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Living Water

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A VOICE OUT OF HEAVEN, A LIGHT OUT OF HEAVEN & A MAN OUT OF HEAVEN

Mark **1:9-11**
Acts **9:1-6**
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I have read tonight of a voice out of heaven, a light out of heaven and a Man out of heaven.

The first scripture tells of the voice that brought heaven's approval of a Man who was sinless, spotless and undefiled. It drew attention to One who was perfect in His pathway here under the eye of His God. That same blessed Person is proclaimed tonight as the Saviour. The glad tidings of God are not concerning us. They are concerning God's beloved Son. "God's glad tidings, concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 1:1,3,4).

God would desire to occupy you with the Man who is filling His presence with joy and gladness. He is the only Man who has come out of death and has gone up into heaven, to whom angels, principalities and powers have all been made subject. He is in the place of absolute exaltation; there is not a higher place in the universe than the place that Jesus fills, yet He is desirous tonight to fill your heart as well. How wonderful the gospel is! I wonder what is in your heart? If you have not Christ, there is not much to fill it.

A servant of God once said, 'Man's heart is too great to be filled with anything but Christ'. That is true, yet how often we occupy ourselves with other things in an attempt to satisfy the desires that find a place in our hearts which are by nature "desperately wicked" and "incurable" (Jeremiah 17:9 AV, Darby).

God has set out certain conditions to bring men into blessing. It is a divinely appointed way and there is no other. There is a multitude of religions in this world and many creeds with various theories but what does God say? He says: "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

A man came into the preaching at Worthing some years ago who was very offended when he was told he was a sinner. 'What are these sins I have committed?' he said. 'I have not done anything wrong'. Oh what a perilous position to be in! I trust you will not take that position tonight.

In Luke 18 the Lord speaks of a man who did not think he was like the rest of men. He said that he was not unjust, rapacious, and so on. Beside him was another man and they were both going up to the temple to pray. The other man "smote upon his breast, saying, O God, have compassion on me, the sinner"

(Luke 18:12, 13). Oh that you might do that tonight. Realise that before God you are a hell-deserving sinner. You have nothing to plead but the righteousness of God which is toward you in Christ Jesus. "Righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ towards all" (Romans 3:22). Towards all! Think of God encompassing all men everywhere.

We need to get down to basics. A politician some years ago spoke about returning to basics but he was not able to bring it about. Yet we return to basics in the gospel. They are that as a sinner you deserve punishment and eternal banishment from the presence of God; instead of which God opens the door of His mercy and says, 'I will bless you'. On what basis? That your sins have been borne and carried away by Another, the very Man to whom God, in the passage we have read, opened the heavens and declared: "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight" (Mark 1:11). It was a voice out of heaven, distinguishing Christ from every other man. That is what I would like to do in the preaching tonight, to mark out the supremacy and uniqueness of the Lord Jesus. There is no other Person like Him.

Has not God made the gospel simple? Then why is it so difficult? Because we do not like to repent. Yet that is the first step to blessing. I recognise God's claim upon me, I recognise that I am a sinner and I need a Saviour and therefore I come to Him and say, 'I have been wrong; God be merciful to me the sinner'. The flood-gates of divine love open immediately. It is wonderful.

The Lord Jesus, the One of whom we have read, said, "The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but my words shall in no wise pass away" (Mark 13:31). You can trust a Man like that. Even your christian friends may let you down but you will never be disappointed in Jesus, never. He is able to save you today and you may trust Him for time and for eternity.

Now how has this all come about? The very Man that was here, approved of heaven, came in to declare the love of God. Heaven was aglow when Jesus came in. It says, "There was a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God" (Luke 2:13). Redemption was not for the angels but they were praising God that a Saviour had been born for mankind.

Thus Jesus began His pathway and grew up in 30 years of hidden life before God. When God says here, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight" it refers to that secret pathway of Jesus. Paul says that what men do in secret is "shameful even to say" (Ephesians 5:12), but what Jesus did in secret was wholly delightful to heaven. So much so that the heavens here were opened to declare God's approbation of the Man who was sent forth to bind the power of the devil and set men free.

He says: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach glad tidings to the poor; he has sent me to preach to captives deliverance, and to the blind sight, to send forth the crushed delivered, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19). No other Man could say, “To-day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears”. A prophecy given hundreds of years before was fulfilled when Jesus stood up in Nazareth to read. It says they “wondered at the words of grace which were coming out of his mouth” (Luke 4:22). Thank God, they have not stopped yet. Those people did not receive the words of grace. What are you going to do with them tonight?

Before He moves out into public service the Lord Jesus went to meet the devil in the wilderness. Satan with all his wiles tempted the Saviour but He did not yield. The devil is successful in his attacks on every other man but not with Jesus. The Saviour met every wile that Satan could put forward and goes forth in triumph to bind the strong man and to set men free. That involved the road to Calvary’s cross, for without Christ’s death and the shedding of His blood there would have been no salvation.

The life of Jesus was a perfect life but without His death there would be no blessing. There needed to be an offering for sin. Jesus was that offering; He “offered himself spotless to God” (Hebrews 9:14).

As we read the book of Leviticus we see the specific instructions that were given that every animal offered had to be without blemish. What did God have in mind in that? He was drawing attention to the perfection of His beloved Son. How interesting those offerings become as we think of Jesus. At the cross, Jesus was the offering priest, the altar and the sacrifice. He endured the wrath of God against sin. Oh what a moment that was. We stand back in holy reverence as we think of the awful moment when all forsook Him.

He endured the taunts, the scourging and the derision of men. They spat at Him and put a crown of thorns upon His head. Every human indignity that wicked hearts could devise was heaped upon Christ. He submitted in holy devotion to the will of His God that He might effect the great work of redemption. It has not been without cost, dear friend. God “who, yea, has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” (Romans 8:32). Who can measure what it meant to His heart; Jesus was there at Calvary in all His perfection when God poured out His wrath against sin and forsook Him.

“Him who knew not sin he has made sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Think of what it meant for the holy soul of the Lord. We become so accustomed to sin, defilement and wickedness but Jesus never knew it, yet He was made sin on our account. How bitter the cry: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark

15:34). Who can measure what it meant for the Lord in those moments? From the God that He had called upon there was no answer! At the moment of His greatest need there was no answer because of all that He was bearing before the eye of a holy and righteous God.

That work has been completed. It has been done once for all. The shedding of the precious blood of Christ is the witness that righteousness has been met. The mercy seat is set forth through faith in His blood. Oh, my friend, trust Christ and trust His finished work. Trust that precious blood that has been shed that every sin may be atoned for and removed from the sight of a righteous and holy God. When I do that I am free from the claims and power of sin, death and Satan. I am set free. What for? To please myself? No. To please the One who has done it for me.

Well, that is really in effect what the apostle Paul came to in Acts 9. There was a light from heaven. Paul had been a persecutor of Christians. His was one of the worst cases of persecution. Paul says himself that he: “excessively persecuted the assembly of God, and ravaged it” (Galatians 1:13).

Lovers of Jesus would have heard in Damascus that Saul of Tarsus was coming and what terror would have entered their hearts. He was the arch enemy of the believers of Jesus. Paul says later, “I indeed myself thought that I ought to do much against the name of Jesus the Nazarean” (Acts 26:9). Saul was not a wicked and immoral man; he was a very religious man. He says he was, “Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to righteousness which is in the law, found blameless” (Philippians 3:5,6). You could not have seen found a more religious man anywhere than Saul and yet he was a hater of the name of Jesus.

What does the name of Jesus mean to you? What side are you going to take tonight? Will you stand by the cross of the One who came to save you? Or will you ally yourself to the world that has cast Him out and crucified Him? What a challenge! What a moment of decision!

Where we read in Acts, Saul was on the road to persecute the lovers of Jesus when this light out of heaven suddenly shone about him. What a wondrous light it was. It obscured every other light. When Paul gives his own account of this moment it says, “a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun” (Acts 26:13). All fell to the ground. What the Lord can do in one stroke of His power! I desire that He may do it for you tonight. He wants you for Himself. He does not want you to be lost for eternity; He wants to bring you into the joy and sunshine of divine blessing.

How did Paul come into it? He said, “Who art thou, Lord?” It was a realisation that there was no other Person to whom he could own allegiance from that

moment but the Lord Jesus. And that is really the crux of the gospel. Writing to Timothy Paul says, “in me, the first, Jesus Christ might display the whole long-suffering, for a delineation of those about to believe on him to life eternal” (1 Timothy 1:16). ‘Delineation’ is a long word but it simply means that in Paul there was set forth an example of a sinner coming into blessing.

We read that he was “led by the hand” and brought into Damascus. Think of that mighty, self-important Pharisee just being led by the hand into the city, to the very people that he had earlier planned to lead to Jerusalem to be put to death! What a change as Saul came into that believing company. There are people like that in Defford today. There are people here who love the Lord. They want you to find your place amongst them. Saul was led by the hand into Damascus to find Christians, lovers of Jesus.

That is the way in which, the Lord says, we have to be converted. He says, “Verily I say to you, Unless ye are converted and become as little children, ye will not at all enter into the kingdom of the heavens” (Matthew 18:3). How needful it is to preach the kingdom, to preach the rights of the blessed Saviour who is above. The kingdom of God is here. It is going to be displayed soon. In the coming day He will take up His rights, as it says: “he shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth” (Psalm 72:8). His name is to be praised universally.

Yet His kingdom is already here. He is enthroned in the hearts of those who love Him, believe on Him and are waiting for Him. This blessed Person I am speaking of tonight is coming back soon, coming back first of all to claim His own and if that happens tonight where you will be?

Once you are saved you are saved for ever. You are not saved today and lost tomorrow. That is false teaching. But, what are you going to do with the time that remains? If the Lord does not come tonight you have tomorrow. Maybe you have to go to business. A lot here I expect are retired; maybe some will have to go to school. What are you going to do there? Are you going to tell persons that you belong to Jesus? Once you get the Person of the Lord before you everything else falls into place.

Oh, you say, ‘You make it sound very good, but I look around and I see Christians in all sorts of difficulties, trials and sorrows’. So you do. God allows those things so that He might work things out in our hearts. It says, “tribulation works endurance; and endurance, experience; and experience, hope; and hope does not make ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts” (Romans 5:3-5). Instead of the difficulties mounting up and causing persons to be depressed

they are all used in His ways to bring about His own work in our hearts, so that we may look away from the things here and look to the Man that is above.

It is a pathway that is well worthwhile. I can say that. It does not lead to greatness in this world nor any prominence as far as man is concerned, but the eye of God is upon those who trust in Jesus and believe in Him. What is more, He fills you with His Spirit meanwhile to satisfy the desires of your heart.

Now, finally, I come to the last verse we read which speaks of a Man out of heaven. It is the same blessed Man who is proclaimed tonight as a Saviour. He is coming back, as Judge! Men pursue their courses regardless of the claims of God, regardless of the claims of the gospel. It is not a matter of choice. Judgment comes upon “those who do not obey the glad tidings” (2 Thessalonians 1:8). Through the gospel God asserts His right to your obedience.

The Lord Jesus is going to deal with those who disobey. We read, “the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven, with the angels of his power, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who know not God”. What a solemn word. “Those who know not God”! What has happened to the believers then? They have gone. Think of a world where there are no christians, where there is no preaching. You have come here perhaps week after week, but there will come a day when the time for the preaching will have gone and gone for ever.

Ah, these things are real; it is not fancy. I am not speaking of something that is a theory; it is true. God will close the door and He may well close the door tonight. Where will you stand? You have the chance to go through the door tonight, into the sphere of divine grace and blessing. If you remain outside you may find yourself outside for ever. You cannot repent in hell; it is no place for repentance, but a place of remorse.

Those “who do not obey the glad tidings of our Lord Jesus Christ” will pay the penalty of “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His might”. Think of the One who is proclaimed in all His blessedness as a Saviour tonight, appearing then in judgment to deal with all that is opposed to God. Do not spurn the gospel, do not say, ‘It is not for me.’

Lay claim to the wonderful grace of God that is proclaimed in the glad tidings. Come to “Jesus, our deliverer from the coming wrath” (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Wrath is coming; there is no doubt about it. The Lord in His wonderful grace and long-suffering has brought you into this room that you might have another opportunity to come into blessing. Then you will have part in this wonderful scene that “when he shall have come to be glorified in his saints, and wondered at in all that have believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:10). Who are they? Those who have been redeemed by His precious blood. Think of Him glorified in His saints.

He is the One who is glorified now; He is going to be glorified in a vast multitude of those who have put their trust in Jesus and “wondered at in all that have believed”.

You know, the world will gaze in wonder in a coming day. Christians who have suffered here will be seen in heaven in this wonderful display of the handiwork of God. Through all the centuries that have passed all those who have put their faith and trust in the blessed Saviour will be seen. May you come into that wondrous throng tonight. Sing His praises now as you will sing them for eternity.

David Bond

A preaching of the gospel at Defford, 19th March 2000

A VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Some time ago, I met a friend of mine who has experienced and weathered many of the storms of life and I said to him, ‘Give me a thought from God’s Word!’.

‘Right!’ he said, ‘Isaiah 41:10, do you know it?’

‘Yes’, I replied, ‘it goes like this:

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

‘No! No! No! Francis’ interrupted my friend, ‘You must not race through it like that! It is a verse for the week. Think of it like this:

“Fear thou not”	that is for day one.
“For I am with thee”	that is for day two.
“Be not dismayed”	that is for day three.
“For I am thy God”	that is for day four.
“I will strengthen thee”	that is for day five.
“Yea, I will help thee”	that is for day six.
“Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”	that is for day seven.’

Isn’t that just wonderful? Here is God’s word to you and to me for each day of the week. It is exactly what I need, and it is exactly what you need, too. It is handed to us to give us strength, support, encouragement and hope for the day, and for every day.

Now, I do not know what day of the week it is when you are reading this but you can just begin where you are with day one.

The word for day one is: **“Fear thou not”**.

I am sure you will agree with me that this comes right down to the point of our need, because at one time or another we are all gripped by fear. Yet God knows all about our fears, and this word is really a command. He says: “Fear thou not” or ‘Don’t be afraid!’; which means that He can banish our fears, for with His command comes His enabling. Perhaps you are gripped by some special fear at this moment. The Lord can free you from it. He can free you gloriously.

Have you ever noticed how frequently God says “Fear not!” in the Bible? This, surely, is all the proof we need that He wants us to be set free from fear, and that He can do it for us! He can free you from fear, as He did the psalmist, who said, “I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears” (Psalm 34 :4).

The word for day two is: **“For I am with thee”**.

This is why we need not fear. The Lord is with us. David, the psalmist, once said, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me”. In other words, the presence of Christ means the banishment of fear. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee”. The word for day one spills over in blessing to day two! “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”. So we may boldly say “I will not fear!” (Hebrews 13:5-6).

When you come to think of it, if the Lord really is with you, how can you be fearful? The realised presence of Christ is the secret of release from fear. Because Christ is with me, I need not be fearful.

The word for day three is: **“Be not dismayed”**.

If you prefer, you can read it as: ‘Do not be discouraged!’ Discouragement is one of the prevailing maladies today and discouragement always comes from the Devil, who just wants to get us down and keep us down. But we need not be discouraged, because God loves us very much and cares for us. He, as it were, bends down over the battlements of Heaven and says, ‘Be not dismayed. Don’t be discouraged! Don’t lose heart!’ Yes, it is God Himself Who says this.

Have you ever noticed 1 Samuel 30:6? Part of it reads like this:

“And David was greatly distressed ... but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

Perhaps as you read these lines this is the very word of encouragement that you need? Well, take it from the Lord Himself: “Be not dismayed!”

The word for day four is: **“For I am thy God”**.

Where is there room for fear and discouragement if God, the Almighty One, is our God, and if He is with us? If you are bruised and battered, or even if you have been broken in the trials and testings of life, take this sweet word from the Lord Himself and realise how personal it is: “I am thy God!”

Thank Him for that word and tell Him that you will accept it from Him.

I think that the special thing to notice in this word is that here it is not the believer who is saying to the Lord, “Thou are mine!” but it is the Lord saying to the believer, “I am thine!” So, however fearful or uncertain you may feel, if you are a Christian, if you are really trusting the Lord as your own personal Saviour, He gives you this assurance. He says: “I am thy God”. What more do you want?

The word for day five is: **“I will strengthen thee”**.

Sometimes after I have preached, one of my friends may tell me: ‘The Lord supported you today’. Yes, He does just that; not only when we may be preaching, but when we are facing the demands of everyday life He gives His gracious and wonderful support. He says, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Yes, it is! I can testify to that, I have proved this to be true over and over again in my own experience, and so have countless christians who have proved that God’s strength has been made perfect in weakness, and they have been able to say: “For when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

If you are in special need of strength just now, will you not take this word from the Lord Himself? “I will strengthen thee!”

The word for day six is: **“Yea, I will help thee”**

Have you ever noticed in Romans 8:26 we read that He “helpeth our infirmities”? I know that the immediate reference is to prayer, but we must not confine the application of this glorious truth to the matter of prayer alone. The fact is, we are weak and strengthless in ourselves, but the Lord comes alongside us, indeed, He comes inside us, to strengthen us. He says, “Yea, I will help thee!”

Do you need His special help at this very moment? Does it concern some physical need, or a need connected with your home or business? Is a loved one ill or in trouble? Or, is it that you have some spiritual need, or lack the assurance of God’s love and forgiveness? Well, the Lord wants to help you, and He will do

just that if you will make your case over to Him. He says, “Yea, I will help thee!”

The word for day seven is: **“I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness”.**

I can say that I am absolutely safe for time and eternity! Do you think that sounds presumptuous? No, it is not presumptuous, for my God is holding me and He is upholding me! Read these wonderful words of Jesus:

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29).

How safe and secure I am! And so are you, if you are one of His sheep! Are you one of His sheep? Do you belong to Him?

Well, there is a word to cover every day of the week, every week of the year, and every year of life itself.

One final thing: notice how personal all this is. Go through Isaiah 41:10 and see the words “thou”, “I”, “thee”, “thy”, “I”, “my”; in other words, it is all between the Lord Himself and you. So take Him at His word now.

Before you put this booklet down, read the following hymn:

‘How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled:
‘Fear not, I am with thee, oh, be not dismayed!
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid:
I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.
‘E’en down to old age all My people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal unchangeable love;
And then, when grey hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne.’

Francis Dixon

LORD, PRIEST AND HEAD

Thou art our Lord! Control my will
And keep each fleshly movement still!
What safety in Thy rule is known!
What sure salvation as we own
Thyself as Lord!

Thou art our Priest! Thou dost sustain
Our hearts in either joy or pain.
The holiest is now our place,
Our hearts are drawn there by Thy grace
For Thou art Priest!

And Thou art Head! In Thee the mind
May wisdom and direction find.
Love's own direction; for the heart
Now learns with Thee its heavenly part
With Thee the Head!

Malcolm Biggs (1875-1941)

HEAVENLY FAVOURS

Love proved on the cross of shame,
Love worthy of God's great Name,
Love, eternally the same,
Wins a heart like mine.

Grace, knowing my every sin,
Grace, dying to make me clean,
Grace that ran to bring me in,
Suits a heart like mine.

Peace, still as a sea of glass,
Peace knowing the judgment's past,
Peace that will for ever last,
Calms a heart like mine.

Joy, fruit of the Father's kiss,
Joy, foretaste of heavenly bliss,
Joy, that springs from love like this,
 Fills a heart like mine.

Lord, while in this world below,
Still more of Thy love I'd know,
So shall sweeter praises flow,
 From a heart like mine.

George Cutting (1843-1934)

COMPANIONSHIP

We thank Thee, Lord, for weary days
When desert springs are dry,
And first we knew what depth of need
Thy love could satisfy.

We thank Thee for that rest in Him
The weary only know—
The perfect, wondrous sympathy
We needs must learn below.

We know Him as we could not know
Through Heaven's golden years;
We there shall see His glorious face,
But Mary saw His tears.

The touch that heals the broken heart
Is never felt above;
His angels know His blessedness,
His way-worn saints, His love.

When in the glory and the rest
We joyfully adore,
Remembering the desert way
We yet shall praise Him more.

Frances E Bevan (1827-1909)

THE STORY OF 'HOW GREAT THOU ART'

'Oh Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed:

Chorus

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!'*

Many thousands throughout the world have sung 'How Great Thou Art' and been encouraged and cheered by it. The hymn is generally attributed to Stuart Hine but his was only a part, though a major one.

The hymn was born in the heart of Carl Boberg in Sweden. One warm summer evening in 1885 he was making his way home from Kronoback to Monsternas, a distance of about two miles, when he was overtaken by a tremendous thunder storm. The rain lashed down and lightning lit up the surrounding fields again and again. As can be the way with such storms the rain suddenly eased and the sun broke through to result in a wonderful rainbow.

Carl had been converted some seven years before, when he was nineteen, following a gospel preaching that had so deeply stirred him that he wandered about afterwards until he fell on his knees in a field and confessed to God that he was 'a sinner beyond measure'. This brought him no peace and for several weeks he was continually crying out for forgiveness until he overheard someone quoting: "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13-14). He saw that he could trust Christ and took Him at His word.

The thought of the storm and the rainbow were still in Carl's mind when he got to his home town of Monsternas. As he saw the calm of the water in the Monsternas Inlet and heard the thrushes singing in the woods, he was overwhelmed with the glories of nature and the way that it, in turn, spoke of the Creator. Seizing a pen he started to write a poem of nine verses. A rough translation of some of them is:

'O great God! when I the world consider
Which Thou hast made by Thine almighty Word;
And how the web of life Thy wisdom guideth,
And all creation feedeth at Thy board:

Chorus

*Then doth my soul burst forth in song of praise:
O great God! O great God!*

When in the storm I hear the thunder rolling,
And lightning flashes darting through the sky;
When gently fall the showers of rain refreshing,
And shines the promised rainbow:

When summer wind across the field is rustling,
And flowers give out their scent beside the spring
When trills the thrush within the verdant arbour,
Or in the pinewood shade we hear him sing:

And when, oppressed by sin, I fall before Him,
Down at His feet and pray for grace and peace;
And then, my soul in righteous pathways leading,
He saves me, makes my sin and strife to cease:

When finally the veil of time is lifted,
And when my faith is changed to sight at last;
When comes the clarion call, the eternal summons,
My soul, redeemed, shall enter into rest:

Chorus

*Then doth my soul burst forth in song of praise:
Thanks gracious God! Thanks gracious God!*

The hymn had a small circulation but in 1890 Boberg became the editor of a Swedish christian magazine and his hymn was published in it, together with a tune. It found a place in a few hymn books but even then it did not become widely known.

Manfred von Glehn heard it in Swedish and translated it into German, changing the 'O great God' to the words we know, 'How great Thou art' in the process. In 1927 I. K. Prokhanoff took this version and translated it into Russian, where Stuart Hine heard it.

Hine, a missionary working in Russia, saw at first hand the effect of this hymn in gospel work. One day preaching in a small village among the Carpathian mountains in Czechoslovakia he was caught in a thunder storm very similar to the one that had inspired Carl Boberg. Out of that thunder storm came a translation of verse one of the Russian version into English:

'Oh Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed:'

Later on Stuart Hine was walking with some christians in woods in Romania. They were surrounded by the sound of birds singing and the Romanians spontaneously broke into song, singing I. K. Prokhanoff's version of 'How Great Thou Art'. As a result verse two was written in English:

'When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees:
When I look down from lofty mountains grandeur,
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:'

The third verse, speaking of the greatest work of all, had to wait a while until Hine came to a remote village where a number of people had been converted through reading a Bible left by Cossack troops years before. These believers were so full of joy and praise that the third verse of the hymn suggested itself almost at once:

'And when I think, that God His Son not sparing,
Gave Him to die — I scarce can take it in:
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died, to take away my sin:'

The hymn that had been slowly forming out of such varied experiences of the work of God now lay dormant for nearly another ten years before the final verse was written.

By 1948 Stuart Hine was back in Britain. With thousands of displaced persons, many from the Soviet Bloc, streaming into Britain after the war, he found a ready outlet near at hand for his evangelical work. One day a Russian who had lost all contact with his family during the war and now could not trace them was converted. While this man rejoiced in his salvation it was tinged with sorrow that he could not share this with his wife who had trusted Christ in Russia years before. At the time of his wife's conversion her husband had been opposed and uninterested. Now he only wished that he could let her know the good news that he too trusted in Christ. Alas there was no opportunity! It would have to wait until the day of Christ's coming! The triumph of that moment is captured in verse four:

‘When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home — what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration,
And there proclaim, ‘My God, how great Thou art!’”

Based on an account by Stuart Hine.

HELP FOR ANXIOUS SOULS — 3

I fear I have committed the unpardonable sin.

What is the unpardonable sin? The Lord Himself distinctly answers that question in Mark 3:29 & 30: “But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: because they said, He hath a unclean spirit”.

In Matthew 12:28 the Lord says: “I cast out devils by the Spirit of God”. They said: “This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of devils” (verse 24). So that in reality they were calling the Spirit of God the ‘prince of devils’! And this was the blasphemy for which there was no forgiveness, ascribing the miracles of Jesus to the agency of the devil.

Now it is evident that if a person still wants Christ to be their Saviour, whatever their backslidings may have been, they have not committed this sin. How could anyone want one whom he believed to be energised by the very power of Satan

to be their Saviour? Why, if you knew of persons energised by Satan you would not trust them with the charge of one of your horses for a single day, much less trust them with the salvation of your soul for eternity!

But some troubled one may say, 'I have sinned very deeply, and my course of backsliding has been long and aggravated'. Yet, while you could not possibly feel this too keenly, and nothing is more sorrowful than such returns to His love, even this has not changed His heart. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1).

We naturally inquire, after doing something or saying something distasteful to a cherished friend, 'What will they think of me?' And this is usually the case with the poor backslider. He says: 'What must the Lord think of me now, when I even condemn and hate myself for my God-dishonouring ways?'

Well, He thinks about you as He always thought. "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11). He knew from the very beginning how bad your history would be, yet He gave His precious life-blood to redeem you. It was in view of all I was, and all that I shall turn out to be, that He "loved me, and gave himself for me".

I have been waiting for God to give me some inward sign of pardon and acceptance

"Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (John 4:48) is an old fashioned bar to blessing. It springs from the unbelief in our hearts, from the desire to have something for sight or sense to rest upon rather than the word of God and the Person and work of Christ. How soul refreshing it is to see that nobleman of old, turning from the reasoning of his own heart to lend a willing ear to, and to find a satisfying sufficiency in "the word that Jesus had spoken" (John 4:50).

Sooner or later we all have to fall back on that. When the well known preacher, Dr Chalmers, was dying he said to his friends, 'Give me a bit of the naked word of God to die upon'.

I knew a farmer in the Fens who in great perplexity of soul besought God to give him some token of acceptance. He had a flock of sheep in the farmyard at the time, wandering about within the enclosure, and he asked God, if there was any hope of salvation for him, that ten of these sheep might be in a certain waggon

shed when he went that way. Shortly afterwards he went to that side of the yard and eagerly counted the sheep under that shed. To his great relief, he found exactly ten! Was this enough for his anxious soul? No! It only gave him a transitory flush of hope, which soon passed away. Was it a mere accident or was it a token from God in answer to his prayer?

Once more he repeated his request and again asked that ten sheep in another corner of the yard might be his token for salvation. With increased excitement he went to the corner to count the sheep and once more, to his comfort and astonishment, found just ten! ‘And did this give you peace and assurance?’ I enquired. ‘No’, he said, ‘Nothing gave me the certainty of my blessing until I got the sure word of God for it.’ He was all in a fog of uncertainty until he planted his foot firmly on “Thus saith the Lord” and took his bearings by the chart of Scripture.

If you open your Bible and turn to the first chapter of the gospel of Luke, you will find a striking contrast between simple faith and sign-seeking unbelief. As soon as Mary heard the heavenly message she said: “Be it unto me according to thy word”. The answer to her faith was, “Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which have been told her from the Lord” (verses 38, 45). On the other hand, when Zacharias had heard Gabriel’s message, he said, “Whereby shall I know?” and was struck dumb in consequence. Instead of his mouth being opened in praise, as Mary’s was, it was closed in dumb silence by the judgment of God.

Oh that we might be brought, like the centurion of old, to say to the Lord, “Speak the word only”, and that shall be sufficient. “Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19).

Let it not be said to you, “Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe”. What greater wonder could be shown than what was shown at Calvary — the Son of God dying for guilty rebels? What better token of safety then this, “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it”?

Must there not be an inward work of grace? How can I be certain that God's work of grace and my repentance have been deep and real enough?

The Spirit of God does not occupy us with His work within us, but turns the eye to Christ and His finished work for us. It is true that unless there is a work of grace in our souls we should never care to participate in the fruits of what the Saviour did for us on the cross. But peace rests, not upon what we discover of the Spirit's work in our hearts, but upon God's satisfaction in Christ's work on the cross.

If we could only get peace when we were satisfied that the inward work of grace was deep enough, not a single honest believer would ever have peace.

If you came with thirst to a drinking fountain would you stand looking at it wondering if your thirst was deep enough? Why no, your thirst brings you there, but it is the water that quenches your thirst when you are there. If you so realize your soul's need that the cry of your heart is, 'I must have Christ: I shall perish without Him' be assured you are heartily welcome to Him. "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of water of life freely" (Revelation 21:6). "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

How simple are those invitations to the thirsty one in the closing pages of the Bible:

"I will give...freely";
"Let him take...freely".

Repentance is the judgment of what we are and what we have done in the light of what God is. It is the result of God's work of grace in us. A traveller who takes a short cut at midnight across a dark muddy field and falls into a dirty ditch may get some idea of his dirty state when the moon emerges from behind clouds; as the light of the morning dawns he will get a still clearer and ever increasing knowledge of his true condition. So the sinner, "by the light from on high", is brought to repentance and the longer he walks with God, the nearer he comes to the light of "perfect day" and the deeper sense he will have of his own unworthiness. Never will he be able to say that his repentance is real enough or the sense of his unworthiness deep enough. But this he can say: 'The further I go on the more I discover that I am bad enough to need such a Saviour, and the more I wonder at the grace that could stoop to care for such a sinner'.

George Cutting.
(This concludes the series)

THE CHURCH IN FOUR ASPECTS - 4. THE HOLY CITY

Revelation 3:7-13 21:9-27

Through the messages to the seven churches given in the beginning of Revelation, the Lord reveals to John the state of the church as a whole, and begins with Ephesus, because the point of departure is seen there. What it means is this; the church had fallen away from first love.

Now, John is shown what Paul never saw. You do not find in Paul's writings the idea of revival of the church here. In his second epistle to Timothy, Paul gives instructions as to what one is to do when the church has become a "great house" (that a man has to purge himself from vessels to dishonour and to "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart") but he does not give the idea at all of the revival of the truth of the church in souls. But in John, though the Lord shows to him the departure, the truth comes out in the latter part of the addresses to the seven churches of a certain degree of revival. It is that which made me read the address to the church in Philadelphia because undoubtedly you have there a revival of the truth in the apprehension and practice of it.

Philadelphia does not describe to us a company characterised by holding certain truths, but it stands representatively before the Lord in the truth of the church. It might be reduced to a very small company but the whole value of Philadelphia is that it stands in the truth of the church and the Lord, in addressing them, speaks not of something peculiar to Philadelphia but of what is proper to the church as a whole.

The position of Philadelphia was this: "Thou hast...kept my word, and hast not denied my name". That was characteristic. Then He says, speaking of the synagogue of Satan, "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee". I do not think that means Philadelphia simply, but states what is true of the church. "Christ loved the church". Then He says, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience" — here again I think Philadelphia is looked upon as representative — "I also will keep thee out of the hour of temptation". The Lord is really speaking in spirit to the church. I decline altogether the idea of attaching any peculiar value to a particular company because that company holds something distinctive. The only value of any company in the present dispensation is that they return to what was from the outset, that is, that they represent morally the church as before Christ. Then the Lord can speak to

them and I think that is the position of Philadelphia. It includes those who are morally in the truth of the church's position before Christ.

I would add that I have no doubt that it is the special line of truth which is opened up to us in John's writings as to the revelation of the Father and the Son and the gift of eternal life and the Holy Spirit which brings souls into the truth of Philadelphia; when you have got there you have really returned to the point of departure, to the truth of the church.

If you read the addresses to the last three churches, you will find that neither Sardis nor Laodicea has got back to Christ; the Lord is distant in both of them but in Philadelphia He is the holy and the true and they keep His word and do not deny His name.

But it was given of the Lord that, as the revelation to Paul had placed the church in heaven, so John should see the church coming down from God out of heaven. That will take us to chapter 21, where he says. "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away". These verses should be read in conjunction with the previous chapter, because they follow on quite in the line of it. John had been led on to see the final resurrection and judgment, to see every moral question settled and then, as a close, he sees the holy city coming down from God out of heaven, and the tabernacle of God is with men. That is where we get the holy city connected with the eternal state; it is not a new subject but the final outcome.

The kingdom (what we commonly speak of as the millennium) is the means to an end and is in view of the eternal state; after the repression of all evil and the final dealing with it, the kingdom is delivered up and God is all in all and then it is that you get the holy city coming down. Then, "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them", and will be their God, and they shall be His people; former things are passed away; and there is no more death. All things are new; the tabernacle of God is not with Israel but with men; there is no distinction between races. Those first few verses are much more properly attached to the preceding chapter; I touch on them because they give the proper sequence.

In verse 9 we read: "There came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife". But notice this, John does not see the bride, the Lamb's wife, in her relations to the bridegroom but as a city. It is the same city, I suppose, which had been spoken of previously in the chapter as "a bride adorned for her husband", but here it is "the bride, the Lamb's wife". "He showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God". She must have been taken there in the first instance and the apprehension of this was the power of the ministry of Paul; John sees her coming from God out of heaven, having the glory of God. It is a wonderful result, and particularly to one like John, to whom the ruin of the church had been revealed, the decay of everything down here, all ending really in Thyatira and Laodicea.

I will very briefly notice a few details which are given to us for it is of the very deepest interest to us to see the features which distinguish the city as coming down from God out of heaven. The first point is that she has "the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and had a wall great and high; and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel." "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." So far you get, I think, the marks of identification.

The first is the glory of God. Ever since sin came into the world, what has been in view has been the glory of God. What I understand by the glory of God is the complete and perfect satisfaction of the divine attributes (righteousness, holiness, love etc.) in the accomplishment of God's counsels of grace. The glory of God appeared to Abraham; there you get the first idea of counsel in the way of promise. Stephen saw the glory of God in the presence of Jesus. And in Paul there shone forth "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". In the church is seen the perfect and complete satisfaction of the divine attributes in the accomplishment of God's counsels of grace. And this is what characterises "Jerusalem above". Her shining is like unto a stone most precious and she is resplendent with the glory of God.

The second mark is the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. That conveys to me the thought that in the church you cannot ignore the twelve tribes of Israel; they have their place in the counsel of God and salvation came out from them to the gentiles. We have become partakers of their spiritual things. The twelve tribes are represented in the city. Then the third mark is that in the foundations are the

names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The names complete the three marks of identification of the city.

The next point is the measure of the city: "And the city lieth four-square, and the length of it is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel". That is the measure of it. It has often been pointed out that it is a cube. You get the idea of measuring also in chapter 11; the temple of God and the worshippers and the altar were to be measured. What does this measuring mean? I believe that it is the demonstration that every demand of divine righteousness is answered. It is really the fulfilment and display of what is spoken of in 2 Corinthians 5: "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him". In the church all is equal and exact and there is no adjustment wanted; the length and the breadth and the height of it are all equal. There are two ways in which righteousness is presented to us in Scripture; one as the ground of our justification as here upon earth and the other in the ministry of reconciliation that, as a result of Christ having been made sin for us, we have boldness to enter into the holiest. Here you get the whole thing completed and displayed. That is the measure of the city.

Then we find the preciousness of what is there. "And the building of the wall of it was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones". "And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl; and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." The idea which that conveys to me is that it is the precious result of the formative work of God individually in the saints. No precious stone gives light but reflects light. That is the preciousness of the church in that sense. But then each precious stone is the fruit and result of the work of the lapidary; everything that would obstruct light has been removed. The idea of preciousness in each individual part is carried on to the gates. The foundation is the beginning and the gates are the completion of a city; as we read in the Old Testament, the foundations of Jericho were laid in Hiel's firstborn, and the gates set up in his youngest son (1 Kings 16:34). "Every several gate" is of one pearl; each was unique of its kind. It all conveys, I think, the idea of the work of the Spirit of God in believers; the practical result of which is that every believer is bright in the light which comes from Christ. That is what ought to be here; every one of us should reflect some trait of the perfectness of Christ.

Now I pass on to the fourth point, to the characteristics of the city. It says, “And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” These are the distinctive marks.

First, there is no temple. I doubt if there ever was before a city without a temple but the heavenly city has no temple; the city itself is the church and is composed entirely of living stones and profession has no place; hence there is no temple — “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it”. A temple would be out of place in the heavenly city, where God dwells and is approached without a veil. You can have, and do have, a temple here upon earth, for in the present dispensation, believers, living stones, are the temple in the midst of profession and the city is not yet. Those who constitute the city were the temple down here.

The next characteristic is that there is no need of natural light; they have no need of the sun nor of the moon; the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. It is enlightened in what is displayed of God in what God has secured for Himself for His own glory, for the display of His own attributes; and all is made known in the Lamb; it is that which is the light of the temple, and they do not need natural light. A man who is a great natural light is no good as such in the temple of God. The Corinthians were looking for natural light, cultivated men, men of ability. That is where Christendom is at the present time but what is suited for the temple is the spiritual man. As to the city, the glory of God lightens it and the Lamb is the lamp thereof, the lamp-bearer. What they are enlightened by in the heavenly city is all the good of God; divine attributes in their display and satisfaction all shine out there. That is the second great characteristic.

Thirdly, the nations get the good of it. Just as in regard to the temple the Lord could say, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations”, that is, the nations were to get the good of what was established in Israel, so when you come to the heavenly city the nations are to walk in the light of it; that is, all the light which comes out in the church is good for the nations. The revelation of God, and of what God is, which is centred in the church, holds good in blessing

for the nations down here; and how it is effectual is in the sense, that if God could make known in the church “the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus”, how good God must be! That will hold good for the nations here upon earth; they will walk in the light of the city.

There is one more point; the gates of it are not shut. The reason is that there is no night there; the very power of good and light excludes the entrance of anything that is of darkness; there is the opposite element to darkness. That is the last characteristic of the heavenly city.

I do not doubt that all these characteristics ought to be seen in the church on earth. What will come out in the heavenly city ought in principle to have marked the temple of God down here. The church ought to have known its privilege, that Jew and Gentile have access by one Spirit to the Father; that there was no temple in that scene; that the greatest natural lights were entirely out of place where the Spirit of God was and what was wanted was the spiritual man. Then again, the nations ought to have got the good of it, because the church was to be the place of supplication and prayer and intercession and giving of thanks for all men. Then evil ought to have been excluded by the very power of good and light in the temple.

It is wonderful that God has been pleased to show to us how the church will come out in its public outward aspect as the city, and all the features and characteristics which will mark it when it does come down from God out of heaven.

May God give us grace that faith may lay hold of it. I do not think that you can take in the truth of it without its having some present effect upon you. The features which will come out perfectly then ought to mark those who, through grace, have really returned to the first principles of the church. It is a great thing that God should have brought us back to it and my conviction is this, that it is really the truth which God has been pleased to give in a special way through John, that has brought us back in some little degree to the apprehension of what God gave originally through Paul, the truth of the church in its relations to Christ. And depend upon it, the more we enter into the truth of the church’s place in relation to Christ, the more we shall enjoy the thought of the wonderful display which God is going to make in the heavenly city. May God give us to understand it spiritually. What is made known to us is but the completion in glory of what is formed here.

F. E. Raven

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