

No. 40

Living Water

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“IN ALL THE SCRIPTURES THE THINGS CONCERNING HIMSELF”

On the glorious resurrection morning Mary went to seek for Jesus. She sought Him in the tomb but He stood behind her. She thought He was the gardener but the one word ‘Mary’ revealed to her the Saviour.

As we read some passages in the Old Testament, how often our eyes are holden and we see only the earthly form. We see Aaron the priest or David the shepherd or Solomon the king but, if like Mary we are really seeking the Lord Jesus, He manifests Himself to us through the outward type and we turn in glad surprise and looking up say, Rabboni!

As we continue to seek, we find Christ in the most unexpected places in the Old Testament until the whole glows with the glory of the Lord. “In the volume of the book it is written of me”. All the lines of history and type, of psalm and prophecy, converge towards one centre—Jesus Christ, and to one supreme event, His death on the cross for our salvation. From that centre again all the line of history in the book of the Acts, of experience in the epistles and of prophecy in the Revelation radiate out once more to testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

After His resurrection our Lord not only “opened the scriptures” to His disciples but also “opened their understandings that they might understand the scriptures”. He is ready to do the same for us. The same Holy Spirit who moved holy men of old to write the Scriptures is close at hand to make the words life to our souls by taking of the things of Christ and revealing them to us. Christ is the key to the Old Testament scriptures.

A M Hodgkin

“I COME QUICKLY”

Revelation 22:6-7, 10-14, 16-17, 20

Introduction

I would like to focus our attention on these three words of the Lord Jesus, “I come quickly”. They are mentioned three times in this final chapter of the Bible in three separate connections:

in verse 7 the Lord says, “I come quickly” when He is referring to words—words that are faithful and true;

in verse 12 He says “I come quickly”, when He is referring to His reward being with Him to render to every one as his works shall be; and,

in verse 20 when the Lord says, “I come quickly” there is the response: “come, Lord Jesus”.

I wonder if we might think about these three wonderful words of the Lord Jesus in connection with:

christian doctrine,
christian conduct, and
christian response to Christ and witness.

The second coming of Jesus is a very interesting subject. I recently read an article in a christian periodical where the writer rightly warned his readers about trying to set a date for the second coming of the Lord Jesus. He pointed out that there is no date for this event given in the Bible and that there have been many false attempts in the past to put a date on His return. Yet the prospect of the second coming of Jesus should also have a profound effect in our lives.

Reading the article led me to think about our Lord's own words: "I come quickly". Their repetition three times at the end of Revelation emphasises their importance. Any careful reader of the New Testament can see that the coming again of the Lord Jesus was expected by believers alive at that time to take place in their own lifetimes. Several scriptures support that viewpoint. For example, when Paul writes to the Thessalonian Christians who had been recently converted, he reminds them of the effect of his gospel preaching. They had only heard the word over a three week period yet they "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens" (1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10). This expectation followed from their being converted.

The writer to the Hebrews also says, "For yet a very little while he that comes will come, and will not delay" (Hebrews 10:37). Paul and other writers in the New Testament clearly indicated they were expecting the return of the Lord Jesus. Yet He has not come again. Many hundreds of years have passed since the Lord Jesus gave this Revelation to His bondman John.

I suppose agnostics or atheists would say it is a false hope. But I believe the Lord Jesus intended that the expectation of His second coming might be a living reality to believers down through all the centuries. If you love someone who is alive but absent you long for the opportunity to see that person again. As christians we are in a remarkable position of believing in the Lord Jesus, yet not having seen Him—"whom, having not seen, ye love" (1 Peter 1:8).

Christian Doctrine

"I come quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

This passage says "These words are faithful and true" and then later, "Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book". Many people, even christians, find doctrine dull and boring! Many people nowadays are not too interested in reading books. John speaks here of "these words". Whose words are they? They are the words of Jesus. I think once we realise that they are His

words our outlook becomes changed towards the Bible, particularly the New Testament. If you love others, you value what they say. If you receive a letter from someone you love and have not communicated with for a while, you are likely to take great interest in their words. When children begin to speak, parents and friends are very interested in their words. Why? Because they love them. How we should value the words of the Lord Jesus!

There is a blessing attached to reading the book of Revelation. Jesus says, “Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things written in it; for the time is near” (Revelation 1:3). I do not claim to understand everything about the Book of Revelation. But I believe its words are His words and because they are His words it is right to value them. It is right to seek the help of the Holy Spirit to understand them.

Revelation commences with the Lord revealing Himself in a fresh way to John who already knew Jesus well. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved. He leaned on the bosom of Jesus when the Lord was here on earth. Yet John was frightened when he saw Jesus in judicial clothes as revealed at the beginning of the Revelation. He “fell at his feet as dead”. Then the Lord put His hand upon him. What a privilege—to have a fresh touch like that.

John then received the Lord’s view of the seven churches in Asia Minor. We can read in Revelation chapters 2 & 3 of the way He presented Himself in His own glory to each one of them, how He praised all that was good in them and set out what displeased Him. I believe these two chapters not only give a view of these seven churches that existed at that time but look forward throughout the whole church era, right down to our time. They are the words of One who loves us and who is going to come quickly. If we are truly waiting for Him, we ought to take His words to these churches very seriously.

Later in the book we find the Lord revealing the judgments that will one day come upon this earth. Not all those chapters are very easy to understand but we learn from the Lord Himself what is going to happen in the day of wrath, when God’s fury comes upon this earth. I think that should have an immense effect upon us as we go through this world and in our relations with our fellow men and women.

John, in his gospel, also refers to keeping the Lord’s commandments and His word. He records the words of Jesus: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” and again, “If any one love me, he will keep my word” (John 14:15, 23). Keeping the words of the Lord Jesus demonstrates that we truly love Him. And if we do not understand everything, and none of us does, we should remember that the Holy Spirit is here to guide us believers into all the truth—to help us in our understanding.

May each of us here, while we await the coming One, not merely for an event,

but a Person, be helped to respect all the words of Jesus whether spoken directly, given through John or given through others of His apostles. May we seek help to understand them and not only to have them in our heads but to put them into practice in our lives from day to day.

We should also note that the individual believer is emphasised in many passages in Revelation. That is very important in our day. I find it easy to go with the stream. If most people do something, I tend to do it too. To counter this tendency to “go astray as sheep” each of us needs to respect the words of Jesus and draw on His aid to stand by them. And if someone else does not keep the words of Jesus, let me ensure I keep them.

Christian Conduct

“Behold, I come quickly, and my reward with me, to render to every one as his work shall be.”

The second time Jesus says “I come quickly” there are several references to conduct. First, John is told not to seal the words of the prophecy of this book for “the time is near”. When Daniel received his prophecy, God told him to seal the words because they were for a later time (Daniel 12:4). Why is there this difference? Because the “time is near”. If we believe Jesus could come any time, that should have an immense effect upon our conduct. He says, “Behold, I come quickly, and my reward with me, to render to every one as his work shall be.” When He says too, “Let him that does unrighteously do unrighteously still; and let the filthy make himself filthy still; and let him that is righteous practise righteousness still; and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still” there is a suggestion that things will become fixed.

When I think of the expression “let him that does unrighteously do unrighteously still”, I think of Balaam. He is mentioned early in Revelation. He was a man who “loved the reward of unrighteousness” (2 Peter 2:15). He was given many opportunities to repent but he was an unrighteous man and promulgated doctrine that ensnared God’s people in immoral conduct and idolatry. Balaam eventually perished (Numbers 30). His end is a solemn warning!

Then it says, “let the filthy make himself filthy still”. I think of Jezebel who is mentioned in chapter 2 of Revelation. We read of her in the Old Testament, a woman who urged Ahab on as he sold himself to do evil. He introduced idolatry and evil practices among God’s people. As our society is publicly allowing practices that God’s word condemns, we should think about the solemnity of evil practices becoming fixed.

But then there is the encouragement to believers. “Let him that is righteous practise righteousness still”. A truly converted person who receives the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit then has the capability of living righteously for the pleasure of God. It is not that believers do not sin, for alas we do, and

thank God there is an answer to our sin. “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin” and “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7, 9). But it is also true that persons who are truly converted have something of God implanted within. The Holy Spirit can provide us with the strength so that we are true to God’s work within us and live righteously for the pleasure of God.

You may say, ‘It is difficult’. We live in an evil world where there are all kinds of things that are unrighteous. But if we have our eye towards the coming of Jesus, we have tremendous motivation for wanting to live in a right way that will be pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ. Such desires affect us in our homes, our work, our relationships with believers on the Lord Jesus and in many other ways as well. When we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour our faith is reckoned as righteousness. We are constituted righteous in the sight of God. Let us be true to what God has made us—hence “Let him that is righteous practise righteousness still”.

Then it says, “and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still”. Believers are addressed as “holy brethren”. The Lord provides ministry to sanctify His people. Scripture says, “in order that he might sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26). It becomes the means whereby the Lord Jesus can keep us clean while we are still in this evil world.

When a soldier pierced the side of Christ “immediately there came out blood and water” (John 19:34). The blood of Jesus cleanses from the guilt of sin but the water cleanses from its power. It is the application of the death of Christ to the circumstances and associations of life. It is the “water” aspect of the death of Christ which, I think, is covered by the expression that we get here, “Blessed are they that wash their robes”.

Then He says, “Behold, I come quickly, and my reward with me, to render to every one as his work shall be”. The Lord says at least seven times in His word to the churches (Revelation 2 and 3), “I know thy works”. The Lord knows our works. He knows what we are seeking to do. He knows if we want to do what pleases Him. Every bit of right desire is taken account of by Him; He says, “I know thy works” and He is going to come and “render to every one as his work shall be”.

When the Lord Jesus was here He told a parable about two bondmen. One bondman carries out profitable work. “Who then is the faithful and prudent bondman whom his lord has set over his household, to give them food in season?” While the other bondman says, “my Lord delays to come” and he began “to beat his fellow-bondmen, and eat and drink with the drunken”. It shows the effect of ignoring the coming of Jesus and settling down just as unbelieving men and women and forgetting about the coming of the Lord. What are the results? One gospel says, “to eat and to drink and to be drunken” (Luke 12:45); another

gospel says, “eat and drink with the drunken” (Matthew 24:49). In other words our lives just drift into evil speaking and immorality, often in association with others.

The Lord says in the passage we read, “my reward with me”. I know that every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ will be with Christ eternally because all are under the shelter of the blood of Jesus. But His reward is still with Him. Remembering that I am responsible to Him and that He will review my life should greatly help me now in my conduct while I wait for Him to “come quickly”.

There then follows a collective reference, “Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life, and that they should go in by the gates into the city”. Earlier on in Revelation the Lord Jesus gives this as a promise to an individual overcomer in the church in Ephesus: “To him that overcomes, I will give to him to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). There, while the Lord could commend much, He said they had left their first love—declined in affection for Him. Yet to an individual overcomer He says, ‘I will give this wonderful blessing of being able to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God’.

As remarked earlier, I think the expression “Blessed are they that wash their robes” is a reference to the water, the use of the water that comes from the death of Christ. It speaks of an ongoing application of the death of Christ to my circumstances and my associations of life. What is the consequence: “that they may have right to the tree of life, and that they should go in by the gates into the city”. It suggests to me that it is possible to enjoy the tree of life not only as an individual overcomer but with others. It is a great thing to enjoy the sweetness of a personal link with Christ but it is also a precious collective privilege to be able to enjoy feeding on Christ with other persons who also love the Lord.

In chapter 21 of Revelation there are references to the city, the holy city, the wall of the city and the twelve gates being twelve pearls. Now He speaks of going in by the gates into the city. This conveys to me entrance in an orderly way to enjoy city life. There is only one street in the heavenly city with the tree of life in its midst.

Gates are mentioned frequently in the Bible. They are quite prominent in the Old Testament. They were not only where persons came in and out of the cities but where municipal administration was undertaken. In the book of Nehemiah after years of ruin a number of gates were rebuilt. I think one of the references in Nehemiah has a bearing on “going in by the gates” in Revelation. Nehemiah said: “the gates of Jerusalem should not be opened until the sun was hot” (Nehemiah 7:3). It suggests to me that persons coming into Jerusalem at that time had to wait until everything was clear and transparent. Nehemiah’s injunction was doubtless to prevent persons coming in surreptitiously (Gal 2:4) to damage

life in the rebuilt city. It is like persons establishing their right of entrance without ambiguity! Despite these days of difficulty each of us should be concerned today to act in an orderly way that might carry the confidence of others so that we can enjoy 'city' life together and feed on Christ with one another.

Responsiveness and service

“He that testifies these things says, Yea, I come quickly. Amen; come, Lord Jesus.”

I want now to come to the final reference in chapter 22. Jesus says, “I come quickly” which is followed by the response, “come, Lord Jesus”. I think this statement links back to verses 16 and 17 where it says, “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies. I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star”. What a wonderful presentation of Jesus! “I am the root...of David” refers to His deity. The “offspring of David” refers to His humanity. And then He says the bright, morning star. In the past week in early mornings you could see the morning star in the clear night sky and then it faded at daybreak. It is a great thing to have the light of the coming of Jesus in our hearts before the time when He comes to reign in righteousness and have His public glory.

This threefold presentation of Jesus should have a profound effect upon us—in our responses to the Lord and in our witness to the world. I once passed a building where was a notice outside: ‘reaching up and reaching out’. I thought that is what a christian should do. I believe that is what is described here.

Firstly there is a response to the Lord: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come”. We should long for Christ to come into His rights so that the terrible travesty of a judgment against Him is reversed. The earth belongs to Him and the fulness thereof. One day He is going to come into His glory. I think the Spirit would produce this desire in us for the Lord to come.

I think the New Testament writers depict the responsiveness of the bride. When you read Paul’s epistles, and the epistles of others, you see that their minds were full of Christ; they were looking forward to the day of Jesus Christ and their doxologies set out their responses. For example, Paul in his second letter to Timothy, written shortly before his death, refers to “all who love his appearing” and then adds this expression of praise to the Lord “to whom be glory for the ages of ages”.

Then our passage says, “And let him that hears say, Come”. Paul wrote his epistles not only to bright, responsive believers but to others who were not so bright and were contaminated with bad doctrine and conduct. This is amply illustrated in the epistles to the Galatians and Corinthians. Paul in his ministry, in his approach and presentation of Christ, was trying to get others to be in keeping with this response, “the Spirit and the bride say, Come”. I think today

if any believer is brightly waiting for the Lord he or she can encourage other believers by personal example and by exhortation to join in the cry of the Spirit and the bride.

Then the appeal goes further, reaching out to the whole of humanity. I love this scripture because it seems to help believers in their outlook towards all. It commences with those who really love Christ and earnestly desire Him to come again. Then there are those who are interested, who love the Lord but maybe are not hot in their affections for Him. Thirdly there are persons who are needy people, thirsty people, not necessarily converted but dissatisfied. There are plenty of such people around in this world today. And finally there is the whole of humanity, who may not even feel their need. Often people, even real Christians, view others denominationally. This scripture views persons according to their love for and need of the Lord.

Recently when listening to a number of persons I have met in business, including successful people, I have become aware that there is a real longing in their hearts for something they are missing. They know that there is something lacking from their lives. They are dissatisfied. They are thirsty. What a privilege it is to be able to point to Jesus. He is the One who gives the living water. When He was here He said, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37).

Then we have, "he that will, let him take the water of life freely". The water of life is available to all because of the completed work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. You could not have a wider outlook than that. The living water, the water of life, is available to all. And I believe if we believers really have this message in our hearts it will make every one of us evangelical.

What a time we are living in! A sad time morally, yet still a very wonderful time because it is the day of salvation. We are living just before the coming of Jesus, yet the water of life is freely available to everyone. Oh, to be able to convey that message to others by what we say, by our practical conduct, by being able to reflect God and commend the gospel in practical acts of kindness.

This scripture helps me in relation to a worry I have about certain people I meet because I am unsure if they are truly converted. They appear not to be for they show little interest in the Lord's things, yet they say they are truly converted. I cannot determine who is the Lord's but I can point all to Jesus, the One who has got the water of life to give. He is the One who is able to satisfy every need, the needs of every human heart. He is freely making this water of life available to whosoever will.

I commend these three statements "I come quickly" from the lips of Jesus to you. Let there be a full response from the heart of each one of us while we await the wonderful moment of His return.

Ken Hollands

Address at Sutton Coldfield, 20th November 1999.

WE KNOW NOT...WE KNOW...

(Romans 8:26,28)

In goodness givest Thou, in goodness takest:
Who know Thy heart, O God, can trust Thy hand.
Wisely the vase Thou mouldedst, wisely breakest:
To trust is ours, 'tis Thine to understand.

Our Father, Thy great love the cross hath told us:
We know not all Thy way: but Thee we know.
Thou gav'st Thy Son; no good wilt Thou withhold us;
'Tis love that lifts us up, that lays us low.

Not in the boons wherewith Thy good hand blesses
We rest, here or in Heaven: our home's Thy heart!
Yet here, as there, wise love all power possesses;
And all Thou dost is love, for love Thou art.

Not now Thy heart its purpose for us reaches;
Another day is ours, another place:
Now love's deep wisdom disciplines and teaches;
Then Thou shalt rest, and we see face to face.

All the vast course of things love's plan is serving—
Day, night; life, death; what men call good or ill:
With power untiring, purpose never swerving,
Thou workest out Thy good and perfect will.

All things are Thine, all ours, now and for ever:
Complex Thy work, but simple is Thy love,
Well known though passing knowledge, failing never;
O peace and joy, and praise, here and above!

A Carruthers (1860-1930)

(Written on the death of his first child.)

IF JESUS CAME TO YOUR HOUSE

If Jesus came to your house to spend a day or two—
If He came unexpectedly, I wonder what you would do.
I am sure you would give your nicest room to such a honoured Guest
And all the food you served to Him would be the very best.
And you would keep assuring Him you were glad to have Him there—
That serving Him in your home is joy beyond compare?

But when you saw Him coming would you meet Him at the door
With arms outstretched in welcome to your heavenly Visitor?
Or would you have to change your clothes before you let Him in,
Or hide some magazines and put the Bible where they'd been?
Would you hide your worldly music and put some hymn books out?
Could you let the Saviour walk right in, or would you have to rush about?

And I wonder if the Saviour spent a day or two with you,
Would you go right on doing the things you always do?
Would you keep on saying the things you often say?
Would life for you continue as it does from day to day?
Would your family conversation keep its usual mode,
And would you find it hard each meal to give thanks for the food?

Would you sing the songs you sing and read the books you read,
And let Him know the things on which your mind and spirit feed?
Would you feel quite free to take the Lord wherever you planned to go?
Or would you feel the need to change your plans for just a day or so?
Would you be glad to have Him meet your very closest friends?
Or would you hope they'd stay away until His visit ends?

Would you be glad to have Him stay for ever, on and on
Or would you sigh with great relief when He at last was gone?
It's challenging to think about the things that you would do
If Jesus came in Person to spend some time with you.

Anon

ARTHUR STACE - GRAFFITI WRITER WITH A DIFFERENCE

When, as part of the Millennium celebration at the beginning of the year, the word 'Eternity', in copperplate style, was illuminated on Sydney Harbour bridge, it was in its way a striking tribute to Arthur Stace. For thirty-five years Stace had been writing "Eternity" on the pavements and footways of Sydney. In an interview in 1965 he told how in 1930 he heard a sermon based on the text, "For thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy" (Isaiah 57:15). He came out of the church with the word 'eternity' ringing in his ears and felt impelled to write it. He said, 'I had a piece of chalk in my pocket and I bent down right there and wrote 'eternity'. I have been writing it at least fifty times a day ever since.' 'Eternity' has been described as Stace's 'one word sermon'. But who was the man who chose such a message? His is a wonderful story of the grace of God.

Arthur Stace was born in a small shack-like dwelling in Balmain. He had two sisters and two brothers. The whole family were in and out of jail many times, and were plagued by a love of alcohol. Often in the morning, when his parents were still drunk from the night before, there would be no breakfast and young Arthur would slip out to steal milk from the neighbouring houses and bread and cakes from shop counters. He soon picked up his parents' drinking habits and at the age of fifteen was jailed for drunken behaviour.

Because of his weakness for alcohol he found it difficult to keep a job and commenced a life of housebreaking and more serious crime. On one occasion a Magistrate told him, 'Don't you know that I have power to put you in Long Bay Gaol, or power to set you free?' Arthur Stace groaned in his heart when he heard those words because he knew he needed something which the magistrate did not have the ability to give—power to stop drinking, power to overcome a vile heredity, power to throw off the effects of a slum environment with its evil companions, power to break the ingrained habits of sin—power to make the crooked straight.

The drinking went on; whisky, gin, rum, and finally methylated spirits. Several attempts were made to help Stace. He was hospitalised, and spent some time in the Broughton Hall psychiatric clinic but all these failed. A man like this needs power, power to control the mind and body's craving for drink, power to overcome the forces that drag him down. Is there such a power? Yes there is, and it really

works. The gospel is the “power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth”.

Arthur Stace, a methylated spirits derelict, living by cunning, one August day wandered into a special service for men. He went in to get the tea and cakes that were on offer but, as he put it later, ‘I went for a rock cake and met the Rock of Ages’. There were some three hundred men there. Many, like himself, were down and outs; many were crooks. Arthur looked at the group of christian workers, helping with the tea, clean, fit and happy and said to the man sitting next to him, ‘That is what I want to be like’.

During the service he heard the good news that Christ loves sinners, that He died for them, that He rose again, that He is alive and has power to save. Parting from his companions he slipped into University Park and under a large fig tree he cried out for mercy to that living Christ. Here a wayward soul touched God by simple faith—here was sincerity and reality. Here was human pride and strength broken. Here was helplessness and despair. Here was a sinner surrendering to God, and from heaven came a power—a power stronger than vile heredity, stronger than an evil environment, or habit or evil companions—a power which gave mental peace and independence and freedom. It was the power of the Spirit of God. Arthur Stace went out of the park with the Spirit of God in his heart (Ephesians 1:13).

Soon after his conversion, he learnt what he called the secret of success in the christian life—prayer and obedience. ‘Much prayer’, he said, ‘keeps the channel clean, keeps us in touch with God’. The second secret is obedience. To Arthur Stace God was the power, so ‘obey God in every thing, small and great’. The power of God alone can enable us to overcome the power of inborn sin.

The real change that had taken place was evident to all around him. Arthur found a house in a poor environment because he wanted to be a witness to those who had known him in the past. He started to preach on the street and for twenty four years he preached on the corner of George and Bathurst Streets, Sydney. He worked in hostels for the homeless and was always glad to recount what God had done for him. The gospel is true, it works. Behold a modern miracle in the life of Arthur Stace!

‘Eternity’, there was Arthur Stace’s ‘word’ lit up as part of the new year celebrations in Sydney. A journalist recording the event wrote, ‘What would Arthur Stace...have thought of the use of his word in what was essentially a

pagan festival?’ Arthur is with the Lord and not able to answer for himself but surely he would have rejoiced, if in the midst of the celebration of the passing of time, even a few people were made to think of how they would spend eternity. In a way it is not much different from Stace’s own effort, writing ‘eternity’ fifty times a day on the pavements of Sydney for more than thirty five years.

Based on material provided by John McKerrell (Sydney)

TRIUMPH

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over” (Psalm 23:5).

The psalmist speaks here in tones of holy triumph. Not only is he fearless but he even feasts on the goodness of God in the presence of his enemies. History records that armies have feasted in carelessness while the enemies were at their very doors but this is not a feast like that. The enemies are known and their power owned but in God we have such a resource that we are not only confident but also delighted beyond measure in His love. We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.

This is illustrated in the story of Stephen, the first martyr, who suffered death for Christ (Acts 7). His foes were of the mightiest and were most malignant; their hatred knew no bounds but he was above it all. Full of the Holy Ghost, he looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus. That glory eclipsed the grandeur of the most august assembly upon earth, while the blessed Person whom he beheld in it made it all his own, setting his heart there perfectly at home in divine love. His enemies did all that lay in their power against him; they took his life but he was more than conqueror; he overcame evil with good and spent his latest breath in praying for his murderers. Magnificent triumph!

The Thessalonian believers received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. They suffered from their own countrymen. Yet how sweetly they were encouraged! "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us." And, meanwhile, the Lord would direct their hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 3:5). Thus may the youngest believers find opposition in the circle of their acquaintance, yet not only become victors there by divine power but also find a table prepared for them in the presence of their foes.

The saints at Philippi took their part in the conflict of the gospel in which Paul was engaged. As in "the first day" of the gospel in that city there were still many adversaries. But the apostle seeks to put them in the same holy triumph which was his when he and his companion prayed and sang praises to God in the inner prison. In nothing terrified by their adversaries, they are to accept their sufferings as a token of God's salvation and an additional gift of His grace on behalf of Christ. The designs of the enemy turn out to the furtherance of the gospel and the good soldiers of Jesus Christ rejoice always in the Lord.

To the Ephesian believers Paul speaks of the terrible satanic opposition to the purpose of God and encourages them to be strong in the Lord and the power of His might, clothed with the panoply of God. Yet before he speaks of this opposition he shows how that same divine power, working in us, is able (above all that we ask or think) to set us in the full realisation and joy of that purpose of God for us.

Whatever then the nature of our conflict, whether connected with our christian profession among those who surround us or the testimony of the gospel or the truth and enjoyment of God's purpose, we are enabled to say, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

The psalmist passes from this to the thought of God's expressed favour, "thou anointest my head with oil". It is said, "Ye have an unction (or anointing) from the Holy One" (1 John 2:20). The love of God is spread abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us (Romans 5:5). The Spirit puts our hearts into the enjoyment of the holy affections of the Father's heart in association with the Son of His love. As He keeps the babes of God's family in these sweet affections they are guarded from the deceits of those who come in the spirit of the antichrist. Their minds may not be fully formed, being babes, but by the Spirit's power they are put in the circle of the truth, in the Father's love, and the lie of the tempter is discerned.

It is then added—and how suitably!—“my cup runneth over”. If by the Spirit’s power we are brought into the fulness of God’s love and favour, our portion of joy is unbounded; we have an overflowing cup.

Thus in this psalm we compass a circle, ending where we began. We began with the divine satisfaction of His own company, the green pastures in which He makes us lie down; we survey the character of our path through this world with all its attendant difficulties and dangers, its deepest shadow and its most dreaded enemies, and the soul is assured that the shepherd care which is over us is more than enough, and it returns to rest in that love and favour which forms its everlasting portion, and there to wonder and adore.

J Revell

This series of meditations on Psalm 23 will be concluded in the next issue with: “The Path and the Home”.

HELP FOR ANXIOUS SOULS—1

Introduction

Many years ago a christian called George Cutting wrote a book called ‘Light for Anxious Souls in some of their Difficulties’. In it he answered various questions which perplex believers in the present day. The book has been long out of print but it is intended over the next few issues of “Living Water” to publish several extracts from it.

Two things particularly marked George Cutting’s style: he drew extensively on the Bible and he had a great gift in illustrating his points with simple incidents from everyday life. His illustrations are drawn from a time when probably the most common form of quick travel was a horse, when telephones were unknown and when life was more simple than it is today. No attempt has been made to update his writing since the material speaks for itself.

In the last words of his book George Cutting said: ‘Should the Lord, in His rich grace, be pleased to use this little book for your soul’s blessing, kindly hand it on and pray that others may share like favour.’ These extracts are republished in the spirit of that request. Ed.

I know it is all in believing, and I try to believe, but I cannot.

Let me examine this oft repeated statement a little more closely. People little dream what is involved in it.

God has fully declared Himself in the Person of His Son, and acted in this world in perfect consistency with Himself. In doing this He has, according to your making out, so far forfeited all claim to your confidence that you even 'try to believe on Him but cannot'!

More than this He has sent a special message from heaven by the Holy Ghost — the gospel message —but the tidings He sent are so unworthy of your acceptance, that though you have been good enough to try to believe it, you really cannot.

It is written that, "Abraham believed God" (Romans 4:3). How simple is that statement! We are told subsequently (verse 19) that he did not consider appearances, that he did not look at himself and that he had another Person before him, One so reliable that he believed He was able to perform what He had promised. And thus, we are told, "he gave glory to God".

Suppose it had been written: 'Abraham tried to believe God, but could not'. What a serious reflection it would have cast on the God who cannot lie!

Now compare your own statement with this. How dishonouring your unbelief is to God.

Beside this, does not your statement that you have tried to believe but cannot manifest its own folly on the very face of it? It makes out that you are trying to trust an untrustworthy person. 'Oh', you say, 'but I don't think He is unworthy!' Then your words do both you and Him an injustice for who would speak of trying to trust one in whom they had confidence? Has a child to try to trust its mother?

It is to be feared that you are looking at faith as some great work that you are required to perform in order to secure salvation for yourself. Is it not so?

Ah, but this is all wrong. We must learn to discern between faith and the activities of faith. Suppose that you are in a part of the country that you do not know, yet in company of friends who know the neighbourhood well. A deep stream has to be crossed and only one solitary plank connects the two banks. You are told by those who know this bridge that the plank is strong enough to bear your weight and because you trust them you walk unhesitatingly across.

If you took a berth aboard a liner it would prove your confidence in her seaworthiness. Your faith in the ship may be very firm or very wavering, but the moment that as a passenger you board that vessel you confess by action, if not by word, that you have confidence in her ability to get you to your destination. You heard of the ship, your confidence was inspired by what you heard and then came the act which publicly expressed that your trust in her was a real thing. So we read: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation".

"Faith cometh by hearing,
Hearing by the word of God."
The word of God testifies to an all-worthy Saviour.

I get such a report of Him that, without trying, I do believe on Him. And when I go to Him and tell Him so, and act accordingly, I am but confessing by lip and by life where my confidence is reposed.

Behold that worthy One in the place where righteousness has now placed Him and the next time you say in your heart, "I cannot believe", ask yourself the following questions:

who is it that I cannot believe?
what has He said that is so unworthy of my receiving it?
what has He done and how has He behaved to sacrifice my confidence so entirely?

How can I be "always confident" when my state of soul is so variable?

Our souls are never fully established until we see that our ever- changing practical state has nothing to say to our acceptance before God.

When Abel brought his offering to the Lord, "the firstling of his flock and the fat thereof" we are told that "he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying to his gifts". It was not the personal excellence of Abel that God looked at in counting him righteous but the excellence of the sacrifice that he brought and his faith in it. As when a customer takes a cheque to the bank, he gets in full what the cheque is worth. He would not get more if his character were ever so good, nor less if it were ever so bad. It is not a question of what the customer is worth, either morally or commercially, but what the cheque is worth. It was thus with Abel and it is thus with every sinner coming to God through Christ. God reckons to the account of every such believer all that He knows the work of Christ is worth.

Is it perfect? Yes, it is perfect for ever. Then the believer's place of acceptance corresponds with it. Therefore we read: "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" i.e., those who have faith in Him (see Acts 26:18).

A few years ago I went in the company of a few christians from Penzance in Cornwall to Land's End. Sitting on the box with the driver, the latter drew my attention to a church in the distance. 'We shall pass that church,' he said, 'and I am told that between this point on the road and reaching the church we lose sight of it nine times over'. This made me curious to prove the statement. We descended a small hill and lost sight of the church. At the crest of the next hill the building could be distinctly seen. Again we dipped into a valley and the church disappeared from view; when we came out of the valley we could see it again. Thus we travelled on, sometimes losing sight and sometimes catching a fresh view, until we came within a few yards of the ancient building, having as the coachman had stated lost sight of the old building nine times over within that three or four miles.

Now, how often do you suppose the church went up and down in that three or four mile drive?

'The church go up and down?' you say. 'Not once. The ups and downs were with you, not with the building'. Exactly. And, let us add, in the variable condition of soul of which you speak, the ups and downs are with you, not with Christ. There are no ups and downs in God's thoughts of Christ's personal worth or of the value of His sacrifice and, if He accepts you on that ground, there can be no ups and downs in your acceptance either. There is no change in Him above. He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever"; and God "hath made us accepted in [Him] the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6).

If you would know what God thinks of the believer, you must turn your eye to Christ; for "as he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17).

A christian of my acquaintance, who had spent long years of hopeless endeavour of reaching a kind of perfection in the flesh, at last got free, and thus expressed himself: I used to think that I must try to be good enough to be accepted but now I see that it is Christ who is good enough to be accepted and God accepts me in Him.

If our behaviour had anything to do with our title to acceptance, then a flaw in my behaviour would necessarily mean a flaw in my title. But, thank God, the truth is that our behaviour flows from the knowledge of our place of acceptance before the Father and not that our acceptance is based upon our behaviour. We

are “called saints”, i.e., constituted saints by the calling of God and then asked to “walk as becometh saints”. We are called to behold the manner of love bestowed upon us that we should be called His children and then told, “as dear children”, to “walk in love (1 Corinthians 1:2, Ephesians 5:3, 1 John 3:1, Ephesians 5:1).

To use a figure, God first fills the purse and then teaches us to spend what He bestows.

I am troubled because I cannot fix the exact date of my conversion.

That is a small thing compared with the fact that you have turned to God from your evil way, that you have trusted Christ and are now seeking to serve Him. It has often been remarked that Paul did not say, when writing to Timothy, ‘I know when I believed’, but “I know whom I have believed”. I may not know exactly when I first awoke this morning, nor what woke me, but I know I am awake. God would not have us to have faith in our conversion, but in Christ.

“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). When the Spirit begins His gracious work in the soul, He does not occupy me with His work but with my need of Christ’s work. I bow before God as a repentant sinner. My one burning desire is to have Christ, yet I feel so vile that I fear that He will not have me. I never dream at that time that this is the fruit of an effectual work of grace in my soul and I may, in my ignorance, even date my blessing from the day I found Christ and, trusting in His blood, found peace; whereas the work of grace commenced on the day when the Spirit wrought in me to turn my soul to seek Him.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the work began when “he came to himself” in the far country and said, “I will arise and go to my father,” not when the father fell upon his neck and kissed him. It begins when soul thirst is created, not when it is satisfied.

George Cutting

THE CHURCH IN FOUR ASPECTS

Editor's note

This is the second in a series of articles, begun in the last issue, on different aspects of the church. Again, the article can be a little difficult to get into so an introductory note may help.

As in the first article, F. E. Raven draws on Ephesians and Corinthians, the first to give the side of privilege and the second the side of our responsibility. On the side of privilege, believers are built together "unto a holy temple in the Lord". The church is the temple because the Holy Spirit dwells in it and it is the body of Christ on earth as the Lord's own body was the temple of God when He was here on earth (cf: John 2:21).

The temple in this aspect cannot be defiled; it is the subject of divine energy and grows to a holy temple in the Lord. In contrast, where it is a question of our responsibility as in Corinthians, we find, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy"

F. E. Raven goes on to dwell on the great importance of the temple as being the only place where the light and grace of God are known. To illustrate this he instances the city of Corinth itself: 'Go back for a moment to Corinth, and think of its condition and the idolatrous people there. If anyone desired to get any light as to God, or any idea of the grace of God, where could it be found? In the christian company, and nowhere else.

It came out there because they recognised the presence of God, that God was dwelling here by the Spirit, and what characterised the dwelling of God was grace and light. To know about the law, people might have gone to Jerusalem but to know anything about grace and light they would have to go to the christian company, where alone they would find it expressed.'

Ed.

ASPECT 2—THE TEMPLE

Ephesians 2:19-22

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Introduction

My thought at this time is to speak of the church as God's temple. In 1 Corinthians 3 the apostle says that as "a wise architect, I have laid the foundation". I do not therefore expect to get the truth of the complete building in Corinthians, because what is presented is elementary—a foundation, If I want to get the completeness of the building, what is in the mind and counsel of God, I have to go to Ephesians.

I am going to speak first as to what is presented in Ephesians, and then to look a little at what comes before us in Corinthians, because the latter brings out the practical bearing of the truth, which is very important to us.

It is very helpful in the present day to understand aright the truth of the temple, to recognise the presence of the Spirit of God here, for the practical result is that you become vessels for the manifestation of the Spirit. Where the presence of the Holy Spirit is not recognised the human mind is allowed, in its activity in the things of God, constructing them into a system, and the consequence is that the light of the Spirit is very greatly obstructed.

The temple in Ephesians

In Ephesians 2 the apostle is working down from the truth of the Head to the truth of the temple. He says, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord".

The temple, as I understand it, is identified with the glory of the kingdom. You get the same connection in the Old Testament. When God's people were wanderers in the wilderness God walked with them in a tent; in His grace He came down to their condition. The idea of a temple did not connect itself with the wanderings of God's people in the wilderness but with the city and a fixed habitation.

The temple connected itself in the Old Testament with the glory of the kingdom and it was not until a man of peace (Solomon) reigned that the temple was built. David was not allowed to build God a house because he had shed much blood. David and Solomon both form a type of Christ—David as subduing enemies, Solomon as reigning in peace.

I believe that the connection between the kingdom and the temple is confirmed by the fact that when the eternal state is spoken of in Revelation, the kingdom having been delivered up, the idea of the temple is dropped and the expression is used that the “tabernacle” of God is with men.

The thought of the temple in Ephesians connects itself with the counsels of God in their accomplishment in the kingdom, “the administration of the fulness of times”, which is identical with the kingdom. So we find a later reference to the kingdom in chapter 5, that “no...idolater hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God”. In the kingdom, Christ is supreme. It is a mediatorial kingdom and although that is not a scriptural term it conveys the idea well, for Christ is the Mediator and all the good which God has for man is administered in power through Christ.

We get the blessings of the kingdom. “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit”. When the kingdom is established, righteousness, peace and joy will reign in a public way through the Lord Jesus Christ. He will reign and it will be the kingdom of God and of Christ; “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever”.

Now we find here that “all the building fitly framed together groweth”. The temple is not looked at here as complete but as growing spiritually, “unto an holy temple in the Lord”. The expression “in the Lord” appears to me to connect the temple with the kingdom and what will mark the kingdom will be the glory and the supremacy of Christ. He is Lord now to those who have faith and in the kingdom He will be publicly the Lord. What faith gets now—peace, grace and reconciliation—will be for the earth then, for God’s people down here. He will be the Head and Husband of His people, and Head of the Gentiles and these blessings which faith now enjoys will be brought into the world through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here we have that the whole building “fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord”. When it is viewed in the light of the kingdom, there is no hand of man seen in it. It is “fitly framed together”, it “groweth”, indicating that there is divine energy in every part of it—it “groweth unto an holy temple”, where there is nothing that can defile, “an holy temple in the Lord” in the One who is supreme in the administration of the kingdom.

That is the view which is taken of the temple here and, further, we are told that it is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets”, that is, on the foundation of their testimony and the chief corner-stone is Jesus Christ.

I do not propose to say much more as to Ephesians. My object in referring to chapter 2 was to show the church as the temple of God and I believe that it is the temple of God, as being the body of Christ. The church could not but be the temple of God if it is the body of Christ, as the Lord's own body when He was down here could not but be the temple of God, for the simple reason that God was there.

The temple in Corinthians

Now we will turn to 1 Corinthians 3:16: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." I trust the Lord may enable me to suggest a few thoughts in connection with this passage, which is of great importance to us practically.

Here you come on to different ground from Ephesians. In Ephesians the prominent thought was the counsel of God. Here it is somewhat different; the building is looked at in connection with the responsible work of man, and this is another side of the truth.

It is a very great thing to see the two sides of a truth in scripture; the same truth may be presented on the one side in connection with the counsel of God, and on the other in connection with the responsibility of man. The temple being viewed here on the ground of responsibility, you get the possibility of the temple being defiled, and judgment coming upon the defiler.

In Corinthians the temple is connected with man's responsibility. The warning is introduced—"If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy". From the point of view that the temple is looked at in Ephesians, "fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord", there is no possibility of defilement coming in. But in any case the temple of God is holy, that is its character, and woe be to the man that corrupts it. I have no hesitation in saying that the temple of God has been corrupted and the worst principles have been introduced in it. No one can know the history of the professing church without knowing that. The consequence of that is that judgment will come upon the corrupters. Depend upon it, God will vindicate the holiness of His temple. But man is responsible to maintain it; that is the point here. There is no responsibility in Ephesians 2 but there is responsibility here. The saints are responsible to maintain the holiness of God's temple, because the Spirit of God dwells there.

I want now to give you one or two ideas connected with the temple. The first and most important point is that God is there. There are two very important points

which flow from this—grace is there and light. Go back for a moment to Corinth and think of its condition and the idolatrous people there. If anyone desired to get any light as to God, or any idea of the grace of God, where could it be found? In the christian company, and nowhere else. It came out there because they recognised the presence of God, that God was dwelling here by the Spirit, and what characterised the dwelling of God was grace and light. To know about the law people might have gone to Jerusalem but to know anything about grace and light they would have to go to the christian company, where alone they would find it expressed.

If you were to ask me where the manifestations of the Spirit come out, I would reply, ‘Through the body’. Many persons in the early days of the church evidently fell under the power and influence of the Spirit, who had no part in the Spirit. But of real christians it is said, “By one Spirit are we all baptised into one body...and have all been made to drink into one Spirit”. The manifestations of the Spirit are set in the church as the body of Christ.

I see many a gifted man who is undoubtedly in the body of Christ, yet knows little of the truth of the body nor of the presence of God here by the Spirit. Such look upon the house of God as only a building of brick or stone, a place of worship, and therefore, although he is a member of the body of Christ, he is not as serviceable as he could be. There may be a manifestation of the Spirit there but the light of the Spirit is greatly obstructed. If the presence of the Spirit is not recognised, man always allows his mind to work. People study systems of theology and the like, which are the work of men’s minds, and feeding on those things they have their minds formed by them and the light is thus greatly obscured. I do not deny that the manifestations of the Spirit may be there, but it is greatly marred.

If you recognise that God is dwelling here by the Spirit, you will recognise that it is only the spiritual person who can appreciate His presence. That is what the apostle urges at the close of 1 Corinthians 2. It is the spiritual man that discerns all things and the Corinthians were not spiritual. They were the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelt in them, but everything was in confusion among them because they were not spiritual. It raises a very important question with us as to what ‘spiritual’ means.

What I understand by a person being spiritual is that the flesh is subdued and the Spirit is the power of apprehension and the source and spring of thought and feeling. That ought to be the case with every believer. We all have part in the Spirit; the Spirit of God dwells in us and therefore the Spirit of God ought to rule

completely in us. The Spirit is to be the spring of activity as well as the power for understanding. There is nothing I dread more in the things of God than the activity of my mind. I do not set aside the mind but in the christian the mind is simply an eye; it lets in light, that is all. I could not understand the things of God without a mind but if you want to understand the things of God, you must guard against the activity of the mind. What you want is to be subject to the Spirit of God and to judge the flesh and that way you will get an understanding in the things of God. You get understanding by the Spirit because the Spirit brings the mind of Christ.

I am no longer speaking of the temple in connection with the glory of the kingdom; I am speaking of the temple in connection with man's responsibility. Of course the very fact of believers being the temple of God is an immense privilege but the matter is viewed in scripture from the side of responsibility also. The first practical thing for us is that we should covet by the grace of God to be spiritual, that the Spirit should really be to us the power of understanding and the spring of thought and activity, governing the mind and feelings. If the presence of the Spirit is recognised in the soul, then there is a wonderful sense of light and grace.

Then, as belonging to the body, we are vessels for the manifestation of the Spirit. But take care that you do not obstruct the light. You are to be a vessel of light and grace here. Do not let anything hinder the light which ought to shine out through you and the grace that ought to be manifest in you.

I have only one thing more to add. All good which God has for man comes out through the body of Christ. Just as when Christ was here upon earth the good that God had for man was expressed through His body. What God had to say to man and all the good works which God had for men came out through Him; "virtue went out of him and healed them all". And so the good which God has for man now is by the Spirit, through the body of Christ, the church; that is the channel of it.

May God give to us understanding that the saints are the temple of God, for God is dwelling here by the Spirit.

F. E. Raven
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