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Living Water

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Editor: Mark Lemon

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THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD — 4

Paul, a man who knew God

“But surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all, and count them to be filth, that I may gain Christ; and that I may be found in him, not having my righteousness, which would be on the principle of law, but that which is by faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God through faith, to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead.” (Philippians 3:8 -11)

Here is a man speaking who certainly does have a knowledge of God, and has been formed by it. We need to remember that Paul writes from prison. Prisons are not comfortable places at the best of times and Roman prisons were probably worse than some. Paul writes from prison.

He writes affectionately to these believers in Philippi, telling them much of his own soul experience. It has often been said that it is not exactly a doctrinal epistle. You will find vital truth there as to the Lord's Person but it is not an epistle given over to setting out the truth. It is much more to do with the reflections of a man of God, perhaps not long to remain in this scene, who desires to pass on to those dear to him in Philippi what he had come to know of God in Christ, and to commend it to us so that we might follow in the same steps. “But whereto we have attained, let us walk in the same steps”.

In our chapter Paul speaks first about all his claims to be a good Jew: all the things that would have given him a status in the world that he valued. We mostly have a world that we value. For some of us, it might be the world of sport or the world of entertainment. Not many of us are as interested in every world as we are in some particular one. There was a world that meant something to Paul, or had done, and that was the world of respectable Jewish religion. But Paul came to it that it was not worth having at all. He says, “what things were gain to me these I counted, on account of Christ, loss”. He says, ‘I have been over it all and I want to let it all go on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord’.

This is the man who has travelled around the Eastern Mediterranean. He has been shipwrecked. He has been beaten. He has despaired even of living. He has been taken up once for dead. This is a man who is entitled to speak. Some of us may feel that we do not have much right to speak because we have got so little

experience but you could not cast much doubt on Paul; he has plenty of experience to bear out what he said.

He says, “that I may gain Christ”. He has been attracted to the Lord Jesus Christ and his desire was to be found “in him, not having my righteousness, which would be on the principle of law, but that which is by faith of Christ”. It is interesting that as Paul moved from one epistle to another (and years would have separated this epistle from the epistle to the Romans) his thoughts remain. He is still concerned to be righteous before God, but by faith of Jesus Christ. He has not shifted his ground at all. What he once committed himself to remains.

I have to ask myself what I have committed myself to that remains. Well, I may have committed myself to some things that I now thoroughly regret. The best thing is to be done with those, to let them go, judge them. But as to things that are solid ground in the soul, Paul did not let them go and let us make sure we do not let them go, either.

His desire was to be found “in Christ”, blest in Him, and “to know him”. It is not enough to have known the Lord, as we might say, just once. Paul wanted to maintain it as a current reality “to know him and the power of his resurrection”. The power of resurrection as it bore on the Lord Himself, Paul knew well. The Lord had spoken to him from glory. The power of resurrection had been seen in Christ raised from among the dead and ascended up where He was before but Paul wanted to know that power for himself. I suppose that is the kind of power that Mr. Deck desired when he wrote the line of the hymn:

‘Thy life is now beyond the grave;
Our souls Thou hast set free’.

“The fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death”. As Paul explored what it was to know the Lord, he had to bring before the Philippians that to know the Lord in glory was not enough. Yes, that was the great lever in his soul and that was where the Lord had appeared to him but for Paul it meant being prepared in his own spirit to go the way the Lord had gone. I say this as knowing very little about it, but acknowledging the truth of it, that if we are to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, we have to accept for ourselves the way that He has gone. All the martyrs and those who suffer for righteousness’ sake today (and there are many such) bear witness to this, the fellowship of His sufferings, conformed to His death. “If any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead”.

We say, ‘Paul, are you not sure whether there is going to be a resurrection? Not sure whether you will be there? What about “we, the living, who remain to the coming of the Lord, ... shall be caught up”?’ Paul wants to make it his own in his soul experience. He wants to make the resurrection world his own and he shows that he does not claim to be fully there as yet. I am struck with the hymn we sang, that we cannot yet claim to have arrived in full:

‘...A perfect state,
To meet Christ’s perfect love — this we await’.

None of us has reached perfection in that sense yet. Still, in this chapter Paul does have something to say about perfection: “As many therefore as are perfect, let us be thus minded”. So let us be careful about this word ‘perfect’. There are those who fully belong to Christ and desire to have a portion with Him and know a place of favour before God in Him. I think Paul has that in mind as he speaks about “As many therefore as are perfect” or full grown. It would be a mark of maturity to want to go this way.

Let us be concerned for greater maturity in our own spirits. Old or young, it is never too soon or too late to grow in maturity. The great goal finally is that “we all arrive ... at the full-grown man” (Ephesians 4:13). Let us be on the way to maturity now. Let our feelings and ways and manner of dealing with things be marked by features that belongs to what another scripture calls “full grown men”. There is the full grown man of Ephesians and there are the full grown men of Hebrews. They are different thoughts but they are both worth pursuing as to what is to be looked for now and what is to be looked for in the eternal day.

These things test us all and we do well to be sobered by what has come into our reading of the scriptures today, that even as to well established truths of scripture our faith may fail. Let us look into the truth of God in scripture; see where God has proved Himself to be true constantly, throughout His word; see how He has brought us to the present time; see the liberty into which He has brought us; see the work of His Spirit; see the formation that is proceeding, even now, often in very unfavourable circumstances. And let us be assured that what God has begun He will complete unto Jesus Christ’s day, for His name’s sake.

David Burr

Part four of an address at Croydon, July, 2000

This concludes the series.

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS — CHAPTER 1

(Highlights of a Bible reading)

The chapter has a defined structure. Verses 1-7 form an introduction; the purpose of the epistle is set out in verses 8-17; from chapter 1:18 through to chapter 3:20 we get the state of man in fallen nature. The epistle is to develop our understanding of what God has done in our Lord Jesus Christ and how we come into the enjoyment of it. It is to establish us in what God has set on.

In the gospels we have only brief references to what the Spirit of God takes up in such detail in Romans. The Lord speaks of giving His “life a ransom for many” and there are, of course, references in the gospels that bear on the atonement and the work of redemption but there is nothing like the detail that the Spirit of God gives here. So it is calculated to establish us in the gospel, that we might know our foundations.

Some of the highlights of the first chapter are: “separated to God’s glad tidings”, then “marked out Son of God in power”, then the revelation of both the righteousness and the wrath of God. Finally, there is a short doxology when Paul exclaims “God...who is blessed for ever. Amen”.

Before going on to those points there are some very interesting matters raised in the early verses. Paul describes himself as a “bondman” in the first verse. A bondman is not just a servant; he has responsibilities; his master has placed his trust in him. A worthy bondman would be committed to his master’s interests. Paul was a true bondman of Jesus Christ. He was “separated to God’s glad tidings”. In describing himself in such a way Paul reflected the spirit of his Master.

Paul describes himself as a “called apostle” and those in Rome as “called saints”. Both expressions would convey a definite intervention on God’s part. Later, in chapter eight, he says, “But whom he has predestinated, these also he has called” (v 30). It is what God had in mind from eternity. It is a remarkable feature of the gospel as it comes out in this epistle, that on the one hand there is man’s responsibility and God’s appeal to us all, yet there is also what God had in mind from eternity.

The glory of the calling as applied to all believers comes out in this epistle. As to our being maintained in it day by day, great questions arise as to what room I make for the Lord and the Holy Spirit in my life and what fellowship I find among the people of God. If we find discouragement along the way then we have to examine ourselves as to why that is. These are the realities of the christian path.

In verse 5 Paul refers to having received “grace and apostleship”. Grace in its most general sense is a divine supply. In some of the later chapters, we have grace in regard of the gospel in contrast to law. But as to any service, grace is a divine supply to enable the work to be carried on. No position can be filled out without a supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ. It is striking how often in the epistles grace is called down upon the saints. It is evidently needed and we need to avail ourselves of it.

The apostle brings something of it out in the first epistle to Timothy where he speaks of the Lord appointing to ministry, “a blasphemous and persecutor, and an insolent overbearing man”. There was no grace there but “the grace of our Lord surpassingly over-abounded with faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 1:13). He was affected by the grace of God towards him in Christ and what flowed into his heart then flows out of it in his attitude towards others.

We need grace as a constant supply. The grace of God has reached our hearts once, but we need to be maintained in it. Even the apostle Paul is recorded as losing his spirit occasionally and then realising that he has done so. We learn from these things. Others have passed the same way as, all too often, we go ourselves.

In verse 4 we are told that the Lord was “marked out Son of God in power by resurrection of the dead”. (The reference is plural, it means the resurrection of dead persons.) The resurrection of the dead was a witness to the Lord’s power down here. The Lord sent a message to John the baptist, “Go...tell John...the dead are raised”. The reference may well extend to the raising of those persons that Matthew tells us about who “after His arising” were raised from the tombs and appeared to many in Jerusalem (see Matthew 27:51). We are not told anything more about that. It is totally mysterious; we do not know who they were or what happened to them afterwards but it is “after His arising” and that is what is so significant about it.

In verse 17 we come to another important matter. Righteousness of God is “revealed therein, on the principle of faith, to faith”. The starting point for us is to realise that whatever our background we are all helplessly sunk in sin and it needs the righteousness of God to be revealed to reach into our hearts to bring us into the benefit and glory of what God has in mind.

The righteousness of God has been revealed at the cross. God would have been righteous to have swept the scene in judgment but Jesus took the judgment upon Himself. So the righteousness of God is shown there. Yet at the same time He has judged and condemned sin and made a way of salvation for the sinner and is righteous in being able to do so.

There could never have been any doubt about the actual righteousness of God. Jeremiah says that: “Righteous art thou, Jehovah, when I plead with thee” (Jeremiah 12:1). The question was, how was the righteousness of God able to meet man’s state.

It is opened up further in chapter 3:21 onwards. “But now without law righteousness of God is manifested, borne witness to by the law and the prophets; righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ towards all, and upon all those who believe”.

In order to make us realise our need of God’s righteousness the apostle paints a very vivid picture of the lost condition of man. These are two pivotal things in the gospel: the righteousness of God and the utter ruin of man. The principle of faith is over against the principle of works. So that God is holding out His offer of righteousness on His own terms and it is to be received by faith. He makes it available by faith and not by law and it must be received by faith.

Faith means taking God at His word. If we trust somebody we take them at their word. If God says, ‘I will bless’, we accept that He will bless. If God says, ‘What has infringed my rights must be put right’, well, Jesus has done that. We take God at His word. If we recognise that what God says He means, we are left with no other option than to obey. The challenge in the gospel is not to choose between one thing and another; it is to obey. If I obey, that shows I recognise that God means what He says. If I disobey it infers that I do not recognise that God really means what He says.

Then we find that God’s wrath is revealed: “There is revealed wrath of God from heaven” (verse 18). We have had righteousness of God revealed; now there is also wrath of God revealed from heaven upon all impiety. That is a concept that men do not like to face. They are very happy with the idea of a God of love and a forgiving God but the idea of the wrath of God they do not like. And yet it must come upon all unrighteousness.

The wrath of God is not actually part of the gospel. It may be necessary to refer to it but when Paul speaks of the righteousness of God he says it is “revealed in the glad tidings”. If the wrath of God is revealed there is the need of a remedy and that remedy is provided in the glad tidings.

Verse 18 speaks of those who are, “... holding the truth in unrighteousness”. And then in verses 19 and 20 there is a rejecting of the greatness of God in creation. “Holding the truth in unrighteousness” is a very striking phrase, because we should hardly think of those in the latter part of this chapter as consciously clinging to the truth at all. Many spoken of in this chapter hold whatever they do hold very lightly and turn aside from it and largely ignore it. Verse 21 shows the

downward course. There is some knowledge of God: “knowing God, they glorified him not as God”. They did not give Him the place that was due to Him. Then it says: “neither were thankful”. We might not have expected that to come in just there but it raises a question for us all. If we really know God we cannot help being thankful, very thankful indeed.

If Verses 19 and 20 are not heeded then it leads to a downward way. Verse 20 says, “from the world’s creation the invisible things of him are perceived”. We are to understand that there is a power behind what we can see with our eyes. The power behind creation — the laws of nature for example — the power of God holds it all there; “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3). All these things are there for us to believe and accept but the natural man does not do it.

There seems to be three stages of decline. Idolatry, then the question of lust and then there is the reprobate mind. “God gave them up to a reprobate mind” (v.28); that is a mind void of moral discernment. They do not know what is right and what is wrong. That is the difference between believers and the spirit that particularly marks the world today. “Void of understanding, faithless, without natural affection, unmerciful; who knowing the righteous judgment of God, that they who do such things are worthy of death, not only practise them, but have fellow delight in those who do them”. Paul writing to Timothy speaks of a similar state of things: “But this know, that in the last days difficult times shall be there; for men shall be lovers of self ...”. What we see here is a prophetic picture of the world before the Lord comes. But the condition of man needs a remedy because the righteous judgment of God is that “they who do such things are worthy of death”. That judgment is equally righteous.

In announcing the gospel we start from the stand-point of God’s righteousness. We start in our own souls from this point in the acknowledgement of God, our own sinfulness, our inability to do what is right and we come, on the ground of faith and sovereign mercy on God’s part, to see the righteousness of God revealed.

We get conviction of sin because the Spirit of God works in our heart to make us realise how dreadful we are. In the mercy of God it does not stop there. We see that there is an answer in the death of Christ. It is the work of the Spirit of God in our souls to make us realise what we are capable of in the way of sins.

Each one of us should get the same impression as the apostle Paul had. He calls himself the ‘chief of sinners’. Each believer should come to it that he is no better than Paul.

There is a doxology at the end of verse 25. In the middle of what Paul is saying he adds, God, “who is blessed for ever. Amen”. One aspect of worship to God would be to God as creator.

We see it in scripture, certainly in the Psalms and in the Revelation. There are ascriptions of glory to God as the creator: “for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11). It is something we need to think of.

Highlights of Bible readings at Bromley and Croydon — November/December 2000.

[DV future issues may contain similar articles based on Bible readings in the Epistle to the Romans.]

OUR GREAT GOD AND SAVIOUR, JESUS CHRIST

Luke 4:16-21
2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

At the beginning of this preaching I would like to say that I am delighted to see everyone who is here tonight. One thing is certain; you are not here by accident nor is it an accident if you were, perhaps, brought up in a christian home or that someone handed you a gospel booklet or spoke to you about your soul. You are here because God loves you and He has placed you in this room tonight to hear about Jesus. I do not know where you are in relation to God but, at the close of the year, God is giving you an opportunity to come to Christ. That opportunity may never be yours again.

In Luke’s gospel, in chapter 4, it says of Jesus that, “he came to Nazareth”. Think of the Lord Jesus Christ coming into this world. The words ‘The rescue mission of the Lord Jesus for a lost and guilty world’ could be written across this passage. Think of the One who was there in the synagogue that day. He was the Messiah. He was standing in their midst and the prophet Esaias was handed to Him. It was not a book like we have; it was a roll. He unrolled it until He found the place where it was written: “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”.

The passage in Isaiah goes on to speak of the “day of vengeance of our God” but the Lord did not read about that. He left out the part that you and I deserved.

Why do you and I deserve vengeance? Why do we deserve the wrath of God? It is because we are sinners. Everyone in this room tonight was born in sin. We commit sins but we have a fallen, sinful nature.

God brought in judgment in the time of Noah, when He caused the flood to come upon an ungodly world. He acted in judgment also in respect of Sodom and Gomorrah, when He rained fire and brimstone upon those cities. If God came out in judgment tonight, where would you be? How has God dealt with you and me? Did He send a flood upon the world? No! Did He pour fire and brimstone down upon towns or cities? No! What did He do? He sent His Son, Jesus, to be the Saviour! In love for us He gave His only begotten Son. That is why in this preaching I must take you, in mind, to a place called Calvary and I must point you to a Saviour suffering and dying for you there. Can you say that the Saviour who died there is your Saviour? Have you ever thanked the Lord Jesus for taking your place, bearing the judgment that was due to you? Tonight I want you to come to Jesus and to trust in Him as your personal Saviour.

When Philip spoke to Nathanael about Christ, Nathanael was a doubter. He said: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?". Philip's reply is very simple. He says, "Come and see" (John 1:46). I would like you to come and see tonight. Come with me and see the Lord preaching to the poor, giving sight to the blind, bringing captives deliverance! What a message!

Yet I must warn you tonight. There were many blind in Israel and there were many captives but only those who reached out in faith to Christ got blessing. You cannot afford to be careless about your never-dying soul. You cannot afford to neglect the matter of how you stand before God.

You may have money, a good job and you may be successful in life but, if you are without Christ, really you are poor. Yes, Jesus came to give good news to the poor and to the blind sight. If you are without Christ tonight, then you are blind as well as poor. You need to get your eyes open, to have a new beginning and a new outlook. If you ask the Lord Jesus Christ to come into your heart, that is the kind of transformation that will take place in your life.

Jesus came to give captives deliverance. When the hostages came out of Beirut, not so long ago, I remember the newspaper headline — 'Agony of captivity, ecstasy of freedom'. If you are a captive to sin tonight, think of the freedom which comes as a result of knowing that your sins are forgiven and experiencing the joy of freedom in Christ.

Then it says in the passage that we read that He came to send forth the crushed delivered. How many tonight are crushed by the burden of sin? If you are crushed under that burden you can be delivered. Who can deliver you? Jesus! Let me give you some illustrations from the Bible.

Come with me to Jericho. In Luke 19:1-10 we read of the Lord coming to Jericho and there He met a poor man called Zacchaeus. You may say, 'Stop — I thought it said in the Bible that Zacchaeus was a rich man.' Yes, he had a great deal of money, but in reality he was poor. After the Piper Alpha disaster one of the counsellors in Aberdeen, speaking to those who were sorrowing, said, 'What is lacking in the North East today is faith'. There may be great riches but there is spiritual poverty.

In your heart tonight you have a need. The human heart cannot be satisfied by material things and success. Solomon, of whom we read in the Bible, was a man who had everything, yet what did he say? "I hated life" (Ecclesiastes 2:17). How many there are like that today; in their very lives they are crying out for relief. They are really saying 'I hate life'. The human heart can only be filled by Jesus.

Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was going to pass by so he climbed a tree. He "sought to see Jesus who he was". The Lord Jesus came along and He stopped and He looked up. The Lord Jesus looks into your heart as you sit in your seat here. He looks behind the exterior. We can be experts at hiding our thoughts and our feelings. But the Lord Jesus looks behind the outward appearance and He looks right into your heart and He sees that you have a need.

I was sitting in a Little Chef in Dundee recently. There was a man sitting there who looked miserable. I caught him at the door and said, 'Here is a gospel booklet for you'. He said, 'Do you think that I need it?' I replied, 'Everybody needs Jesus'. He told me that it was amazing that he should have been handed such a booklet that night. He was a prison warder and only a few weeks before he had been taken hostage at Shott's Prison. He thought that he was going to be killed and he had no idea where he would go in eternity. My friend, I say it again, you are not here by accident. You are here tonight because God has placed you here, because in your heart there is an emptiness and a need. What happened to Zacchaeus? The Lord Jesus looked up into the tree where Zacchaeus was and said, "Make haste, and come down". And Zacchaeus came down; he accepted the Lord Jesus and he found true riches in Him.

Now, as another illustration of the Lord freeing the captives, let us see how the Lord brought deliverance to a man in Gadara on the east side of the Sea of

Galilee. We find an account of it in Luke 8:26-39. Here was a man in the most terrible bondage; he was demon possessed and no one was able to restrain him. Persons are held captive in many different ways. Isaiah speaks of sin as “cart-ropes” (Isaiah 5:18). How many young people in Peterhead are captive to alcohol and drugs, held by cart-ropes of sin. My friend, tonight there are people who are crying to God that you may be saved tonight.

There was a man converted in Belfast who was brought into a preaching one Saturday night when he was quite drunk. The man accepted the Lord Jesus as his Saviour. On the Sunday night he was back at the service. He came up to the preacher afterwards and said, ‘I was in a drunken state when I came to the Lord last night. Can I do it again tonight now that I am sober?’ So he bowed his head and he asked the Lord Jesus to be his Saviour. He worked in the ship-yards in Belfast and each Friday night he had collected his pay packet and then went to the local public house and that is how he spent the first part of his pay. He was a captive. The Friday night after he came to the Lord, when the hooter sounded he went along with the rest of his mates to the to the public house and with all of them standing there he looked up and said, ‘Thank You, blessed Lord, for saving my soul’. That is wonderful! The Psalmist says, “Jehovah looseth the prisoners” (Psalms 146:7). That is what the Lord Jesus did for that man in Belfast. Jesus came to give captives deliverance.

Well, to come back to this man we read of in the Bible who was in Gadara, because he was possessed by demons he wore no clothes and did not live in a house but in the tombs. What happened when he came into contact with Jesus? The man was changed; he was found, “sitting, clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus” (Luke 8:35). That is what the Lord Jesus will do if you will let Him into your life. He will bring about a complete transformation. When we come to Him we have a life changing experience.

Jesus came to give sight to the blind. Let me show you someone who was really blind! I am thinking of the thief on the cross. Why do I say that he was blind? Well, here was a man on the brink of eternity yet, as we read in Matthew’s gospel, he was mocking the Lord Jesus who was crucified on the cross next to him. How blind that thief was! How many tonight are blind, going on heedless of the welfare of their soul with no thought of God or eternity? Perhaps you are blind to the fact that you are a sinner, heading for hell in your sins.

What happened to that thief? He stopped his mocking and says to the Lord, “Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42). How did the Lord answer him? He said, “Verily I say to thee, To-day shalt thou be

with me in paradise”. The believer has a wonderful hope before him, a hope centred in Christ.

I recently went to see someone who was going through deep sorrow, yet nevertheless was still able to thank God for the hope that we have in Jesus. What a wonderful hope it is. Soon, sorrow’s night will be over. Soon our lives here will be gone. What have we got that lasts? The only thing we have is what we have in Jesus. This is how the hymn puts it:

‘Only one life, ‘twill soon be past.
Only what’s done for Christ will last.’

Jesus came to send forth the crushed delivered. Where can we see someone in the Bible who is crushed? One example is the woman we are told about in John 4. She was crushed under the burden of sin. My friend, you may try many things to get rid of the burden of your sin or to distract you from it but the only thing that can meet the need is the precious blood of Jesus.

For 2000 years the Lord Jesus has been giving the blind sight, giving captives liberty and sending forth the crushed delivered. What a glorious Saviour we have to speak about tonight. He came to this world and died and now He lives again. He is still saving souls and changing lives. Persons in Peterhead are still being saved. Yet in a little while the day of grace is going to end. It might end tonight. The Lord Jesus is going to descend from heaven and call all those who are His to be with Him for ever. When that happens the opportunity for you to be saved will be gone.

Make no mistake, Jesus is coming again. He says, “Yea, I come quickly” (Revelation 22:20). Someone commented in the newspaper recently that we are on the brink of Armageddon. Yet we know from the book of the Revelation in the Bible that christians will not pass through the great tribulation. The Lord has promised, saying, “I also will keep thee out of the hour of trial” (Revelation 3:10).

Tonight God holds out the offer of salvation to you. What are you going to do with it? Maybe you have left God out of your life. Maybe you have no interest in God. Maybe you do not even care. The prophet Isaiah speaks of people like that. He says: “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die” (Isaiah 22:13). We see this lack of interest in divine things all around us. People have no interest in the glad tidings. Yet, whatever you think of God, He cares about you. He remains unchanged in His attitude towards you.

Jesus preached the “acceptable year of the Lord”. But the “acceptable year” will be followed by what Isaiah spoke of as “the day of vengeance of our God”. That is why I read in Thessalonians. The Lord Jesus is coming to call every believer to be with Himself. None who have trusted in Him will be left behind. Every believer who has died will be raised and together with all those believers that are alive at that time, all will be caught up to be with Him.

What will happen to those that are left? They will enter the time of judgment. During that time things will be so awful that persons will pray for the rocks to fall on them. We read: “in the great day of the wrath of the Lamb; who is able to stand?” (see Revelation 6:16).

After that terrible period of judgment, John records: “I saw the heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and one sitting on it, ... And the armies which are in the heaven followed him” (Revelation 19:11, 14). As prophesied in Zechariah the Lord’s feet will touch the mount of Olives and there will be vengeance upon those who have been disobedient. We must preach the day of grace, a day of salvation, but we must also warn of coming wrath.

When Christ returns He will not only deal judicially but, as recorded in Malachi, He will be “the Sun of righteousness” arising “with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2). Think of the healing that will be needed to bring Israel into the land as one people. What healing, too, will be needed among the nations. The Lord Jesus is the One who is going to come here and set up His kingdom. He will reign from “sea to sea”, “from the river to the ends of the earth”. What a dominion it will be! He will reign for a thousand years. Violence will be no more in the land. Children will play in the streets of Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus Christ will bring all this to pass.

Peter in his second epistle tells us something very solemn. It says, “the Lord knows how to ... to keep the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Peter 2:9). After the thousand year reign of Christ the Lord will take His place on the great white throne and judge the wicked dead. All those who have rejected Him will stand before Him. The Scripture says that the dead, great and small, will stand before Him and as eternally lost will be cast into the lake of fire. They will pay the penalty for all eternity of their sins. In Revelation chapter 1, John saw the Lord Jesus in something of His judicial character. His eyes were as a flame of fire, His feet like brass, His voice like the voice of many waters. That gives us a little indication of what the Lord will be like when He takes His place on the Throne.

Thank God for every one in this room who can point to Calvary's cross and say, 'Jesus paid the penalty there for me'. How wonderful if you can say, 'Hallelujah, I will never have to come under judgment because Jesus bore my sins at Calvary'. He paid the penalty. The alternative is that you pay the penalty, which is everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.

I do not want to close with a vision of hell but with a look into heaven. In Revelation 5 we find the company of the redeemed described. It includes the poor, the crushed, the blind — all who have been delivered by the Saviour. Heaven will be full of such persons who are cleansed in the blood of Jesus. They are praising their Redeemer. Every voice in heaven will praise the Lord because He has paid the penalty. He has delivered us, He has saved us.

Tonight is your opportunity to trust in Christ. Tonight the Lord Jesus would stand before you and say, 'What are you going to do, will you accept Me?' Let your heart's door be open to receive Him. Ask Him to be your Saviour. Simply say, 'Lord Jesus, save my soul'. Experience the liberation of having your sins forgiven. Find the joy of becoming a christian and experience the blessed hope that becomes yours in Christ.

May God bless the word, for His name's sake.

*Graham Mair,
A preaching of the gospel, Peterhead, 17th December 2000.*

ALONE

Centre of heaven's delight,
Angelic praise
Heralds Thine advent night,
On Thee they gaze.
Angels their God can see
Robed in humanity,
Veiling divinity,
Yet all alone.

Treading Thy path alone,
 Shame and despite
From those who were Thine own,
 Shunning Thy light.
Friend to the desolate,
Sad and disconsolate;
Pouring out love on hate,
 Thou wast alone.

Yet joy did fill Thine heart,
 Doing God's will.
Naught moved Thee from Thy part
 All to fulfil.
Perfect dependent Man,
Thou didst completely span
All God's redemption plan,
 Yet wast alone.

In dark Gethsemane,
 There all alone
None knew Thine agony,
 Not e'en Thine own.
Sleep on, disciples, sleep,
Rest while your Lord doth weep,
None could His vigil keep;
 He was alone.

Yet onward still to go,
 On to the cross,
Drink deep that cup of woe,
 Of grief and loss.
All from Thee then did flee
When on the accursed tree
God hid His face from Thee;
 Truly alone.

Leslie G Milner
(Extracts from a longer poem.)

SWEET FEAST OF LOVE DIVINE

Sweet feast of love divine!
'Tis grace that makes us free
To take the bread and wine,
In memory, Lord, of Thee.

Here every welcome guest
Waits, Lord, from Thee to learn
The secrets of Thy Father's breast,
And all Thy grace discern.

Here conscience ends its strife,
And faith delights to prove
The sweetness of the Bread of Life,
The fulness of Thy love.

That blood that flow'd for sin
In symbol here we see,
And feel the blessed pledge within,
That we are loved by Thee.

Oh! If this glimpse of love
Is so divinely sweet,
What will it be, O Lord, above,
Thy gladdening smile to meet!

To see Thee face to face,
Thy perfect likeness bear,
And all Thy ways of wondrous grace
Through endless years declare.

Edward Denny (1796 - 1889)

THE NIGHT IN WHICH HE WAS DELIVERED UP

Hark, the solemn strains uprising!
Sweetly swells the note of praise,
From the chamber where the Saviour
Leads His own the note to raise.
On the night of His rejection
All is darkness, deepening gloom,
As the Son of man goes onward
To the cross, to death and tomb.

Hark, the gentle strains uprising:
Softly swells the note of praise;
All His anguish we remember
As to Him the voice we raise.
All our guilt was laid upon Him —
On God's own beloved Son;
All the waves and billows pouring
O'er His head, He cried 'Tis done!'

Hark, the gladsome song uprising;
Louder swells the note of praise;
Lord, we hail Thee as the Victor
While to Thee the voice we raise.
Thou whom men cast out, rejected,
Sittest crowned upon God's throne;
Yea, Amen! Thou, Lord, art worthy!
This we gladly, fully own.

Hark, the mighty song uprising!
Loudly swells the note of praise!
Heaven and earth shall soon adore Thee,
All to Thee their voices raise.
Thou hast loved us, Thou hast washed us
In Thy blood from every stain;
Raise we then the joyful chorus —
Worthy is the Lamb once slain!

J. Revell

“THE PARSON’S CONVERTED!”

William Haslam was rector of Baldhu in Cornwall. In 1851 he went through a period of extreme spiritual distress concerned as to whether he was saved or not. This concern was caused by the conversion of several of his parishioners. His distress came to an end in a most remarkable way. He was converted through his own sermon! Here Mr Haslam takes up the story.

One Sunday I was so disturbed that I was quite unfit to take the service. One of my friends had said to me ‘If I were you, I would shut the church and say to the congregation, “I will not preach again until I am converted. Pray for me!” As I wondered whether to do this the church bells began to ring and I realised that it was too late to put off the service. I thought that I would go and read a few prayers and leave it at that. The hymns for the morning had been selected by the Clerk, for I was far too upset to consider them. They seemed to bring me some comfort so I thought that I would read a portion from the gospel.

The passage for the day was from Matthew 22:42: “What think ye of Christ?” I decided to say a few words in explanation of the text. I saw that the pharisees and scribes did not believe that Christ was the Son of God or that He was come to save them. They were looking for a king, the son of David, to reign over them as they were. Something was telling me all the time, ‘You are no better than the pharisees yourself — you do not believe that He is the Son of God, and that He has come to save you any more than they did’. I do not remember all I said, but I felt a wonderful light and joy coming into my soul, and I was beginning to see what the pharisees did not.

Whether it was something in my words or manner I do not know but all of a sudden a local preacher, who happened to be in the congregation, stood up and shouted: ‘The parson’s converted! Hallelujah.’ In another moment the church was full of praising. Instead of rebuking this ‘brawling’, as I would once have described it, I gave out “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow” and the people sang it with heart and voice. When the singing subsided I found at least twenty people crying for mercy. They all found peace and joy in believing. Amongst this number were three from my own house and we returned home praising and blessing God.

The news spread in all directions that the parson had been converted through his own sermon. The church would not hold the crowds that came to the evening service. I do not remember what I spoke of but I remember telling them that, ‘If I had died last week I should have been lost for ever’. This startled many who

were earnest in their attendance at services and I had to tell them that they too would be lost if they did not give their hearts to God.

At the end of this eventful day — my spiritual birthday, on which I passed from death to life — I could scarcely sleep for joy. I woke early in the morning with the conviction that I must get up and go and see a friend in a village a mile away and tell him of my conversion. He was a pious man who had often spoken to me about my soul and who had been praying for me for three years or more. I had gone about half a mile when I met him coming towards me. He stopped and leant back against a fence and said, ‘Are you converted?’

‘I am just on my way to your house to tell you the good news that I have found peace and that my soul is saved’, I replied.

The dear man said, ‘Thank God’; then he went on to say: ‘I woke up in the night thinking of you and I tried to pray for your conversion but did not seem to be able to do so. It occurred to me that perhaps the difficulty I felt in praying for your conversion was because you were converted already, so I came to find out.’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘It is true, the Lord has saved my soul.’ I thanked him for all the help he had been and for the long patience he had exercised towards me. We spent a happy time together thanking and praising God. Then we each returned home.

After breakfast a visitor arrived on an errand of quite another kind. My visitor said to me, ‘Did you say last night that if you had died last week you would have been lost for ever?’

‘Yes I did,’ I replied, ‘And I meant it.’

He stayed a long time arguing with me. Then he told me that he pitied me and could see the madness in my eyes. Seeing that he made no impression on me and that I would not retract my words, he said: ‘I cannot agree with you and I will oppose you as hard as I can.’ Turning at my gate he said, “Haslam, God stop the man who is wrong!”

‘Amen’ I replied very heartily.

He left me and the following Friday he broke a blood vessel in his throat and since that time he has never been able to speak above a whisper.

The above was the start of a gospel ministry in Cornwall which the Lord was pleased to bless abundantly for many years.

FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

Following in Reproach and Testimony

John 19: 25-27

21: 19-22

In chapter 19 we find those who follow in reproach. Jesus goes on His way to the cross. Now the test comes! Who will be with Him as the rejected One? Nailed to the cross, between two malefactors, scorned, hated, and spit upon, the object of man's derision — who will follow Him there? "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene ... and the disciple standing by, whom he loved," These sisters and the brother are following in reproach.

How encouraging this is, especially to those who are in small gatherings, where the fewness of numbers and outward feebleness is realised! Yet it is the reproach of Christ! Think of that little gathering at the cross! There were but few: the multitudes had cried, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" but these were a few lovers of Christ, prepared to stand by the cross in the darkest hour! What it must have meant to them to be there but what must it have meant to the Lord's heart to see them there, prepared, if needs be, to suffer the same indignities as were heaped upon their Master. No doubt, but for the ordering of God, the enemies would have treated every follower of Jesus as they treated Him, but those devoted hearts said in effect — 'If to follow Him means going the whole way, we will go with Him!'

Surely at the judgment seat of Christ, when He will review the paths of His own, those who stood by the cross so devotedly will stand out then in a holy dignity before the vast company of the saints to hear the Lord express His great appreciation of their loyalty. Can we do likewise? Let us remember our brethren who are in reproach today — following our rejected Lord. It was the same devoted love that led Mary Magdalene to remain at the sepulchre, still following Him even then.

The last reference to following in the gospel of John is in chapter 21, where the Lord Jesus in resurrection-life is heard saying to Peter, "Follow thou me!" He would have us follow in testimony. We are left here awaiting the coming of the Lord and the one important matter is for each one to be in the path of testimony, in affectionate loyalty to Him. Peter had said, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death", but he had proved his inability to do so: now, humbled and restored, the Lord enjoins him: "Follow thou me!"

May the Lord be pleased to bring each heart under His influence and allure us after Himself and as He says to each of us, "Follow thou me," may our sincere response be:

‘Saviour, we long to follow Thee,
Do Thou our hearts prepare
To count all else, whate’er it be,
Unworthy of our care.’

F. S. Marsh.

This concludes this series.

THE COMING OF THE LORD

I cannot tell what is going to happen from looking at events in the world. It is impossible to forecast in that way, for when everything is to take place according to God, the first movement will be from the right hand of God.

Waiting for the Lord brings in the idea of responsibility of the servant, if the Lord were here there would be no responsibility. We are to be faithful to Him in His absence... If you are watching for the Lord you are occupied with His interests.

It has been a comfort to me to think that when I set eyes on Christ I shall be like Him to see Him. It is not that I see Him to be like Him, but I am made like Him in order that I might see Him.

All our hopes are centred now on the coming of the Lord, on the manifestation of the church in glory, that is the latter glory. It is useless looking back to the past glory.

Supposing there had been in scripture a day set when the Lord Jesus should come, what would be the effect on souls? They would say, 'The Lord is not coming yet, we need not trouble ourselves about that.' But there is no excuse for the church going on with the world. The thing to me is, not 'when' the Lord is coming. His coming is not a matter of time. Dear friends, morally that is of no consequence. The nearness is this — not of time but of affection, that the coming of the Lord is near to our hearts, that we love His appearing, not that we can calculate His appearing, but love it and thus the Lord's coming is near.

If you are under the power of the Spirit and under the sense of Christ's affection, you are always ready for the coming of the Bridegroom, you have not got to prepare; the only preparation, properly speaking, is the possession of the Spirit.

...you see many people looking for the Lord's coming, but they look at the event, not at the Person.

Paul...speaks of the "exceeding greatness of his power to usward" (Ephesians 1:19) but when John speaks of it he says, "I will come again and receive you to myself" (John 14:3). John presents the Person, Paul the power.

The coming of the Lord is often in people's minds connected with judgment, but believers look for a Saviour from heaven... There will be judgment at the coming of the Lord; for wherever there is lawlessness, the Lord will put an end to it, but that is not the purpose of His coming (See Thessalonians 1:10).

Men who are interested in politics are occupied only with what is transpiring on earth, but before anything momentous can happen on earth there must be a movement at the right hand of God ... Christ sits at the right hand of God until the time appointed for His foes to be made His footstool.

We have to use all we have to distinguish Christ. When we pass away there will be something left if Christ is really our life, then in glory, Christ will distinguish us, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4) — what Mary did, He said, should never be forgotten (See Mark 14:9).

F. E. Raven

Extracted from 'Handing on the Torch'

**Come, return, immortal Saviour;
Come, Lord Jesus, take Thy throne:
Quickly come, and reign for ever;
Be the kingdom all Thine own!**

R. Robinson

A CALL TO THE CONVERTED

“Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from among the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee”

Ephesians 5:14

INTRODUCTION

Why a call to the converted?

Because all are apt to grow cold and become careless through unwatchfulness; all need to be alert, not self-satisfied, and therefore off guard; all need to cultivate a loving spirit, the mark of true discipleship, lest we grow hard; and because all need to keep the light shining brightly. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Worldliness, covetousness, love of money, indolence, fear of man all tend to grow on a person. Why a call to the converted? Because, in short, in a world like this, with foes and snares around us, with lusts and fears within, we need to be awake, alert and purposeful.

When a spiritual movement begins it is living and therefore growing but soon a tendency appears for it to become formal, orthodox, institutional, traditional, and therefore to all intents and purposes lifeless. Christianity, and every spiritual movement springing from it, have shown this tendency as time has passed. Ephesus was just one of those places to foster such a tendency towards decline. It was a city of importance in the world; it enjoyed a settled civilisation which lasted from Croesus to Constantine. It was a great commercial centre possessing good wharves and good roads to the interior and a great religious centre with the temple of Diana one of the wonders of the world in its midst. It was a home of mixed superstitions as Acts 19 clearly shows. In short it was a cosmopolitan city, an epitome of the world itself. Here the christian church had been formed and nourished by Paul’s ministry for the space of three years and to this company the epistle containing this clarion call to the converted was addressed. It was a call to awake to their privileges, responsibilities and opportunities.

A CALL TO WAKE UP

A call to wake up to their privileges

The call is to awake to their privileges, for nowhere are the privileges of believers set out more fully than in the epistle to the Ephesians. First, they are summarised in one phrase: “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”. Then they are specified in detail: chosen to be holy and blameless before God in love; predestinated for adoption by Jesus Christ; accepted in the Beloved; redeemed; forgiven; given an inheritance in Christ; sealed by the Spirit; quickened together with Christ; made nigh by His blood; made fellow citizens with the saints; and of the household of God. To all these are added the gifts needed for growth, upbuilding and perfecting. These are the privileges that the saints were called to awake to. “Awake thou that sleepest and arise” from the lifeless inattention, ignorance, or indifference to the blessings wherewith we are blessed.

A call to wake up to responsibilities

Since privileges always entail responsibilities it is well to consider these. They also are summed up in a single phrase: “walking worthy of the calling wherewith ye are called”. As in the case of privileges, so in that of responsibilities, they are also set out in fuller detail. To be long-suffering, forbearing, diligent, truthful, generous, grateful, loving, compassionate, forgiving. In short to be imitators of God as dear children, and to walk as children of light in all goodness and righteousness and truth, redeeming the time because the days are evil.

The call is to awake to privileges freely and graciously bestowed by God, and to face up to responsibilities flowing therefrom.

A call to wake up to opportunities

Awake also to the opportunities. “Redeeming the time” is literally buying up every opportunity of serving Him who has conferred all the privileges upon them. For the space of three years they had had the advantage of the ministry and example of the apostle Paul who by conduct, character and manner of life had rejoiced in the privileges, recognised the responsibilities and responded to the opportunities to which he now exhorted them. “It is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” (Romans 13:11). “Awake to righteousness, and sin not” (1 Corinthians 15:34). “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:5, 6). Thus had the apostle written four years earlier to the Roman saints, and nine years earlier to the church of the Thessalonians.

A CALL TO ARISE FROM AMONG THE DEAD — ARISE FROM LIFELESS WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP AND SERVICE

The tragedy in spiritual things is that the most correct orthodox phrases may be used in a most incorrect manner. The warmest expressions of fellowship may proceed from cold hearts. The most striking activities in service may spring from self-importance.

To sing of 'losing sight of all but Thee' with a cold heart and a mind occupied with other things is to go to the Lord's table as a mere service of obligation, a means of keeping in fellowship! In fellowship with whom or what? Hence the call to arise and walk carefully, being not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

Arise too from the outward pretence of fellowship since the Lord requires sincerity in His people. "Behold Thou desirest truth in the inward part". It is not to be the correct conventional formula, "Yours affectionately in Christ," in word only, but in deed, and in truth. "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead."

We are to arise also from mere appearance in service for the Lord. Is our service really self-sacrificing labour, or simply self-satisfying occupation? Such a reflection will challenge any awakened conscience. It is, of course, gloriously right to enjoy the work of the Lord. A happy worker is always the better worker. But true acceptable service of necessity springs from love to Him whose we are and whom we serve. Therefore this call comes to the converted who have let their hands hang down in slothfulness. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead."

A PROMISE FROM CHRIST HIMSELF

The call is a true challenge but there is also the promise "and the Christ shall shine upon thee". Literally it means 'shall light thee up', as in Psalm 34:5: "They looked unto Him, and were enlightened". We are to be assured that Christ will enable us once more to shine as lights in the world holding forth the word of life. Note, it is Christ Himself who gives us light. He never tires in service to His own however dull, heavy and forgetful they have become. As to Laodicea, so to the ease-loving, slumbering, slothful servants to-day, not only is the call 'Awake' and 'Arise' but "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me".

W. G. Turner