



# *Living Water*

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

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

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Cover Picture — Snowdonia

Printed by Christian Design & Print, High Street, Bures, Essex. C08 5JG. UK

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## MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES — SMYRNA

“And to the angel of the assembly in Smyrna write: These things says the first and the last, who became dead, and lived: I know thy tribulation and thy poverty; but thou art rich; and the railing of those who say that they themselves are Jews, and are not, but a synagogue of Satan. Fear nothing of what thou art about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast you in to prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give to thee the crown of life.

“He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. He that overcomes shall in no wise be injured of the second death.” Revelation 2:8-11

It has often been noted that, in common with the church at Philadelphia, the Lord does not draw attention to any negative features in Smyrna. They are told, however, that there will be suffering and tribulation, though the Lord shows that this is only for a fixed time. They were to have “tribulation ten days”. This is often taken as a reference to the rule of the ten Roman emperors who persecuted christians (Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Maxminus, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian).

The Lord knew that even in such trial there were those in Smyrna who would be overcomers and that is a challenge to us. There should always be faithfulness to Christ, despite opposition and persecution. In God’s mercy, persecution is not something which we experience much in England today but we probably all wonder at times how we would react if we faced the kind of trial that our fellow christians in other parts of the world are experiencing at the present time.

The Lord knows what there is in Smyrna for Himself and associates Himself with it. He speaks here of knowing the “railing of those who say that they themselves are Jews, and are not, but a synagogue of Satan”. Those in Smyrna knew of such opposition and the Lord in His grace tells that He takes account of it too. Much of the persecution in the early church seems to have been the result of Jews stirring up hatred against christians. The Lord enters feelingly with His own into this. The Lord presents Himself to the company in Smyrna as the “first and the last”, and the One, “who became dead, and lived”. He had been the way of suffering and death but He is alive now. His exhortation to the

suffering church is: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give to thee the crown of life”. The Lord identifies Himself with these suffering brethren and tells them: “I became dead”. That is a great comfort to those who know that there is no hope of deliverance in this life from circumstances that they are passing through. When we read accounts of christians who have had to face martyrdom we often get a sense that they had a special understanding, given to them by the Holy Spirit, that death was but the door into life.

The promise made to the overcomer is that he “shall in no wise be injured in the second death”. The “second death” is the “lake of fire” according to Revelation 20:15 and 21:8. “If any one was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). It is a place prepared for the devil and his angels and those who are unbelieving are cast into it too. The “second death” is the most dreadful thing that could happen to anyone but it causes no fear for any of the redeemed. Their outlook is one of life. The Lord says, “Be thou faithful unto death and I will give to thee the crown of life”.

At first sight the promise to the overcomer not to be injured in the second death seems rather strange, since no believer will know the second death. Perhaps it is brought in here to show that dreadful as would be the suffering in Smyrna it would be as nothing compared to the torment of those who are subjected to the second death.

In giving them such a promise the Lord intended to encourage them to face the awfulness of being imprisoned or even killed for the faith. These are matters that none of us could think lightly of entering into. It must have been very frightening and those in Smyrna must have been much cast on the Lord. In any time of reproach or persecution that we may come into, we know how we do not like it and how we try and avoid it. We can therefore understand a little of how these believers felt and how necessary it was for the Lord to encourage them. If they were maintained it was because of Him. It has often been noted that in times of persecution, those who have been very confident before they were put to the test have often failed when the time actually came, while others, who have been timid and fearful lest they might fail, have been sustained and gone through triumphantly in the power of the Lord.

The Lord presents Himself to this assembly as “the first and the last”. This is

a title of God. It comes from Isaiah where Jehovah describes Himself as “the first and the last” (See Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, 48:12). The “first and the last” is the One who was before all things and the One who ever remains. He was there before any of the persecutors came into existence and He is there when everything else is gone. So that it is particularly significant that the Lord uses this title of Himself in addressing these persecuted believers. If we consider the One who is the “first and the last”, and then think of the idols and emperors that those in Smyrna may well have been expected to worship, there is simply no comparison. The Lord is telling them that ‘While it may appear that Satan is in control, that is not the case at all’. It was calculated to assure their hearts.

The Lord speaks to these brethren of the “crown of life”. James tells us in his epistle: “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for, having been proved, he shall receive the crown of life” (James 1:12). The contrast is clear between death as the result of faithfulness to the Lord and life as the reward that the Lord gives for it. This reward, like the other rewards, are those that are proper to every true believer. Those that have been faithful even unto death are not to be looking for some superior place on that account: the Lord will know what place to give them. The crown of life is something which every believer should be looking for.

*Based on a Bible reading at Bromley, Kent, November 2002.*

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Smyrna (modern Izmir in the west coast of Turkey) is about 40 miles north of Ephesus. It was an important commercial centre and the ruins of the Roman Forum can still be seen. Smyrna was a centre of emperor worship which of course is directly contrary to christianity.

### **A VISIT TO THE EMPTY TOMB**

**“And on the first day of the week Mary of Magdala comes in early morn to the tomb, while it was still dark, and sees the stone taken away from the tomb. She runs therefore and comes to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, to whom Jesus was attached, and says to them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and the other disciple, and came to the tomb. And the two ran together, and the other disciple ran forward**

**faster than Peter, and comes first to the tomb, and stooping down he sees the linen cloths lying; he did not however go in. Simon Peter therefore comes, following him, and entered into the tomb, and sees the linen cloths lying, and the handkerchief which was upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in a distinct place by itself. Then entered in therefore the other disciple also who came first to the tomb and he saw and believed;...”** John 20:1-8

John, in writing his account, refers to himself as “the other disciple” and I want to draw your attention to this verse where he went into the tomb and, it says, “he saw and believed”. I would like each of you to come to the tomb and to be like John, to see and believe.

Here was John, on that dusty hill side outside Jerusalem, where momentous events had taken place over the previous few days. The Lord Jesus Christ, the One on whom he depended and who had taught, shepherded and provided for him, had been taken and crucified. John had seen the Lord still the waves, feed the five thousand and, later, the four thousand, heal lepers, made the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak and had raised the dead. All these things Jesus had done. Then He had gone on the journey to Jerusalem and there the leaders of the people, the Pharisees and the chief priests, had seized Jesus and delivered Him up to be crucified. John, maybe, thought he understood what was happening when the Lord wrought miracles and taught but it was apparent that it was not until he came to the tomb that he really started to understand what tremendous things God was doing.

I want you to come in mind and heart to the tomb, tonight, and look inside. The first thing you think about a tomb is that it is where they put someone who has died. The tomb where Jesus was laid was a rich man’s tomb. It was a new tomb that Joseph had prepared for himself. I do not know if you have ever thought about it but it is an evidence of the sinful state of man that all are subject to death. The Bible says, “By one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death”. If we have no saviour, we have no hope beyond that. There is nothing to look forward to but death and judgment. The Bible is quite clear that all those who remain in their sins will come under judgment.

I suppose that the man who prepared this tomb did not think there was any other prospect except that he would be laid there one day. Surely there is no

one here who only wants that prospect. Because it says, “it is the portion of men once to die, and after this judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). There is no escape from that. Some people think that when they die that will be the end of it but that is not so.

How can any of us escape the judgment? How are you going to? Well, the good news is that Another has paid the penalty. Someone else has borne that judgment for you. Would that every one here would realise that without a Saviour they are still under judgment. I am not here to tell you about judgment, nor am I here to tell you about death or the tomb, but rather to point out that the tomb that John looked in was empty. The Lord Jesus had been laid in there. Pilate had made sure that He was truly dead; there was no mistake about it. Pilate asked the soldiers who had been on guard at the crucifixion, and they said He was already dead. There were plenty of witnesses to that. The body of Jesus was laid in that tomb, just outside Jerusalem, and a great stone was rolled across in front of it and the stone was sealed. Then there was a guard put on it by the Jews, so that no one could take away the body of Jesus. We are told that the Jewish rulers were concerned lest the disciples might steal away the body of Jesus.

The chief priests and the Pharisees took that kind of action but there were others who were interested in the Lord such as these women, of whom we read, who came to the tomb very early in the morning. They felt the fact that the One they depended on had been crucified and was dead.

The Lord is not dead now! When Mary got to the tomb she found the stone had been rolled away. She found the tomb was empty and she ran to tell the other disciples. Having heard her report the two disciples ran to the tomb to see for themselves. Peter went into the tomb and then John followed and he saw that the Lord was no longer in death, He was no longer in the grave.

Would that each of you would look with the eye of faith into that tomb and have the assurance that Jesus, the One who was crucified then laid in the tomb, is no longer in death but in glory. The hymn we sung says:

‘But lo! He’s risen from the grave,  
And bears the greatest, noblest Name:  
The Lord — almighty now to save  
From sin, from death, from endless shame.’



The tomb is empty! The Lord is no longer there! I can witness to that. I know in my heart that Jesus is no longer in the tomb. There is no need to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In contrast to those in John's time it is not even certain today where it is. Apart from this visit by Peter and John you do not read of the disciples going to the tomb again. There was no point. They knew the Lord was not there. He was risen and ascended into heaven! It was a wonderful thing that the disciples saw the Lord during the forty days after the resurrection before He was carried up into heaven.

Why did the Lord go to the cross and then into the tomb? It was so that we might be forgiven. We are all sinners, we are all under judgment and we all need a Saviour. It was necessary that He should go that way because He alone could bear God's judgment. He alone could bear that punishment, the punishment that we each deserved for our wrong doings and disobedience. The judgment that is due to you and me because of our sins was poured out on the head of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think of the awfulness of it! That the One who knew not sin, the One who was perfect in the sight of God, who was always obedient to His will, laid down His life. He accepted the mocking, scourging and terrible mistreatment by men. He accepted that because His Father's will was that He should go to the cross and there bear the judgment of God. That was far more severe than the scourging at the hands of wicked men.

Why did He do it? Because He loved you! Because He does not want us to come under divine judgment, but rather that we should come into life. He wants to deliver us from the situation we are in as away from God and subject to God's judgment.

Jesus went to the cross so that we might be able to preach God's way of salvation. What is it? Listen and I will tell you: "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Believe the gospel; own before God that you have done wrong, that you are a sinner and that you are in need of a Saviour and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust in Him. Accept that when He went to the cross and bore God's judgment in the three hours of darkness, that He went that way for you. Pray to Him now and ask Him to save you; in that way you will obtain forgiveness and have peace towards God.

Although the tomb might seem a gloomy place, it actually points the way into life. No longer need we be under the sentence of death; we can come into life — eternal life! Jesus came that we might have life “and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). It is available to every one here. You can have life, life outside of this scene, eternal life, life for ever with the Lord Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal. For God has not sent his Son into the world that he may judge the world, but that the world may be saved through him” (John 3:16, 17).

Are you still in your sins? Are you not sure whether you have been saved? It is something that each one of us needs to make sure of for ourselves. Jesus is not asking us to do anything difficult or great; that is not the divine way of blessing. He asks us to trust in Him. As the hymn puts it: ‘Simply trust Him, that is all’.

John did not do anything extraordinary; we read only that he “saw and believed”. I would that each of you, tonight, if you have not already put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ might just see that Jesus is the answer to your need as a sinner.

People often look to themselves and try and work things out for themselves but God is saying, ‘I sent the Lord Jesus Christ here because no one can save themselves, all are under judgment, all have sinned. I will send my only begotten Son into the world to be the Saviour’. God is offering you forgiveness for your sins tonight. Take a look in the tomb. The Lord Jesus suffered the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God. He took a place in the tomb but He is not there now! He was raised for our justification. He is now in the glory and He looks to each of us to put our trust in Him.

Think about the disciples: they had suffered dreadful disappointment when the One that they thought was going to redeem Israel was crucified. They could not understand it and sometimes we find it difficult to understand the gospel, to realise that Christ has done all the work necessary for our redemption and that it only remains for us to come to Him and accept Him as our Saviour. I wonder how many times some of us have heard the gospel preached, heard that it is simply a matter of believing in the Lord Jesus and yet have taken no notice of it.

The Bible teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming again to call all those that have trusted in Him to be with Him for ever. It may be that the Lord will come tonight! If that were so, would you be ready? Are you sure that you would be caught up to be with Him?

If you are uncertain I would appeal to you to sort matters out tonight even as you sit on the seat where you are. Ask the Lord to forgive your sins, ask the Lord to give you peace, ask the Lord to give you faith. There was once a man who said, "I believe, help mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). He found it difficult to believe, but he did the right thing; he appealed to the Lord to help him. If you find it difficult to believe, ask the Lord to help you and He will meet the sin of unbelief along with all your other sins.

We read, "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you" (Luke 11:9). Those are the words of the Lord Jesus. He does not want any one to have difficulty; He does not want anyone to hesitate and miss the opportunity of salvation. He wants you to take your opportunity tonight and simply trust in Him.

I was reading during the week of a young man who was kidnapped in the jungle. He managed to escape. He described himself as an atheist, yet he recounted how he fell on his knees and prayed to God. Perhaps even yet he might turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not wait until you are brought to extremity like that, until you are in dreadful conditions. Be like John, who looked in the tomb; he saw it was empty because, although the Lord Jesus had been there, He has come forth triumphant. Every one of us can in mind and heart look into the empty tomb tonight and see that the Lord has been that way of death and is risen victorious.

No one else can deal with the problem of your sins. The Lord Himself is the only One who can save you and tonight He is available to you if you will simply trust Him. May every one of us put our trust in Him for His name's sake.

'We love to look within the tomb,  
Robbed by Thy death of all its gloom;  
The stone for ever rolled away,  
Thy death the power of death did slay.'

*Bill Trim*

*A preaching of the gospel, Hampton, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2003*

## GOD'S WAYS

Isaiah	55: 6-13
1 Corinthians	12: 27-31
Psalms	139: 1-6
Romans	11: 29-36

I want to speak about God's ways. His ways are very interesting, particularly as we consider His ways with each one of us individually. It is good for all believers to reflect on God's ways with us and see how we have proved Him and His love.

God's ways are not our ways. They are far, far greater and more blessed than our ways or thoughts. Think of the greatness and glory of God as the Creator. At this time of year — springtime — we feel the warmth of the sun and we see the plants putting out new shoots and the bulbs coming into life. All speaks of the glory of the Creator.

Now God is working at the present time and all His ways are wonderful. J. N. Darby said that 'God's ways are behind the scenes but He moves all the scenes that He is behind'. He adds that we are not to think much of man's busy movements; they will all accomplish God's. So whatever may be proceeding at the present time in this world, and God is allowing much, we can be certain that it will only bring about what He has in mind. Some think that when events affect certain parts of the world it is a great fulfilment of prophecy, but we live in the 'times of the Gentiles' and God's prophetic 'clock' is for the time being held in abeyance. The great event that as Christians we should be looking for is the coming of the Lord. Let us have our eyes on that hope before us — the return of our Lord and Saviour.

God's ways are exceedingly great in their scope. The hymn expresses it:

'Great God of wonders, all Thy ways  
Are wondrous, matchless, and divine.  
But the blest triumphs of Thy grace,  
Most marvellous, unrivalled shine.'

Isaiah 55, where we read, speaks of this; it is a wonderful gospel chapter. God is speaking through the prophet about the character of His thoughts and ways. The ways of God in divine grace are to affect our hearts. He has worked in grace to secure us for His pleasure and I trust that everyone here has been the subject of the operations of divine grace. God has made manifest in an unsurpassed way the character of His heart. He has done it in Christ. There could be no greater way to affect our hearts than the way that God has taken in divine love

and grace towards us. Titus tells us that “the kindness and love to man of our Saviour God has appeared” (Titus 3:4). It is the kernel of God’s ways. They all flow from that wonderful spring that you and I could never explain — His heart of love.

It has been said that ‘His love was there before the necessity for His grace ever existed’. It is a stupendous thought that His love has motivated Him in His ways in time so that we might be blessed eternally. The God who is from eternity and to eternity has secured us for the praise of the glory of His grace.

We may wonder about God’s governmental ways with His people, particularly when they pass through adversity. We may reflect on such matters as to our own circumstances. One thing we do know is that where His government is, His grace is there as well. Thank God for that. His love is behind His ways of government as in all other of His ways.

The triumph of divine ways is that as a result there is that formed in our hearts for the praise and glory of God. He will have that eternally but He has praise at the present time as well. The book of Job in the Old Testament is a wonderful book. (If you have never read it I would encourage you to do so. Some profound statements are made in it, even as to the creation.) God worked with Job, and after many chapters recounting his experiences Job came to it, “that thou canst be hindered in no thought of thine” (Job 42:2). How true that is! What a triumph of the divine ways!

He will accomplish all His thoughts for our blessing and His own glory and praise, now and eternally. Whatever the circumstances, love lies behind it all. God is securing results in our hearts and as we are subject to His will we will surely profit from it. You can look over the history of various ones in Scripture, Jacob, for instance, and see how this works out. Jacob had his own ideas of how he would operate. He was a great bargainer but he had to come to it that God’s ways were best. When Pharaoh asks him about his life, Jacob replies, “Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life” (Genesis 47:9), but when he blesses his grandsons, he says, “...the God that shepherded me all my life long to this day, the Angel that redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads” (Genesis 48:15-16). He had proved God in his ways and found he could bless. As you read the experiences of Jacob you find that he had to prove what God says, that, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways (Isaiah 55:8).

The end of God’s ways will be a scene of glory responsive to Himself and the centre of that scene will be the One in whom He has every delight, Christ, in all

His distinctive glory. I trust that everyone here has an appreciation of the distinctive glory of Jesus. We come to Him first as Saviour, own Him as Lord. Then we prove His teaching and learn from Him. I believe that as we come that way we will be here as vessels of service and of praise.

Divine love has been expressed in a wonderful way. God could have swept all away after Adam's disobedience. He did not do that; in His ways He clothed them with coats of skin — involving the death of another. We get, too, in the early part of Genesis, the announcement about the seed of the woman bruising the serpent's head. These great thoughts have their fulfilment in Christ. Truly the way that God has taken is a way of more surpassing excellence. It is love's way and His grace shines in it all.

Grace has been defined as love in activity. The shining of that divine love began with God. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (1 John 4:10). That love is seen in a blessed Man, in Jesus. The love of Jesus was seen in His pathway here. How excellent it was! Paul wanted to show that way to the Corinthians. They were not behind in any gift; they were a company full of self-importance and boasting but Paul regards them in the dignity that is proper to saints of God and labours to bring them to conformity with that. While he credits them with the blessing of God in the way of gift, he says, "Yet show I unto you a way of more surpassing excellence". That is what God has shown us. He has demonstrated divine love in the giving of His beloved Son. We read in the epistle to the Romans: "God commends his love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us" (Romans 5:8). While we were yet sinners He expressed His love in giving Jesus that we might come into blessing.

Where did that path of excellence take Jesus? It took Him to the cross! Our Saviour expressed divine love there. Let our hearts ponder the pathway of Jesus, a pathway that was committed devotedly to the will of God; it shone in its perfection, in all its moral glory, against the dark background of man's hatred towards Him. How great is the love of Jesus, He who gave Himself for us. Paul learned of the way of surpassing excellence from Christ. He displayed this to the Corinthians and he desired to put them in mind of his ways as they were in Christ. We, too, have to learn the way of more surpassing excellence through contemplation of the Lord Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul tells this gifted company, as he goes over a list of attributes, that these things were nothing if they did not have love. May we be affected by divine love and may that love be displayed in us. The Lord Jesus left His own with these words: "By this shall all know that ye are disciples of mine, if ye have love amongst yourselves" (John

13:35). He also said, “As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you: abide in my love” (John 15:9). These words would help us to appreciate the way of more surpassing excellence.

We are exhorted to remember the Lord Jesus and as we do so, the bread and the cup remind us of love’s way. Our hearts are brought back week-by-week to an appreciation of that sacrificial love and that is to stimulate affection for Christ. God’s ways are not arbitrary in any sense. They are full of tenderness and blessing. Elijah found that God was not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire; He was in the soft gentle voice (See 1 Kings 19:11-12). The prophet had to learn God’s ways. Divine love has been displayed and as learning from Christ, our hearts should be affected by it, for love is to be seen more and more amongst His people. I believe that there is a great call for this today. What do we see in the conflicts amongst men? We see the hatred men show to one another. Thank God for reconciliation amongst His people. The greatest hatred, that middle wall of enclosure, has been broken down by the death of Christ (Ephesians 2:14). Thank Him, too, for the love pervading amongst His own. It is to be a characteristic of God’s people.

Hebrews tells us that the new and living way has been opened up to God. The Hebrew believers were told of the greatness of what has been secured in our Lord Jesus Christ. It eclipsed all that was in the Jewish system. The new and living way, right into the presence of God, has been opened up through the blood of Jesus. So we can now draw near. The approach to God stands open; it is a new, freshly made way and it is by the blood of Jesus. The pathway of Jesus was absolutely perfect. His motives were perfect, His holy movements were perfect, His sacrifice and shedding of His blood were perfect too — “the blood of the Christ, who by the eternal Spirit offered himself spotless to God” (Hebrews 9:14). God’s love was displayed and witnessed to in the shedding of the precious blood of Jesus. His blood is the basis of our redemption and the basis of the new covenant blessing that Israel will enjoy in a day to come. Paul longed to be characterised by that spirit, the spirit of the new covenant, the spirit of divine supply in blessing towards man and amongst His own.

In Psalm 139 we come to the experiences of David. He begins by saying, “Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me”. If you care to read the Psalm you see that the writer was conscious that wherever he went God’s eye was upon him. He says, “If I ascend up into the heavens thou art there; or if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there; if I take the wings of the dawn and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand

shall hold me. And if I say, Surely darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night; even darkness hideth not from thee, and the night shineth as the day: the darkness is as the light. For thou has possessed my reins; thou didst cover me in my mother's womb". He goes over much and he realises that there is no escape from God and nothing can be hid from His eye. Sometimes, we have got to come to that, too. We try one way and another but we have to acknowledge that He knows best. That is the experience many have come to in life's journey, to prove "the good and acceptable and perfect will of God". He makes no mistakes. It may be that we prefer something else and God has in love to take us a way that brings us to the desire expressed by the psalmist: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; prove me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any grievous way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting".

His ways bring us back to the fact that we have to bow to Him, understanding that He knows the end of a thing from the beginning and is set to accomplish His end in each one of us. What an end it will be, each one of us the subject of God's ways. What is He doing now? He is forming in our hearts a treasury of the knowledge of Himself, an appreciation of His love and His blessing towards us. He has in mind the display of that treasure in a coming day. In my parents' house there was a verse hanging on the wall headed, 'Then shall I know':

'Not till the loom is silent, and the shuttles cease to fly,  
Will God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why  
The dark threads are as needful, in the Weaver's skilful hand,  
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.'

What a pattern He has planned! The God who is from eternity and to eternity has planned a wonderful scene that will display His triumph and glory. Christ will be there, the very centre of it and myriads upon myriads of saints, sustained in the power of the Holy Spirit, will praise and adore Christ and yield praises to God. How blessed through divine grace to have a part in that glory scene. What a triumph of His ways. Sometimes there are the dark threads used in the skilfulness of the Weaver in the way that He may take us. It is all part of the pattern to be displayed. How thankful we should be for it.

I believe that we need to understand even at the present time, in a day of public breakdown in the church, that God is never defeated in the accomplishment of His ways. Let our hearts hold on to that. Despite the public breakdown and what may have overtaken the church, God has not given up His thoughts. He will secure glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus eternally. He is securing it now in our hearts that we might be with Him in accord with His ways, with subject



minds and hearts. It will surely yield greater praise to God.

David comes to the point in this Psalm when he says, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; prove me, and know my thoughts”. He would say ‘God’s way is best’. Then he adds, “And see if there be any grievous way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting”. In the Lord’s ways with Peter, recorded in John 21, the Lord searches Peter, and Peter perhaps did not understand but finally he says, “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I am attached to thee.” Then the Lord says clearly to Peter, “Follow thou me”. Peter was to follow in the way everlasting. The Lord would give the lead in a way of life and blessing and glory. “Lead me in the way everlasting”, is the way home to glory. It involves for us the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh to be secured spirit, soul and body for the testimony of our Lord. What a need there is for this today. Paul delighted to be on the heavenly road. What a privilege to be here for the testimony of our Lord, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God and having our eye fixed on Christ on high. Paul was truly in the way everlasting and he looked forward to the crown before him, a crown for all “who love his appearing”.

Paul goes over God’s ways in the epistle to the Romans chapters 9 to 11. The burden of his heart was for the Jews, his brethren according to flesh. How he yearned for them. They were beloved on account of the fathers. The promises were theirs. God has not given up any thought as to that. God will yet bring His earthly people to wonderful blessing. Yet when Paul speaks of God’s earthly people and thinks of the way that the Gentile has been brought in, he comes to the recognition of God’s ways in mercy: “God hath shut up together all in unbelief, in order that he might show mercy to all”.

Do we ever think of mercy? “Mercy was shown me”, says Paul. That was mercy to the chief of sinners. As we think of God’s mercy, does it produce in us an appreciation in our hearts of God’s sovereign operations towards us? We are all the subjects of mercy and that should subdue our hearts and lend an appreciation and tone to every thanksgiving we give to God. There was never a way that was so full of love, grace, mercy, compassion and blessing as that shown by God towards us in Christ. At the thought of mercy Paul breaks out into one of the outstanding doxologies of scripture, “O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways!” He continues, “who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor? Or who has first given to him, and it shall be rendered to him?” What is the answer to all these questions? Do we have an answer? We do not have an answer at all. It is to bow our hearts in adoration to God Himself, the

God who planned the universe for His pleasure and glory and, despite everything, has secured it for Himself through Christ. He has secured us; too, for that scene of glory, we are brought into the blessing of sonship and liberty. You and I, as the subjects of God's operations in grace and mercy have a place before Him. Oh the triumph of it all!

The glory of God's ways is beyond us and yet it moves our hearts to bow in worship now as it will do eternally. So we read, "For of him, and through him, and for him are all things: to him be glory for ever. Amen." We could end with no greater appreciation than that as we think of the end of God's ways.

These thoughts will have their fulness in eternity but we can enter into them now in the power of the Holy Spirit. An appreciation of sovereign mercy gives a sweet tone to responses from our hearts to God. We who are creatures in time have been secured to praise God eternally! The thought bows the heart in worship even now.

May that outflow of praise and worship to God be in greater flow from each heart here, for His name's sake.

*Eric McPhail*

*Address at Defford, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2003.*

## **SPRING, 1915**

And violets and primroses  
My brother vouches he hath seen,  
Fragrant and sweet and innocent,  
On smiling banks, in meadows green!  
Yes, kind and blue are yon clear heavens,  
Yet this to me seems a strange thing,  
That earth, with that red blight of blood,  
Should blossom into a new spring!

But think, soul dazed with grief, how long  
God's gracious sun lights bad and good;  
To godly and blasphemers both,  
How long His kindly earth gives food.  
The heavens that saw just Abel die,  
By brother's hand, still sent their rain  
On fields and gardens tilled and reaped  
By that red hand of cruel Cain.

When came the Maker of the sun,  
The heavenly giver of the rain,  
With light and grace divine for men,  
Yea, for the very race of Cain —  
That glory brighter than the noon  
Ripened no fruit but hate and guilt;  
Then drank this earth more precious blood  
Than Abel's, by hard sinners spilt.

While dead the Lord lay in earth's depths  
Earth glowed in all the grace of Spring,  
And went His crucifiers up  
Their worship to God's shrine to bring.  
Their blood-stained hands the firstfruits brought  
Upon the resurrection day,  
And each appointed offering  
Did duly on the altar lay.

Have we seen men pass to and fro  
Between heaped shrine and blood-drenched sod;  
Seen hands all foul with mire and gore  
Held up in fluent prayer to God?  
But God hath seen such hands and lips  
E'en from the day His Son was slain;  
Yea, He hath watched such ways as these  
Since the altar and the deed of Cain.

If silent still are yon clear heavens,  
If still the sun shines down in peace;  
If every winter warms to spring,  
If summer's harvests do not cease:  
It is because the very cross,  
Which was the crowning crime of man,  
Was yet the sacrifice which won  
The earth for heaven, in God's wise plan;  
Shields men from righteous wrath today,  
Tomorrow shall bring in the Age  
When wars shall cease in righteous peace,  
Shall be far banished the fell rage  
Of men who death and havoc hire  
To reap for them the fields of earth.

Then throned shall sit the Lamb once slain,  
And all shall praise His power and worth.

Thou earth shalt have a lovely spring;  
Thy meadows, banks and streets shall sing;  
When love's once Victim reigns, of all  
Thy kings and lords the Lord and King!  
His glory o'er thee shall shine bright,  
And all the ways of nations light;  
Peace, righteousness and joy shall bloom  
Through all thy lands in heaven's glad sight.

*Alexander Carruthers (1860 - 1930)*

### ALONE

That pathway — O let it be treasured!  
For none ever trod it before.  
Those steps of aloneness unmeasured  
Our spirits must praise and adore.

None, none had been laid in that manger,  
And none had been laid in that grave  
But Jesus, the heavenly Stranger,  
Who came wayward sinners to save.

Alone in the hall of decision  
When judgment was taken away;  
Alone on that cross of derision,  
Of darkness, distress and dismay.

Alone, apprehended and taken,  
While lovers forsook Him and fled;  
Alone, and completely forsaken  
When judgment was poured on His head.

And yet 'twas for us He endured it;  
Alone in perfection was He.  
Our blessing — He only secured it,  
By dying alone on the tree.

Lord, Thou art no longer deserted!  
The Father is sharing His throne  
With Thee, who our judgment averted  
That we might be never alone.

O love unsurpassed and unbounded!  
O love that will ever endure!  
Until in the glory surrounded  
With those Thou hast died to secure.

*Doris Markham*

## **DEATH AND LIFE**

O Son of God! When we recall  
The shades of sad Gethsemane,  
The wounds, the bitter cup of gall,  
The cross endured so patiently.

Thy sacred person we discern,  
And in Thy death see love divine!  
We worship Thee with hearts that burn  
To see Thy face in glory shine.

For Thee, Lord Jesus, were the tears,  
The thorny crown, the blackest night;  
For us, a "life for endless years",  
With all Thy ransomed saints in light.

Had we the kingdoms of this earth,  
How vain would such an offering be!  
All Thy redeemed must know Thy worth  
Throughout the great eternity.

Of Thine assembly hear the praise  
(An anthem that shall never cease);  
Already, Lord, the voice we raise  
In notes of heavenly joy and peace.

*J.R.M. (from the French)*

## GRAFFITI WITH A DIFFERENCE

A cell-block in Richmond castle in Yorkshire contains a strange testimony to faith in God, written on the walls by christian conscientious objectors who were held prisoner there during the early years of the 1914-18 war. Feelings ran high in the general population against conscientious objection. Men who refused to fight were sent white feathers or sarcastic invitations to join the girl guides. Banners were set up with words like “Conchies are a disgrace to our town” and people wrote to newspapers calling for them to be horse whipped. All this must have added to the pressure on those who did not want to bear arms.

Conscription for the armed services was introduced early in 1916 but the legislation allowed men to appeal against military service on grounds of occupation, hardship, faith, or moral beliefs. Tribunals were set up to assess the cases of those seeking exemption. Many of those who objected to the taking of life went into the Non-Combatant Corps but others, including some christians, thought it right to seek total exemption from the war effort. Where this was not granted, they were sent to prison and some were held at Richmond.

The dreary and flaking walls of the cells at Richmond bear the inscriptions they wrote. Many are difficult to read and some totally secular; others were written by serving soldiers who were imprisoned for other reasons and used the walls to record the way that they despised conscientious objectors. Yet among the writings are some that stand out as an evidence of true Christian faith and what they wrote still has a message for us.

Bert Brocklesby, a Methodist preacher from Doncaster, drew a kneeling figure crushed by a heavy weight with the inscription:

“Every cross grows light beneath  
The shadow, Lord, of Thine”

Others quoted passages from the Bible. One wrote:

“And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10).

Perhaps one of the most striking inscriptions is the following poem:

Precious thought, my Father knoweth,  
In His love I rest,  
For whate'er my Father doeth  
Must be always best.  
Well I know the heart that planned  
Nought but good for me,

Joy and sorrow interwoven,  
Love in all, I see.  
Precious thought, my Father knoweth,  
Careth for His child,  
Bids me nestle closer to Him  
When the storms beat wild.  
Though my earthly hopes are shattered  
And the tear drops fall,  
Yet He is Himself my solace,  
Yea, my all in all.

The conscientious objectors held in Richmond castle were secretly taken to France in May 1916, along with a number of others, as part of a plan to discipline and possibly execute them for disobeying orders in the presence of the enemy. This plan was not carried out and eventually the men were returned to England. Most were sent to Dartmoor or to Maidstone Prison where they were held until the end of the war.

*(The cells at Richmond Castle are not open to the public and thanks are due to Lorraine Cooper for arranging access and for other help in the preparation of this article.)*

*Ed.*

## **THE CONVERSION OF A BUDDHIST PARATROOPER**

Joe was a foreign Paratrooper, a Buddhist by religion, stationed at RAF Stafford where he was on a training course. Joe was not his real name but this was what his RAF colleagues called him. The date was 1941, and one Sunday afternoon Joe was so bored that he readily accepted an RAF Chaplain's invitation to come to the chapel and see what a church service was like. A member of the congregation sat with him to help him find the places.

The text for the sermon was from Acts 5 about Ananias and Sapphira who sold a possession and in giving money for God's work, brought it to the apostles and kept back part of the price for themselves, while pretending that they were giving the full price to God. There was no reference in the short sermon to sinners needing a Saviour, or to the way that Christ died for our sins. As the chaplain was to admit later, the sermon that day was

quite unsuitable for Joe. Yet whether the sermon was suitable or not, God was at work!

After the service Joe asked to see the chaplain. He came into the room and in front of several airmen said bluntly, 'I am a sinner and I need a Saviour; there is only one Saviour and that is Jesus and I want Him.' When Joe and the Chaplain were alone, Joe asked the Lord Jesus to come into his heart and life and to be his Saviour. Then he thanked Him for coming in. Joe quite simply and sincerely trusted Him as his Saviour. The Chaplain gave Joe a copy of the Bible to read.

The next morning Joe looked tired and this was not surprising for he had been reading the Bible until 2.30 am! Having trusted in the Saviour Joe found that the Bible contained God's word to him. There was a lot in the Bible that Joe did not understand but even so he realised that it was a personal message to him. Later Joe got a Bible in his own language.

When he came to leave the camp, he did not pack his two Bibles with his other luggage but carried them in his hand as a testimony to his new found faith in Christ. As he went round and shook hands with the RAF officers in the camp, many of them looked startled, or even mocking, when they saw the Bibles he was carrying. Joe was no longer a Buddhist; he was trusting in Jesus and was not ashamed of it.

## **PRAYER**

We are not told that the Lord Jesus taught His disciples to preach, but He did teach them to pray. Christ Himself prayed, but His disciples fell asleep when prayer was most needed in Gethsemane.

Prayer is learnt by praying. Prayer is not just going through a routine but is the personal life-breath of every christian. Our history with Him begins with the simple prayer to the Lord to come into our lives and to cleanse us from our sins. That sincere and simple prayer will change your life and we are to continue to pray for the rest of our lives. Prayer is not just a parachute to use when our 'plane' is falling! Nor is prayer to be a shopping list of wants for yourself and others. Prayer is as important to spiritual life as physical breathing is to our body.



Prayer can be at any time in any place but it is good to have a quiet place to get alone to talk to God. God loves His children to speak to Him. Prayer changes people and problems. Our love for God is so little, alas! His love for us is wonderfully great. He is full of loving kindness and tender mercies.

In my efforts to serve the Lord I soon found how easy it was to be so busy seeking to help others that I was often too tired or too short of time to pray myself. A daily quiet time at the beginning of every day can so easily be neglected or become formal with serious results for one's own special relationship with the Lord Himself. In the Acts we read that, "They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). We must begin every day with him. The habit of the quiet time is most important and is revealed in our actions throughout the day.

The Lord Jesus is often recorded in Scripture as praying to the Father. His pattern must become ours. In the Old Testament, the book of Nehemiah is a wonderful example of the way a man of prayer again and again called on God. Each time, the crises, the hopeless situation, the obvious defeat became glory to God. (Read Nehemiah 1:4, 2:4, 4:4-9, 5:9, 6:9) In fact the whole book of Nehemiah is a good example of the New Testament injunction to "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Sleepless nights can be precious moments when one has Someone with whom to talk, One who never sleeps! My mother was a widow for thirty years and often spent many sleepless hours. Someone suggested that she should try counting sheep. She replied, 'I gave that up years ago; now I talk to the Shepherd'.

The sweetness of His presence makes the sense of loneliness all the more worthwhile and He Himself is our real life. He said, "Lo, I am with you always". Remember that God is concerned about the little things. The Lord Jesus spoke about two sparrows being sold for a farthing, or five sparrows for two farthings, "yet not one of them is forgotten before God" (Luke 12:6 & Matthew 10:29). "Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows..."

In Thessalonians we read, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). What a

challenge it is! Do you remember how the Lord Jesus thanked the Father as He prayed? In feeding the five thousand He gave thanks before He fed them (John 6:11). Before He raised Lazarus, He thanked the Father for hearing Him (John 11:41). When He took the cup and the bread as setting on the Lord's Supper, He gave thanks (Luke 22:17 & 19).

In faith we must learn to pray with thanksgiving, no matter how difficult the circumstances may be. We know God has the answer already and He is able and willing to give the absolutely right answer every time. It is thus that our faith in God grows stronger and the peace that comes to us is His perfect peace. As prayer becomes much more than just saying, 'Give me', so joy takes the place of anxiety. As praying without ceasing becomes walking with Him, we get to know from our own experiences that "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

God looks to us in all circumstances to exercise faith in Him and to lift up our hearts in prayerful thanksgiving, making our requests known to Him and yet at the same time thanking God in faith and anticipation of His provision. Pray with thanksgiving and you will rejoice with continual gladness. Underline in your Bible Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

*Keith Ensor (1991)*

## **EXODUS.**

The main subject of the Book of Exodus is Redemption. As slaves of Pharaoh, the children of Israel afford a fitting picture of ourselves as under the bondage of sin. Satan, the god of this world, held us captive by the pleasures and allurements of the world. Our hearts naturally answered to the attractions he placed before us, for we are sinful by nature. God, however, came down to deliver Israel — and in Christ God came down to deliver us.

There were two parts to Israel's redemption: first by the blood of the Passover lamb, and then by the power of God which brought them through

the Red Sea. In the first case they were saved from the righteous judgment of God; in the second they were delivered from the slavery of Pharaoh and Egypt. These matters, a pattern of the twofold effect of the death of Jesus, are of greatest importance. The believer is entitled to say, 'God will never judge me; for Christ has borne the judgment. His blood has been shed; it has been sprinkled, as it were, upon the lintel and two side posts'. Nothing else can shelter us from God's righteous judgment but the precious blood of Christ is a perfect shelter, for it is a witness that the judgment has been borne.

Then, too, through Jesus' death and resurrection we are set free from the slavery of sin. In resurrection Jesus has taken His place as Lord; and if we own Him as Lord and confess His name the power that Satan has through sin is broken in our souls. Moses is a type or picture of the Lord Jesus, and it was under his leading that the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea and for ever left Egypt.

In Jesus' death the world as a system was judged. The Lord Himself said, "Now is the judgment of this world". Very few believers rightly understand what the world is. I do not refer to the material world, that is the earth, but to the world as a system. Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and from that day onwards Satan has been doing all that is possible to make man happy away from God. By this means Satan seeks to keep people under his control. Many so-called "good things" are part of Satan's world. Even the name of Christianity he has added to his world to beautify its appearance and so deceive people. The world shows its character because the rule of God through the Lord Jesus is refused.

Under the leadership of Moses the children of Israel were conducted through the Red Sea and their every need was met in their wilderness position. The manna satisfied their hunger; the water from the smitten rock quenched their thirst. God also gave them seasons of refreshment, such as Elim; and the Sabbath was a sweet anticipation of that rest to which they journeyed. Let us note that the first song in the Bible is found in Exodus 15 and also that the Sabbath is again mentioned in chapter 16:3. It is given for the sake

of man in Exodus. In Genesis 2 God's rest was disturbed by sin. Therefore there is neither song nor Sabbath until after there is redemption.

Another principle is also introduced, namely, the covenant. God had spoken of a covenant in Noah's day and also in Abraham's; but here a covenant is made with the children of Israel. This is what is referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews as the 'old covenant'. Its terms or conditions were dependent upon the people of Israel keeping God's law. Since this was so, the whole position of the children of Israel was changed after this (see chapter 30, etc.). The idea of a relationship or a bond is always suggested in a covenant. If one person stands in a certain relation to another in a covenant, there is a bond between them. The terms may differ according to what the agreement is; but it always supposes a certain and definite relationship between those affected by the covenant.

The terms of the new covenant are a contrast to the old. The new rests on God's "I will", as we see in Hebrews 8. Believers to-day are not under law but under grace. In the new covenant we know God who loves us and who will remember our sins no more. He is always on these terms with us. It is an abiding and definite relationship, and our hearts are on this footing with God. He is our God (see 2 Corinthians 3; Hebrews 7:7, etc.; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

In chapter 25 God told the children of Israel to make Him a tabernacle so that He might dwell among them. To-day God has builded His people together to be His dwelling-place by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).

Moses put the tabernacle together; and it is only as we are subject to the Lord Jesus that we are practically built together into one dwelling-place for God (see Exodus 40 and 1 Corinthians 14).

*Malcolm Biggs*

*In the next issue, God willing, "Leviticus"*