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Living Water

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Editor: Mark Lemon

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FEATURES THAT SHOULD MARK THE CHRISTIAN HOUSEHOLD

Exodus 10: 25-26

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Introduction

I want to consider the features that should mark a christian's home. In the Acts of the Apostles where we get the account of the beginnings of christianity there is a great deal of emphasis on individuals and where they come together but as we go on in the Acts there is increasing emphasis on the houses of believers. It would help us all to consider the features that should mark such homes as shown in these passages from Exodus.

The setting in Exodus covers the time of the plagues that came upon Egypt before the children of Israel were extricated from the slavery that they had been under in Egypt and were released to go and serve God. It was a time when judgment was about to come upon Egypt and it parallels with the time we are in. The day of God's grace in long-suffering is about to end with judgment coming upon this present evil world. We should therefore think about features that should mark our homes while we wait for our final deliverance to go to be with the Lord.

There are three aspects for us to consider:

- the christian home is to be a place of divine light;
- there is to be spiritual food in the christian home; and
- certain things are not to find a place in the homes of christians.

The first two aspects are positive features of the christian household. The third matter for us to consider is the way that the homes of believers should be free from negative features. In Exodus we are told about some of the plagues that came upon Egypt — a plague where the river turned to blood and the fish died and a plague of frogs that came up out of the rivers and went into the Egyptians' houses but not into those of the Israelites. It would lead us to think about the character of the world and the moral death that lies upon this world. Believers' houses need to be free from the influences of this present evil world.

Then there were also the dog-flies which also came into the homes of the Egyptians but not into the homes of the children of Israel. The dog-flies became the means whereby God demonstrated a "separation between my people and thy people; to-morrow shall this sign be". The dog-flies speak of the works of the flesh: malice, envy, evil speakings and injurious language that, alas, mark men and

women after the flesh. Yet in the homes of believers, as persons indwelt by the Spirit, feeding on Christ and appreciating the divine light that has come in through Him, there should be features formed in them that would differentiate in a moral sense between God's people and the people of the world.

The christian's home as a place of divine light

In Exodus 10 we read, "there was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt ... But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings". It is a wonderful thing to have light from God: light as to the revelation of God in the Lord Jesus Christ and light as to the value of the Bible. How important it is in a world of moral darkness.

The Holy Spirit's comment in Exodus about the darkness on Egypt was "so that one may feel the darkness". Today, even unbelievers may at times feel the darkness in the world and the mess that society is getting into away from God. The more I go on the more I see how wide the variation is between what is accepted in the world and the standard set in the Holy Scriptures. There are those whom the "god of this world has blinded" (2 Corinthians 4:4). So the world is going to come under the judgment of God. Those of us who have light from God should feel the awful character of things in the world. We have light from the Holy Scriptures and we should not minimise its value.

In the New Testament we see some practical examples of light from God coming into the homes of believers:

Matthew invited the Lord into his house and made a great entertainment for Him (see Luke 5:29); his house was marked by divine light;

when the Lord came into the house of Zacchaeus, He brought divine light saying, "Today, salvation is come to this house" (Luke 19:9);

Martha invited the Lord into her house and what light and blessing resulted;

light marked Lydia's house when she invited Paul and Silas saying, "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there" (Acts 16:15);

the Philippian jailor demonstrated that God's light had come into his house; he rejoiced "with all his house, having believed in God" (Acts 16:34);

Cornelius is another example; he was "pious, and fearing God with all his house" (Acts 10:2); there was light there.

These examples would be an encouragement to us that we too might rejoice in light from God and make way for it. Light comes in so that we can see — see ourselves, see the beauty of Jesus and see what God wants. God has got a purpose for each of us. He made man for His pleasure and He secured people

for His pleasure through the incoming of Jesus and all that He has done on the cross.

The christian's home as a place of spiritual food

In Exodus 12, we read of the Passover. Each household was to take a lamb without blemish and that lamb speaks to us of Christ. It is a great thing to be able to feed on Christ in our houses, to value Him and talk of Him. Modern life tends to be very rushed. The four days the lamb was in the house (from the tenth to the fourteenth day of the month) would give the household time to consider it. It is wonderful to read the Gospels and consider the attractiveness of Jesus in all the various settings into which He came.

In the house at Bethany, Mary sat at His feet and listened to His word. She would get instruction from Christ but there is something in being at the feet of Jesus and taking time to be there, time to think about Him, time to contemplate Him.

If the Passover lamb had not been slain and the blood put on the lintel, there would have been no deliverance from judgment. But that having been done, they could then, in type, enter into the fellowship of His death. We need both sides. It is important to contemplate the life of Christ but our deliverance has been wrought in the death of Christ.

By being genuinely affected by the death of Christ we are changed; “we all, looking on the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face, are transformed ...” (2 Corinthians 3:18). We cannot change ourselves but we can look on the glory of the Lord. As we do that the Spirit of God changes us and makes us more like the Lord.

We need to remember, too, that Jesus had to suffer to bring us into salvation. On that passover night the children of Israel had to eat the flesh roast with fire. It speaks of the way that the fire of divine judgment came upon Jesus. It is to subdue our spirits and help us to see what sin is in God's sight. In that way we come to a little understanding of what Jesus suffered. That builds up our spiritual constitution in view of facing the challenges of the present day.

We need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us to be occupied with the detail of Christ's perfections. There are so many features to dwell on. How little we speak in our homes of His perfections and about the wonders of what is set out in the Scriptures about Him. Where the household of one of the Israelites was too small for a lamb it was to be shared with a neighbour. So we should be able to share with one another the outcome of the contemplation of Christ.

The basis of safety in the passover in Egypt was the blood of the lamb put on the door posts and the lintel. God does not say, ‘When I see you eating’; it is “when

I see the blood, I will pass over you”. Nevertheless, through eating the Passover we are to be brought into accord with its import. We are to appreciate the features that were seen in Christ and meditate on them and the fact that He had to suffer and die for our sins. We read, “Unless ye shall have eaten the flesh of the Son of Man and drunk his blood, ye have no life in yourselves”. As continually appropriating Christ in this way we are built up in our moral constitution to display features that are pleasing to God.

The blood was put on the door posts and on the lintel. It is a household setting rather than a matter of individual salvation.

There is a particular protection in being in the home of a believer and great value in being brought up in a christian home. Each one of us, of course, needs to come to know Christ for ourselves and accept Him as a personal Saviour but Acts 16 shows that God wants to secure households. When Paul writes to the Philippians you see how much he valued what was secured for God in Philippi in the households of Lydia, the jailor and no doubt many others.

We must always remember that the world is under judgment; the wrath of God is revealed (Romans 1:18). One of the things that comes out in these passages in Exodus is the distinction there was between the homes of the Israelites (the people of God) and the homes of the Egyptians. It was not an artificial distinction of dress or special symbols but a moral one. God intends the life of Jesus to come out in our mortal flesh. We are to be “always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:10).

The Passover is brought into the Epistle to the Corinthians. “For also our passover, Christ, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Then, we are told to keep the feast of unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. That is something that ought to be going on in the homes of believers. Sincerity and truth might seem to be something reached immediately but actually they are features that we each need to be maintained in from day to day. As long as we are here we have the flesh within us and it may assert itself from time to time. It is only by feeding on Christ and judging ourselves in the light of the death of Christ that we are kept.

The feast of unleavened bread follows on from the Passover. After eating on the fourteenth day there was to be a week of unleavened bread intended to bring about moral consistency with what they had just partaken of. So that on the one side we have Christ’s work for us which is complete but God has a lot to do in us to form us after Christ.

The children of Israel ate the Passover with their loins girded. They were going on an arduous journey and they needed a good meal before they started. We are on an arduous journey also. It is not easy to be a christian in this world and we

need what will sustain us. God sees to it that we are provided with a wonderful source of food for our hearts and minds in the Lord Jesus Himself. He is the bread of life.

The passover was to be eaten in haste. The children of Israel had been several hundred years in Egypt but God was now delivering them. For us, God intends that, as getting the gain of Christ's death, we might leave the world morally now. (When the Lord comes we will leave it literally.) Therefore there ought to be something of that spirit found in the christian's home. We are not here for good; we are going to a better place. It is a great thing to have the light and joy of the Lord's return in our hearts. We sometimes see that in older believers but it ought to mark us all. We belong to another Man in another world; that is where we are going and we should be ready to depart. It is something that should enter into our conversation in our homes, perhaps more than it does.

Things that ought not to be in a believers home

Now, just a word on the things that should not be found in a believer's home. Naturally, in Egypt, everything depended on the Nile. As a result of the plagues it turned to blood and the frogs came up out of the Nile and went into the homes of the Egyptians. There are not many references to frogs in the Scriptures but Revelation speaks of "three unclean spirits as frogs". The frogs coming up out of the Nile speak of the unclean influences that mark this present world, the world that is under judgment. We should be concerned, in our homes, that these unclean things are not in evidence. The account in the Bible shows that every part of the houses of the Egyptians was infected. The frogs got into ovens and beds as well as more obvious places.

The positive things we have referred to, the appreciation of light from God and feeding on Christ, are the great preservatives and they should displace these terrible influences of the present evil world. Each of us who are householders have a big responsibility to see that his house is kept in order. In taking up those responsibilities, we can be thankful for the prayer of the Lord, "Father ... I do not demand that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them out of evil" (John 17:11, 15). There is divine power to help us. We need power if we are going to be kept.

Believers are not of the world yet they are in the world. God does not ask us to have some community that is remote from everybody else. Believers' homes are in the same street as other people but then there is divine provision: the prayer of the Lord, the help of the Holy Spirit and the Father's care so that we might hold our homes for God.

We need to hold fast in our hearts the purpose of God in redeeming us. Over all these plagues could be written, 'It was God's plan'. God wanted His people free

from wrong influences so that they might serve Him. It is a good thing to stand apart from problems that trouble us and dwell on God's great objective in redeeming us which is that we might be free to serve Him and to enjoy His love, now and for ever.

With the plague of dog-flies, we read, "the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of dog-flies ... I will distinguish in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no dog-flies shall be there". The dog-flies speak of the features of the flesh, features that can only be negated through the appreciation of divine light and feeding on Christ. So, instead of the flesh, the features of Christ are in evidence: His kindness, long-suffering, and patience. All these things are to be seen in practical evidence in our homes.

I had occasion a little while back to take a person (who probably had never before been in a home of a believer) to see an elderly sister in the Lord. He was impressed with her, impressed with her house, with what she did not have in her house and her contentment, her interest and her love for the Lord. He saw a home that was free of the dog-flies that he had been used to all his life as an unconverted person. It is a challenge for all of us. Are the features of Christ in evidence? Are there features of the old man such as bickering and malice? Such things as that do not belong to christianity.

A believer's house should be marked by the peace of Christ, the knowledge of the love of Christ, joy in Christ, the warmth and affection and kindness that all flow out from contemplation and feeding on Him. The Lord spoke about coming to a house where there was a "son of peace" (Luke 10:6). Some of the houses spoken of in the Acts, such as that of Aquila and Priscilla and the house of Lydia, must have been like that as affected by the love of Christ.

In Exodus 8 we read, "that thou mayest know that I Jehovah am in the midst of the land" (v.22). There was a particular area (the land of Goshen) that was not affected by the plagues. God was there. That is what we want in our gatherings, that Christ might be in prominence, that ministry should be Christ-centred. We can enjoy that now — 'land of Goshen' conditions — and, too, be looking forward to the Father's house above. We read in Psalm 78: "He led them safely so that they were without fear, the sea covered their enemies and He brought them to His holy border, this mountain which His right hand purchased". It is a wonderful end to it all.

Ken Hollands

Based on a Bible reading in Bromley, 10th May 2003.

SALVATION

Acts	4: 10-12
Romans	10: 8-10
1 Samuel	25: 14-16
Psalm	96: 1-2
1 Thessalonians	5: 9-11

Most of these scriptures refer to “salvation”. There are many ways that we can look at salvation, and I would not claim to speak of all of them, but I would like to encourage every one of us to look more deeply into the wonderful salvation that is in Christ Jesus and to seek to be in the good of it.

Salvation in Christ alone

In the first scripture we read the apostle Peter makes a very bold declaration: “salvation is in none other”. It is very important to realise that salvation is in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Let us remind ourselves of the need for salvation. Sin has come into this world and the human race has become lost through sin and cannot by itself get out of that position. The devil and his many agencies are against the human race and have enslaved many and people have no power to set themselves free. We live in a society which has many ideas for improvement. For example, in this country, the government emphasises education to free people from poverty and deprivation. Education by some people would be considered a way of salvation. The recent war in Iraq was intended to deliver people from a bad regime. Whether that country will get a better or a worse regime remains to be seen, but waging a war is another way in which some people attempt to achieve salvation.

Over against all such ideas the apostle Peter is very specific: he states unambiguously: “salvation is in none other”. We believers should never forget that basic truth — salvation is in one Person and by one route and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ. Today people talk about different beliefs and assume that there are different ways of reaching God as if there might be alternatives to christianity. The wonderful thing is that God has made salvation now available — available to all.

The first reference to salvation in the Bible is made by Jacob when blessing his sons. He assessed them all and of some he painted a black picture. When speaking about Reuben Jacob alludes to his immorality; when speaking about Simeon and Levi he refers to their cruelty and violence; he also says that Dan would be a serpent on the way, pointing on to the apostasy that would come about through his tribe. Then he adds, “I wait for thy salvation, O Jehovah” (Genesis 49:18). Thank God that this awaited salvation has now come, not only for the descendants

of Jacob but for all men. God's salvation has come in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus came into this world He was brought as a babe into the temple. Simeon took the babe Jesus in his arms and said "mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luke 2:30). He knew that God's salvation had arrived. Then when Jesus began His teaching He said, "the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10).

Peter announces that "salvation is in none other" after the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus. He was speaking of One who was rejected by the rulers of the world and by the people in authority. Christ was rejected both by Pilate, a political ruler, and by the religious leaders. Peter states that Jesus Christ risen and ascended to the right hand of God "is the stone which has been set at nought by you the builders, which is become the corner stone'.

Let us remember that salvation is bound up with one glorious Person. Today, as in Peter's day, there is an exclusive way of salvation. Let us not be deflected by the ideas that are abroad in this world today that there are other ways of salvation. Salvation is in none other save the Lord Jesus Christ.

Salvation from wrath

How then do we obtain this salvation? That is a matter that Paul develops in the epistle to the Romans where he sets out the teaching of the Gospel. Paul makes several references to being saved and to salvation in the epistle. One of his early statements is: "I am not ashamed of the glad tidings; for it is God's power to salvation, to every one that believes" (Romans 1:16). Then he speaks about being saved from wrath. He tells us, "there is revealed wrath of God from heaven upon all impiety, and unrighteousness of men holding the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). The wrath of God was seen when Jesus was on the cross, when He, the sinless One, was made sin for believers. Because my sins were hideous in the sight of God, they had to be taken away and only one Person could do so. The Lord Jesus bore the wrath of God when, "Him who knew not sin was made sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The wrath of God is revealed and it is going to come upon the world of the ungodly. Also if persons die in their sins they will be raised in their sins to face the Lord Jesus Christ as Judge and a Christless eternity. Paul, thankfully, also speaks of believers being justified by His blood; "having been now justified in the power of his blood, we shall be saved by him from wrath" (Romans 5:9). It is a wonderful blessing to be under the shelter of the blood of Jesus.

Salvation through confession

In Romans chapter 10 Paul states that, “with the heart is believed to righteousness; and with the mouth confession made to salvation”. Here Paul emphasises what is inward and what is outward. Sometimes, Christians today consider that salvation is connected only with an initial acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. Thank God for all who make that start! I hope that every one here has had that beginning, but Paul speaks of making a confession with the mouth.

Many people say that religion is a private matter. It is true that believing is a private or personal matter, but confession with the mouth is not private: that is public. Paul emphasises here that with the heart is believed to righteousness. It is a wonderful thing to be clothed with the righteousness of God (see Romans 3:22). There is the need of what is inward — an inward, secret link with the Lord Jesus — but there is an outward aspect as well.

Paul states that with the mouth confession is made to salvation. Confession of Jesus as Lord involves stating that He has control of our lives and that we accept Him as our Lord not only as our Saviour. We entrust every thing to Him — our soul, our life, our present happiness — and we make known publicly, in a world where He was crucified and where He is still not wanted, that Jesus is our Lord. I think we see an illustration in the Gospels. The woman who had a flux of blood came to Jesus and secretly touched the hem of His garment. Power went out from Jesus and the woman was healed. I think that was like “with the heart” believing to righteousness. Jesus asked who had touched Him and she then publicly confessed before all the people what had happened to her. Jesus then said, “Daughter, thy faith has healed thee; go in peace” (Mark 5:34). I think that was like “confession made to salvation”.

Peter once failed to confess Jesus as Lord, although he truly loved Jesus. When he went into the house of the high priest he genuinely wanted to follow Jesus but instead of confessing Him as Lord he denied that he knew Him. As a result he got into a terrible mess. I expect many of us have failed to confess Jesus as Lord when challenged. I certainly have failed! I also know that failing to confess Jesus as Lord brings bitterness of soul and vexation of spirit. Later, as we read in the Acts, Peter boldly confessed Jesus as Lord. Peter’s failure caused the grace of our Lord Jesus to be perfectly displayed. It is a wonderful thing that we have a Man in heaven who loves us even when we fail.

Confession of Jesus as Lord is very closely attached in the scriptures with baptism. When the children of Israel came out of Egypt they first knew the shelter of the blood to save them from divine wrath. Then when they reached the Red Sea they were pursued by the Egyptians. What then did they do when they were trapped? They cried out and Moses said to them, “Fear not: stand still, and see the

salvation of Jehovah, which he will work for you to-day” (Exodus 14: 13). Enemies were against them, but God opened the way of deliverance through the Red Sea — typically by means of the death of Christ. They were baptised to Moses in the cloud and in the sea. When they came to the other side of the Red Sea they started to sing. Moses’ song was, “I will sing unto Jehovah, for he is highly exalted: The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea”. It ends up, “salvation is of the Lord” (Exodus 15:1). They then were enjoying the benefits of being saved from their enemies.

If you start out on the christian road, you will find you have enemies. There are people who will try to drag you down to the level of this present evil world, try to get you away from the Lord. Yet we can avail ourselves of the power of God’s kingdom by public confession of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I think Paul had something of that in his soul when he speaks in Romans 10 about confessing with the mouth Jesus as Lord. It is like putting up the flag in a foreign land. I was in America after the September 11 disaster and in many country villages and outside houses the American flag was being displayed as a demonstration of loyalty to the USA. We christians want to show our loyalty to Jesus in this world where He is despised.

One day He is going to come here and reign as King of kings and Lord of Lords but meantime He protects those who own Him as Lord and confess Him at school, at work, or in other contacts with our fellow men and women.

If we slip away from the Lord, as we easily do, we should quickly beseech the Lord, as king David did, to “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (Psalms 51:12). Once we put our faith in Christ we will always have a living link with Christ. It is a great thing to know that no one shall seize any out of Christ’s hand or can pluck out of the hand of the Father. (John 10:28-29). How thankful we can be for such assurance but, oh, to be kept in the joy of our salvation! If a cloud comes in, we want to go simply to the Lord, confess our sins and be restored to the joy of salvation. I know what it is to have failed and to get back to the Lord and to receive a fresh sense of His wonderful love. He has never failed. He has never let God down. He worked out the great plan of salvation Himself, alone upon the cross, in order that we might be secured eternally. He will give us the grace now and the strength by His Spirit to overcome here.

A circle of salvation

I read this passage in Samuel to speak about the value of christian company in respect of practical salvation. The setting of the passage is that David had been anointed but he was not yet king and was despised and rejected by Saul’s regime. While that was so, he had men who were associated with him and who had been

sent out with a message of peace. Abigail's servants state that David's men "were very good to us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything, as long as we companied with them, when we were in the fields. They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the while we were with them feeding the sheep". Abigail's men had found that David's men had provided salvation for them.

There was teaching given many years ago about salvation connected with the church. I think the early christians, converted on the day of Pentecost, found the assembly (or church) a practical sphere of salvation; it was a circle of blessing. There they could enjoy real fellowship centred in Christ, there they could share the precious things of God and in that environment there was protection from the influences of the world.

We are in a different situation today. The Holy Spirit is still indwelling believers but the christian profession is in public disarray. That is why I read this scripture because it speaks of a time when David's kingdom was not yet publicly established and was outwardly weak. Yet in these weak and broken conditions there was protection in the company of those who loved David. There is great value today in keeping company with those who love Christ. I have proved that in my own life as a christian. I have often found during times of pressure and temptation in business that keeping in contact with God's people, even if only few in number, worked out in practical salvation for me. I would encourage everyone here, particularly those who are younger, to prove the value of keeping in the company of God's people who love Christ. I think a reason that many believers do not grow much in their soul is because they fail to keep in the good environment of the company of God's people.

I thank God even for the privilege of meeting with a few believers in the Lord Jesus Christ where I live. They are a check to me; they are a help to me. Maybe I also help them a little, but certainly I find their company a sphere of blessing and protection. I think that is the working out today of the concept of salvation being in the church. It does not mean to say that it is not in Christ, for surely it is in Him, but where Christ is honoured, where the Holy Scriptures are valued and there is liberty for the Holy Spirit, I believe there is protection for any of God's people. I would again encourage us all, particularly younger ones and those who are young in the faith, not to "forsake the assembling of ourselves together" but actively to seek the company of God's people.

The converse is that those of us who are a little older should be actively seeking to assist those young in the faith. I was struck the other day when reading in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 3, where Peter said to the lame man: "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarean rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6) and the man had faith

in His Name. But the Scripture also says that Peter took hold of him by the right hand and raised him up.

In Luke's gospel chapter 10 the Samaritan first poured in the oil and the wine and then he took the wounded man on his own beast to the inn and took care of him. The Samaritan ensured that he was brought into an environment where he could be cared for at the same standard that he had experienced on the Jericho road. The two pence the Samaritan supplied would be adequate for the wounded man's needs. Two pence is like the supplies that come from above from the Lord Jesus. Souls do not need gimmicks, novelties or fresh winds of perverted doctrines. Souls are protected and nourished by the good teaching of Jesus and with the food that would come from Him. We who are more mature in the faith should actively seek to protect and help forward God's work in young souls.

Publishing salvation

Psalm 96 commences with these words: "O sing ye unto the Lord a new song". It is a great thing to sing to the Lord. When we have a link with a precious Saviour who is at the right hand of God, who died for us, who lives for us, who loves us and cares for us, who is an all-the-way-home-Saviour, we have something to sing about. One hymn rightly declares: 'Ours is such a full salvation'. Let us sing to the Lord, sing in our homes, sing in the gatherings of God's people of the great salvation that has come to us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then the Psalm adds: "publish his salvation from day to day" (v.2). I think that publishing presents another aspect of salvation. We have already referred to confessing Christ as Lord in an alien world where He is rejected and where you are made to feel that you are not of the world. But publishing would involve "holding forth the word of life".

Jesus not only prayed that His disciples might be kept from evil but when risen from the dead He said, "as the Father sent me forth, I also send you" (John 20:21). Jesus published God's salvation and we believers have a tremendous responsibility to this perishing world. We can publish His salvation in different ways. The New Testament emphasises the conduct of believers in the practical relations of life. For example, in his letter to Titus, Paul speaks of the way that old men, old women, younger men and younger women should conduct themselves in day to day life. Publishing salvation should firstly be in the way that we would seek to do what is right before the authorities, before our fellow men, in practical details of life.

Scripture also refers to people asking christians about the hope that is within us. In other words, they see something in believers; they see a joy and a peace that they lack. I have noticed that many people have come to know the Lord, come into the circle of God's people, through individual contacts with believers. They

have initially seen something in a believer that has caused them, as exercised souls, to ask questions. Do people see this peace and joy with you and me today? Then there is the pro-active side. “Publish His salvation from day to day”. That can be in many ways and includes both brothers and sisters. It can be in acts of kindness that we might do as well as in preaching. It is in speaking to people about the Lord. It is in searching out opportunities to hold forth the word of life. We Christians should both keep ourselves unspotted from the present evil world and so be kept in communion with the Lord Jesus, and on the other hand feel our responsibility towards the masses of humanity who as yet do not know the Lord and are on their way to a Christless eternity. We should pray for opportunities to “publish His salvation from day to day”.

Future salvation

I read in Thessalonians because it speaks about future salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. “God has not set us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”. If we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we already have salvation for our souls. If we are confessors of Jesus as Lord we will know practical salvation from this world from day to day, but we still await the salvation of our bodies. We await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour who shall, “transform our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory” (Philippians 3:21). The best days lie ahead for us. Paul says, “whether we may be watching or sleep”. There are many believers who have fallen asleep in Jesus. Since I last visited here some I remember are no longer here; they are with Christ which is very much better. They have fallen asleep in Jesus but they await the salvation of their bodies as I await the salvation of my body. Full salvation is bound up with one Person and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is lovely to look forward to living together with Jesus. Sometimes I think of the privilege the disciples had when they lived together with Jesus for three years but we believers on Jesus can look forward to actually living together with Him for ever.

What precious, wonderful aspects of salvation are contained in the Holy Bible. They all centre in one Person, in the Lord Jesus Christ. May our hearts well up in increasing thankfulness to Him that there is salvation in none other for neither is there another name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved.

Ken Hollands

An address at Bromley, 10 May 2003.

THE EARTHLY HOUSE

They tell me that I am getting old but that's not really so,
The house I live in may be worn, and that of course I know.
It's been in use a good long while and weathered many a gale,
I'm therefore not surprised to find it's getting rather frail.

You tell me I am getting old — you mix the house with me.
You're looking on the outside, that's all that most folk see!
The dweller in the little house is young and bright today,
Just starting on a life that lasts through long eternal day.

The changing colour of the roof, the windows looking dim,
The wall a bit transparent and getting rather thin,
The foundation not so steady as once it used to be,
And that is all that you observe — but that's not really me!

I patch the old house up a bit to make it last the night,
But soon I shall be flitting to my home of endless light.
I'm going to live for ever there; my life goes on — it's grand.
How can you say I'm getting old? You do not understand!

These few short years can't make me old, I feel I'm in my youth.
Eternity lies just ahead, full life and joy and truth.
We will not fret to see this house grow shabby day by day,
But look ahead to our new home, which never will decay.

Through faith I've been made fit to dwell in that blest house above,
Cleansed in the precious blood of Christ and growing still in love;
The beauty of that glorious home no words can ever say,
'Tis hidden from these mortal eyes, but kept for us some day.

Beth Coombe Harris

ON HIS BLINDNESS

Time was, when to read was a pleasure,
To search out the truth a delight;
Time was, when my pen was my treasure
In practice both morning and night.

Yet though I can read no longer.
And though I can write no more,
Yet now I can think and ponder
As I never could think before.

What if light may fade from the vision
And sound fall dull on the ear,
If truth to the soul's intuition
Stand forth yet more certain and clear.

The letter of Scripture I've tested
Its grammar, precision and sense,
But now every line is invested
With spirit and life more intense.

The light of the Father there shining
Is seen in the face of the Son;
The Spirit's effulgence combining
These radiant glories in one.

"I thank Thee, O Father", said Jesus,
"For so it seemed good in Thy sight",
And whatever He doeth shall please us,
For we know all His counsels are right.

Thomas Newberry
(Written after going blind)

GOD SET ME APART FROM BIRTH

This account of the conversion of a Russian soldier was recorded by an RAF chaplain while stationed at an American Air Base in Germany after the war. It is given in the first person as originally written up by the chaplain.

I was only three years old when my mother hoped I was dying. She loved me quite well but I was one of fourteen children and she never had enough food for us all. So when I took ill with typhoid fever she told my eldest brother to hide me away in a small warm cupboard. After three days he came to see if I was dead or alive. Perhaps unfortunately for my brothers and sisters this treatment cured me and I did not die after all.

My parents were Ukrainians and I was born in Siberia. When I was old enough I attended the village Communist school. There I heard very often that there was no God and that only stupid people believed that there was one. The teachers told us that if we saw or heard anyone pray we should come and tell them and they would see that these people were re-educated. Some children in our village did report that they had heard a grandmother or an uncle pray. These people disappeared from the village, never to be heard of again.

At the age of sixteen I was taken into the Red Army. We had no uniform and no food was issued. Soon after being sent to the front line I was taken prisoner by the Germans. The German troops did not have enough to eat, so you can guess the plight of the prisoners. Many froze to death during the night hours. I knew that if I stayed the same fate awaited me

I decided to escape. The opportunity came to cut my way through the wire netting. I did not get far because a soldier saw me and stood me by the wall to face the death penalty. An officer quickly intervened, however, and told the soldier to lower his gun. Then I was ordered back into the camp. The thought came to me, 'Why can't I die? What is keeping me alive in this world?'

After travelling all the next day we were allowed to sleep the night in a field. I hid under some hay and thought myself safe but other young prisoners did the same and at the morning roll call many were missing. An order was given to set fire to the hay. Then the officer in charge had another idea. The Germans were to stand on top of the hay and with rifle and bayonet kill all who were hiding.

One soldier stood on my chest and shot down the left side and then down the right side; then he stuck his bayonet into the hay, but nothing touched me. As I lay and trembled I said to myself again, 'Why can't I die? What in this world is

protecting me? If there is a God protecting me and I find Him, I will serve Him for the rest of my life’.

After some hours I crawled out of my hiding place and walked away. But where to? I had no idea which direction to go. Along a small path I saw in front of me a horse whip and it seemed a voice was telling me to pick it up. I did so and walked on. Had it been a piece of bread on the path I should have picked it up alright, but why carry a whip?

Suddenly someone ordered me to halt. It was a German soldier. I had unwittingly walked into the German lines. The soldier saw the horse whip in my hand and pointed beyond him to a horse and cart tethered to a tree. He thought I was the driver who brought them supplies so he allowed me to go on without question. On and on I went till my strength gave way. A woman in a cottage must have seen me fall. She took me into her home and looked after me until I felt stronger. I knew, however, that if I stayed there and was discovered we would both be shot, so I told her I must move on. There was a forest on the other side of a nearby river and there she thought I might find some friendly soldiers.

It was springtime and there were ice floes in the river. The bridge had been destroyed by advancing troops, so my only course was to swim across. I took off my clothes, rolled them into a bundle and began swimming with the bundle clasped to my head with one hand. I was still weak and the water was very cold. I could not save myself without letting go of my clothes. Eventually I reached the other side, naked, with no food to eat and nowhere to go. ‘Oh, why don’t I die?’ I cried. Yet even as I uttered this despairing cry I saw my clothing caught in reeds at the river side. I marvelled that the current had brought the bundle so near to me. I stayed in that forest three days without seeing a soul. I was only seventeen but I did not want to live any more. I did not intend to die of hunger and exposure so I decided to try to hang myself.

Unexpectedly I saw a man cutting wood. He was just as surprised to see me as I was to meet him. He asked me what I was doing there and I told him my story. He warned me of the danger of arrest, but I had nowhere else to go. He told me I could go home with him. It was dinner time and his wife was putting a meal on the table as we walked into the room. She did not ask who I was but with a friendly greeting invited me to take a place at the table.

I realised with some surprise that I had come into the home of religious people. They told me that the German army was occupying their village and that the soldiers had given them freedom to hold Bible classes and to meet together to read God’s word. This was something new for them as they had always had to meet in secret. They told me I would remain hidden until they found out what

the mayor of their village thought of their hiding a Russian soldier who was also an escaped prisoner of the Germans.

Also in the house was a girl of thirteen. I knew by her accent that she did not belong to that area. She told me that she too was a refugee and that these kind people who were caring for her were christians. When I asked her where her parents were, she said, 'They have gone to be with the Lord'. I did not understand, so I enquired, 'They have gone to be with whom?' She then said, 'They are dead and, because they were christians, they are in heaven with the Lord Jesus'. I said, 'When you are dead, you are dead'. I also asked her why she was not sad at having lost her parents. She replied, 'They are not suffering any more'. This did not satisfy me. I wanted to know how she knew all this. She was younger than me and here she was telling me about something I had never heard of. She told me she had read it all in the Bible — a book I had never heard of either. That night I heard from that little girl, named Marie, the story of Jesus Christ from His birth to His crucifixion and resurrection.

Three weeks later in that same village I received Jesus as my personal Saviour. I realised that God had saved me for a purpose. He had led me to this home. I had cried, 'God, if ever I find You I will serve You for the rest of my life'. So there was a God and He had heard my cry.

I discovered that the whole village had only two Bibles and four hymn books. They could not give me a Bible, but they allowed me to write out the gospel of John. For four years this was all I had until I got to Germany after the war and began working in an American army camp. One day the postman brought a parcel which had been sent to me from America. I turned this over and over before opening it, wondering who could have sent me a parcel and how they knew where I lived. Perhaps it was a food parcel. At first I could not quite bring myself to open it. What a joy when I did so to find it was a Bible. I danced round the camp calling everyone to come and look at my Bible. It belonged to me, my very first, my very own. I never thought I would own a Bible, which cost as much as a cow in the Ukraine. I do not know to this day who sent me that Bible. Whoever it was, may God bless them abundantly!

EXTRACTS FROM A DIARY, 1929 — MALACHI

October 13th.

We considered Malachi whose name means a messenger. The burden of Jehovah to Israel, "I have loved thee," is a complaint of long-rejected love and the answers back of the people are taken up by the prophet. These answers speak of the utter indifference and insensibility of the people. Think of such an answer as "Wherein hast thou loved us?" And the prophet goes on to speak of this special place. A son honoureth his father and a servant his master, and Jehovah would have had Israel serving Him in all the delight and liberty of sons, and the faithfulness of servants. He got neither. The worst they could find was given to God; what the governor would refuse He was offered. There was none among them who would serve except for reward — not even shut a door or kindle a fire upon the altar and it was a day when shutting the doors and kindling the fires on the altars were needed.

Chapter 2 addresses the priests and gives them a command which tells of rebukes, but has in view that God's covenant might be with Levi again. It was a covenant of life and peace, and God gave it to Levi that he might fear. The law of truth was in his mouth and unrighteousness not found in him; he walked with Me in truth and uprightness and turned many from iniquity.

This is the state we need now. Where there is such failure with the people there is need for priestly state, and we have it here described for our gain. The priest's lips should keep knowledge and God's law be given. Instead of this they had departed out of the way and many stumbled. So as the prophet describes such sorrow in their midst he asks, "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" If God had His place, would not brotherly love hold us all?

They might come to God's altar and weep and sigh, but there was nothing in it for God. So the prophet says twice, "Take heed then to your spirit". This, I suppose, refers to what is inward, instead of mere outward profession. There is a spirit in Philadelphia which the Lord appreciates. There is no spirit in the Laodicean thing. Oh! let us take heed to our spirits, to the living relations which exist by the Holy Spirit: the owning of God and Father, the affections which show care one for another and the delight that ministers to God. Look at the spirit of the Philippians! Paul served God with his spirit, but there is the collective conscience and there is the collective spirit which rightly is to mark the christian company.

Chapter 3 gives the spirit which God loves. There is the delight in the Angel of the covenant — the Messenger of God's heart and of good things. The purification must go on, of course, deep and severe, fiery discipline, but how cheering that

He sits as Refiner. It is not consumption but refining. He is like fuller's lye; He is a purifier. There is refining and there is purifying. The quality of the gold is enhanced in fire and the cleansing of the fuller's lye removes all uncleanness of association. Levi shall be purified and purged and God now has priestly services and Judah shall offer pleasant oblations and God will come near to judgment. We want that. It means all hindrances exposed and all evil agencies disposed of. The sons of Jacob will not be consumed.

And now we learn the word from the prophet to lead us on right lines, as if he added for our cheer the results of this searching ministry, "Then they that feared the Lord..." Jehovah observed it and then heard it. He sees and hears with pleasure. They speak together of Me and of My Son, of My interests.

Now He speaks His heart. Think of the language of God's heart! "They are mine" — just a few, but it is Jehovah of hosts who speaks. We want to have hosts in view. And a day is to be prepared when God will enjoy all this, and so will they be honoured. He says, "I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him".

The Sun of righteousness is the hope. But meanwhile let us remember the statutes and ordinances for all Israel. The sweet and blessed movements seen here are to be held in relation to the whole church and all the commands and statutes to govern the whole company.

Extracts from the diary of R. Dunn.

1929

This is the final extract from the diary.

CHRISTIAN WALK

(Extracts from the notebook of Frank Purday)

Acceptance is what Christ has gained for me; acceptability is what the Spirit of God is working out in me. The more simply I admit my acceptance, the more I glorify Christ; and the more anxious I am about my acceptability, the more I honour His grace.

J. B. Stoney (3:187)

We read (Romans 14) that, "every one of us shall give an account of himself to God". I believe that the whole of our acts will be detailed there, before the judgment seat, not for us however, as if we were in the flesh, and thus to our

condemnation, but to make evident to our own eyes the grace which occupied itself with us — regenerate or unregenerate. In the counsels of God I am elect before the foundation of the world; hence I think that my own history will be detailed before the judgment seat, and parallel with it, the history of grace and of the mercy of God toward me. The why and the how we did this or that will be manifested then. For us the scene will be declarative, not judicial. The history of each one will come out in perfect transparency: it will be seen how you yielded and how He preserved you, how your foot slipped and how He raised you up again, how you were drawing near to danger and shame, and how He by His own arm interposed. Some parts of our life, till then entirely unexplained, will be fully disclosed and become altogether plain.

J. N. Darby (Collected Writings 7:23)

“Being made free from sin” is a positive statement, and you have become the servants of righteousness. A man gets the sense of it when he submits to the righteousness of God. In preaching the righteousness of God, if you got the true idea of it, you would see that the presentation of God’s righteousness is not merely that a man may be justified, though that is the beginning, but that he may be set free from the bondage of sin. The object of God in the gospel is to establish links between the soul and Himself, and in order to establish such links He must break the bondage. He sees man held in bondage and His thought is to set man free, in order to form links between that man and Himself. The first is by righteousness, and the second by resurrection, for if a man apprehends the power of God coming in to take a Man out of death and to give Him glory, he says, ‘I can hope in God’. While I realise my own weakness I can hope in God who raises the dead. In that way the link of hope is formed between the soul of man and God.

F. E. Raven (20:73)

“Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.” Begin your day always with this declaration, both silently and aloud, and you will greatly prosper.

J. B. Stoney (12:501)

References, given only so that any extract can be considered in its context if desired, except where otherwise stated, relate to the New Series editions of the Ministry of the individuals concerned. The reference for the first extract in this article is shown as: 3:187. This means that the extract is taken from the “Ministry of J. B. Stoney” (New Series) Volume 3 page 187. All the books from which these extracts are taken are published by the Kingston Bible Trust, Wembley Avenue, Lancing, West Sussex BN15 9LX UK

ELDER AND YOUNGER

1 Peter 5: 1-7

Acts 2: 14-18

Psalm 92: 13-14

Psalm 144: 9,12-15

2 Kings 6: 1-7

These scriptures bring before us the mutual and happy relation that God would have to exist in the christian company between those that are older and those that are younger. The greater part of our assembly, or church, life is spent in the local companies where the Lord has been pleased to set us. These scriptures suggest to us how we would get the fullest possible gain from the spiritual experience of elder brethren, coupled with the energy that should mark the younger in the house of God.

To give a simple illustration, a father, who in a business has gained valuable experience over many years, is joined by his sons; when the experience of age is coupled with the energy of youth, what results should flow! So with us, the Lord would have us get the greatest possible advantage from the older ones so that the younger ones might be rightly guided. You seldom see a christian company prosperous spiritually unless there is room for both elements.

Peter says, addressing the elders, "Exercising oversight, not by necessity, but willingly; not for base gain, but readily; not as lording it over your possessions, but being models for the flock". Peter deals first with the elder brethren and then addresses a word to the younger ones. He says, "Likewise ye younger, be subject to the elder, and all of you bind on humility towards one another". He says to all, "bind on humility".

The line of the younger with the older runs right through the ways of God. There are Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Samuel and David, David and Solomon and then, in the New Testament, Paul and Timothy and John and Gaius. Peter writes in chapter 5 of his first epistle, "By Silvanus, the faithful brother". Silvanus was a younger brother and Peter an elder, but he was serviceable to Peter and was valued by him. It is the great business of the elder brethren to see that they make room for the development of the younger and give scope for their spiritual energies.

In the first scripture read, Peter brings in the thought of shepherding. There is an abundance of ministry today, but many of the local companies feel the lack of shepherding. We should have been spared much of the sad experience arising from those who have wandered into the world and have lost heart, if there had been more of the spirit of shepherding.

Peter speaks of himself in this chapter as a “fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of the Christ, who also am partaker of the glory about to be revealed” (v. 1). The contemplation of the sufferings of the Christ would bring mellowness of spirit and holy sensibilities which would fit us to take up the service of the shepherd. We would find that we reflected the true shepherd heart of Christ. Then being “partaker of the glory” would show what is in view, so that the service of shepherding would be taken up in the light of the coming glory! The older ones would be seeking to interest the younger as to the coming glory. The test of believers in their service in the local company is not exactly what they say, but the spiritual value of what they have left behind.

Peter was commissioned of the Lord to “Feed my lambs” and to “shepherd my sheep”. We know that it is a much more difficult thing to shepherd sheep than to feed lambs. In dealing with young believers, there is a certain responsiveness, but the older ones are sometimes restive and it needs peculiar skill in the shepherd to shepherd the sheep. Sheep not only need feeding but a great deal of care. They have their ailments; they receive injuries; there is the call for a constant watchfulness. A sense that they are the sheep of the flock of God would help us.

Peter, having addressed himself to the elder brethren, turns to the younger and says, “be subject to the elder”. If we are to qualify in relation to the house of God as vessels in His service, the first great lesson is that of being subject to the elders. In addition to the word to the younger brethren, the apostle says, “and all of you bind on humility towards one another”. This is one of the garments in the christian’s wardrobe, and it fits us as well in December as in August.

We are to learn humility from the Lord. In the service of feet-washing, the Lord laid aside His garments and girded Himself with a linen towel — He bound it on. That would be a great object lesson for us. Peter says, “bind on humility”. It is to be there permanently. It is not a thing you put off and on occasionally, but it is always there.

It is a delightful thing to come into touch with those who have bound on humility. I remember a brother once saying that he gave an address on the subject of humility and when he had finished he said he had to get to the Lord, because he was very proud of it! Peter says that He “to the humble gives grace”. The Lord gives grace to the one who has bound on humility and then exalts him in due time. We find that those who exercise true spiritual influence are marked by humility and the Lord has given them this excess of grace. As bowing under the mighty hand of God, He exalts us in due time (see verse 6).

Humility would enable us to wait for the due time. God has a time in His own mind for all His people. David stands out as one who waited humbly for the due time. The trouble is that the flesh cannot wait. Young people have to wait on the

Lord in humility, before they are brought forward in the Lord's time. Wanting to push oneself forward will never give one what the Lord has in mind.

In our second scripture, Acts 2, we find four things: the first is, "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy". What we would look for in relation to the younger generation, referring to them spiritually as sons and daughters, is that they might prophesy, that they might be vessels to communicate the mind of God. The next thing is that "your young men shall see visions, and your elders shall dream with dreams; yea, even upon my bondmen and upon my bondwomen in those days will I pour out of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy". If there are to be true spiritual features of prosperity, these things must be present.

We do not see much of sons and daughters prophesying. One would love to see that feature more in evidence. In Philip's house, the four daughters prophesied. What a delightful house that would be to go into! There was the evangelist Philip, then there was Paul and then there were the four daughters who prophesied. What an atmosphere there must have been in that household in Acts 21, as Agabus came in and prophesied. It does not say they were prophetesses, but they prophesied. They had the mind of God at that moment. That is greatly to be desired for sisters and brothers, for women as well as men, that they should be intelligent and able to communicate God's mind at the present time.

The pouring out of the Spirit is upon God's bondmen and bondwomen. We sometimes wonder if there has been sufficient recognition of our place as bondmen and bondwomen because, in Deuteronomy, not only was the man's ear bored but the woman's ear too. We have to challenge ourselves as to whether we have been to the door, and had our ear bored (see Deuteronomy 15). That is, we are to be permanently and irrevocably committed to the Lord and His interests. That is the bondman's and the bondwoman's position.

To pass on to Psalms 92 and 144. Psalm 92 refers to the older believers: "Those that are planted in the house of Jehovah shall flourish in the courts of our God. They are still vigorous in old age, they are full of sap and green". Psalm 144 has reference to the younger ones: "That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; our daughters as corner-columns, sculptured after the fashion of a palace". This is a beautiful description of what might be called a truly spiritual and prosperous christian company. The first feature is that the sons would be as plants grown up in their youth, indicating that the growth in the house of God is normal.

When you think of the daughters — that is, the younger sisters — the illustration is used of a corner-column, "sculptured after the fashion of a palace". You look first for the development of spiritual growth and then for spiritual ornamentation in the house of God. Peter refers to the ornament of the sisters, that is, "a meek

and quiet spirit” (I Pet. 3: 4). God loves the idea of spiritual beauty in His house. Timothy would be one of the best illustrations of one planted in the house of God and growing up in His courts. He had all the vigour of youth, combined with the depth of a father.

Both Psalm 92 and 144 refer to the ten stringed lute. Some of us seem to have only one string. You can certainly get music out of one string but not very much. Romans chapter 5 gives one of the first strings: “tribulation, which worketh patience”; that is a string in the instrument. Then if we go on in the knowledge of God, we get a completed instrument, one that has ten strings. There should be a note rising from whatever sphere of responsibility we touch.

A local company prospers as each one is doing his or her part in service. In God’s world there is no unemployment; each one has to find out his or her bit of service and labour at it heartily. There should be room made for the young men to develop on the line of service. Three things follow that are very beautiful. There will be no breaking in; no spiritual lawlessness will be working in the christian company. In a spiritual setting like this, there is no breaking in. Then it says that there is no going forth: that is, the whole life interest is in the local company. Then, too, “No outcry in our streets” — what a delightful suggestion! “I exhort ... be of the same mind in the Lord” (Philippians 4:2), the apostle says. Perhaps two sisters are complaining against each other; there could not be a delightful state of things such as the Psalm describes if there is a complaining spirit. So the Psalm ends with this, “Blessed the people that is in such a case! Blessed the people whose God is Jehovah!”

The thought in the last scripture is in regard to the younger men. We know what so often marks young men naturally — that they know more than their parents, a feature which has perhaps been common to many of us. But we see in this scripture how the youthful element amongst the saints, the generation that is growing up, ask the man of God to go with them and they will get all the gain of his experience. We see, too, how their energies are wisely directed, so that the axe-head having been lost is recovered at the direction of Elisha. In many of our activities, there is no spiritual gain or real fruit for God, because we do not come under spiritual leadership. That is the great lesson of the last scripture.

Harry Nunnerley

Edited version of a Bible reading at Katoomba, Australia, April 1938.