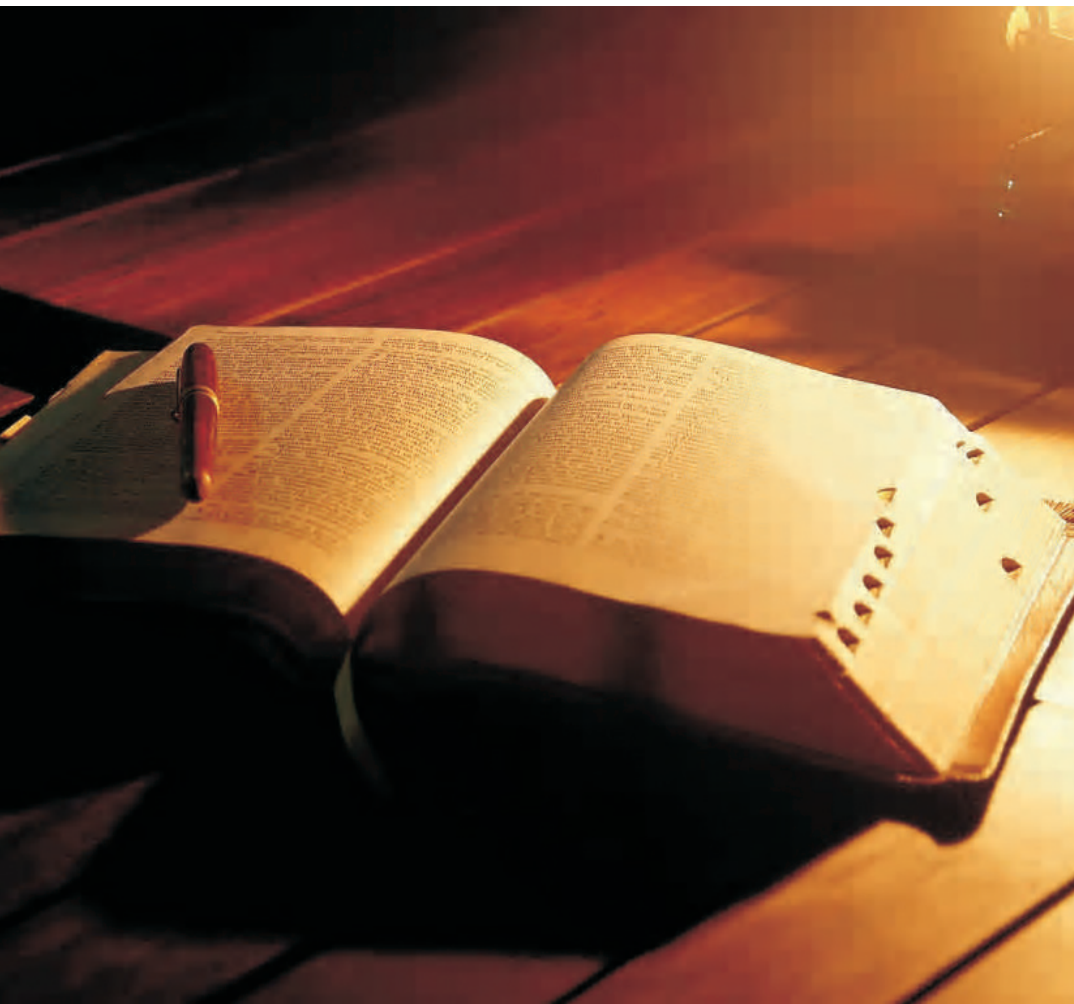


THE OLD PATHS

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The Old Paths

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Let my cry come near before Thee, O LORD: give me understanding according to Thy word. Let my supplication come before Thee: deliver me according to Thy word. ... My tongue shall speak of Thy word: for all Thy commandments are righteousness.

(Psalm 119:169,170,172)



From the Editor's Desk

“THE WORD – LIGHT FOR REVEALING”

“Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a Light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105)

The first record of God speaking is: “Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). God is the Source of all things (Gen. 1:1); the Spirit of God is the energiser of all things (Gen. 1:2); and the Word of God is the revealer of all things (Gen. 1:3).

THE LIGHT INCARNATE

“For God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Cor. 4:6). Prior to this lovely verse, the apostle Paul had already rejoiced in the light of the Glorious Gospel of Christ. In this illuminating message, the Revealer of Divine glory is Christ Himself. The word “Light” in verse 6 is not the usual word. It means radiancy, illumination, shining forth, emphasising the ability to give light rather than the light itself. God allows light to penetrate. The true image of God has shined (past tense, at conversion) into the centre of our being, giving the full revelation of the Father in the Son. The “Face of Jesus Christ” is the unveiling of His Person and Presence. “In Him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). He is the Author and Source of eternal life. This “life” which springs from Him, becomes our “Light”.

“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Alas, “Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

THE LIGHT ILLUMINATING

Light and darkness do not mix. “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1John 1:5-6). A ray of light shining through a window reveals dust and pollution in the air that otherwise may not be noticed. The light exposes every sin which needs to be erased. Physically, light represents Glory. Intellectually, light reveals Truth. Morally, light speaks of Holiness. “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1John 1:7).

THE LIGHT INSPIRED

“Walk as children of light: (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)” (Eph. 5:8-9). These qualities are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit through the Holy Scriptures, the inspired Word of God. “Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light” (Rom. 13:12). As we enter 2020 we pray that God Willing, we will hear God speaking through the Holy Scriptures in the teaching of the magazine, to preserve us individually and collectively in assembly testimony to be lights in a dark day, “Among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15).

“The entrance of Thy Words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Psalm 119:130).

Reflection

There are those who claim a sort of negative purity because they do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, but let us ask ourselves: Is my delight in the law of the Lord? Do I study God’s Word? Do I make it the man of my right hand – my best companion and my hourly guide? If not, the blessings of Psalm 1:1-3 do not belong to me.

Worship in Matthew's Gospel

T.J. Blackman

Worship, praise and thanksgiving are, understandably, features of all four Gospels, whether speaking to us of Emanuel the King, the perfect Servant, the sinless Man or the Only-begotten Son. Each Gospel presents the subject in a different way.

Matthew brings before us eight occasions when the Lord was worshipped. On each occasion the same word is used. It is the word used by Satan (Matthew 4:8-10) as he offered to give the Lord Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world" if He would bow down and worship him. Although some attempt to dilute this word to mean "homage" which can be given to God or men, the Lord's reply makes it clear that it is worship intended for God alone. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve". Thus, each of the eight occasions in Matthew's Gospel when the Lord is worshipped is proof of His deity, for such worship was never refused. The same word is used twice in Revelation where John made the mistake of worshipping the angel who spoke to him. The angel rebukes him and says, "worship God" (Revelation 19:10; 22:8,9).

1. (2:2,11) - Wise men from the east, therefore Gentiles, probably from Persia. Although for many reasons we understand Matthew to be "the Jewish Gospel", right from the beginning it shows that Gentiles were more receptive to God's Messiah than His own people. About 400 years before, God's last word to His people Israel had included the threefold prediction that His name would be great among the nations (Malachi 1:11,14). Of course, the Lord's words through Malachi, speaking of such praise "from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same" and "in every place" await a future fulfilment. Here in Matthew 2 it is obviously not a day but a night scene, when guidance is given through a star, nor is it "in every

place”, but just a few wise men from the east. However, the One whom they worship is the same.

If the coming of the wise men is an echo of ancient prophecies, it also anticipates abuses of the present dispensation. When for centuries religious people have exalted the virgin mother above her “firstborn Son”, how striking it is to read, “they worshipped Him”, with Mary content to be “the handmaid of the Lord”.

We understand the word used for offering here is generally used of an offering to the Lord. It may be a mystery how they came to appreciate the greatness of One born in such lowly circumstances, but they evidently gave the best they could. Even so, the richness of their gifts fades into insignificance before One who is more precious than gold, more fragrant than incense and far more pure than myrrh.

2. (8:2) - The Leper – the disease of Leprosy is a graphic figure of human depravity. In spite of the repulsive and contagious nature of his disease, he found the Lord to be approachable, recognized His ability to cleanse, bowed to His will. Thus, as he worshipped, he acknowledged the mercy, power and sovereignty of the Lord Jesus.

3. (9:18) - Jairus – in the face of imminent death. He believed the Lord Jesus could save his sick daughter *from* death. The Lord saved her *out of* death. Jairus recognized His ability to heal, and learned His ability to raise the dead. Thus, we see that worship is not only an expression of appreciation, but can lead to a deeper appreciation of Christ.

4. (14:33) - Disciples in the boat – danger: the wind was boisterous, the waves were wild, it was the darkest hour of the night. The Lord had gone up into the mountain to pray and the disciple’s little boat was being tossed on a mountainous sea. But none of the dangers could keep Him from His own. Neither the storm nor the darkness was a barrier to His love. Even Peter’s attempt to meet the Lord on the waves was a failure. But Peter was saved, the storm calmed and

all taken safely to the “desired haven”. There is really no real danger while the Lord is praying for us. And He will never cease to do so as long as we are here below: He “ever liveth to make intercession” for us (Hebrews 7:25). He is always near “to all that call upon Him in truth” (Psalm 145:18).

5. (15:25) - The Syrophenician woman – a demon-possessed daughter. The Lord is beyond the borders of Israel, it seems He came specially to speak to this Gentile woman and deliver her daughter. His way of dealing with her is unique. First of all, she came addressing Him as Son of David and using language which really belonged only to Israel. The Lord was unresponsive. Then, as she continued to cry for help the Lord raised an objection: “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel”. Finally, she “worships Him, saying, Lord help me”.

Soon the Lord brought out her “great faith” by showing that, dispensationally, it was still the time for ministering spiritual bread to the “children” of Israel, but not yet to the “dogs” of the Gentiles. But she knew that the Master’s table was so richly spread that even the little dogs would have plentiful provision. She soon discovered that, whatever the dispensation, “The LORD is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Psalm 145:9). Like this woman, in worship we should seek to magnify the Lord and glorify Him for the abundance of His mercy and truth. Thus, our worship will also be the expression of “great faith”.

6. (20:20) - James, John and their mother – They seem to have come to Him in the expectation that their worship would deserve special privilege. All they obtained was an invitation to be slaves. Not just to be His slaves, but also to render bond-service to His people. In His kingdom that is the only route to true greatness: to be “servant of all”! Only the attitude of a bondservant is suitable for the worship of the One who “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life ...” (Matthew 20:28).

7. (28:9) - The women after His resurrection – devotion. Matthew records two occasions when the Lord appeared and was worshipped after His resurrection. The first time, He appeared to the women who had been to the empty tomb. Although, as John records, He had said to Mary, “Touch Me not” (John 20:17), they seem to have instinctively “held Him by the feet” as they worshipped Him. Prostrate before Him, they tenderly hold those beautiful feet which had been so cruelly pierced and fixed to the cross. How we too would cling devotedly to His sacred wounds as we worship the Father for giving us such a Saviour!

8. (28:17) - The disciples after His resurrection – doubt. On the part of some of the disciples there was a very different attitude to that of the women. “And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted”. The word means to be “in two minds” or “divided in mind”. This was probably the occasion of which Paul speaks in 1Corinthians 15:6 when He was seen of “above five hundred brethren at once”. Faith magnifies the Lord, but doubt belittles Him. If their worship was marred by doubt, the Lord Himself provides the remedy in the following verses. He speaks of His universal power (v18), His love for all nations (v19), His demand for all His commands to be obeyed, and the assurance of His constant presence with all His servants throughout this dispensation.

We close with an important question: Since the Lord was worshipped when He was here on earth, is it right to worship Him now that He is in heaven? Worship of the Son of God is never sinful, neither is the Father offended by it, for honour given to the Son is honour given to the Father who sent Him (John 5:23). However, the full revelation of the New Testament makes it clear that prayer and worship in the present day should normally be addressed to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit (see, for example, John 4:23; Ephesians 2:18; 3:21; 1Peter 2:5). Thus, prayer and worship today are an experience of communion with the tri-unity of our gracious God. But when we see the Lamb upon His throne, our eternal song will be: “Worthy art Thou ...”.

The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 8:9-25

Ian McKee

Simon the Samaritan Sorcerer (v.9-11)

We are now introduced to a strange character, generally called Simon Magus, or Simon the sorcerer. He was Satan's man to efface or erase the truth being preached by Philip. It is often the case that where truth is preached, error is also taught in parallel. Where God is at work, Satan will also be at work. Simon was Philip's rival.

The city of Samaria had previously been under a very different influence than that of the Gospel. Simon "used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that [he] himself was some great one." Simon not only practiced Satanic arts but also revelled in self-promotion and exalting himself making extravagant claims, in effect seeking to impersonate God.

Simon had already developed a reputation in Samaria and had attracted a considerable following "from the least to the greatest." Although the source of his power was demonic, he was acclaimed by his adherents from all levels of society as one in whom "the great power of God" resided. His self-publicity secured for himself a deluded following with a regard akin to worship.

Gospel success in Samaria (v.12)

The people who paid close attention to Philip's preaching (v6) now believe "the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ." What was preached is identical with the Gospel of the grace of God: its key content included the facts of the Gospel with an emphasis on repentance and faith, the remission of sins, followed by baptism, and a subsequent life evidencing the reality of salvation in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

Philip was not engaged in self-publicity. His message asserted the sovereignty of God and the Name, or Person, of the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, belief and baptism are indivisible in the Acts of the Apostles.

Simon's duplicity (v.13)

It may be useful at the outset to clarify that Simon the sorcerer, despite initial appearances, was not saved: "thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent" (v21,22). New Testament language does not always distinguish between believing and professing to believe, for example "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils [demons] also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). Simon was clearly impressed by the effects of Philip's ministry, but he had not exercised saving faith! He was, however, convinced of the power of the Name proclaimed by Philip and Simon's wonder grew the more as he witnessed the miracles. He, who caused amazement to others, was himself amazed.

The phrase "beholding the miracles and signs which were done" is not said of the converts in verse 12. They believed the message preached. Simon's attention was solely on the associated miracles. His apparent conversion was not the result of repentance and faith in Christ. The impressions made upon him were mental, rational, natural and evidently nothing more than that. Also, "he continued with Philip", which implies that the preacher and the miraculous were the focus of his interest, rather than the content of the preaching.

We have previously noted that Jewish converts at Jerusalem were cognisant of the implications and personal cost associated in being baptised. Religious and social exclusion and hostility would result. Thus reality in testimony was virtually guaranteed. However, this is the first time in the new era of Gospel grace that we have a counterfeit convert. It is interesting that this first occurred far from Jerusalem, no Apostle was present, and it involved a non-Jew.

While the duplicitous actions of Simon were sufficiently convincing to secure his baptism, they are recorded in Scripture for our benefit.

While those interviewing applicants for baptism or assembly reception should not approach their responsibilities with a closed or suspicious mind, nevertheless they must not be gullible nor complacent. It is also clear from this passage that baptism does not bestow salvation.

Peter and John come to Samaria (v.14-17)

The words “Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God” indicates an important new stage in the advance of the Gospel.

While the autonomy of individual assemblies is clearly taught in the New Testament, that does not infer that independency is according to God’s will. Far from it. So Peter and John are sent as representatives of all the apostles to visit the new work commenced at Samaria. There is no jealousy or resentment about this on the part of Philip. Why should there be? After all the work is one.

This visit by Peter and John from Jerusalem and bestowal of the Holy Ghost is particularly apt as the traditional religion and mind-set of the Samaritans was schismatic and independent. It is of benefit also that Jerusalem and Samaria are thus linked. The fact that all twelve apostles had remained in Jerusalem was appropriate in according this work full recognition of fellowship.

The visit of Peter in this context is important. We recall that after Peter made his confession “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16), the Lord stated to him “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 16:19). It was Peter who opened the door of Gospel opportunity to Israel in Acts chapter 2 and, as we shall see, to Gentiles in the home of Cornelius in Acts chapter 10. Peter was present when the Holy Spirit came to Jewish believers in Acts chapter 2 and to Gentile believers in Acts chapter 10. It was therefore appropriate that Peter should visit this new work among the Samaritans. It is also a further stage in the fulfilment of the Lord’s commission, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and 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).

It must have been an interesting experience for John to come to Samaria. Remember that John, with James, once wanted to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans (Luke 9:54)! The ban on preaching to the Samaritans (Matt. 10:5), had since been rescinded (Acts 1:8), and it is good to see that John's earlier anti-Samaritan prejudice has been totally replaced. This is the last recorded appearance of John in Acts, although his name is mentioned in 12:2.

Peter and John "when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost." The Samaritans until this point were in a broadly similar position (although with much more information about the historical Jesus and His words and ministry) to Old Testament believers. The Samaritan experience was therefore (exceptionally) in two stages: salvation and baptism; and, later, the reception of the Holy Spirit. The delayed gift of the Holy Spirit is consistent with the significance of this new work.

The apostles "laid ... their hands on them" does not imply any idea of 'confirmation' as practised by some denominations. Nor can any idea of 'apostolic succession' be supported as such transmission is not taught in the New Testament. Remember there is no laying on of hands at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), nor in Cornelius' house (Acts 10:44), so the Holy Spirit is not received only by the laying on of hands! That action only takes place here and in Acts 19:6 in exceptional circumstances to confirm the validity of the work, guard against rivalry and to bind the work of God together. Here it is a token of solidarity to avoid separation into Jewish and Samaritan assemblies, hence avoiding the perpetuation of an historical schism into the new age of grace.

From sorcery to simony (v.18-19)

The actions of Peter and John, and the immediate evidences of the reception of the Holy Spirit (additional to the miracles performed by Philip, vv. 6,7), greatly impressed Simon. He seemed to view the

apostles as extraordinarily gifted practitioners of some superior 'magic'.

The ability to transmit power to others as possessed by Peter and John (and not by Philip) brings Simon Magus out in his true colours. So "he offered them money, saying, 'Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.'" But divine gift is not for commercial traffic! From this incident the word "simony", the buying or selling of ecclesiastical office for material gain, has entered our language. It is interesting to note that it was financially induced sin that was initially prominent in the early church (Acts 5:1-10; 6:1; 8:18).

We should be careful that our motives in service are not tainted in any way by the desire to secure financial, material or reputational gain. We should serve with a pure motive, inputting to the work of God, not seeking personal advantage from it!

Peter's response (v.20-25)

"Peter said unto him, 'Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.'" Peter had no doubt that Simon, who until this point appeared to be genuine, was not saved. "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter", that is, in the Saviour, in salvation. It was Simon's words that betrayed his inward state, "thy heart is not right in the sight of God." Peter asserts that Simon is "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." That is, Simon exhibits a poisoned or corrupt morality. Also that, whatever his profession, he is still a captive and has never been freed from sin.

But even yet pardon was not an impossibility for Simon. There is grace in God, and efficacy in the blood of Christ: "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought [evil intent] of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

The immediate response of Simon is "Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me." However, Simon showed no sign of repentance, or even contrition.

The emphasis in his words indicate that he had faith in Peter, but no appreciation of Christ. There is no evidence that Simon prayed as he had been urged. Simon, like so many others, dreads the future consequences of his sin, but does not truly feel his present state of ruin and guilt. He is not looking for pardon, just to escape God's judgment.

The success of the Samaritan summarised (v.25)

Peter and John stayed in Samaria for an extended period of preaching throughout many Samaritan villages. It is good when there is no rivalry in the work of the Gospel: Philip evidently had no jealousy that Samaria was 'his work'. And Peter and John were only too pleased to associate and assist in a work commenced by another. So it should ever be. Then they "returned to Jerusalem" and Philip most likely returned at that time as well, as is suggested by the next verse.

(To be continued D.V.)

MISINTERPRETED TEXTS

The late John J. Stubbs

Romans 12:11 – "Not Slothful in Business"

Quite frequently this scripture from Romans 12:11 has been used to exhort believers to be conscientious and industrious in their secular affairs. Now, it is right and proper that Christians in business life should be reminded that it is their duty to attend to their responsibilities with diligence and care. Honesty, integrity and sobriety should certainly mark the believer engaged in daily business. All too often the testimony of the Lord has been much dishonoured by professing believers being unreliable and lazy in such situations. The pressure of business with all its temptations demands the

Christian's constant watchfulness. We must however, ask the question, 'but is our secular occupation in view when Paul exhorts the Christians at Rome to be "not slothful in business"?' We submit for the reader's careful consideration that our worldly calling is not at all alluded to here by the beloved apostle. The exhortation is better translated as in the RV "in diligence not slothful" and might well be also rendered, "not flagging in zeal" or "never slack in earnestness". HCG Moule in his commentary on Romans correctly remarks, '*In business*' gives perhaps too special a direction to the thought, as we use the word '*business*' now".

The same Greek word "business" as the AV renders it, appears as "diligence" in (v8). It occurs also in the following passages, 2Corinthians 8:7, Hebrews 6:11, 2Peter 1:5 and Jude 3, where it would be absurd to think of the idea of business as we presently understand it. In Romans 12:11 we have three exhortations that are closely connected, "In diligence not slothful; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord". Our zeal must be ever controlled by spiritual wisdom and motivated only out of loyalty to the Lord. Keeping the clause, "in diligence not slothful" in its immediate context, it is to be noted that the injunction of (v9), "Let love be without hypocrisy" RV, is further explained by all the clauses down to (v13). These are the ways by which love will manifest itself in the various circumstances of life.

Thus love is holy – "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (v9). Love is brotherly – "Be kindly affectioned ..." (v10). Love is self-effacing – "in honour preferring one another" (v10b). Love is zealous – "in diligence not slothful" (v11, RV). Love is enduring – "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing steadfastly in prayer" (v12, RV). Love is caring – "Communicating to the necessities of the saints; given to hospitality" (v13, RV). We suggest that "in diligence not slothful" is the preferred reading and the significance of the apostles words of (v11) would also be that in seeking to practise the Christian graces of (vv. 9,10) we should not be half-hearted in our earnestness, but "fervent in spirit".

It is clear we trust that in “Not slothful in business” Paul is referring to the spiritual and not to the secular. It is to be regretted that some Christians are too much absorbed with their business affairs that spiritual activity and assembly duties have to suffer. The message to such would be, “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier (Jesus Christ)” (2Tim. 2:4). Priority must be given to eternal things. By relating “Not slothful in business” as it stands in the AV to a Christian in the business sphere, we are missing the real meaning of the words. We recognise then that “Not slothful in business” apart from its contextual meaning, would be a fitting directive for the Christian businessman. In the context looking at it in its vital relationship with the other exhortations, we are being taught that in pursuit of Christian virtues and our service for the Lord, we shall not lack in spiritual zeal.

Mr John J. Stubbs

The papers and writings of MR JOHN STUBBS of Scotland have been published in this magazine with his kind permission. We wish to record the home-call of this esteemed brother and express our deep gratitude for his spiritual teaching and deep understanding of the Word of God. He was predeceased by his dear wife a few years ago while he himself suffered a debilitating disease that limited his preaching and writing in recent months. The committee express their sincere Christian sympathy to his daughters and family circle.

The home-call of these beloved brethren reveals our deep poverty and urgent need for exercised and competent brethren from India to provide profitable seasonal written ministry for the teaching and encouragement of the Lord’s dear people.

Editor

The Book of Ezra

The late M.A. Rudge

A Record of Recovery and Reconstruction

The book of Ezra opens with a word for word repetition of the closing verses of the previous book, where events are described as a double fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah (2Chron. 36:20-23). The first of these events is already in the past. The land has lain desolate until she has “enjoyed her Sabbaths ... she kept Sabbath to fulfil threescore and ten years.” The second event is about to commence, with the proclamation of Cyrus leading to the return of a remnant and a movement of spiritual recovery.

It is a movement which originates within the sovereignty of God but is closely linked with the corresponding truth of human responsibility (Ezra 1:3-6). This last event is an awesome reminder of Divine sovereignty, which is mentioned originally in the prophecy of Isaiah, almost two centuries earlier. Cyrus is named as God’s anointed servant, “My shepherd,” who will be used by Him to secure the release of His people from Babylon, “that saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure” (Isa. 44:24-45:7).

Isaiah speaks of the God of Prophecy and its fulfilment, the Architect of History. He presents this aspect of Divine sovereignty as the sole prerogative of Deity (Isa. 41). In relation to Egypt and Assyria, the two superpowers of the day, Isaiah uses the illustration of a beekeeper and insects which swarm at his whistle, and the temporary hire of a razor to shave unwanted hair from the body (Isa. 7:17-20). In a comparable passage relating to Assyria, the balance between Divine sovereignty and human responsibility is dwelt upon by using the figure of a horse and its rider (Isa. 37:28,29). The Lord is the rider. The horse has a limited opportunity to show its potential strength and use its restless energy but the Lord remains in control. It is a

remarkable exposition, which preserves a balance between the two lines of truth.

It must have seemed somewhat strange to hear Isaiah speak of a Gentile Monarch, an idolater, who did not know Jehovah (Isa. 45:4), and his being chosen as God's deliverer. What had happened to the Davidic dynasty? We learn that the Davidic covenant and its promises will be fulfilled by Jehovah's Anointed Servant and that the event in which Cyrus was to be involved is an interim fulfilment. We also learn the important lesson, which is taught elsewhere, that although God, in His sovereignty, may choose to use a person as a means of blessing to others, it does not necessarily indicate His approval of that person or the methods used (Exod. 17:1-6; Num. 20:1-13; Phil. 1:12-20). This is an area where we must learn to distinguish between God's directive and permissive will. God's approval is a matter of conformity to His will and the word of God. The book of Ezra records the return of a remnant to Jerusalem and the long journey in spiritual exercise on the part of those who felt a responsibility to return to the word of God (Ezra 3:3,4). We can be sure that this met with God's approval.

It may not be readily appreciated that Ezra himself, did not join the movement until a generation later. Former leaders of the first "going up" had passed on and as the leader of a second, much smaller movement, Ezra represented the same convictions of the previous generation (Ezra 7:1-7). This is always a welcome sight. The first six chapters deal with a movement which brings about the establishment of the people of God in a right position, in separation from Babylonish confusion. Jerusalem is "the place of the Name" and the only Divinely recognized gathering centre for the people of God. Today, it finds its expression outside the camp of Christendom, in the churches of God, those who "in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1Cor. 1:2).

In chapter 7, after an interval of almost sixty years, we see a ministry aimed at establishing the people of God in a right spiritual condition.

Again it begins with the way being prepared by God and is linked with a man who has felt the corresponding truth of human responsibility, “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10). There was no place for such a ministry in Babylon. He may well have taught there, but Jerusalem and the house of God were the only place for the practical outworking of what he had learned concerning the mind of God.

There is nothing in Ezra’s previous experience to indicate that he could have been prepared for the sight which met him on his arrival. He is astonished by what he sees (Ezra 9:4). He is not alone in this kind of experience. It could so easily have been a stumbling block to him but his priestly background and training stood him in good stead. He is brought to his knees (Ezra 9:5). At this point we learn another lesson. It is one thing to be in a right Scriptural position but it must be matched by a right spiritual condition. Doctrine must be translated into practice. The lesson is a simple one but deeply practical, “As thou has said, so must we do” (Ezra 10:12).

The book ends in a rather open way, “All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children” (Ezra 10:44). Questionable practices and wrong associations do not come to an end with the generation which allows their introduction. The consequences of failure pass to the next generation. Failure carries within itself its own momentum. Restraint exercised by the memory of times when things were different, is not felt in the same way by succeeding generations.

The lessons of the book of Ezra remain an open question for all generations of God’s people. The closing note of the book will not be lost upon those who are concerned with preserving the rich heritage of the people of God for the future. Wherever this is the case, it can be said, “yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing ... neither is this a work of one day or two...” (Ezra 10:2,13).

An Outline of Ezra

Chapter 1 – Performance of God’s Pleasure: stirrings in Babylon and stewardship in prospect.

Chapter 2 – Return and registration of a remnant: numbering in Jerusalem and stewardship in retrospect.

Chapter 3 – Setting forward the work of the house of God: building the altar, keeping the feast, laying the foundation.

Chapter 4 – Building in troublesome times: hands are weakened. A letter sent, a search made, a reply received. “Then ceased the work of the house of God” (4:24).

Chapters 5,6 – Building in troublesome times: A work that cannot be caused to cease. A letter sent, a search made, a reply received. Hands are strengthened, “And this house was finished...” (6:15).

Chapter 7 – Preparation for God’s Purpose: Ezra the priest, the scribe. Stewardship in prospect. Letter of commendation and commission.

Chapter 8 – Return and registration of a remnant: gathering in Babylon, stewardship in prospect. Weighing in Jerusalem, stewardship in retrospect.

Chapter 9 – Purification of God’s people: Ezra’s astonishment, confession and prayer.

Chapter 10 – Purification of God’s people: a covenant and a proclamation.

Christ for His People

A **SAVIOUR** to **Save** (Matthew 1:21)

A **SHEPHERD** to **Lead** (1Peter 2:25)

A **RESTORER** to **Heal**..... (Psalm 23:3)

A **HOPE** to **Wait For**..... (1Timothy 1:1)

Get to Know Your Bible

J.A. Davidson

NEW TESTAMENT OUTLINE – Paper No 4.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

THEME

Luke presents the SYMPATHETIC SAVIOUR. The key verse is Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost”. The Saviour Who comes near to us, feels for us and meets our great need. Luke dwells particularly on the grace and goodness of the Lord in His PERFECT MANHOOD. It is Luke the beloved physician who sets forth Jesus in all the perfection of His sinless humanity. Luke alone, records the words of the repentant thief, “This Man hath done nothing amiss” (Luke 23:41).

This beautiful Gospel, with inspired clarity and simplicity presents the Saviour, the Son of Man and through Him, the provision and glorious possibility of salvation for the sons of men. Yet, the more carefully we study this book, the more we are impressed with its profound revelation of God’s “Beloved Son” (Luke 3:22) and the salvation He has provided for the poor and needy.

Matthew the gospel of the King begins; “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Luke sweeps back beyond David and Abraham through Adam to “The Son of God...” (Luke 3:38). “ “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that which is begotten holy shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35 – Newberry). Luke records this sublime statement of the incarnation. So was fulfilled the prophesy; “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). Mary’s Son

would be God manifest in the flesh. Language cannot exhaust the profound mystery that is shrouded here.

The central section of this beautiful Gospel reveals the great Kinsman Redeemer. He came, the next-of-kin to humanity, wealthy and willing to be the Redeemer. This is revealed in His teaching, temptation, travels and triumph onward to Calvary. Finally, by the mystery of His death, He put sin away, that by regeneration others may have eternal life. Believers are made, “Partakers of the Divine nature”. We just carry this great message of the Gospel telling of the Saviour Who has come near to seek and to save those who are lost and far from God in their sins.

WRITER

Luke means “luminous”, a light. He was a Gentile physician (Col. 4:14). He writes for Gentiles in general and Greeks in particular being fluent in classical Greek. Theophilus, to whom Luke writes, was probably a Gentile whose idea of perfection was that of the individual. Luke shows the full perfection of the Blessed Man, the Lord Jesus. He writes about the journeys of the Lord while here on earth as He came to provide salvations for Adam’s ruined race. God’s interest in the Gentile nations is particularly noticeable in this Gospel. There are few O.T. quotations and little is said about Jesus fulfilling prophecies which were not so important to Gentile readers as they were to Jewish readers. Luke accompanied Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles on many of his journeys. There are indications of Pauline influence in Luke’s Gospel. For example, the account of the institutions of the Lord’s supper agrees in every particular detail with Paul’s account. Luke is the only gospel writer who mentions that Christ appeared to Peter after resurrection.

METHOD

Luke was careful to confirm historical fact by reading (1:1), hearing (1:2) and tracing from eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word to write things “in order” (1:3) (by method). Inspired by the Holy Spirit he writes with moral association of events rather than historical

sequence. He covers the longest period of all the Gospels from before birth to ascension.

DIFFERENCES FROM OTHER GOSPELS

The focus is upon the Son of Man displaying the Power of God in Grace among men. Luke does not stress His office as Matthew, nor His mission as Mark, nor His Deity as John but Christ Himself, Christ on earth; "Behold the Man".

The other Gospels emphasise Majesty, Urgency and Deity. Luke stresses sympathy, grace and compassion. He writes about the poor, needy, diseased, helpless; those a great way off, healing, joy, those that were found, amazement, fear not, the weeping, women and children, "It came to pass", songs and prayers. There are fourteen parables peculiar to Luke with emphasis on Grace for the needy. There is a lengthy section in which much of the material is unique to this Gospel Luke (9:51-19:27).

Luke is the Gospel of His WALK. "Behold My hands and My feet" (Luke 24:39). He is the Samaritan as He journeyed, the Shepherd on the hillside, the Saviour at the bedside, the Stranger on the roadside.

Luke records journeys:

Luke 2:4 – The journey from Galilee to Bethlehem in Judæa where He was born.

Luke 2:22 – The journey up to the temple in Jerusalem where He was presented to the Lord.

Luke 2:39 – The journey from Jerusalem back to their own city Nazareth.

Luke 2:42 – The journey up to the Passover at Jerusalem at twelve years old.

Luke 2:43,44,51 – A day's journey without Him sorrowing. Again He went down with them and came to Nazareth.

Luke 3:21; 4:1,14 – His journey to Jordan to be baptised, into the wilderness where He was tempted, and His return in the power of the Spirit into Galilee.

Luke 10:33 – “But a certain Samaritan, as He journeyed”. Why does He liken Himself unto a Samaritan? Because His long six month journey up to Jerusalem began in Samaria (Luke 9:51-52). He had compassion upon the wounded man lying half dead by the roadside. He Himself had further to go; He was going up to Jerusalem to die for sinners.

Luke is the Priestly Gospel. It begins with Zacharias, a dumb priest doing temple duties (Luke 1:8,20). “He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them” (Luke 24:50). It ends with priestly blessing and the temple filled with praise.

In the Book of the Acts, Luke writes about cities. In his Gospel he writes about villages; the villages He went to, the houses that He entered and the tables where He sat. Even at the cross He is seen to be the sympathetic sufferer showing compassion for the women, granting assurance of paradise to the repentant thief.

OUTLINE

Ch. 1:1-4 – The PROLOGUE and PURPOSE of the DECLARATION

Ch. 1:5-3:20 – The PREPARATION by John the Baptist, BIRTH and EARLY YEARS of JESUS

Ch. 3:21-4:13 – The PRESENTATION to PUBLIC MINISTRY

Ch. 4:14-9:50 – The PROOF of the POWER of the SON OF MAN in His GALILEAN MINISTRY

Ch. 9:51-21:38 – The PATH to JERUSALEM and REJECTION

Ch. 22:1-24:53 – The PASSOVER, DEATH, BURIAL and RESSURECTION APPEARANCES.

HINTS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Luke stressed the example of the Lord in prayer (Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18,29; 22:32,40-41).

The universality of the Gospel. It is especially the Gospel of Love and Hope, Pity and Faith, Heaven and Hell. The Gospel of Luke concludes with the Lord’s commission to preach the Gospel to all nations. As

we continue to preach, remember the command “That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name” (Luke 24:47).

Luke emphasises forgiveness (Luke 3:3; 5:18-26; 6:37; 7:36-50; 11:4; 12:10; 17:3-4; 23:34; 24:47). “Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10).

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

THE SUBJECT

The subject of John’s Gospel is the intrinsic WORTH of the SON OF GOD. John writes his Gospel about the Son of God on earth and stresses His Deity. John writes his Epistles about the Son of God in Heaven and stresses His Humanity. His Gospel is written after Matthew, Mark and Luke, in a time of increasing heresy. Gnosticism which developed at the end of the first century is challenged and refuted by John’s presentation of the Son of God.

John was a humble fisherman of Galilee and yet he leaned on the bosom of the Son of God. We are permitted in his account to hear the heart beatings of the Incarnate Son. The man who fished down in the depths of the Sea of Galilee soars like the eagle to the greatest heights. As speech reveals the hidden thoughts of man so does “The Word” utters the unseen God. The key to this Gospel is found in the closing words of the prologue. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:18). This revelation is the unveiling, the exegesis of something hidden in order that it may be seen. The fourth Gospel combines the Person of majestic authority, sublime service and wondrous humanity seen in the synoptics as “The Word (Who) became flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His Glory, the Glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Thus John is inspired in the first Chapter to refute the idolatrous conceptions of the Gnostic heresy which was rife in his

day. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The two words "Grace and Truth" are the key to the revelation of God in this Book. "Grace" manifest in love ministering joy at the wedding (Ch. 2); breaking the power of sin at the pool (Ch. 5); coming to the terrified on the storm tossed lake (Ch. 6); opening the eyes of the blind to behold His beauty (Ch. 9) and groaning in spirit at the presence of death (Ch. 11). Grace and truth, love and light, shine out in the revelations of the Great "I am". He was full of "grace", the unmerited love of God. He was full of "truth", coming to bear witness to it; full of "glory"; that of the only begotten Son. There are many sons, but only one Son. God as Father is mentioned over one hundred times.

THE STRUCTURE

Matthew and Luke start with the genealogy. Mark begins with the Gospel. The synoptics end with the ascension. John has no start and no finish. (John 1:1) "In (the) beginning was the Word" (no definite article), "In beginning". There never was a moment when "the Word" was not. This indicates a state not a start. He "was", **ever** the pre-existent One. There never was a moment in the eternal ages when God could not say, "Thou art My Son" (Psa. 2:7). He who created time preceded time and He who is before time is eternal and Divine. Christ is the organ, the vehicle of God's thought. The communication of God's purpose of redemption is the Lamb of God, (John 1:29,36). The first verse of this Gospel teaches His ETERNITY, His EQUALITY and His DIVINITY. The last verse states "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25). John's Gospel has an unfinished theme, for Eternity will never exhaust the infinite fulness of the Son of God.

The chronology of the Lord's earthly ministry is constructed from this Gospel. The references to the annual feasts in John 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 10:22; 12:1 indicate a duration of over three years. John also

records specific time periods in days and even the hours of the day. "Now before the feast of the passover" (John 13:1), marks the first evening of Friday as the day of the crucifixion.

One marked feature of John's Gospel is the occurrence of the number seven and its multiples. In this Gospel the Spirit of God perfects and completes the revelation of God in the Person and Work of the Son of God. There are seven "I Am's" – "The Bread of Life" (John 6:35,41,48,51); "The Light of the World" (John 8:12; 9:5); "The Door" (John 10:7,9); "The Good Shepherd" (John 10:11,14); "The Resurrection, and the Life" (John 11:25); "The Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6) and "The True Vine" (John 15:1,5). There are also seven occurrences of "I am" without a predicate (John 4:26; 6:20; 8:24,28,58; 13:19; 18:5,8).

THE SEER

The Gospel itself is anonymous as to its authorship. This is the "eagle" Gospel. It soars into the heavens with steady wing and searching gaze. John is the Seer. John writes about His Deity yet he saw Him wearied at the well, weeping at the tomb and witnessed His thirst on the Cross. John is the only Gospel which mentions literal "blood". John was one of the "eyewitnesses" who saw Him in Judæa and Galilee; in the houses, by the wayside; in the room, by the sea; on the mountain, in the garden; on the Cross, by the tomb; on the shore and later, on the Throne. With Peter and James, John saw His Grace in the House, His Grief in the Garden, His Glory on the Mountain. On these three occasions John noted His hand, His tears and His face. At the sepulchre, John "saw, and believed". John is called "the beloved disciple" or the disciple "whom Jesus loved", (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20). Matthew and Mark are mentioned five times each in the N.T., John is mentioned thirty-five times.

THE SCOPE

John writes later than the other Gospels. He has universal appeal with the oft repeated word, "whosoever". John writes his Gospel that sinners might be saved; his Epistles that saints may know and

the Book of Revelation that servants may be ready. Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote for the benefit of readers who were Jews, Romans and Greeks. John wrote for believers and so gives more profound truth universally.

THE SIGNS

“And many other SIGNS truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name” (John 20:30-31).

John builds his Gospel around seven public miracles or “signs”; turning water into wine (John 2:9); healing the nobleman’s son (John 4:46-54); healing the man by the pool of Bethesda (John 5:2-9); feeding the five thousand (John 6:1-14); walking on the Sea of Galilee (John 6:16-21); healing the blind man (John 9:1-7); raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44). The undisturbed grave clothes (John 20:6-8), and the miraculous catch of fish (John 21:1-14), were signs performed only for His disciples after resurrection.

THE STYLE

John writes with absolute simplicity yet with majestic beauty. His style is marked by plainness yet profundity. The vocabulary is the most limited of all the Gospels written in short sentences of weighty truth. The first three Gospel’s **recorded**. The fourth Gospel **interpreted**. The tone of John’s Gospel is marked by Evangelism, his Epistles by Enlightenment and Revelation by Encouragement. In John’s Gospel we read about the Lord meeting the need of individuals not mentioned in the previous three accounts. He is the Personal Saviour. As Son of God, He knows the character and needs of each. Thus we see Him in His personal contacts with Nicodemus by night (Ch. 3); the Samaritan woman at the well (Ch. 4); the impotent man by the pool (Ch. 5); the blind man outside of the temple (Ch. 9); and Lazarus the dead man in (Ch. 11). Woven into these lovely stories is John’s threefold theme stressing LOVE (Ch. 3); LIGHT (Ch. 9), and LIFE (Ch. 11).

All preachers of the Gospel must stress:

- (i) Man's RUIN. Man is dead in sins and needs LIFE "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).
- (ii) God's REMEDY. God has proved His LOVE. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16).
- (iii) Man's RESPONSIBILITY. Man must come to the LIGHT. "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (John 3:21). The word "believe" occurs 98 times.

John the Baptist was the herald; the "voice" was transient passing and dying away. The "Word" abides. The preacher of repentance must always precede the Christ. There must be a putting away of sin by the Lamb of God. How great must Christ be when the noble forerunner felt unworthy to unloose His sandals.

His humility is seen in John's account of; the tomb (John 11:34); the table (John 12:2) and the towel (John 13:4). Yet in this context John stresses His Deity, "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God" (v3). The four Gospels are necessary to record the great mystery of God manifest in flesh. Matthew and Mark show us a King Who was yet a Servant. Luke and John reveal a Man Who was always God.

THE SECTIONS

Ch. 1:1-14 – The PROLOGUE

Ch. 1:15-51; 3:23-36 – The PREACHING of John the Baptist; The POINTING of the DISCIPLES to CHRIST

Ch. 2:1-3:22; 4:1-6:71 – The PUBLIC MINISTRY of the LORD JESUS

Ch. 7:1-12:50 – The PLOTTING to KILL JESUS

Ch. 13:1-17:26 – The PREPARATION of the DISCIPLES for HIS ABSENCE

Ch. 18:1-20:29 – The PASSION, BURIAL and RESURRECTION

Ch. 20:30-21:25 – The PURPOSE of the BOOK

FURTHER STUDY

The fourth Gospel rewards the additional study of the fulfilment of O.T. types – “The Lamb of God”, “Passover”, “Signs” of Moses, “Dwelt” (Tabernacled), “I am”, “Bread” (Manna from heaven), “Water”.

The Upper Room Ministry of Chapters 13-17 inspires believers to loyal service in the period of His absence till He comes again.

The discussion in chapter 4 promotes an understanding of the very important doctrine of worship.

Many pioneers of the Gospel have distributed copies of John’s Gospel with great blessing to needy sinners who never have seen a complete Bible or heard the message of God’s love.

The Central Theme of the Gospel

N. John Jeyanandam

“Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1Corinthians 15:3,4)

It would be helpful to briefly consider a few basic points that form the central theme of the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the vital foundation stones on which the gospel message has to be built.

Jesus Christ and Him Crucified

The object of the gospel preacher should always be to win souls for Christ. To achieve this, we must bear in mind the words of our Lord, “And I, if I *be lifted up* from the earth, will draw all men unto Me” (John 12:32). The next verse clearly tells us that He said this

“signifying what **death** He should die”. ***The Cross then is to be the source for drawing power.*** And this is why the great apostle of the Gentiles determined to set aside the wisdom of the world when seeking to win men for Christ and to know nothing “save *Jesus Christ* and Him *crucified*” (1Cor. 2:2)

It is our duty to lift up Christ. Having preached the gospel to the Galatians, Paul was able to say to them, “Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you” (Gal. 3:11). This must always be set before the eyes of our audience. If our preaching should draw men to Christ – then we must read and reread the four Gospel records and constantly meditate on that Calvary scene. We must become so familiar with what took place on that hill called Calvary, and then we can graphically describe it to our listeners, so that they, as it were, shall see with their own eyes the crucified Christ.

This is most important, as the Apostle says: “I determined not to know anything among you, save (except) ***Jesus Christ*** – and Him crucified”. The crucifixion will greatly lose its value and power unless those to whom we share the gospel are prepared by learning first something of Him Who was crucified. Hence the preacher should first dwell on the person of Christ; and what a theme this is!

Jesus Christ – His Incarnation

Our people are familiar with the concept of incarnation, so it is not difficult, when speaking to them, to declare that Jesus Christ is God manifested in the flesh. Before His incarnation, He with the Father and the Spirit, was part of the eternal, uncreated Triune God. It is wise to clearly state that He ***became*** Man. He did not merely take the *form* of a man, (as the Spirit of God took the form of a dove – see Matt. 3:16; Luke 3:22 and John 1:32) but He ***actually*** became a man. This is a fact more profound and superior to the Indian understanding of the word “incarnation”.

One of India’s most successful evangelists, *Tamil David*, tells of five marks which can only be found in Christ:

1. He is both God and Man.
2. He is sinless.
3. He took upon Himself, the sins of others.
4. He lives forever.
5. He is coming again.

We would add a sixth: He is present with every saint (Col. 1:27).

These are easy to remember and would help to impress the greatness and goodness of the *Person* of Christ upon the hearers.

Jesus Christ – The Unique Person

Next, it will be apt to state that unlike all other leaders or teachers, Christ's coming to this world was ***foretold***. Any one or two of the following Scriptures may be quoted: Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; 53:3-5; Micah 5:2.

Following this, it is good to contrast His teaching with that of other teachers. Such words like, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). These words will always impress upon any audience as being of the highest merit. Or such verses as Luke 5:31; Matthew 11:28; John 3:16; Luke 12:4,5.

A missionary was preaching in a village, when one who had read a Gospel stood up and made the following statement, "Jesus must have been the Son of God, for who but the Son of God could give such teaching as 'whosoever' shall smite you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also"?

Jesus Christ – His Mighty Works

Having spoken of ***His Words***, next draw the attention of the audience to ***His Works***. It can be shown how merciful, loving and unselfish Christ was. Special stress should be laid on the fact that Christ performed no miracle ***for His own benefit***, and this fact can be

contrasted with the supposed miracles of all the other religious leaders. During His crucifixion the mob wanted a sign and said, “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us” (Luke 23:39). Though He had power to do so, He did not respond to their request.

His power in stilling the storm, casting out evil spirits and raising the dead, should be highlighted; and having thus exalted Christ the tremendous fact that such a One came to this earth with the sole purpose of making propitiation (appeasement) for our sins should be emphasized. It is written, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1Tim. 1:15). But the problem is, how can condemned sinners be saved without God’s justice being compromised? Did He not declare: “The soul that sinneth is shall die?” and “the wages of sin is death”? There is but one way that makes it possible for a just God to justify the unjust. A worthy substitute must be available who will willingly take the sinner’s place and bear his punishment. This is precisely what Christ has done! He *alone* was worthy, for He alone passed through this world without sin – hence His blood alone can cleanse our souls from sin.

Jesus Christ – The Sinners’ Friend and Substitute

Having brought your hearers thus far, ask them to ponder for a moment the greatness of man’s sin – their sin and yours – that demanded so great a sacrifice, even that of the Son of God! It is here that we have to look to the Spirit of God to convict them of sin, for that is what we cannot achieve; it is His special prerogative when the gospel is being preached (John 16:7,8).

Do not fail to emphasize the fact that it was no **ordinary death** that Christ had to suffer. It was death by the cruellest form – by **crucifixion**! And why? Because He had taken on Himself the punishment that was to be meted out to us rebels, and the vilest of criminals. By **thus** dying, God’s righteousness was vindicated; His abhorrence of sin was declared; and we learn something of the abomination of our sins in His sight.

Jesus Christ – His Substitutionary Death

Now your audience is more or less prepared for a declaration of God's promise to **forgive** all who accept His Son as their Saviour and Substitute – quote John 3:16 or other gospel verses which teach the doctrine of substitution, e.g. 1Peter 2:24; Romans 5:8; 2Corinthians 5:18,19; Isaiah 53:6. And along with such verses as Romans 10:9; Luke 12:8,9 or 2Corinthians 5:20 from which an appeal to the sinner to trust Christ as the Saviour can be made.

The evangelist must never forget that salvation is God's idea, and is His wisdom and not man's, "Salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9). Therefore, it has an unfathomable depth. Experience is simply the door through which salvation comes into the conscious level of our life, so that we are aware of what has taken place. Never preach one's personal experience – preach the great thought of God behind the experience. When we preach, we are not simply proclaiming how people can be saved from hell and be made moral and pure, but we are conveying the good news about our Lord Jesus Christ, and the divine plan of salvation.

Jesus Christ – His Death, Resurrection and Ascension

Let us conclude this chapter with the three vital points that shine as the tri-colour of the gospel flag. They are summarized for us by the apostle Paul in 1Corinthians 15:1-3. These are the centre and the pivot of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are:

- 1) ***The Value of the Death of Christ:*** "Christ died for our sins". This would include, among other things, His unique sin-atoning suffering, and sacrificial death on the cruel cross, for the redemption from our sin and deliverance from eternal judgment.
- 2) ***The Veracity of His Word:*** It was "according to the Scriptures". We must preach the authority, reliability and infallibility of God's word. If, instead, we emphasize emotions or experience, we shift the sinner's hope from an unshakeable rock to sinking sand.

3) ***The Victory of His Resurrection:*** “He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures”. This would include presenting Him as the almighty Saviour, seated at the right hand of God the Father, soon to return for His people and then with them He will set up His eternal kingdom.

Jesus Christ – The Judge

That God is love is not new in any religion. But that God is upright, just and righteous is unique in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. That God is a holy personal Being, who works righteously and judges in righteousness, is the distinctive news of the truthful gospel. The call of our Lord Jesus Christ itself is a judgment and accusation for all those who refuse to accept His claims (John 12:48; 9:39). The very good news itself brings condemnation for those who would not believe it (John 3:18,19 and 36).

Obviously, it is not necessary to include all of these topics in detail at every meeting. These are the broad areas of approach that we need constantly focus our audience to ponder.

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The Death of Christ Displays God’s Power

Selected

In chapter one of his first epistle to the Corinthians the apostle Paul brings before us the astonishing paradox of the cross. He reminds us that the Jews require a sign, a demonstration of power, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. Yet to the Jews the preaching of Christ crucified was a stumbling-block, although the cross was the greatest manifestation of divine power the world had ever seen. And to the

Greeks it was foolishness, although it was the greatest display of divine wisdom the world had ever seen. Only to the saved, those whose eyes have been anointed to perceive the mysteries of the cross, is Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Paul stresses two characteristics of this demonstration of the divine attributes; firstly it is incomprehensible to the natural man, and secondly, and this helps to explain the first, it is irreconcilable with the natural man's conceptions and standards of power and wisdom.

This is really Paul's object in referring to the cross in this chapter, to show how man in the flesh is at variance with God, although, alas, by the carnal Corinthians he was regarded, gloried in and cultivated. If there is one particular aspect of the death of Christ which lays the axe to the root of the tree as far as man in the flesh is concerned, which confounds and exposes and repudiates him, it is the cross. It forever demonstrates God's estimate of him and His manner of dealing with him.

But our object in this article is especially to see in the cross the manifestation of the "power of God" (1Cor. 1:18,24).

Jeremiah tells us, "He hath made the earth by His power" (Ch. 10:12), and records the words of Jehovah, "I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm" (Ch. 27:5). Later Jeremiah recalls these words and pleads them in prayer in a time of perplexity. "Ah Lord God! behold, Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee" (Ch. 32:17). See also Isaiah 40 vs. 25,26.

From the creation of the world the invisible things of God are clearly seen, "even His eternal power and Godhead". "That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them" (Romans 1:19,20). This is a display of God's power so patent, so obvious, that it leaves man "without excuse", and shows that his ignorance of God is wilful, a tragic evidence of man's moral perversion.

The demonstration of God's power at the cross, however, is of another order. It is "spiritually discerned". The magnitude of creation and the mighty forces of nature that operate within it are obvious to the dullest of men, even though in his perversity man refuses to recognise the Creator or to "glorify Him as God". But to the natural man the cross is the symbol of weakness, it speaks of One who has been judged and rejected by the great ones of earth, a helpless victim of man's power, One who is about to go out in inglorious defeat by suffering the most shameful of deaths. That such an One could meet our need, who could not even meet His own, this is the pinnacle of absurdity for natural reasoning.

Thank God, however, "the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1Cor. 1:25), and not only stronger than men but stronger than Satan. The power of God manifest in creation is natural power which operates in the sphere of the material and the physical; but the power of God manifest in the cross is spiritual power which operates in the sphere of salvation (1Cor. 1:18,21,30).

Often in the Old Testament the people of God were reminded of His greatness by a reference to the mighty deliverance of the nation of Israel from the bondage and tyranny of Egypt. Through the death of Christ, our Passover, and through making bare the mighty arm of Jehovah, we have known deliverance from a bondage more cruel and a tyranny more severe than that of Israel. We have been redeemed by the cross not merely from Egypt and Pharaoh, but from sin and from Satan. This is truly redemption by power as well as by blood; and not merely a temporal salvation, but an eternal salvation.

One way of considering the greatness of Christ's accomplishment at Calvary, and the immensity of the divine power which there was securing salvation for the helpless and the hopeless, is to ponder those things which Christ is said to have annulled by His death. The Greek word employed is "*katargeo*" which is variously rendered in

the Authorized Version. It is derived from the preposition “*kata*” signifying “down”, and “*argos*” which means “inactive”. Hence the basic meaning is to render inoperative or ineffective, to bring to nothing, to annul.

1. The death of Christ has annulled sin

See Romans 6:6. Sin has made instruments of all our members, so that our whole bodies are under the dominion of sin, and are the slaves of sin. This is a thralldom and a tyranny that no human power can break. Sin reigned over the whole human race and over the whole being of each individual member of it. Unregenerate men and women are “all under sin” without exception (Romans 3:9).

When the Jews in incredible disregard of the facts declared, “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest Thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant (slave) of sin” (John 8:33,34; compare Romans 6:16-23). The Lord was teaching that the fact that a man habitually practises sin, shows that he is a slave to sin. Sin is a bondage from which no man can free us, a plague from which no man can heal us, a defilement from which no man can cleanse us, a debt from which no man can discharge us. No-one can deliver himself, much less his neighbour, from sin and its power.

Only by the death of Christ could redemption be purchased, and only by our dying with Him could the tyranny of sin be escaped. When Christ came into the world it was with the express purpose of putting “away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). This mighty work was accomplished by meekly submitting to the stroke of divine judgment which sin deserved, and by exhausting the fires of divine wrath burning against sin. Infinite power was effecting an infinite salvation from an infinite ruin by bearing an infinite load. Needless to say this profound mystery of the cross, and the immensity of the sacrificial work of Messiah, were completely imperceptible to carnal sight. Carnal man did not and could not appreciate these things.

2. The death of Christ has annulled the law

“The strength of sin is the law” (1Cor. 15:56). What gives sin its power to condemn is the fact that it is a violation of God’s law. This leaves the sinner without excuse, and demands his punishment as a moral obligation of divine justice.

But by bearing the sentence of the law upon the sinner, its curse (Gal. 3:13), Christ has died to the law; and all those who died with him, died to the law also. So the law has been annulled as far as the believer in Christ is concerned. “Loosed” and “delivered” (Rom. 7:2,6). “Done away” (2Cor. 3:11,14) and “abolished” (Eph. 2:15) are various translations of the same Greek word “*katargeo*”, to annul. The law’s claims have been met, its demands have been silenced, so that it has no power over the believer in Christ. He has died from beneath its dominion, died to the law, its bondage and its curse.

3. The death of Christ has annulled death

In 2Timothy 1:10 we read of “our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”. “The sting of death is sin” (1Cor. 15:56), because death is the wages of sin. If Christ annulled sin on the cross, then death is itself rendered powerless. “The law of sin and death” has no further hold on one to whom the benefits of Christ’s death are reckoned.

Because Christ entirely put away sin by His death, “it was not possible that He should be holden of it (death)” (Acts 2:24). God raised Him from the dead on the third day as the divine demonstration that death is defeated, and that a new life that death cannot touch is available to mankind in a once-crucified, now risen Saviour. So the resurrection of Christ is the evidence that His sacrificial work is efficacious, and that sin and death, those mighty powers that held the whole human race helplessly in thrall from the day of Adam’s fall, have been overcome. No wonder subsequent Scripture views the resurrection of Christ as “the standard miracle of God’s power” (e.g.

Eph. 1:19,20). Death was annulled in principle at the cross, but will be annulled completely at the resurrection when Christ returns (1Cor. 15:26,54).

For the believer, eternal death is nullified: spiritual death has been swallowed up by eternal life, and is being progressively overcome in practice in this life, until we reach fulness of life in the glory: and physical death has been stripped of its curse and sting, and has been turned into gain (Rev. 21:6-8; John 5:24,25; Phil. 1:21,23).

4. The death of Christ has annulled Satan

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy (annul) him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14,15).

If sin and death are both annulled, then Satan is stripped of his bonds and his weapons. He has no further hold upon those who are identified with Christ. Our victorious Saviour overcame all his assaults, stripped him of his might, brought his thralldom to an end, and secured his ultimate doom. The mighty tyrant who had usurped authority over the whole world, and who had reigned mercilessly over his helpless victims, is a beaten foe, conquered at the cross.

When we consider the great work of creation, we are reminded that it cost the Son of God but a word: “He spake and it was done”. But when we think of redemption, we are obliged to measure the mighty spiritual forces of evil which had to be overcome, and the great and costly work by which alone they could be annulled. Not by a word from the throne, but by His incarnation, humiliation and death could this be achieved. “The weakness of God”, the cross in all its incomprehensibility to the carnal mind, is the means which God has employed to display forever the exceeding greatness of His power. The submissive Lamb of God is the arm of the Lord revealed.

Psalm 139

Cliff Jones

Continuation of the article from TOP № 24.

God is Omnipresent

God is present everywhere, at all times. This truth is stressed in verses 7-12. No one can hide from God, He is always present, He cannot be avoided. In Jeremiah 23:23-24 we read “Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD”.

Whether we are alive or dead we cannot avoid God. How wonderful it is for those of us who are believers to know these things. The all powerful God loves us continually. He who “spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Rom. 8:32) is always watching over us for our present and eternal blessing and His glory. Being omnipresent He is always with us, whatever situation we are in. He cares for us continuously. He has said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5) and He is continuously and at all times working all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28).

How foolishly we behave if we attempt to run from God in disobedience and try to avoid His presence, and His guidance and control over our lives. Let us remember Jonah who disobeyed God and tried to flee from His presence. We read in the book of Jonah that God sent a great wind, prepared a great fish, a gourd, a worm and a vehement east wind. God was in total and complete control and used His power to ensure Jonah’s obedience. Jonah found that he could not escape from the presence and power of God and ultimately Jonah obeyed God and the people of Nineveh were blessed.

Darkness prevents people seeing things. Crimes are often committed

in the night. We depend on light to enable us to see. But God, who created light (Gen. 1:3), who is light (1John 1:5) and dwells in light (1Tim. 6:16) is independent of His creation. God is infinitely greater than His wonderful creation. Darkness and light make no difference to an all-seeing, everywhere present, all-knowing God. When the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world there was light in the night-time (Luke 2:9) and at His crucifixion there was darkness in the day-time (Luke 23:44). Both light and darkness are under His control.

There is no place on earth or in heaven, among the living or the dead where God is not present (Amos 9:2). A sinner can only escape the wrath of God by coming to Him and being saved by grace, through God-given faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8,9). It is good for believers to be conscious at all times of the omnipresence of God. He is always present to lead, guide and protect us. He is the good Shepherd and we are the sheep of His pasture (John 10:11,14; Ps. 23). The truths brought before us and emphasised in Psalm 139, stimulate feelings of thanksgiving and praise. How very sad it is that so many will not come to Him (John 5:40).

God is Omnipotent

God's power is without limit. He is omnipotent, that is His power is infinite, and this truth is brought before us in verses 13-18. Being omnipotent, all things which are in accordance with His perfect will are possible with Him. We can see and appreciate something of the power and wisdom of God in creation (Ps. 19:1). We are part of His wonderful creation and each one of us can say "He created me". God knew us even before the world was created for we were chosen "in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). We have been in His mind eternally and continuously. He was in control of every aspect of our existence from our conception and our development in the womb (Job 31:15). The sovereign God, infinite in power, wisdom and love, determined our physical, mental and emotional characteristics. All we have and are was determined by God and any who might be regarded physically or mentally as the finest specimens

of human beings have nothing to boast of because “it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (Ps. 100:3).

Our minds and our bodies are living evidences that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (v14). God gives life and it is not to be taken by man, either by abortion before birth or by murder after birth (Exod. 20:13). Our existence is evidence of God’s omnipotence. But even more wonderful than our conception and development in the womb and after being born, was our new birth when we were born again (John 3:3,5). The Holy Spirit revealed to us the truth that “the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6) and that because of the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, God can now “be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). We were “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever” (1Pet. 1:23).

We are always in the mind of God, whether we are awake or asleep. He is always seeking our blessing, whether we are striving to know Him better and do His will or in a backslidden state and not seeking to know Him and obey Him. We are constantly being cared for and protected by God who loves us and gave His only begotten Son, the “altogether lovely” (S of S. 5:16) Lord Jesus Christ, in whom He was well pleased (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). He gave Him to suffer, bleed and die for us (Acts 2:22,23). The omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God has done and continues to do wonderful things in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers live in anticipation of the personal return of the risen and glorified Lord for all those who have been saved, whether they are dead or alive (1Thess. 4:15-17).

God’s works, plans and purposes are wonderful and beyond our imagination. His eternal thoughts are precious (Ps. 40:5). The almighty God, the “high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy” (Isa. 57:15) eternally, and at all times, cares for each individual believer. Paul expressed the love of God for each one when He said “the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

God is love and God hates sin

God is holy and righteous. His holiness and righteousness are unchanging and absolute. David knew that God is loving, gracious and merciful. In Psalm 139 David was lead by the Holy Spirit to contemplate and write of the greatness of God and in verses 19-24 we read of his reactions which resulted from this contemplation. David loathed sin in himself and in others and he hated those who are enemies of God.

There was a time when all believers were enemies of God (Rom. 5:10) and “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1) but having been saved, believers are called to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). Believers enjoy liberty and freedom to worship and serve as lead by the Holy Spirit. If those of us who are believers are to be lead and used by the Holy Spirit we must be clean vessels fit for the Master’s use. We are not our own, for we have been bought with a price (1Cor. 6:19,20). If we are to become gradually more and more conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29) and live a life of service in accordance with His will and to His glory, we should be separated from the world and to God (2Cor. 6:17). This separation must not be simply positional, in the sense of having the appearance of not being involved in certain activities or not going to certain places, but it must be a separated condition. That is, it should be separation in reality, with no spiritual pride but a heart filled with love for God and a desire to serve Him, being conscious at all times of His holiness and righteousness.

The separated believer led and guided by the Holy Spirit, will possess spiritual discernment enabling him to choose between that which is good and in accordance with the will of God, who is holy, and that which is evil. The separated believer will experience increasing love for God, His Written Word and fellow believers. There will be an increasing sensitivity to sin and a desire to be more holy and righteous.

David hated the enemies of God (vv 19-21) and he showed hatred of

sin and sensitivity to sin in the verses we are considering. God is love but He hates all manner of sin. In Proverbs 6:16-19, we read, “These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren”. Then again God hates the one who loves violence (Ps. 11:5) and He hates “all workers of iniquity” (Ps. 5:5). God’s name is often taken in vain and this causes distress to a believer who hates the sin but has intense pity for those who commit such blasphemies.

The Lord Jesus Christ loved sinners. He was the friend of sinners and won them to Himself but He was, at the same time, holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26). The believer seeking to live a life which is increasingly holy and righteous must lead a life which is separated from the world and to God. The separated life involves avoiding permanent relationships with unbelievers (2Cor. 6:14) and demands a prayerful choice of companions, employment, places frequented and use of time and energy for “the friendship of the world is enmity with God” (Jam. 4:4).

Living in the constant expectation of the return of the Lord concentrates and focuses a believer’s mind and stimulates the desire for a separated life. Separation leads to blessing (Ps. 1:1) and the gradual replacement of evil in the life with holiness, that is “perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2Cor. 7:1).

Striving, in the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, after increasing holiness and being led by God in paths of obedience leads to a prayer like the prayer of David in verses 23 and 24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”. The believer will want God to reveal to him any sinful ways of which he is not aware so that the sin may be eradicated, and the believer progress further in the way that God would have him go, as one who

has been redeemed by precious blood (1Pet. 1:18,19). Once the believer is aware of sin in his life, if that sin is confessed and abandoned, then God is faithful and just to forgive that sin and cleanse from all unrighteousness (1John 1:9). God wants a believer to love Him with all his heart, soul, mind and strength and to love his neighbour as himself (Matt. 22:37,39; Mark 12:30,31). Such a believer will “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world ... For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1John 2:15,16).

David asked God to reveal to him any wicked way that was in him, (v24). He knew that such a way would lead to pain and grief and he prayed to be lead in “in the way everlasting”. The believer seeking to please God in this life by leading a holy and righteous life will be yearning to be with God in heaven, where there is fullness of joy and there are pleasures for evermore (Ps. 16:11).

Help for Young Believers

The Veterans Advise – № 6

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

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1Corinthians 15:58)

The farmer's harvest and the employee's weekly wage are counted as the reward of their labour. The artist or the soldier may look upon the honours received from men as matters of far greater importance.

The preacher of the Gospel, if he is a God-fearing man, will count that the material gifts he receives are a small consideration. These are just something toward his expense account while he performs his Master's bidding. They are not his recompense.

The present reward of the preacher's work is in seeing souls saved and the assembly built up as a testimony for God. These two things are always found following each other in the accounts of the labour of the apostles of our Lord. They were obedient to His commission to make disciples of "all nation, baptizing them ... Teaching them" (Matt. 28:19,20).

The joy frequently expressed by the apostle Paul in regard to those he acknowledged as his "children in the faith" was to him, his reward in time, while he looked forward to the day when he would be privileged to present them before his Lord in glory. He prayed and toiled first to see souls truly converted to God, then built up in the faith and thus preserved for God.

To the Thessalonians he wrote: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy" (1Thess. 2:19,20). As a father naturally delights in his children and counts that all the toil they have occasioned him is well rewarded, so the true servant of Christ rejoices over his own spiritual children. He will admonish them kindly, but earnestly. He will pray for them and seek to give suitable ministry to properly feed their souls. This is not so of the hireling "whose own the sheep are not" (John 10:12).

One cannot but sense the fervour of the apostle in his desire toward those Thessalonians. He writes: "For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord" (1Thess. 3:8). To the yearning heart of this servant of Christ, it would have been like a death blow to have learned that those saints had turned aside. This would have been **his** loss as well as theirs.

When the Corinthian's were morally contaminated, when factious persons created schisms among them, when boasting destroyed the

usefulness of the gifts God had bestowed upon them, and when some foolishly taught that “the resurrection was past already”, it was to this godly man as though he had lost the reward of his labour. The Galatians “did run well”, but they also had been seduced away, causing distress to the apostle's heart.

The many practical exhortations given to Ephesian believers were aimed at helping them to “walk worthy”, “walk in love”, “walk as children of the light”, and “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time”. As they heeded these admonitions, the apostle would feel that his labour was being rewarded. Otherwise, he would feel that he “had laboured in vain” (Phil. 2:16).

What shall we say will be the joyful experience of this faithful man when the day of rewards has come? He has been with Christ for centuries enjoying that “far better” condition, but with so many more, he awaits to be rewarded with us at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Not a tear that fell during those years of toil, not a groan, not a pang will be forgotten then. Nor will anything which you have done out of love to Christ be forgotten, dear brother, dear sister. He is coming quickly and His reward is with Him, “To give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12).

“Let us labour for the Master
From the dawn till setting sun.
Let us talk of all His wondrous love and care,
Let us gird our loins and serve Him,
And yet wait for Him to come,
When He calls His blood-bought yonder,
We'll be there.”

... Whereunto I also labour, striving
according to His working, which
worketh in me mightily. (Colossians 1:29)

Questions and Answers

Question: “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits” (Romans 12:15-16).

What do these verses mean?

Answer: “Rejoice with the rejoicing. Weep with the weeping”. Of course we understand the theory of these verses but how should we put this teaching in practical use?

The context in Romans 12 is the Righteousness of God in relation to Christian conduct. This chapter does not give us a cluster of rules and regulations but a genuine response of love “without dissimulation” (v9). This is self-denying love; simple, unaffected desire for the good of others. Practically this means entering into the experience of others, to congratulate or to console, to sing with or to suffer with. Love cannot be selective. It is perhaps easier to weep and to show sympathy than to control any thought of envy toward those who have experienced more joy or blessing than ourselves. We should have the same respect one for another.

This is not uniformity but a loving attitude which is not haughty or opinionated but humble. Relationships and fellowship between believers would be much better if we all had this lovely attitude of being able to put ourselves alongside the experience of others. We should cultivate this rich ability of being able lovingly, to enter into their case.

The public ministry of the Lord Jesus began in John 2 at a wedding and ended in John 11 at a funeral. On each occasion, He met their greatest need. He wept with sorrowing sisters. He brought joy to guests that had no wine. Each event ended with a feast.

... Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

John the Baptist had been baptising in the river Jordan. Many Jews to whom John had been sent as the herald to prepare their hearts to receive their God and King as foretold centuries earlier (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1) had come to *“his”* baptism and in acknowledgement of their need of repentance were baptised by him, confessing their sins and justified God in His verdict against themselves. Others having come out of curiosity or disdain, *“rejected the council of God against themselves”* (Luke 7:30) refusing to be baptised by John, especially those of the religious ‘elite’ of the day, the Pharisees, who in their misguided religious zeal falsely thought themselves to be children of God and accepted by Him, by their physical links with Abraham.

Against John’s protests, Jesus was Himself baptised *“to fulfil all righteousness”* (Matt. 3:13-17). He identified Himself with the people He had come to save from their sins. Coming straightway out of the water having no sins to confess, the Holy Spirit alighted upon this unique Man and Heaven was opened as the Father confessed His pleasure in His Son. Hence in such a manner the public ministry of Christ began.

Behold...

Sometime later John sees Jesus walking towards him returning from the wilderness where He had overcome the devil, after having been tested for some forty days by him. Desiring all those around to take a long, intelligent and contemplative consideration of this sinless Man, John calls all within earshot to **BEHOLD HIM**. We could do no better than to heed his advise and reflect deeply on the manner of the walk of Christ, His life, His words and His ways while here on earth, so well detailed in the gospel records. His perfections, His graces and His glories would all unfold before the honest heart as He fulfilled His ministry in a most difficult day and often in the most hostile of situations, as envious men sought occasion against Him.

John’s ministry would soon be fulfilled and he was content to fade away from the attention of the crowds as can be noted in his later words, *“He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all”* (John 3:30,31).

The Lamb of God

Since man’s rebellion in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), approach and acceptance with God has always been by means of sacrifice and the substitutionary death of an animal, necessary because of man’s now sinful condition. This is noted with Abel (Genesis 4), and most emphatically through Israel’s offerings upon their altars.

However, the vast volume of shed blood by such sacrifices could only temporarily cover and NOT deal fully with the sin question, hence a continual necessity for such sacrifices. A perfect sacrifice was necessary. It was in response to Isaac's query to his father concerning the absence of a lamb for sacrifice as they ascended Mount Moriah, that Abraham had declared, ***"My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering"*** (Genesis 22:8). John had the honour of identifying this blessed Man as that fulfilment, the Lamb of God's providing, without internal or external flaw.

Which taketh away the sin...

But despite such Biblical testimony, millions today like Abel's brother Cain, still think the need for a blood sacrifice to deal with sin is unnecessary, even offensive. But could the unclean waters of Jordan wash away Naaman's leprosy 800 years previously (2Kings 5), or the sin of those baptised by John? Certainly NOT!

Literal application of water, including baptisms, can never assist in washing away or cleansing from sins defilement and make a sinner – an enemy of God, into a child of God. While some Bible verses superficially seem to suggest such, consideration of the context makes it clear they teach no such thing. Such teaching despises Christ, condemns men and opposes Scripture which seeks to teach mankind that, ***"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin"*** (1John 1:7). Peter writing to the early believer's based his exhortation upon the fact of them being ***"redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God"*** (1Pet. 2:18-21). What a blessed position when we, by confession and repentance and faith in this Lamb and His sacrifice on the cross, receive full acceptance with God, ensuring that our names are written in the ***"Lamb's book of Life"*** (Rev 21:27).

Of the world

John now expands his testimony beyond the Nation of Israel to embrace all of mankind, as is constantly noted in this Gospel record. We should diligently hear his call and receive this Lamb, who will soon be the executor of divine justice, not only upon those living in Tribulation Days who will cry to the rocks to ***"Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb"*** (Rev 6:17), but also as the Great White Throne Sitter when men's destiny will be the ***"Lake of Fire"*** by the absence of their names in the ***"Book of Life"*** (Rev 20:15).

John baptised ***"unto repentance"*** exhorting those who were baptised to ***"believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus"*** (Acts 19:4). Believer's baptism today is a post-conversion act to identify them with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and bears testimony to their new walk in Christ and is a necessity for assembly fellowship. Like John, the desire of those of us who have been redeemed should be to exhort the perishing world around us to, ***"BEHOLD the Lamb of God"***.