

MORAL EXCELLENCE

"Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, that I should bear witness to the truth" - John 18:37.

"And if I say the truth why will ye not believe me" - John 8:46.

Frankness, plain open speaking and truthfulness rank high when we come to consider the moral excellence of our Lord Jesus Christ. As He walked amongst people He had no pretence. His candour and truthfulness were an integral part of His every day walk.

Even in the best of people, politeness and expediency take the edge of truthfulness. In all walks of life being economical with the truth is common place. Not so with the Lord Jesus. He was unmercifully candid. He was never rude or crude, but He never varnished his language to please His hearers.

The startling expression in Matthew 21:31, when confronted by the chief priests and elders, bears witness to this. *"The publicans (tax collectors) and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you"*. They believed, you did not! He was not prepared to say in their absence what He could not say in their presence. On another occasion he accused the same people; *"This people honours me with their lips , but their hearts are far from me"* - Matthew 15:8.

Think, too, on a different level, of the late night discussion with Nicodemus. The eminence and importance of the visitor did not deter Him from pronouncing words that shocked the good man to the point of his intellectual mind enquiring, *"How can these things be"* - John 3:9. He had already said *"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God"* - John 3:3. There was no diplomatic softening of the message. He would meet the enquiring man's mind with the truth. Ecclesiastical merit was insufficient. There could be no special exemption for a member of the Sanhedrin. He must enter the kingdom of God, by the new birth, like everyone else.

This is moral excellence.

The Lord's dealing with the Samaritans, too, caused astonishment among the disciples and infuriated the Pharisees. He broke all convention by speaking to the Samaritan woman (John 4:29). But it led to her believing on Him! In Luke

17:16 it was a Samaritan who returned to thank Him for his cleansing, while nine Jews did not! And all this, leading up to the Parable of the 'good Samaritan' (Luke 10:30-37), which showed the Jewish priest and Levite in a very poor light compared to the Samaritan who came to the aid of a battered and bruised man by the roadside.

This brought out into the open what the Pharisees and scribes did not want to hear. It was exposing the darkness of the human soul. No one other than the Lord could have taken such high ground.

This was morality par excellence!

Remarkably, his enemies, recognised his truthfulness, yet graciousness. When they were sent to arrest him, returned without Him, proclaiming, "*Never man spake like this man*" - *John 7:46*.

The moral glory that shone from the Saviour silenced the most severe critics. It could not be otherwise for John, the beloved disciple and apostle, writing years later said "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory the glory as of the only begotten of the Father FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH*" - *John 1:14*.

While we never could attain to this level of excellence, we are nevertheless exhorted to emulate the Apostle Paul who spoke the "*truth in Christ*" - *1 Timothy 2:7*.

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