

No. 38

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.

(This article covers the last two exhortations. The first two were printed in issue number 37.)

“Keep yourselves in the love of God”

By way of illustration I want to refer to Acts chapter 11. In the early part of the chapter it has been established through Peter’s experience that God was working among the Gentiles as well as among the Jews. “Then indeed God has to the nations also granted repentance to life”, and then we are told that those who were scattered through persecution went about speaking the word and, while some spoke only to Jews, some who were perhaps more bold came to Antioch and spoke to the Greeks also announcing the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus. “And the Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” I trust, dear fellow christian, that is what happened to you when you were converted. You believed and you turned to the Lord. You stop looking at yourself, and begin to look to the Lord.

Word of this got back to Jerusalem. The movement of information was not as easy as it is now but someone took the word back there. It was a happy moment

in Jerusalem, when they heard of the work of God in another place and set out to forward it by sending Barnabas. He arrived at Antioch and saw the grace of God. What did he see? He saw Greeks who had recently been heathen idolaters who had now turned to the Lord and were waiting on the Lord and seeking direction. Barnabas rejoiced to see the work of God and he exhorted all with purpose of heart to abide with the Lord.

I think that has to do with keeping ourselves in the love of God. I know it is personal to the Lord here but we should all keep ourselves in the love of God. We do easily stray outside of it; things are going well and we feel that God loves us and then things do not go so well and we feel that we have ended up on the shady side of the street and the sun is not shining any more. Jude tells us to keep ourselves in the love of God. Do not get out of the sunshine; there may be troubles on the sunny side of the street as well but keep in the sunshine, keep yourselves in the love of God. Barnabas says, 'The first thing you need is purpose of heart. Do not give up; keep going and abide with the Lord'. This good counsel is recorded for us. Do not try to do it on your own but abide with the Lord.

A large crowd of people were added to the Lord. They were attached to Him personally and they clung to Him. And then Barnabas saw there was someone else that could help, Saul or Paul, so he brought him to Antioch and there they were for a whole year gathered together in the assembly and taught a large crowd.

I may not have much capacity for teaching but we would do well to use what capacity we have because, thank God, there is another generation coming along. We need teaching so that we are sound in the faith and do not get tossed about by winds of doctrine. It is important to have an outline of sound words; it is important to know what the Bible says and what it does not say. At Antioch they were together for a whole year and no doubt they were glad to get together and learn. And as we go on we find that Antioch is a good place to be, a good centre for the testimony of the Lord. The work of God was prospering there. The disciples were first called christians there. That is a dignified title, even if those who gave them that title did not mean anything very dignified. They heard the christians speak about Christ and so gave them that name. Our concern needs to be that we are worthy of such a name.

“Awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ”

Finally, Jude says, “Awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” That is an unusual way of speaking about the coming of the Lord. Of course we need mercy from day to day and if we pray and call on God for it I trust we receive it. But awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ conveys something that we need to wait for until He comes to grant it to us. As we see the state of the world and the darkening conditions around us, we can say wholeheartedly that that is the mercy we are looking forward to, to be taken out of it all.

One aspect of the faith of christians is we are looking for the Lord to come. When we reach the end of Scripture, in the book of the Revelation, and John is about to close the book, having no more to say about prophecy—that is all over—the Lord says He has sent a messenger to testify these things in the assemblies. Then John gives the Spirit’s comment: “The Spirit and the bride say, Come”. The Spirit surely is looking for the Lord to come. His work in a sense is then complete. I know the Spirit is to be with us forever but as for His work down here, as the hymn writer says:

*‘Soon shall this service cease,
Thy patient toil be o’er.’*

Now, I would ask, ‘Have you a conscious sense of having part in the bride of Christ?’ Are you conscious of belonging to this company that is to be for the pleasure of the Lord eternally? You might say, ‘How do I reach that in my soul?’ We are told in another place that: “By one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body”. So that gives us a place together in what scripture calls the body. But the bride is particularly the saints of God viewed as those that are to be for the pleasure and joy of the Lord at His coming. The heart of the bride is looking for the Bridegroom. The Lord looks to have His church to be with Himself. This is not something to contemplate only when days are bright but when days are very difficult:

*‘Midst darkness faith clearly sees beaming
The light of Thy coming afar.’*

The darker it gets outside the more we begin to look for the bright and morning star.

I would like to leave with you a sense that this is your place as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ: to have a part with those who are looking for the Lord and His coming. I am not directing you to any particular christian company save to say that to find a practical part with others in looking for the Lord to come is a

great blessing for your soul. It is a great preservative too because it gives direction to your life. It is the proper calling of all the saints of God. The sorrow is that not all are very conscious of it and we could all be much more conscious of it than we are. But let us be looking to the coming of the Lord. It is a mercy but it is also for His joy and for His glory.

David Burr

Part 2 of an address at Defford, 1999.

“Building yourselves up on your most holy faith.” and “Praying in the Holy Spirit.” were printed in issue number 37.

HE THINKS OF ME

Psalm 40:17

In sorrow's hour, when earthly links are broken,
And loved ones are by Jesus called to rest,
In grief my soul seeks comfort in His presence
And solace finds—a balm for hearts oppressed.
He thinks of me.

And when a Father's hand in wisdom gives me
The cup of weakness, weariness and pain:
I learn that love my blessing has been planning:
And even when I cannot see the gain
He thinks of me.

When pressed by foes without and fears within me,
'Fear not, my child', He calls, 'Be not dismayed.'
No weapon formed against His own will prosper.
On this I rest; His faithful word hath said
He thinks of me.

He thinks of me. Yes, and with understanding,
He loves and cares, He takes my burden sore.
And underneath with arms of strength upholding
I know He's ever near: I ask no more.
He thinks of me.

William Findlay

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

My life is in the yellow leaf,
The flowers and fruit of love are gone;
The worm, the canker and the grief
Are mine alone.

Byron

A CHRISTIAN PARAPHRASE (Written 1915)

My life is in the yellow leaf,
But I have heard God's call above;
No worm, nor canker and no grief
Are in His love.

He gave His Son in death to lie,
And took away death's sting for me;
That I might live (and never die)
In liberty.

And sure it is that by and by
He'll take me with my Lord to be;
That I may live with Him on high
Eternally.

So whether old, or whether young,
In God Himself I find my rest;
And in His praise I'll use my tongue,
For ever blest.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER
(Written 1940)

My life is in its winter now,
Spring, summer, autumn, all are gone,
But God's great love I still avow,
My heart has won.

The warmth and sunshine of His love,
Make brightest summer-time to me,
And here I wait the call above,
His face to see.

Yet not alone; His saints are here,
In heavenly bonds to walk as one;
And gather to that Name so fair,
Of Christ alone.

To feed on life's perennial Tree,
To mind the things that are above,
To drink the stream, so full and free,
Of endless love.

If such our life, no shade is there,
Or worm, or canker, or of grief;
No dread of signs which may appear
Of yellow leaf!

We praise our God that, where sin reigned
To death, with all its pain and grief,
His grace has triumphed and has gained
So great relief.

D. L. Higgins [1850-1945]

YE ARE NOT YOUR OWN

“Not your own”, but His by right
His peculiar treasure now,
Fair and precious in His sight,
Purchased jewels for His brow.
He will keep what thus He sought,
Safely guard the dearly bought,
Cherish that which He did choose,
Safely guard and never lose.

“Not your own”, but His, the King,
He the Lord of earth and sky,
He to whom archangels bring
Homage deep and praises high.
What can royal birth bestow?
Or the proudest titles show?
Can such dignity be known
As the glorious name, His own!

“Not your own”, To Him ye owe
All your life and all your love;
Live that ye His praise may show,
Who is yet all praise above.
Every day and every hour,
Every gift and every power,
Consecrate to Him alone,
Who hath claimed you for His own.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)

QUESTIONS FROM GHANA

Background

This article includes a selection of questions asked by a Muslim who has since found his way from Islam to Christ. It will be evident that he was studying the Bible and the questions are printed here for two reasons. Firstly, they give an insight into the problems faced by those brought up under Islam. The first few questions fall particularly into this category. The second reason for printing the questions, and the answers, is that some believers may themselves ask these kind of things. More could be said on many of the points but the intention in the replies was to direct to the Scriptures rather than to reply at length. (The answers were all provided by David Burr.)

The questions and the replies

Question From Galatians 4:22-30, Muslims say that verse 22 is pointing to two covenants of Isaac and Ishmael and that the first covenant is dead while that of Ishmael is perfect and working at present. How do you explain this to me as a Muslim?

Answer The two covenants in Galatians are:

[i] bondage and the law, and

[ii] promise and liberty (Jerusalem above, and Isaac).

Jesus has set free those who believe in Him, and nobody who has tasted freedom should want to be back in bondage (Galatians 2:21 & 5:1).

Question From John 16:7 is he said “Comforter” a human being or a divine being? The Muslims say that because the word “he” is used in the King James version this verse is speaking of a human person who was the last prophet.

Answer The Comforter is the Holy Spirit (John 14:16) and is God, not man (Genesis 1:2, John 4:24, Romans 5:5, 1 Corinthians 12:11). God is always “he” in the Bible.

Question Muslims accept that God is One, but why do christians speak of God in three Persons, i.e. Matthew 28:19, Acts 5:3-4, 2 Corinthians 12:4-6 & 13:14, and Ephesians 4:4-6? From the ten commandments, Isaiah and Deuteronomy the almighty God disclosed that He is the One and only God (Allah). Please explain God in three Persons and the holy Trinity to me.

Answer God is certainly One (Deuteronomy 6:4). He is also three, because He has made Himself known in three Persons all of whom are co-existent and co-eternal (John 1:18, 14:16, 15:26, & 17:5). I cannot possibly 'explain' the Trinity: but if you open your heart to the Holy Spirit He will help you to accept and enjoy the revelation of God to believers in our Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

Question How many times are christians commanded by Christ to pray in a day?

Answer There are no rules about how often to pray, but remember 1 Thessalonians 5:17, which means having a prayerful spirit all of the time.

Question In whose name do christians baptise a new convert, Jesus Christ, or the Trinity? Please give me a proof from the Bible.

Answer There is Bible authority for baptising to or in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 10:48 & 19:5) and also to the full name of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19). I personally like to use both.

Question Is baptism a sign pointing to repentance, or burial of your old body, or your total salvation after being baptised? What is Holy Spirit baptism, and which of the two is best to be attained by a christian?

Answer Water baptism is a sign of our burial with Christ (Romans 6:3). We are not saved by being baptised. The baptism of the Holy Spirit brings you into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13) and is one effect of the gift of the Holy

Spirit to those who obey God (Acts 5:32). Though both baptisms convey that my old nature has had to go, they are different, and every believer needs both.

Question Based on Hebrews 11:1, faith can only be understood as accepting God, but Christ was born of the human race. So why should we have faith in Him and accept Him as our Saviour, as the christian doctrine declares in Acts 4:12 and John 3:15?

Answer If the Lord Jesus were only a man He would not be our Saviour and Lord, but He is also God (John 1:1) and He calls on us to believe on Him (John 14:1) and salvation follows when we do (Acts 16:31).

Question Is tithing still in force as at first in the Old Testament?

Answer The New Testament does not require tithing. It encourages sacrificial but willing giving (2 Corinthians 8:9 & 9:7). [Read all of both chapters]

Question Christian doctrine says we are now under grace [rather than law] and I want to know a lot about the subject of law and grace.

Answer Law goes back to the commandments but includes the whole idea of trying to please God by good works (Romans 10:5). There is nothing wrong with the law itself (Romans 7:12) except that no one can keep it in their own strength, which is why the Lord Jesus has died for us (Romans 5:6). Grace is the goodness of God and now reigns (Romans 5:21) and gives us our privileges as believers (Ephesians 4:4-9).

Question What is sin?

Answer 1 John 3:4 is best translated “sin is lawlessness”, that is to say doing what I want and not what God wants (Ephesians 2:3).

Question Who is Satan? Who is Lucifer and what is the difference between a serpent and a snake?

Answer Satan is the devil, that “ancient serpent” [or snake] (Revelation 20:2). Genesis 3 tells us plenty about him, and Isaiah illustrated from Babylon the kind of presumption that marks him and those through whom he operates.

Question What type of food and drink is a christian not permitted to eat?

Answer We are to abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood, and from what is strangled (Acts 15:29). I know of nothing else.

Question Please give me the full meaning of the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:1-12).

Answer In a letter like this I cannot do justice to the Lord’s teaching on the mount. He is saying what sort of people belong to the kingdom of the heavens, the kind of spirit they show, and the sort of blessings they enjoy either now or in the future. Remember He was speaking to Jews, who hoped to restore an earthly kingdom even by force of arms. He is saying that the kingdom of the heavens is not like that.

Question Kindly explain to me the vivid point of love, or Christ’s unfailing love, or in short, John 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-8.

Answer God is love (1 John 4:8) and shows His love by giving His Son (John 3:16) and His Spirit (Romans 5:5). He expects us to love too (1 John 4:7-21). I cannot explain love, but I know that God loves me (and you) and that I love God, even though with nothing like His love for us.

GUIDANCE

**“He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
for his name’s sake”** (Psalm 23:3).

“The paths of righteousness”. There are such even in a world confused by sin. There are paths which are approved of God as right and comely, in which His people may walk. Have we found them? Do we tread them?

The verse begins, “He restoreth my soul”. This is not, as some suppose, restoration after failure; it has more the sense of invigoration. After hard manual work a person may feel the wear and tear of life, but then is wonderfully and sweetly restored by sleep. The believer similarly feels the strain connected with the toil and conflict inseparable from life in this world, but he has an unfailing and blessed resource in his Lord. We come from Him into matters of this present life, to be for Him here, and our retreat is with Him. When feeling pressure here we retire to His company and gain fresh vigour for the conflict.

Thus are we prepared for treading the paths of righteousness in which our Shepherd leads. Drawing all our strength and vigour from the joy of His presence we only seek to follow Him.

The world is a tangled maze in which the shrewdest human wisdom is lost. Sin has confused everything. How shall we find our way? Shall we adopt the manners, principles and motives of the world? Surely not. To do so is only to cast ourselves more deeply into the labyrinth. Is it safe to make a rule of following our brethren in Christ, and do whatever we find them doing? Again the answer must be, ‘Surely not’. Of Israel of old it was said, “the Lord alone did lead him.” So now it is our privilege to have our eye steadfastly fixed on Him and to say, “He leadeth me”.

Every believer would own his responsibility to walk in ways of righteousness but all are not clear what the standard of righteousness is. It is not that which seems right in our own eyes for that is the principle of the world but it is that which is according to the revealed character and will of God and that which is in harmony with our relationship to Him. Nothing less than this is righteousness for the believer.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable . . . for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). We should therefore give diligent heed to all that God has written. There we find set forth all that He is and there we learn all that He has made us to be to Himself. Thus are we instructed in every

obligation which rests upon us and our minds are formed by all God's will concerning us.

But further than this, we find all the principles of righteousness embodied in the life and walk of our blessed Lord on earth. With His own feet He has marked out the path and He calls us to follow Him as His sheep. He puts us in no place which He has not Himself filled. Every excellency was found most perfectly displayed in Him; love, holiness, dependence, obedience, devotedness; all that God looked for as according to His own character and will, and as suited to man's position, He found in His blessed Son as Man here on earth. How attractive thus becomes every element of righteousness as we see it set forth in His blessed Person!

There is another idea also connected with His leading and our following Him, which is that our eyes are fixed on Him and we have spiritually the joy of His presence. Many seek to engage themselves with the life of the blessed Lord, endeavouring to imitate it, but they find it hard and difficult. What is the reason? They are like one tracing a path which he knows he ought to tread, with no object for his heart in that path, and everything around to attract him from it. It is very different when one follows closely behind the dearest friend, whose company cheers and whose kindly words encourage. Other things lose then their attraction and we are soothed as regards the sorrows, difficulties, and fears of our way. Now the Lord has passed through all our path and has reached the throne of God but from that place He gives us the sense of His perfect interest in us, His tender care for us, His delight to cheer us, and His gracious approval as we follow Him. It is as "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith," that we run with patience the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:2). We have Him where He is as the object of our soul's affection and we run on in His own path until we reach Him where He is.

"He leadeth me". Mark the personal character of it all. It is not that we ignore others or undervalue their fellowship; on the contrary we desire that we may walk together in the same steps but this can only be as we each have the eye fixed on the Lord Himself and are directed by Him. We thus walk together for we follow Him.

Why does He thus care for His sheep and lead them so tenderly? The answer is, "for his name's sake." The great end is always His own satisfaction and the manifestation of the glory of His name. He watches over us then and directs us for this very thing, that we may be here for His own pleasure, and for the

spreading abroad of the lustre of His name. How sweet it is thus to think of all that He gains for Himself in the comely and right behaviour of His own!

May He give to each one to be fortified for the path we tread, directed of Him, and cheered by His precious love, that we may thus be found ever in “the paths of righteousness, for His name’s sake”!

J Revell

This continues the series of meditations on Psalm 23. In the next issue DV ‘Confidence’.

CHRIST’S PRIESTLY SERVICE TYPIFIED IN AARON’S

Exodus 28

This chapter tells us of the garments that Aaron had to put on to present himself before Jehovah. He was the representative of the people, these twelve tribes of Israel whose names he carried, a type of what Christ is doing for us in heaven. The Lord is not priest according to the **order** of Aaron, but He is exercising priesthood, at the present time, according to the **type** presented in Aaron.

Christ is now hidden in God, like the High Priest when he entered into the most holy place on the day of atonement.

A priest presupposes sins, miseries, or (as in the Epistle to the Hebrews) weaknesses. He is a mediator to intercede in favour of the people and to represent them before God. I am weak, but all my weaknesses become not an occasion of judgment but the occasion, for God, of displaying all His tenderness and all His compassions towards me by the means of our Priest.

Down here Jesus washes our feet, but **in the presence of God** He represents us in His perfection. He unfolds the riches of God’s mercies towards us down here, and He presents us to God in His own perfection. Exodus 28 shows us how the priest presents us before God.

The ephod was the characteristic garment of the High Priest. The two parts of it were joined by two shoulder-pieces which carried the names of the twelve tribes on two onyx stones. The girdle is a sign of service: “Let your loins be girded” (Luke 12:35). The breastplate was fastened to the ephod, and also carried the names of the twelve tribes on twelve stones. The garments were made of fine

twined linen; they were ornamented, as it were, with all possible graces, while the ground-work represented purity itself.

Aaron was to carry the children of Israel before God. He carried them on his **shoulders**: all the burden of His people and His government is on the shoulders of Christ. If the stones had not been on Aaron's shoulders, the ephod would have fallen down: it was fastened together by the names of the children of Israel. If Christ is Priest, we are on His shoulders, carried in memorial before God. He carries the burden and the government; He does everything. Its efficacy depends entirely on Him, even in what we do for the church.

Aaron also carried the names of his people on his **heart**, on the breastplate of judgment. There is not a ray of God's glory and love shining on Christ that does not also shine on us who are carried upon His heart. Christ's heart presents us to God. It is not only to obtain particular graces for us, but it is **ourselves** that He presents, according to the love that there is between Him and God.

The Urim and the Thummim are the **lights** and the **perfections**. Aaron carried the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before God, according to the perfections of the presence of God. Our sins cannot get beyond Christ and come in between God and Him. He maintains us continually in judgment before God, according to the lights and perfections of this presence. God never hides His face. He may chasten us; through our fault we may lose communion with Him; but if God hid His face from us He would be hiding it from Christ...It is our failures that bring up a cloud between us and God; that is a consequence of our weakness. But God's sovereign grace is not changed by it at all.

"Holiness to Jehovah" is always before God. Our prayers go up in holiness to Jehovah because Christ is there. The iniquity of our holy offerings (for there is iniquity, and all our service is imperfect), is presented before God according to divine holiness in Christ.

This chapter gives us a better understanding of the extent of the love and the features of grace that are towards us, so that we are filled with thanksgiving, and find ever fresh resources in Christ; for our acquaintance with Him can always grow, and increase our joy.

J. N. Darby

Translated from "Le Messager Evangelique" 1886 Vol.27 page 214.

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OPPOSITION TO BE EXPECTED

I Thessalonians 1

It is a beautiful testimony that the apostle renders to the Thessalonians in this chapter. He was praying unceasingly for them in view of their combats against Satan, interceding in order that God might act in their hearts and sustain them against the attacks of the enemy. But the apostle was also always giving thanks to God for them all, their state being a source of joy for him before God.

Before beginning this subject, let us observe that by their afflictions they were in communion with the apostle and the Lord, and filled with joy (verses 6 and 7). There is never a religious awakening without persecution. Satan would wish above all that christians should remain quiet and live in conformity to the world. Thus when the rights of Christ are claimed over hearts in this world, which is the kingdom of Satan, he sets everything in motion to oppose that. Did he not raise up all possible kinds of opposition against Jesus? As soon as we become imitators of the apostles, we have the joy of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by persecutions. The effect of these is to expose the flesh wherever it is. God uses Satan's opposition to manifest what there is in man's heart. The effect of the faithfulness of christians is to make the world—unknown to itself—a preacher of the gospel, even by means of the persecution; for in blaming the principles, conduct and hopes of the christian, the world speaks of them and publicises them.

But let us return to the reason for the apostle's thanksgiving. In verse three we find several remarkable expressions. The words "before our God and Father" show that all that the Thessalonians were doing flowed from the true source of good. "Your work of faith": there are christian works which, being done in the light and the profession of Christ, glorify God before men (Matthew 5:16). There are others which are begun with Him but carried on without regard to God and consequently do not glorify Him. Faith, love and hope were the basis of the work, labour and patience (respectively) of the Thessalonians. The church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:2) also had works, labour and patience, but their first love had faded away. The water was still flowing while the spring had already dried up.

A work of faith flows out exclusively from the relationships of my soul with Christ, without regard to either difficulties or results, but with regard only to the will of God. Labour must be the fruit of love, otherwise it is hireling's work. Our labour can only be anything by love, because in this way it is the expression

of the love of God. Patience in this labour will very soon be necessary because of the difficulties and opposition that we meet. This patience must be that of hope... Christian patience is not just letting things carry on, but strength in view of the hope of glory, in the midst of the world's scorn and rejection. Nothing can discourage it. The object of faith is always the same; the love of Christ is always the same; the glory that is promised to us is unchangeable.

The truths that had brought the christians of Thessalonica into this life of activity and communion are recapitulated in verses 9 and 10. They had turned from idols to God, not to other idols. Everything that detaches our heart from God is an idol. The miser worships the idol **money**, the glutton makes **his belly** his god. To rest on money in order to be happy is also idolatry. Only the efficacy of the Holy Spirit can turn us from idols to God. When God takes possession of the heart, the idols fall. That does not happen without a struggle. God must be our only object. No doubt the way may be traversed more (or less) quickly, but the chief point is that God should be our object...

Since their conversion the Thessalonians had been awaiting the Lord Jesus from the heavens. His coming was the moment awaited for their deliverance and their joy. We desire the presence of the One we love: to be joyful in awaiting the Lord, we must also be assured that He is coming to take us to Himself, and that there is neither judgment nor wrath to come for us. The christian is not in any vague relationships with the Lord but in known relationships. Christ is known as Friend and Saviour. Believing on Him we are on His side in this world. We must be either of the first Adam or of the second. If I am united to the second Adam, I know my destiny, and I know that if the first Adam deprived me of the earthly paradise, the second has given me heaven. The whole life of the Thessalonians had become the manifestation of their communion with Christ.

J. N. Darby

Translated from "Le Messager Evangelique" 1887 Vol.28 page 277.

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THE BESIEGED CITY

2 Kings 6: 24-29

7: 1-20

My purpose is to speak on the great famine in Samaria. There is a well known saying that Scripture has only one interpretation, though it may have many applications. I do not propose to interpret this Scripture. (Interpreted, it no doubt refers to a people in relationship with God, in the place of privilege, but under the power of the enemy.) My thought is rather to apply it.

Two scenes are brought before us. In the one, you get a fearful struggle for existence; in the other the abundance of supply. These two scenes are found very close together and, for the moment at least, they exist concurrently. They represent, to my mind, two spheres which can easily be seen and taken account of by those who have eyes to see them. They are both found in this world. On the one hand, Satan has set up his kingdom and it is marked by famine and death. On the other hand, God has brought to pass His kingdom and it is marked by abundance and life.

The people of Israel were in a sad plight and they present a sorry and a solemn spectacle. Ben-Hadad the king of Syria had come against Samaria with his army and had besieged it and shut up the city to death. What a picture it is of what Satan has brought to pass in this world.

You may remember that scripture in Ecclesiastes: “There was a little city, and few men within it”. The “little city” represents this world. You may say: ‘This world is a very big city.’ Oh yes, but it was a little city when Satan besieged it—only two people in it. “And there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it.” Why did the devil build great bulwarks against this world city? If an enemy builds bulwarks against a city, his purpose is to cut off all communication between those within and those without.

We get a glimpse of the state of things resulting from the siege. There was famine in that city. God never intended His creature to be in famine. He delights that man should be in moral abundance. When God created man at the outset, He gave him affections and desires and He meant to satisfy them, but He intended that He Himself should be the satisfaction. When Satan got man’s ear and led him into sin he knew that, consequent on that, God must pass sentence of death

on His creature and Satan used that with tremendous force to instill into man's heart fear and dread and distrust of God. These are the mighty bulwarks that the enemy built against this world city, thinking to cut off all communication between the creature and the Creator. For the moment it looked as though he had succeeded, for communication was cut off between the creature and the God. But Satan could not shut God out; he could not destroy communication between the Friend outside and the besieged inside.

Now man is a moral being and he must be kept going with something. What were these poor people in that city doing? They were eating asses' heads, and paying famine prices for them. Ten dollars for the head of an ass in that besieged city. And they were eating dove's dung and paying half a dollar for a cup of it. And such was the straitness of the siege, that women were eating their offspring. What a blighting of all those finer sensibilities which God established in connection with man. What an awful contrast to Eden, that fair scene of plenty and beauty and love. Yet that is a picture of what is going on all around us, of what Satan has brought to pass in this world city which he has besieged.

Did you ever stop and think of what this world offers a man for his heart? He is a moral being and Satan knows it and seeks to keep him going, otherwise out of sheer desperation he might break away and turn to God.

I think that the great mass are being fed on what appeals to their pride and ambition and self will. What is there in that for man's heart? Look at the various walks of life in this world. They all present opportunities for man's ambition to be fed and his pride and self-will to be gratified.

Look at the world of letters and learning, or the world of finance, or war, or politics or religion. They all present fields in which Satan energises man to gratify his ambition and feed his pride. Take account of the men who have risen to the top in these various spheres of life—presidents, great generals, writers, millionaires—what have they got for their heart? Nothing! Their heart is empty. No more food in that than on an ass's head—there is very poor picking on that—and yet what a price they pay to get there, the surrender of every moral principle; famine prices, such as they paid in that famine-stricken city in Samaria!

Then there were those kept going on something far worse than that. There were some who were feeding on dove's dung. Loathsome, disgusting stuff! None but a man of vitiated appetite could be induced to feed on that. Yet there are thousands

in this world city kept going on that which answers morally to dove's dung. Look at the printing press today, pouring out its tons of vile literature, and people are swallowing it. They are living on it. Pass down the streets of your city—note the places of amusement and see what they are dealing out for the hearts of man. It is being swallowed wholesale. People are living on dove's dung and they are paying a fearful price for it. Think of the cost—depraved minds, shattered bodies, damned souls. That is what they are doing in the besieged city.

Then the fearful struggle for prominence in this world, whether socially, or financially, with all the jealousy and bitterness and hatred and greed—men at the throats of their fellow, with no regard for those relationships which God established among men. That is what answers, I think, to women eating their offspring during the seige.

That is a picture of what Satan's world is—the besieged city, around which the mighty bulwarks of the enemy have been built. It is man without God, dependant on Satan to minister to his need. Is there anything morally beautiful about that? No, you morally shrink from it. It is horrible. The breath of hell is on the whole scene dominated by Satan.

As the king of Israel passed along the wall of Samaria a woman cried unto him: "Help, my Lord, O King". It was a cry that represented the characteristic state of that city. Things were unbearable. Satan goes too far; he draws the reins too tightly sometimes. The woman's cry was not intelligent; she cried to the wrong man but that cry went further than the ears of the king. It went right up to the ears of God and sank into His heart.

The king said, "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee; out of the barn floor or out of the wine press?" A wise answer that: what can man do in the presence of such an enemy? Nothing! The king was no better than the woman. He was besieged too. That is as true today as it was then. Draw near to thinking persons and they will tell you that things are very unsatisfactory. They try to better the social and economic conditions; philosophers philosophise and statesmen legislate, hoping to bring about a happier state of affairs but they leave God out, and the city is still besieged. If men were honest they would answer the cry that ascends from this famine-stricken world just as the king of Israel did: "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?"

Friend, there is nothing in this world for your heart. The barn floor and the winepress are both empty. There is neither food nor joy in them. There is only famine and woe and misery on the barn floor and in the winepress of this world's besieged city.

I said a moment ago that the woman's cry went right up to the heart of God and He answered it. The impotency of man has only furnished an opportunity for the display of God's power and His love. The scripture I quoted from Ecclesiastes earlier continues: "Now there was found in it (that little city) a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man".

I pass on now to another scene. The Syrians are in flight, so filled with fear that they do not even unloose their horses, nor take down their tents, and all the way of their flight is strewn with garments and vessels which they have cast away in their haste. There is utter defeat for the enemy. The Syrians had invaded divine territory, just as Satan, in capturing man, had invaded God's land. They had come with a great host and besieged Samaria but the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear the noise of the chariots, even the noise of a great host. The host of God had invaded the Syrian camp and the voice of God had sounded there.

Here we get a striking figure of what has come to pass through Jesus, the blessed Son of God. He came into this world as the poor wise man and by His wisdom delivered the city.

He was poor; He had none of this world's resources. Satan offered them all to Him but He would not touch them. Its glory and its pride in no way appealed to Him. They had no place in His heart. The whole thing was under the dominion of the enemy. He on whom death had no claim died in this world. Think of that! He died rather than recognise Satan; indeed He died to annul Satan, and His wisdom was displayed in His death. He had resources—infinite resources outside of human understanding and they came to light when He died. The resources of the heart of God were at His disposal. He had ever found His joy in connection with them and He brought those resources near to man.

He has invaded Satan's territory. He has shattered the bulwarks of the enemy—darkness and death—for He has brought into the scene of death the light of the love of God. O friend, have you heard the voice of Jesus, God's blessed Son,

telling out at Calvary (where Satan's power was at its height) the heart of God? Has the light of that reached your heart? If so, God has got into the besieged city. One bulwark has gone, the bulwark of darkness. I will tell you something else. If the light of God's love has reached your heart, if you can say, 'I know His heart, and His love has won my heart', then the siege is over. There is no more famine. Your soul hunger is gone and in finding your joy and satisfaction in God you have begun to live. The second bulwark, the bulwark of death, has been demolished and you have got out of the city. You can say 'God loves me, and I love Him'. The bulwarks are gone and the poor wise Man has done it. I wonder if you know Him, and if not, would you like to know Him? He is not in death now. He is risen from the dead. He sits at God's right hand, a Prince and a Saviour.

If there is one that does not know Him, let me say, He is well worthy of your confidence; the windows of heaven have been opened and the Holy Spirit has come down to bring near to you all that has been brought out in that blessed Man.

You do not need to ascend into heaven to bring Christ down, nor into the deep to bring Him up from the dead. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth... that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." The kingdom is near to you, as near as Satan's kingdom was near to you. It is right here for you. Will you not step out of Satan's besieged city into a sphere where salvation and abundance and life may be enjoyed in the power of the Holy Spirit?

Now the first to avail themselves of what had come to pass were four leprous men. Leprosy is a figure of sin, but it does not merely illustrate a man who says he has done things he ought not to have done and left undone things that he should have done. It illustrates a man who knows he is as bad as bad can be, inside and out. It is like a man who once came back from a preaching and said, 'I have learned three things from that preaching: first, that I never did a good thing in my life; second, that I never could do a good thing in my life; and, third, that Christ has done everything for me'. He had learned that he was only sin from centre to circumference; that is leprosy. When a man comes to that he says, 'There is only one thing for me, and that is death'. Good it would be if that truth got hold of you to-night.

“And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate.” Their case was desperate. Even if things had been normal their case was bad enough but, in a time of famine, their case was hopeless. “And they said to one another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore come, let us fall unto the host of the Syrians; if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.”

I can see those men coming. It was twilight. And they came just as a sinner comes to God. What brought them? Confidence? No! What brought the prodigal from the far country? The Father’s love for him? No! He had never known his Father’s heart. Sheer desperation brought him—a mighty famine—and it was twilight for him too; the full light of a father’s heart had not yet reached him. What brought any man in this room to Christ? It was desperation. That is just the way the sinner comes to God. He does not fully take in how he will be received.

When these men came to the uttermost part of the camp of the Syrians, there was no man there. The enemy was gone and instead of an enemy they found a Friend, for the best friend a poor hungry man could find would be food and drink, and they went from tent to tent eating and drinking. God had turned the enemy’s stronghold into a house of feasting and He has done the same thing spiritually. As a sinner, death was on me as the judgment of God. The thought of it rightly filled my heart with dread, but the poor wise Man has delivered the city. He has used death—man’s enemy too—as a means of revealing God and of winning man’s heart. In death I have found God, and God has found me. There is feasting.

They found raiment too, those leprous men. Everything to satisfy within and to clothe them without. Then what do they do? They begin to evangelise. Think of those four leprous men who but a short time before had been the most miserable in Samaria; they become earnest evangelists. They say: “We do not well; this is a day of good tidings and we hold our peace: if we tarry to the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king’s household”. There is a lesson in that for us. The “morning light” will soon break. The Lord will soon be here. If we miss the opportunity of witnessing to this world’s besieged city in the night of His rejection, we will suffer loss.

At first the king was sceptical but he sent and soon proved the truth of the glad tidings. But the lord on whose hand the king leaned, when he heard the previous day the prophet speaking of plenty on the morrow, scoffed at the thought. I trust that there is no man in this room to-night who would scoff at divine things. Within twenty-four hours that lord was dead in the midst of all the abundance. They trod upon him in the gate and he died. The blessing of life was all around him when judgment overtook him. O friend, how solemn for you, if in this moment of privilege, with those around you partaking of divine bounty, you despise it and perish for ever.

One word more and I am done. You notice what the prophet said in Samaria: "Tomorrow about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria". Yet these four men came into their blessing for nothing. How was that? They came that night and what they got they did not have to pay for. They got it all for nothing. Tomorrow you will pay for all you get but, tonight, you may have all there is in the heart of God for you for nothing! There was meat and drink and silver and gold and there was clothing, all for nothing.

I think it speaks of a sinner when he first comes to God. He gets everything for nothing. Those are the terms. Come to Christ tonight and get everything for nothing. Tomorrow you will pay for all you get. If you turn to God tonight, He will meet you just where you are. He will fill your heart like these lepers were filled up.

He will give you silver and gold. What is that? He will give you the Spirit and the Spirit's appreciation of Christ—unsearchable riches. You can come and be satisfied tonight and tomorrow you will want more of Christ. You will say, 'What I have had was very good, but I want more'. You can have all you want. "A measure of fine flour for a shekel and two measures of barley for a shekel". You have to pay more for the fine flour than for the barley. What is the barley? It speaks of how Christ will build you up that you may be vigorous and strong in spirit. But you have to pay for it. How? By way of self-surrender. But you can afford the price because in the power of the Holy Spirit you have such an appreciation of Christ that you prefer Him to yourself and every taste of Him you get makes you want more.

Then there is the fine flour. “A measure of fine flour for a shekel”. You have to pay twice as much for that as for the barley. It is more precious but you can afford it. It speaks, I think, of all the moral beauty of Jesus. The blessed Son of God was down here in Manhood, in this world, in perfect grace and meekness and in all the moral loveliness of One come down from heaven. Would you not like to be like that Man? Well you can be. The grace of that Man is brought within your reach and can be put upon you if you are prepared to pay the price of it. So that, instead of the horrible kind of thing which you find in the besieged city, the cruel jealousy and the malice and hatred that you find in Satan’s world, you get an order of man down here, taking character from the moral food he eats and coming out in all the moral grace and loveliness of the blessed Lord Himself.

I ask you, Is it not worth going in for? That is what God has brought to pass in connection with His kingdom. There is a scene of life there and of blessedness and perfect satisfaction.

Is there a soul here tonight that will step out of Satan’s kingdom into the kingdom of God, out of a scene of darkness and death and into a scene of light and perfect satisfaction?

May God bless His word and give us to appreciate in deeper measure what He has brought to pass.

Herbert Gill

This concludes this series of preachings.