

Living Water

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Editor: Mark Lemon

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THE LOVE OF JESUS — PART 4

“...having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end”
(John 13:1).

“...even as the Christ loved us, and delivered himself up for us...”
(Ephesians 5:2).

In chapter 13 of John we have the little company of whom it says, “having loved his own who were in the world”, He “loved them to the end”. Nationally the Lord was not received, but to those who did receive Him He gave “the right to be children of God” (John 1:12).

“Having loved his own who were in the world”. The Lord loved them and was prepared to go right through with everything for them. He came here in love for His Father, to do His work. I love to think of the persons that gathered round Jesus when He was here. He loved them so much that He was prepared to do anything for them, even to die for them.

The Lord had two reasons to go into death. Firstly His love for God and His desire to do His work. Secondly, His love for those that had gathered round Him and were faithful to Him. The Lord has committed Himself to the completion of God’s work. It was a work that was accomplished at Calvary and all will be brought to light when all God’s people are with Him in glory.

In Ephesians 5, Paul speaks about the Christ who loved us and who delivered Himself up for us. Paul would bring us all into it. “Christ loved us, and delivered himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour”. The sacrifice has been for us but it has been delightful to God. Surely that is the most important thing of all. That perfect sacrifice involves that every thought of God is going to be secured.

In a past eternity God had every plan and purpose laid out. He had every resource to meet it and to carry it through to completion. So if we have an appreciation of the One who has loved us, we are as Paul says to be “imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love” (Ephesians 5:1).

If we are in the enjoyment of the love of Jesus it will have an outward effect upon our walk. It will be seen that we have another Man before us and another

spirit marking us. We will be walking worthily of the calling of God. We will be loving one another. That was the Lord's commandment (see John 15:12). The Lord displayed it so perfectly in Himself — in love He would wash the feet of the disciples and go right to the cross for them.

George Greeves

Extracted from an address at Chippenham, April 2002

(This concludes this series on "The Love of Jesus")

MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES

Introduction

In Revelation chapters two and three we are given the Lord's addresses to seven assemblies in Asia Minor. They may be looked at as representative of the public history of the church down the ages, but they also represent features that may mark the church at any time, so the passages have a special encouragement and warning to us in the present day, as well as to those in the first century to whom they were sent. The Lord speaks of the things that He approves of and tells them where there are matters of which there is need for repentance. The company in each place is viewed in relation to its responsibility on earth. If the conditions of departure noted were to be found in the early days of the church, how much more in our own time and how great is the need for the overcomer today.

To each company the Lord presents Himself in a different way. These presentations are intended to give an impression of Himself and stir the hearts of those that are faithful to Him and encourage them to continue in difficult circumstances. The Lord provides the remedy, in the way that He presents Himself, for each form of defection to which He draws attention and the apprehension of this serves to bring out the overcomer.

It is helpful to see that the whole book of Revelation was to be sent to all seven of the assemblies. Those in each place would have read not only the Lord's assessment of the assembly in the place where they lived but the word to all the others. The prophecy which follows the addresses to the churches was sent to all of them as well and it is noticeable that towards the end of the book the Lord is referred to again as having some of the features that He is described as having at the beginning of the book. His "eyes are a flame of fire", and "Out of his mouth

goes a sharp two-edged sword” (Revelation 19:12 & 15). At the end of the Revelation John is given a vision of the “bride” as coming out of heaven, both as it will be in the day of Christ’s earthly reign and in eternity. Each of the assemblies addressed at the beginning of the book is therefore able to see what the church is truly in the eye of God. It is not a case of each company comparing itself with another. As seeing the Divine ideal as set out in the church as it will be seen in the time of display, they would each have been able to measure themselves according to the divine standard.

At the end of each section some brief notes are given on the literal sites of the cities referred to. These have been added for the benefit of those who may not have access to a Bible dictionary and because the Lord Himself in His addresses to the churches often draws attention to literal features to illustrate the point that He is making to them.

Ed.

MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES — EPHESUS

“To the angel of the assembly in Ephesus write: These things says he that holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lamps: I know thy works and thy labour, and thine endurance, and that thou canst not bear evil men; and thou hast tried them who say that themselves are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars; and endurest, and hast borne for my name’s sake, and hast not wearied: but I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works: but if not, I am coming to thee, and I will remove thy lamp out of its place, except thou shalt repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. To him that overcomes, I will give to him to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.” (Revelation 2:1-7)

To Ephesus the Lord presents Himself as the One who “holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lamps” (Revelation 2:1). Verse 20 of the previous chapter tells us that “The seven stars are angels of the seven assemblies; and the seven lamps are seven assemblies”.

The “angel” in each assembly is not to be confined to one individual, but includes those who take responsibility in a place. This properly applies to all. To think that someone else is responsible for conditions in the place where I am and that I have only to follow them or blame them, as the case may be, is a negation of what the assembly is intended to be. All need to be ready to shoulder responsibility in the place where they are and to take on what service is needed. Scripture does speak of leaders and leadership and that is not to be despised. Yet the assembly of God is to be made up of persons who are functioning according to what they may discern the Lord has given them to contribute.

It is noticeable that the responsible element (the stars or angels) are in the Lord’s right hand. It is only as coming under His control that responsibility can be exercised rightly. Anything else will only lead to trouble and difficulty.

The Lord is portrayed as walking in the midst of the seven golden lamps. The lamps are the seven assemblies and as the Lord walks in their midst He is assessing all that is proceeding. He takes account of the state and conditions in each of them. If they refuse His assessment and do not repent and judge themselves the Lord speaks of removing “thy lamp out of its place”. The realisation that the Lord takes account of things in this way is a salutary word to us all.

At first sight, all would have seemed well at Ephesus. We are told that they could not bear evil men, they “tried them who say that they themselves are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars” and they had a judgment of the doctrine and works of the Nicolaitanes. They did not come short in effort or doctrine nor in the exclusion of evil. These are all things which are rightly prized in the christian company, but they had left “first love”. In writing his epistle to the Ephesians Paul sets out some of the greatest and most elevated truths concerning Christ and the assembly. Even when it comes to practical exhortations to husbands and wives, he calls on husbands to love their own wives even as the Christ loved the assembly and delivered Himself up for it. They had such a pattern of the Lord’s love brought before them, but here they needed a call to return to first love. That is what the apostle Paul prayed for in relation to the christians at Ephesus: “That the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts, being rooted and founded in love” (Ephesians 3:17). It is not said to be true of them but is given in the form of a prayer. This would preserve them and us from any presumption about it and lead us to pray. There is not only a call to first love but to the first works. Where the character of first love is absent

our praise and our service tend to become formal and dead whereas they should be marked by living affection for Christ. Early in the Acts of the Apostles we find an example of first works and first love: “they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers” (Acts 2:42).

The Lord presents Himself to Ephesus as taking account of all that is proceeding. The Lord’s assessment of us in this way is very searching and is to prompt repentance with us and a return to Him. Recovery is not to doctrine or to a company but to a Person — the living Lord Himself. If any of us are to be overcomers we must appreciate Christ above all others.

The promises to the overcomer are available for every believer. The promise to Smyrna shows this; it is: “He that overcomes shall in no wise be injured of the second death”. No believer will be injured in the second death. These are promises that every saint can count upon but particular promises are brought forward in each case which are intended to provide support for the overcomer.

The promise to the overcomer in Ephesus is to “eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God”. Deadness and formalism are some of the consequences of the loss of first love and eating of the tree of life is the reward of the overcomer. It is not the tree of life on earth that is spoken of but “in the paradise of God”; it speaks of what is heavenly. When we come to Revelation 22 we find that the tree of life is producing 12 fruits, one in each month. There is something different and suitable in Christ for every kind of circumstance and position. This is something that is available to us now as the hymn puts it:

‘Lord, in Thee we taste the sweetness
Of the Tree of Life above;
Taste its own eternal meetness
For the heavenly land we love.’

One mark of the overcomer is that he has ears to hear. As the Lord taught in the gospels He often cried out, “He that has ears to hear, let him hear” (see Matthew 13:43 for instance). It is an important feature that we should be making way for the Lord’s word and hearing what the Spirit says to the assemblies. The responsibility is on us all and the state of each individual is tested by this.

Based on a Bible reading in Bromley, Kent, 29 October 2002.

Ephesus, in western Turkey, has very extensive ruins. At the time when the Revelation was written it was very prosperous with a population of over 300,000. It was a great centre of commerce, having an important harbour, though this was already beginning to silt up. Many pagan visitors came to see the temple of Diana at Ephesus. From the Acts of the Apostles we know that there were many christians in Ephesus and some of those who believed had before practised magic arts. They brought their books of charms and publicly burnt them.

In the next issue, God willing, "Smyrna".

THE WHEEL OF LIFE

“The word that came to Jeremiah from Jehovah, saying, Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. And I went down to the potter’s house; and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made was marred, as clay, in the hand of the potter; and he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make. And the word of Jehovah came to me, saying, House of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith Jehovah. Behold, as the clay in the potter’s hand, so are ye in my hand, house of Israel.” Jeremiah 18:1-6

I wish to speak about the means God uses to develop His work in our souls. So let us go with Jeremiah to the house of the potter and see him at his work. What do we find there? The potter is working at the wheel and he takes an unshaped lump of clay, puts it on the wheel and the wheel begins to turn. At this stage, no one knows what the potter has in mind to make. The wheel goes round and round, sometimes slowly and sometimes more quickly. The potter’s hands work the clay, at first, perhaps, gently and then more firmly. Then the point comes when the wheel is stopped, the clay is removed from the wheel and there is the vessel that the potter had in mind to produce. Jeremiah saw the potter at work and it was a picture of God’s ways with His people.

Think of being in the hands of the divine potter! That unshaped lump of clay represents each one of us and He puts us onto His wheel. What is the wheel? I think that it is the circumstances of life, which God uses to shape that lump of clay, so that the finished product is as He would have it. That is glorious! If we

think of all the failures of believers we may feel discouraged, yet finally God's thought for each one of us will be reached.

How testing the circumstances of life may be; yet it is all part of God's wheel going round. Younger ones face the circumstances of school or college life and while we may not follow what God is doing in our school life, He is working to a plan and that plan is going to be fulfilled. Then there are the problems of work life and, maybe, unemployment. God uses these circumstances as well. In fact, there is not a circumstance that He allows in our lives in which His guiding hand will not work in fashioning us so that Christ is formed in us. That was what was in His mind from the beginning. Think of the first man, Adam; he was made in the image and likeness of God. There was a representation of God in that first creation, which subsequently fell. So, now, in new creation God is bringing about that which represents the divine mind.

The circumstances of life go on. God uses the experience of such things as sickness, ill health and disability to bring about His purposes. Many have to face the matter of ageing, the weakening of the human frame and the problems that brings. That is the wheel going round as His hands gently, and sometimes more firmly, shape the vessel. Many believers are faced with persecution; that, too, is all in the hand of the divine potter. Through these difficult circumstances there is to be brought about a reflection of Himself. The way that God fashions His work in each one of us is different. God is making each according to His pattern. It will be displayed in the coming day and there will not be a flaw or anything failing about it. It is His work on the wheel.

God makes His call in the gospel and He secures one here and one there. The Lord secured Mary of Magdala out of whom He cast seven demons. What did He make of her? He made her a vessel for God's praise. Think of the wonderful message He gave to her: "I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God" (John 20:17). He took that unshapely lump of clay and formed it so that it was pleasing to Himself.

Think of the way that the Lord shaped the twelve apostles during the time they were with Him here on earth. When He speaks of them to His Father in John chapter 17 He does not refer to their failings but says, "I am glorified in them" (v.10). How beautiful that is. In the final analysis, the Lord Jesus will be able to look at His own and say, "I am glorified in them". That will not be a tribute to

what we have done but to divine workmanship as He has taken us along the way that He has prescribed. We may have kicked against it but He takes us His way to bring about what is pleasing to Himself. The world is full of persons who claim to be self-made. Soon their glory will end in the dust of death but what God puts His hand to will shine now, even through persecution and suffering, and will shine eternally to His praise and glory.

For each one of us here the wheel is still going round. When the Lord calls a person home, the wheel for them has stopped, but for us the wheel is still going round. The vessel is not finished yet, but be assured of this, “that he who has begun in you a good work will complete it to Jesus Christ’s day” (Philippians 1:6). That day is coming. The rejected Nazarene will have His public glory, but His glory will also be seen in the myriads made like unto Him. Each will have a story of divine grace to tell, a story of the way that the divine hand has taken to form us after Him.

May we be encouraged to be with God in what He is doing with each of us. God is going to see that the full result is brought about in each one and finally there will be a reflection of His own glory.

Alex Mowat

Extracted from an address at Yeovil, 24th April 2004.

FAITHFUL PROMISES

Standing at the portal of the opening year
Words of comfort meet us, hushing every fear.
Spoken through the silence by our Father’s voice,
Tender, strong, and faithful, making us rejoice.

I, the Lord, am with you, so be not afraid!
I will help and strengthen, so do not be dismayed!
Yea, I will uphold you with My own right hand;
You are called and chosen in My sight to stand.

For the year before us, Oh what rich supplies!
For the poor and needy living streams shall rise;
For the sad and sinful shall His grace abound;
For the faint and feeble perfect strength be found.

He will never fail us, He will not forsake.
His eternal covenant He will never break!
Resting on His promise, what have we to fear?
God is all-sufficient for the coming year!
Onward then, and fear not, children of the day!
For His word shall never ever pass away!

Frances Ridley Havergal

THE TRIUNE PRESENCE

“Certainly I will be with thee” (Exodus 3:12).

“Certainly I will be with thee”, Father, I have found it true:
To Thy faithfulness and mercy I would set my seal anew.
All the year Thy grace has kept me, Thou my help hast been,
Marvelous the loving-kindness every day hath seen.

“Certainly I will be with thee”, let me feel it, Saviour, true,
Let me know that Thou art with me, very precious, very near.
On this day of solemn pausing, by Thyself all longing still,
Let Thy pardon, let Thy presence, let Thy peace my spirit fill.

“Certainly I will be with thee”, Blessed Spirit, comfort me,
Rest upon me, dwell within me, let my heart Thy temple be!
Through the trackless year before me, Holy One, with me abide,
Teach me, comfort me, and calm me, be my ever present Guide.

“Certainly I will be with thee”, starry promise in the night!
All uncertainties, like shadows, flee away before it's light.

“Certainly I will be with thee”, He hath spoken: I have heard!
True of old, and true this moment, I will trust Jehovah's word.

Frances Ridley Havergal

THE SERVICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

To Thee, blest Spirit, now we bring our praise;
Sent from above to serve us here below,
That we may grow in grace and heav'nly ways,
And all the depths of love divine may know. .

The glories of our Lord Thou lov'st to tell,
And we, responding, yield ourselves to Thee;
What wondrous grace that Thou shouldst in us dwell,
And in Thy love with us for ever be!

Thou art our Guide when all is dark around;
The truth made known, a lamp unto our feet;
Our rest, our peace, our joy through Thee is found,
Till face to face our glorious Head we meet.

We look for Him to come, the time is nigh;
The bride with earnest longing nears her home,
To be with Him, adorned for Him on high;
Her voice, with Thine united, utters, "Come!"

E. J. Hemmings

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Lord Jesus, our souls would adore Thee,
We render Thee blessing and praise;
In worship and homage before Thee
Our hearts and our voices we raise.

We ponder, with spirits adoring,
The love that in death Thou hast shown,
Our grateful responses outpouring
To Thee who hast made us Thine own.

Thy path of devotion we treasure:
In deep adoration we see
The will of Thy God and His pleasure
Secured and accomplished by Thee.

We hail Thee as risen and living —
Supreme to us now, Lord, Thou art;
To Thee we are joyfully giving
The worship and praise of our heart!

G. H. Brown

THE BLESSING OF THE FATHER

Father, now we come before Thee,
Humbly we would seek Thy face,
While our thankful hearts adore Thee
For Thy changeless love and grace.
Naught can dim the cloudless favour
Of the place in which we stand,
Brought to Thee through Christ our Saviour,
Kept by Thine almighty hand.
Vain is fear since Thou art for us;
All good gifts from Thee come down;
Every day that passes o'er us
With Thy goodness Thou dost crown.
May we here Thy will be doing,
In Thy service faithful be,
Day by day our path pursuing
With the help that comes from Thee!
With Thy heav'nly beams enlighten
Every step along the way;
May our path go on and brighten
Unto Thine eternal day!

G. H. Brown

A WITNESS IN STITCHES

Until quite recent times it was common for young, sometimes very young, girls to prepare a sample of their needlework skills. This often took the form of an embroidered picture or design with an inscription added. Many of these inscriptions expressed the personal faith of those who stitched them, or the longings of their parents that their children should come to know the blessedness of the Lord.

Generally these embroideries were extremely beautiful and have found their way into collections across the country. Others have been shown in special exhibitions. Given below are a few examples of some of the most striking inscriptions, which carry a message for all time. (Where the location of the sampler is known this has been noted in the text.)

The heavens do now retain our Lord
Until He come again,
And for the safety of our souls
He there doth still remain.
And quickly shall our King appear
And take us by the hand,
And lead us fully to enjoy
The promised Holy Land.

Sarah Smith (1794)

Better by far for me
Than all the seamster's art
That God's commandments be
Embroidered on my heart.

Mary Cole (1759)

Lora Standish is my name.
Lord guide my heart that I may do Thy will,
And fill my hands with such convenient skill
As will conduce to virtue, void of shame;
And I will give the glory to Thy name.

Lora Standish

(Lora was the daughter of Miles Standish, one of the Pilgrim Fathers, who went to Boston, February 1621)

Great God compassionate and mild,
Forgive the follies of a child.
Teach me to pray and mind Thy word.
That I may learn to fear the Lord.

Mary Postle (1747)

(Goodhart Collection, Montacute House, Somerset)

Be Christ my pattern and my guide,
His image may I bear;
O may I tread His sacred steps
And His bright glories share

Great God Thy Name be blessed,
Thy goodness be adored,
My soul has been distressed,
But Thou hast peace restored.

Sidney Jefferis, Aged 14 (1804)

(Exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
November 1991)

Protect me Lord amidst the crowd
From every thought that's vain and proud,
And raise my wondering mind to see
How good it is to trust in Thee.

Caroline Crouse, Aged 11 (1826)

(Exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, November
1991)

Jane Likens is my name
Virginia is my Station
Shepherds Town is my dwelling place
And Christ is my salvation.

Jane Likens, Aged 11 (1822)

(Exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, November
1991)

Father whate'er of earthly bliss
Thy sovereign will denies,
Accepted at Thy throne of grace
Let this petition rise:-
Give me a calm, a thankful heart
From every murmur free,
The blessings of Thy grace impart
And make me live to Thee.

Lucy Grant (15.10.1840)

Sierra Leone(Victorian & Albert Museum, Reference: T54. 1934)

Two sisters, Mary Ann Richards and Elizabeth Jane Richards, prepared two very beautiful samplers:

Tell me ye knowing and discerning few
Where I may find a Priest both firm and true,
Who does stand by me when in joy and griefs
And there His love and friendship soft express.

Mary Ann Richards (1800)

(Victoria & Albert Museum, Reference: T96.1939)

See how the lilies flourish, white and fair,
See how the ravens fed from heaven are,
Then ever trust thy God for cloth and bread,
Whilst lilies flourish and the ravens fed.

Elizabeth Jane Richards (1800)

(Victoria & Albert Museum, Reference: T97.1939)

A verse, which appears on a number of samplers, sometimes with additions, as in the instances below, is attributed to John Newton the converted slave ship captain. He is believed to have written it for his niece, Elizabeth Catlitt.

Jesus, permit Thy gracious name to stand
As the first effort of an infants hand,
And while her fingers o'er this canvas move
Engage her tender heart, to seek Thy love.

With Thy dear children let her share a part
And write Thy name Thyself upon her heart.

M. A. Tipper (1868)

This sampler was worked in one of George Muller's Orphanages in Bristol.
(Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Reference: T11-1952)

Lord permit Thy gracious Name to stand
As the first effort of an infant hand,
And while her fingers on the canvas move
Engage her tender thoughts to seek Thy love,
With Thy dear children let her have a part
And write Thy name Thyself upon her heart.

Remember time will come when we must give
Account to God how we on earth do live.

Harriett French Aged 11 (1840)

Harriett lived in Loose, near Maidstone, Kent
(Bristol Museums Collection, Reference: TA2318}

Jesus, permit Thy gracious name to stand
As the first effort of an infants hand,
And while her fingers o'er this canvas move
Engage her tender heart, to seek Thy love,
With Thy dear children let her share a part
And write Thy name Thyself upon her heart.

Oh that our thoughts and thanks may rise,
As grateful incense to the skies;
And draw from heaven that sweet repose
Which none but he that feels it knows.

Elizabeth Paul (1817)

(Bristol Museum Collection, Reference: T922

Hail risen Jesus; hail my Lord and God,
I am Thine own, redeemed by Thine own blood.

O Lord, what hast Thou done? Thy death and smart
Have got the day and won my very heart.
Beyond my faith and hope and every grace
I'll boast alone of Thee, my righteousness.
Elizabeth Willetts, Aged 11 (1806)

We've no abiding city here,
Sad truth were this to be our home;
But let this thought our spirits cheer
We seek a city yet to come.
We've no abiding city here,
We seek a city out of sight;
Zion its name – the Lord is there,
It shines with everlasting light.

Sadly this sampler is unsigned and not dated
(Bristol Museum Collection, Reference: N5633)

THE LORD AS TEACHER

Teachers get discouraged with their pupils but this Teacher never does! He takes you up as you are: “A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench”. What poor material the Lord takes up! How do I look at my brethren? Do I expect them to be fitted to some standard of my making? Am I expecting some great change? We shall go on with bruised reeds and smoking flax until the end. A word in the New Testament says the unruly are to be rebuked, the weak are to be supported, the feeble minds are to be comforted, but we are to have patience toward all. Every brother and sister may test my patience. The Lord comes in as God's elect. He takes up the most unlikely material. Think of His patience with Peter, and of His patience with me.

Then we read: “He shall not faint nor be in haste”. He will bring in a universe for God's pleasure. The holy city is yet to come down from God having His glory. He is going on. What is in the mind of the Lord is God's glory and the securing of it in His own. How it would help us to be patient with one another! Not that divine principles are to be given up. We are to stand by divine principles

in the spirit of the dispensation of grace in which we are. We are to be restful as to the ability of divine Persons to carry the work through.

Paul in writing to the Corinthians says of the report that had reached him: “I partly give credit to it” (1 Corinthians 11:18). Some of us would have said that he had abundant proof, but he says, “I partly give credit to it”, and yet he holds to divine principles. He would be unsparing with those who were not keeping the commandment. “If anyone thinks himself to be...spiritual, let him recognise the things that I write to you, that it is the Lord’s commandment” (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Then we see in Luke’s gospel Jesus teaching in chapter 7, bringing forward as a model the woman who had come into Simon’s house. She had come behind Him weeping. What an example for every one of us! Some of us may cease to shed tears over our state once we find our liabilities have been borne by Jesus. We may tend to lose the sense of mercy but it should not be so; the tears are to go on. The kisses and the tears are blended — tears for what she is; kisses for what He is. Tears of repentance for her state and kisses, the greeting of love, because He has come within her reach.

He says, ‘She has never ceased to kiss my feet from the time she came in’. Why stop kissing those feet? We are to go on. Paul went on to the end. Long after his conversion he was shedding tears; he says that he was “less than the least of all saints” (Ephesians 3:8); he was shedding tears. Then he speaks of the Son of God, “who has loved me and given himself for me” (Galatians 2:20); he is blending the tears with the kisses. Oh that our souls might be steeped with a sense of mercy, that we may never move out of the sphere where the sense of mercy prevails!

What a model this woman in Luke 7 is! The Lord uses her as an appeal to the proud heart of Simon. What a need for us to come in with a sense of mercy! As J. N. Darby said as he neared the end of his course here, ‘I go to obtain mercy’. A sense of the mercy that has brought Christ near to us and a sense of the unworthiness that marks us would give us a fine opportunity of bestowing affection on the blessed Lord.

G. V. Stanley.

DAVID'S COMPANIONS AND PAUL'S FRIENDS

How precious are those specific links which are formed by the hand of God! There is the great general link which connects us with all the children of God — all the members of the body of Christ; but there are specific links which we should ever recognise and seek to strengthen and perpetuate, in every right way.

I was lately looking, with much interest and profit, at David's mighty men in 2 Samuel 23, and Paul's friends at Rome in Romans 16. Out of the many thousands of Israel — circumcised members of the congregation, children of Abraham — there were comparatively few who distinguished themselves by personal devotedness and whole-hearted consecration. Then, even among those few, there were marked differences. There were "the thirty", "the three", and "the first three". Each gets his own specific place on the page of the 'book of responsible, practical life', according to what he was or what he had done. Moreover, we are told particularly what each one did and how he did it. Nothing is forgotten, but all is faithfully recorded and no one can ever get another's place. Each does his own work, fills his own niche and gets his own reward.

So also in Romans 16, nothing can be more marked or striking than the beautiful discrimination which characterises this chapter. First of all, note the way in which Phoebe is commended to the church at Rome. "I commend unto you Phoebe our sister". On what ground? Is it that she is 'remembering the Lord in the breaking of bread' or 'in fellowship', or 'in communion', at Cenchrea? No, that is not the ground but that "she is a servant of the assembly" and that "she has been a succourer of many, and of myself also".

Paul presents, in touching and forcible language, the moral basis of her claim upon the hospitality and succour of the assembly. To say that a person is 'in fellowship' is, alas! no guarantee of personal devotedness. It ought to be, but it is not! And hence, to expect the sympathy, succour and confidence of the Lord's people on that ground is unwarrantable. Even the apostle himself, when he asks for the prayers of the brethren, presents the moral basis of his claim. He says, "Brethren, pray for us". What is the ground? Is it because we are breaking bread or in fellowship? Nothing of the kind, but because "we

trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly”.

Then, mark the notice of Priscilla and Aquila. What had they done? They had been the apostle’s helpers. They had laid down their own necks for his life. And he adds: “Unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the assemblies of the Gentiles”. This is uncommonly fine. They had obtained in this way the confidence and esteem of the apostle and of all the assemblies. Thus it must ever be. We cannot jump, all in a moment, into people’s confidence and affection. We must commend ourselves by a life of practical righteousness and personal devotedness. As the apostle puts it elsewhere, “Commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2).

Again, — look at verse 12: “Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord”. See what lovely discrimination is here! Why does he not class all three together? The reason is plain: because two had only laboured, while the third had laboured much. Each one gets his and her place, according to what they were, and according to what they had done.

Nor would Tryphena and Tryphosa have had any cause of envy and jealousy against Persis, because she was characterized as “beloved” while they were not; or because the word “much” was added to her labour and withheld from theirs. Ah! no; envy and jealousy are the pernicious fruit of a miserable self-occupation; they are to find no place in a heart devoted to Christ and His interests.

I look at 2 Samuel 23 and Romans 16 as specimen pages of the ‘book of responsible, practical life’, in which each one is written down according to what they are and have done. It is, of course, all by grace. Each one will delight to say that “By the grace of God I am what I am”. Moreover, all the children of God and members of Christ are equally “accepted in the beloved”; all stand in one common relationship. The very feeblest member of the body of Christ is loved by God as Christ is loved. The Head and the members cannot be separated. As He is so are they. The feeblest child in the family has his own place in the Father’s heart, with which no one can ever interfere. (See Ephesians 1:6, John 17:26, and 1 John 4:17).

All this is blessedly true and nothing can ever touch it, but, when we turn to the grand question of practical life and personal devotedness, what endless variety there is. We find “the three”, “the first three”, and “the thirty”. It is one thing to be “accepted” and another thing to be acceptable or agreeable to Him. It is one thing to be a beloved child and another thing to be a devoted servant. There is the love of relationship and the love of complacency.

These things must not be confounded and, most assuredly, it should be the earnest desire of every “accepted” child of God to be an acceptable servant of Christ. Oh! may it be so more and more in this day of indifference and self-seeking. A day in which so many seem to rest satisfied with the mere fact of being in fellowship, as it is called, and so few are pressing after that high standard of personal devotedness which, we may rest assured, is “agreeable” to the heart of Christ.

Let me not be misunderstood. True fellowship in the Spirit — the communion of saints — is precious beyond all expression; and the breaking of bread, in truth and sincerity, in remembrance of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us, is one of the very highest and richest privileges for those whose hearts are true to Him. All this is clear. Yet, on the other hand, we must never forget the strong tendency of our poor hearts to rest in mere forms and formularies when the power is gone. It is one thing to be in nominal fellowship and go through the outward form of breaking bread, and another thing altogether to be an earnest, devoted, pronounced disciple of Christ. This latter is what we should all ardently long for, but to rest in the former is a miserable delusion, deadening the conscience, hardening the heart and deceiving the soul.

We may observe the same thing in the case of the twelve apostles. We read much more about “Peter, James and John” than about the other nine — and not only so, but even in the case of those three, we mark a difference, for one is specially named as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”, and who leaned on His breast at supper. Thus it is all through the word. Look at Abraham and Lot; Elijah and Obadiah; the Shunammite and the widow of Sarepta. Christian reader, let us earnestly seek a closer walk with God — deeper intimacy with the mind of Christ.

“Bought with a price,” and not my own,
No longer to myself to live,
To be for Him, for Him alone,
Who gave me all that grace could give,
Who gave Himself-for me made sin,
My guilty worthless heart to win.

Bought with a price,” I now would seek
A living sacrifice to be,
Conformed to Him, pure, holy, meek,
Whom on the throne I now can see;
To walk like Him this desert place,
In truth and love and power and grace.

“Bought with a price,” to wait for Him,
Resting beneath His gracious smile,
Which brightens hope when faith grows dim,
And cheers me through the “little while,”
Whilst waiting here His face to see,
Who comes Himself to welcome me.

(Poem by G.W.Fraser)

Charles H Mackintosh

THE CERTAINTY OF OUR SALVATION

Can anyone be certain that all his or her sins are forgiven? Can anyone be sure that they are going to heaven? Is it wrong to say, ‘Yes, I am quite sure and certain’ in answer to these two questions? Wishful thinking, uncertainty, and doubt are the very opposite of Christian faith; “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). God gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and there is no certainty without receiving Him. However good we are, unselfish, kind, generous or religious, there will never be any certainty without faith in Him. When a person receives Christ as personal Saviour, three changes take place:

First, there is an awareness of sin and unworthiness — there is no more hope of being good enough for God and heaven. No one can ever save themselves, nor work for salvation by righteousness or religion. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). One awakened soul put it: ‘I am a sinner, I need a Saviour, there is only one Saviour and that is Jesus, and I want Him’. †

Secondly, once Christ is received, He begins to separate and change the heart and life of the believer at home, in the world, at work and socially. A daily ‘quiet time’ alone with God is essential — as essential as daily washing and feeding of the body, so also the spirit. People will notice the difference and so will you.

Thirdly, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ will be increasingly important and precious. God so loved me that He gave His only-begotten Son that I could believe in Him and not perish for my sins but have everlasting life. He died for me, in my place, bearing my sins. His blood was shed to guarantee my forgiveness before God, because God so loved me.

Christ rose again the first day of the week and thus proved God’s acceptance of His sacrifice for me. “It is finished,” He cried out on the cross. His resurrection is a proof of it. “It is finished” — I know by reading the word of God — and I need that assurance daily. The Lord’s day is now the most important day every week for God has blessed the first day for me — “I know that my Redeemer liveth”.

The certainty we all need personally comes as we really have faith for ourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit brings the truth of the Bible home to us as a reality.

“God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son hath not life”

(1 John 5:11-12).

“Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us”

(1 John 3:24).

Keith Ensor (November 1989)

† God willing, the story behind those words will appear in “Living Water” No 68

GENESIS

In Luke 24, the Lord divides the Old Testament Scriptures into three sections, Moses, the prophets, and the psalms (Verse 44). It has been remarked that in “Moses” we have the rights of God over man; in the prophets, the patience of God waiting upon man; and in the psalms the result of the testimony of God in man.

The first five books of the Bible are those referred to as the books of Moses. In Genesis we have the rights of God as Creator; in Exodus the rights of God in redemption; Leviticus follows Exodus and supposes us in relationship to God, and brings before us God’s rights to our devotion and sacrifice; Numbers shows us God’s right to our loyalty and service; Deuteronomy concludes this section of scripture and tells us of the loving obedience which is due to God. If we are to enjoy our true blessings as believers, we must keep near Christ; His words and His wisdom must influence our minds and hearts. God alone has title or right to our hearts.

In this article I shall briefly consider Genesis. The first thing to do is to read it! There is a great lack to-day of reading scripture. Better by far to put this magazine down and take up our Bibles and read them, if we have not had our definite reading to-day and the accompanying waiting upon God in prayer. I suppose however that we have each read Genesis through.

Genesis brings before us in embryo many principles which afterwards find their full development. First, there is creation and God working, and at the end of that work, the Sabbath. This is very important — work in contrast to rest. A sabbath remains, we are told, in Hebrews 4:9. Turn to your Bible and note how often this principle is insisted upon and in what different connections (See Genesis 2:2, 3; Exodus 16:23; 20:10; 31:14; 35:2, etc.).

There cannot be true rest where there is sin (See John 5:16, 17). In the garden of Eden the two trees are full of typical teaching; the one (life) the gift of God; the other (the knowledge of good and evil), linked with our responsibility. Then with the “fall” we have God’s solemn question to Adam, “Where art thou?” and, too, man’s attempt to hide from God and conceal his ruined condition, such attempts being so utterly useless when he must meet a holy God. We have also the promise of the woman’s Seed, who should bruise the

serpent and God clothing Adam and Eve with coats of skin, which meant that death had to come in for them to be so clothed.

Outside Eden we have Abel's righteous faith and Cain's act of murder. It is very important to remember that Cain's works were evil before he killed Abel. His sacrifice was an evil work (1 John 3:12). How solemn this is; and especially so since Jude 11 pronounces "Woe" on any who are religiously like Cain today. After this we read of Cain's going out from the presence of the Lord and building a city. This is just what the world is, persons away from God and trying to be happy. Cain is also a type of the Jews, who killed Jesus and have a mark on them in God's ways.

Genesis chapter 4 gives us the world; Genesis 5 the line of faith. The world gets worse and worse and ends in judgment. Before the judgment comes Enoch is taken to God without dying, typical of the way that the church will be raptured before the final judgment on the world. What a wonderful scope these chapters give us! They typify what has already taken place and what will yet transpire on this earth. Abel's sacrifice, a picture of Christ's sacrifice, shows us the line of faith; Enoch is translated, as we shall be soon (1 Thessalonians 4:17); and Noah is saved through the judgment, as the Jews will be. This is one side, a bright side indeed!

On the other hand are Cain's religious works, probably the best he could do, but since there was no shedding of blood they were evil: his act of murder, the world and its city and trades, pleasures and sin; the flood ended all that line in judgment. The same two sides exist to-day. On which side are you?

Genesis 8 begins a new subject. A new earth is before us, with Noah placed over it with a sword of government in his hands, as it were. Government is a very important thought running through the Bible. (See 2 Samuel 8:15; 1 Chronicles 29:23; Ezekiel 1:26, 28; 10; Daniel 2:37, 38, etc.; John 19:10, 11; Romans 13; Revelation 11:15-18.)

In chapter 12 we have Abraham's call. Notice the interesting passages in the New Testament as to the "calling" of believers. Abraham is also the pattern man of faith. He is called out of a world that had become idolatrous. We do not read of idolatry before the flood.

What a small beginning it was, God calling just one man. The world was there with its kingdoms and its Babel; man was seeking to make a name and God views it all as confusion and calls one man! He is to be the depository of promise. Notice, too, what Galatians says of “promise” (Chapter 3:16, etc.).

We might have had many arguments against the course suggested in Abraham’s call but Abraham obeyed (see Hebrews 11). He also believed God in spite of everything seeming to contradict what God said. Genesis 15:6 is the basis of much in the New Testament. (See especially Romans 4) Abraham was a man of faith and a pilgrim; he had his tent and altar.

Isaac next comes before us and also his bride. The first mention of love in the Bible is in chapter 22, the next in chapter 24, I believe. Isaac has his bride after his death and resurrection, typically, and after Sarah’s death. Israel (Sarah) is set aside before the church (Rebecca) comes in.

In Jacob’s history we have illustrated a very great deal. Discipline and God’s ways with us are set forth in his history. The end of his life is bright with faith, and his action is alluded to in Hebrews 11.

Joseph is a wonderful type of Christ. He is loved by his father but suffers from his brethren and is thought dead. In fact, far different was the case. Set over all the glory of Egypt in highest honour, he fittingly typifies Christ as Lord in exaltation who had been rejected and crucified by the Jews. Joseph has a bride in his position of glory and his brethren are also brought to confess their sin in rejecting him, as the Jewish people will own their sin in refusing Christ.

Genesis is most wonderful. I have only given a brief sketch of its contents. It has been rightly named the ‘seed plot’ of the Bible.

Malcolm Biggs

In the next issue, God willing, “Exodus”.