

# Liberating Love

*Bryn Jones*

***You called, you cried, you shattered my deafness; you sparkled, you blazed, you drove away my blindness; you shed your fragrance and I drew in my breath, and I pant for you. Augustine***

I settled down in my seat, making myself comfortable for the train journey home from London to Yorkshire. As I did so, a young city gentleman took his seat opposite me. He was conservatively dressed in grey pinstriped suit, white shirt and club tie, and was carrying a briefcase and *The Times*. Throughout the journey he busied himself reading documents and making jottings in the margins of papers. Periodically he checked his watch, which suggested anticipation of what lay at the end of the journey.

Finally, the train slowed as it entered the station. He was already standing before it came to a halt, his briefcase closed, at the ready. I followed him on to the platform and out through the ticket barrier.

Suddenly, the city gentleman changed as a young woman rushed to meet him. Throwing her arms around him, she hugged and kissed him. Briefcase and *The Times* fell to the ground. In total disregard of the crowd of passengers pressing

through, the two lovers gazed adoringly into each other's eyes. The rest of us moved on with knowing smiles.

There is something wonderfully abandoned about being in love. It frees the true self to emerge from behind the facade of conditioned personality. I looked back for a moment at the young couple, who were still holding each other in a loving embrace. All day they had been what was expected of them, but now they could show how they both felt in love!

It's strange how we are so afraid of expressing emotion in relation to God for fear of being accused of emotionalism. It seems we are allowed to become emotional about everything and anything in life-except God.

Yet it is nothing new for people to misunderstand the extravagance of love. When Mary brought her jar of expensive perfume—a means of financial savings in those days—and poured it on Jesus' head and feet, Judas, whose heart had never felt this woman's love for Christ, regarded her action as a waste of money.

His cold, calculating mind saw her act of worship as religious fanaticism. He couldn't understand her passionate feelings of love for Christ. All he could see was the value of the perfume—a year's wages—much of which might have gone into his own pocket.

Mary's love expressed in this rush of affection and disregard of decorum troubled Judas's mean heart. To him, Jesus wasn't worth this 'waste' whereas, to Mary, Jesus was worth more than all she had in this world.

Our mind and affections will always concern themselves with what we value most. The person who fails to appreciate the Lord's worth can never engage in worship. If there is anything that occupies a higher priority in life than God, we tend to hold on to that, and whatever is lavished on him will appear a waste.

One of the most graphic images of David, the 'man after God's own heart', is that of the dancing king. He was leading the procession as Israel brought back to Jerusalem the ark of the covenant, which had for so long been in the hands of the Philistines.

For David, as for all Israel, the ark symbolised the presence of God among them. This was surely a time for rejoicing and great praise-God was again showing them his favour by returning to them this visible expression of his presence. David was unable to contain the ecstasy of the moment. Filled with the joy of the Lord, he leaped along the road in front of the procession.

Scripture records that David 'danced before the Lord with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets ... King David leaping and dancing before the Lord' (2 Samuel 6:14-16).

Whenever spiritual awakening has come to God's people, such vocal praise and extravagant exuberance has again made itself known.

I remember speaking, as a young teenager, with an elderly *lady* who had witnessed the Welsh revival. I recall the glow on her face as she described how the great chapels of the area had been filled with hundreds of people, some lying sobbing on the floor, others standing on seats and waving handkerchiefs, some shouting God's praise, some singing with their hands in the air.

To the cold-hearted such scenes are viewed as religious fanaticism and extremism, but in the presence of God it is none other than the liberation of the redeemed by grace. Such expressions of worship from freed hearts are spiritually acceptable because they are spiritually real.

I'm glad that worship in spirit and truth embraces the demonstration of our feelings. Feelings are the deepest and strongest motivations in our life. They are no cause for shame or fear. Even though our faith doesn't *rely* on feelings, it is nevertheless made the more joyous and warm because of them.

By faith Jesus performed miracles, but he let it be known that they were also the result of his being 'moved with compassion'. His teaching was similarly motivated: 'When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things' (Mark 6:34).

It is impossible for us to engage in any aspect of life without involving our emotions: anger or joy, peace or fear, happiness or disillusionment are the reasons for our attitudes and actions every day.

For too long we have been intimidated by conservatism, tradition and the fear of religious extremism. We need to express the pent-up feelings that have accumulated through days, weeks and in some cases years of either pain or happiness.

There is a time for silence, and for solitude, but these can never be experienced in their full richness unless they are counterbalanced by the release of the emotions and actions. We are not only creatures of mind and feeling, but of speech, gesture, touch, movement. Until the fulness of our created nature finds liberated expression in the abandonment of worship, our inner being remains unfulfilled and no act of worship is complete.

Many of the Hebrew words associated with worship show the wide variety of emotional responses involved in praise of God-shouting, raising of hands, bowing of the knee, prostration at his feet, joyous singing and dancing.

As well as being an expression of our liberty, worship is itself liberating. It allows the soul to express itself and, in the expression, to find the healing of God's love.

The psalmist expressed the feelings of liberated emotions in describing the Israelites' experience when God released them from captivity to return to their land: `When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them"' (Psalm 126:1-2).

To empty our worship of the expression of feeling is the same as robbing springtime of its flowers, nature of its colour, the birds of their song. Everything becomes dull and drab.

Our heartfelt worship is what clothes life with the colourful robes of majestic splendour, and gives to God the love he desires.