

The Third Mile of Love

Different spiritual food at each spiritual level

He made him ride in the heights of the earth, That he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock; curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock, with fat of lambs; and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the choicest wheat; and you drank wine, the blood of the grapes (Deuteronomy 32:13-14).

Probably when we read these verses we think that they refer to the old Israel and how the Lord used to prepare everything for them as they walked in the desert. However, these verses have other deep and important meanings for the spiritual growth.

According to the early fathers, the first principle of the spiritual life is:

The person consists of different elements and there is a special kind of spiritual food for each of these elements.

A person consists of: soul, mind(maestro of soul), spirit and flesh. We all know the food for the flesh, but we might not know that each of the other elements has its special spiritual food.

"I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father (1 John 2:13).

In fact, the reason behind this seemingly unfamiliar conviction of the early fathers is that they have realised that the root of sin lies in the fact that the person has become disintegrated after the fall. In creation, God has created man as one unit that works in harmony. But when sin entered the human nature, disintegration resulted. So, the mind started to work on its own, the soul on its own and so on.

Probably we all remember the words of Jesus where He says: *“Love the Lord your God from all your heart, all your mind, all your soul”*. These words show that each of these elements has become separate from the other.

The early fathers realised that the greatness of salvation of man lies in that all these elements would be re-united and work in harmony one more time.

We all know the commandment that says:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).

We have all started the path of salvation; we all know how to start, but what after that? Probably most of us would say that we should grow in the spirit, serve the Lord and complete our mission. However, the early fathers used to emphasise that this salvation has to reach its fullness inside man. By this, the glory of God can be revealed in us and hence it can cover all the earth as written in Habakkuk and Isaiah.

We all know the promises that talk about the glory of God that covers the earth and we all hold tight on them, pray them and await them. However, we rarely notice that the revelation of the Lord's glory over the earth lies in that His glory would be revealed and manifested in the life of His people first, in the life of each individual. His glory cannot be revealed in us when we are disintegrated from inside. Thus, we need to be restored to the inner integration and our being needs to be in unity one more time.

Paul frequently talks about the believer being in Christ and Christ being in him. Also John the apostle wrote about the same thing. But, have we ever thought how this can happen practically. We practise it by faith and this is 100% correct.

However, in order to enter into its effectiveness and actualisation, we need to be one in Christ and Christ in us. This happens after we are restored to the inner unity. If this disintegration is corrected and restored to the original harmony, we will start to experience real unity between us and Christ.

There is a very important and fundamental truth that has been lost from the Church of this generation. There is a place for practising all the biblical truths by faith. We understand a biblical truth and accept it by faith; then we learn something new from the Word of God and again accept it by faith. This is great and it surely works in us. However, if we want to enter to the fullness of the spiritual truth, this requires a different level of understanding of the inner state. This in turn leads us to a different level of spirituality that reveals the greatness of salvation.

The Church of Christ lives at a certain level of spirituality while she actually needs to move to other further spiritual dimensions. The level the Church is walking in is a true level of spirituality which proclaims salvation; the believers can be at this level and they still experience peace with the Lord and are fruitful in their ministry. However, at this level there is usually some place for sin in their lives; it still reigns inside them in a hidden way causing some of the weaknesses to come on the surface at times. The believers usually say: “well, that’s normal; these are some of the characteristics of the old man that we need to get rid of”. We usually comfort ourselves by saying: “our sins are forgiven in Christ and there is no problem”. This is completely correct and is 100% biblical.

But what is in the heart of the Lord for this generation and for these days is that He doesn’t want these sins to occur because He is preparing His Church to be holy without spot or blemish. The Church is being prepared to be the bride of Christ. The bridal ornaments cannot be put on the bride if she is not cleansed and has filth around her.

The Holy Spirit is now preparing the final ornaments of the bride of Christ and He wants to start putting them on the believers so that they would be prepared as the

bride. Yet, He stops and does not proceed because He still sees spots that appear in the people of God which hinder putting these ornaments. These spots have to be cleansed first. Salvation has completed everything, so there is no place for these spots. The bride should be similar to her Bridegroom so that she would be capable of receiving the ornaments. The characteristics of Jesus have to appear clearly inside us as the Bible says. The characteristics of Jesus do not have the spots of sin. The face of Jesus has to appear in our faces before the final ornaments can be put on us. Our generation is so saturated with reading, teaching and preaching; their deep longing and desire is to see the face of Jesus in our faces.

Sometimes we fail to see that grace is able to change our generation and our limited abilities; and hence lift us from one point to another. We actually need to climb the mountain of the Lord in order to be close to Him. On top of the mountain, the ornaments would be put; there is no place for the ornament down at the foot of the mountain.

There will then be no place for the reign of sin in our lives:

'Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God' (1 John 3:9).

'...so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Romans 5:21).

This was the conviction of the early fathers in relation to the special kinds of spiritual food for each of the human elements. In fact, they emphasised that the spiritual father should be able to discern the spiritual level of his disciples and the kind of food they need.

This is also the reason behind their love to use the term *"the spiritual father"* instead of using other designations like: *"counsellor"*, *"teacher"* or *"mentor"*. A physical father can discern the age of his child, his growth and the kind of food he needs. So, for example, a mother or a father would never give meat to a breast

feeding baby. They know that he only needs milk. Then when this baby grows up, they will be able to discern that he needs to change this kind of food. It should be exactly the same in spiritual matters.

True spiritual fatherhood is now lacking in the Church of God. So, what is left is some kind of fatherhood related to responsibilities and giving and not the fatherhood in its full picture as a gift and calling from the Lord.

The kind of spiritual food has to change as the inner man grows.

'So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah,^[b] do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah,^[c] do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him "Feed My sheep' (John 21:15-17).

After the resurrection, Jesus was handing the responsibility of the Church to Peter and to the other disciples. His words emphasise the concept of feeding, drawing our attention to the importance of feeding in terms of tending and looking after the Church. Spiritual feeding was the first responsibility that Jesus handed to the disciples after resurrection as clear in the above verses.

In the above verses, we also notice something else which is even more important. Jesus used three different expressions in talking to Peter. He said to Peter: *"feed my lamb"*, *"tend my sheep"*, and then *"feed my sheep"*. This difference is clear in the original Greek language.

"Feed my lamb" refers to the first level of food. The lambs are small sheep and thus they need a certain kind of food. In his epistle, Peter highlighted that milk is what

is required first: ‘...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby...’ (1 Peter 2:2).

In the second phrase, Jesus tells Peter: “*tend my sheep*”. This means that the second level does not only require feeding but also tending. The reason behind this is that the food is being given through teaching and preaching, but the people of God do not grow. This is similar to a child who has got a problem in his abdomen; so, he eats but the food is not digested; he does not grow. The believers at this stage are exactly the same; they take food but the food is not being absorbed in their system so they do not grow. This happens because at this second level, together with offering the food, the minister should take care of the other hidden oppositions that come from inside the person which hinder the growth. This actually requires spiritual insight and discernment; this is a rare gift. Lack of insight and spiritual discerning at this level causes problems in the growth of the believers.

For the third stage, Jesus uses the word ‘*feed*’, yet He does not say: “*feed my lamb*” but instead He says: “*feed my sheep*”. This means that they have grown up now and the hindrances inside them have been dealt with. So, after these hindrances have been dealt with, they require adult food.

In the epistle to the Hebrews Paul highlights that milk is for children, but adults need strong food.

‘For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil’ (Hebrews 5:12-14).

This shows that there are different kinds of food and that the obstacles to absorb food should be dealt with. We notice here that the major hindrance at this middle stage of spiritual growth is: not knowing how to obey the crucified Christ in the

narrow path. Thus, this needs a lot of tending until the soul learns how to practically obey. At this stage, there are lots of opposing factors due to the fallen nature particularly in the mind and the soul. The reason behind this is the disintegration of the different elements of the person and not being yet restored to unity and integration. If this unity and harmony starts to happen, the heart would be completely straight in its path of obedience and following Christ. One would then be able to receive every spiritual food that is being offered. The person would thus differ in his spiritual growth from one month to the other. Unfortunately, these days, years may pass and we hardly notice any spiritual growth in ourselves or in others.

Talking about the third stage, Jesus tells Peter: *"Feed my sheep"*. This does not only refer to the strong food which is for the adults, but there is also another mystery here. This stage is different from the middle stage. It is not about obeying the commandments or having a righteous heart in following the crucified Christ. There is another thing which is required because this is the third stage and the person has grown up more. This is clear in the words of Jesus in the verse immediately after:

'Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish' (John 21:18).

What do these words mean practically?

This truth is found in different parts of the Scripture in a clear way even in the book of Song of Songs which talks about bridal love.

At this level of spiritual growth the person is required to walk in things that may be against logic or against what is accepted. In the previous stage, the person was required to be obedient, obey naturally accepted things; the person at this stage would have learnt that faith means to trust the Lord in whatever action one needs to take. Thus, in the middle stage, the person is put in circumstances that test his

faith. If the believer obeys the commandments, he passes the tests of faith. However, in the third stage, the believer would face things that seem very difficult; it would sometimes seem that one would step in something that would put him in disgrace. As a result, the person may start thinking and telling himself: *“this could not be from the Lord because it may cause other people to stumble”*. This happens because, based on our human wisdom, we understand that the path of Christ should be that of honour. Yet, Christ Himself has suffered disgrace. Also, in the Beatitudes, Jesus taught us that those who are rejected because they are righteous and those who are disgraced and humiliated are blessed:

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake’ (Matthew 5:10-12).

However, it is actually very difficult for a believer to accept these words unless he has already entered in the third stage i.e. only if he has already accepted the kind of food of the third stage. This food has to come to him from someone who has actually gone through this third stage so that the person delivering this kind of food would be speaking out of experience; hence, can deliver grace and life to those who are listening to him. This allows the minds of the listeners to start to be renewed and thus they start to be able to accept and receive facts and truths that they were unable to receive before. Their eyes would also start to be opened to the fact that part of the path with the crucified can include disgrace. Actually, this is what makes one come closer to Christ. The more we draw close to Christ, the more we will be separated from worldly things. In **Galatians 1:10**, Paul wrote: *‘For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.’*

When we receive and accept the disgrace of Christ, we are cleansed from the disgrace of sin. Hence, we start to be ready for the final ornaments of the bride.

Let us read some verses from the book of the bride:

'I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, "open for me, my sister, my love, My dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, My locks with the drops of the night." I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them? My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him. I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock. I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer' (Song of Songs 5:2-6).

The scene here shows the bride in the comfort of her home. She is sleeping but her heart is awake. Actually, she is at the best spiritual level; her heart is awake even when she is asleep. Also, she is actually resting in the home of believers; yet, she was unable to know that there was another step that awaits her and that she will fail in it. She has always waited for Christ to come from the doors which she knows well i.e. from ministry for example. She has never thought that there are other doors for Christ that she has never known before and that He can surprise her from a back door that she has never known before. In verse 3 the bride says:

'I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?'

This is a deep and mystical verse. The bride heard the bridegroom calling her from outside saying: *"I am in trouble; open for Me. It's raining; it's night time and I'm outside in the darkness; there is a lot of trouble around me"*. Yet, the bride, from inside, said: *'what have I to do with darkness; I have left the darkness outside; I have nothing to do with darkness anymore; I was in this darkness before accepting Christ and the faith, but now I have left it.'*

The bride was not able to perceive that Christ can call her from a back door. Maybe He is calling her through unbelievers who are going through certain difficulties and He wants to be glorified through her. He may be calling her through a certain problem that can happen in her life which will lead to the glory of His name, though

it may seem deadly to her. Her pretext was logic: “this can never be the Voice of Christ; He can never allow me to go back to darkness; I can never be in disgrace; I have put on the robes of honour; because of Him I put on this robe. How can I put the robe of disgrace on more time? I have left the steps of disgrace, the steps of the past, how can I be put in a picture that would put me in disgrace in front of the other believers”.

‘I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?’

The robe refers to the appearance. The bride is here saying that she has got an honourable appearance and that she can never lose it. She has washed her feet and she cannot defile them. She is walking in paths and steps that are full of grace and honour, how can she be put in something different.

Remember the words of Jesus to Peter in John 21 where He asked: “Peter, do you love Me?” Peter replied: “Yes, Lord”. Then Jesus asked again: “Peter, do you love Me?” Peter replied: “Yes, Lord”. Then Jesus asked the same question for the third time: “Do you love Me, Peter”. This time Peter was grieved.

Do you know the meaning of this third question? Most interpreters say that because Peter denied Christ three times Jesus asked this question three times. This could be a possible interpretation which is great, but it can also refer to something else.

The second question means: “Are you ready to walk with Me the second mile of love?” Jesus had spoken about the second mile in the Sermon on the Mount. Peter replied: “Yes, Lord I am ready”. The second mile means more love and giving to others. Peter said: “Yes, Lord, I can and I am ready”.

Yet the critical question comes after that. “Peter, are you ready to walk with me the third mile of love (which is an extension of the second mile in a special mystical way)?”

As though Peter wants to say: “why are You asking me this question? Are You not sure of my love? I am worried of this question. What is this third mile?”

Then it is as though Jesus would reply: “Peter, I know that you love Me, but I am not sure of the love that will require the third mile because you don’t know what this third mile is.”

“What is this third mile then?”

“It is to accept to be like Me: crucified, dead, and ready to be put in disgrace as I was on the cross.”

Jesus was full of honour when He was ministering on earth. In the first year of His ministry, people were still getting to know Him; however, in the second year He was in the fullness of honour as all scholars say. Yet, in the third year, the picture started to be different. The opposition of the Pharisees began to increase and the people started to question whether He was truly the Messiah or was He a prophet working with Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. The story finally ended with disgrace and the cross. However, out of this, resurrection and salvation resulted.

Now, let us go back to Peter.

“Peter, are you ready for the third mile?”

“What is the third mile Lord?”

“Leave your logic. Be ready to receive and accept pain, suffering and disgrace if they are put in your path. If you want to be in full unity with Me, I am the righteous Christ. But, I am also the Christ who was put to death and put to the shame of the cross. However, I am also the Christ who was risen from the dead. This is my path. If you want to love me the love of the third mile, someone else will girdle you and carry you where you do not wish.”

Let us now go back to the bride.

“O’ Bride, do you want to hear My voice, know Me well and come close to Me? I can come from a backdoor, an unexpected door. I can ask you to come outside with Me in the rain and in the darkness where your appearance will be distorted”.

“Of course you are a bride and you care for your appearance. You would say: “rain, darkness, mud, oh, this will distort me! I can’t be distorted like this. I can’t be marred like this because I have a good appearance in front of others. This is not wrong, this good appearance is for Your glory my Bridegroom; I want to be like this for Your glory. I learned this at church; this is what I was taught”.

“But I am sorry bride, what they taught you at church was the food for the first and second stages; they haven’t given you the food for the third stage. That’s why you are not ready for the third stage. You are not ready for the third mile of love”.

Let us go back to verse 4 in Song of Songs. The Bridegroom wants to correct this missing part in the bride’s life and understanding because the bride wasn’t given the required food for this.

“My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him.”

The mind of the bride is not able to accept going outside in such weather because she has not received this kind of food. However, the Bridegroom knew that her love for Him is true. So, He wanted to knock the door of her heart, of her love. Thus, He put the hand of love through the latch of the door. As soon as the bride saw the wounds of His love, she started to get out of her bed and she wanted to open for Him. But she was divided from inside; her heart wants to follow Him, but her mind tells her to beware the mud, darkness and rain outside. Her heart is pushing her forward whereas her mind is pushing her backwards.

'My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him. I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock.'

We know that myrrh refers to something which is painful. The bride was opening the door because she was drawn to the Bridegroom by love but at the same time her hands and her heart were dripping with myrrh because they were full of pain. It is as though she was saying: "I love You Jesus; I want to be with You all the time, but I can't walk with You in this step; it is difficult." So, as though Jesus said: "alright, I'll then have to leave you because I don't like those who follow me with a divided heart."

In verse 6 we read:

'I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.'

The Bridegroom is not at all ready to take the bride while she is in this state.

When the Bridegroom disappeared, the bride woke up. She started to be attentive from within. She started to feel that she will lose Him. So, she decided that she has to follow Him even if in disgrace:

'I sought Him but I could not find Him. I called Him but He gave me no answer.'

She then went after Him searching for Him.

'Take care O' bride! Take care of the rain and mud!'

'Oh, no, it's not a problem; I cannot leave Him; I have now accepted the third mile, the mile of disgrace and pain.'

In verse 7 we read:

'The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me.'

What is this?! Could it be possible that she is walking with Him and her robe is taken away from her?! Is it possible that she walks with Him naked and disgraced?

This was what has hindered her from the very beginning. But, when love awoke her, or in other words, when the food of love was given to her by the hand of Christ, she became ready to follow Him.

The hand prophetically refers to a food which is offered. So, when He stretched out His hand, it was as though He was feeding her spirit the food of love. Thus, her spirit changed after she received the food. She was able to walk the third mile of love which is full of pain, disgrace, and suffering. She didn't mind anymore because her spirit had received and accepted a different kind of food.

The bride was then able to say that though they wounded me and took my veil from me, I will still follow Him.

These days, the Church needs this kind of bridal love which is ready to follow the Bridegroom in the third mile of love. Such pains and sufferings purify and purge the deep wounds that humanity was wounded with because of sin. When we accept these cleansing sufferings, we would then be ready to accept and receive the final ornaments of the bride.

This deep spiritual life and this spiritual inheritance have made the early Church live at this level of bridal love. Hence, they were able to stand fast in times of persecution and martyrdom and they drew many to the Christian faith.

Brothers and sisters, most of us may think that the ability to stand fast in times of persecution and martyrdom was due to their strong faith. Actually, this is only

partially true, but the main reason behind this was the food of love that they have received which have qualified them for the third mile. The reason for standing fast was the strong tie of love between them and Christ. Thus, they refused to run away from martyrdom even when they had the chance to do so. This was the slain love; it is the love of Christ Himself because He is the slain lamb.

Historical facts emphasise that as much as the Church had lost many people at times of martyrdom, the Church had at the same time received more people who accepted and received the Christian faith at that time as they witnessed this slain love. This is actually the mystery behind the love of Christ on the cross and this in itself is full of the power of salvation.

These days of the end times, the Church needs to restore her spiritual inheritance; one of its features is the slain love which can draw many to faith and prepare the Church as a bride ready for the final ornaments.