

No. 36

Living Water

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FORMED ACCORDING TO THE POTTER

Jeremiah 18:1-6

This passage from Jeremiah brings before us that God has rights over you and me. You may think that your life is your own and that you can do with it what you choose but remember that you have been bought with a price and you belong to Another. God has rights over you because He has paid the price in full in the precious blood of Jesus. You have been redeemed and you belong to Him. God has rights over you today and He is working with you, like the potter working with the clay, moulding it exactly the way he wants it to be. He shapes each of us to the way He wants us to be. He is shaping us for glory. The treasures that will be there as an evidence of His love in a day to come will be the result of the Potter's hands today. As He moulds each of us according to His will and shapes us through the ways through which He is pleased to pass us, it is in view that we might be a trophy of His love in that quickly-coming day.

Of course, you may say, 'When I am passing through the trials of life, it is not easy to see that God is fashioning me for glory'. I know it is not. I speak very sympathetically to those who are passing through difficult trials in the present day. None of us here today is unmindful of the sorrows that there are in this very locality but I would suggest that it is all part of God's wonderful plan and that through these very sorrows He is shaping every one of us in view of us being more pleasurable for Him, so that we might shine in that eternal day as trophies of His perfect love.

It is very significant that this scripture starts with the word from Jehovah: "Arise and go down to the potter's house". We need to arise and go down and see what the Potter is doing. At times we may feel that some persons seem to have sorrow upon sorrow, while others appear to go through life relatively unscathed. God ways are mysterious but God's ways are perfect. God is working all things according to His divine plan and the wonder of it is that for the believer we can take account of what God is doing. We do not question what God is doing but we take account of it. This is the very thing that Jeremiah is instructed to do here: "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words".

There is a great need today of coming back to God's own word. How many things there are today that go under the banner of christianity that have no

foundation whatever in God's word. Everything that relates to Christ personally, everything that relates to the christian pathway, must have its foundation in God's word. "And the vessel that he made was marred, as clay, in the hand of the potter; and he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make". Notice that, "as seemed good to the potter to make". It may not have seemed particularly good to Jeremiah but it was good to the potter. It reminds me of Solomon in 1 Kings chapter 3. With all Solomon's wisdom, with all Solomon's wealth, the thing that he asks for of God is a wise and understanding heart (see v12). The note to that passage explains that it is a heart that hears. I think we need hearts that hear God's word, hearts that feel the way God feels about things, hearts that appreciate what is good to the potter.

What Jeremiah sees is that God is shaping things according to His own will. It reads, "cannot I do with you as this potter". God can do it and will do it. I love to think of the hands of that potter; they would actually be in the clay itself as it revolved on the wheel. The potter would shape it according to the sensitivity of his own hands, with the skill that the potter would have. One moment the clay is a shapeless mass and the next moment it becomes an object of value, a vessel to honour, serviceable to the master, prepared for every good work.

Are you and I such today? God is fashioning each of us so that we might serve Him. He is working things out in your heart and life so that you might be serviceable. He is the perfect potter. He knows exactly what He is doing and in His plans for you He is fitting you for glory. Be absolutely sure of it. He has rights over us but have we submitted to those rights? Have we submitted to Christ as our Lord? Have we based our christianity upon His word? The word of Jehovah came to Jeremiah and he obeyed. May we each one be those who are prepared to be fashioned according to the hands of the potter who in love is forming you and me so that we might be vessels for glory, serviceable to Him until He comes to take us to be with Himself.

There is a passage in the prophet Joel which speaks about the years that the locust has eaten being restored. That is something that only God can do. As we look back on our lives we see years that were wasted, times when we were not committed to Christ in the way that we should have been, when we did things that the Lord could not approve of. We all know that and we do not need to go over it but the wonder of it is that, whilst you can never

restore the years that you have lost because you can not turn the clock back, God can restore to you the years that the locust has eaten. We may look back on years that are wasted and we become depressed and say, 'what a failure I've been'. While that may be true, faith can reach out to the fact that God can restore to you what you and I cannot restore. He can give to you the blessings that come from His own blessed heart of love.

If you look a little earlier in chapter 2 of the book of Joel, in verse 12 you find it says, "Yet even now, saith Jehovah, turn to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah your God" (Joel 2:12, 13). Maybe we have rent our garments over things that have happened in the past. Yet God shows here that that is not what He requires at all. It is not the rending of your garments but your heart that is to be rent before Him so that we might feel things in the way that He feels them.

He would have each one of us to be drawn into His very presence so that we might not be governed by the sentiments of what is human but rather that we might be governed by the precious love of God that is able to triumph over everything. Do not be discouraged if things look impossible; God can do what man cannot do and these things are not impossible to Him. But the responsibility upon every believer is as set out here, "turn to me with all your heart, ... and rend your heart, and not your garments".

How much work there is that the devil has done and been successful in but God is able to do what is impossible to man. He is able to restore and in His love He would appeal to every one of us today to come into the enjoyment of that love so that we might be caught up in the spirit of what God is doing today.

Let us go down and see what the Potter is doing. He is working with His hands, working in His love, in order that vessels might be fashioned for glory. Let us hear His words and embrace the spirit of God's wonderful love for souls today so that there might be blessing. When the clouds seem dark around may our eyes be on that shaft of sunlight that is coming through, like those verses in Joel, so that our faith might be held in relation to a world where Christ is at the centre and where everything will soon be for His eternal glory.

Keith Wickens

Extracted from an address at Chester, 21st March, 1998

DEVELOPMENT IN LOVE FOR CHRIST

John 20: 11, 15, 16

John 12: 3

Luke 22: 31 & 32

My desire is that the Holy Spirit would take advantage of this occasion to stimulate our love for the Lord Jesus. It is a service that He loves to do. In that sense we do not have to ask Him to do it. Yet I think He loves to hear our desire that our love for the Lord Jesus might be increased. What cause we have to love Jesus, the One who gave Himself for us when we were still sinners. If we have proved His love, as I trust we all have, then I think we would desire to know more of it. How wonderful it is. It is a subject of which the Scriptures are full.

The first person that I read about was Mary of Magdala. What an experience she had! She was in a very sad state at the beginning for she had seven demons. Somehow she got into contact with Jesus, and in His presence those demons had to go. What replaced them? Jesus did. He filled her heart. She was attached to Him from that point forward; she was one of those who ministered to Him of her substance; everything that she had was for Him. What it must have meant for Mary to see the object of her affections taken and crucified.

Where we read it speaks of Mary weeping at the tomb. What tears though she must have shed through those days after Christ was crucified. Then she comes to the tomb; her affections bring her there, where last she had seen her Lord and her love comes out. She says: "Tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." Love knows no impossibilities. Then she hears that lovely word, "Mary". The affection of Christ reached out to her in His speaking that name. Immediately she responds saying, "Rabboni", that is, "my teacher". The Lord had wonderful things to reveal to her even then; He says: "I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God". He says, 'You take that message to my brethren'. How the Lord loved to claim those that were precious to Him.

Mary does not have to ask who "my brethren" are but goes immediately to the disciples to bring that wonderful message. Mary disappears from the scriptural record at this point. She merges into the company as one of the brethren. She would have been in the upper room; her name would have

been among the 120 names there. She would have been happy to be numbered with lovers of Jesus.

In John 12 we have Mary of Bethany, another beautiful object of the love of Jesus. We are told that, “Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus” (John 11:5). The Lord Jesus comes into the house and Mary sits at His feet. She realises the important thing for the moment. Jesus was speaking and Mary was deaf to everything but the voice of Jesus. How good it is to be able to concentrate on what Jesus would communicate to our hearts. Something was formed there in Mary of Bethany. If Mary of Magdala was marked by the intensity of affection, Mary of Bethany was marked by the intelligence of affection. What she would have learned at the feet of Jesus!

The next time we hear of Mary was at a time of great sorrow. Lazarus had died. The sisters sent a message to Jesus telling Him that Lazarus was sick and in due time, at the direction of the Father, Jesus came to Bethany. Martha comes to Jesus and He opens up wonderful things to her. Martha needed teaching and the Lord Jesus gave her teaching about Himself as the “resurrection and the life”. Then Mary comes to Jesus but Jesus did not have to answer Mary. All that He had said to Martha, I believe, was already in Mary’s heart. His answer to Mary was His tears. Was ever affection displayed like that in His tears!

Later we find Mary in the house pouring out what is of great price upon Jesus. I think that it speaks of what she had acquired sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to His word and something, too, that had been learned at the tomb of Lazarus, an intelligent understanding of where that blessed Man was going, where His love was taking Him. She poured it out upon Him. I do not think that anybody other than Jesus in that house really understood what Mary was doing.

The Lord puts His own precious interpretation upon it. Mary was in the intelligence of the fact that He was going into death and the grave but that He could not be held in it. That is why, as we have often noticed, Mary of Bethany was not at the sepulchre. She was not seeking the living amongst the dead. There was the light in her soul that Jesus was coming out of death, that the blessed One who was the resurrection and the life could not be held by its power.

In Luke 22 we get Peter. He had an early experience with the Lord. He was led to Jesus by his brother and the Lord said to him, ‘Thou art Peter, thy

name shall be Cephas, meaning a stone'. The Lord could see that there would be something solid in Peter. Peter responded immediately when the Lord called. Peter was one to whom the Father could reveal wonderful things: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Peter failed, and did so very seriously, but the stone character never changed. The Lord could say, "when once thou hast been restored confirm thy brethren". The Lord would say also, "I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not". The Lord's love never changed for Peter. No doubt Peter's failures are given to us because he is an object lesson for ourselves. Yet through all our failures the Lord's love and intercession never changes. How precious the service of the high priest and the advocate is in our weakness and failures. How we need His intercession for us that our faith may not fail and that we may be brought through each experience and come out like Peter, with a deeper love for the Lord Himself.

Three times the Lord said to Peter "Art thou attached to me?" Peter was upset about that but he had denied the Lord three times and the Lord went over the ground in his soul and established a link of affection with Himself. So the stone character in Peter is seen in the Acts of the Apostles. In his epistle, Peter speaks of the Lord Jesus as "a living stone", and we come to that One and are built into the building of which He is the centre. He is the centre of everything for our affections.

Finally, just a reference to Paul. Think of Paul as Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road with his heart full of hatred, struck down by that great light, struck down by One who would say: "I am Jesus". What love was expressed in those words. Paul never forgot them. The first thing he did was to preach Jesus that he is the Son of God. He preached the One who had shown him such love and forgiven him. Paul would say later, "the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). His life was changed from one of hatred to one of love. Paul gave up all the things in which he might have boasted. He says that he counted "them to be filth, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8). It was that love of Christ that sustained Paul through all his experiences, imprisonment, stoning, shipwreck, scourging, nothing turned him aside. His imprisonment in Rome resulted in epistles being written, words which have a message for our hearts today.

Paul's concern was to, "present you a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2), to win the affections of believers for the Lord, just as his had been. That was Paul's service right to the end.

Well, we are in wonderful company—those who love Jesus. You might say, ‘I do not measure up to the persons you have been speaking about’. I certainly do not but the supply of the love of Jesus, the limitless ocean of His love, is just as available to us as it was to them. We can find full satisfaction in the love of Jesus.

The Lord is about to come. The One who has loved, the One who has died for us, is about to come for His own. What it will be to see Him! May our lamps be burning brightly for Him like the five wise virgins in the parable. They were drawing on the Holy Spirit’s power and resources to keep those lamps burning for Jesus. Very soon we will be with Him. Let our answer be “Amen; come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:12, 20).

May the Lord bless the word.

George Greeves

Extracts from an address at Maidstone, 11th April, 1999.

CONSECRATION

Forbid it, Lord, that there should be
Within my heart no room for Thee;
That other gods and lords should claim
A shrine once hallowed to Thy name.

Thou once hast suffered sore to win
My wayward heart from shame and sin;
Thy love now claims it as Thine own,
A kingdom for Thy glorious throne.

Each worthless idol I disdain
And bid Thee there unrivalled reign;
My heart is Thine, so let it be
For ever sanctified for Thee.

Walter Brown

'TIS WELL WITH ME

'Tis well with me, O Friend unfailing!
When I am resting in Thy love.
Depressed and sad—my courage failing—
Thou liftest me my fears above.
Thy joy dispels my night of sorrow,
And myriad blessed mercies follow,
When Thy love-beams upon me shine.
E'en here on earth I find a heaven,
Such sweet content and peace are given
To him whose will is lost in Thine.

I find the hostile world opposing,
But be it so; 'tis nought to me.
Not in her smile am I reposing—
Her praises I distrust and flee.
In Thee my spirit finds its pleasure,
Thou art my Friend, my chosen Treasure,
My solace, though all comforts fail.
Is wave on wave of trouble swelling?
Thy faithfulness surpasses telling,
My Anchor holds within the veil.

When sin's dread burden weighs upon me,
When judgment thunders fill my ear,
I hasten, Lord, to gaze upon Thee—
A risen Christ dispels my fear.
Safe on the Rock my soul is hiding—
That blessed place of God's providing!
No stroke of wrath can reach me there.
For me there is no condemnation,
Christ is my peace, my sure salvation,
What hand can pluck me from His care?

When Thou dost lead through deserts dreary,
I follow on, and lean on Thee:
Thy strength sustains my footsteps weary,
Thy cooling streams there flow for me.
Thy wonder-ways, so full of blessing,
Thy wisdom, Lord, by faith confessing,
I walk in peace, for Thou art near.
The path of faith is ever lowly,
But they have guidance sure and holy,
Who follow in Thy footsteps here.

Though death seems dark and fraught with sorrow
To those who scarce believe Thy love,
'Tis but the veil o'er that fair morrow
Thine own shall spend with Thee above.
Why should I fear the journey's ending?
'Neath every cloud Thy love is sending,
In perfect peace I pass along.
Thou art my Sun that shineth ever,
My life, my Strength that faileth never,
My rest and my eternal song!

W. C. Dessler (1660 -1722)

A THREEFOLD APPEAL

When Peter stood before the world
And thrice denied his blessed Lord,
It was no thunderous voice from heaven
That love and loyalty restored.
Lord Jesus, 'twas a look from Thee
That made him weep so bitterly.

When those with various ills were brought
And laid on beds beside the way,
No great physician of this world
Bore all their griefs and ills away.
Lord Jesus, 'twas a touch from Thee
That wrought the healing instantly.

When Mary, in her faithful love,
Went to the tomb to find her Lord,
The angels there in white arrayed
Spoke not to her the wondrous word.
Lord Jesus, 'twas Thy loving voice
That made her broken heart rejoice.

.....

O, give our hearts to prove afresh
Thy loving look, Thy touch of power,
And may the accents of Thy voice
Restore our hearts each day and hour.
Lord Jesus, may we ever be
Living and waiting here for Thee!

Mary Farrant

A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO YEAR 2000

Probably there has never been such a build-up to a new year as is happening for year 2000. The excitement of the change of the date, an extra public holiday, the apprehension of what might happen due to the so-called millennium bug and the extraordinary lengths to which some people seem to be prepared to go to celebrate the new year have all played a part. But what does the date actually mean? Has 2000 any significance more than any other date?

Sometime in the sixth century an astronomer called Dennis the Short established our present calendar, commencing with the birth of Christ. However Dennis was probably four or even five years out in his calculation. A further error was that he started to count with year 1, since the idea of zero was not understood. So two thousand years from the birth of Christ actually occurred up to six years ago.

In many ways none of this matters. If we look to the Bible we find it does indeed speak of times of coming judgement, and of a time when the Lord Jesus Christ will come to reign, but there is no indication of the date. Quite the reverse. When the disciples asked the Lord if the time had come to set up the kingdom, the Lord's reply was: "It is not for you to know times and seasons which the Father has set in his own authority" (Acts 1:7). Regardless of the date, believers in Jesus are always to be waiting for His return. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians he told them that they had been turned to God from idols to "await his Son from the heavens". How this challenges all of us who have trusted in Christ. Are we really waiting for Him?

While we cannot make much of year 2000 in itself it does appear to give particular opportunities for testimony. For all the inaccuracies in the way the date has been arrived at, it does remind us that the intention was to count from that unique moment in history when "the Word became flesh", when Christ was born and was called Jesus, because He would save His people from their sins.

For some people 2000 will be a disappointment; after all the hype it will be like many another year. Many people will probably pause and consider

the passage of time and just where their life is leading. Life ebbs away. It was on the last, the great day of the feast, that “Jesus stood and cried saying, If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink”. That invitation is still given. There is rest, forgiveness, peace, and satisfaction for every one who comes to Him.

Perhaps we should let Peter have the last word. He speaks of those who say “Where is the promise of his coming? for from the time the fathers fell asleep all things remain thus from the beginning of the creation...The Lord does not delay his promise, as some account of delay, but is long suffering towards you, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:4 & 9).

THE WORLD TO COME

Imagine a universe that is characterised by meekness and lowliness of heart! Christ was meek and lowly, and the world to come will take character from Him.

He (Christ) is going to rebuke strong nations. How? Well really it is by insisting on peace.

The apostle says the “world to come, whereof we speak” (Hebrews 2:5). Having it so little before us is a weakness with all of us...The effect of not apprehending the world to come is to go on with the present world, and to connect Christ and saints with the existing order of things.

I often think if I were not a christian I should be a really awful man. When I see the inequalities of the world, the dark contrast between the

intense poverty and great luxury...it afflicts me tremendously, and if I had not the sense that God knows better than I do, if I had not the check of being a christian, I should just be an out-and-out radical. But I have no doubt that God knows how to modify things in reference to people. With the world as it is I have not a vestige of sympathy. What I mean is that, with the Lord in His rightful place, you will get perfect administration coming in, and you will not have these inequalities. When He was here, they had "bread enough and to spare" (Luke 15:17), and when He comes to administer things, you will not have the enormous inequalities which exist now.

In the world to come there will be no room for the pride and arrogance of man. All that is going to be set aside; that day will be marked by what Christ was when here: He was meek and lowly in heart. When He comes again He comes to give character to everything, and there will be no room for what is not according to Christ.

No one ever got deliverance from the present world except by the apprehension of the world to come. Moses got deliverance from the present world by the apprehension, so far as it then could be apprehended, of the world to come. He had as fair a prospect in regard to this world as most men could have; but he gave up the present world, because God gave him a ray of light in regard to the world to come.

The world to come is the scene and sphere of God's administration in grace; righteousness is maintained, but grace is dominant; it is put under the Son of man, and is established on the ground of redemption, that is, on the ground of grace, not law, though righteousness is fully maintained.

All praise will be led by Christ; it is most wonderful how this opens out in the Psalms: "In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee" (Psalm 22:22), and then, "My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation"

(Psalm 22:25), and “I will sing unto thee among the nations” (Psalm 57:9). My conviction is this, that in the millennium all praise will be led by Christ...Every circle will be conscious that Christ praises there, whether it be the great congregation, or the nations. Christ is the centre, because He not only reveals God, but sustains all. The light of God has come to us in Christ, but He has taken the priestly place on man’s side. We see Him taking up everything on man’s behalf, so that He becomes the leader in every circle.

The title Son of man is connected with the world to come. It is the divine answer to the corruption of man; He is God’s Man and is the answer to all the evil that Satan has brought in.

It is clearly revealed in the Old Testament in regard to Israel that when God takes up His dealings again with them in the future, He will begin with new birth. It is perfectly plain from Ezekiel 36 that though they have forfeited all claim by sin, God will resume His dealings with them, and having brought them to their own land, He will sprinkle clean water upon them, and they shall be clean. They will be born again. What it conveys to my mind is this - that God will lay a completely new moral foundation in His people here upon earth. What is born of the Spirit is spirit - God will sprinkle clean water upon them and they shall be clean. Thus by the sovereign act of the Spirit of God they will be begotten again in view of the blessing which they are to enjoy upon the earth.

F. E. Raven

Extracted from “Handing on the Torch”. Copies of this book in both English or Spanish are available from the Stone Publishing Trust, Price £4.00 including delivery. (For the address of the Trust, see page 2.)

SHEPHERD CARE

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want”

(Psalm 23:1)

David who wrote this psalm had been a shepherd. He knew what was involved in the care of sheep. In speaking to Saul, he showed how he had felt the responsibility of keeping his father's flock. Trusting in the living God he had slain both a lion and a bear to rescue from them a lamb that was in danger. In the lowly path of duty to his father in caring for the defenceless sheep and lambs he had proved faithful.

David's heart turns to God, viewing himself as a simple helpless sheep, and he rejoices that he is in the care of the Lord. It is as though he would say: 'As I cared for my father's sheep so does the Lord care for me. They were too foolish to know what was for their own good, but I looked out for them the greenest pastures and caused them to feed there. If journeying I led them gently, if foes threatened, they could not protect themselves, but I protected them, watching over them night and day. All this and more is the Lord to me. I am as foolish and defenceless as any sheep, but He cares for me'.

The Lord Jesus when here upon earth said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10). All believers on the Son of God are God's sheep; they form one flock with one shepherd. For them, all hangs upon the care of that shepherd. He has received them as given to Him by His Father and He holds them as His own sheep, in common interest with the Father. He brings them into the fulness of blessing and in spite of all that the devil can plan and accomplish, in spite of all the feebleness of the sheep, the Lord holds them for His own heart and for His Father who gave them to Him.

How sweetly then, and with what depth of meaning, we may take up David's words and say, "The Lord is my shepherd". Then we can add in the confidence of faith, "I shall not want". The world is one vast place of need, but in the company and under the care of the Son of God, and as objects of His love and that of the Father, need is unknown. Our

circumstances may be deeply trying, but when the heart is most affected by them, turning to the Lord it finds such rich compensation in Him that it exclaims: "I shall not want".

Only one thing is really essential to my happiness, and that is His company, for all I need is found in Him. The Lord is thus known individually. He is "my shepherd". Doubtless He is a shepherd to others, and the more we know His care for ourselves, the more we are ready to rejoice that others share it, yet we begin thus with ourselves. He is my Shepherd.

The believer who is most feeble may rejoice in this. Indeed, the very consciousness of feebleness causes him to recline more fully and constantly in His love. When it is a question of our fellowship in the presence of God our portion is the same and in the enjoyment of it we embrace in our thoughts all the children of God. When we consider our pathway in this world, we find that each one differs from every other. How sweet it is then to know that whatever the pathway may be, we are known individually to Him and are the objects of His unceasing care.

Then again as we consider the present divided state of believers here on earth and feel that we are deprived of the care of many of God's servants, what a comfort it is to turn to Him who is unailing, and exclaim "The Lord is my shepherd". We rejoice that we are under His eye and hand, even as we are loved by His heart.

May each christian reader rejoice more and more in the unceasing shepherd care of our gracious Lord!

J. Revell

This is the first of a series of meditations on Psalm 23. In the next issue D.V. "Satisfaction"

A ROMAN GOVERNOR'S DILEMMA—IS IT YOURS?

**“Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?”
(Matthew 27:22)**

That is a searching question. I would like to put it into the mouth and fasten it upon the conscience of every unconverted person, for be you man or woman, boy or girl, some day you will have to face this question with God. My prayer is that you may face it wisely today.

It is two thousand years since that question was put by Pilate to a rabble mob, thirsting for the blood of Jesus. Pilate has gone, but his question still lives, and, coming down the ages, it speaks to every man. It appeals as loudly as ever to every unconverted heart, demanding an answer: “What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?”

Pilate was the governor of Judaea, the Roman governor. Rome was the then existent world empire. Now Pilate had nothing to do with creating the position he was in. Indeed, he would have liked to have evaded it. But he was responsible to face it. I might say it was a divinely formed position. My meaning is this. Government is of God, and Pilate, as Roman governor, was God's servant. In truth, it was a privileged position, for during that empire's regime the blessed God was pleased to come into Manhood. Jesus was born, and grew up under the eyes of men, was presented to the Jewish nation and brought before Pontius Pilate.

God was addressing Himself to men in perfect grace in that Man. What a Man! All that God had for men, all that He had to say to man, was presented in Christ. A greater privilege and a greater responsibility never rested on a Roman governor than rested on Pilate. He ought to have declared for Christ.

Dear friends, a divinely formed position has come to pass in regard to you and me. When Adam sinned the whole race was involved. It matters not who you are, nor what your station in life may be, nor where you live; the effect of his transgression has reached you, for the whole race, by Adam's sin, was plunged into condemnation and death. You did not

create that position; neither did I. But we are responsible to face it, and, but for the grace of God, the outlook is as dark as midnight.

But God has met the situation. His grace has abounded towards all. He has raised up a new Head for man, a Saviour, Jesus. Christ has died. He has borne the judgment of God. He has taken up Himself the liabilities that lay upon man, and by one great act of righteousness at the cross He has perfectly glorified God in regard to sin.

God has gloriously answered that work in that He has raised Jesus from the dead, and in a risen Christ He presents all His thoughts of blessing to men. How simple it is! Everything now depends on Christ and your relation to Him. Men compare themselves with themselves. They are not wise. You may be more moral than your neighbour, but that will not help you, for in Adam all are under condemnation. The only way out is by Christ. Righteousness and life are found in Him, and in Him alone; and that brings us again to Pilate's question: "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?"

Now I want you to look at the way that Pilate met, or rather evaded, that solemn question. Prior to the Lord being brought before Pilate, He had been betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter and tried before Annas and Caiaphas. Early in the morning His accusers led Him away from Caiaphas to the judgment hall, but they themselves went not in to the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. What hypocrisy! They were punctilious as to their observance of a religious feast, yet about to stain their hands with the blood of the Son of God.

Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation bring ye against this man?". Insolently, they reply, "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to thee".

Pilate said, "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law". He would liked to have taken a neutral position, to have placed the responsibility on to other shoulders, but he could not. Neither can you. "The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." So, "Jesus stood before the governor". That position is yet to be transposed. Some day the governor will stand before Jesus for judgment.

We have then recorded the secret interview between Christ and Pilate. Pilate asks Him: “Art thou the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered him, “Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?”

Four thousand years before, God had put that question to Cain, a murderer, “What hast thou done?” What answer did He get from the fallen sons of Adam? Four thousand years of rebellion and guilt culminating in the murder of Christ, the Son of God.

Let me catch up Pilate’s words again, and address them to Christ, the life giver: ‘Blessed Lord, What hast Thou done?’ The answer comes from the Lord addressed to His Father: “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”

I pass on, “Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world”; an important fact to consider at the present moment. “If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate sayeth unto him. What is truth?” But he does not wait for an answer. He goes out.

On every hand people are asking, “What is truth?” In 2 Timothy 3 mention is made of a class of person who are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”. There is a moral reason for that. Where is the truth? It is to be found in a Man—Christ. “We beheld his glory”, says the apostle, “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”. Jesus says, “I am the Truth”.

Why does Pilate go out? I think I can tell you. The truth leaves only one man standing. Do you want the truth? It may dismiss you. I do not mean that it only leaves one man personally standing. It only leaves standing room for one man characteristically—Christ.

“What is truth?” I beseech you to answer that question soberly, not flippantly as did Pilate, and to remain for the answer. You will be dismissed, another Man morally will occupy the ground, but if you are brought to appreciate Christ, you will rejoice in the exchange. It is infinite gain to make room for Him. The trouble is, people want to retain themselves and to retain Christ too, and that is impossible.

Pilate did not remain for the answer. He went out and said unto them, “I find in him no fault at all”. But “they were more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place”. Pilate catches the word “Galilee”. It seemed to furnish a plausible escape from a difficult position. He would dismiss this troublesome subject without committing himself. Possibly that is where you are.

“When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilaean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.” Now, Pilate, surely your difficulty is solved! That is a clever stroke! You have Him off your hands now, this man that has perplexed you! You have dismissed Him. He is sent to Herod. Herod was glad to see Him. He had wanted to see Jesus for a long time. He had hoped that some miracle might be done by Him. But the Lord answered him nothing. As assumed king of the Jews Herod was much less excusable than Pilate. “And Herod with his men of war set him at naught, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate”, and once more He is on Pilate’s hands.

Poor Pilate! Your question, “What shall I then do with Jesus which is called Christ?” is as unanswered as ever. “And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves.” What a friendship! Based on the mutual rejection of the truth! I want none of it.

I thank God for a wonderful bond of friendship with many. What is it based on? The truth. Pilate and Herod had been at enmity, but they can unite on the rejection of Christ. I pity those whose friendship is based on such iniquity.

Pilate then called the chief priests and the rulers and the people together and said, “Ye brought this man unto me, as one that peverteth the people; and behold I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof you accuse him. No, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him; and lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him”. Then release him, Pilate! You would have expected that. No, Pilate says, “I will therefore chastise him, and release him”. Was there ever such a miscarriage of justice? Pilate admits His innocence. He knew that for envy the chief priests had delivered him. Yet he will scourge an innocent Man.

Are you doing that? Conscious that you should ally yourself with Christ, but anxious to save your face with the world, would you add stripes to Christ? What a warning is Pilate! The truth shines resplendent in Jesus, yet the whole world is against Him. Will you join with the world against Christ?

Pilate says, “I will chastise him”. And he does. He took Jesus and scourged Him, and the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put on Him a purple robe, and Pilate brought Him forth to the people again. “Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!”

At the sight of Jesus the religious leaders cried out, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate is now back at the place where he started, only that he is weaker than ever. He says, “Take ye him and crucify him; for I find no fault in him”. “The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself Son of God.” Pilate, already troubled, is the more alarmed. Going back into the judgment hall, he again questioned Jesus, “Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer”. Poor Pilate. It is terribly solemn to trifle with Christ. It was then that Pilate’s wife sent him a message, “Have nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him”.

It is a mercy to have a pious, conscientious wife. Do not trifle with a godly wife’s advice. God had taken unusual pains to impress that woman’s heart with Christ’s righteousness, and through his wife God sent Pilate a

message of warning. He speaks to Jesus in the judgment hall again. Noting the Lord's silence, his pride is wounded by it; he says to Him: "Speakest thou not to me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" "I have power", pleads Pilate. Yes, power officially, as given by God. Yet personally he is weak as water.

The Lord replied, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above: therefore he that hath delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him." Outside the clamour was increasing, and the Jews cried out, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend". Do you want to be Caesar's friend? He represents the world, the political world, if you like, and "Whoever therefore is minded to be the friend of the world is constituted enemy of God". To decide to be Caesar's friend constitutes you God's enemy.

The pressure increases on Pilate. He hopes there may yet be an outlet from his position. It was customary at the Feast of the Passover for the governor to release unto the people a prisoner at their request. They had a notable prisoner called Barabbas, an outlaw, a robber and a murderer.

Pilate never dreamed that they would ask for Barabbas, but the chief priests and elders had persuaded the multitude that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus, and when Pilate put the question to them, "Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said Barabbas. Pilate sayeth unto them" (and that brings us once more to our original question), "What then shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?"

I ask you not what you will do with churches or chapels or priests or preachers. No! What will you do with Jesus which is called Christ? That is the point. You must have to do with Him, just as Pilate had. You cannot evade it. What will you do with Him? "They all say unto him, Let him be crucified". Again Pilate pleads, "Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified".

"When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude,

saying, I am innocent”. Did he believe that? Did the people believe it? Did the angels that looked on believe it? Did Satan and his hosts believe that Pilate was innocent? He gave the lie in his own words: “I am innocent of the blood of this just person”.

Justice said, ‘Release Jesus’. Pilate says, “See ye to it”. Vacillating man! It was Pilate’s responsibility to see to it yet he seeks to shelve it on to others, pleading, “I am innocent”. Do you think he got rid of the bloodstains by washing his hands before that multitude? Could he clear his guilty conscience thus? Can he plead, “I am innocent” before the throne of God? There was only one thing that could erase those stains. It was the blood of Christ Himself.

You remember when the Lord rose from the dead He announced to His disciples “That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem”. In virtue of His death on the cross, in which God’s holiness had been maintained and His inflexible righteousness and judgment against sin had been vindicated, the heart of God was now free to flow out in unlimited blessing to man.

The testimony of repentance and remission of sins in the name of Christ could now be announced world wide and the Lord would have it told out first in that guilty city, Jerusalem. Such is grace! I can imagine Peter saying, ‘Lord, You do not mean us to go to those Jerusalem sinners? That is where they crucified You!’ Yes! “Beginning at Jerusalem.”

With such a commission, the disciples could have gone to the Roman soldier that pierced the Saviour’s side and told him that the precious blood which met that cruel spear thrust could remove every trace of his guilt. They could have told the men that crowned Him with the thorns that there were crowns of glory if only they would believe and cast in their lot with Christ. Even Pilate might have found mercy. But, poor dupe of Satan, he had trifled with his conscience; he had bartered away his soul for present gain, and he soon lost all that for which he had surrendered Christ. Falling into disfavour, he was dismissed by the Emperor, banished and died a miserable suicide.

In the Rocky Mountains there is what is called the 'Great Divide'. It is the spot where the waters break, those falling eastward finally reaching the Atlantic, and those going westward reaching the Pacific. Pilate's question is the great moral divide. On either side there is a world. One is built up on sacrifice and surrender, built up on Christ. It is God's world. The other is Satan's world, for he is the god and prince of the present world system. He will offer you a place in it, luring you on to destruction, for it is a doomed world. It will soon pass away and be replaced by a world filled with the glory of God, a world that abides for ever. It may be that you are standing at the great moral divide now. On which side are you going to be found?

I remember well my conversion. I was a young man, scarcely twenty years old, ambitious and anxious to make the most of this world. The word was being preached in power, and God was speaking to my heart and conscience through it, but I was hanging in the balance. "What shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?" was a very living question with me then.

The speaker told of a man well known in America in the early days of its history. His name was Aaron Burr. He was grandson of Jonathan Edwards, a man famous for his learning and piety. Burr's father, too, was I believe a christian minister. Burr's body is buried on the campus of Princeton College, where the man who was used to bring blessing to my soul had been a student.

When Aaron Burr was a young man he went one day into his father's study and sat down to think. The Spirit of God was evidently striving with him. He began to weigh things. He knew what was in him, for he was a man of rare attainments and an attractive personality. He was conscious of great resources in himself, and as he sat there he reasoned: 'The world offers me this. Christ offers me that. Which will I go for?' He came out of that room deciding that the world had more to offer him than Christ. Fatal choice!

He started out on a brilliant career. He rose to a great height and was nominated for the Presidency, but in his political career a man named Harrison crossed his pathway. Burr in jealousy challenged him to a duel.

Hamilton fell mortally wounded. I saw his grave in New York city a few years ago. The whole country was shocked, for Hamilton was a man greatly valued, and from that moment Burr's star began to set. After a chequered subsequent career he went to his grave unmourned, yea cursed, by the very world for which he had sacrificed all.

These great divides are solemn moments. Young man, young woman, what are you going to do with Jesus which is called Christ? Pilate will never ask that question again, never! You may yet ask it, because today you are on speaking terms with God, and God is still on speaking terms with you. But Pilate will never ask it again. He is going to ask another question: 'What then shall I do without Jesus which is called Christ?'

I put that question to you, my unconverted friend. When the cold hand of death is laid upon you, what will you do without Jesus? When the world is tottering; when the voice of the Son of God summons you from your grave; when the elements are melting; when you stand naked at the great white throne, what will you do without Jesus then? When you face the dark gloom of an eternal night, what will you do without Jesus which is called Christ? May God bring you to face this issue rightly.

All hell will be arrayed against your making a right decision. God—Father, Son and Holy Ghost, will help you to face it aright. Every christian has had to face it, every one of us. Many of us could point to the time when we did so. You have the support of many christians here present, and of countless others.

Look once more at Pilate. What was there to convince him? The testimony of the truth, his own conscience, his wife's counsel, and, behind that, all the support of heaven. But he got his eye off Christ, and gave his ear to a faithless, godless world, and he missed it, and missed it for ever.

"What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" God grant that you may face this question wisely, and decide for Christ now. May God bless the word.

Herbert Gill