

No. 37

Living Water

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FOUR EXHORTATIONS FROM JUDE

Introduction

Jude wrote in difficult times. Much of his epistle is taken up with warnings as to conditions that were affecting the church of God. Yet it is not the custom with the Spirit of God to give warnings and not to give any remedy and the remedy is to be found in verses 20 and 21 of Jude:

“But ye, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

I would like to commend each of those four things to everyone here and to draw upon other scriptures to illustrate them.

(The first two are given in this article. God willing, the remainder of the address will be printed in issue number 38.)

“Building yourselves up on your most holy faith.”

Jude starts with building ourselves up on our most holy faith. Notice that Jude does not encourage us to rely on God to build us up—that would be right in its place—but Jude looks to everyone to take some personal responsibility. Each of us is accountable to God personally, each of us stands before Him and each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. God puts certain resources our way and He expects us to make use of them. One thing that He has put our way is our most holy faith; that is what we are all committed to as believers on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The whole of scripture contains our most holy faith and we can only draw on one or two features now. But we do need to ask what that faith is and whether we are using it to build ourselves up so that our spiritual constitution is strengthened.

By way of illustration, I turn to the third chapter of John’s gospel and go over the history of Nicodemus and what the Lord had to say to him. Nicodemus was an enquiring soul and the Lord answered what lay behind his enquiry. He

speaks about the need of being born anew. That is to say, there is nothing about me as born into the world which is for God at all.

Now let me ask whether you actually believe that? There is nothing in our nature which is for God. Instead God has to work in your heart and mine to bring about what is of Himself, the work of His Spirit and what is like to His beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ. What is old is to go entirely and is to be entirely replaced by what is new. In experience we find that very hard to come to but it is what the Lord Jesus presents as the truth, and He adds, “except any one be born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”. There is no room in God’s sphere for anything of myself whatsoever.

Do you recognise that God began to work with you, not with a view to improving you, but that God was going to begin with you entirely afresh? The reason why I press this is that if you have never been sure that nothing of the old was carried over, then in a time of crisis you will fall back on what is old. You will rely upon your flesh to get you through times of trial and difficulty, when God is saying that that cannot be done; a christian is obliged to rely on God altogether.

That does not set aside building ourselves up, since what we need to do is to draw upon the resources that are in Him. But as we face the crises and difficulties of life, do we as christians rely upon the work of God and appeal to that or do we lapse back into something else?

The Lord says, “the wind blows where it will”. It is a reference to the Spirit of God moving in His own right and authority, not accountable to me at all. He acts and we do not discern exactly how it comes about but the effect is to be seen. As you come across a person whom you once knew, we might say, after the flesh and you meet them again after God has had to do with them you see that there is something new that was never there before, which is the work of God. “Thus is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”

The Lord now moves forward to touch upon another vital matter. He says, “No one has gone up into heaven, save he who came down out of heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven”. It brings before us the personal glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Life and salvation lie in Him and nowhere else. There is no link with heaven except through Him but He in grace has come down out of heaven; yet in another sense He had not left it—the Son of man who is in heaven. He came to earth to make the joys of heaven known and available for

us to take up and make our own. Again I ask whether this is a reality to us personally: that there are the things of God to be enjoyed and made ours in our own souls?

John 3 speaks of the great transaction when the Son of man had to be lifted up, just as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness. In Numbers 21 you see people who are rebellious; they begin to speak against God and against Moses. We know something of that ourselves if we are honest. God saw them falling into sin and He sent serpents among them which bit the people; they were dying and appealed for help. Moses goes to God about it and he is told what to do. He was to make a serpent of brass and set it upon a pole so that all who look might see it and might live. The Lord says, 'It has to be like that for the Son of man; He is to be lifted up so that we might see Him made an offering for sin'. There is a close connection between Numbers 21, John 3 and Romans 8, because in each place we have the issue of sin faced and resolved to the glory of God and a way made through for man to live. This is the way to life. "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal."

I do not want to say much more about this, except to remind you that it is part of our most holy faith and it is something in which we can be built up. We have needed our sins forgiven and our state to be dealt with and we need to accept that the Lord Jesus Christ who knew no sin was made sin for us. It is essential that you let that become bedrock in your soul.

“Praying in the Holy Spirit.”

The second thing Jude mentions is “praying in the Holy Spirit”. Prayer has particularly to do with needs and maintenance of the testimony of God down here and with bringing our petitions before God but praying in the Holy Spirit reminds us that in approach to God we are bringing God on our side as well. The Spirit of God is available to link Himself with our prayers as long as we are praying according to the will of God. There is great need for prayer in the Holy Spirit; there are situations that we get into that we surely would not if we were bringing them to God in prayer and dependence and seeking the help of the Holy Spirit as we do so. I believe that God would give us an answer as we bring our burdens and problems to Him. As relying upon the Spirit of God we gain access into the presence of God where He would provide us with a remedy

for what is burdening us. I do not know exactly what burdens you may be carrying but one does get a sense of the need of taking issues to God in prayer and getting His answer to them.

I want to refer to John 4 here because the Lord is saying there that our whole approach to God is in Spirit. That is the way that God has revealed Himself and the way that I am to come before Him in the spirit of genuine approach and reality. That extends to our approach together, that we are together in spirit and in truth and drawing near to God. The Father seeks such as His worshippers.

In John 4 the Lord is speaking to a woman. I did not have in mind to speak about her history but refer to her because she introduces into her conversation with the Lord the subject of worship. She says: "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where one must worship". So there she was, poor soul, with ideas about religious orthodoxy. Orthodoxy never remedied anything at all and we all remain prone to it. She was a Samaritan with one way of worship and there was Jerusalem with the Jews and the temple. The Lord says to her, "Believe me, the hour is coming when ye shall neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father". What a revelation it was that He brought before her, that things were going to move beyond time or place or religious orthodoxy. Souls were going to be set free to worship God as the Father. "The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth." I wonder if we make that our own as well. I realise that worship would primarily have in mind the people of God being together in that worship but then there is the question whether my heart is joined with the people of God in the spirit of worship.

There is room, I think, for more liberty before God. Concern to be in the spirit of contribution is of God. It is given to brothers to give an audible contribution but sisters contribute substantially by their attitude and spirit in the gatherings. That, of course, has its counterpart in personal life as well. So when we come before God, the Old Testament reminds us that none is to appear empty (see Deuteronomy 16:16). I feel free to address all my brethren in this respect, including the younger ones whom we can encourage to use liberty before God. Many of us did not find it easy to get liberty in public worship as young people. I can only commend to you that God will support you if you go forward in faith. It is the service of the Spirit to support those

who draw near to God in reality of heart. But we might bear the word too as older ones, that God is to come first and that we might be concerned as to what we contribute in our approach to Him. “The hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth.” The Lord looked forward to that and He is entitled to it by way of response both to Himself and to His God and Father.

David Burr

Part 1 of an address at Defford 1999.

In the next issue, “Keep yourselves in the love of God” and “Awaiting the Mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ”

THE AGE OF THE UNIVERSE

God has not told us the age of the universe; He simply tells us that He created it. In Hebrews 11:3 we read, “By faith we apprehend that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that that which is seen should not take its origin from things which appear”. In Genesis 1:1 we are told, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. In Isaiah 45:18 we read, “For thus sayeth Jehovah who created the heavens, God himself who formed the earth and made it, he who established it,—not as **waste** did he create it: he formed it to be inhabited:—” Genesis 1:1 is the beginning of time but we are not told when this was.

In Genesis 1:2 we read, “And the earth was **waste** and empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep”. God has not told us how it got into the condition spoken of here as “waste and empty” nor how long a lapse of time there was between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. It is interesting to notice that the same expression “waste and empty” is used prophetically in Jeremiah 4:23 to describe the earth after man has ruined it by his sin. We read, “I beheld the earth, and lo, it was waste and empty, and the heavens, and they had no light”. We see from these verses that there was a ruin between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2 and there will be another ruin as a result of man’s sin as described in Jeremiah.

All that God has been pleased to tell us of the time between Genesis 1:1 and verse 2 is that the world was not in the condition that He had made it. It is not

necessary for us to appeal to science to prove the truth of God’s word. “Every scripture is divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, fully fitted to every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The account that is given of the creation in Genesis 1:3-31 is to show us how in six days God, who has all power and wisdom, made the earth a suitable dwelling place for man, arranging all for his good and happiness. The universe had already been created in Genesis 1:1 and then in Genesis 1:2 we read, “darkness was on the face of the deep” .

God’s purpose in the Bible is not to satisfy our curiosity with the details of creation but to reveal Himself in all the glory and majesty of His Person as light and love—and to reveal His purpose in creation. We read of this in Ephesians 1:10: “to head up all things in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth” .

Some have difficulty about the question of sin coming into the world because Romans 5:12 says, “For this cause, even as by one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death” . They believe because of this verse that there could not have been any forms of life or the death of such creatures before Adam’s sin. However, it is important to see how scripture speaks. The ‘world’ is spoken of as a system of things over which Adam, the first man, was placed as head (see 1 Corinthians 15:45).

Satan brought a lie to Eve when he said, “Ye will not certainly die” (Genesis 3:4) and this was before Adam or Eve had sinned. However it is surely true that Adam brought sin into the present system of things called “the world” in 1 Corinthians 1:21, for Adam was the responsible head of that creation (Genesis 1:26 and Psalm 115:16).

May each be encouraged to read the Bible, not just to learn facts about such things as creation but to find the wisdom of God for our individual pathway—learning where to find christian fellowship, where to gather together according to God’s word, assured that “if any man do his will, he shall know concerning the doctrine whether it be of God” (John 7:17).

G. H. Hayhoe

Adapted from “The Christian Shepherd”

THE COMING OF THE LORD

2 Samuel 19:24-30

The story of Mephibosheth is a very touching one. He was of the household of Saul. Saul, who had been the anointed king, had been David's great enemy and on more than one occasion attempted to kill him. Yet David when he subsequently became king after Saul's death was stirred up in his thoughts and, in the spirit of Christ, said: "Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?" (2 Samuel 9:3). What a generous disposition David had. He did not seek for the remainder of Saul's house to destroy them but to bring them into blessing. "And Mephibosheth ... shall eat at my table as one of the king's sons". He also had his lands restored to him. Mephibosheth felt undeserving of this mercy and kindness that David had showed him but he rejoiced in it. We also should rejoice as we appreciate increasingly what God has done in blessing us, God who is rich in mercy!

Then there came a time when David was dispossessed by one of his sons and for a time a usurper occupied Jerusalem. How did Mephibosheth conduct himself while David was in rejection? Well, it tells us where we read: "he had neither washed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace". Day by day, everyone would have been able to see that Mephibosheth was in mourning. He waited patiently and faithfully for the day when David would return to his rightful place. One day his hope was realised; David did come back and Mephibosheth rejoiced in it, even though, alas, David misunderstood him.

For us, all this is an illustration of how each of us who has been shown mercy from the Lord, in that He has cleansed us with His own blood, should conduct ourselves as we await His return. The Lord is away; He is cast out and rejected, just as David was, but He is coming back. I think if there is one thing that has receded amongst Christians generally (and I include myself in this) it is the reality and the imminence of the Lord's return. I think the sense of it would have a profound effect on all of us, on our walk and ways, if we just thought, 'He may come tonight'. We expect to remember the Lord Jesus tomorrow, but if we were in His presence it would not be necessary. That is something that has laid hold of me quite powerfully in the last few months; the act of remembrance, the breaking of bread, that appeal of the Lord Jesus to His own before He went to the cross, is applicable only during the time that the Lord is

absent. It is the provision of His love in order to keep our affections in life as we await His return.

We go on from day to day and we are always thinking about what is going to happen tomorrow and perhaps worrying about it. We were reading recently in John's gospel where the Lord is preparing His own for the time of His going away. He said, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it fear" (John 14:27). The christian is not to be fearful, for we have an outlook that is beyond everything in this world with all its fears and apprehensions, beyond the scene of time and sense, even beyond death to the realm where the Lord Himself is! The eye of faith can see Jesus where He is, "crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2:9).

When David comes back to Jerusalem Mephibosheth says "all my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king". Would we not all be as dead men if it was not that God has intervened in mercy and attended to the matter of our sins? That precious blood has provided God with a righteous basis so that He can reach out and bless each one of us though we are undeserving of such blessing. Similarly did David desire to bless one of the household of Saul, the offspring of the one who had pursued him so relentlessly and would have killed him.

What a God we have to do with. Indeed, He is rich in mercy. I feel for myself the need to appreciate more the greatness of what He has done in love towards me and to make way for the work of the Holy Spirit within to bring about change in us in this waiting time, in view of the Lord's return.

We wait for Thee, Thou wilt arise
 Whilst hope her watch is keeping;
Forgotten then in glad surprise
 Shall be our years of weeping.
Our hearts beat high, the dawn draws nigh
 That ends our pilgrim story
 In Thine eternal glory.

Ken Melville

Extracted from an address at Defford, 26th June 1999

“MY HELP COMETH FROM THE LORD”

(Psalm 121:2)

Jesus was close when you prayed last night.
He talked with God about you.
Jesus was there when you fought that fight,
He is going to bring you through.

Jesus knew when you shed those tears,
But you did not weep alone.
For the burdens you thought too heavy to bear,
He made them His very own.

Jesus cared when you bore that pain,
Indeed He bore it too;
He felt each pang and ache in His heart,
Because of His love for you.

His presence shall ever be with you—
No need to be anxious or fret.
Wonderful Lord! He is there all the time,
He has never forsaken you yet.

Anon.

AS FOR GOD — AS FOR MAN — AS FOR ME

Psalm 18:30

As for God, His way is perfect
Though we do not understand,
We can learn in life to trust Him
Who for us the way has planned.

Psalm 103:15

As for man, his days are grass,
Like a flourishing flower is he,
For a short while he appears
But so soon, no more will be.

Psalm 17:15

As for me, the psalmist ponders
Satisfied I soon shall wake,
For I shall then bear His likeness
And no more my Lord forsake.

Bernard Avery

O BLESSED SAVIOUR

O blessed Saviour, Lord and King,
With joy we worship Thee;
Our prayers and praise to Thee we bring
In peace and liberty.

Thy love doth set our spirits free,
Our hearts do upward soar;
Hearts occupied with none but Thee.
Thee worship and adore.

A worthy object, Thou O Lord,
Dost all our praise receive;
Worthy art Thou to be adored
More than our hearts conceive.

Thou didst humanity adorn,
To make the Father known;
Never was holy manhood seen
As seen in Thee alone.

O blessed Saviour, we on Thee
With deep affection gaze;
In Thee we every beauty see
And sing Thy worthy praise.

E. Tonn
(Reprinted from "The Christian Shepherd".)

A MODERN MARTYR

The Columbine High School in the USA re-opened last August after the dreadful shooting of thirteen people by two young teenagers. The story of the shootings went round the world but media attention focused on the killers' hostility toward racial minorities and athletes. There was another group the pair hated every bit as much, if not more: christians. According to some accounts, of the thirteen people killed by the gunmen's hate-filled rampage, eight were known to be christians.

One of those killed was Cassie Bernall, a seventeen year old student who was sitting in the school library reading her Bible when the killers burst in. According to witnesses, one of the gunmen pointed his gun at Cassie and asked, 'Do you believe in God?' Cassie paused and then answered, 'Yes, I believe in God'. They were the last words that she ever spoke for, though the gunmen asked her why she believed, she did not have a chance to reply before they shot her dead. One of her classmates said later, 'When the killers asked if there was anyone who had faith in Christ, she spoke up and they shot her for it'. Another described Cassie as 'A light for Christ'.

Cassie's story is all the more wonderful in that only a few years ago she was deep in the same darkness and nihilism which marked her killers, dabbling in the occult and witchcraft. Then a relatively short time ago she came to know Christ and her life was changed. Two days before her death she had written a piece of blank verse describing the transformation which had taken place:

'Now I have given up on everything else,
I have found it to be the only way
To really know Christ and to experience
The mighty power that brought
Him back to life again...'

Based on 'Taking a Stand for Christ' by Charles Colson

ALBANIA AND KOSOVO UPDATE

Following the brief details of the way that a number of Kosovan refugees have come to know the Lord Jesus, given in issue No. 34, the following information has come to hand.

“The majority of the Kosovan refugees had never heard the wonderful gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as almost all are muslims. We praise God that He has used these sad circumstances to enable these poor people to come into contact with the gospel for the first time in their lives.

“Now most of the refugees have returned to Kosovo where conditions are dreadful. Many towns and villages have been largely destroyed leaving most of the returning refugees homeless and destitute. In addition there is the problem of revenge and violence by both Serbs and Albanians.

“... Refugee families that were saved in Albania have been visited and some of the meetings continued until 1.00am, such was their joy in their new found faith ... We need to pray very much for this new work as the devil will be set against the spread of the gospel in Kosovo, a previously closed land to the word of God.”

(The above is based on information from Cecil Gaw and Wesley Ferguson in Belfast.)

SATISFACTION

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.” (Psalm 23:2)

“He shall be saved, and shall go in and out and shall find pasture” (John 10:9) said the Lord, of the one who should enter in. Under the care of the Good Shepherd there is pasture.

Yet where is it found? Some contrast their pleasing circumstances with those which are painful, as though the green pastures were in these. But it is not at all in the circumstances of this life that the green pastures of the Good Shepherd are to be found. So entirely apart are they from present things that it is often as a result of what is painful that we are brought into a sense of divine and unfailing satisfaction.

Mary of Bethany found pasture in sitting at the feet of Jesus hearing His word (Luke 10:38-42). Martha was loved by the Lord and sought to show Him due attention, but in so doing her soul was sadly disturbed and fretted with care. The greater her sense of the honour due to Him the more she was oppressed by her inability to render it to her satisfaction, so that she exclaimed, "Bid her therefore that she help me". Excellent as Martha was, and good her intention, this was not green pasture, nor was her soul in perfect rest.

"One thing is needful", the Lord replied, "and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her". What is the one essential thing for the soul's rest and happiness and the Lord's own satisfaction? What is the "good part" which shall not be taken away? Surely this is the joy of His company, in which we receive the communications His love delights to make, the unfolding of the Father's heart. In perfect quietness, in abstraction from all the disturbing elements found in circumstances, she sat at His feet and heard His word.

Is this choice ours? Do we know this favoured spot? If so, do not our souls approve it as the greenest pasture? There may we not only feed, but also lie down in fullest satisfaction and divine rest. The words of the psalm are remarkable, "He maketh me to lie down". With difficulty would a hungry sheep be made to lie down, but once fully fed it would happily do so. The figure then is very simple—that of perfect satisfaction and rest. Thus we have the company of the Lord Jesus. In faith we reach Him outside the bustle and din of this poor world and in His presence learn of the Father's love. Thus we prove the truth of His own words: "Whosoever shall drink of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). What a marvellous portion to be enjoyed now.

But what of circumstances? They are touched in the story of Mary of Bethany in John 11. Almost the heaviest blow that could be struck fell upon her tender heart in the sickness and death of her beloved brother but she had her resource. She fell at the feet of Jesus weeping and in His company, so long known and loved by her soul, she saw His holy tears. He had touched her circumstances with feelings more deep and tender, because more holy, than her own. What was the effect of this? Was it to set her at rest in them? No, but rather to draw her heart out of them to its resting place in divine satisfaction in Himself and His love.

So we see it expressed in John 12. A supper was made for Jesus and Lazarus recovered from death was there, yet neither the supper nor Lazarus engaged Mary's heart. It is the love and glory of Jesus that fills her gaze and as she sees Him going on that way to death she expends on Him the very costly ointment she possessed. Thus circumstances with all their deep bitterness only showed how she had found truest pasture with Him.

The prison of Philippi (Acts 16) proclaims the same precious truth. The midnight praises of Paul and Silas, in a loathsome dungeon, showed that they had green pastures in which they lay, although their backs were smarting from the scourge. So, again, the Roman prison from which Paul wrote to the Philippians, for he testifies of unfailling joy in the Lord, be his circumstances be what they may. "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).

All this is laid open to all believers as their common portion, though, alas, not commonly enjoyed. How shall we enjoy it? Mark the words—"He maketh me to lie down ... he leadeth me". Let us unfeignedly put ourselves in His hands, for He knows how to conduct us there and how to set our souls in all the divine rest and joy of those green pastures. He has said: "He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Let us then be constantly as those that have come to Him and as those who have Him as the object of faith of their souls and thus prove unfaillingly the truth of His words.

J. Revell.

This continues the series of meditations on Psalm 23.

In the next issue D. V. "Guidance"

THE UNKNOWN GOD

“...for, passing through and beholding your shrines, I found also an altar on which was inscribed, To the unknown God. Whom therefore ye reverence, not knowing him, him I announce to you.”
(Acts 17:23)

Athens was an interesting city; it was a little world in itself; it was the centre of learning of the old world, as Corinth was the centre of commerce. Both cities were in the province of Achaia and Paul went to both but in neither did he pander to their pride. He would not take any money from the Corinthians for the support of the gospel, although they were rich. He took money from the Philippians, though they were poor, but the Philippians were spiritual and the Corinthians were carnal. He would not give the Corinthians the occasion in any way to glory in the flesh.

In the same way he would not talk wisdom with the Athenians. He could have done so but he did not for it would not have helped them. “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). What was the preaching? Christ crucified. “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling—block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”

Now in this scripture which I have read, we get an account of Paul’s visit to Athens, the kind of people he met there, a synopsis of what he preached to them and the effect of his preaching. They were very cosmopolitan at Athens and we are told of some of the kinds of people who formed Paul’s audiences.

Jews were there. I suppose they were the religious people of the day. I do not ask you, ‘Are you religious?’ People may be religious without really knowing God. The Lord said: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:5). A round of observances and no vitality in it—that is mere religion. The

Buddhist, the Brahmin, the Confucian have it; Saul of Tarsus had it all the time that he was persecuting the Lord Jesus.

But not only were there Jews there; there was also a kind of nondescript class, for it says Paul disputed in the market daily with them that met with him. What a heart Paul had! He was always ready to speak of Christ.

I love to think of Paul on the road to Damascus where he met the Lord Jesus. His heart was captured that day and ever after he took every opportunity to speak of Christ. If he speaks of how a husband should love his wife, he uses it as a sort of excuse to speak of how Christ loved the church. So, wherever you find him, in the market or elsewhere, it mattered not to him, he was always ready to speak of Christ.

Then there were certain schools of philosophy in Athens: there were Stoics and Epicureans. We get a word in our language taken from the same root—‘epicure’. The philosophy of the Epicureans was pretty much this: ‘A short life and a merry one. Let us catch pleasure as it flies. What care we for the future?’ “Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die” (Isaiah 22:13).

Then you get the Athenian or the Areopagite; it says that they “spent their time in nothing else, either to tell, or to hear some new thing”. There are many like that around today, people who have a craze for novelty, always running after something new. It is not a question with them of it being true, only that it is new.

If a man comes to me with so-called ‘new theology’ I examine the date of it. If it bears a date later than the first century, when the last of the apostles passed off this scene, I mark it down as the lie of Satan. John says, “I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning” (1 John 2:7).

These were the kind of people that formed Paul’s audiences at Athens. They might reason and debate and argue amongst themselves—for there were many shades of opinion among them—but they stood morally on one common ground; they were all ignorant of God. Paul stands there in that pagan city and says: “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For

as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To the unknown God”.

The Athenians had registered prominently in their own city, on one of their shrines, their ignorance of the only true God. And Paul adds, “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you”. Now God could not be declared if He had not been revealed, but God has been pleased to reveal Himself. He has borne witness to Himself in creation; He has revealed Himself in Christ.

Paul begins with the lowest rung of the ladder, God as made known in creation. It ought to have been a stunning blow to the pride of the Athenians that with all their wisdom they had not found out God, for even in creation God intended that men should find Him, as it says: “That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us”. All creation speaks of Him. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard” (Psalm 19:1-3).

Who put the sun in the heavens? God did it. He put the moon in its place and the stars and established the marvellous timing of the universe. A friend of mine was once assisting an astronomer take some observations in Winnipeg. In a moment of leisure when he was examining the heavens he said to the astronomer, speaking of a certain star, ‘I think that star is almost on the meridian tonight’. The astronomer consulted his records and said, ‘Put your eye to the telescope and count twenty on the astronomical clock and you will see the star cross the meridian’. My friend, who afterwards told me of the incident, said to me, ‘I counted up to sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, no star; but at twenty I saw the star cross the meridian and the astronomer said, God’s timepiece is never a second late’.

All creation speaks of Him. Not only does it speak of His ability, as we read in Romans, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20), but there is also abundant evidence in creation of His goodness. Paul said to them at Lystra: “Nevertheless he left not himself without a witness, in that he did

good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). Yet, though I see in creation, in God’s handiwork, abundant evidence of a supreme mind and though I see also evidence of His goodness, wonderful as all this is, it does not tell me what God is; it does not reveal to me His nature.

I was in Edinburgh some years ago, in Princes Street, and a friend drew my attention to the Scott Monument. He told me that when the City decided to erect a monument in memory of Sir Walter Scott they offered a prize for the best design. An almost unknown architect won the prize and he was so inflated with his success that he took to drink and fills a drunkard’s grave. The monument is a beautiful specimen of architectural skill. You admire the genius of the man who designed it but you cannot admire the man. What a person can design, what skill they may have in their hands, does not tell me what the person is. So when I look at creation, though I see in every part of it the work of One of infinite skill, yet what God has done in creation does not tell me what He is. Yet God wants me to know what He is.

There is a part of scripture, just three words, which you will find many times inscribed on walls and on public clocks and the like. Many seem to think that they are very simple words, and they are, but I have been studying those words for years and I feel that they are far deeper than my soul can fathom. Here they are: “God is love”.

Do you understand them? They are beyond me. I touch the fringe of them but there is a depth in them that I cannot reach. It is not only that God has affections—I have affections and very strong ones too—it is not only that God has affections, but that He is affection. It is His nature! “God is love” and God could never rest—I say it reverently—without those affections being responded to.

Now upon whom did God set His heart? Not on the unfallen angels. He has set His heart on man and I love to watch the way God takes to win man so as to secure a response to His heart. I see God come down first of all in the Garden of Eden, when man had sinned and when not only had man lost God but God had lost man. God come down to seek man. I hear that tender cry: “Adam, where art thou?” I want to stand aside and let the blessed God put that question to you. ‘Where are you?’ It is not where do your father or mother, or your

brother or sister stand, but, 'Where are you?' God came to seek man, but what happened? Man ran away from God and hid in the trees of the garden. He was afraid of God.

Years passed, and God speaks to man in another way. On Mount Sinai He gave the law. Perhaps you do not think that there is anything much in the law to attract man's heart. No, but I can see what was the underlying principle of it. Love! God said to man: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). Why did God say that? He was feeling after man's affections. He as it were says: 'I am love and I want a response to my heart'. But God did not get it then. He knew full well that He would not get it on that principle but, none the less, you can see that God was set upon securing the affections of man.

But if Adam ran away in the garden, at Mount Sinai the people stood afar off; they were afraid and they said to Moses, 'You speak with us, but let not God speak with us lest we die'. Once more God appeared to be defeated.

Then again God came near in angelic form. He appeared to Manoah's wife, Samson's mother, and she went and told her husband saying, "A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible" (Judges 13:6). She too was afraid. Well, what was God going to do? I remember once passing down a street in our city in winter and it was very cold. Someone had thrown out a sheaf of grain on to some waste ground and that sheaf of grain was covered with sparrows who were having a fine feast. As I drew near to them they became agitated and as I got nearer still they took to their wings and flew away.

I said to myself, 'What is the matter with the sparrows? I meant them no harm.' The fact was that there was nothing the matter with the sparrows; the trouble was with me. I was far too big! Then I thought about how I could get among the sparrows so that they would not be afraid and there was only one answer. If I could be a sparrow myself I could be amongst them and they would not fly away.

Now when God came near to man in one form or another, man was afraid and God said, 'I will become a Man, so as to get near to man'. In coming near to

man in that way God came in at the weakest point, in babyhood. Adam was created a full grown man, but when God drew near to man He came in the form of a babe. I do not believe that we meditate sufficiently on the truth of the incarnation. Can you fathom it? All the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Christ as Man here. Meditate on that! Let it percolate into your soul!

Now when the angels heralded to the shepherds the birth of that Babe, did they run away? No! They said, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us" (Luke 2:15). God has got near to man at last. They were not afraid of the blessed God now and when that Babe grew up to manhood it was said of Him, "Then drew near all the publicans and sinners for to hear him" (Luke 15:1).

I sometimes think of that crowd we are told of in Luke 15. When the Lord told the story of the lost sheep, I can see those publicans and sinners looking at one another knowingly and saying, 'That is you and me'. And when He speaks about the shepherd, they would say, 'That is Himself'. The circumference of the crowd gets smaller and smaller as they press upon that blessed Man to hear the words of grace that fell from His lips. There is none so accessible as Jesus. A poor leper, that no one dare touch, Jesus could touch him. Outcasts, ashamed of facing their neighbours, could draw near to Christ. We read: "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). God has drawn near to man in Christ with a view to taking up man in Christ for the joy of His own heart.

Yet even when the Lord was here in that wonderful way, the question of sin and death still remained unsettled. Who could settle it but the blessed Son of God Himself? Job, in the Old Testament, had an intelligent thought; he said: "How should man be just with God?...If I wash my hands with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch...For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and that we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:2, 30-33). Job felt the distance between himself and God and he wanted to have that distance removed. You may remember how the daysman comes in at chapter 33; the true Daysman is Christ. Who

could remove the distance? None but the Son of God. How is He going to remove it? There is only one way; He must go into death.

I do not think that we dwell sufficiently upon the sufferings of Christ. I would encourage you to go and watch with Him in Gethsemane. I have often thought of how, when He was there, there was none to watch with Him. He took three disciples with Him to watch with Him, but they went to sleep, and an angel appeared unto Him and strengthened Him. Yet the Lord has had many follow Him in spirit into Gethsemane since and I love in my spirit to travel there. How one's soul is subdued by it! But there are no atoning sufferings in Gethsemane. Satan was allowed to press upon the spirit of the Lord all that was involved in His going to the cross. "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). But He speaks to the Father: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done". Jesus goes through Gethsemane in perfect communion with God.

But when you come to the three hours of darkness on the cross, which He entered into in order to remove the distance which had come in between your soul and God, there is no communion; it was unmitigated judgment; it was total forsaking. Do you think that we would trifle with sin, or ever have any question of the eternal judgment of those who die in their sins, if we contemplated intelligently what Christ went into in those three dark hours?

Think of the Lord Jesus as the One who was great enough to bear the full weight of divine judgment against sin! He would secure for the heart of God that by which God could come out in all the magnitude of His grace toward man. But oh! think of what it cost Him to go into the darkness! It is more than the sin offering here. You remember the cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Do you remember what happened just before He went into the darkness? There was a dying robber by His side, and the dying robber said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say to thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). And immediately it follows, "And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour". The blessed Lord, as it were, said to him, 'I will speak peace to you now; I

must go alone into the next three hours, for none could stand with Me there, but I will first set you at peace in the light of all that I am about to pass through and we will meet on the other side.'

What took place in those three hours of darkness, when He was having to say to sin and was forsaken by His God, is left largely for our souls to contemplate. For thirty three and a half years He had passed through this scene with never a cloud between Himself and God but in those three dark hours, when He was having to say to God in regard of sin, all that God is in His holy nature against sin burst forth upon Him. There was not one drop of comfort in that bitter cup; He drank the dregs of bitterness but He was great enough to exhaust the full weight of divine judgment against sin, and He exhausts it before He dies. Then He cries with a loud voice, "It is finished".

You may ask, 'If He bore the judgment of God against sin before He died, why did He die?' He must die to make atonement; He must die to end our condition in the flesh and I believe He died to illuminate, with the fathomless love of God, the dark valley of death. Death spoke of God's displeasure. Christ goes into it, displays the heart of God, meets all the power of Satan in his stronghold and overcomes him, and now God has raised Him from the dead and placed Him in glory, and the glory of God shines in His blessed face. In the place God has given Christ, in that bright glory, I see by faith the immeasurable distance between God and man removed for ever. If you will turn to Christ, God will not only give you the sense of the forgiveness of your sins, and the knowledge that the power of death has been broken for you, but He will give you the Holy Spirit and through Him a living conscious link with Christ in glory, whereby you may enjoy now and eternally the favour in which He, as Man, is in the presence of God.

God has placed a world under that righteous One. He placed a world under Adam. What did he do with it? He filled it with sin and death. But there is a Man who has had to say to sin, putting it away by the sacrifice of Himself, and under Him God has placed a living world, and He invites you to have a part in it. Yet it is also a righteous world and only righteous people can have a part in it. I hear someone say, 'What hope is there then for me, a sinner, to share in that world?'

Well, that righteous world is for sinners who take their true place with God. The moment a man takes his true place of repentance towards God he has done the first right thing he ever did. If you desire a place in that world, I would encourage you to get to God about your sins. Have you ever done this; taking sides with God against them, owning to Him that had He judged you for them it is only what you deserved? These are the marks of a repentant man. If a man owns that he is all wrong, that proves that he is getting right.

Now it says in the scripture we read, “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked”. It is a serious thing to mock! “Others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.” There may be those who are saying, ‘I would like to be a christian, and I mean to be one some day.’ If I could assure you that a week hence you might not only hear the gospel but also would be saved by it, would I encourage you to postpone your acceptance of it until then? I would not. I will tell you why. I would not dare to die without Christ, but I would not care to live without Him. And if I could make such a promise to you, and you took me at my word and said, ‘I will put it off for another week’, you would miss something which you would never pick up in eternity—a whole week of the company of Christ! Would I want to rob you of that? I certainly would not! “Others said, We will hear thee again” but there is no record that they had another opportunity for it says, “Paul departed from among them”.

Let me tell you something that happened in my own life. I have never forgiven myself in regard of it. Over thirty years ago, when I was a young christian, I was lodging with several other young men in a big house and in that house was a man called Trevor, to whom I had often spoken about the Lord. One Saturday night a gospel meeting was being held and I said to him, ‘I wish you would come and hear the gospel tonight’. ‘No’, he said, ‘I will come next week’. I told him that next week he might not have the opportunity but he insisted that he could not come that night but would do so the following week.

On the following Tuesday I was sitting in my room and it was past midnight. I had been reading in the Bible about the coming of the Lord and I thought to myself, Supposing the Lord were to come tonight, are all in this house prepared to meet Him? I at once thought of Trevor and had a profound sense that the

Spirit of God would have me go and speak with him. I was deeply impressed with the possibility of the Lord coming that night and that man not being ready. I thought that I could not go and hammer on his door at that time of night for I would disturb others in the house; so after a long argument with myself, but utterly unhappy in my spirit, I decided to leave it. The next morning we all went to business as usual but on my way home in the evening I met one of my fellow lodgers who told me that Trevor had been killed in an accident that morning. I never forgave myself. Oh, for one more opportunity to speak to that man about Christ, but I had missed it for ever.

I trust that you will not delay. “Others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain clave unto him, and believed.” The names of some of them are written down for us here in the scripture. “Among which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.” But the writing is still going on, for the Spirit of God is writing yet. Is He going to write your name down in this, it may be the last hours of the day of His grace? Are you going to decide for Christ today and have your name inscribed amongst those who believe?

Oh! that you might just make your decision now, not only for eternity, but for time! I do not want to present a gospel just to take you to heaven; I want to present a gospel that will give you the unspeakable privilege of being for Christ down here.

I have known Him, blessed be His name, for over thirty years, and when I go ‘home’ I am not going to a strange Christ; I am going to meet One whose blessed features I have been learning these many years. I would like to encourage you to close in with Him, not only for the coming day, but in order that you may begin an acquaintance with His heart now, and get to know Him better and better until He calls His people home.

Herbert Gill

The second of a series of preachings.