

No. 51

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,
The Baptist Church, High Street, Bures. CO8 5JG. UK

Living Water — Issue No. 51

Recent Ministry

Page

THE SAVIOUR!	Tim Pons	4
THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS - CHAPTER 5		10
Highlights of a Bible reading		

Poetry Selection

A selection of poems by Ceneita Thompson (1822 - 1909)		
“THE LOVE OF CHRIST WHICH PASSES KNOWLEDGE”		14
OUR FATHER AND OUR GOD		15
THE SAVIOUR’S NAME		16

Testimony Section

A VISIT TO THE GYPSY ‘KING’		17
THE BIBLE IN A CONCENTRATION CAMP	Martin Niemoller	18

A Voice from the Past

YOUNG WOMEN & YOUNG MEN SPEAKING FOR GODA. E. Myles		18
An exhortation to all to speak out for Christ in this dark day		
SPEAKING TO THE HEART	J. H. Trevitt	21
J.H.Trevitt shows us the importance of being moved in heart		
SPIRITUAL MANIFESTATIONS	Dr. C. C. Elliott	21
Dr. Elliott sums up his address with the words: “I do believe that it is of the utmost importance that spiritual experiences...should be known by everyone of us and if what I have said tends to send us to the Lord in prayer to see what it is that prevents them being ours, I shall be glad indeed”.		

A Word for Today

THE BELIEVER’S SPIRIT - SUSTAINED IN THE PRESENCE OF SUFFERING	Gerald Cowell	24
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THE SAVIOUR

And there were shepherds in that country abiding without, and keeping watch by night over their flock. And lo, an angel of the Lord was there by them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they feared with great fear. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I announce to you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people; for to-day a Saviour has been born to you in David's city, who is Christ the Lord.

(Luke 2:8-11).

What we have read is the part of the story of the birth of the Saviour. The shepherds had this message from an angel and tonight I want to speak about the message that they got: "to-day a Saviour has been born to you". How many times in the last week in your home, school or office have you heard people talking about a saviour? It is not the kind of word we use every day, is it? What is a saviour? If you look in a dictionary it will tell you that a saviour is someone who rescues you. Here is a wonderful message in the Bible spoken to shepherds 2000 years ago, which is just as real from God to you tonight. A Saviour has been born for you!

What do you need a Saviour for? Are you happy with your life? Maybe it is not perfect. Maybe there are things you would like to change. Maybe sometimes there is sorrow in our lives or deep stress but most of the time we are reasonably happy with our lives. So why do we need a Saviour? Why do you need someone to rescue you? What do you need rescuing from? I want to try and explain that tonight by drawing your attention to someone in the Bible.

I do not know if any of you read the 'Times' newspaper on a Saturday but there is a columnist in the Times called John Diamond*. He is not a christian and he is dying of cancer, very, very slowly. He has had chemotherapy, he has had a number of operations. He has had his tongue cut out and he cannot speak. A few weeks ago he wrote in the Times that he had been to the doctors and they had found yet another lump and he needed to go through another few weeks of surgery and radiotherapy. He was wondering if he could really face it but he looked at his life and he knew deep down he really wanted to live. It was worth almost any suffering if it gave him a chance to live. Deep down inside each one of us there is something that wants to live. We do not want to die. There is something that fights and fights against the idea of dying. You and I want to live.

Sometimes people find themselves dying quite young. Without any choice. I want to tell you about a man in the Bible who I think died quite young. He had no choice — and it is not Jesus.

The man I want to tell you about deserved to die and he knew it. He had some kind of trial. He had been found guilty and he was guilty and he knew it. The Roman guards came to his cell to drag him out. It does not tell you in the scriptures but I think that man desperately wanted to live. I think he was deeply afraid.

Imagine if you knew that you were going to die today would you be afraid? I think that man was afraid. He needed a Saviour more than anything else in the world. He needed someone to rescue him that day. When the soldiers dragged him out he wanted someone to come and free him. The soldiers dragged him away and they made him carry his cross through the streets of Jerusalem. He dragged that heavy cross up to the little hillside called Golgotha, which means place of a skull, just outside the city walls.

The soldiers took that man and they held him down. They put nails through his hands and feet and fixed him to a cross. Then they lifted up that cross, slotted it in a hole in the ground and firmed it in and stood back. He was hanging there in the most indescribable pain. He needed someone to rescue him. This is not just a story. This was a real man. He needed a Saviour! He needed someone to rescue him, to come and take him down from the cross. Because if no one came he would just hang there in agony until he died.

No one was coming to help him. Not just because of the soldiers guarding at the foot of the cross. Not just because of the crowd. No, no-one was coming to help him because he deserved it. He had done something so terrible that he deserved to die. And he knew it. He said it himself; it is recorded in the scriptures. It says that he was a robber. I do not know what he had done, maybe he had robbed with violence. Maybe somebody had died, I do not know, we are not told. But that man deserved to die and he knew it and there was no-one to save him. But, oh, how much he needed a Saviour!

When the thief looked to one side he saw there was someone else there who had been crucified. He had a crown of thorns on His head and His face was bruised because He had been beaten. It had spit on it where the soldiers had spat on Him. There was hair missing from His beard where they had pulled it out. He was bleeding because He had been scourged with a Roman scourging. There

was a sign over His head. I do not suppose that the thief on the cross could read it but it said, 'The King of the Jews'.

There were people at the foot of the cross next to him and they were laughing at that Man. They were saying, "He has saved others; let him save himself ... let him descend now from the cross" (Luke 23:35, Matthew 27:42). The thief joined in, and he swore and he cursed at that Man next to him. He said the same kind of things: 'Save yourself and us, come down from the cross, you saved others now save yourself!' He swore at Him and he cursed Him and he hung there in his pain.

I do not know what he knew about that Man on the next cross. I think he probably had heard Him say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). I do not know what else that thief knew about the life that had brought Jesus to the cross. There were hundreds of people that knew Him. Thousands of people through Judea and Galilee and outside who knew about the life of that Man.

In the borders of Tyre and Sidon there was a Greek Syro- Phoenecian woman whose little daughter had been healed of a demon by the word of that Man. In Capernaum there was a man whose withered hand had been healed by the word of that Man. Down in Jericho there was a blind man who had cried out some days before, "Son of David, have mercy on me" and the Lord had healed him and now he could see (Mark 10:48).

In Jerusalem there was a man who had lain for 38 years by the pool of Bethesda waiting for someone to throw him in when the waters were stirred by an angel. One day Jesus had walked in amongst the sick lying by the pool and had healed him. There was a man who had been blind; he had appealed to Jesus and had been sent by Him to the pool of Siloam, with mud on his eyes, and told to wash. And he had washed and he could see. And there were many, many more.

How many more people were there across the face of that land that day who knew about Jesus and thought He was wonderful? They knew Him as a man who could heal. They knew Him as a man who brought them divine love. Think of so many little towns and villages across Judea and Galilee, across even the other side of the Jordan where there were people whose lives Jesus had touched. There were people who had been healed. There were people that had been brought back to life. There were people who loved Him.

But there by that cross at Jerusalem there was a crowd of people who hated Him and they shouted at Him. There were scribes and Pharisees self-righteously standing there. They had achieved their plan and crucified Jesus. There was a little group of people, the mother of Jesus and her sister, and one or two others, and John the disciple standing there as well. But not one of them, could do a thing to rescue that thief on the cross and none of them could do anything to help the Man next to him.

I want you to think about that man who was on a cross next to the Christ. I do not know what he understood but he turned from swearing and cursing Jesus to rebuke the thief on the other side of Jesus. He told him to stop cursing Jesus. He told him that as thieves they both deserved to die; but that the Man on the middle cross had done nothing wrong. And he said to Jesus, “Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him, Verily I say to thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42,43).

He had found a Saviour! That thief was dying. He wanted to come down from that cross. He wanted the pain to go away but it did not. But he did find a Saviour. I want you to understand tonight what kind of a Saviour this is. It is a Saviour for sinners. It is a Saviour that loves you. It is a Saviour who is concerned about your life day to day. But far, far more than that He is concerned about where you will be in eternity.

The thief did not come down from the cross alive. He was still there when Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” The thief was still there when Jesus cried, “it is finished”. He was still there when Jesus cried “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit” and He died (Luke 23:46). The thief was still there. Still hanging on his cross, still in agony.

Think about that. The thief had reached out to Jesus with his heart: he could not move his legs, he could not move his arms. He had reached out with words from his heart and asked Jesus to help him. And he got an answer. He believed what Jesus had said to him. He put his trust in Jesus but now Jesus was dead and the thief still hung on his cross. Nobody came to take him down instead soldiers came to break his legs to speed up his death. They did the same to the thief on the other side but when they came to Jesus they found that He was already dead. Have you understood that? The Son of God was dead.

There was a man in Jerusalem that day whose name was Nicodemus. Some time before, Jesus had said to him, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him may not perish, but have

eternal life” (John 3:16). Just think about that for a moment. When Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus down from the cross and carried Him away to bury Him in a new tomb, Nicodemus came too. He brought myrrh and aloes, and whatever was needed to embalm the body of the Saviour.

I just wonder what Nicodemus was thinking as he handled the body of the dead Saviour? I think that it must have come home to him in a special way that God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son. He must have realised that God loved him! Yes, God so loved you and me that He gave His only Son. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son”. Nicodemus had seen Him. He had the evidence in front of him that Jesus had died. Nicodemus was a real man. Just as John was a real man. John said of the cross, ‘I saw it, I was an eye witness. I saw the spear pierce His side and out flowed blood and water’. John wrote about it in His gospel. I would love to know what Nicodemus would write: That I handled the body of the Christ, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believes on Him may not perish”.

What did that thief think there on the cross? He had never even heard those words. All he had heard was what Jesus had said to him, ‘Today, you will be with me in paradise’. His sins were forgiven. He had peace in his heart. He had pain in his body but there was peace in his heart. It was the peace spoken of in Philippians, the peace of God that surpasses every understanding (see Philippians 4:7). He will be in heaven according to the scriptures. He did something so vile that he deserved to be crucified, and he knew it, but he will be in heaven and there will be plenty of other people who have done worse things than him who will also be in heaven. Why? Because they have done what the thief did. They have reached out in faith and said, ‘Lord forgive me’, or whatever words they have chosen to use. If, tonight, you reach out in your heart to the Saviour He will forgive you, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life”.

That is why Jesus came. That is why He died. That is why I have got peace in my heart. Maybe tonight you are afraid of dying. Would you be like that poet that I read at school who said:

‘Fight, fight against the dying of the light,
Fight against it because there is something unknown out there.’

Although the whole world tries to believe that there is nothing now on the other side of death, yet the struggle to believe that is spoiled by the fact that Jesus

Christ has been here and He has told us what it is like. We cannot go to our graves believing there is nothing after death because deep in our hearts, we know that it is not true. The Bible tells us that after death there is the judgment. That there is some point at which God looks at your life and reviews it. What will He say when every hidden thing is brought out into the open? When every thought and every thing is known? When He judges you against the standard of His holiness, what will He say of your life?

You are sick with sins and as Jesus said, unless you come to Him you will die in your sins. He is the only One who can heal you. If you die in your sins you will be raised in your sins and judged in your sins. Do you know what there is on the other side of the judgment, according to the scriptures? There is a place called hell. Maybe you prefer not to talk about that. Maybe you would like to think it is imaginary. But it is in the scriptures — Jesus said it, and I would rather believe Him than any one else — He said that hell is there.

It is not a place like you see in pictures of imaginative artists. It is not like that. The Bible tells you that it is “eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). It is for the enemies of God, for their torment. It was not a place made for you and me. But the Bible says, if we die in our sins, we will be there. That is why the Saviour came. That is why you need to be rescued.

It is not the fear of death, exactly, you need to be rescued from. It is that thing that will happen to you beyond death if you die in your sins. You need to be rescued and Jesus came to do it. He is the Son of God, He understands God’s heart. He knows that God loves you and He knows that God is holy and righteous just as the Bible says. He knows that if you die as you are, you would have no hope at all. So He came Himself to take your place under God’s judgment, because He loves you.

At Calvary’s cross, in the three hours of darkness Jesus bore the judgment of God for me. He has borne it completely and to God’s satisfaction. He has borne it in such a way that as trusting in Jesus I can be in God’s presence for eternity and not be worried. Because Jesus has cleansed me there is not a sin or a stain upon me.

What have I done to deserve that? Have I led a good life? No! Have I come to church? No! What have I done to deserve that? Nothing! I have just been to Jesus and asked Him for myself to forgive me. That is what I have done. And that is all the gospel asks you to do. It is all God asks you to do. You are so stained with sin, you are so deeply involved in sin that you may not understand

or realise that there is not a thing you can do to help yourself. You cannot save yourself, you need a Saviour. If you want a Saviour there is One for you today. It is Jesus. The only Person in the whole world who can save you.

You can come to Him very simply. All you have to do is speak to Him. No special words. No set formula. Just speak to the Saviour and ask Him to forgive you your sins. You do not understand how much He loves you. If you speak to Him now, from your heart, if you mean it and you call Him from your heart, He will hear you. He loves you so much He has to hear you. He is not above the clouds, He is not a long way away; He is right beside you, now, in this room here, beside your heart. He is asking you to trust Him and believe in Him.

I wish I could find the words that would make you turn to the Saviour for yourself and find out what I am talking about. You have got to do it yourself. Nobody can do it for you. But if you turn to Jesus and ask Him to forgive you, you will find out what I mean. The Bible says that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Tim Pons,

A preaching of the gospel — Warley, October 2000

** John Diamond died during 2001.*

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS — CHAPTER 5

Highlights of a Bible reading

The chapter begins with the important statement: “Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ”. As having faith in Christ we are justified; we each have a standing before God as though we had never sinned at all. Our justification before God can never be taken away because it is not based on what we have done, or do, but on the work of Christ. We come into it on the principle of faith. Because God is completely pleased with what Christ has done He can extend justification to those that have faith in Christ. That is an immense blessing. Our peace with God is based on this, which in turn, and that sets us in liberty before God. God is not looking at our shortcomings, He is looking at Christ.

Our sins have gone in their totality in the sight of God. All was dealt with completely to God’s satisfaction at the cross and the resurrection proves that this

was so. He was raised for our justification (Romans 4:25). In Romans 8 we find the consequence: “It is God who justifies: who is he that condemns?” There cannot be any kind of condemnation at all, for God has wrought.

Justification is on the principle of faith. If we have doubts, then we shall not enjoy peace with God. We need to see the settled disposition of God towards us. Each believer has a settled relationship with Him, unrelated to state or actions, based on what Christ has done and how God values it. God has shown His valuation in raising Him from the dead. Unless, as Christians, we have this sense of settled peace, when we do commit sins we will become fearful of God which is not His desire. Mr Darby once said: ‘Suppose my soul is out of communion, the natural heart says, I must correct the cause of this before I can come to Christ. But He is gracious; and knowing this, the way is to return to Him at once just as we are, and then to humble ourselves deeply before Him. It is only in Him and from Him that we shall find that which shall restore our souls’.

The apostle is presenting these matters of justification and peace on a very high level. Justification by faith is in view of access by faith into the favour in which we stand. God wants us in His presence as like Christ. Those who are “in Christ” are no longer in their sins.

In verses 3 to 5 we get the concept of boasting in tribulations: “knowing that tribulation works endurance; and endurance, experience; and experience, hope; and hope does not make ashamed”. Tribulation has the effect of keeping us close to Christ. David the king, learnt a lot through tribulation and he wrote some wonderful Psalms as to the way God had helped him in various difficult circumstances, some brought about by his own sins. The result was that he could praise God.

When we are first converted, in the joy of redemption, justification, reconciliation, and peace with God we just think how wonderful Christ is. Then, may be, our circumstances change and things go wrong. The challenge is whether our trust in God remains the same. Then, too, having gone through that kind of experience we find that despite all things, we did come through it and we realise how trustworthy Christ is.

In the gospels the Lord never promised that the path of discipleship would be easy but warned that there would be sorrows, tribulation and difficulty. Yet He

also assured His own that He would be with them in all these things and the result is that we learn more of Him. We are to arrive practically at the truth of the statement that, “in all these things we more than conquer” (Romans 8:37).

James, in his epistle speaks of endurance and goes on to speak of the “end of the Lord; that the Lord is full of tender compassion and pitiful” (James 5:11). It is often only when we look back on certain experiences that we can boast in tribulation.

Satan takes every opportunity to try to destroy the peace which a believer has. The answer to this, brought forward here, is the power of the Holy Spirit by whom the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. It is very interesting that this is the first mention of the Spirit’s service in the epistle, and that it is in relation to conflict. We find how important the love of God is in respect of support in trial when we come to Romans eight where we read that nothing, “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

Verse 8 of chapter 5 reminds us that before we thought about God at all He thought about us. He commends His love to us. The earlier chapters of the epistle have shown how inexcusable man is. The sinfulness of man is thoroughly gone into in chapter 2 of the epistle, which shows that every type of person (pagan, carnal, or religious) is out of court as far as God is concerned. Yet, while we were in that condition which was hateful to God, He commends His love to us by giving His Son to die for us. There is nothing that could so persuade us of His love, than the fact that when we were in such a state, God gave His Son to die for us.

We needed to be reconciled to God. It is not God being reconciled to us. We are the ones that have caused the offence and that fact magnifies the love of God. He does not impose His love upon us. He commends it! We are responsible beings and it is for each of us to accept His commendation.

In verse 11 we read that, “we are making our boast in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ”. Making our boast really means to ‘glory in’. Because of what God has done we are able to glory in things which are unpalatable down here but most of all we glory in God Himself. In Jeremiah we read, “let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am Jehovah, who

exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth” (Jeremiah 9:24).

In the way of testimony, an illustration of this kind of boasting, or glorying, is found in the story of the woman who said to an atheist, ‘If I die tonight I will go to be with Jesus: if you die where will you go?’ She was glorying in her salvation. She died the next day and the atheist came to Christ! That is the sort of boasting that God is pleased to use.

It helps us to understand the epistle to the Romans to see that the first eleven verses of chapter 5 are a kind of summary of what has gone before. Up to that point the apostle is speaking of the way that our sins have been met. From verse 12 onwards, the chapter speaks of the root principle of sin. Justification is in relation to sins. ‘Sins’ are what we commit. ‘Sin’ is the principle of disobedience which is abroad in the Christ also hated in His own holy soul, it gives a deeper understanding of the sufferings that our Lord went through. The Lord’s feelings are expressed in His cry: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” (Mark 15:34). Romans opens up to us something of the significance of what was done in the three hours of darkness on the cross. There the Lord resolved the question of both sin and sins. There He delivered us from the power of Satan. Those three hours play a vital part in fulfilling the will of God.

Highlights of a Bible reading, Bromley, May 2001.

“THE LOVE OF CHRIST, WHICH PASSETH KNOWLEDGE”

I've seen Thee, Lord, in death for me,
And in Thy life have liberty;
But who shall tell the cost to Thee?

Thou gav'st Thyself, God's Holy One,
His spotless Lamb, His blessed Son,
Oh love! What wonders hast thou done!

That love doth Calvary's cross declare,
Displayed, but not exhausted there,
For love's eternal - everywhere!

In heaven, it works unwearied still,
For me, it works with love's sweet skill,
That love itself my heart doth fill.

Thy love like air encircles me,
In it I live, and then to Thee
It springeth back responsively.

Thy company is joy supreme,
Thy presence heaven itself doth seem,
All else is but a baseless dream.

Could love do more? 'Tis limitless,
'Tis sovereign in its power to bless,
And union crowns my happiness.

United by one Spirit, we
Are one for all eternity,
And naught can sever me from Thee.

Love's work complete, communion flows
Unchecked; for in love's deep repose
Thou canst to me Thy heart disclose.

My cup is full and floweth o'er -
My soul a ceaseless song doth pour -
My Lord! I worship, I adore!

Cenita Thompson (1822 - 1909)

OUR FATHER AND OUR GOD

Our Father! sacred name of holy joy,
Heaven's wealth of love disclosed without alloy,
Unchanging, infinite, eternal, free,
In all its boundless depth flows out from Thee.
To be our Father, yet the God Thou art,
Is inconceivable to human heart:
Yet what Thou art can be the only key
By which to solve the wondrous mystery,
For God is Love.

Our Father! This the manner of Thy love,
To have us as Thy sons to dwell above,
And in Thy house to find our home and rest,
And learn the love which hath so richly blessed.
Accepted in Thine own beloved Son
In all the value of that blessed One;
In love before Thee - holy, without blame,
Thus only suited to Thy holy name,
For God is Light.

Our God! Who carest for us day by day,
And bids us all our care on Thee to lay;
Then fills the heart with peace no tongue can tell,
Its restless tossing stills, and all is well.
Our Father! Who has made His joys our own,
And all heaven's treasure freely open thrown;
Bowed in adoring sense of what Thou art,
And all the boundless love that fills Thy heart,
We worship Thee!

Cenita Thompson (1822 - 1909)

THE SAVIOUR'S NAME

Strike the chord and sing His praises,
Sound afar the Saviour's name
Heaven itself the anthem raises,
Saints on earth His praise proclaim.

Precious, priceless name of Jesus,
God alone its worth can tell,
Spotless, through that name He sees us,
Fitted e'en with Him to dwell.

Name that tells a life's devotion,
Sorrow's overflowing tide
Deeper far than deepest ocean
Failed to turn Thy steps aside.

This the name the world despises,
Jew and Gentile scorn alike;
To His own, the prize of prizes,
Sweetest note that angels strike.

This the name that God delighteth
Highest honour to award;
Every knee shall bow to Jesus,
Every tongue confess Him Lord.

But His saints that hour awaiting
Joy e'en now to own Him all,
And though here despised, rejected,
Worshipping before Him fall.

Blessed Jesus! Reign unrivalled,
Lord of every loyal heart;
Vain are all earth's vain allurements
If with Thee we have our part.

Wondrous, radiant Man in glory!
Once who hung upon the tree,
Ending there our awful story;
Bending low, we worship Thee!

Cenita Thompson (1822 - 1909)

A VISIT TO THE GYPSY 'KING'

The leader of the gypsies living in Romania is known as their king. A supply of Bibles had been donated for the use of the gypsies. This is an account of how they were received.

A very long-standing friend of mine used to attend school with the king and she arranged for Gyula and I to take Bibles and christian literature for children, which had been donated, to his home. Since he leads a very busy life I had envisaged a brief visit, however he appeared to be in no hurry and as we prepared to leave urged us to stay for lunch as his guests.

During lunch his eldest daughter appeared, and on seeing the children's christian books wanted to take some to teach the little ones. The king expressed his sincere thanks and gratitude for the gift and commented: 'The Bible alone contains God's way of salvation for humanity, but also provided the best guidance for daily life, relationships, wisdom, law and understanding; so that food must be found for the body of those facing famine, but the mind and soul must be treated too.' His aim is to distribute the Bible to all the gypsy families under his authority.

He then shared his testimony. Initially he had no interest in the things of God but in 1992 his little boy became desperately ill and could not eat anything. No one appeared able to help him and his mother was distraught. When a visiting missionary came to the area she went along to the meeting. On hearing of her trouble the missionary said, 'God can heal your son'.

'If He can then let Him do it', she replied. Taking the boy in his arms the missionary prayed for him and from that time the boy improved and has regained his health. His mother was so appreciative that she began to attend church, later giving her heart to the Lord and being baptised. Her father was furious on hearing that she had become a believer and insisted she went to an Orthodox priest. This man told her that she must repent of her actions. She replied, 'How can I repent of repenting? The Lord Jesus has forgiven my sins, changed my life and given me joy and peace for ever.'

At that time her husband, the king, was not a believer but in 1996 he was taken ill with a heart attack in Bucharest. He was alone at the time and in great pain and was afraid of dying. He cried out to the Lord, promising to serve Him if only He would get him back safely to his family. The Lord answered that prayer and the king came to trust the Lord for himself.

Based on an account provided by Margaret Robinson.

THE BIBLE IN A CONCENTRATION CAMP

The Bible: what did this Book mean to me during the long and weary years of solitary confinement, and then for the last four years cell-building at Dachau? The Word of God was simply everything to me, it provided comfort and strength, guidance and hope. It was master of my days and companion of my nights. My window was too high to look outside, but not too high to call through and give forth portions of the Bible that might be caught from my window by the passer-by. Later on, when I was allowed to walk in the courtyard for half an hour daily there were other windows-not too high to prevent me from call up the Word to him, the brother prisoner. "The Word of God is not bound"; it became a comfort and strength, guidance and hope for-others as it ought to be.

And to-day? What does this Book now mean to me? It is just the same, only that the restrictions have gone and the opportunities have widened. The task is lying ahead of us. There is a world waiting for the life of God and for His peace. We have to unfold it to them from the pages of the Bible, and announce to a longing mankind-the message of love and righteousness, of grace and truth, the message of the desired peace which passeth all understanding. Here is a Book given from God. Take it, read it pass it on, and keep it; for it points the way of Salvation.

Martin Niemoller (1892-1984)

Between 1938 and 1945 Martin Neimoller was held in various Concentration Camps by the Nazis.

YOUNG WOMEN & YOUNG MEN SPEAKING FOR GOD

2 Kings 5: 1-4;
Daniel 1: 3-4;
3: 13-18

I turn to the second book of Kings with the intention of showing you one whose speaking should greatly encourage all the young people, and especially the young women, to speak for Christ. I find that there are very few women who are prepared to speak about Christ unless the atmosphere is sympathetic.

This little maid, of whom we read, is a captive. But although the maid is a captive and waits on Naaman's wife, she does not speak like a captive; she speaks in all the dignity of a "sent" person. It was no accident, not even an

incident, that she was in that country, and in that place - though it may have appeared so in the history of Syria. God is over all these happenings; behind the scenes He is `sending' persons who are able to represent Him. Wherever His people are found, in whatever circumstances, He would have them to bear the marks of those who have been `sent' - those who belong to another place, but are where they are as `sent' there. I feel sure that if you could have looked on that little maid you would have seen Israel in her manners, her speech and her heart. She is spoken of as a maid of the land of Israel. She is in another country, in circumstances that were not agreeable, but she is there in all the dignity of the people of God; she is a maid of Israel, a "sent" person, and so she speaks.

Look at what she says! She brings God in as having a prophet in Samaria and she brings in God in an appealing way, for what could appeal to a leper like the news of one who could heal him? We should be able to speak in such circumstances of Jesus! We should be able to present Him in an appealing way as able to meet every kind and character of the need so prevalent today. She brought God in. How it changed the whole situation! What a speaker she was!

I would like to ask the young women who are believers: 'Have you ever spoken about Christ?' Have you thought that this was a kind of service out of your reach? Do you think that this is reserved for men or even for those whom the Lord may have gifted? This is not that kind of speaking; this is the speaking that can go on in the kitchen, in the factory, in the office, or anywhere. It is a speaking that is great enough and dignified enough to reach up to the great military commander of that country; it is a speaking that is great enough to reach the ears of a king. How far-reaching was the word of this captive maid!

I would commend to the young women the idea of speaking about Christ. Before you do so, and as you do so, see that you carry the marks and the dress and the manners of one who belongs to Christ, for if you want to be effective for God, if you want to speak in this manner, you must bear those marks.

In the reference, in the book of Daniel, we get the thought of young men. What we see in this story is how the world system would bid for the most comely and beautiful amongst the people of God to adorn its own system. These young men were part of a company of young persons who were taken to adorn the kingdom of this heathen despot.

If the world is bidding for you and attracting you, I speak to young believers, before you are charmed by it I would like you to lay hold of this fact that behind it is a strange god — not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ but another god. That is what is behind the world. Whatever it uses to attract the people of

God, there is behind it another god, its object is to take you away from the God who loves you, and from Christ who died for you.

Now, although these young men were captives they were being loaded with favours; they were being taught the learning of the Chaldeans. Every young person who has to pass through the world comes under this kind of influence. The world will be glad to have you; but behind it all is another god. Such circumstances call for speaking. What are you going to do? We are called upon to speak!

We may be prone to think that speaking is the weakest thing that we can do. When Paul went to Ephesus (Acts 19) he did not go with carnal weapons, but he brought down all the strongholds of the enemy; he spoke for God. He spoke in all the dignity of one who would bring God in, and he brought that stronghold down. Look at these three young men. The moment that they stand out for God the favour turns to fury. That which, perhaps, in other circumstances seemed so attractive, now becomes manifest in its true character. If you are not conformed to this world, to its fashions, to its manners, to its ways, and its prince and god, you will find that favour may turn to fury; and then we see the worst that man can do. A furnace is the greatest destructive agency in man's control. A furnace heated seven times represents the worst that the world can do to you if you are faithful to Christ. Make no mistake about it, that is what the world will do to you if it is allowed; but what we learn is this, that 'sent persons,' those who are faithful and speak for God, are supported by God.

A furnace heated sevenfold means nothing to God! It is the merest trifle compared with the power of God; and we do well to note the result of the bold speaking of these young men, of the faithfulness that was prepared to say, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us ... But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods". The result of their speaking is that it was made known to all people, nations and languages — that the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego was a God that could deliver, that He was greater than any other god.

I think I have indicated what is on my mind. I cannot help feeling what possibilities for God there are in His people. If there were but a thousand devoted hearts, a thousand faithful persons - men and women, youths and maidens - a thousand faithful speakers - what it would be for God! I am sure the earnest prayer of each of us is that we may be united in this devotion and in this kind of faithfulness.

A. E. Myles

Extracted from an address at Birmingham, May 1932

SPEAKING TO THE HEART

It is said in Isaiah 40, "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem". may I plead for that in respect of our links with one another, in relation to any service with which the Lord in His goodness may entrust us? Do we make an appeal to the heart? Do we speak to the hearts of God's people? Do we appeal to that which is the seat of every emotion, or are we content to address the minds by imparting information about divine things of divine Persons? I make bold to say that if we are concerned to appeal to the hearts of God's people there will be response; if we merely appeal to the minds there will be no response.

J.H. Trevitt

Extracted from an address at Barnet, June 1929

SPIRITUAL MANIFESTATIONS

Acts 26:14-18

I shall say first a word about the first great appearing of the Lord to the apostle Paul. It is one of many appearings, as the Lord said, "For this purpose have I appeared to thee, to appoint thee... a witness both of what thou hast seen, and of what I shall appear to thee in". So there were many appearings to the apostle during his life, but this was the first, the great initial appearing. I suppose it was the greatest and it had a profound effect upon him. I have no doubt that with any servant of the Lord who seeks to serve Him, an analogous experience takes place. That is, there is a real spiritual appearing of the Lord (not in a vision like this, of course) which marks the character of the ministry. I think there is that with each of us who are servants of the Lord, and whether the work is small or great, the Lord will give us, as He gave Paul, a distinct impression of His commission. You cannot run without a commission; you cannot engage in service without a distinct impression of the Lord. It may be feeble, but it must be there, and that appearing will characterise the whole of the ministry of the servant.

It is very important to notice that the germ of the whole of the double ministry of Paul is contained in what the Lord said to him here. I refer to the ministry of the assembly (or the church), and the ministry of the gospel. The ministry of the church is obviously contained in germ in the beautiful expression, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?...I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" It contains the

germ of the whole ministry of the church which was developed in fuller measure in Paul as he went on in his pathway, and it was the secret of his devoted labour. If he knew and acknowledged that the church which he had persecuted was really Christ, he was prepared to prove Christ's love to the church in himself to the uttermost, whether he were loved or not: "If even abundantly loving you I should be less loved (2 Corinthians 12:15). He loved and served the church which Christ loved. That is the real motive of service to the church; we are so impressed with Christ's love to the church, and what it is to the heart of Christ, that we love to serve it. It will prepare us for acting in the meanest capacity, and though we may know but little about it, it will bring suffering to us.

Now there is another feature in this appearing which I would point out; that is, the close connection and intertwining of the two ministries. The Lord immediately goes on to give Paul his evangelical ministry, how he should go to the nations to open their eyes, "that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God". That is the evangelical side, though without the slightest doubt it was in view of the church, so that those of the nations thus reached should become part of that wonderful vessel. You see how the two ministries are intertwined there; they are not divorced; What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate (|Matthew 19:6). That is, there is to be no divorce between the ministry of the gospel and the ministry of the church; they would be mutually conducive to each other's progress, and they are both impressed upon the apostle at this wonderful appearing.

I have already referred to the many appearings that were made to Paul, and of some of them we have a record. For instance, when he came to Jerusalem and wanted to stay there and preach, the Lord appeared to him in an ecstasy and said: "Make haste and go quickly out of Jerusalem" (Acts 22:18). He pleaded with the Lord, and said he would like to stay: "Lord, they themselves know that I was imprisoning and beating in every synagogue those that believe on thee; and when the blood of thy witness Stephen was shed, I also was standing by and consenting, and kept the clothes of those who killed him" (Acts 22:19-20). But the Lord became insistent and said, `You are to go'. The Lord is able to appear to His servants to give them directions for service, and while we may have to gather much as to His will, there is such a thing as the Lord giving preemptory instruction, and I suppose every servant knows what that is; you cannot argue; you must obey.

That was the result of one appearing of the Lord to Paul; and again when the apostle was in some distress because he had made an error before the Council,

that very night the gracious Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good courage; for as thou hast testified these things concerning me at Jerusalem, so thou must bear witness at Rome also” (Acts 23:11). He would fulfil his service, and he would go to Rome and testify for the Lord there. The Lord is so gracious: he knew that the heart and motive were right, and he would comfort His servant.

Then again we read that after he had been caught up to the third heaven, which was indeed more than an appearing, when he came down he was given the thorn for the flesh, and found it very trying for himself, a man of so impetuous and active a character. He besought the Lord thrice to take it from him, but the Lord said, “My grace suffices thee; for my power is perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). So he was called to suffer this, that he might find the power of Christ resting upon him. That was a gracious, comforting word of the Lord to him, and showed what a deep interest the Lord took in His servant, and how His grace was sufficient for this and everything of that kind.

When again at the end of his arduous life of service he stands before that inhuman monster whom he calls the ‘lion’, and all the saints at Rome deserted him, and no man stood by him, the Lord again manifested Himself to him, as he says, “The Lord stood with me” (2 Timothy 4:17). Do you think that the Lord would desert His servant though all deserted him? Never! He made Himself known in full support of His servant. Oh, do we feel it, that it is only as He supports us that we have courage? It is only as He supports us that service is at all effectual, so that, as he says, “through me the proclamation might be fully made”. But the Lord does support us, as He supported His aged servant at that time. We see thus how Paul was well acquainted with these wonderful manifestations and communications from the Lord.

Now we may know a little about it, or may know a great deal about it, but one feels that we should all be concerned as to our experience of these things. Opposers say there is nothing in it but mere imagination; but manifestation of the Lord are real. What is the effect in the soul? It is that the love of Christ is very near to us, very warm in our hearts, and we greatly appreciate it and enjoy it. I cannot explain its effects better than that. There is a realisation of His love in a deeper sense than ever. I do believe that it is of the utmost importance that such spiritual experiences as I have referred to should be known by everyone of us, and, if what I have said tends to send us to the Lord in prayer to see what it is that prevents them being ours, I shall be glad indeed.

Dr. C. C. Elliott

Extracted from an address at Bristol, July 1931.

THE BELIEVER'S SPIRIT - SUSTAINED IN THE PRESENCE OF SUFFERING

Romans	8: 16-18
2 Timothy	4: 22
Hebrews	12: 9-23
Psalm	73: 26

Each of the New Testament scriptures read refers to the believer's spirit:- the Holy Spirit itself bears witness with the believer's spirit that we are children of God;

Paul desires that the Lord Jesus Christ might be with Timothy's spirit; and, God is called the Father of spirits in connection with the disciplinary education through which He passes each one of those He regards as sons.

All this indicates how much divine Persons are concerned about our spirits — that they might be assured, sustained and then educated so as to be in accord with the Spirit of Christ.

God has spiritual ends in view and one object before Him in the present trial is that we might gain a spiritual outlook and so be in sympathy with Him in what He is doing. The natural heart sets its hopes on greater ease and comfort here-then end of the war, retirement from business, etc. Its hopes do not go beyond such things. The word, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory about to be revealed to us" indicates that the whole of "this present time" (i.e. the whole christian era) will be a time of suffering and that the sufferings will not end until the dawn of glory. We are to accept suffering as normal and not to set our hopes on ease and comfort here, otherwise we shall have many disappointments and our wills may become rebellious.

Our hope is to be fixed on the day of glory, "the revelation of the sons of God". God has "begotten us again to a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3). A hope which awaits the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ and our appearing in glory with Him. Hope is a most important feature - often lacking amongst us - and essential to our present salvation. "We are saved in hope", "as helmet the hope of salvation". "Now the |God of all hope fill you...that ye may abound in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit".

Scripture does not say that our circumstances bear witness that we are children of God - they may appear to belie it. The natural heart always regard material comfort and prosperity as the evidence of divine favour. But we do not need circumstantial evidence, for "the Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God" - and this in a scene of suffering. The Spirit's witness is far more important than anything material. We are to inherit even material things - all things with Christ. We are Christ's joint-heirs. The whole world in this sense, is ours, but in that day, with Him. Now we are privileged to suffer with Him.

Three kinds of suffering might be referred to:-

[i] The normal sufferings of a godly person as found in the groaning creation, not only having part in the woe which is the result of sin, but feeling with God as to the whole condition, and so, in measure, groaning as Christ groaned (Mark 7:34), (John 11:33 & 38). People groan and grumble, but the Christian groans according to God, and with the intelligent hope "awaiting sonship, the redemption of the body". And in this the Holy Spirit joins His help to our weakness, and the Spirit itself makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered. How we would desire to feel things more instead of being so shallow, so that we might experience the help of the Spirit in this way!

... *Text lost on Disk* ...

second and third books of the Psalms respectively. The third form especially tests us, and has been the special feature of the trials of the last few years.

All three forms of suffering came upon the apostle Paul. When we think of the persecutions he endured we might well think the suffering was sufficient for any man, and he would be spared all others. But he suffered in health - he had a thorn for the flesh to buffet him, and in addition calamities came upon him. He was shipwrecked four times (including the one recorded in the Acts) and a day and night he spent in the deep. Further he speaks of perils of robbers, perils of rivers, perils of the desert, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness. The natural mind finds such things inexplicable. It would expect a chosen vessel to be shielded from all such things. Have we not thought in our time of ships that were unsinkable because there were believers on board? Would we be prepared to accept the ministry of one who was shipwrecked three times? Would we not be inclined to think that the Lord was not with him? Such happenings are a test of spiritual

judgment and outlook. Many turned away from Paul as a prisoner, but he says he is the Lord's prisoner (2 Timothy 1:8).

We need to allow our minds to be governed by the scripture in these matters. God loves us too well to consider merely for our ease and comfort, though the very hairs of our head are numbered. These happenings that we do not expect and cannot understand, at any rate at the time, are really the result of love's calculation. It was when the Psalmist went into the sanctuaries of God that he understood. he no longer envied the wicked for he realised that the man most to be pitied is the man who lacks discipline. "Moab is at ease from his youth... and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel..." (Jeremiah 48:11). The great result is reached in verse 26 of Psalm 73: "My flesh and my heart faileth: God is the rock of my heart and my portion for ever". No adverse circumstance could now affect his assurance and joy for they were in God Himself.

A similar end was reached in God's dealings with Job. Calamities came upon him, blows which seemed pitiless. But, referring to him, James says: "Ye have seen the end of the Lord, that he is very pitiful and of tender mercy". At the outset Job, though outwardly serene, he knew no peace or rest of heart (see Job 3:25-26), and the blows that fell upon him were necessary according to the calculation of divine love, to teach him true joy and rest in God alone.

One has often thought of the circumstances of the incoming of our Lord. What a calamity the enforced journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem would appear to be at such a time! What hopes and fears Joseph and Mary must have had as to the possibility of finding accommodation! Then to learn that there was no room at the inn, only a manger in the public courtyard available at the birth of the Son of God. No ease and comfort there. Judging by the outward circumstances there was no indication of God's favour and interest in that supreme event:

'O strange yet fit beginning
To all that life of woe.'

The whole trend of Scripture shows that God has greater ends in view than to grant the objects of His favour mere material comfort and prosperity. In us the end is to be conformed to the image of His Son; and every form of suffering, "all things", indeed, work together for good with that great end in view.

In the light of this the christian is not doleful. He boasts in tribulation. James says, "Count it all joy when ye fall into various temptations, knowing that the

proving of your faith works endurance. But let endurance have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4).

The evidence that God with a man is not seen in his circumstances, but in the fact that his spirit is maintained in joy and victory. As subject to the Father of spirits we live. The very discipline is the proof of His love, for “who is the son that the Father chasteneth not?” And in the suffering the “Spirit itself bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God”. And further, the Lord Jesus Christ will be with our spirits (2 Timothy 4:22) - a most precious thing.

He has trodden the whole path and is the Leader and Completer of faith. He was “made perfect through suffering”. No thought of ease and comfort prevailed with Him, but the acceptance of increasing suffering until the end. And it is ours to know not only the grace supporting us, but He Himself being with our spirits. How evidently true this was of Stephen!

May God grant to us a spiritual outlook and a subject heart in accepting the “sufferings of this present time” so that we may prove in our spirits the love and support of divine Persons and be maintained in joy and victory until He come.

Gerald Cowell

An address at Cambridge, 25th November 1944.

