness; for while he has truly "left the world to follow Jesus," the world now has surely left him—seemingly among the back numbers of the past.

But he finds the Man of Galilee is also still afoot. They walk together. He remembers he has an old deed among his papers, and it is to a land that is beyond this, the mortgage is about to be cancelled with the payment of this his last trial, and God is not ashamed to call him by name and welcome him; for he hath prepared for him a city.

And as to company—Plenty! He begins to look over the directory and after he passes the twelve tribes of Israel with their twelve thousand names apiece, he gives it up, for John by his side tells him it is a great multitude which no man can number." So lonesomeness is forever over, as

"With souls of all ages, we
In harmony meet,
Our Saviour and brethren,
Transported to greet."

—Heart and Life Magazine

THE LADDER OF PRAYER

There is a ladder which I climb
When worn with toil and care,
It scales the massive walls of Time
To a region beautiful, sublime,
This invisible Ladder of Prayer.

And I ascend to rest and peace
In that calm atmosphere above,
To stress and strife there comes surcease,
From pain I find a kind release
In thoughts of truth and love.

And lo! the crooked ways seem straight,
And the rough stones beneath my feet
Are smoothed away the while I wait,
For prayer leads up to heaven's gate
And makes life full and sweet.

—Elizabeth Scollard in Heart & Life

Of all that we have, His tithe must be rendered to Him, or in so far and in so much He is forgotten of the skill and of the treasure, of the strength of the mind, of the time and of the toil, offering must be made reverently.
—Ruskin.