

Living Water — Issue No 22

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FOUR COMMITTED PERSONS - 4
AN UNNAMED WOMAN OF MARK CHAPTER 14

“And when he was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he lay at table, there came a woman having an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly; and having broken the alabaster flask, she poured it out upon his head.” (Mark 14:3)

I read about the woman in Mark 14 because she had conviction of heart. It was a difficult time; the Lord was about to go to the cross; there were those who were seeking how by subtlety they might seize Him and kill Him.

The Lord is in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, and into this house comes a woman. Does she come with trepidation? No, it does not say that. I think she comes with a desire of heart that can only be fulfilled and satisfied when she had broken her alabaster flask and poured out her ointment on the head of Christ. This is simple yet it is so real.

Allied to her conviction (and she had conviction else she would have never broken through in these trying circumstances) was love for Christ. She breaks through all the barriers, even the criticisms of those present, and pours her offering on the head of Christ.

Have we got a conviction like that? As we, in God’s will, come on the morrow to the Lord’s supper may it be a moment to break through. It will not there be in an atmosphere of hostility but in one that is conducive to offering praise to Christ. Let it be that tomorrow is the day when you break through, break your flask and pour out that precious treasury on Christ!

Do you have that conviction of heart that will not be satisfied until He is honoured? May that be the conviction of every heart here that Christ must be honoured and may we have the courage and faith to open our flask and pour out the offering upon Him.

He is worthy of it. As I have said, He was on the way to Gethsemane. What pressure was to come upon Him there! Now, in these last days, and who knows, it may be our last opportunity, let us not miss out on giving expression to the God-given conviction of heart that will yield an offering of praise and honour to the blessed Lord Himself.

Alex Mowat

This concludes the extracts from an address at Defford in June 1996.

“LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED”

“Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe on God, believe also on me. In my Father’s house there are many abodes; were it not so, I had told you: for I go to prepare you a place; and if I go and shall prepare you a place, I am coming again and shall receive you to myself, that where I am ye also may be”. (John 14:1-3)

These verses, no doubt, are familiar to most of us here, having provided comfort and solace to many sad and troubled hearts. I trust the Lord may use them today to bring comfort to our beloved brethren who sorrow, both the immediate family and our brethren locally, for the loss they have sustained is severe.

Our beloved sister devoted her life in service to God’s people, service that continued to the end; it is a lesson to us all, beloved friends, as to what the Lord Jesus would desire from every one of us.

I would now draw attention to His service. The Lord was speaking to His own who were sorrowing because He was to leave them. He gave them this precious message that He was going away on their behalf. “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it fear” (v.27). The article of death is a real thing but the Lord has met it and that is the comfort for the hearts of those that believe on Him today, that He has met him that had the might of death and overcome him (see Hebrews 2:14).

What a comfort, what a cheer! Our brother referred in prayer to a sense of victory. We are here today as those that sorrow, but with a sense of victory as well, that the One who is speaking here has gone before.

He says “I go to prepare you a place”. How much was involved in that, beloved friends. It meant for Him facing the power of death in all its might, typified in the ark of the covenant going into the Jordan when it overflowed all its banks (Joshua 3:15). He has gone into death and overcome it for all those that believe on Him. What a comfort to be amongst them.

Then He says, “I go to prepare you a place” there was no doubt or uncertainty that He would fulfil His mission. None whatsoever! He was going forward in the full power of His own might to meet every foe so that He might prepare a place for His own.

Our beloved sister is enjoying that place in her spirit now. The body we will lay in the grave in view of the final call. She will have a body of glory like His to express something of His glory. Every saint will radiate His glory in the coming day. Our sister will shine amidst myriads of others who are Christ's own. I trust everyone here will be amongst them.

The basis for this hope is that we believe in the finished work of our Lord Jesus, the fact that He died for our sins; His precious blood was shed in order that our sins might be forgiven, that we might have this hope that is beyond the grave.

I trust these few words therefore may appeal to our hearts, "I go to prepare you a place". Then He also says, "I am coming again". Our sister has gone on a little way before. He came to take her to His own presence. But soon He is coming again for all His own. What an empty place the world will be when every lover of Jesus leaves it at His assembling shout.

May we all be ready for it, dear brethren. May our hearts be ready, hearts burning for the coming of the Lord. How near it is! May the Lord encourage all, and especially those that mourn, for His name's sake.

David Bond

A word given at a burial at Croydon, 3rd February, 1997

Thou knowest, Lord, the weariness and sorrow
Of the sad heart that comes to Thee for rest;
Cares of today, and burdens for tomorrow,
Blessings implored, and sins to be confessed;
We come before Thee at Thy gracious word,
And lay them at Thy feet: Thou knowest, Lord.

H. L. L.

“WITHOUT ME YE CAN DO NOTHING”

“Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abide in the vine, thus neither can ye unless ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, *he* bears much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.” (John 15:4-5)

It is a wonderful thing to belong to the Lord Jesus. The Bible tells us of some who “gave themselves first to the Lord, and then to us” (2 Corinthians 8:5) and that is exactly what S—— and T—— have done. Long before they committed themselves to one another in their marriage vows today, they each, for themselves, came to know the wonderful blessing of trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and finding peace with God. That is the greatest thing that any of us can ever find. To know that we have peace with God, that our past is settled, that the question of our sins is met before a holy God—those are things that we come into as trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and they are available to everyone here. Today we may come to Christ in our need, inviting Him into our lives and hearts. I know that S—— and T—— would be delighted, if the occasion of their marriage was also the time when someone found blessing through coming to know our Lord Jesus Christ as their own Saviour.

I have read this passage from John’s gospel, and I particularly want to draw T—— and S—— attention to these words of Jesus, “for without me ye can do nothing”. I believe that would encourage all of us who know the Lord Jesus to make way for Him in the circumstances of life. This is no ordinary marriage. What you and I have witnessed is the coming together of two persons who love one another but who also know and love Christ. That gives us very great confidence about this occasion. We live in a society where marriage is often, alas, lightly entered into and as lightly discarded, but that is not christian marriage. To continue in christian marriage we each need the help of the Lord; we need His direction and His comfort. The scripture we have read shows the way that the Lord Jesus would delight to come into our lives and help us in the journey of life.

T—— and S—— have embarked on a new course today. Through marriage they have taken on new responsibilities; they will come into new joys and will have to

take new and different kinds of decisions, and probably they will encounter new kinds of problems as well. In all these matters the Lord wants to be with them. Remember, S—— and T——, that Jesus loves you, He cares for you, you belong to Him, and in everything He wants to be with you. I believe that today He would encourage you to draw Him into all your matters.

There are plenty of examples in the Bible, and particularly in the gospels, of the way that the Lord is with His own to help them in the circumstances of life. Many of you who know your Bible will be able to think of quite a number of examples for yourselves but I would like to remind you of a few such instances.

In Luke 8 we read of a time when the disciples were in a boat and because of a sudden storm the boat was full of water and the disciples were in danger (See Luke 8:22-25). Life can be like that. Things happen suddenly; events arise over which we have no control and we find ourselves overwhelmed with a problem and may wonder which way to turn. What did the disciples do in their trouble? They cried out to the Lord! He did two things in response to their cry. First, He dealt with the immediate problem that was troubling them. "He, rising up, rebuked the wind and the raging of the water; and they ceased, and there was a calm." Many christians here today could tell you of that kind of experience where they have not known what to do, and they have cried out to the Lord, and He has provided the answer for them.

Then the Lord did something else for the disciples. He said to them, "Where is your faith" (Luke 8:25). They had faith. Part of their problem, part of the reason for their being frightened in the boat, was that they were not exercising the faith that they had. The Lord resolves their immediate problem but then He answers a deeper, underlying problem in their own hearts, the fact that they were not using the faith they had.

Another kind of problem that arises in the lives of many of us, and it may happen to us particularly when we are married, is that we have difficulty in balancing the time we give to our ordinary responsibilities with the need that we have as christians to make time for the Lord. It is essential for our spiritual health and growth that we make time to read the Bible, time for prayer, time to contemplate

Christ, time to be quiet with Him and to allow Him to speak to us, time to be occupied in His work. Most christians would tell you that at times they have had a problem in the way that they allocate their time. We have in Luke 10 an account of someone who had this problem; she was called Martha.

One day Martha was very busy. She had a tremendous amount to do because she had a great number of visitors. She was distracted and troubled by it all. What did the Lord say to her? He said, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but there is need of one". What was the one thing that she needed? It was the need to make way for Himself. Everything fits into place, everything comes into order, when we make way for Him. It is no new thing for those who love Christ to have difficulty in balancing their responsibilities with making time for the Lord. But the Lord provides the answer to that question. He would say to us today, "there is need of one" (Luke 10:41,42). We need Him.

Marriage brings a new range of relationships. The Lord will help us with them. The apostle Peter was a married man and he had a mother-in-law. Do you remember the incident in Mark 1 where Peter's mother-in-law was in his house and was ill with a fever? Peter, and Andrew his brother, were very concerned and they spoke to Jesus about her. Immediately He resolved the situation. "And he went up to her and raised her up, having taken her by the hand, and straightway the fever left her" (Mark 1:30, 31). How simple it is. Peter and Andrew just spoke to Him. How simply, if you know Christ, you can turn to Him in every circumstance.

The Lord would be with us too in the joys of life. Sometimes joys find us out as christians. Life can seem so fine and we can be so rejoicing in things, even in our service for the Lord, that we may forget about the Lord Jesus Himself. In Luke 10 there is a record of a time when some of those who companied with Christ were like that. They had been sent out by the Lord and had been given power by Him to do certain things; when they came back back they were full of joy in what they had done and how even the demons had been subject to them through the name of the Lord. They were in danger of being over-occupied with success and with joy in what had occurred. Jesus saw just what was going on so He told them not to rejoice that the demons were subject to them but to "Rejoice that

your names are written in the heavens" (Luke 10:20). That brings us back to what Christ has done personally, for if our names are written in heaven it is not because of anything that we have done but because we have trusted in what Christ has done at Calvary for us.

The final illustration comes from John's gospel chapter 2 where we are told about the first miracle that Jesus performed. It was at a marriage where He turned water into wine. The host and hostess had miscalculated the amount that was needed. John tells us: "This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory" (John 2:11). It is a comfort to everyone of us who knows Christ that the way that the Lord Jesus first manifested His glory was not by some dramatic miracle of raising a dead person, curing a leper or anything like that, but by meeting a domestic deficiency.

Today I specially commend these words to you: "without me ye can do nothing". We need to bring the Lord Jesus into every matter. He alone is able for everything. It is wonderful to have the Lord with us in our marriages. Some of us today perhaps are thinking, 'I wish I had made more room for the Lord in my marriage, or in my life.' Well, it is not too late for any one of us. If you do not know Christ it is not too late to come to know Him. Today there is an opportunity for you to invite Christ into your life. It is a most blessed thing to have Him in control of your life. It is not too late either, for any of us who are christians, to let Christ have a greater place in our lives.

I think it was Peter Marshall, one time chaplain to the United States Senate, who recorded that he overheard a conversation between two little boys. One was saying to the other, 'Who is the boss in your house, your mum or your dad?' The answer he got was, 'God is the boss in our house'. I suppose that child had seen both his parents either individually or together reaching out to God in prayer about the problems of life and finding that God could bring in an answer to those perplexing problems. As I say, it is wonderful to know Jesus in the journey of life.

Then there is another way in which this scripture applies. T—— and S—— in their marriage vows have taken on certain special responsibilities. T—— prom-

ised to act as head of his house; S—— has promised to love and cherish and obey her husband. Perhaps you think that is old-fashioned for 1996. But it is God's order in marriage. Marriage was created by God. Right at the beginning of the Bible we read that God said, "It is not good that Man should be alone" so God created Eve and brought her to Adam in order that he might have a "helpmate his like". If God has created marriage He has also provided certain rules for it. They are not rules to restrict us but rules that will result in happiness.

A happy marriage is a God-centred marriage, one where God's ordering is accepted and entered into. But both of those who have been married today are going to require a great deal of help from the Lord in working that out. Subjection does not come to any of us easily, nor, for that matter, does the operation of headship as it should be according to God. Headship is not a husband lording it over his wife and ordering her around. That may be the devil's parody of it, but it is not headship according to God. We have to learn to be subject and to learn how to exercise headship and we find the perfect pattern of both in Christ.

Jesus is the perfect model of subjection. When He came into this scene, you remember, He was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51). In His public ministry He was subject to the Father (John 14:31). That subjection finds its acme in those words that He uttered in the garden of Gethsemane before He went to Calvary's cross, "Not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). Christ is still subject. He is ascended up above all heavens, but He still waits the Father's word before He comes to call all His own to be with Him for ever. The time for that great event is fixed by the Father and the Lord is subject to the Father still in that way.

In eternity, we are going to see subjection shine in perfection. Everything is going to be made subject to Christ and then He is going to give up the kingdom to God, "that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). When people laugh at subjection, when they poke fun at it, just remember that in eternity the glory of subjection, as it truly is in the eye of God, is going to shine in all its perfection. We find the most wonderful model of subjection in Jesus.

Then we find a wonderful model of headship in Jesus. I suppose the greatest pattern of it is found in His relation to the church. He loves the church; He

nourishes it. The church consists of those persons who have trusted in Him and belong to Him. The Lord Jesus has His interest in those who belong to Him and He cares for them. He is head because He is worthy to be head. All resource and power is in Him and it is towards His own. All His actions towards the church are based on His love. He loved the church and gave Himself for it, and the apostle Paul brings that forward as a pattern for husbands that they should love their own wives, "even as the Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it" (Ephesians 5:25). What a pattern! How are any of us as christian husbands going to take on any of the features that we see so wonderfully and perfectly in Christ? It is only as coming under His influence that any of us can fill it out. We must come ourselves under His headship, under the dominion of His love. We must take our character from Him. We must learn patience, too, and understanding from Him, for headship is a very practical thing. Peter in his epistle gives us a word about it. He says that husbands are to dwell with their wives according to knowledge, as with a weaker vessel, and then he adds a reason: "that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Peter 3:7).

So we come back to the words that we read together at the beginning: "without me ye can do nothing". S—— has a wonderful model of subjection in Christ and T—— has a wonderful model of headship in Him. As we in any measure, any of us who are married, are able to draw from Christ so our lives will be blessed. In a few minutes we are going to begin a time of prayer and praise. Many of our prayers, no doubt, will be for the blessing of the Lord on T—— and S—— in their lives together. We will pray with confidence; we will pray as knowing that they belong to the Lord and that they can draw everything that is necessary from Him.

S—— and T——, may the Lord bless you in your lives together. May He make His face to shine upon you. May He bless your household here for Him. May it be so, for His name's sake.

Mark Lemon

Word at a marriage meeting in London, August 1996

THE MAT

IT WAS on a winter's morning in the days of old,
In his cell sat father Henry, sorrowful and cold.
'O my Lord, I am aweary,' in his heart he spake,
'For my brethren scorn and hate me for Thy blessed sake.
If I had but one to love me, that were joyful cheer—
One small word to make me sunshine through the darksome year!

'But they mock me and despise me till my heart is stung—
Then my words are wild and bitter, tameless is my tongue'.
Then the Lord said, 'I am with thee; trust thyself to Me;
Open thou thy little casement, mark what thou shalt see.'
Then a piteous look and wistful, father Henry cast
Out into the dim old cloister, and the wintry blast.

Was it that a friend was coming, by some angel led?
No! a great hound, wild and savage, round the cloister sped.
Some old mat that lay forgotten, seized he on his way—
Tore it, tossed it, dragged it wildly, round the cloister grey.
'Lo, the hound is like thy brethren', spake the voice he knew;
'If thou art the mat, beloved, what hast thou to do?'

Meekly then went father Henry, and the mat he bare,
To his little cell to store it, as a jewel rare.
Many a winter and a summer, through those cloisters dim,
Did he thenceforth walk rejoicing, and the Lord with him.
And when bitter words would sting him, turned he to his cell,
Took his mat and looked upon it, saying, 'All is well.

'He who is the least and lowest, needs but low to lie;
Lord, I thank Thee, and I praise Thee, that the mat am I.'
Then he wept, for in the stillness his Beloved spake,
'Thus was I the least and lowest, gladly, for thy sake.
Lo, My face to shame and spitting did I turn for thee;
If thou art the least and lowest, then remember Me'.

Henrich Suso (1295-1350)

PRAYER

THE WEARY ones had rest, the sad had joy
That day, and wondered HOW.
Some workman, pausing at his task, had prayed,
‘Lord, help them now!’

Away in foreign lands they wondered HOW
Their simple words had power.
At home, some christians, two or three, had met
To pray an hour!

Yes, we are always wondering, wondering HOW,
Because we do not see
Some one, unknown perhaps, and far away,
On bended knee!

F. M. N.

WOUNDED FOR ME!

In the autumn of 1917 and just after experiencing some of the air raids on London, I went to live in a small country town. In bed one night I took up a magazine and read the following story.

“During the war an old clergyman was staying at a London hotel. Walking down the street one day he came upon a wounded soldier who was painfully making his way along on crutches. The clergyman stopped. ‘Thank you’ he said earnestly, ‘for being wounded for me!’ The soldier looked surprised. Many people sent cigarettes or organised concerts for the wounded, but few thanked them! The clergyman quietly went on: ‘I can tell you of One who was wounded for you!’ The soldier was even more surprised. ‘Yes’, said the clergyman, ‘Wounded for our transgressions (yours and mine), bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed’. Then he told him very simply the wonderful story of the cross.”

As I read this account in bed that night it seemed to thrill me. Losses and terrible war experiences seemed to fade and the simple gospel story shone out brighter than ever. I had heard the gospel often, and believed it years before, but that night it gripped me afresh. I felt that I would like to sing for ever ‘Wounded for Me!’ He, the Son of God, was wounded for me! The words of the chorus came to me and, fearing I would forget them in the morning, I got out of bed and wrote them down:—

*“WOUNDED for me, wounded for me,
There on the cross He was wounded for me;
Gone my transgressions and now I am free,
All because Jesus was wounded for me.”*

A few days later I sat down at the piano and found the little tune. Hundreds of thousands of copies of this little chorus have been sent out and many have been helped. May it help you! Do you believe He was wounded for you? He was. Receive Him, thank Him, and then serve Him till you see Him face to face.

W. G. Ovens

Later Gladys Roberts of the North East India General Mission added the following verses:-

DYING for me, dying for me,
There on the cross He was dying for me;
Now in His death my redemption I see,
All because Jesus was dying for me.

RISEN for me, risen for me,
Up from ^{the} grave He was risen for me;
Now evermore from death's sting I am free,
All because Jesus has risen for me.

LIVING for me, living for me,
There on the throne He is living for me;
Daily He's pleading and praying for me,
All because Jesus is living for me.

COMING for me, coming for me,
Soon in the air He is coming for me;
Then with what joy His dear face I shall see,
Oh, how I praise Him! He's coming for me.

A WORD OF WARNING—2
THE DANGER OF AN UNFORGIVING SPIRIT

Ephesians 4:31-32

An unforgiving spirit may lead to positive cruelty. This is what the Lord Jesus indicated in Matthew 18. He speaks about a bondman that was forgiven a very large debt by his lord, and who went and found one of his fellow-bondmen who owed him a very small sum, and he throttled him and cast him into prison. So the word in Ephesians is to be kind to one another, to be good as God is good. Paul says, "Let all bitterness, and heat of passion, and wrath, and clamour, and injurious language, be removed from you with all malice; and be to one another kind, compassionate, forgiving one another, so as God also in Christ has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31, 32).

Is there anyone with a hardened, unforgiving spirit? It is something that does not belong to christianity, and is totally unworthy of the way in which God has made Himself known. The Lord Himself told His disciples to ask in prayer, "forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors". Then He adds, "for as ye forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father also will forgive you yours, but if you do not forgive men their offences, neither will your Father forgive your offences" (Matthew 6:12-14). How solemn to be going about unforgiven. I am not speaking about the forgiveness of our sins through faith, in virtue of which we shall have a place with Christ eternally; I am speaking about matters from day to day that affect our liberty with God. The scripture quoted indicates clearly that we have to give the Father ground to forgive us our offences, and that is that we forgive, not only our brother, but men.

We shall imbibe the spirit of forgiveness in the presence of the Father. How wonderful the Father's activities in grace and forgiveness will become to us! Often we retain reserves in our forgiveness, but it is a question of forgiving our brother from the heart.

There is nothing more destructive of assembly features than the unforgiving spirit that the Lord Jesus indicates is so readily found in our hearts, and it can be traced back to the same origin as self-righteousness. If we retain an acute sense

of having been offended we have never had a proper understanding of Calvary. There has never been a proper understanding of how God, as it says in this passage, in Christ has forgiven us. We are constantly brought back in these epistles to what is foundational in our souls, so that we might be preserved from giving a handle to the enemy to spoil things.

Many a christian company has been damaged and spoiled for years by the presence of persons in it with unforgiving spirits. I believe the Spirit of God in these closing days would call attention to the basic matters of christianity, one of which is that we should forgive one another from our hearts.

What can come in, in hardness and harshness, by maintaining an unforgiving spirit, is positive cruelty to one another. The forgiven bondman took his fellow-bondman by the throat, and cast him into prison, until he paid what was owing. It is almost unbelievable that an exacting spirit like that could be found in a man who had just come from the feet of his lord, having been forgiven everything. I would counsel, when somebody trespasses against us, the first thing to do is to get into the presence of the Father and understand in a greater and fuller way what it is to be forgiven oneself. According to Luke 7, the person who is forgiven much is the one who loves much. If we consider the apostle Paul, the further on he went in his history, the greater became his sense of forgiveness on the one hand and the greater his love for God, for Christ and for the saints. That is how we shall prosper.

Think of what it cost the blessed God, so that His kindness and forgiveness might come to us! Think of the transaction at Calvary! I do not think that it would be a very costly matter for any of us to be kind, if we were really affected by the movements of Divine Persons towards us, and in any degree formed by the Spirit after Christ. We may have to speak the truth, which sometimes hurts, and we may have to be faithful with one another, but to say bitter things intentionally that hurt one another is foreign to the very spirit of christianity. So it says, "and be to one another kind, compassionate, forgiving one another, so as God also in Christ has forgiven you".

A. P. C. Lawrence

Extracted from an address at Coatbridge, 1958.

EXTRACTS FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDWARD DENNETT

Christ in some aspect is suited to the need of every soul.

Half the preaching in the world to-day could be done away with to advantage. Nothing can meet the need of people but Christ. There is nothing worth ministering but Christ.

The only object of the preacher is to exalt and make much of Christ. The Spirit's testimony is Christ, and His work is to glorify Christ, and I desire to be in the line of the Spirit, otherwise one could not count upon being used in blessing.

The larger our thoughts of Christ the larger our communion with the heart of God...The glory of Christ is the one subject that fills the heart of God, and filling His heart it should also fill ours.

A real revival in our hearts is always the revival of the place of Christ in our hearts.

Whatever makes Christ more precious to us is of God. Whatever comes between us and Christ is of the devil.

Many people think communion is having happy feelings. It is being in the mind of God. Communion is doing the right thing at the right moment in the right way. Once get out of communion and you cannot do anything rightly.

Are we satisfied with light instead of cultivating the love of Christ? The more light the better if affection goes with it, but if light be held without the heart it will not benefit us. John 20 illustrates this. John had more light about the resurrection than Mary, yet when he came to the sepulchre and found it empty he went home. Mary had no light about the resurrection, yet as she waited there weeping, Jesus revealed Himself to her.

“The house was filled with the odour of the ointment” (John 12:3). This was a matter of fact, but underlying the fact is the teaching that nothing is so fragrant to the heart of God, or to the hearts of the saints when in communion with Him, as an act of absorbing devotedness to Christ.

“My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not” (1 John 2:1). The believer...should never for one moment receive the thought that sin cannot be avoided. If he once admits that sin is a necessary part of his experience, he will soon lose sight of its true character, its hatefulness to God... and in the end become the prey and sport of the evil one as to his walk in this world.

If you want to help souls you must present Christ to them.

“And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught” (Mark 6:30). Surely we could not do better than follow the example of the apostles in this respect. How much we should learn if we did so...we have to do with One who loves us, and this gives us confidence in telling Him everything.

The measure of our love indicates the measure of our usefulness. As the apostle teaches us, we may spend the whole of our substance in philanthropic work, and yet without love it is of no avail.

“Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth” (1 Corinthians 8:1). I have noticed in small companies, when love is strongly developed in the christians, they grow though there is no gifted teacher among them.

Love to Christ is the main-spring of holiness.

“It is I; be not afraid”. the realisation of Christ’s presence is the antidote to every possible fear, and the way to comfort people is the ministry of Christ in the power of the Spirit, so to present Him that they shall apprehend His presence.

It is to the heart and not to the head that Christ reveals Himself, so the more heart you have the more you will get manifestations of Him.

“Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men”. Being redeemed we should disown and reject every authority that conflicts with that of Christ.

The most miserable man on the face of the earth is the christian who is trying to enjoy both worlds.

A PEOPLE WHO KNOW THEIR GOD

“...but the people that know their God shall be strong, and shall act.”

(Daniel 11:32)

Introduction

I am going to attempt to speak about knowing God in simple and practical terms.

If we go further back from the verses read in chapter 11 of Daniel we get the context and find it refers prophetically to the awful situation that was to come about through a wicked and cruel man, Antiochus Epiphanes. It refers also to the coming of evil powers after the church has been raptured away, and God works out His great counsels and purposes with regard to His people Israel. It is in such a crisis we find a people who knew their God. I suppose it would be right to say that it is the crises of life that bring out whether we know God or not.

People who know God are marked by power, they have purpose, peace of mind, they know the presence of God, and they know what it is to engage in prevailing prayer. In speaking of the verses read and from other passages in Daniel I want to draw out these features:

Where we read it speaks not of the man that knows his God—that is true of course—but it is the people; it is collective. Such people are strong and they act. They are practical in their lives, and they will be pure. There will be wise people among them. People who know their God are not easily overthrown; they are not easily diverted out of the path of truth and they do not allow themselves to be robbed of their prayer time, meditation time, scripture reading time, and their private worship. They never think of beginning the day or any of the undertakings of the day without prayer to God and the enjoyment of communion with Him. They are strong; they resist the devil.

Knowing God in this wonderful way does not make us unpractical people; we act. This knowledge of God can be seen. It shows in the way that the christian does his work, the way that a young woman dresses, the way a wife at home does her work and how the husband exercises headship and wise direction in his home. The people who know their God act; if you know God you are a practical, sensible person. That is what makes knowing God so blessed. Is not that what is

needed in a crisis? Alas, when a crisis comes into a christian company or into our business we are often found running round in circles; people who know their God do not panic.

Our scripture then says— “they that are wise among the people shall instruct the many” (verse 33). The footnote in the Darby Translation directs us to the Maschil Psalms -the psalms of instruction. Wise instruction is an absolute necessity among the people of God. How can you live according to God unless you know how He requires you to live? There is nothing that so deeply searches the conscience and heart as the doctrines of holy scripture. But what is so interesting is that instruction is connected with Psalms—that is the worship of God and His praises are to be marked by wise instruction. It is to deliver us from dead phraseology. People who know their God speak meaningfully; they mean something to God—and in addition what they say becomes instruction to the believers who hear them. That is why we have in Ephesians and Colossians psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, not only voicing the affections of the heart to God, which is immensely important, but they are educational. We learn from worship.

Read the Lord’s prayer in John 17 and Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1 and 3, Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple, Nehemiah’s prayer when he established the people in separation to God; you will find that not only are they prayers and worship but there is instruction in the truth. There is more profound truth in Paul’s prayers than in his epistles, profound as they are. The Lord in John 17 brings out things most profound, very far reaching, deeply penetrating—so the very worship of wise persons among the people who know their God is a means of education.

Let us put into New Testament language what these people spoken of in Daniel were doing. In the first epistle of John chapter 5 we read: “For all that has been begotten of God gets the victory over the world; and this is the victory which has gotten the victory over the world, our faith”. Not your personal faith; our faith is the body of christian teaching—that itself is the victory and therefore gets the victory over the world. What were these faithful men recorded in Daniel 11 doing in the terrible circumstances they were in? They were getting the victory over the world through knowing God.

Is it not a deplorable sight to see believers conquered by the world and seemingly totally unable to get disentangled, so fast are they held by the attractiveness and drive of the world. Young brethren, do not think that we elderly brethren are unaware of these worldly things. What I am telling you is the truth of God and if you wish to live faithfully to the God who created you and who has redeemed you, give your life entirely over to Him and you will find happiness beyond your wildest imagination. I know what I am talking about; in God's mercy I have known it for over 50 years. I have failed in that pathway, I say to my sorrow, but I thank God for the way He has brought me.

Young people, now is the time for you to begin to tread this way, value what God has put within your grasp in your early years. It is said to Timothy, "from a child thou has known the sacred letters".

From Daniel chapter 1:8 we learn that Daniel "purposed in his heart"—right from the very centre of his being—not to pollute himself with the king's delicate food. If a person is progressing in the truth it is because they love God. If someone appears to be slipping back, there will be those who make excuses: 'well, things are not too happy at home', 'think of all the troubles amongst christians', or even, 'we cannot expect much of these young folk!' Yet the real reason for all retrogression with any of us is a lack of, or lessening of, personal love for Christ.

Daniel purposed in his heart (his three friends were with him in this) that he would not pollute himself with the king's delicate food, nor with the wine which he drank. That was a bold stand to take—he was on the threshold of a wonderful career, captive though he was. The despotic, heathen king saw that he could use such fine young men. He gave instructions that they for three years were to be trained in knowledge, learning and wisdom, the etiquette and manners, the frivolities and artificial behaviour of an eastern court. We can imagine people saying to him, 'Daniel, your future is assured—you just concede a bit here. Make some concession; it is harmless but helpful. Just talk it over and seek a formula of mutual arrangement with Nebuchadnezzar.' That kind of thing is being pressed today when we separate from the world.

Daniel was not having that ; he had purposed in his heart that he would not pollute himself. It is purpose in heart, not pollution in heart, that is the great need today. Fearlessly he said, No! and requested that he might not have to pollute himself. The eunuch said that if he permitted this refusal of the king's food he would be endangering his head. Daniel's answer was 'just try for ten days'—you will observe christianity at work. Give us pulse and water instead of all these wines, these well laden tables of Babel, this social round mixing with royalty and cultured men and women of the court, and their empty way of life with its falsehoods so necessary to hold such people together.

What I see in the pulse and water is the need to live a simple life. We can be deceptively attracted by certain features of the world, the bright eyed uninhibited throng, the round of supper parties, tea parties, the animated chatter of cultured people. As followers of the Lord Jesus, we have to say 'No'. John's exhortation is: "Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him; because 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". Pride of life is dangerously near to everyone of us. Simplicity of life is to be our objective. A people that know their God act; they have purpose in heart and they are simple in practice. Piety with contentment is great gain.

Our next consideration is the question of persecution. Let us read from Daniel chapter 3. The three companions of Daniel are worthy of our close study in their faithful stand against idolatry. Nebuchadnezzar had been told by Daniel that he was the "head of gold" but nothing would satisfy him but being the whole image of gold and he built one of himself. When this was done then of course it follows that he must be worshipped. This is present day idolatry—man worshipping himself and getting men to worship man and his achievements. Naturally, if away from Christ, this is what we think of ourselves. There were those around the king who wanted their king honoured and made an object of worship; it would also reflect their estimation of themselves.

The refusal of this type of idolatry brought ruthless persecution to the early christians in Rome. They were commanded to sprinkle incense on the altar of Emperor worship—in itself a simple act. I can imagine people saying to those resolute christians, 'But you are silly. You have only to sprinkle a little incense and at the same time say within yourself, 'I do not mean it". But christianity is

observablê. You will find that when you are faced with the practicalities of separation from evil unto God that these subtle suggestions will come to you. That insidious whispering to our consciences, 'are you going to spoil all your life for this?' Ah! but a man who knows his God would never listen to this. The greatest claim, the greatest pull, the greatest driving force in the heart of such men is to serve their God, their Creator and Redeemer.

Nebuchadnezzar is told of these three and he enquires of them, 'Is it so that ye serve not my god? If ye worship not ye shall be cast that same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is the God that shall deliver you out of my hands?' And they answered, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter". There is no arrogance in that reply. You do not have to be arrogant to stand for Christ—those who stand and suffer for the crown rights of their Redeemer are humble and courteous. "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image that thou hast set up". Noble language this; people that know their God are strong.

I do not know whether these were the only three Jews who objected to this. We have no record of whether they were concerned about support; we are not told that they looked for support; faithfulness to Christ demands your own heart, your own mind, and if the whole world forsakes you and you know what you are doing is right then stand. It is very interesting that in this book these three young men stand alone and later on Daniel does also. In so writing His word, God highlights these men without any human support facing this great despot faithfully and they were within yards, within minutes of the burning fiery furnace. So the people who know their God are powerful, have purpose and they have peace of mind.

They were cast into this extra-heated furnace, bound, and the king looked and to his amazement saw four men loose walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt. The king saw "the appearance of the fourth as like a son of God". The people who know their God enjoy the presence of the Son of God, their great Protector in every crisis. In the scriptural annals of faith, Hebrews 11, we read of those who quenched the power of fire.

Our minds will run to Philippians 4—the peace of God guarding our hearts and thoughts by Christ Jesus. When the Lord Jesus was in the wilderness, tempted of the devil, the devil showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and said to Him “all these things will I give Thee if falling down Thou wilt do me homage”. Had not the Lord come here as a Man to win the kingdoms of men? Could this be the way? But the Lord Jesus knew, and He has taught us too, that these things are gained only by way of the cross. He addresses the devil; it is written “thou shalt do homage to the Lord thy God, and Him alone shalt thou serve”. That is what these three young men were saying, ‘We are not going to worship man in his greatness, we worship God only.’ Remember John’s closing words of his first epistle, “Children, keep yourselves from idols”. That is not an empty word; what is an idol?—anything, anyone, any circumstance that has the place in my heart that Christ should have alone. It could be your family; it could be your job; it could be your education, your commercial powers; if any of these have supplanted Christ then you are a worshipper of an idol.

I refer again to Daniel because he was a man of prayer which is another feature of a people who know their God. Daniel refused to obey the king’s command to cease praying to his God for a month. Philippians 4 says, “Let your requests be made known to God”. People who know their God will not pray to kings or governments. What do you expect from government? An honest reply from some of you would be, ‘I do not vote but I am a conservative’. That betrays an expectation from something other than God. Democracy is not the divine method of government. It might be the best that man can devise in an apostate day but do not let us place our hopes in it. God’s government is an absolute monarchy—“I have anointed my king upon Zion”.

There are things political that I pray against. God would have His people pray against the workings of evil. Note those who have brought in or suggested some of the wicked laws passed of recent years. I am not speaking politically but I am speaking of the corruption of the entire political scene. We as christians have no trust in them. We stand for the rights of our Redeemer and wait for Him to come. The less we have to do with politics the better. Let us trust God.

Now Daniel refused to give up or alter his prayer life. He prayed three times daily as was his custom. The jealous enemies resented Daniel’s promotion. Daniel suffered this. His enemies viewed him at work and no fault could be

found there with him. A man who knows his God is diligent and meticulous in his work. His enemies decided they would attack his relationships with his God. So they moved the king to decree this law about praying. Daniel heard that and he went to his home with his windows open as usual and prayed. Now we see these jealous snoopers, creeping round his chambers and saying to one another, 'There he is. Let us come back this afternoon—yes, there he is praying again; see what he is doing tonight. Yes, praying—three times a day, flouting the King's command—a most insubject man. He ought to be subject to the powers that be.' Yes! until they interfere with our relations with God. He was then dragged off to suffer punishment by being flung into the den of lions. We do not read of any other Jew, at that time in captivity, being flung into a den of lions; there was no outward support for Daniel; it might have been a little encouragement if he had seen two or three of his compatriots around.

Remember how Ridley and Latimer encouraged and comforted one another when being burnt at the stake. If you are isolated in your sufferings for Christ it is a tremendous test indeed. You may have to walk alone, but I trust that none of us will have to. Daniel was prepared to and did.

Daniel was cast to the lions and the poor king with a mournful voice cried, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, hath thy God whom thou servest continually been able to save thee from the lions?" Ah! Daniel was there alive. What has happened? "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths". Who is this angel? Those who know their God have peace of mind and protection in the presence of God as He accompanies them in their sufferings.

There is only one more feature of a people that know their God to which I want to draw your attention; it is prevailing prayer, which is perhaps the most important of all. We have it in chapter 9 of Daniel; he is in prayer. Read down the chapter and you will discover there is something prominent which is often missing from some of our prayers, that is confession. There is none here who can enter into the presence of God in our private prayers without confession. A people who know their God are a praying people. Their prayers are fervent. They are not just mere words but they flow from the heart in pleading and supplication. The fervent supplication of a righteous man has much power. The believer's armour is seriously incomplete if praying at all seasons with all prayer is missing.

Daniel was confronting the whole general situation. Look at verse 4 (of chapter 9). "I prayed unto Jehovah my God and made my confession". Look at verse 7: "With the Lord our God are mercies and pardons, for we have rebelled against him and have not hearkened unto the voice of Jehovah". Look at verse 14: "And Jehovah hath watched over the evil, and brought it upon us; for Jehovah our God is righteous in all His works which He hath done; and we have not harkened to his voice.—And now, O Lord our God, who broughtest thy people out of the land of Egypt with a strong hand, and hast made thee a name, as it is this day,—we have sinned, we have done wickedly. Lord, according to all thy righteousnesses, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain; for because of our sins, and because of the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all round about us".

Do we pray like that? Are our private prayers and our public prayers so real, so fragrant? People who know their God pray fervently; they plead powerfully; they reason with God in their prayers; they are humble; they have a broken and contrite heart. They know they have been wrong. We have been wrong and our forbears, we confess, were wrong. God never fails to hear such confession. Let us pray, dear brethren, with fervency. Begone the cold, formal prayers!

May it be that it can be said of us today, "a people that know their God".

Tom Gratten

Extracted from an address at Edinburgh, March 1974.

"Rejoice always; pray unceasingly; in everything give thanks"
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-17)