

No. 50

Living Water

'Living Water' is published by the Stone Publishing Trust
(Registered Charity 1034689)

'The Eagles', Headcorn Road, Staplehurst, Kent, TN12 0BU

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Printed by Christian Design & Print, High St. Bures, CO8 5JG, UK

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THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS — CHAPTER 4

(Highlights of a Bible reading)

This section speaks of our and Abraham's relations with God. Abraham came to know God from the word he received and, as we are told here, his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness. We can look back to Genesis 15 and see what God said to him: "And he led him out, and said, Look now toward the heavens, and number the stars, if thou be able to number them. And he said to him, So shall thy seed be! And he believed Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness". If we believe what God says through the gospel it is reckoned to us as righteousness.

This chapter shows how we are justified. Chapter 3 gives us the divine side: "Being justified freely by his grace". Now, chapter 4 teaches us that from our side we are justified by faith. This matter of justification in these chapters is very important. There is an enormous wealth of blessing to be found in understanding what justification by faith really is. The work of atonement and the precious shed blood of Christ provide the basis for our justification. But, if we are going to come into the gain of it, it has to be on the ground of faith. It is not anything of our own doing.

Justification is that we are put in a state of righteousness before God. Mr Darby expressed it as 'a state of accomplished, subsisting righteousness before God'. The law could not do that, only God could do it. Through the atoning work of Christ, God has provided a basis by which it is righteous in His sight to extend not only forgiveness but positive favour to those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith enables me to lay hold of what God offers in the gospel.

So David is quoted here as saying: "Blessed they whose lawlessnesses have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered" (v.7). Then he adds: "blessed the man to whom the Lord shall not at all reckon sin" (v.8) which seems to go further. Psalm 32 says, "Blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah reckoneth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile". It continues "Thou art a hiding-place for me; thou preservest me from trouble; thou dost encompass me with songs of deliverance" (See Psalm 32:2 & 7). That is a picture of a man who knows what it is to be made righteous and have the blessing of standing freely before God. For us it is a picture of how justification brings in liberty and it magnifies God who has done it. Justification was necessary if we were ever to be conscious of the favour of God and if God was to enjoy a response from His

creature. What we could not do for ourselves, and what the law certainly could not do, God did for us.

This raises the question whether we value justification as much as we should. We are able to value the forgiveness of sins but do we value our appearing before God in Christ? That was something that weighed very greatly with the apostle Paul and it makes for liberty before God.

Abraham is an example of a justified man. He has wonderful liberty with God; God could call him His “friend” and he knew what it was to walk in the liberty that belongs to a person who is justified.

In verse 12 we get the expression: “walking in the steps of the faith... of our father Abraham” The faith that Abraham showed (and which is brought forward as evidence of righteousness with him) was not exactly related to his need for forgiveness, though that has a part to play, but it is related to Abraham committing himself to the mind of God expressed in His promises to him. Abraham did what God told him although it was totally contrary to the wisdom of the world. Probably his contemporaries would have considered him to be very foolish in leaving Mesopotamia.

In considering the historical account in Genesis chapters 12 through to 16 there are a number of separate incidents, or steps of faith, in the life of Abraham from his call through to the matter of circumcision. We get some of those steps in Hebrews chapter 11. The first step was that he “obeyed to go out into the place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and went out, not knowing where he was going” (v. 8). Then we read: “By faith he sojourned as a stranger”; then he had faith to become a father and received strength; then we find the great test of faith when he offered up Isaac. These are just a few of the steps. They show how Abraham’s faith was proved.

As believers we may experience the same kind of thing. So Hebrews chapter 12 begins with an exhortation to us to be in the path of faith. The christian pathway is one of faith though it is not always easy to work it out. We like to know where the next salary cheque is coming from but we have to learn to be dependent and content in the pathway in which the Lord would lead us. The present day is quite an anxious time, particularly for younger people, but God will provide for us. Our concern should be to walk with God and He will provide. He might not provide what I want but He will provide what is necessary.

There is a great reward in the path of faith because we learn more of God there than probably we do in any other way. Faith leads us to give thanks to God and to accept everything from Him. We have all known those who have been remarkable for their simple faith and they are an example to us.

We need to have the full assurance in our souls that God is going to see us through. Whether our circumstances are pleasant or unpleasant God is available to us. The sense of that allows us to rise up in praise to God, accepting His will and being in liberty. Faith is not a blind, despairing kind of thing akin to stoicism. It is a conviction, wrought in us by the Spirit of God.

It is recorded that, when there was a famine in the land in which he was, Abraham made the mistake of going down to Egypt (typical of this world) in order to escape the famine. But his time in Egypt did him no real good and caused sorrow in his soul. Maybe the Lord has to teach us not to seek the cover and protection of the world but to walk by faith.

Based on a Bible reading, Bromley, April 2001.

GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD AND THE FATHER'S LOVE FOR THE SON

God's love for the world

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”.

John 3:16,

This scripture must be one of the best known in the whole of the Bible, yet it has a fresh appeal in the gospel preaching tonight. Every part of this text could be emphasised to give a different presentation of the gospel.

For instance, “For God”; the words follow on the previous verses which show the need of the work of Christ because of the incoming of sin. The Lord says: “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up”. Nicodemus would have known the scripture from which the Lord

Jesus was preaching and he would begin to realise the import of it as the Lord unfolded the need for the sacrificial work which He was to accomplish in view of salvation, not only for the Jew but for the whole of mankind.

Nicodemus was a Jew; he thought everything of the nation, rightly so, for it had been much favoured and blessed of God but had fallen away into idolatry. It was apostate. He was a teacher and came to the Lord with some light in his soul as to who Jesus was but completely dark as to salvation. So the Lord Jesus, great Preacher that He is, unfolds here what is in the heart of God. And now, 2000 years later we have the same opportunity to tell you what is in the heart of God.

What is in our hearts by nature is very different from what is in God's heart. The Bible tells us what is in our hearts. Jeremiah the prophet tells us that our hearts are desperately wicked and incurable. (See Jeremiah 17:9, AV and Darby Trans.) That was not how God had created man's heart but what it became under the influence and power of sin. "By one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). Those words cover 6000 years of history of mankind on the earth. It has proved that the heart of man is exactly the same.

What will change it? Why, my friend, the sunshine of God's infinite love! So that instead of it being desperately wicked it might be the place in which the love of God may find an entrance. He gives you the Holy Spirit that He might dwell in your heart as a result of the reception of the glad tidings.

This is in God's heart and I want to speak of this first to show the wonderful way God has brought it all about. He "so loved the world" but how was He to retrieve man to Himself, to bring back the creature that because of sin had been shut out from His presence?

Probably you remember the story so well, how Adam disobeyed God. He ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and God drove him out from the garden and "set the Cherubim, and the flame of the flashing sword... to guard the way to the tree of life". How then is man going to get back there? How is this great proposal of God going to be effected that, "whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal"?

It needed an intervention from God Himself. No man could effect it. Man has been proven a hopeless wreck. Every test, every responsibility that he has

incurred, has ended in disaster. His whole history, as you trace it in the scriptures, shows him to be an absolute disaster. “There is none that doeth good, not even one” the psalmist says (Psalm 14:3). What is the remedy, then? Why, that God Himself should meet the need by coming in Himself in the Person of Christ. One who is “God over all, blessed for ever” in His Person, was prepared to come in and take the place of a Son in manhood that He might effect redemption. It is wonderful! This is how the Bible puts it: “But now once in the consummation of the ages he has been manifested for the putting away of sin by his sacrifice” (Hebrews 9:26).

Jesus did not come in to live but He came in to die. He did live. He lived in perfect accord with His God for all of His life here. Whether it was in the thirty years before He began His public ministry, or in the three and a half years of His devoted service, He was perfectly in accord with God. In speaking of the Lord’s public ministry, Peter tells us that He went “through all quarters doing good, and healing all that were under the power of the devil, because God was with him” (Acts 10:38).

How wonderful the pathway of Jesus. How much was compressed into those three and a half years of perfect service. The Holy Spirit descended upon Him as a dove at His baptism to distinguish the Man who was wholly pleasing to God and a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight” (Matthew 3:17). The years of public service were a demonstration to man but there were also the 30 years of secret devotedness to His God in which every day was spent in obscurity from the eye of men but never from the eye of His God and Father.

The pathway of Jesus is a study for every one of us. We can never exhaust it. It is there for us to feed on. It is good wholesome food for the soul to trace the perfect pathway of the Lord Jesus.

So we read that God gave His only begotten Son. Think of what that meant to God. Think of how that life would have continued in perfect accord with His God year by year to the present time. He could have lived for ever in flesh and blood condition because there was no sin there. Sin has brought in death. Sin has wrought havoc in the human race. Old age and weakness are the fruits of sin. The Lord Jesus was perfect in His flesh and blood condition. It was a perfect sacrifice that He made at the cross when He “by the eternal Spirit offered himself

spotless to God” (Hebrews 9:14). The offerings in the book of Leviticus all point to the perfection that was found in Christ. There was only one offering for sin, and that was made at the cross, that the great question that brought distance between God and His creature might be resolved and resolved for ever.

Sin is not forgiven: sin was condemned in the death of Christ. How solemn that is, that it needed a sacrifice; it needed One who could bear the holy wrath of God. All God’s holy anger was unleashed against His beloved Son at the cross as He dealt with the great sin question and in that momentous work took up your history and mine before God, the sins that we have committed. We have a fallen nature. We cannot help that; we are born with it but we have committed sins as a result. Everyone here in this room from the youngest to the oldest is a sinner and the older we are, the greater the sinful history. It stands out against us. How is it to be met? We cannot meet it but God has met it and that is the glory of the gospel. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son”. There is not a sinner alive today who is outside the scope of the wondrous work of Christ.

“Once in the consummation of the ages he has been manifested for the putting away of sin by his sacrifice”. A wonderful work has been done once for all. It has been done to God’s eternal satisfaction. All my sins were met there and the precious blood shed is a witness that everything has been removed righteously. His work of atonement on the cross was complete. He could say at the end, “It is finished”, and the blood shed after He died was carried in, we may say, before God on the mercy seat in order that God may come out towards the whole of mankind and show forth His righteousness: “righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ towards all” (Romans 3:22).

Think of that. Righteousness towards all! The righteousness of God is now towards all but, hark, it is only upon all who believe. You need to come in on the basis of having faith in Jesus. No claim of religious pretension, church going and the like or the various systems of religion that man has set up, will meet the need. All that God requires is that you should be of the faith of Jesus, that you should be among those who come in on the basis of faith. “Whosoever believes on him”. It is a Person on whom you must believe, the One who was lifted up on the cross of Calvary as the sin-bearer, who went into the grave to meet the condition of man, and the Man whom God selected from among the dead and put at His right hand. He was “delivered for our offences” but “raised for our

justification” (Romans 4:25). What a great foundation God has laid in the gospel. The devil cannot overthrow the work of Christ. It has been done to God’s eternal satisfaction. That is why He has shown it forth to the universe. Angels look upon the wondrous work that Jesus did and wonder as they see men being blessed by putting their faith in the One who has effected their redemption.

Are you going to come then by the divinely appointed way tonight? There is no other way. Do not be caught by the delusions of Satan. He tells men of alternative religions and the like which are all a delusion that he puts in man’s way to obstruct the shining of God’s love at the present time. When John wrote his gospel, christianity in its power was fading in the world. I suppose he was an old man. We understand that this is the last book of the Bible to be written. The church had begun to fade in its lustre. The world was overtaking the profession of christianity, so John comes in with this wonderful book to draw attention to the One in whom there was no failure whatsoever. So in the presence of the greatest darkness, this wondrous light shines that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes on Him may not perish but have everlasting life”. That is the proposal. That is what God has in mind. Whether you have eternal life or not is another matter. The next chapter shows how you get it but here God is proposing it in the gospel.

“God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish”. It does not only mean perish eternally; it means perish at the present time. The Lord was speaking to Nicodemus about those persons who had perished in the wilderness because they refused the overtures of God. They did not harken to the word and you will perish if you do not harken to God’s word. Let it have an entrance into your heart. Do not sit in the meeting tonight and have your ears heavy. Isaiah the prophet had to speak to some people to whom God said “make their ears heavy” (Isaiah 6:10). They could not hear. They were in the profession of God’s light at that time but completely unmoved as to the need of making a move in their souls. Oh, do not sit in the gospel like that tonight. Things are too critical. It may be the last gospel preaching you will attend.

How do you know what will happen? How quickly death comes in and takes away one and another. Persons are hurled from time into eternity in a moment. Think of that crash of the Concord last year. A hundred persons on holiday were flying out to America to board a cruise liner to tour the Caribbean. As the

aircraft took off flames were seen coming from the under-carriage. The control tower sent a message to the pilot, 'You are on fire'; but it was too late. He had not time to turn back. It was too late and over a hundred persons went from time into eternity as that aircraft, the acme of man's engineering, crashed to the ground. The last century started with the Titanic disaster and finished with the Concord disaster. How God would speak to men in these tragedies.

Now you may ask, how do I get eternal life? You get it by coming to Christ. You must receive it from Him. He gives you the forgiveness of sins and then He gives you the living water. That is the way into eternal life. You have to go to John chapter 4. There you will find how a person is taken from the depths of depravity into the enjoyment of divine love. The Lord says, "the water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life" (John 4:14), and I believe we as christians also need it. We need to know more deeply what the living water is in ourselves as a source of satisfaction independent from everything that is around.

Therefore the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which God has given to us. "For we being still without strength, in the due time Christ has died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). That is our side: I want to speak a little now about the Father's love for the Son.

The Father's love for the Son

"The Father loves the Son, and has given all things to be in his hand"

(John 3:35).

There is not a man in the universe like Jesus. There is nobody else to whom God could commit everything but He has committed all to Christ. He committed our salvation to Him and gave Him the work to do on the cross and He completed it to God's entire satisfaction. When the Lord died He could say, "It is finished".

We can well understand that God would raise such an One from among the dead, put Him at His right hand and give Him everything. He has given your blessing into His hand. He wants you to enjoy it. He wants you to enjoy your christianity and come into a system of things of which Christ is the Sun and Centre of all. He will shed His lustre upon this poor dark world in a coming day. All judgment has been given into the hands of the Son as well, that all may honour the Son as they honour the Father (John 5:23).

Wonderful things are immediately ahead. The Lord is coming, maybe tonight, to call His own to Himself with an assembling shout. What a wonderful moment that will be! Think of myriads of persons leaving the earth, myriads of graves being emptied in an instant. Those who have fallen asleep through Jesus hear the penetrating sound of His assembling shout, to call them out of the grave. Who else could do that but the Lord Jesus who in one stroke of divine power will call every lover of Himself out of death! All that are in the tombs will hear His voice. The saved will rise at the rapture of the saints and be for ever with the Lord. One thousand years later the unsaved will hear His voice and will be raised for judgment.

How will it be with you? Are you to be raised in glory? Or will you be raised with your sins upon you? That is the issue in the gospel tonight. How solemn to be a Christ-rejecter. It says here, “he that is not subject to the Son ... the wrath of God abides upon him” (v. 36). That is a warning of impending judgment. How solemn. You are implored tonight in the preaching; God is stretching out His hands that you may be saved from the judgment that is coming upon every rejecter of Christ and every one who refuses the overtures of the Spirit.

Two thousand years of preaching has not changed the world. It has not changed things outwardly for they remain just the same. When the lovers of Jesus are taken out of this scene antichrist will arise in his pride and arrogance to defy God. It says that he will sit in the temple saying that he is god. These are things that are about to happen and you can see the workings of it at the present time. God is allowing certain things in view of His judgment upon this scene, that He may cleanse it from its wickedness. Satan will be bound for one thousand years and Christ will have His rightful place of supremacy. As we read: “Sit at my right hand, until I put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet” (Psalm 110:1).

The Father will give the administration of the world to come into His hand. When the Lord sits upon His own throne He will take the administration of the world to come and He will rule in righteousness. “His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth” (Zechariah 9:10). Think of the glory of His Name! “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of heavenly and earthly and infernal beings” (Philippians 2:10). Universal accord will be given to the Man that suffered for my sins at Calvary. I love to think of the exaltation of Jesus. I love to think of His vindication in the day to come, the day of His appearing when He will usher in a time of blessing, the like of which

has not been seen before, when the world will be free from the influence and power of sin. Then the devil is to be released from the bottomless pit for a little while and he will deceive the nations again, showing that the heart of man is unchanged. Then fire comes down from heaven and consumes them all.

We are then left with the vision of the great white throne (Revelation 20:3, 7, 9, 11), the solemn time of the last grand assize. No blood-bought saint will appear there but every person that has not claimed Christ as their Saviour will appear to be judged and judged in righteousness by the One “from whose face the earth and the heaven fled”. How different from the lowly Jesus that we know. But it is the same Person, the same Person in different circumstances. The same One that was here in lowly grace to draw near to that woman in John 4 is the One that is to ascend that throne and deal with things according to the rights of God. We read: “if any one was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire” where are “the devil and his angels” (Revelation 20:15; Matthew 25:41). What a solemn end it is.

The great preacher of the Old Testament, Isaiah, speaks of a very solemn thing in the last chapter, “for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched” (Isaiah 66:24). The prophet who could write so tellingly of the sufferings of Christ in Isaiah 53 finishes with that solemn warning about those who refuse the overtures of God’s grace. Isaiah has been called the Luke’s gospel of the Old Testament, being full of divine feelings, but it finishes with that solemn testimony about those who refuse what God is saying.

Let your heart be open tonight to hear the voice of Christ, that you may respond to His appeal. It may not come again. Once or twice God speaks, it says in the book of Job (Job 33:14). It does not say a third time. Have your heart open to Him, to His appeal of divine love. Come into the great circle that is filled with the lovers of Jesus, the ransomed throng who chant the praises of the Lamb who has “redeemed to God, ... out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to our God kings and priests” (Revelation 5:9, 10).

John was alone when he saw all chanting the praises of the Lamb. There are multitudes now who have become worshippers because of what Jesus has done. That is what He wants to do with you tonight, not only to relieve you from your burdens and your liabilities but enable you to answer to God in praise, adoration and worship. May it be so, for His name’s sake.

David Bond,

A gospel preaching at Sevenoaks, June 2001

REDEMPTION GROUND

Come sing, my soul, and praise the Lord,
Who hath redeemed thee by His blood;
Delivered thee from chains that bound
And brought thee to redemption ground.

Once from my God I wandered far,
And with His holy will made war;
But now my songs to God abound,
I'm standing on redemption ground.

Oh, joyous hour when God to me
A vision gave of Calvary;
My bonds were loosed, my soul unbound;
I sang upon redemption ground.

No works of merit now I plead,
But Jesus take for all my need;
No righteousness in me is found,
Except upon redemption ground.

Come, weary soul, and here find rest,
Accept redemption and be blest;
The Christ who died, by God is crowned
To pardon on redemption ground.

Redemption ground, the ground of peace!
Redemption ground, oh, wondrous grace!
Here let our praise to God abound,
Who saves us on redemption ground!

HERE IS ONE YOU CAN TRUST

Jesus, I will trust Thee, trust Thee with my soul;
Guilty, lost and helpless, Thou can'st make me whole.
There is none in heaven or on earth like Thee;
Thou hast died for sinners — therefore, Lord, for me.

Jesus, I may trust Thee, name of matchless worth,
Spoken by the angel at Thy wondrous birth;
Written, in derision on Thy cross of shame,
Sinners, read and worship, trusting in that name.

Jesus, I must trust Thee, pondering Thy ways,
Full of love and mercy all Thine earthly days;
Sinners gathered round Thee, lepers sought Thy face —
None too vile or loathsome for a Saviour's grace.

Jesus, I do trust Thee, trust Thee without doubt,
For whosoever cometh, Thou wilt not cast out.
Faithful is Thy promise, precious is Thy blood —
Secure my soul's salvation, Thou my Saviour-God.

AWAITING THE RETURN OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Antonietta Ambrosini who lived in Milan was taken to be with the Lord in October 2001. Before she died she prepared an article for distribution at her funeral. It was a personal testimony to Christ and of the truth she had learned, which had sustained her through the years. Here is an English version of the article.

He is our Saviour and our God and became Man in order to die for man, who for his disobedience was under the penalty of death. As Judge, God must execute the penalty but as Creator, He loved His creature and thus the Lord Jesus took the penalty upon Himself. If we believe that on the cross He has taken our place, then we can be assured that He has saved us for eternity.

When He returned to heaven, He sent from heaven in His place the Holy Spirit, "another Comforter" who is Himself God, and who helps and sustains us, encourages and guides us through life's journey until we meet the Lord Jesus.

Just as in Adam's sleep Eve was made by God to be his helpmate, so also God the Father has made ready a wife for His beloved Son. She is the fruit of love's sacrifice. The bride of Christ is His church, the church worldwide: she is His body made up of every true believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ is Head of the body, which is united to Him by the Holy Spirit. The bond between the Bridegroom and bride is for ever; believers can live in the enjoyment of this bond so long as they make way for the Holy Spirit and the word of God.

The thought of the church, or assembly, is not found in the Old Testament, which is more occupied with God's chosen people, the Jews. But though there is no thought of the church, in chapter 24 of Genesis we have the wonderful figure of the reality that Christians now know. There Abraham as father sent his servant to his old home to bring back Rebecca as a wife for his son, Isaac, bringing her safely across the desert. In the same way God the Father has sent forth the Holy Spirit to form the bride for the Lord Jesus Christ and support her throughout this world, which for the believer is indeed a desert.

The Holy Spirit and the bride are as one in awaiting Him who says, "I am the bright and morning star". Soon we shall hear the voice of our Saviour, who will call us to Himself to be with Him for ever. Every believer will be taken, both those belonging to the time of the church from Pentecost to the time of the rapture, and also Old Testament believers beginning from Abel as the first man to die. Those from Old Testament times will be the wedding guests. The marriage of the Lamb will take place in heaven and then He will reign.

So let us ask our Saviour to keep us faithful to Him in this waiting time.

Meanwhile the whole creation groans and travails awaiting redemption. There is a tide of evil that seems to prevail in this world that has chosen Barabbas, a tide that flows from the devil. There is an abundance of suffering which the Father allows. Soon all trouble will be over and righteousness and peace will reign. The Father will have His sons enjoying His house and the Lord will have His bride with Him for ever. Every blessing will be the fruit of the blood of the Lamb poured out upon the cross.

The promise

Jesus said: “In my Father’s house there are many abodes... I go to prepare you a place... I am coming again and shall receive you to myself, that where I am ye also may be” (John 14:2-3).

The confirmation

“This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

The waiting time

“Ye turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to await his Son from the heavens, whom he raised from among the dead, Jesus, our deliverer from the coming wrath” (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

“Our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens, from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory” (Philippians 3:20-21).

We shall not all die

“We, the living, who remain to the coming of the Lord, are in no way to anticipate those who have fallen asleep; for the Lord himself, with an assembling shout, with archangel’s voice and with trump of God shall descend from heaven; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall be always with the Lord. So encourage one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).

“The Lord does not delay his promise, as some account of delay, but is longsuffering towards you, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

“For yet a very little while he that comes will come, and will not delay” (Hebrews 10:37).

“Have patience, therefore, brethren, till the coming of the Lord... ye also have patience: stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draws nigh” (James 5:7-8).

“Behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

“I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to everyone as his work shall be.

“I am...the bright and morning star.

“The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, come... Yea, I come quickly. Amen; come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22: 7,12,16,17,20).

Antonietta Ambrosini

PAUL’S PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

(1) “I believe God” (Acts 27:25)

This testimony of the apostle is made at a moment of imminent ship-wreck, when there was great danger to the two hundred and seventy-six souls on the ship. Luke does not record any gospel meetings or other meetings on the ship but he does tell us that in the midst of all the chaos the apostle stands up and says, “I believe God.” So it is today, whether it be ship-wreck or home-wreck or maybe country-wreck, what is to be looked for is a personal testimony to our belief on God.

We are all here today as believers but it is essential that a believer should be able to stand up and say, “I believe God”. The need for it is great; unbelief is rampant; it lurks in our own hearts but I believe God would help us to be held stable in our belief on God against all odds. In the crisis this man stands out; he has a message, a word from God, and he bears testimony to the fact that he believes God. Think of the great value of a man standing up in a crisis, with imminent disaster ahead, to provide a rallying-point, able to give comfort in such a distressing scene. Paul says, “Wherefore be of good courage, men”. Think of the peculiar power of standing in a world of unbelief and calamity and being able to say, “I believe God”.

(2) “I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12)

When Paul wrote to Timothy the testimony was in reproach, and Timothy was liable to be ashamed of it. As the prisoner of the Lord, Paul says, “I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed”. We are believers but can we stand up and say that we know the One in whom we have believed? What is going to stay us in the midst of all the trials of the testimony but the knowledge of the One we have believed? Thank God that knowledge will be ours in glory but the knowledge of the One we have believed will preserve us here.

The apostle John writes: “I have written to you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning” (1 John 2: 14). Paul writes: “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded.” Think of the power of the knowledge that carries with it a persuasion that God is able! My knowledge of the One on whom I have believed persuades me, brings my mind and consciousness to know that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.

(3) “I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound. In everything and in all things I am initiated” (Philippians 4:12)

Paul writes to the Philippians and says: “I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound. In everything and in all things I am initiated”. He was not just taught, but initiated into a mystery. What is this mysterious thing into which he is initiated? “I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound.”

How about that? Do we know that much? We may know whom we have believed, but do we know how to be abased and how to abound? Where does a man learn that? Not in always being on the crest of the wave, not in always being in favour, for he needs both positions. If I know how to be abased and how to abound, it is as having been in both positions. As he says, “In everything and in all things I am initiated both to be full and to be hungry.” How to be full! You may be full and forget everyone else. How to be hungry! You may be hungry and think of nobody but yourself. But to know how to be full and how to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need, as Paul says, is not taught in ministry. It obviously is not that. It is not like the presentation of God to our faith.

I believe God, as the light is presented. Then I know Him in experience, in all kinds of circumstances. I know Him. To learn these things, you cannot get them from books or from one another. You have to pass through it and one feels that the extraordinary conditions through which the brethren are going are to have us learn, to be instructed, to be initiated — how to be full and to be hungry, and how to abound. The apostle is not talking about himself because he wants to do so; he wants to show it is a possibility. In fact he is not speaking exactly as an

apostle to the Philippians; he is a believer and surely we would desire to learn the secret of being initiated in the extremes of these conditions.

We do not know what we may have to face but we have the sense that the same One that enabled the apostle to say that he could do all things will enable us also to face the issue. He says, “I have strength for all things in him that gives me power.” Surely the secret is there, to learn how to draw upon the mighty power of Christ so that we can say humbly and simply that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

A. N. Walker

Extracted from a word at a meeting for ministry, 1943

SUBSTANCE FOR THE SERVICE OF PRAISE

Psalm 66: 13-15

If we are to praise, if we are to offer, we must have that wherewith we may offer. Psalm 66 refers to this; the psalmist refers to burnt offerings and incense. Of course, in Old Testament times the praise of God was connected with material sacrifices — oxen, sheep and incense. But today we are to offer spiritual sacrifices. The question therefore arises, ‘Where do we get what is to be offered?’ The answer is that we are to be persons of spiritual substance. I press that thought; we do need substance in our praise.

One feels if we pondered more upon the Lord, if we were more in His company, if we dwelt more upon His excellencies, if we pondered His pathway and dwelt more on that wonderful life of Jesus — His life from childhood onwards, when there was fruit in season at every moment — that pathway of unique devotedness — what substance we should have, what power to offer to God! Then, above all, the contemplation of His death! The very foundation of all praise is found there. Who can contemplate the death of Christ and not become enriched with material suitable to offer to God?

How weak we feel at times in speaking of the Lord, as we seek to offer Him in praise to God! How weak and empty do we feel, because we have not been contemplating, have not been dwelling upon, the cross of Jesus. His every movement was full of deepest import; His every utterance full of profound meaning; His every act full of the richest instruction. We may well ponder on the cross and get our hearts enriched with what will be suitable to offer to God.

We must remember that there is not only the impulse of the Spirit; there is not only that which is responsive in the way of spiritual sensibility to a presentation of Christ by another believer, as in the case of Elizabeth (see Luke 1:41); there is also that which is marked by intelligence. We should be able to speak intelligently of the Lord, not only in general terms, but to take up the details of His life and His wondrous sacrifice, those details presented to us in fact in the gospels, and in feelings in the Psalms.

Yet the youngest believer is to be encouraged in this matter of praise, because whenever Christ comes before the heart the very sensibilities of the believer respond with impulse. As filled by the Spirit we respond, and hence the youngest believer can respond. If Christ is dear to you, well, to say so to God is praise; to mention that precious name is fragrant to the heart of God. What encouragement to us all, whatever our spiritual state may be! If Christ is presented to God it is a "sweet savour". Yet our measure of substance will be related to the way we have dwelt upon the beauties and blessedness of Jesus. How our hearts would like to hold Him! Oh, for hearts to contemplate Him! If we do so we shall become full of substance wherewith we may offer suited praise to God.

Then, there is another source of substance; Psalm 66 also refers to it. Discipline, the pressure under which we may go, may yield us substance. The present is a time of very distinct pressure. Are we to be losers through it, or are we to be gainers? The psalmist can speak of very intense pressure (Psalm 66:10-12); but the result of the pressure is that he comes into a wealthy place enriched with sacrificial capability and presents to God the fruits of devotedness.

The Lord give us to understand these wonderful things. The service of God is very precious; it is a great privilege to have any part in it. May the Lord give us to be a people of spiritual substance and deep feelings that may suitably respond to the very heart of God. We are living in a very superficial age. We see people professing conversion who have never even cried over their sins. One would like to see deep feeling promoted amongst us which would be a reply to this lukewarm, superficial age. The Lord give us to be a people of deep feelings, for His blessed name's sake.

Malcolm Biggs

Extract from an address at Edinburgh, June 1933

THE GRACE OF GOD

But as fellow-workmen, we also beseech that ye receive not the grace of God in vain: (for he says, I have listened to thee in an accepted time, and I have helped thee in a day of salvation: behold, now is the well-accepted time; behold, now the day of salvation:) giving no manner of offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed; 2 Corinthians 6:1-3

Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but suffer evil along with the glad tidings, according to the power of God; who has saved us, and has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time, but has been made manifest now by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings; to which I have been appointed a herald and apostle and teacher of the nations. 2 Timothy 1:8-11

I, the prisoner in the Lord, exhort you therefore to walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love; ...But to each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ. Wherefore he says, Having ascended up on high, he has led captivity captive, and has given gifts to men... for the perfecting of the saints; with a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ; until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ; in order that we may be no longer babes, tossed and carried about by every wind of that teaching which is in the sleight of men, in unprincipled cunning with a view to systematized error. Ephesians 4:1, 2, 7, 8, 12-14

...that he might display in the coming ages the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For ye are saved by grace, through faith; and this not of yourselves; it is God's gift: not on the principle of works, that no one might boast.

Ephesians 2: 7-9

We do well to ponder together fresh impressions of what the grace of God meant to the apostle Paul.

In 2 Corinthians 6, Paul and others with him are beseeching the Corinthian brethren that they receive not the grace of God in vain. I would suggest that we need to ponder that question and to ask as to whether we might tend to receive

the grace of God in vain. I hope to bring forward some examples of God's grace from Luke's gospel, and to ask what practical results there are in your life or mine that have arisen from your having received the grace of God.

The Corinthians had received a considerable amount of light. Yet light by itself is not sufficient. It is particularly sad that in this second epistle we should have this reference to the possibility of them having received God's grace in vain. One would have hoped that the teaching of the first epistle might have resulted in there being that with them which showed that the grace of God was having its way with them. But I believe we can see as we go into the tenor of the second letter that there was a danger that the receiving of the grace of God might be light to them without any of the practical effects that God's grace is intended to produce.

I say that by way of introduction. Paul is concerned that the brethren in Corinth should remember the word that says, "for... I have listened to thee in an accepted time, and I have helped thee in a day of salvation" (see also Isaiah 49:8). We do well to consider over and over again the grace that met us individually on the road that led to hell. It is the grace that took us up as we were and cleared us from our every liability. It is the grace that served us so that when we came to Christ in all our need that move in faith, no matter how feeble on our part, was sealed from the divine side. When I gave my heart to Jesus I was counting upon the work of my Saviour and His wonderful grace! I can look forward to the future now and thank God from the very bottom of my heart that the penalty of death has been removed. I shall never have to face the judgment that is coming on this world, because I have trusted in the Saviour that has borne all the judgment.

Paul is bringing this word to bear upon the Corinthians. He reminds them of One who says, "I have listened to thee in an accepted time, and I have helped thee in a day of salvation: behold, now is the well-accepted time; behold, now the day of salvation". I look at a company like this and I am very glad to see every lover of Jesus here but I am particularly glad to see those that are younger. May you receive a special blessing from the Lord for being here. Yet I am concerned as to whether everyone here has yielded his or her heart to Jesus. Have you taken advantage of this "accepted time"? The minutes that have gone today have gone for ever. The moments that might be coming — we have not got them yet but we have got 'Now'. It is the only thing in that sense that we have got. Now is the accepted time.

No one has ever loved you as Jesus loves you. He is looking for practical evidence in your life which would plainly indicate that the grace that has been given to you at such immeasurable cost is even now being responded to.

There were those in Corinth who, it would appear, had not taken full advantage of the ministry that had been revealed amongst them and so Paul beseeches them as fellow workmen that “ye receive not the grace of God in vain”. Now, especially for the sake of those that are young, I want to take up one or two references in Luke’s gospel which show persons who did not receive the grace of God in vain.

You might find that the experiences of these persons to whom I am going to refer fit in with little details in your life. If that is so I trust and pray that it will be a very great comfort to you.

Take for instance the man who was let down through the roof. You will remember the house in which the hole was dug through the roof. Luke tells us that the Pharisees and doctors of the law and so on were there. They came out of every village of Galilee, Judaea, Jerusalem and it says, “the Lord’s power was there to heal them” (Luke 5:17). That is the glory of God’s grace. The Lord’s power was there to heal them! As far as we know from the incident only one man got the blessing that was in the mind of the Lord for him and that was the man who was let down through the roof.

The Saviour goes to the root of his problem and says, “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee”. Despite that pronouncement, that man was still lying there. The forgiveness of his sins took him so far and we can thank God from the very bottom of our hearts for the forgiveness of sins. His sins were forgiven but, remember this, the man was still lying there. Then the Lord addresses those who would challenge what He did in forgiving sins. Jesus says: “Why reason ye in your hearts?”. Then the Lord adds, “that ye may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins, he said to the paralysed man, I say to thee, Arise, and take up thy little couch and go to thine house”. But, whilst the Saviour says it, that paralysed man is lying there. What does the Lord mean? The man needs power to put into effect by faith the commandment given to him to “Arise”. How does that power come? It comes by the Spirit and it is an evidence of the glory of grace that waited on that man.

I thank God that he did not receive the grace of God in vain. We read that, “immediately standing up before them”. Have we all done that? The old chorus says, ‘Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus’. Are you doing it? Or have you received the grace of God in vain? Have you stood up for Jesus this week? Have you given a little word to someone close by you as to the Saviour or has this week been a testimony that as far as these last seven days are concerned you have received the grace of God in vain?

The healed man is a witness to the mighty power of divine grace. He was not receiving the grace of God in vain because not only does he do what he was told

to do but there is excess. Grace operative in the believer always has excess and the excess with this man is that he glorified God. He has not received the grace of God in vain.

Levi provides another example of one who received the grace of God and was changed by it. Levi is first seen at his place of business. He was a tax collector — not a popular occupation. While he was sitting at his desk, One came to him who, I suppose, must have been a total stranger. Jesus stood there and there was something about that blessed Man that eclipsed everything else in Levi's life. There was not one department of Levi's existence that was not eclipsed by the glory of the Lord. Have you seen the Saviour like this, as One who eclipses all else?

What next did Levi do? We read, "And having left all, rising up, he followed him" (Luke 5:28). Then Levi made a great entertainment for the Lord in his house. Notice this. Have you made a great feast for Jesus in your own house? Have your affections been unreservedly won for Christ and have you made everything of Him? Or might it be that in this aspect you have received the grace of God in vain?

I love to think of Levi's appreciation of Jesus. May I ask, is there a present response from your heart which can be spoken of by the Spirit of God as a great entertainment for Jesus? You may ask what I mean. I will tell you. How fervent has been your thanks to Jesus for leaving the height of glory and dying for you? How fervent has been your thanks at the expression of His grace? He poured out His own life's blood for you.

How fervent has been your thanks that He has taken upon Himself your every interest and is prepared to be with you every one of the days unto the completion of the age? How fervent has been your thanks that He has shown to you the character of this wicked world in which you are? How presently thankful have you been to Him that He has borne your every need and that you will never see judgment?

I think of the judgment that is going to descend on this Christ-rejecting world. Soon, at any time, we shall be with Christ and be like Him. Has the grace that has given you that hope prompted your heart to give such a response that the Spirit of God could speak of it as a great entertainment for Jesus?

We are getting now to the crux of christianity. It is a question of your personal link with Jesus and of your appreciative response of the glory of grace that has met you. Would to God that many of us had given a greater yield to Jesus in the appreciation of that grace that met us where we were in all our need.

Let us pass to chapter 7 of Luke where we find a woman who had come with an “alabaster box of myrrh” (Luke 7:37). She stands behind the Saviour weeping and she begins to wash the Saviour’s feet with her tears and to wipe them with the hairs of her head. What do you say about her? She is a lovely example of one who has not received the grace of God in vain.

I am getting to what is vital in christianity. Attendance at meetings need not mark any vital christianity. Attendance at meetings can descend to a mere ordinance as also, sad to say, can the breaking of bread. I hope, please God, we shall be sustained always in the appreciation of divine grace and see to it that we have not received the grace of God in vain; the woman did not.

I give one more example — it is in chapter 8. Here we read of a man who dwelt in the tombs and whom no one was able to bind. The man is an example of our state in all its wickedness. They had done everything possible to bind him and could not. Grace from the divine side would give you to understand that by the Spirit you have come to the end of that man. Have you done that?

What does Paul say in 2 Corinthians 5? “Having judged this: that one died for all, then all have died” (2 Corinthians 5:14). Did the man in Luke 8 receive the grace of God in vain? Thank God he did not. What a preacher he became. He was told to go to his own house but he did not stop at his own house; he preached throughout the ten cities of Decapolis. What a monument to the mighty power of divine grace that he, the epitome of wickedness, could be secured by such a glorious Saviour and set up in power here as a witness to the grace that met him where he was. He did not receive the grace of God in vain!

Have you in your soul’s experience moved like that? Have you come to it that, “in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell” (Romans 7:18)? Has the love of Christ constrained you, as it constrained the beloved apostle, that one died for all then all have died? And He died for all that they who live should no longer live to themselves. Are you living your christianity to yourself? If you are, for the moment, you are receiving the grace of God in vain.

These challenges are healthy. Might it please God just to say a word to every one of our hearts that the Saviour who has loved us and who lives for us is looking to each of us today for just a little tribute. He longs to receive from your heart a witness that you have not received the grace of God in vain.

Well now, I pass on to 2 Timothy 1. Paul says, “Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner”. Paul writes from the prison in the Ephesian epistle, “I, the prisoner in the Lord”. He says here, “Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me his prisoner”. May I appeal to all today not to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.

I sometimes think of the mighty extent of the power that has been given to Jesus as Lord. For instance, He is Lord of the dead [see Romans 14:9]. How many untold millions have gone to be with Jesus. It is the greatest comfort to those of us who have lost loved ones as most of us in this room will surely have done. Christ is Lord of the dead and of the living. Think of the glory of His Lordship! The mighty power that has been given to Him makes us realise how wonderfully great He is. But the testimony as to His greatness, insofar as men and women in responsibility are concerned, is in the dust.

We read, “According to the power of God; who has saved us, and has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but, according to His own purpose and grace... Which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time”. Let us rejoice together at the glory of divine grace that thought about us before time began. Paul speaks elsewhere of those who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (see Ephesians 1:4).

Yet my prime thought in reading this passage was the wonder of these words: “which was given to us... before the ages of time”. Given to us! We each were personally in the divine mind in eternity past. You were in mind for blessing. Then the scripture goes on: “has now been made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ”. That is, if this gift in God’s purpose from that past eternity was to be made real and substantial to us it involved the appearing of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. What is the effect going to be with us? It is open to each of us as responsible christians to speak to God about it, to praise Him for it. It is ours to tell Him that we have not received the gift of His grace in vain.

Scripture shows the greatness of what He has done: “Who has annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility”. Have we thanked Him enough? Can we praise Him enough? Are we prepared to keep what has been so graciously committed to us? How do we keep it? Paul says to Timothy, ‘I will tell you how to keep it’: “Keep, by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us, the good deposit entrusted”. (2 Timothy 1:14). Paul is concerned that Timothy might be in the acceptance of the charge that was his. He does not want Timothy to receive the grace of God in vain.

It might be that this word in 2 Timothy 1 might just give us the impetus to be here in relation to the testimony of our Lord for we are told that God has not given us a “spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion” (2 Timothy 1:7). This is what has been given to us and my earnest concern is that we might all take full advantage of what has been so graciously given to us. May we be preserved from receiving the grace of God in vain.

In Ephesians 4 Paul writes, “I, the prisoner in the Lord, exhort you therefore to walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye have been called”. This is a personal appeal from the apostle in prison. “To walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye have been called... But to each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ... With a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ; until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” When will that be? I will tell you. It will be any minute now! We shall arrive at this at the rapture.

Until we arrive at it we are exhorted to walk worthy of the calling with which we have been called. Grace has entered into that. By grace we are saved, through faith, and this not of ourselves; it is God’s gift. Each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. You cannot put any limit on the measure of the gift of the Christ so you can have just as much grace as you want and the more grace you have and the more grace you use, the more grace you will seek after.

“Until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ.” It is like the head-stone being brought forward “with shoutings: Grace, grace unto it!” (Zechariah 4:7). When we see the work of God in all its glory what shall we do but celebrate with one great song of praise the glory of grace that has taken us up and has blessed us so that we should be with and like our glorious Lord for ever.

Ephesians 2 shows us something of the coming ages: “that he might display in the coming ages the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus”. There will be a testimony to the glory of that grace and it has been manifested in His kindness towards us. Ephesians 2 is light as to what is going to happen. The light of it has been given to us that we by the Spirit might be formed by it and that we might have our part in showing this kindness. As the word is, “as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

As we go through the Ephesian epistle and see one superlative reference after another to the glory of divine grace might it be that on our knees we desire of the Lord, as never before, that we receive not the grace of God in vain? May it be so, for His name’s sake.

Ron Gregory,

An address at Leamington, 21st September 1974

(This article has been revised but not by Mr Gregory himself.)