

The Old Paths – October / December : 2019 – No 24

Contents

Editorial – The Word - Seed for Sowing	J.A. Davidson
Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh	J.A. Brown
Called to Blessing and Glory	T.J. Blackman
Stopping the Supplies	—
The Acts of the Apostles (Ch 8:1-8)	Ian McKee
Get to Know Your Bible – New Testament Outline (3)	J.A. Davidson
Labouring for the Gospel	N.J. Jeyanandam
The Death of Christ Demonstrates God’s Sovereignty	Selected
Good Seed	A. Boner
Psalm 139 (Part 1)	Cliff Jones
Help for Young Believers – The Veterans Advice	—
Questions and Answers	—
Verily, verily, I say unto you...	—

Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of Thy word. I rejoice at Thy word, as one that findeth great spoil. ... Seven times a day do I praise Thee because of Thy righteous judgments. Great peace have they which love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

(Psalm 119:161,162,164,165)



From the Editor’s Desk

“The Word – Seed for Sowing”

“The seed is the Word of God” (Luke 8:11)

The Lord spoke of His own death as a sowing of Seed. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). At Calvary He established the principle of sowing, reaping and the vast harvest He will gather. “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psa. 126:5,6). In times of great scarcity, for a poor peasant to sow is like taking bread out of the mouths of hungry children. He casts the precious seed into the ground in great sorrow. The farmer often sows where the ground seems rocky, the briars need cut, he labours in cold and rain, in fear and danger as he sows the precious seed to apparently die in the cold dark death of winter. This is a picture of persevering work despite tearful disappointment.

“Behold, a sower went forth to sow” (Matt. 13:3). Primarily, the Lord Himself was the sower establishing

the pattern that has marked the sowing of the Gospel in this age of Grace. There was nothing wrong with the seed. The results are dependent upon the soil:

The Wayside Hearer: represents the hard soil, HARD hearts, the seed is snatched away.

The Stony Places: little soil, HOLLOW hearts, there is a quick response but no root.

The Thorns: cursed soil, HALF hearts, produced weeds not wheat.

In these three cases, we see the work of Satan, the flesh and the world.

The Good Ground: this was fruitful soil, the Saviour said it was an HONEST heart.

“Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The Kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way” (Matt. 13:24-25). As we approach the consummation of the Age, the enemy increasingly engages in indiscriminate sowing and widespread deception.

“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1Pet. 1:23). Let us plough the ground, sow the good seed of the Word of God, water it in prayer and look to the Lord of the Harvest to bless abundantly. “The Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you” (1Pet. 2:25).

[< Back to Contents >](#)

Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh (Matthew 2:11)

The presentation of the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh by the wise men and their act of worship to the child Jesus is a familiar portion of the Bible to both saved and unsaved alike. Although often referred to only at a specific time of the year, there are spiritual lessons to be learnt from this incident for all believers and for all of the year. The gifts themselves speak of the Person and Work of Christ and their appreciation of Him, while their act of worship has many lessons that we in the 21st century can learn from for ourselves.

The Gifts

Gold: This is a very precious, yellow, metallic element of high density that can be formed into different shapes quite easily. In biblical times it was regarded as the most precious metal and was very costly. The greatest deposits today are found in South Africa and Indonesia.

Frankincense: This is an aromatic gum resin burnt as incense and is obtained from a tree by making incisions in the bark and causing the gum to run out. It diffuses an odour and fragrance when burnt. It was often mixed with other spices as a sweet smelling offering. Commonly found today in Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Pakistan.

Myrrh: This is a perfumed ointment, obtained from gum resin from a tree in the same way as frankincense. It has great bitterness. It was often used in perfume, medicine, incense and anointing oil. It was chiefly used for embalming the dead as it slowed the process of decay. It could be mingled with wine to form a stupefying drink. The greatest deposits are found today in the Arabian Peninsula.

The Significance of the Gifts

Each of these gifts has a spiritual significance to us as believers today.

Gold: Gold is mentioned 417 times in the Bible, far more times than silver (320 times). Right at the beginning of Scripture we read of gold (Genesis 2:11-12) and also right at the end (Revelation 21:15,18,21).

At the first mention it is found in a land *before sin* entered, and at the last mention it is found trodden underfoot in that *sinless city*, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. Earth's most precious metal just to be walked over!

Gold is found elsewhere throughout Scripture, but its significance can be noted in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple, where it often symbolizes the *pure, personal, intrinsic glory of Deity* in its *essential nature and unique excellence*. Different forms of gold are recorded in the divine specifications of the Tabernacle and the Temple given to Moses and David respectively. For example, as well as simply *gold*, we read of *pure gold* (2Chronicles 3:4), then (most) *fine gold* (2Chronicles 3:5), whilst Proverbs speaks of *choice gold* (Proverbs 8:10). All this gold spoke of God's glory. Gold also speaks of that manifested and acknowledged glory radiating through all God's ways and works, and at His presence. So gold symbolizes *glory* – the glory of God's presence and the glory of God Himself. Thus gold was presented to the child Jesus – a gift fit for a king. He was born king – not to be king (Matthew 2:2).

Because of its scarcity and immense value, gold was particularly associated with *royalty* in the OT. Even the Queen of Sheba brought “*very much gold*” on her visit to Solomon (1Kings 10:2) in recognition of *who* and *what* he was. We note also that in the “most holy place” within the Temple that the walls and the altar were completely overlain with gold (1Kings 6:20-22). Here the presence of God would be encountered and a sacrifice be offered for the sins of the people. Likewise, the presence of the young child heralded the presence of Deity on Earth and pointing to the future sacrifice for the sins of the people at Calvary.

One wonders how much gold had ever been seen in Bethlehem before? Gold shows us the wise men's appreciation and also heaven's appreciation of who it was there they had come to worship. It would seem ironic to the unspiritual eye that gold was given to one born in poverty in Bethlehem and raised in obscurity in the back streets of Nazareth!

Another interesting fact is that whenever the young child and his mother are mentioned together, the child is given first place! (See Matthew 2:11,13,20,21). Also note in Matthew chapter 2 that “Herod the king” (vv. 1,3) is no longer given the title of king after the rightful “King of the Jews” has come (See vv. 7,12,13,15,16,19,22). In summary, we feel that gold speaks of *glory, royalty (kingship), power and authority*. Do we acknowledge Him as having *power* and *authority* in our daily lives? Does anything of His *glory* radiate, reflect and resemble our lives? Are we *subject* to Him and His word and gladly submit to His will in everything?

Frankincense: As such frankincense is only mentioned 17 times in the Bible (e.g. Leviticus 2:1-2,15-16), although *incense* is quoted 113 times, this implying frankincense mingled with myrrh and other spices. It was one of the ingredients of the holy perfume (see verses such as Exodus 30:7-8,34-35 and Leviticus 16:12) – these were sweet smelling offerings, burnt ceremonially by the priests, unto the Lord. Both in the Tabernacle and in the Temple the frankincense in the meal offering was all burnt on the altar, for God alone could fully appreciate the excellence of the life of Christ (Luke 3:22). Frankincense, that sweet smelling odour, represents what Christ was to God, His person and life ever rising before the heart of God His father in heaven as an odour of a sweet smell. Since fire draws out the sweet savour from frankincense, so it was with Christ: the greater the fiery trials that He bore, the more fully the odour rose to God. The aroma of His life on Earth provided a striking contrast to the stench of sin that ever arose from this sinful world.

Fragrance was ever associated with Christ. So if gold represents Deity and the *glory* seen in His *perfect* life then the frankincense speaks of the *fragrance* of His *holy* life, i.e. the quiet fragrance of the atmosphere of Christ. Is there a fragrance in our lives and about our character that would bring pleasure to the heart of God above? There are allusions in Scripture in Psalm 72:15 and Isaiah 60:6 where the nations will bring similar gifts in the Millennium!

Myrrh: Myrrh is first mentioned in Scripture as a principal ingredient in the “holy anointing oil” (Exodus 30:23-25). It was used as a perfume (Esther 2:12; Psalm 45:8) and also in embalming the dead (John 19:39). It was customary to give condemned criminals in Roman times that were to be crucified, “wine mingled with myrrh” to produce insensibility. When offered to Christ at Calvary “He received it not” (Mark 15:23).

Myrrh and frankincense together would speak of the bitter experiences that Christ passed through, yet through it all a sweet fragrance released from His life ever refreshed the heart of God. That which was brought at the *beginning* of His earthly life was now brought at the *end* after His death (John 19:39; Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56).

Therefore, gold reminds us of His glory, kingship, power and authority: frankincense speaks of a priestly life with holy fragrance rising to the heart of God above: myrrh would tell of death and sacrifice and the bitter sorrow that He bore, and that He *alone* could bear!

Worship

These three gifts were opened and given as they worshipped *Him*. Worship is really a quiet contemplation of *Him*. How much do we know about this today? We live busy, noisy and fast-moving lives with instant communication, abundant provision and many possessions (at least in *developed* countries as opposed to *developing* countries). For many believers in the 21st century there are great pressures, especially at work and from close and extended family and certainly from the world around us. These conditions and overall atmosphere are hardly conducive to a quiet contemplation of Him. Yet it is *possible* in today's world; indeed it is not only *possible* but it should be *essential* for every true believer to have a quiet contemplation of Him.

Concerning the worship of the wise men, we will consider *the place* where they worshipped, who it was (*the person*) that they worshipped, the manner of their worship (*how they worshipped*) and finally *who worshipped* (the wise men themselves). All these aspects have vital and valuable lessons for us as believers today in our modern world.

The Place (Where did they Worship?)

They came to worship, and to present what they had brought, to a *specific* place (Matthew 2:5-6,9) that God had revealed to them and had given them specific guidance via the star in the sky. It wasn't just anywhere – it was where the Lord was in the midst. It was *the* place that God had chosen (as seen in prophetic Scriptures such as Micah 5:2). It was the place of Divine appointment, although to the natural eye it was an insignificant place! Surely Jerusalem would be the obvious place of worship with its ornate, religious buildings? Yet today God reveals through His word where the Lord is in the midst and where God has chosen to set His name in the midst. What an unbelievable privilege for the wise men to be led to the presence of Christ. Yet that same exalted position can be ours today as a company or assembly of local believers, as *we* come together and worship before the same one that the wise men bowed down and worshipped!

The Person (Who it was they Worshipped)

The wise men worshipped a *person* not a *place*! Sadly today in world religions, certain places have been exalted to pre-eminence such as Mecca, Lourdes, Salt Lake City, Jerusalem, etc. Bethlehem was the place of divine prophetic appointment, but in itself it was no different from anywhere else. Neither did they worship the *star* nor the *gifts* themselves and they certainly didn't worship *Mary* (as favoured and blessed as she was, she was a sinner, as they were also, and needed a saviour, Luke 1:28,30,47). Neither did their worship consist of *self*. It was *Him* and *Him alone* they worshipped. No-one else and nothing else in the place distracted them from the purpose of their coming. Is Christ the *subject* and *object* of our worship – not just the forgiveness of sins or our present and future blessings – but Christ Himself in what He is in Himself and what He is to God!

Although Christ was generally despised and rejected of men, yet these wise men were the forerunners of a select few who also worshipped Him. The reader is encouraged to look at Matthew 8:2, the leper; Matthew 9:18, a ruler; Matthew 14:33, "they that were in the ship"; Matthew 15:25, a woman of Canaan; Matthew 28:17, His disciples and finally Mark 5:6, a man of the tombs.

The Manner of their Worship (How they Worshipped)

They "*fell down*" before Him, thus approaching in deep *reverence* and *respect*. These men were important nobility, but they recognized what *they* were compared to what *He* was! Not only is a bodily position in view

here, but a heart condition! Here was no casual approach or inappropriate language in the presence of the “King”. We could consider how appropriate is our style of language or dress-code when we come into the presence of Christ to worship Him? They came with *something to give* that they had *personally prepared* for Him. Our appreciation of Christ will be greater and sweeter when we bring something that we have personally gleaned of Him! They then *opened* their gifts – it would have been unthinkable after all that preparation and long journey to just hold back and not open and give their gifts. So with us, in our public worship of Him, we should give and take part – the brethren audibly and the sisters silently, together worship rising and speaking well to the Father of the Son.

We notice also the *perception* of the wise men (when “they saw the young child”); He didn’t look like a king and it certainly wasn’t the place you would expect to see a king. Yet this was God manifest in flesh, the Son of God Himself. It took faith on their part to believe that! So with us today, simple believers meeting in a simple way in an ordinary building (if we have one), yet by faith we believe the Divine presence is in our midst.

Who it was that Worshipped (The Wise Men themselves)

These were men of nobility who had travelled a long journey, possibly from Persia or Babylon. They could have been travelling many months or even longer before they arrived at Bethlehem. There must have been great *physical* demands, trials and hardships to overcome on the way. Yet they were led and were determined to arrive to present what they had. Are we just as determined and single-eyed in our approach to worship? There was also *monetary* demands. What they offered was *costly!* Gold, frankincense and myrrh were expensive items. What has it cost us to bring our worship? Not necessarily in monetary terms, but the cost to us in time, thought, study and meditation of the Scriptures to bring out that which speaks of Christ.

What happened at Bethlehem 2000 years ago has many lessons for us as believers today. What the wise men brought and the manner in which they presented it can teach us many things as to the person and work of Christ and also can guide ourselves today as to *our* attitude to worship!

[< Back to Contents >](#)

Called to Blessing and Glory

To complete our studies in the Christian’s calling, mainly based on Peter’s epistles, we will now see what is said regarding that to which we are called in the future.

1Peter 2:9 brings before us a **contrast**. We were called out of darkness into His “marvellous light”.

Darkness means ignorance. We thought we had light, but when the light in us is darkness how great is that darkness! But when the veil was removed, the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God” shone in (2 Corinthians 4.6) and now through the sin-cleansing blood of God’s Son we can “walk in the light, as He is in the light” (1John 1:7).

Darkness means fruitlessness. No wholesome fruit grows in the dark. Darkness was our very nature: “ye were sometimes darkness”. But now we are “light in the Lord” and “children of light” (Ephesians 5:8). Our walk should manifest this radical change, “For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (Ephesians 5:9).

Darkness means hopelessness. Those who are in darkness live only for this world – they can see nothing else. If they do get a glimpse of eternity, it is only of “the blackness of darkness for ever”. But otherwise those who walk in darkness do not know where they are going “because that darkness hath blinded his

eyes" (1John 2:11). How different it is for those who are called: "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth (1John 2:8).

We have been called out of that darkness into His marvellous light, but the darkness, and those who are trapped in it, are all around us. In the midst of "crooked and perverse nation" we are to "shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15), as by life and lip we 'shew forth the excellencies of Him who hath called us ... into His marvellous light'. "We preach not ourselves" (2Corinthians 4:5), but our aim must be to live Christ and preach Christ to all around us.

1Peter 3:9 shows the importance of **conformity**. "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing". It is not conformity to this world, where people usually want to pay back those who offend them in the same coin. It is conformity to the Lord's example. The believer's eternal inheritance is described in 1Peter 1:4: "An inheritance incorruptible (it can never be spoiled), and undefiled (it can never be sullied), and that fadeth not away (it can never cease from its splendour)". What we have freely received is what we should desire for our persecutors. We were no different from them until the Lord called us. Our prayerful desire for others should be that they may inherit the same amazing undeserved blessing which has been bestowed upon us for time and for eternity.

In **1Peter 5:10** we have the assurance of our **coronation**. "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you". The work of God in us will endure and outlast all the attempts of the enemy to destroy us. Romans 8:30 says, "Whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified". "Glorified" is in the past tense because it is as certain as our calling and our justification. No link in this chain of divine grace can be broken.

2Peter 1:3 reveals the secret of Christian **character**. "According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue". The glory to which we have been called and the perfectness of the One who has called us provide the great incentive to become more and more like Him. The wonderful message of 2Peter is that God wants us to know Him, and through knowledge of Him to become like Him. This does not happen automatically but increases more and more as we "give all diligence" to develop the fruits of our God-given faith.

2Peter 1:10 teaches us how to have **certainty**: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall ...". Calling is placed before election, not because election is the result of it, but because it is the call of God and our response to it which links us in our experience to God's sovereign choice. We cannot make God's purpose any surer than it is. But it becomes sure to us when we bring forth the fruits which manifest the genuineness of our faith. The nature of a tree is clearly discerned by its fruit (Matthew 7:16-20). So also is the reality of our profession of faith. As we find God's character reproduced in us we are more and more sure that we are His children and therefore heirs of His glory and joint heirs with Christ. This is not to say that we could lose our salvation if we make no progress. However, if there is no fruit it may be that there is no life.

In Hebrews 3:1 children of God are called "partakers of the heavenly calling". It comes from heaven, and having made us fit for heaven, guarantees our arrival there. In Philippians 3:14 it is termed "the high calling (or, calling on high, JND) of God in Christ Jesus". This refers to the rapture of the church when the Lord Jesus descends "from heaven with a shout ..." (1Thess. 4:16,17). We were called by the gospel and saved in order to obtain the "glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2Thess. 2:14). Thus, the rapture is not a reward, but it is the consummation of God's grace toward us in Christ Jesus. It is for all those "that are Christ's at His coming" (1Corinthians 15:23). Therefore the "calling on high" in itself is not the "prize" Paul is speaking of in Philippians 3, but it is the occasion when rewards will be given to all those who have fought the good fight, finished their course and kept the faith, because they "loved His appearing" (2Timothy 4:7,8).

"Glory" is a difficult word to define. But in 1Peter 1:11 we read of the "sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow". Glory evidently includes all that flows from His sufferings on the cross – from

resurrection onwards. It is His exaltation as Great High Priest, Heir of all things, Lord of all and King of glory. And by God's grace we are called to participate in the glory He has won. Called to marvellous light, called to eternal blessing, called to rejoice in the everlasting kingdom and glory of Christ! May the Lord enable us to walk worthy of such a calling. To walk on earth as those who are destined for heaven. To walk with Him in this day of His rejection, till we reign with Him in a universe full of His glory!

[< Back to Contents >](#)

Stopping the Supplies

In time of war, one of the easiest ways to secure the fall of a fortress or country is to stop the supplies. This is one of Satan's easiest and commonest ways of getting a Christian "on the shelf". Satan sets himself to stop the supplies – that is, he tries to keep you from reading your Bible. When he cuts off the supplies of the "sincere milk of the Word", he has gained a greater victory than many Christians realize. Twenty-four hours pass and we have had scarcely a bite, far less a meal out of God's Book. Leanness and barrenness is the result, and we wonder what is wrong. It is simply a case of "malnutrition" – sheer weakness and spiritual exhaustion through lack of food.

Let us make sure that nothing is allowed to stop the supplies of spiritual food. Let us gather the manna daily, that the verse 1John 2:14 may apply to us: **"I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."**

[< Back to Contents >](#)

The Acts of the Apostles Chapter 8:1-8

Already in the Acts of the Apostles we have witnessed the fact that blessing of the apostles' preaching provoked religious persecution. First the Jewish leaders "laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day" (Acts 4:3). Then they "laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison" (Acts 5:18). However, persecution was taken to a new level with the trial and martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6:8-7:60). There can be no doubt now but that the Jewish leadership will remain unrepentant and will refuse to accept that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Messiah of Israel. The appeals of Peter to date for repentance and faith have been scorned and spurned. They have added the murder of Stephen to their crime of crucifying the Lord. We shall now consider the impact this had on the Jerusalem assembly and on the spread of the gospel.

Great persecution (v.1-3)

Acts chapter 8 opens with a reference to Saul, who was introduced to us at the end of the previous chapter, "and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul" (Acts 7:58). Now we have additional information about him, "And Saul was consenting unto his [Stephen's] death" (v.1), a phrase that more properly belongs to the end of chapter 7. This additional wording makes clear that Saul was not present at the stoning of Stephen accidentally: he was in full accord with and was approving of the actions of the Sanhedrin and, indeed, took pleasure in this action against the Christian community.

The statement "And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem" (v.1), is really the start of Acts chapter 8. (Readers will be aware that Scripture was not written originally with the chapter and verse divisions we now use to help us refer to and locate particular texts). This

persecution commenced the same day as that on which Stephen was murdered. The Jewish leadership despised Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah in humiliation on earth; they have refused and rebelled against the presentation of Him glorified in heaven; have rejected the witness of the Holy Spirit in the testimony given by Stephen; and now they turn on the Lord's people generally. After Stephen's address Christians could be portrayed as being 'anti-temple', so the Pharisees unite again with the Sadducees and a storm of fierce persecution now bursts on the Jerusalem assembly, "and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles" (v.1). So it was the saints generally, not the apostles, who were scattered. There were, however, sufficient believers who remained as the assembly continued to function at Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-29). All credit must be given to the apostles, who were the most hated by the Sanhedrin, for remaining given the danger. Leadership makes great demands and they probably conceived it to be their duty to remain.

However, we should note that not everyone approved of the killing of Stephen or of the wave of persecution that followed. The devout men who carried Stephen to his burial were most likely God-fearing Jews rather than believers, especially in view of immediate persecution of Christians. Their action at this time and in this context demonstrated that they disapproved of the Sanhedrin's actions. Nor were they silent, they "made great lamentation over him" (v.2). They didn't bury Stephen as a criminal, but mourned deeply for him, deploring the cruel injustice of his death.

Without in any way minimising the impact of persecution and discrimination experienced by Christians until the present time in many forms, we do need to retain a sense of proportion. News about Stephen's martyrdom must have been devastating to the Jerusalem believers; and the wave of persecution that followed was horrific. But we should note that not everyone concurred with those actions. Indeed, as we have seen, they clearly demonstrated their abhorrence of the mob rule orchestrated and unleashed by the Sanhedrin. It is ever so easy to cultivate a mindset that everyone is against us. Not so. It can be surprising where sympathetic support will come from. And we must never forget that what happens in God's permissive will may result in greater blessing. Let us consider the contrast between the negative and positive results from this wave of persecution.

First of all Saul "made havock of the church" (v.3). The only other Scriptural usage of this word for 'destroy' occurs in the Greek Septuagint version of Psalm 80:13 speaking of wild boars destroying a vineyard. Hence Saul ravaged the church, acting as a wild beast with a brutal and sadistic cruelty. His persecuting zeal drove him to make house to house searches for believers who were dragged forcibly to prison. Women now, for the first time, are equally included in the persecution. He also sought and secured his victims' death: it was not only threatenings, but "**slaughter**" (Acts 9:1). He confessed himself that he "persecuted this way **unto the death**, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:4). Also, "which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when **they were put to death**, I gave my voice against them" (Acts 26:10). Saul therefore had much blood on his hands.

Luke, in the gospel that bears his name and in the Acts of the Apostles, often makes reference to women, their circumstances, their service, etc. Here he is careful to record how that persecution impacted upon them. Sometimes an undue emphasis can be given to the public service of men. However, it should ever be remembered that the influence and supportive actions of Christian mothers, wives, sisters, aunts, etc. is absolutely vital to assembly testimony, to the spread of the gospel and to the spiritual tone of home and family life. That is understood by the enemy and, therefore, women may also be called to pay a price for faithfulness. The impact on children from their parents' association with the gospel is also very real. Often it is Christian women and the children (whether saved or unsaved) of believers who receive slights and insults resulting from the public stand of husbands and fathers for Scriptural principles and truth. It is good to know that the Lord takes note of all such and no doubt will compensate and reward it even if it is unpleasant at the time.

Gospel progress to Jews (v.4)

But God allows certain, even sad, happenings in the furtherance of His purpose. Satan, who most certainly was behind the persecution, oversteps himself. So we read, “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (v.4). God’s response to Jerusalem’s rejection of the gospel is that others should hear it. Evangelisation beyond Jerusalem started that day, carried forward by the generality of believers hounded out of their homes and city by the enraged Saul. This sharing of the glad tidings of the gospel is to Jews. Evangelisation is not confined to apostles and, resulting from this, the gospel spreads and other assemblies are planted (when we come to Acts 11:19 we will see that the assembly at Antioch, with all its subsequent history, traces its origin to believers of this dispersion).

Gospel progress to Samaritans (v.5-8)

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (v.5) is in contrast to the movement of the gospel as recorded in (v.4), which was to Jewish communities beyond the immediate scope of persecution.

Philip, one of the deacons in Acts 6:5, and companion in that service with Stephen, takes the gospel message to Samaria. He therefore traces the gracious movements of the Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in John chapter 4 and fulfils in part the interest of the Lord “ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The gospel acknowledges no national boundaries or distinctions. While Samaritans are not Gentiles, it was appropriate that a Greek speaking Jew should take the message to them as this was more likely to reduce the level of anti-Jewish prejudice. As well as having the right message it is beneficial to have the right preacher!

Luke regards Stephen and Philip as complementary: both were preaching evangelists, both belonged to the seven deacons, they also performed public signs and wonders (Acts 6:8; 8:6), and both paved the way for the onward spread of the gospel beyond Jerusalem and ultimately to the Gentiles.

Philip is an evangelist, preaching Christ as a herald. Preaching Christ involves death, burial, resurrection and ascension truth. It was the only message, when believed, which could bring to an end some 1,000 years of Jewish and Samaritan hostility. Philip is never recorded as teaching converts, which emphasises the point that he concentrated on using the gift that he was given by the Lord (to the profit of himself and others) and did not aspire to imitate the evident expository gift granted to, for example, Stephen. Samaritans were also awaiting to receive a Messiah (John 4:25,29), they called Him “Restorer” and identified Him with the “Prophet” of Deuteronomy 18:15. Philip had the inestimable privilege of identifying that blessed Person.

The impact upon his hearers is given in verse 6, “and the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake”, that is, they kept on giving heed, being held captive by his words. Hearing Philip’s message, and seeing his miracles or signs which he did from time to time, they paid close attention and gave a favourable response. As neither Stephen nor Philip were apostles, therefore Scripture does not restrict those miracles, which were only at the commencement of the age of grace, to apostles.

A variety of confirmatory miracles were performed: the exorcising of evil spirits, which uttered wild shrieks on exiting; the healing of those with paralysis; and reversing of disabilities.

The story in Jerusalem was one of great persecution, opposition to the message, imprisonment, etc. However, as a direct result, there was great joy in Samaria, openness to the gospel message and deliverance (v.8).

(To be continued D.V.)

[< Back to Contents >](#)

Get to Know Your Bible

NEW TESTAMENT OUTLINE – Paper No 3.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

One lesson to be learned from the first book of the New Testament is the relevance of the Old Testament. The first Gospel contains over 50 direct quotations from the OT and includes 75 allusions to OT events. The first Gospel shows that Jesus Christ is the Messiah of Israel and explains God's Kingdom programme. The OT clearly taught that Messiah would bring in a glorious utopian reign on earth in which the nation of Israel would have a prominent position. The nation rejected the One who claimed to be "Jesus Christ, the Son of David" (Matt. 1:1) as its true King. The Jew would then ask, what has happened to the promised Kingdom, since this Messiah has been rejected? The Gospel of Matthew includes some "mysteries" about the Kingdom, which had not been revealed in the OT. These "mysteries" show that the Kingdom has taken a different form in the present age, but that the promised Davidic Kingdom will be fully and literally manifest at a future time when Jesus Christ returns to earth to establish His rule.

THEME

The Gospel according to Matthew commences with a summary statement "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham". Why does David's name appear before the name of Abraham? Would not Abraham, the father of the nation, be more significant to a Jewish mind? The King who was coming to rule over the nation was to come through David (2Sam. 7:12-17). John the Baptist came with a message saying, "Repent ye: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). "Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). The key to His preaching is in (Matt. 6:33) "But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you".

WRITER

Matthew has been likened unto an architect. He selects large blocks of the Lord's teaching ministry and builds a huge edifice of discourse material and doctrine. It is the Gospel of the Lord's lips, no other Gospel records more of the Lord's WORDS. Levi the tax gatherer became Matthew the collector of the Lord's sayings. "It hath been said" (Matt. 5:31), "But I say unto you" (Matt. 5:32); "Ye have heard" (Matt. 5:33), "But I say unto you" (Matt. 5:34). Chapters 5-7 is referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. Chapter 13 presents the parables of the Kingdom. Chapters 24-25, The Olivet Discourse, is detailed prophecy of future events relating to Jerusalem and the Kingdom.

Matthew was a Jew and had been working for Rome as a despised tax gatherer. He had been a servant and observer of the vast Kingdom of Cæsar. He is now inspired to write about the King of Kings who will have a greater kingdom. Matthew presents the Prophesying Saviour in the long prophetic passages of chapters 13, 24 and 25. Mark writes about the Practical Saviour busy as the tireless worker. Luke's theme is the Perfect Saviour in the perfection of sinless humanity. In John, we observe the Personal Saviour meeting the need of the religious man (Ch. 3), the sinful woman (Ch. 4), the impotent man (Ch. 5) etc.

ORDER

The order of the Gospel of Matthew is arranged logically rather than chronologically. The genealogical tables are broken into three groups, a large number of miracles are given together and the opposition to the Messiah is stressed in one section. The order is therefore thematic rather than chronological.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

This expression is peculiar to the Gospel according to Matthew and occurs thirty two times. "The kingdom of God" occurs four times and together with similar expressions the word "Kingdom" occurs fifty times in

the book. The Kingdom of God emphasises who it is that is King and the Kingdom of heaven refers to the realm. The expressions are not synonymous but can be used interchangeably according to context. The former expression was familiar to the nation from the book of Exodus (Ex. 19:6), being a theocracy, a people with no other King but God Himself. "God" is not equivalent to "the heavens". God is everywhere and above all in every dispensation, whereas "the heavens" are distinguished from the earth until the Kingdom comes in glory and manifestation when rule in heaven and on earth will be one. The Kingdom of God is always inclusive of the Kingdom of heaven, but the Kingdom of God is not limited to the Kingdom of heaven until in their final form, they will become identical. "Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet" (1Cor. 15:24-25; Psa. 110:1).

The kingdom emphasises responsibility and represents generally the conditions produced in the world by the preaching of the Gospel in the absence of the King. In the period between the rejection of the King and the future manifestation, it has been foretold by the Lord in the parables of the Kingdom and includes true and false. The Kingdom foretold (Dan. 2:44), was preached by John Baptist and the Lord Himself. He presented Himself to Israel as their Messiah and King. This was evidenced by His miracles but was twice deliberately attributed to the works of Satan (Matt. 9:34; 12:24). The leaders and the nation rejected His claims. Chapter 13 introduces the mysteries of the Kingdom and parables to a great extent replace miracles. The King is rejected and a literal Kingdom is set aside until His future manifestation and glory. "The same day went Jesus out of the house (of Israel), and sat by the sea side (of nations)" (v1). "He spake many things unto them in parables" (v3), "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom" (v19). Chapter 13 begins the section dealing with the training of the twelve and teaching by parables what God is doing in the present age.

OUTLINE

Ch. 1:1-4:11 – The PRESENTATION of the KING

Ch. 4:12-7:29 – The PROCLAMATION of the KING

Ch. 8:1-11:1 – The POWER of the KING

Ch. 11:2-16:12 – The PROTESTS against the KING

Ch. 16:13-20:34 – The PREPARATION of the disciples in view of the rejection of the KING

Ch. 21:1-23:39 – The official PRESENTATION and national rejection of the KING

Ch. 24-25 – The PROPHETIC anticipation of the KINGDOM

Ch. 26-27 – The PASSOVER and PUTTING to death of Jesus, the KING of the Jews

Ch. 28 – The POWER of His resurrection and the great commission of the KING

SUMMARY

The words of the King constitute the law of the Kingdom and proclaim the principle of righteousness. The works of the King exhibit the powers of the Kingdom which bring peace. The will of the King is revealed in the oft repeated word, "Blessed", for the purpose of the Kingdom is to bring joy.

A study of the eight mountains in Matthew will reward the reader with an outline revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David in this majestic Gospel.

The Gospel according to Matthew is the Gospel of His Presence. Ch. 1:23 – At the beginning: "They shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us". Ch. 28:20 – At the end: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world". Ch. 18:20 – Central: "For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them". How blessed to enjoy His presence even now.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

THEME

He “took upon Him the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). This statement defines the theme of the second Gospel. Mark writes about the Perfect Servant. He said Himself; “The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto (served), but to minister (serve), and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). This statement defines the main divisions of the Gospel of Mark:

“The Son of Man came” – SANCTIFICATION

“Not to be ministered unto, but to minister” – SERVICE

“And to give His life a ransom for many” – SACRIFICE

The introduction to the Gospel of Mark is, “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). The final command is, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The purpose of His life, and service, and sacrifice is to give to us the message of the Gospel. The Son of God became the Servant of God in order to provide the message of the Gospel for men. He, who is equal with God, become a Servant in no other relationship than to accomplish the Divine purpose of Salvation through death.

The prophetic vision of the Servant of God given in the prophecy of Isaiah is presented fulfilling His service and accomplishing the purpose of God in death. In Isaiah 53:5, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed”. The climax of His service was that He “Became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). This Gospel, about the sympathy, submission, suffering and sacrifice of the Son of God, declares salvation for man who was bound in sin and condemnation. He came, “To give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

WRITER

Mark has been likened unto a painter. He brings together the picture of the background, gives detail to the happenings and events and puts the Lord vividly in the forefront.

The inspired writer was familiar with the land of Israel, especially Jerusalem. The journeys of the Lord Jesus as He walked, talked, reacted to unbelief, His anger, how He looked at the disciples all add details which suggest the account and observations of a personal eye witness. This eye witness may have been Peter as inspired by the Holy Ghost to recall these details to have them recorded. The early acceptance of this Gospel as authentic in the inspired canon would indicate the writer to be well known to the apostles. This was true of John Mark, mentioned three times in the NT by the combined name, and eleven times by his Gentile or Latin name Mark. Mark was the imperfect servant or attendant with Paul, then with Barnabas (Acts 15:37-39), and possibly Peter. The outline of Mark’s Gospel and the contents are parallel to Peter’s preaching (Acts 10:34-43). It is to be noted that Mark was finally restored to profitableness and the confidence of the apostles (2Tim. 4:11).

The Gospel according to Mark is not simply a biography of the Lord’s life, a chronological account of His works or a set of reminiscences by His followers though it contains elements of all these. Under the gracious oversight of the Holy Spirit, Mark used his many contacts with Peter, Paul and Barnabas in their oral preaching and the reminiscences of early disciples to compose a historically accurate and trustworthy Gospel.

DIFFERENCES

The Gospel according to Matthew stresses the Majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ. Mark records His Industry, Luke reveals His Sympathy and John tells of His Glory.

Matthew records His Words in detail; what He said. Mark writes about His Works; what He did. Luke is the Gospel of His Walk; the journeys He made and where He went. John stresses His Worth; what He was and always will be.

Marks Gospel presents much of the material found in Matthew and Luke, yet this Gospel is marked by brevity, simplicity, energy and urgency as the writer emphasises the Person and Word of the Perfect Servant. Mark's style is rapid and concise. He records nineteen miracles but only four parables. This direct style was suitable for the Romans when it was written. Being short, concise and plain it is to be recommended today to readers who have been recently saved.

OUTLINE

Ch. 1:1-13 – The SERVANTS PREPARATION

Ch. 1:14-3:12 – The SERVANT'S PREACHING and early GALILEAN MINISTRY

Ch. 3:13-8:38 – The SERVANT'S PREPARATION of His DISCIPLES

Ch. 9-11 – The SERVANT'S PATH to JERUSALEM

Ch. 12 – The SERVANT'S PARABLE about the VINEYARD

Ch. 13 – The SERVANT'S PROPHECY on the MOUNT OF OLIVES

Ch. 14-16 – The SERVANT'S PASSION, DEATH and RESURRECTION

The BEGINNING of Genesis in contrast to the BEGINNING of Mark

In Genesis 3, the first man was placed in Paradise, he was tempted and he failed. In Mark 1, the Second Man was driven into the wilderness, He was tempted but did not fail.

In Genesis 3, when Adam heard the "voice", he was afraid and he hid himself. In Mark 1:11, the "Voice" said, "Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased".

In Genesis 3, the animals were beautiful, tame and playful. In Mark 1:13, He "was with the wild beasts".

In Genesis 3, the angel had a "flaming sword". In Mark 1:13 "angels ministered unto Him".

In Genesis 3, man was deceived by Satan and fell. In Mark 1:34, "He cast out many devils".

In Genesis 3, man, because of his sin, was driven out. In Mark 1:26, the unclean spirit was cast out.

In Genesis 3, the woman was favoured yet she fell. In Mark 1:30, the woman was fevered yet He lifted her up.

THE GOSPEL OF URGENCY

Characteristic words of Mark's Gospel are "immediately", "Straightway", "rising up a great while before day", until "even, when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils" (Mark 1:32,35). In each miracle we get a Picture of Sin, the Plight of the Sinner, the Pity of the Servant and the Power of the Saviour.

MEETING THE NEED

Mark 1:30 – Distress in the Home: "They tell Him".

Mark 4:38 – Difficulties in the Storm: "They awake Him".

Mark 6:30 – Discouragements in the Work: "They told Him".

Mark 9:28 – Deficient of Power: "They asked Him".

Mark 10:10 – Division among the People: "They asked Him again".

THE GOSPEL OF HIS HANDS

He toiled long in tireless work touching the needy. He lifted the Fevered (Mark 1:31), "He came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up". He touched the Leper (Mark 1:41), "Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth His hand and touched him". He raised the Dead (Mark 5:41), "He took the damsel by the hand" (Mark 5:42), "and straightway the damsel arose, and walked". He recovered the Deaf and Dumb (Mark 7:33), He "put His fingers into his ears, and He spit, and touched his tongue". He guided the Blind (Mark 8:23,25), "He took the blind man by the hand ... and put His hands upon him. ... He put His hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up".

Mark notices that He toiled long into the evening. “And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered at the door” (Mark 1:32-33). “When the even was come, He saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side” (Mark 4:35). “The day was now far spent” (Mark 6:35), He fed the hungry multitude. “When the even was come, He went out of the city” (Mark 11:19). He entered the city, He presented Himself to the city, He wept over the city, but we never read of Him spending a night in the city where they were plotting His death. “In the evening (of betrayal) He cometh with the twelve” (Mark 14:17). “Now when the even was come” (Mark 15:42). Mark again records the darkening evening of His burial. Mark was not an eye witness yet he records times and places. It is so beautiful to meditate upon the “solitary place” (Mark 1:35), where He prayed. “The desert place” (Mark 6:35), where He was moved with compassion toward them. “A place which was named Gethsemane” (Mark 14:32), where He wept. “The place Golgotha ... The place of a skull” (Mark 15:22), where He died. “The place where they laid Him”, “He is risen” (Mark 16:6).

WOMEN

The positive portrayal of women in Mark has attracted many scholars. The miracle of Jesus concerning Simon’s wife’s mother (Mark 1:29-31); two women are praised for their faith (Mark 5:34; 7:29); a widow is indicated to the disciples as an example of self-giving (Mark 12:43); and the prophetic anointing by a woman will be told wherever the Gospel is preached (Mark 14:9). Women were present as witnesses of His death (Mark 15:40-41), burial (Mark 15:47) and resurrection (Mark 16:1-8). In contrast to the faithful women who followed their Lord, Mark portrays the twelve apostles as lacking in faith (Mark 4:10; 9:19); hardness of heart (Mark 8:17-21); betrayal (Mark 14:18); denial (Mark 14:30). In the garden Mark records, “And they all forsook Him, and fled” (Mark 14:50). The last human name mentioned in Mark’s Gospel is that of a woman. “He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of who He had cast seven devils” (Mark 16:9).

COMMISSION

Mark not only often records the time of day and the place of location but he is inspired to reveal the inward emotions of the Perfect Servant. “Jesus was moved with compassion” toward the leprous sinner (Ch. 1), the straying sheep and the starving multitude (Ch. 6). In this we do well to follow His example in service. His commission before He ascended from the Mount of Olives was; “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). “And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following. Amen” (Mark 16:20). The Perfect Servant is “working” still.

[< Back to Contents >](#)

Labouring for the Gospel

“... Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father” (1Thess. 1:3)

A builder builds an edifice that lasts just for half a century, but we gospel workers labour for a cause that endures for *eternity*. The artist paints what may last only for a generation, but we labour to beautify *forever*. The sculpture chisels out a shape on the marble that soon wears out, but we through God’s help endeavour to impress the likeness of Christ upon those we work, and that would endure *eternally*. A hundred thousand men were employed in Egypt to construct a pyramid for a *dead king* and in India a Taj Mahal for a *dead queen*. Let us be conscious that we are engaged in a far nobler work in constructing *living temples* for the most High and Holy living God.

There are three distinct assignments earmarked for a servant of the Lord – his *way* of life; his *witness* to Scripture and his *work* for the Lord. They should be rightly combined in a worker’s life-pattern, irrespective

of individual preferences and rights, which are to be set aside for the sake of the gospel.

Labour of Love

Christian work is a labour of love because of our love for God and the love we have for the perishing souls. The apostle Paul writes, “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glorify of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1Cor. 9:16). Here Paul refers to the immeasurable *pains* he suffered, because of the compelling force behind the call to *preach* the gospel.

The gospel should be our life’s burden. For this cause everything else must be sacrificed. Paul says that necessity is laid upon him. We have a stewardship entrusted to us, and so we should do everything for the sake of proclaiming the gospel. This should be discharged willingly and freely. Our dedication should be to all the people, seeking only their salvation and to make them disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Labour of Faith

Our work should be a “work of faith” (1Thess. 1:3). As for the Thessalonian church, the apostle was primarily concerned that they should “turn to God from idols” (1:9). The apostle continued to assert their faith in Christ. The gospel came to them, “not ... in word only”, (which means not simply by man’s oratory, for that would lack power) but “in power, and in the Holy Spirit” (1:5). It is not the shouting of the preacher, but his confidence in the scriptural authority which he impresses on his hearers. It is always the Holy Spirit that gives the assurance and works through the preached word, produces the power that brings about the conviction and which results in conversion. He also says that the gospel came “in much assurance” (1:5). Both the apostle and the converts were given deep assurance by the Holy Spirit that this *work of faith* was genuine and continuing.

Thus Paul prays for them, that God would fulfil this manifestation of faith, “the work of faith with power” (2Thess. 1:11). The work of faith does not come out of one’s self or of the flesh, but it is subject to the outworking of the Author of faith – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Labouring for a Purpose

In life’s race, we should *concentrate* on the goal. In the game, the contestants *compete* for the crown. In the ring, the boxer *contends* with the opponent. With the commendation of our Lord, let us “so run” shunning intemperance and scorning shadow boxing. Let us control and curtail natural appeals and appetites, lest we ourselves should be rejected. The apostle Paul says, “I keep under my body (i.e. under control) and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1Cor. 9:27). We must possess the *charge*, imbibe the *confidence* and fulfil the great *commission*.

Labour – Well Pleasing to God

The apostle Paul gives three reasons for the confidence God gave him in his work for the gospel (1Thess. 2:3). His work was not *based* on deceit nor did it *appeal* to uncleanness, neither did it *require guile* to convince others. It could stand for itself and be accepted of God. Further, Paul aimed to please God and not men in his preaching (2:4). This was evident from the fact that his labours had been *selfless* in nature, characterised by *lack of flattery* and freedom from covetousness and *self-glory* (2:5-6). He laboured among the Gentiles, as a nursing mother who cares for her own child giving milk, love care and part of her life itself, with all tender gentleness (2:7). He had also shown willingness to devote everything, even his own soul, for their spiritual welfare (2:8). Such should also be our labour.

In our labours we should be able to call upon the very people with whom we labour (who see our outward actions) and God (who sees our hearts and minds) as our witness for the truth in our words and work. “At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established” (Deut. 19:15; 2Cor. 13:1). It must be holy and just and unblameable. The word “*holy*” would mean our public conduct in relation to God, “*just*” would mean the relationship with men, and “*unblameable*” would mean our relation to self. Such a labour would be well pleasing to God.

Labouring for High or Low

For a gospel preacher there is no strict work schedule that he should do only such and such a work. He is expected to be an all-rounder and be always willing to do *any work* and at *any time*, irrespective of the nature of the job entrusted. It may be a respectable job or a menial one. Whatever the circumstances are, and to whomsoever the Lord leads us, we must feel happy to discharge our calling, without any reservation or murmur.

“Weep with them that weep, if you cannot relieve them. Bestow personal menial service, if you cannot give gold. Teach children, if you are not competent as an instructor of men. Be a support to the household, if you are not able to become a pillar of the state. Be a lamp in the chamber, if you cannot be a star in the sky. Gladden the house circle, church circle, if it transcends your powers to illuminate the town. Talk to the few, if you have no vocation to preach to the crowd”
– S. Coley

‘Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find food’ (2Kings 7:9). The good news we offer is the good news we ourselves need to receive anew. Ultimately, evangelism boils down to this: one starving person telling another starving person where to find food.

Holding onto the Labour

“Behold, I come quickly: *hold that fast* which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Rev. 3:11).

The imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ should encourage us not only to be *faithful* to the work we have been committed, but that it should continue *unhindered*. The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches this.

“Take care of him ... when I *come again*, I will repay thee” (Luke 10:35). The man rescued by the Samaritan was brought to an inn where he was left in the care of the innkeeper who was instructed to “take care of him”. Because of the promises given by the Samaritan on his coming again, the innkeeper had to take good care of the rescued man, “Whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee”. The service was to be given based on the assurance given by the Samaritan. As was the innkeeper, so are we labourers in His service, looking forward to His imminent return and to accept the *compensation promised* – a pleasant reward, similar to a blank cheque written in advance, as “*whatsoever* thou spendest more”. Then, should we not spend a little extra and work harder in taking care and serving our fellow travellers on our life’s journey? Let us march forward, unwavering, day after day, pursuing the set course of labour entrusted to us.

The Lord Labouring for and with Us

King Saul was informed that Jonathan “hath wrought with God this day” (1Sam. 14:45). Earlier Jonathan hazarded his life, declaring, “It may be that the *LORD will work* for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by *many* or by *few*” (v6). Later, he said by faith, “The LORD hath delivered them into the hands of Israel” (v12). In these verses, we clearly see one’s work must be accomplished with God, so that He can use His vessel to do His work. Or else, one’s work will merely be the work of the carnal self – the work of man. Said Paul “But God gave the increase” (1Cor. 3:6). When the apostle Paul reported to the Jerusalem Council he said, “What miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them” (Acts 15:12).

Our Lord said, “The Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works” (John 14:10). Similarly, in the Lord’s service, the same principle applies. “The *Lord working* with them” (Mark 16:20), is how the ascended Lord is seen in relation to His servants. Thus, when the servant does anything in the Lord’s Name, his service is wrought *with* the Lord, and hence the following are the signs. “We are *labourers together* with God” (1Cor. 3:7-9). Paul’s work in the field and on the building site was really “God’s husbandry” (1Cor. 3:9) and “God’s building”, since “He was giving the increase” and “the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21). We are *workers together* with Christ (2Cor. 6:1) and God is working in His people to do His will and His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13), demanding our faithful and full co-operation in His work.

The Labourers Wage

Did not the soldiers serve for wages? Vine dressers eat of the fruit, and shepherds also live off the flock. Old Testament law speaks of the threshing ox, the plough-man and the priest (1Cor. 9:9-13). So, does not a labourer, in the spiritual sphere, deserve recompense in material form and in mundane materials? Surely he does. "The labourer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7). The Lord will supply all his needs. So there is no need to advertise and report to men.

We should not advertise our needs, go on a shopping parade to various houses of God's people or go from one church to another, pleading either for our personal needs or that of the ministry in which we are involved. Our Lord is faithful and He will supply the right things at the right time in a marvellous way. Let us bear in mind that our God is no debtor to men. On the other hand, God's children should also be concerned about workers' needs and should carry out their responsibilities adequately.

———— Path of the Lord's Servant ————

Servants of Christ, stand fast amid the scorn
Of men who little know or love the Lord;
Turn not aside from toil: cease not to warn,
Comfort and teach, trust Him for thy reward:
A few more moments' suffering and then
Cometh sweet rest from all thy heart's deep pain.

For grace pray much, for much thou needest grace;
If men thy work deride, what can they more?
Christ's weary feet thy path on earth doth trace;
If thorns wound thee, they pierced Him before;
Press on, look up, though clouds may gather round;
Thy place of service He makes hallowed ground.

Have friends forsaken thee and cast thy name
Out as a worthless thing? Take courage then;
Go, tell thy Master; for they did the same
To Him, who once in patience toiled for them;
Yet He was perfect in all His service here;
Thou oft hast failed; this maketh Him more dear.

Self-vindication shun; if in the right,
What gain'st thou from taking from God's hand
Thy cause? If wrong what doest thou but invite
Satan himself thy friend in need to stand?
Leave all with God. If right, He'll prove thee so;
If not, He'll pardon; therefore to Him go.

Be not man's servant; think what costly price
Was paid, that thou mayest His own bondman be,
Whose servant perfect freedom is. Let this
Hold fast thy heart, His claim is great to thee:
None should thy soul enthrall to whom it is given
To serve on earth, with liberty of heaven.

All His are thine to serve; Christ's brethren here
Are needing aid; in them thou servest Him,
The least of all is still His member dear;
The weakest cost His life-blood to redeem;
Yield to no 'party', what He rightly claims
Who on His heart bears all His people's names.

Be wise, Be watchful. Wily men surround
Thy path. Be careful, for they seek with care
To trip thee up. See that no plea is found
In thee thy Master to reproach. The snare
They set for thee will then themselves enclose,
And God His righteous judgment thus disclose.

Cleave to the poor, Christ's image in them is;
Count it great honour if they love thee well;
Naught can repay thee after losing this
Though with the wise and wealthy thou shouldst dwell,
Thy Master oftentimes would pass thy door,
To hold communion with His much-loved poor.

"The time is short", seek little here below;
Earth's goods would cumber thee and drag thee down;
Let daily food suffice; care not to know
Thought for tomorrow; it may never come;
Thou can't not perish, for thy Lord is nigh,
And His own Hand will all thy need supply.

– Selected

Reprinted with kind permission from the book "MEN IN GOD'S SERVICE" by N. John Jeyanandam

[< Back to Contents >](#)

The Death of Christ Demonstrates God's Sovereignty

In the previous article we quoted the words of Solomon recorded in 2Chronicles 6:4, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who hath with His hands fulfilled that which He spake with His mouth to my father David". If these words are considered it becomes apparent that in addition to declaring God's faithfulness, they declare God's omnipotence and sovereignty. For if God's hand fulfils what His mouth pronounces, the might of His hand is demonstrated as well as the faithfulness of His lips.

The fact is all the more remarkable when we realise that by declaring His intention, God is leaving the way wide open for every one of His almost innumerable foes to seek to bring His purpose to nothing and so to discredit Him. Yet God is so sublimely confident of His invincibility that He freely reveals His purpose; for well He knows that His hand is able to fulfil whatever His mouth speaks. In these remarkable terms in Isaiah 46:9-11, God Himself declares the unique glory of His sovereignty: "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure: ... yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it".

The greatest wonder of God's sovereignty, however, is that He not only triumphs over His foes, but actually overrules their hostility, and utilises their vain efforts to oppose Him, to work out His own purpose. This does not lessen the guilt of those who seek to oppose God, whether they be the hosts of hell, or the unregenerate children of men, but it does magnify God, the sovereign Ruler and Disposer of all.

If our readers will recall the many details of the death of Christ which were the subjects of express

prediction in the Old Testament, they will appreciate what a golden opportunity this afforded to the enemies of God to thwart, if only in some minute particular, something of His purpose. Conversely, in retrospect, in the fulfilment of all these details, we have a magnificent demonstration of the complete subjugation of all things to God. His foes have been routed, spoiled and led in triumph through the cross.

In no other circumstance is the greatness of God in employing His foes as His unforced yet unwilling agents more apparent than at the cross. The contemplation of such a theme bows our hearts before a God of unimaginable greatness, of unqualified sovereignty, of irresistible might. This is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The New Testament saints delighted in this aspect of the death of Christ. For them it transformed the apparent shame of the cross into a glory that was wholly of God. On the day of Pentecost Peter proclaimed, "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:22,23). And when the saints were threatened, they addressed God in prayer, and speaking in the language of Psalm 2 of the universal association of men to oppose God and His Christ, they could describe them as gathered "to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:24-28).

It is well worth considering more specifically some of the means which God employed in accomplishing His eternal purpose of man's redemption in the death of Christ:

1. He overruled the malice of Satan

Satan is the arch-enemy of God. Probably he is the greatest creature which God ever made. Although limited, his power and wisdom are very great. He has authority over a vast host of fallen spirit beings, and by the fall of Adam became the prince of this world. In many ways Satan was active in regard to the cross, but we also learn from Scripture that he was the prime instigator of it. Scripture reveals in general terms that he is the dominating influence in the wickedness in the world, and that men are his dupes and tools (e.g. Acts 26:18; Eph. 2:2; 1John 5:18 [R.V.]). But in John 13:3 we read that it was the devil who put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray the Lord Jesus, and in verse 27 and Luke 22:3 we are told that Satan entered into him with a view to its accomplishment. This last expression is unique, and indicates something more than demon-influence, or even demon-possession. It is a direct and personal intervention by Satan himself, in order to secure the destruction of Christ.

Why he intervened in this way, when he must have known the Scriptures, is more than we can say. We might just as well ask why, if he is so wise, did he rebel against the Almighty, a necessarily futile endeavour? Possibly malice blinded his mind and robbed him of his astuteness. Nevertheless he instigated the betrayal of Christ, which led to His murder, and in so doing accomplished his own downfall (Hebrews 2:14), and rendered certain his ultimate destruction (Rev. 20:10). So God triumphed over His mightiest foe, taking him in his own craftiness.

2. He overruled the covetousness of Judas

The means that Satan had employed to gain Judas was greed. Judas had the bag, the common purse, and had abused his trust for his own advantage. He became a thief (see John 12:6). The Lord knew Judas from the beginning (John 6:64,70,71), and suffered him through the years as the determined agent of His betrayal. For thirty pieces of silver Judas sold the Lord, and in so doing he both fulfilled the Scripture, and secured his own doom. For though God made use of his covetousness to accomplish His purpose, and to bring to pass His own specific words, Judas was a free agent who bore the full measure of his guilt (Matt. 26:24; Luke 22:22). Peter stigmatised his deed as "iniquity", and stated that he went to "his own place" (Acts 1:15-25).

3. He overruled the envy of the chief priests

The Jewish nation was a theocracy, and the leaders were spiritual guides and not merely politicians. The first and most important consideration of all was that they should move in the fear of God. How desperately

sad that Pilate, a cynical man of the world, could see through the shameless hypocrisy of the professed men of God! “He knew that the chief priests had delivered Him for envy” (Mark 15:10). Instead of rejoicing that God had visited His people and had sent a man to recover them to Himself, they viewed His influence as a threat to their own position and reputation, and were willing to stoop to the most shameless dishonesty and the most cruel injustice in order to remove Him. They tried for crafty reasons of their own to avoid taking and killing Christ on the feast day (Matt. 26:5), but God’s prophetic programme decreed that the lamb should be slain on the Passover day, and their plans miscarried, that God’s Word might be fulfilled.

As a result of their efforts, however, Christ was crucified, and by His death removed their priesthood entirely, bringing in a new and heavenly priesthood instead. What a triumph of the grace of God that many of the old priesthood should later be converted to the new! (Acts 6:7).

4. He overruled the ignorance of the Jews

Although the prophets were read in the synagogue every Sabbath day, the Jews were so ignorant of them that they failed to recognize Messiah, and as a consequence fulfilled the Scripture in condemning Him (Acts 13:27-29). See also Acts 3:17,18. The people of God should be willing agents of God, moving righteously in the knowledge of His will; but here the people of God moved in ignorance and rebellion, and yet all unwillingly fulfilled the Scripture and accomplished God’s will.

5. He overruled the unrighteousness of Pilate

Pontius Pilate was the personal representative of a proud and mighty empire. Rome had brought law and liberty to many lands which had only known the tyranny of despotism. Yet Pilate’s treatment of Christ has brought the stain of the greatest injustice and crime that man has ever committed upon the record of Roman jurisprudence, a stain which was later exacerbated by the cruel persecution of the Christians.

How often Pilate acknowledged that Christ was without fault! Yet at the last he succumbed to the implacability of the Jews, and with a futile gesture of innocence gave authority for the execution of a man for whom no grounds of death in Roman law could be produced. Just what motivated him is difficult to decide. Was it cowardice, love of popularity, laziness, expediency? Whatever it was, it moved him to do what he himself had publicly acknowledged to be uncalled for and unjust, and resulted his being numbered amongst that great gathering together against God and His Christ which perpetrated the murder of Christ (Acts 4:27).

No doubt this gross and cowardly injustice was ordered by God to secure the manner of Christ’s death, as prophecy had predicted it. When Pilate suggested that the Jewish leaders themselves deal with the matter as one concerned only with their own laws, they refused, insisting that it was not lawful to put any man to death (John 18:31). They had no such inhibitions about stoning Stephen (Acts 7:59), or smiting James with the sword (Acts 12:1,2). Why then this strange self-righteous scrupulosity regarding Jesus of Nazareth? It was in order to fulfil the divine purpose of crucifixion by being lifted up on a tree, which was a Roman, not Jewish, mode of execution, and which was intimated in prophetic Scripture.

Because of the nature of the deed, the providential ordering of God in the death of Christ is more evident in the overruling of man’s wickedness, but once the deed was done it is beautiful to observe one outstanding example of willing cooperation. Why should Joseph, a rich man, come forward at this juncture (Isa. 53:9)? Why should a man of Arimathæa have a tomb at Jerusalem (Matt. 27:57)? Why should it be in the garden where Christ was crucified (John 19:41)? Why should it be a new tomb, undefiled by death (Lev. 6:11)? And why should a fearful secret disciple, instead of being overwhelmed by the murder of Christ, boldly come forward to confess to Pilate his interest (John 19:38; Mark 15:43)? Truly Omnipotence hath servants everywhere, and operates “according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11).

[< Back to Contents >](#)

“Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2Peter 1:21)

If it be true, then, that bad men **could** not and **would** not have written so holy a book, and that good men **could** not and **would** not have written a forged book, the Bible must be what it claims to be – the Word of the living God.

– A. Boner

[< Back to Contents >](#)

Psalm 139

David wrote this magnificent Psalm under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2Pet. 1:21; 2Tim. 3:16). David was a sinner like all of us (Rom. 3:23) but he was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22) and the trend of his life was towards God whom he loved and sought to serve, honour and obey.

There is a limit to the extent to which finite man can understand and appreciate God who is infinite in every aspect of His Being. We cannot leave it to our imaginations to know anything about God. God is a God of revelation and, in grace has gradually revealed Himself to mankind. As we read and meditate on the Word of God the Holy Spirit graciously reveals truths about our wonderful God.

David knew God and was overwhelmed by His infinite greatness. David knew that God is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. David was aware of the presence of the eternal, unchanging, all-knowing, almighty God whom he loved. In Psalm 139 we read of David speaking directly to God, using the personal pronouns – Thou, Thee, me, my and mine. God was David’s God and David’s thoughts and meditation on God filled him with awe and wonder as he dwelled on God’s infinite and unchanging majesty, power, knowledge, wisdom, love and grace.

David was a man of great personal courage. He had killed a lion, a bear and the giant Goliath (1Sam. 17:34-36,50,51) but he was full of reverence and godly fear of the holy, all-knowing, everywhere present, all-powerful God. David bowed in worship and submission to God.

God is Omniscient

God is omniscient. He has a complete, perfect knowledge at all times of the past, present and future. David was in awe of such wonderful knowledge and wrote, “O LORD, Thou hast searched me, and known me” (v.1). He uses the word LORD, indicating the name revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:13-15). LORD, using small capitals, is the name, YAHWEH which we pronounce Jehovah. It is the personal name of the God of Israel, the covenant name of the Almighty, infinitely powerful God who can make and keep covenants with Israel and with those who have been saved by grace. The essence of the meaning of this sublime name can be expressed as I AM THAT I AM, and it speaks of the unchanging One. The name is used in connection with God’s purposes in redemption (Exod. 3:14,16; 6:3). It leads the mind to think of God as the One who has an underived, eternal existence, the cause of His existence being in Himself. He is the independent, self-existent, self-sufficient One, who possesses eternal life in Himself and reveals Himself. He is immutable and eternally unchanging (Mal. 3:6). Jehovah is the personal name of the God of Israel. It speaks of the very substance and essential being of God and is not derived from His works.

God is love (1Jn. 4:8,16) and all His plans and purposes are rooted and founded in love, grace, mercy, truth, holiness and righteousness. Because of the limitations of our minds we do not even know and understand ourselves, but God knows each one of us perfectly and completely, and each of us can say, “Thou God seest me” (Gen. 16:13).

Thinking people all around us are very conscious of the fragile state of society and the world at large. They use expressions such as “what is the world coming to?” A great deal has been written and said in attempts to deal with the problems, worries and anxieties that people are experiencing and their stresses and feelings of inadequacy, also their inability to face the uncertain and insecure future. Books and articles are written and courses are provided in attempts to discuss and explain the psychological aspects of human beings so that people might better understand themselves. Efforts are made to enable people to be confident, assertive, experience self-esteem and feel successful.

Sometimes people who are very stressed and worried will not even consider their state before God, saying, for example, “religion is a crutch needed by the inadequate”. How very sad it all is. People do not realise that sin lies at the root of all the problems with which they are confronted. A person will never experience peace and satisfaction unless and until, by the grace of God, he knows the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and is walking a path of obedience to Him in a life that is becoming increasingly less self-centred and increasingly more God-centred. Only then will the cleansing power of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ ease the troubled conscience and peace with God and the peace of God be experienced by the individual. How we need to pray for those who are lost.

Only God knows us completely and absolutely. Verses 1-6 of the Psalm tell us that God knows all our physical movements, even those that might seem trivial to us. He knows the absolute truth about every aspect of our being. He knows the truth regarding our hopes, intentions, aims, aspirations and our real motives even though we do not truly know them ourselves. The God in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28) knows all the thoughts we have ever had, He knows what we are thinking in the present and what we will think in the future. He knows every word we have spoken and every word we will speak even before we give utterance to our thoughts. It would have been better for many of us if some of the thoughts we have had, had not entered our minds and if many words had never been spoken (Matt. 12:36). We need to pray “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3). Thoughts precede and result in words and actions and can cause habits to develop and so characters are formed.

What we allow our minds to be occupied with, what we dwell on, will determine the sort of people we are. We must be very careful regarding what we read and think about, and very careful regarding what we see and the company we keep. Our minds are being influenced and habits and patterns of thought are being formed continuously. We must feed on the Living Word through meditation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, on the Written Word. Careful and prayerful use of our time will, by the grace of God, cause believers to gradually become more like the Lord Jesus Christ and gradually His ways will become our ways.

Thoughts can result in words, and in James 3:8 we read that no man can control the tongue. The things we say can create havoc and only the Holy Spirit can effectively control the tongue. It is good to meditate on the effects that thoughts can have. The Word of God tells us that, “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body” (Jam. 3:2). In Proverbs 23:7 we read that as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he”, and in Matthew 12:34 “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”.

God knows all things and He cannot be deceived by hypocrisy or outward appearance (1Sam. 16:7). God knows the heart, therefore “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). In Proverbs 25:3 we read “the heart of kings is unsearchable”, that means it cannot be searched by men. No man can be quite sure of what another man is thinking, but David the king, knew that nothing can be concealed from God.

David is overwhelmed by God’s perfect, absolute, infinite knowledge, and every believer who meditates on God and His ways will likewise be overwhelmed. We, being finite, are always limited in our knowledge and understanding. God is infinite and the finite can only understand, comprehend or imagine the infinite to a very limited extent. David wrote “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (v6). Such infinite knowledge combined with such love, grace, mercy and power calls forth spontaneous

praise, adoration, love and worship together with a desire to be careful to do His will and please Him for “the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed” (1Sam. 2:3).

The truths presented to us in the Word of God are for our edification, blessing, comfort and guidance (Rom. 15:4). We must meditate on the truths revealed to David and recorded for us in Psalm 139. God is omniscient and we would do well to remember that “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). One day each one of us will stand before the judgement seat of the Lord Jesus Christ and give an account of himself to God (Rom. 14:10,12; 2Cor. 5:10). God is supreme, knows all things, is infinitely powerful and He rules in the kingdoms of men (Dan. 4:17,25,32).

(To be continued D.V.)

[< Back to Contents >](#)

Help for Young Believers

The Veterans Advise – No 5

This is the fifth reprint from the writings of a veteran brother who served the Lord for 48 years in South America.

**“Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway”
(1Corinthians 9:27)**

A Christian is referred to in the Scriptures as a light, a soldier, a workman and also as a vessel. Oh, the joy of being used as a vessel in the Lord’s hand! We know that God is sovereign. He can apply this vessel to one work and that one to another. He may use one to win hundreds of souls to Christ. Another may be sent to serve in some difficult place. Our deep desire is always to be in His hand, and not cast aside.

This was the solemn concern in the heart of the apostle Paul, when he said: “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” Was he afraid of being lost after all? No, that did not depend on his faithfulness, but upon the value of the sacrifice of Christ. He could rejoice saying: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” That settled his eternal salvation. In what sense, then, did he fear lest he should be a castaway?

A Christian blacksmith was asked to explain why, seeing he was the Lord’s, he should be experiencing so many trials. He replied by explaining that in his work, he would take up a piece of metal from which he hoped to make a useful tool. He would heat it in the fire, then hammer it on the anvil; then he would heat it again and chill it. If he found it would take a temper, he would continue this heating and hammering process until the metal was ready. If he found, after the first or second heating, that the metal would not serve his purpose, he would throw it out on a pile under the window to be sold as scrap. “See”, said he, “I would rather be in the fire and used of God, than be on the scrap heap.”

The apostle Paul wished to be a useful vessel – not a castaway vessel. Are we concerned about being in a condition that God can use us? To begin with, we are all “vessels of mercy” (Rom. 9:23). We have the option of being vessels “unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master’s use” (2Tim. 2:21). This is conditional, as is no doubt expressed in the word “sanctified”. “Bring an offering in a clean vessel” (Isa. 66:20). Any one would prefer to drink from the poorest kind of vessel, if clean, rather than from a filthy golden cup.

What might be some of the causes of defilement that might result in a once-used vessel being rejected? Perhaps the most common source of defilement would be pride. The apostle, who had a wholesome dread

of this thing, said: "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh ... lest I should be exalted above measure" (2Cor. 12:7). Have you been permitted of God to lead a soul to Christ? Don't say in your heart: "I did it, and I'll do it again." He who knoweth the hearts of all men may just lay you aside as a defiled vessel. This has happened undoubtedly to some, and because of the flesh in all of us, it could happen to any one. All vessels must be repeatedly cleansed, if they are to be used again and again.

Another cause of defilement would be love for the praise of men. How we long to see results? But, is that longing entirely from the desire that God might thereby be glorified? The apostle Paul again expressed another, and perhaps somewhat rare concern in 2Corinthians 12:6. His concern was, "lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me". This is surely a healthy concern for every servant of God. Will a man rob God? Yet, if we should crave apparent success that we might be highly esteemed, would our vessel not be defiled thereby? To be and continue to be a vessel "meet for the Master's use", there must surely be constant searching of heart. When there is little or no evidence that we are being used as the Lord's vessels, should there not be much godly exercise lest our deceitful hearts urge us on to activities, which while we are defiled, can only spread defilement to others?

Let us not imagine that because we have been used of God already and gone on for years as preachers of the Word, we shall necessarily continue to be used. God is sovereign and He could lay aside (cast away) any vessel at His pleasure, and who could say to Him: "What doest Thou?" He may deign to use us still, if we are clean. If not, we may well expect to be castaway.

The responsibility for a vessel's defilement may not be altogether chargeable to that individual. While some surely need words of encouragement, others have been spoiled and defiled, by flattery. Young men starting out to preach should be very small in their own eyes. Would to God we could always keep small! Some might have become useful men but for the lack of judgment on the part of others. For one reason or another they have been unduly praised and elevated, their pockets filled with money and their every comfort sought. Soon their desire to "endure hardness" is gone: they are no longer a blessing. Their popularity decreases and the curtain falls.

Does this not explain why some, less able to catch the ear of the crowd, are found plodding on quietly after the other has disappeared like a falling star? The Lord deliver us from rendering any vessel unfit for God's service.

[< Back to Contents >](#)

Questions and Answers

Question: "Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ" (Heb. 6:1). What does this mean?

Answer: The context of the previous verses is growth and maturity. This does not come by old age but by whole hearted devotion to Christ, a fuller knowledge of Christ and the foundation of the Doctrines of Scripture concerning Christ. Milk is good but beneficial especially to infants and invalids. It would be strange to say that you need milk therefore we will not give it to you. We are leaving the milk as the child leaves the alphabet, as a plant leaves the root, or as a building leaves the foundation. "The first principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5:12) are the beginning, the elements, the rudiments of the Gospel. "The principles of the doctrine of Christ" (Heb. 6:1) are the words of the beginning, the initial elementary doctrine of Christ from which we make spiritual development as borne along by the Spirit of God.

The six items of verses 1 and 2 are indispensable and do not refer to the ceremonial cleansing and Old Testament ritual which were not foundational. What we build upon is the basic rudiments of the Gospel, public confession of repentance, faith and identification, resurrection and future life.

“Wherefore, leaving the Word of the beginning of the Christ, let us go on [to what belongs] to full growth” (JND). The answer of growth, maturity and development in Christ.

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: (Ephesians 4:13)

[< Back to Contents >](#)

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. (John 5:24)

There are twenty five occasions in John’s gospel account where the Lord Jesus is recorded as using the form of address, **“Verily, Verily, I say unto you (plural) or thee (singular)”**. On each occasion it was to draw His hearers attention to a notable statement that He was about to make, statements of sublime truth and depth that we ourselves need to heed, such as that above. There is a double emphasis upon the **“Verily”** meaning ‘of a truth’. He is the embodiment of divine truth, the One who revealed truth in a way that none before or after Him could. They were statements spoken with calm repose and authority, even in the face of hostility from those around that despised Him. He would tell them what they needed to hear for their own good. But alas, how few turned their ears to listen to His word.

He that heareth My word

The discourse from where these words are taken began when the Lord made the statement **“My Father worketh hitherto, and I work”** (John 5:17) and was recognised immediately by His hearers as being a claim of equality with God, as is the case, proven by Him repeatedly in the gospel records. His hearers reacted against His claim, to which the Lord responded by emphasising that all He said and did was in complete accord with the Father and not as one acting independently of Him. To honour the Son is to honour the Father that sent Him and hence the need to wholeheartedly embrace the Son’s words and substance of His teaching. This is the imbibing of His teaching into our hearts and souls, in recognition of and submission to the truth that He spoke with an authority that eclipses any other being. He could only speak truth and that in a way which continually glorified His Father above.

And believeth on Him that sent Me

God had formerly given a law through Moses centuries earlier, but salvation could never come by law keeping or good works: it could only expose man’s sin and guilt as was its intent. God has now given His Son to accomplish what the law could never do due to mankind’s weakness. To believe on God the Father who sent the Son, is to acknowledge this truth and the unique and vital mission He came to fulfil.

It is to believe the sure testimony that God has now given to us of His Son: **“He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son”** (1John 5:10). It is to confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who came in full accord and blessing and will of the Father. It is the submission to and reception of Him and His sacrifice on the Cross and His resurrection from the dead as the sole ground upon which God can and will accept us in peace.

Hath everlasting life

This was the truth that the Lord sought to impress upon His hearers and all who subsequently observe His words; it is those that **“Hear”** and **“Believe”** who become possessors of **“Everlasting Life”**. This is the one vital possession that we need prior to our departure from this world: it cannot be acquired once we’ve gone. This is not vain presumption but certain fact based on the work of the Cross. There need be no doubts, no hesitations upon the matter. It cannot be wrenched away from anyone. It depends completely on our dependency upon Him and not on ourselves. It is a matter of believing God’s word and by faith, receiving His gift of life.

And shall not come into condemnation

It is impossible for the believing one to be brought into judgment and condemned for committed sin. In contrast, the Lord had earlier taught, **“He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God”** (John 3:18). This is the dreadful hope, even if not recognised, of the unbeliever. We can appreciate therefore why the Lord speaks with such necessity and solemnity. He further taught the basis of the condemnation, **“that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil”** (John 3:19). He was that Light who men sought to extinguish on the cross but there in the darkness, He gained the great victory over death.

It should be noted however that true conversion will bring a repulsion of the sin once practiced, not licence to continue in it. **“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”** (Romans 8:1). Some claim they have everlasting life but their conduct denies a life controlled by the Holy Spirit. This is hypocrisy, a sham.

But is passed from death unto life

The true believer has passed from one state into another and cannot be taken back to the former. This is because it is God **“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son”** (Colossians 1:13). Satan has to surrender them to the Son; he is powerless to prevent this release.

Many however, still blinded by the devil, insist that death ends it all. The Son could again testify: **“For the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice. And shall come forth”** (John 5:28), unto the resurrection of life or of damnation in the Lake of Fire. The One who spoke the worlds into existence with His voice will similarly reconstitute men’s bodies for their final destiny. Let us therefore take heed to His voice NOW and thus pass **“from death unto life.”**

[< Back to Contents >](#)
