

Living Water—Issue No 9

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“THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE PREACHING”

1 Corinthians 1:18 — 2:5

I would like to say something tonight, with God’s help, about the “foolishness of the preaching”. That might seem a strange subject yet Paul says it, and if you want evidence of it you have only to stand in the street and announce the name of Jesus to see that many people count it foolishness. What I have to say to you tonight is not thought much of in the world, but it is God’s way, and God, in His own wisdom, chooses not to act as man acts.

I want you to cast your mind back to Noah’s day. The world was going on its own course. People were wicked then, as they are now. Indeed it is interesting that the Lord Jesus likened Noah’s day to our own; He says that there were those “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,” (Matthew 24:38). That is what we have today, life going on a social whirl of partying, people pleasing themselves and doing what they like. But God spoke to Noah and told him to build an ark in the middle of dry land!

Noah is called a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5) and for 120 years or so he preached. But men did not take heed to his preaching. We are not told what he preached but he certainly preached God’s righteousness. As far as we know there was no result. What a terrible thing it is that preaching can go on with no apparent effect.

Noah built the ark; what a wonderful vessel, built according to God’s specific plan in order to bring salvation. Today the gospel is God’s specific plan of salvation for you and me. Noah did exactly what God had said; he was faithful and he preached too. Noah knew that God was going to come in in judgment. Yet people did not take any notice. They may have said, ‘Fancy Noah building that boat in the middle of dry land, how ridiculous’. In Worthing there was for many years a boat in a back garden. It was so big that it could not be got out even over the wall. In the end they had to knock the wall down to get the boat out! Well, that was what the ark must have seemed like. Noah preached for years about the righteousness of God and nothing happened! Men went their own way. How he must have been mocked, yet he was faithful to what God had to say to him. That is the way for every preacher, to be faithful to what God has told him to say. Therefore, although it seemed a ridiculous thing for Noah to build that ark in the middle of dry land, there comes a day when God says, ‘enough is enough’.

He waited 120 years while Noah preached, yet it says that only eight souls were saved. Out of all the teeming thousands that were on the earth at that time, only eight were saved! What a solemn thing that is. Yet how patient God had been in all those years before while Noah went on faithfully preaching. But there comes a time when God has to intervene.

When Jesus came He preached, "the acceptable year of the LORD" (Luke 4:19). He did not finish the quotation and proclaim "the day of vengeance of our God" (Isaiah 61:2). But in Noah's time judgment came. God commanded and the waters came. But thanks be to God, Noah and those with him were saved.

Now I come forward to another preaching, many thousands of years later. The apostle Paul in his missionary journeys came to Athens and saw the city given up to idolatry. It says, "his spirit was painfully excited in him" (Acts 17:16). He saw an altar to the unknown God and he preached faithfully. He said "God ... now enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent, because he has set a day in which he is going to judge the habitable earth in righteousness by the man whom he has appointed, giving the proof of it to all in having raised him from among the dead" (Acts 17:31). But it says, "some mocked"! A very sad thing. I hope there is nobody in this room tonight who mocks the words of the gospel. You do so, dear friend, at your peril. "The word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness".

It is a solemn thing that the name of Jesus is of no account in the world, that people blaspheme by it. But what does the name of Jesus mean to you? Is He just a good man, or is He the Son of God and your Saviour? Paul, when he preached in Athens, was not deterred by the reception; he goes on preaching.

It says, "and some said, We will hear thee again concerning this". We cannot ever say that. How many times has it been said in the preaching that it might be the last time? It may well be so; this may be the last time. You cannot say, 'We will hear thee again concerning this'. I would urge you not to be a mocker like some of those on Mars hill. Do not be a procrastinator, putting things off, but rather be like those at the end of the chapter who accepted the glad tidings. That is what we want you to do, to accept the glad tidings.

So we have these two examples from the Old and the New Testaments of the "foolishness of the preaching". What *is* this preaching? I draw your attention to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. God acts in His own way. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD" (Isaiah

55:8). If we tried to draw up a plan of salvation, we would fail miserably. We could not possibly devise such a wonderful plan, but God, being who He is, has devised a perfect plan of salvation, which involved the offering of a perfect sacrifice.

Jesus came in. The time was right. I used to wonder why Jesus was born when He was. Why not in the last century, or today? But it says, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4). Everything that God does is perfect.

Think of the Babe in Bethlehem's manger. Man's wisdom would have Him born in a palace, but Jesus was born in a stable! The "foolishness of God is wiser than men". It is the way that God has acted in pure grace towards us. God has acted in a totally different way from the way we would act. So we have Jesus in Bethlehem's manger, in lowliness. That is God's way.

Then Jesus grew up in obscurity. We have a glimpse of His perfection when He was twelve years old. (Read Luke 2:40-52). How perfectly He understood things. It speaks in our passage about the wisdom of men being made foolish. The wisdom of God was there in a Boy of twelve hearing the teachers and asking them questions. But what grace too! "He was in subjection" to His parents. That is not man's way, but it is God's way. How wonderful it is. It is totally opposite to the way you or I would act. It is God's wonderful way of grace to reach us. Jesus came in as He did that He might be the friend of tax-gatherers and sinners. How approachable Jesus was. You can gauge how approachable a person is by how little children come to them. What did Jesus say? "Suffer the little children to come to me; forbid them not;" (Mark 10:14). How attractive Jesus was. He took them in His arms. That is God's way:

We find Him growing up, thirty years in obscurity. That is not man's way. People like to promote themselves. The world is full of those who put themselves forward. This is a violent, arrogant world where people step on each other to get to the top. Yet it says of Jesus, "a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench," (Matthew 12:20). Such is the grace of Jesus. We find Him doing everything well; what perfection we find in the Person of the Lord Jesus.

Yet there was everything against Him. The world and its prince, Satan, were against Him. Yet how skilfully Jesus met them as we find in the temptations. Jesus answered so skilfully. How differently we would have reacted. But in

Jesus we have an example of a Man who had only the glory of His God and Father before Him, and was in subjection to Him. That is God's way.

Jesus goes on in the way that led to the cross. It is a wonderful thing, which cannot be fully understood, that Jesus was born to die! You and I were not born to die—we die because of the consequences of sin. Jesus was born to die. He said, "I have been born for this" (John 18:37). How unlike man's way that is. The love of God comes to its zenith on Calvary's cross. The hatred of man is shown at its zenith too! As has been said, 'Jesus was God's love-gift to the world'. What did man do? Put Him upon the cross.

It is good to stop, and contemplate the way the Saviour went, in lowliness, for you and me. That is not our way. It says here, "Jews indeed ask for signs, and Greeks seek wisdom". We are living in a world where people clamour for the visual, for what can be seen, and for wisdom. Knowledge is on the increase; people want to know more and more. Yet they have no idea of the things which *really* matter.

Jesus was lifted up to die:— what weakness! yet what a blessed, divine paradox that through that weakness we are saved! How strong Jesus really was. He was God "manifested in flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16); "In him all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell" (Colossians 1:19). Think of the power that was resident in Jesus, yet He died in weakness on the cross! Why did He go that way? Because it is God's way, not man's. Through that weakness He provided a way of salvation.

He could have come down from the cross. I have spoken of those who mocked at Noah and at Paul; think of how they mocked at the blessed Saviour! They "sneered, saying, He has saved others; let him save himself if this is the Christ, the chosen one of God" (Luke 23:35). They "reviled him ... saying ... If thou art Son of God, descend from the cross" (Matthew 27:39,40). He could have done; it was not the nails that held Him there; it was His love for you and for me. It was in outward weakness, my dear friend, that your salvation was secured. As the hymn says, 'Through weakness and defeat He won the meed and crown'. Where do we find that victory? Jesus dying on the cross? You might say, 'What a victory for the Devil'. Yet when Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 29:30) what a victory it was for God! All that stood against me has been borne by Jesus. All my sins, past, future and present, every one has been borne by Jesus. I am totally justified and this is true for everyone who believes in Him.

Jesus is alive! He was “raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25). It is a wonderful thing that we can preach the gospel because Jesus is alive. There would be no use in preaching if Jesus were still in the grave. Jesus is alive! Paul preached that on Mars hill, and there were those there that mocked. But it is irrefutable that Jesus was raised from the dead and therefore He has power. My Saviour who suffered in such weakness and defeat, now has great power. He said after He arose from the dead, “All power has been given me in heaven and upon earth” (Matthew 28:18). What a Saviour we have! It is the power that will be displayed in a day to come, when Jesus will come to reign on this earth. It is also the power that can keep you and me without stumbling until the end.

The gospel that we preach is not anything in wisdom of this world. We might try and dress it up, put a fancy cloak on it. Peter says, “we have not made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ following cleverly imagined fables” (2 Peter 1:16). There are no cunningly devised fables in the gospel: it is the message of the cross and it brings real power.

Paul was no orator; he says here, “And *I*, when I came to you, brethren, came not in excellency of word, or wisdom, announcing to you the testimony of God. For I did not judge [it well] to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and *him* crucified. And *I* was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling; and my word and my preaching, not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of [the] Spirit and of power; that your faith might not stand in men’s wisdom, but in God’s power.” Would that we saw more of that today. I have heard more than once of times when a preacher has put over the gospel very nervously and poorly, yet souls have been saved. What is it? It is the power of the Holy Spirit. God can work despite men; He does what He wills. He chooses to use the weak things of this world. How wonderful it is that in the glad tidings, in the person of Jesus, God has come down to where *we* are. He has identified Himself with us. Jesus was ‘touched with the feeling of our infirmities’ (Hebrews 4:15). He was like us, sin apart.

The last the world saw of Jesus was on the cross. But for everyone who has faith—the gift of God—“we see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour” (Hebrews 2:9). We do not see all things subjected to Him *yet*, that is plainly obvious. That is why there is so much opposition today to the gospel. But Jesus is crowned with glory and honour. That One who suffered such ignominy and shame, the Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, is now crowned with glory and honour. The gospel comes from that vantage point. It comes from a risen

and glorified Saviour. I urge you tonight to listen to what God is saying. Do not listen to men; they will lead you astray. Listen to Jesus.

God has chosen the despised things of this world that He might bring to naught the things that are. All the things that militate against God are going to come down. As I said at the beginning, man is so arrogant; he thinks he knows everything, yet the apostle says, "If any one think he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know it" (1 Corinthians 8:2). How little we know. The scientists will tell you that the more they know, they realise the more there is yet to know. We have to deal with God Himself who is the creator of all things, and we have to deal with the Lord Jesus, by whom the worlds were made. How great Jesus is, and yet in the marvellous wisdom of God He became so weak and died so that you might, by believing, be forgiven and saved.

Jesus' precious blood was shed. I hope that everyone here has been redeemed, bought by the precious blood of Jesus. We have been bought with such a price, the blood of Jesus, and there is power in that blood. As the old hymn says, 'There is power in the blood'. It may look weak outwardly; people may say, 'What foolishness!' But if you are saved by that precious blood, you know what power there is. Power to overcome every evil; power to face the world, and you know too that you will be brought into God's very presence. Well I leave that with you. May you trust the Saviour for yourself today.

Five times in the Old Testament it says that the fear of the LORD brings wisdom or knowledge*. We live in a world where, increasingly, people do not fear God. Yet the thief on the cross, next to the Lord Jesus dying in apparent weakness and shame, could say to the other thief, "Dost *thou* too not fear God, thou that art under the same judgment?" (Luke 23:40). There was something about the blessed Saviour although He was in such weakness, which was so attractive and which was authoritative.

I urge you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to repent of your sins, to ask forgiveness for them. Fear God, the almighty God with whom we have to do, and put your trust in the blessed Saviour, who, 'through weakness and defeat, won the meed and crown'. May we give glory to Him as the One who has done it all, for His name's sake.

Philip White

*Job 28:28, Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, 15:33.

THE POWER OF THE REDEEMING BLOOD

Background

H. F. Gerecke was an American Forces Chaplain who was appointed to provide spiritual care to war criminals as they awaited trial at Nuremberg just fifty years ago. This account provides a wonderful testimony to the victory of the Saviour in the hearts of some of the leading Nazis.

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In August, 1943 I went on active service and I was stationed in a large hospital. From 1944 for fourteen months, I ministered to the sick and the wounded. In 1945 we crossed the Channel to France arriving in Germany on 15th July. A few months later, I was appointed chaplain to the high Nazi criminals during their trial at Nuremberg.

Before having to visit these Nazi leaders in their cells, I asked myself the question: must I greet these men who had brought such unspeakable suffering on the world, and had been the cause of the sacrifice of so many millions of lives? My two sons had been killed in the war. How should I comport myself before such men so that they would be willing to listen to God's word?

First of all I went to Goering's cell. The former Air Marshal took a military attitude, clicked his heels and gave me his hand. Then I made them all a short visit. This was on November 20th, just before the trials took place. The night I passed in prayer, asking God to give me a message for them. From that moment, God gave me the grace, after the example of Jesus, to hate sin, but to love the sinner. These men must hear something of the Saviour who suffered and died on the cross for them.

There were twenty one prisoners. Frank, Seyss-Inquart, Kaltenbrunner and von Papen chose the Roman Catholic Church for their spiritual aid. Keitel, von Ribbentrop, Raeder, Doenitz, von Neurath, Speer, Schacht, Frick, Funk, Fritsche, von Schirach, Sauckel, and Goering desired Protestant ministry. Four others, Streicher, Jodl, Hess, and Rosenberg, never attended any service.

A double cell in the prison was made into a small chapel where we could hold services. A former Lieutenant Colonel of the S.S. was our organist for both the

R.C. and the Protestant communities. Towards the end of my service in Nuremberg, this organist trusted in Christ. The simple gospel of the cross had changed his heart. We used to sing three hymns, read portions of the Bible and then I gave a short address followed by prayer.

Sauckel was the first who opened his heart to the gospel. He was the father of ten children and had a believing wife. After a few visits, we knelt down by his bed, and he prayed the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). I believe that he was perfectly sincere.

Then Fritsche, von Schirach and Speer asked permission to take communion. As I saw these three men receiving the bread and wine I was seized with emotion, for God had worked mightily through His word and Spirit in their hearts, and as repentant sinners they accepted pardon through Christ.

Raeder, the former Chief of the German Navy, zealously read his Bible. He often came to me with difficult passages and early on he took communion with us.

Keitel, once Chief of the German Army Staff, asked me to convey his thanks to those who had provided for their spiritual welfare, being criminals. With tears he said, 'They have helped me more than I could have imagined, may Christ sustain me.' He was also among the first to take communion.

With von Ribbentrop, at first I found no response, but later on, he began to read the Bible.

After the trials the sentences were announced. Goering, von Ribbentrop, Keitel, Kaltenbrunner, Rosenberg, Frank, Frick, Streicher, Sauckel, Jodl, and Seyss-Inquart were condemned to death. Hess, Funk and Raeder to prison for life. von Schirach, and Speer were sentenced to twenty years, von Neurath to fifteen and Doenitz to ten years. Schacht, von Papen and Fritsche were acquitted. The greater part of the remaining time I spent in the condemned cells.

The condemned men were allowed one last visit from their wives. It was a sad meeting. I heard von Ribbentrop ask his wife to promise to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. Sauckel asked his wife to vow to bring up their numerous family beneath the cross of Jesus. Goering asked what his little daughter Edda said when she heard of his sentence, and had to hear that the child

hoped to meet her daddy in heaven. This moved him, and it was the first time I saw him in tears.

Some of those who had committed their souls to God I visited five times a day. von Ribbentrop read his Bible the greater part of the day. Keitel was most moved by the portions which spoke of the redeeming power of the blood of Christ. Sauckel was very upset, and said many times that he would collapse before the execution of the sentence. He prayed out loud continually, "God be merciful to me a sinner". These three took communion for the last time in their cells. God had changed their hearts, and now in the presence of death, having lost all material things, and about to lose their unworthy lives, they were able to rely on the promises of God for lost sinners.

On the evening before the execution of the sentences I had a long interview with Goering. I put before him the necessity of preparing himself to meet God. In the course of our conversation, he ridiculed certain Bible truths, and refused to accept that Christ died for sinners. It was a conscious denial of the power of the blood. As I recalled to him the hope of his little daughter to meet him in heaven, he replied, 'She believes in her manner and I in mine'. 'Death is death' were the substance of his last words to me. An hour later I heard many agitated voices, and then I learned that Goering had taken his own life. A small empty glass tube lay on his breast. He had gone into eternity—a frightful end.

Now that Goering was dead, von Ribbentrop was the first to mount the gallows. Before he left his cell he declared that he put all his confidence in the blood of the Lamb, and he prayed that God would have mercy on his soul. Then came the order to proceed to the execution chamber. He mounted the thirteen steps to the gallows, I uttered a last prayer, and he was no more. Keitel also went into eternity confiding in the pardoning grace of God. Then Sauckel went to his death, and with a last greeting to his wife and children and a last prayer, he exchanged his earthly life for an eternal one. Frick assured me before his death that he believed in the cleansing blood, and that during our simple gospel services he had personally met Jesus Christ.

One of the last to be executed was Rosenberg who had constantly refused all spiritual aid. To my request that I might pray for him, he replied with a smile, 'No thank you'. He died as he had lived, without a Saviour. Now came Streicher's end. At first he refused to give his name, but as the moment of execution came

he mentioned the name of his wife and went into eternity with a cry of 'Heil Hitler'. A dreadful end!

The sincere repentance that God worked in the lives of these who, according to human estimation, were worthy only of the deepest infamy, may give perhaps a ray of hope to those who have corrupted their lives through sin. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

H. F. Gerecke

THE TRIALS OF FAITH

(An extract from the letters of Lady Powerscourt)

Background

In 1826 Theodosia Powerscourt wrote "Some of my friends accuse me of writing very uncomfortable letters" and this may some times appear to be so but this is only because of the very free way in which she spoke of the difficulties of the christian path. The letter which follows gives an insight into the spiritual conflict which she understood.

October 23, 1827

...Often, often has Satan stopped my way, not only by the idea that those I spoke to might think I practised what I said, but because I found hid in some chamber of imagery a desire that they *should* think so; but at last I found out that the idea came out of Satan's opiate-box. Some lessons we do not learn till after long experience, such as these:— First, we are not to do evil that good may come. Second when sin lies heavy on our conscience, we are to force ourselves into the presence of God, not sulk from Him. Third, we are not to flee from Satan, but resist, in order that he may flee from us.

Blessed to be under the Lord's teaching—to be trained up by Him in the way we should go—to have Jesus representing God to us, [and] representing us to

God—to, have Jesus interceding for the sinner with God, to have the Spirit interceding for God with the sinner. Blessed to be rising in His school, though every class presents a more difficult lesson. Blessed to have a waste heart—to feel it a wilderness, a desert [and so] fitted to receive and rejoice in such promises as this, (true with regard to us, though stolen from the Jews,) “The Lord shall comfort thee; He shall comfort all thy waste places. He will make thy wilderness like Eden—thy desert as the garden of the Lord.”....

Theodosia Powerscourt

COSTLY GRACE

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjack's wares. ...the forgiveness of sins and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessing with generous hands without asking questions or fixing limits. ...Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without a turning from sin. ...Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is ...the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows Jesus.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all it is costly because it cost God the life of His Son: “ye are bought with a price” and what has cost God so much cannot be cheap for us.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945

THE HOUR

“Father, the hour is come.” John 17:1

One hour there is in history's page
Pre-eminent o'er all the past;
'Twill shine and shine from age to age,
While earth, while heaven itself, shall last.

O'ercome by time's oblivious power,
While earthly glories all decay,
The memory of that blessed hour
Shall never, never pass away.

A watch-fire on a lofty hill,
Conspicuous o'er the waste of years,
That friendly beacon, blazing still,
The weary, way-worn pilgrim cheers.

Thou'lt say,—What deed of glory gave
Such lustre to that single hour?
Go, ask the earth, the sun, the grave,—
They all confess'd its thrilling power.

Aye, wrapp'd at noon in deepest night,
The trembling earth it shook with dread;
The sun at mid-day lost its light,
The opening grave gave up its dead.

Child of the world, 'tis not for thee
To feel its heart-consoling power;
Dead—dead to God,—thine eye can see
No glory in that wondrous hour.

Christian, 'tis thine alone to know
And prize it more than all beside;
So bright with love, so dark with woe—
The gracious hour when JESUS died.

Edward Denny (1796 – 1889)

THE EVERLASTING ARMS

Weep not, when friends forsake or ties must sever;
When for thee life has lost its earlier charms,
One heart divine still loves thee, now as ever,
 And underneath are everlasting arms.

Fear not the lightning nor the dreadful thunder,
Nor tremble 'mid the din of dire alarms;
Calm shalt thou rest, alone, while nations wonder,
 For underneath are everlasting arms.

As among ravening wolves the lamb so tender,
If cruel calumny thine honour harms,
Fear not! Be still, for One is thy defender,
 And underneath are everlasting arms.

Strong, soft protection in the clasp maternal,
That, in the ruthless wind, its darling warms;
But stronger, softer still the Love eternal
 That holds thee in its everlasting arms!

E. L. Bevir (1847 – 1922)

A HOUSEHOLD FOR THE LORD — 5

A very great deal of trouble and sorrow would be avoided if believers engaged themselves more in Christian activities. If there were more service there would be less room for things which lead to envyings, jealousies, evil speakings, and personal differences and misunderstandings.

Practical deliverance from what is of the flesh is found as we move in activities which are of the Spirit.

Much that is sorrowful amongst the people of God arises from slothfulness. There is a lack of definite purpose to serve the Lord, and people get engaged with all kinds of selfish pursuits.

The house of Stephanas is a good example for us all; they had devoted themselves to the saints for service (See 1 Corinthians 16:15). The Lord greatly values a definite committal of this kind. If there were more of it, how greatly we should benefit, and time would be redeemed instead of wasted!

C. A. Coates

EXTRACTS FROM THE 'OUTLINE OF JOSHUA' BY C. A. COATES

It is possible for us to take the truth of God and use it to glorify ourselves instead of seeing that everything that has divine value must go into the treasury of the house of Jehovah. *Outline of Joshua p.39.*

We ought to feel more seriously than we do the state of the christian profession. We do not feel half seriously enough how the Spirit is displaced and the divine order set aside... *Outline of Joshua p.83.*

I do not care for outward fellowship if inward fellowship is not there. Right principles are like the walls of a house ... but walls are not the comfort of the house ... but the real bond of unity is the enjoyment together of things connected with the affections. If you have only principles, you have only walls; they are important because they protect all that is inside; but, if there is nothing inside, what is the good? It is an empty shell. *Outline of Joshua p.92.*

If I do not see the perfection of everything on God's side in Christ, I shall not be established in grace; if I do not see the possibility of departure, I shall get careless in responsibility. We want the two things rightly balanced in our souls if we are to be preserved.

Outline of Joshua p.95.

We are apt to forget the power of evil, which as regards christians operates chiefly ...through nice people who are not at all governed by what is spiritual. ...There are many such, professing Christians too, who are not governed by the Spirit.

Outline of Joshua p.97.

The real thought of repentance is not merely that a man feels he has done wrong but that he has lost his link with God. One doubts if there is any genuine repentance until there is a desire to know the living God.

Outline of Joshua p.100.

We can test everything by this. Does it bring God in or shut Him out? If it shuts Him out, it is idolatrous. A man may say, I have my business to attend to, but can you carry it out with God? You need Him in the details of your business, and if it shuts Him out it is idolatry.

Outline of Joshua p.107.

Selected by F. D. Waterfall

Wherefore should I fear in the days of adversity, when the iniquity of my supplanters encompasseth me? —They depend upon their wealth, and boast themselves in the abundance of their riches.... None can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him, (For the redemption of their soul is costly, and must be given up for ever,)

But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol: for he will receive me.
(Psalm 49:5-8, 15)

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCES

Exodus	13 : 21-22
	15 : 22-27
	16 : 13-15
	17 : 8-15
Luke	22 : 35-51

I wanted to speak, as simply as I can, about being a christian and the kind of experiences that a christian has. These passages in the book of Exodus are a good place to look, even though they are in the Old Testament, for the kind of experiences that a christian may have. They tell us about four things that ought to be of interest to us.

The first is about light; the second about thirst and its remedy, drink; the third is hunger and its remedy, which is food; and the fourth thing is conflict. I would just like to say a little about each of those as they enter into your experience and mine.

I do not think anyone escapes having these kind of experiences. Indeed, if we *do* escape we shall not make very much headway. God intends that the christian should make headway through life. We are not just put here to fill out our days and wish they were over. God leaves us here for a purpose, and He works it out in our souls so that at the end of our lives here there might be more than there was at the beginning. It is a good thing to have that in mind. When life here is over, and we do not know when that may be, there should be more to our souls than there was to start with. I commend it to us all, young and old. If we are among the old we may need to ask ourselves, 'How much have I grown, and what kind of experience have I got?' If we are young, we still have, maybe, *maybe!* some time to say, 'I would like to commit myself more to the Lord and make some progress and grow, as I go through whatever brief life God may leave me here for.'

Taking these scriptures just in the order that they come in the book of Exodus; the first one is the story of how God made Himself available to His people by way of **light**. It says that, "Jehovah went before their face by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them in the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; so that they could go day and night." That is, He intended that they should make progress all the time.

When you come a bit later you find that they were not always on the move. Indeed, they were not to move until God gave them the signal, by raising the cloud, and setting out before them. So it was important not to go ahead of the cloud, but when the cloud *did* move, they needed to be ready!

So, if God was minded that they should move day and night, then they needed to be *able* to move, day and night, and be ready to do so. You and I have to be ready to move when God directs us. We have to be ready to go, as this scripture says, by day and by night.

It sometimes seems as if most of the journey is by night! We are in a very dark world. The christian will not find light there. As we go through this world you and I need the light that only God can give us. You may have noticed something rather striking about the hymn we sang. It begins by saying how God is light, and then immediately refers to the Lord Jesus Christ:—

*'Our God is light: and though we go
Across a trackless wild,
Jesus, Thy footsteps ever show
The path for every child.'*

That is where you and I find light—in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I would like to direct you to the gospel of John. John's gospel is about a lot of things, and one of them is about the Lord Jesus coming into the world as light. It says, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light appears in darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not" (John 1:4,5). The darkness could not swallow up that light! It could make nothing of it. "The true light was that which, coming into the world, lightens every man" (John 1:9). He has cast a light upon you and me.

Perhaps someone here is not a believer. The Lord Jesus Christ, coming into the world, has cast a light upon *you*. You may not realise it yet, but He has shown you up, in God's sight, for exactly what you are. God knows you through and through for what you are. And you appear before God illuminated by the light that the Lord Jesus Christ shines upon you. That is what scripture says.

One of God's great desires for you is that you should come to see yourself in that same light and should come to know your need of the Lord Jesus Christ not only as the One who casts a light upon you but the One who will enlighten you in your soul and as the One who will make you fit to stand, in light, before God Himself.

It is worth following some of the passages in John's gospel that speak further of the light. The Lord Jesus said of Himself, "I am the light of the world". One of the places where He says that was just after the incident where a woman had been brought to Him and had been thoroughly exposed for what she was (see John 8). All those who had brought her to Him had also been exposed for what they were. She had been exposed as an adulteress: they were exposed as hypocrites. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). That was a word for the woman, whose life had been clothed in darkness; and it was a word for those who had brought her to Him, that they might get free of their hypocrisy and walk in the light that the Lord Jesus Christ would shed upon their way.

In the ninth chapter the Lord Jesus encounters a man who had been blind from birth. He is like you and me; he had never had any light as to God and His things and the Lord Jesus was minded to bring him into the light.

It is a lovely chapter. This man starts off with nothing—blind from birth, no sight, no resources, unable to do anything for himself. No one around is willing to do anything for him. Even his parents, when they saw the going get hard, left him to himself.

But to such a one the Lord Jesus comes and makes Himself known in such an attractive way. Finally, the Lord Jesus says to him, "Thou, dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, And who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?" (John 9:35,36). His desire, having started off from nothing, was to come to a knowledge of the Son of God and to become one of His disciples.

He is a most attractive man. Scripture does not speak about his history, his sins or his faults; he is portrayed as a vessel of God's blessing, a man who had nothing, to whom the Lord Jesus came as light and illuminated him to the point where he was able to see and had the privilege of looking upon the Son of God.

He is a man who is an illustration to us of the pure blessing of the gospel as it comes to us, that takes us up when we have got nothing and brings us to a knowledge of the Son of God.

I now speak of the twelfth chapter. The Lord has something to say there. "Jesus cried..."—This is the last time the Lord speaks publicly—"I am come into the world as light, that every one that believes on me may not abide in darkness" (John 12:46). Let us not abide in darkness when God has sent His Son into the world so that we might have light.

Those are not the only passages in John's gospel that speak about light. I commend to you to find the Lord Jesus as the One who will bring light to your soul. He has come into the world. He has come in to illuminate you so that you might not walk in darkness but might have the light of life.

That is just how God was to His people as they embarked on this wilderness journey. Light is available for you and me. I love to think, as I go through the world—there are many problems there, many problems for the believer to face, the way is not easy—that *there is no moral issue to which God does not have an answer*. He will give it to you if you earnestly seek His face about it. God does not leave you struggling in a moral pit or mire from which there is no extricating of yourself.

If you are a believer you have the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ that, "he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life". If you are struggling with a moral problem now—and there *are* believers going through just that sort of struggle—take it to the Lord Jesus and get it resolved. It does not have to stay unresolved. It may expose you. It may call for repentance on your part. It may call for a change in your way of life. But you do not have to go on in darkness; there is no need for that for the Lord Jesus Christ is your light.

The next experience that the children of Israel had was to go three days in the wilderness and find no **water**. From what little I know, three days without water is a very long time; it is difficult and dangerous not to have water for three days. Perhaps that is why it comes here as a test before the lack of food becomes a test. Man cannot go so long without water.

The believer cannot go long without refreshment. That is what water is for, a source of refreshment. That is what these people needed. But what they came to were these bitter waters. The hymn we sang gives a clue as to what these waters mean. They are bitter waters and they have to do with the disappointments of life. Once you have embarked with high hopes on the path of a christian, desiring to follow the Lord—and it is right that you should do so—you nevertheless find that life is not all easy. You find that there is a bitterness to things as you face what is in yourself that is a disappointment, and you begin to face the antagonism of the world and the things that are attractive in the world. These are different ways in which you find that you have encountered some bitterness.

This is presented here as one of the first experiences that they had, but I think that we may get further on into life than this and still encounter some bitterness and not have the remedy. At least, I can think of no other reason why we do sometimes meet believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who seem embittered in some way.

The only remedy is the one that was here. The people cried out, and Moses cried out, and God found a remedy. "Jehovah shewed him wood, and he cast it into the waters, and the waters became sweet." That is a pointer to the Lord Jesus Christ as the remedy for the bitterness of life. Just the Lord Jesus personally.

Mr. Darby, when he speaks about this passage, speaks about the cross, the wood of the cross. Well, it is very appealing, to think of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who came into the world as light, being prepared to suffer for you and for me so that we should not find life bitter any more.

If you are finding life bitter, God does not offer you any remedy in your circumstances; He does not promise that things will get better. What He does promise is a remedy for you in your soul, something to comfort you personally; just as it is always obvious if someone is bitter, it is also obvious if they have found comfort. It is a great remedy for your spirit to remember that the Lord Jesus has been the way that you and I have to go, and to know that He loves us and cares about us, and that God has not changed, that God *is* faithful and that He will bring the remedy to you just where you are in your soul now.

That just causes me to ask you, 'How are you getting on?' You do not have to answer me, but, how *are* you getting on? You may have been on the road a long time, and thank God if you have been. And thank God if you have not turned out of the way. But it may be that things are not too bright, that you are a little discouraged. It can be with younger people too. It would be very foolish to say that we have never been discouraged and wanted to turn back.

This is experience that christians have, of finding that the going *is* hard and testing and that we *do* need help. And the help comes from the Lord Jesus Christ personally. That is why He came into the world. He came here to save sinners, but He also came here to pass through the experiences that you and I have and to become sympathetic with us. He has become our High Priest and He has taken that place as having suffered for us, having died for us, and having borne all our burdens. And we can always turn back to Him in our troubles.

It is a great sorrow if we ever turn away from Him, but just turn back to Him in the midst of your sorrow and burden and find that *He* is unchanging, *He* is faithful and He loves us just as much as He ever did. He loves us in our bright days and He loves us in our bad days and His desire is that every day, however painful and troublesome, should be bright for Him.

Now the next chapter is about food. Once again, it comes as a solution to people's complaining and bitterness. They wished that they had died in Egypt, and that is very low ground to get onto. But God provides a remedy for them: the manna.

It was a miraculous supply. Nature had nothing to do with it. It came to light just instantly. "In the morning the dew lay round the camp. And when the dew that lay round it was gone up, behold, on the face of the wilderness there was something fine, granular, fine as hoar-frost, on the ground. And the children of Israel saw it, and said one to another, What is it?" And Moses said to them, "This is the bread which Jehovah has given you to eat." We know what the Lord Jesus thought about this because chapter six of John's gospel is about very little else. It is about the Lord Jesus coming into the world, to be, He says, "the bread of life", to satisfy your hunger.

Food in the world of nature is for energy and maintenance and growth and so is food for the christian. You and I need energy; we need to be maintained and we

need to grow. There comes a stage in natural things where we do not expect to grow any more but as believers in the Lord Jesus you and I ought to be growing in our souls all the time. All the time that we are here in the world is the time for growing and here is the food that will make you grow.

The Lord begins in John 6 by speaking about the manna, which is like He was, here in the world, available, lowly and humble, just as the manna was fine and granular, fine as hoar-frost. Small, nothing conspicuous to be seen, that was the manna and that was the Lord Jesus as He was here. That is food for us. Let us take heed to His example; it will help us to grow according to God if we take heed to the Lord Jesus Christ and feed upon Him here.

But chapter six of John's gospel is not complete until the Lord has spoken about the need of feeding upon Him in the way that He died, and taking *that* home into our souls as well. If you read that chapter—as I trust you have done, but read it again—when you come to the verse where some of the people said, "This word is hard; who can hear it?" ask yourself if you understand why they said it was hard. It will be a good test of whether you have understood the chapter.

You will not go through the sixth chapter of John's gospel and take it in, at all, without saying to yourself, 'this word *is* hard, who *can* hear it'. Who can take it in that the Son of God came here to be the food of our souls, and that to become our food He had to die and that I will get no real enduring good of Him without appropriating Him and His death for myself?

Then read on to the end of the chapter, where nearly everyone had gone away. The Lord Jesus said to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Peter spoke up, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast words of life eternal". I do not know if Peter understood what the Lord was saying, but he discerned that what the Lord was saying had to do with the very roots of man's being and his need of food for his soul, his need of God and his need of a personal link with the Lord Jesus. So Peter and the other disciples continued to cling to the Lord and that is what you and I need to do.

We find it a difficult and testing chapter of scripture, but do not go away. A lot of people did, but stay with the Lord Jesus and He will teach you more. And if you turn on another chapter you will find more that you do not understand but you will be assured—I am persuaded of this—that the Lord Jesus Christ had the

words of life eternal. He has things to say which are quite different from what any others have said. He spoke, and was, the Word of God, which is life for your soul.

Just as I put to you the question whether you have had this kind of experience of bitterness and finding the remedy for it, so I would ask you whether you have had the experience of the Lord Jesus Christ as food for your soul. I am not wanting to speak in riddles, I am just seeking to convey to you what is in scripture that the Lord Jesus Christ is food for your soul in the same way as you need food for your body. Otherwise you will *not* grow; you are in danger of drifting downwards and becoming withered.

The Lord Jesus is satisfaction for your heart and for your being and you will begin to come out like Him. As Mr. Darby says in another of his hymns, 'In this Thy nature grow'—become like the Lord, take on features of Him. How do you think it came about that the disciples were first called "Christians" in Antioch? (Acts 11:26). Do you think it was because they talked a lot and spoke about this Man the Lord Jesus Christ? Or do you think it was because people saw that they were like Him, and that they were different from other people and that there was a change coming about in their lives which was obvious to the other people in Antioch? I think that is why they were called christians.

When Paul was on trial and Agrippa says to him, "In a little thou persuadest me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:28), do you think that Agrippa had just noticed the kind of doctrine that a christian would put out? Or was it that in Paul's testimony Agrippa, however far from God he may have been in his soul, saw someone who was different from himself, someone who had a link with the Man of whom he spoke, someone whose life had been changed through his link with the Lord? And as Agrippa spoke, perhaps somewhat disparagingly, "In a little thou persuadest *me* to be a Christian" he knew what a christian was, and he knew that it was a different sort of man from what he himself was; he knew it was a man like Paul, who had been changed by the gospel and by his link with the Lord.

Now I want to say a word about what scripture calls **conflict**. The children of Israel were not going to get through the desert without encountering enemies. Amalek came into view, and Moses spoke to a younger man of whom we have not heard previously. Moses says to Joshua, "Choose us men, and go out, fight with Amalek". It was not a question of running away.

In London we have been reading in the book of Judges where Gideon got an army together of something over thirty thousand people. God said that it was too many, and the first way to thin the numbers was to eliminate those who had no stomach for the fight. Could you say, from memory, how many that eliminated? It was just over two-thirds who went when the test was, 'go back if you are afraid for the fight'.

It is not a question of running away. Here is a battle that is to be fought. It is an interesting story. Moses went to the top of the hill; as he raised his hands Israel did the best in the battle. If he put down his hands Amalek began to prevail. There came the moment when Moses could not hold up his hands any more. The battle would begin to go Amalek's way, very dangerous. Moses needed to be sustained, and he was sustained, and the battle went the right way and Amalek was dealt with and God says, "Write this [for] a memorial in the book, and rehearse [it] in the ears of Joshua". Joshua might have said, 'I would never forget such a battle'. Well, God says, "Rehearse it in the ears of Joshua". Remember what the point of the battle was. God said, "I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens".

Christians are engaged in conflict as they go through life. Indeed if you and I are *not* engaged in any conflict there is something badly wrong, because the world has its view of the Lord Jesus Christ and it has its own view of christians. There are plenty of places where christians are imprisoned and murdered and ill-treated for being christians. Through mercy it is not quite like that in this country, though it is sometimes not far below the surface. If you and I are never encountering any conflict there is something wrong.

I wanted to speak about the spirit in which conflict has to be taken up. That is why I read those verses in Luke. As always, the Lord Jesus Christ is the great example to us. In reading these verses beforehand they had a fresh appeal to me. We come to the night in which He was delivered up and He is speaking to His disciples. He says, 'When you were sent out with nothing, did you lack anything?' And they said 'No'; they did not lack; they got through wonderfully, mercifully, day by day. But He says, 'Now we have come to a time for a change. You are going to be on your own responsibility.' "But now he that has a purse let him take [it], in like manner also a scrip, and he that has none let him sell his garment and buy a sword." He gives the reason for this; observe this carefully. He says, "that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned with the lawless: for also the things concerning me

have an end." A terrible comment on the world, that the Son of God, the only Man who was holy and harmless and undefiled, was reckoned with the lawless.

Who was He reckoned with? He was reckoned with you and me. He was reckoned with *us*, with what *we* were in our nature and our heart. That is where He was reckoned.

"The things concerning me have an end." All His history, all that wonderful and beautiful life of service was all coming to an end. It was not going to be completed without the will of God being completed in Him. What was their answer to that? "Here are two swords." The Lord just leaves it there, He says, "It is enough." You and I might think it very strange that the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ could produce two swords. We might wonder where they produced them from but the Lord just left it.

Then He went out according to *His* custom, to the mount of Olives and the disciples also followed Him. You will notice that in this gospel they all, apart from Judas, had the opportunity to follow Him. He went to 'the place'—an interesting phrase. I suppose it conveys that it was exactly the *right* place. No different place, no chance place—He was at the right place. When they were there the Lord gave them a word—"Pray". He said nothing about swords.

"Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw," which I take it was near enough still to be seen, "and having knelt down he prayed". He asks for this cup—the burden that lay upon Him—He asks for it to be removed, but immediately, before the end of the same sentence, He says, "but then, not my will, but thine be done." This is what the hymn describes as 'divine perfection in a Man'.

"An angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening him. And being in conflict he prayed more intently." I hardly need to say that you and I are not called upon to rise to the conflict that the Lord went through in these verses, but I have often sought to take heed to this verse of scripture. If you are in conflict or if you ever find yourself in conflict, I commend to you, dear fellow christian, to take heed to this verse. "Being in conflict he prayed more intently."

The pressure grew. "And his sweat became as great drops of blood, falling down upon the earth." It must have been an amazing sight, a very holy sight, unique in the history of time. "And rising up from his prayer, coming to the

disciples, he found them sleeping from grief." A very gracious way of putting it. The Lord says to them, "Why sleep ye? rise up and pray that ye enter not into temptation." The word that they needed has not changed. Before He went a stone's throw away He had said, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." The word had not changed. What you and I need in conflict has not changed. We need to be in prayer, in dependence.

While He was still speaking, this crowd comes, and Judas, with his shameful approach, to kiss the Lord. "And they who were around him,"—these same disciples—"seeing what was going to follow..." They discerned accurately enough what was going to follow, that if they did nothing, this crowd was going to take hold of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and was going to have its way with Him. And now they said, "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" They had got these two swords and they thought that was what they needed. Why not take one of them? Without waiting for an answer one of them smote the bondman of the high priest and took off his right ear. Well, that is a sad thing: to ask the Lord what to do, and then to do what *you* think of doing without ever waiting for an answer. A solemn thing, but how often we do it. We ask the Lord what to do, and then actually decide for ourselves without waiting for *His* answer. And, of course, the result is a disaster. This man did completely the wrong thing. The mistake went right back to when they took those swords in the first place. They had not understood the Lord; they had mistaken Him and so they had to learn the lesson the hard way.

It could have been that the bondman of the high priest had to learn a lesson the hard way too, It was a great shame for him that he was there. But is he now going to have to suffer for someone else's mistake? have an obstacle put in the way of his ever hearing the word of the Lord? No, the Lord says, "Suffer thus far; and having touched his ear, he healed him."

Dear friends and fellow christians, there is a conflict and for it we need light, we need refreshment and we need food. But we also need our spirits to be right. The only way to get your spirit right—to get anything right—is to give heed to the Lord Jesus Christ and wait upon His word. May we be ready to do so, for His name's sake.

David Burr