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Living Water

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MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES — LAODICEA

“And to the angel of the assembly in Laodicea write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God:

“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would that thou wert cold or hot. Thus because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and am grown rich, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art the wretched and the miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold purified by fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white garments, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness may not be made manifest; and eye-salve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see. I rebuke and discipline as many as I love; be zealous therefore and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking; if anyone hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him and he with me.

“He that overcomes, to him will I give to sit with me in my throne; as I also have overcome, and have sat down with my Father in his throne.

“He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.”
(Revelation 3:14-22)

When we read of the conditions in Laodicea, what strikes one most is the fact that it is so like the state of world today. People are so taken up with their own cleverness and prosperity that there is no room for God’s work among them. Yet even where a christian company has got into such a state, the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus is seen in that He is at the door and still knocking.

Laodicea represents one of the saddest failures. The church should be bearing light and witness to Christ but any witness that there was must have almost gone. That is important to note in the present time, when much that professes the name of Christ is little different from the characteristics that mark the world.

It is very clear in Laodicea that something had gone wrong within. Visitors to this locality might have thought that all was well but the secret link with Christ, essential for each one of us if we are to be kept livingly on the christian way, had been largely lost. The tragedy at Laodicea was that, having lost what was so vital, they were completely unaware of it. They said that they had need of nothing.

The church in Laodicea suffered from a great deal of self- deception. They say, “I am rich, and am grown rich, and have need of nothing”. By contrast the Lord says, “thou art the wretched and the miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”. We need to get the Lord’s view of the situation as it actually is. It is a serious matter to deceive ourselves. John tells us elsewhere, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

The Lord’s view is very clear. His description of the condition in Laodicea is severe and was intended to bring to light who was true and who was not in that company. Those who thought they were all right would have been indignant about this assessment. There would have been others, through God’s grace, who were prepared to accept it as the Lord’s word, who were prepared to be zealous and repent, to cease from being lukewarm and be something very different. It would stimulate those that had a real desire to be right, to let the Lord into their lives. The Lord envisages that someone would be convicted by His rebuke and awakened to the fact that He did not have the place in the company that He should have.

The Lord presents Himself to Laodicea as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness”. The church ought to have been a faithful and true witness to Christ and the Lord would recall them to it. He is the “Amen”, nothing can be added after the Lord has spoken. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “For whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea, and in him the amen, for glory to God by us” (2 Corinthians 1:20). We are to be sure that in Christ we are on solid ground.

The second feature that the Lord brings before them is His glory as the “beginning of the creation of God”. That is, He is the starting point of all that God has ever done or will do, of all that is for His pleasure. It

emphasises the contrast that there was not much for God's pleasure in the church in Laodicea.

In presenting Himself in this way the Lord would remind them of what had come to them when they had read Paul's letter to the Colossians which was to be read in Laodicea also: "And when the letter has been read among you, cause that it be read also in the assembly of the Laodiceans..." (Colossians 4:16). That epistle particularly brings out the glory of Christ as creator: "... because by him were created all things...all things have been created by him and for him. And he is before all, and all things subsist together by him" (Colossians 1:15-17). Christ is "firstborn of all creation", the One who has the chief place.

It has often been remarked that "firstborn" is not to convey that the Lord had any origin; He always was from eternity, but He has the first place in what is for God. That is to put an end to the empty self-opinionated state that the Laodiceans had fallen into. Alas due to our natural ways of thinking, we fall very easily into the same thing.

Those in Laodicea thought that they had need of nothing, but they needed to be restored in their link with Christ. If they had taken to heart what had been written in the epistle to the Colossians they would never have got into this condition. They needed to "seek the things which are above, where the Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God: have your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth; for ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-3).

In Laodicea they were lukewarm. It is interesting that the Lord, in bringing in correction, brings forward some material illustrations. The Laodiceans knew about lukewarm water. Their water supply came from the hot springs at Hierapolis by means of an aqueduct. By the time it arrived at Laodicea it was lukewarm and had to be left for a while before it could be drunk. Similarly, Laodicea was a place famous for eye treatment. The Lord draws on these material things to bring their condition home to them.

Even with a company like Laodicea all was not lost. The Lord brings in the remedy and tells them how to avail themselves of it. They were counselled to buy from Him:

- “gold purified by fire, that thou mayest be rich;...
- white garments, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness may not be made manifest;
- and eye-salve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see”.

Before anyone can buy from Christ they must have a known link with Him. There is true spiritual riches to be had from Him. The apostle Paul in writing to the Philippians gives an example of what it is to buy “gold purified by fire” from the Lord. He recounted to the Philippians some of the things which were an advantage to him as a man after the flesh, how he was a “Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, persecuting the assembly; as to righteousness which is in the law, found blameless” (Philippians 3:5-6). But he continues, “but what things were gain to me these I counted, on account of Christ, loss. But surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all, and count them to be filth, that I may gain Christ...” (Vs.7-8). What a pattern this is!

The second part of the remedy is “white garments”. Clothing is what is seen by others. It is that which is of Christ which is to show in our daily walk. In a world of uncleanness, how important it is to have white garments. Without such garments the Laodiceans were naked.

Finally, there is “eye-salve...that thou mayest see”. It speaks of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Without Him we cannot see things in their moral and spiritual import. We need constantly to cry to the Spirit of God that He might give us understanding, that we might see things as the Lord sees them.

The Lord makes a most touching appeal here. He not only knocks at the door that was closed against Him in this church but he speaks as well. He says, “If anyone hear My voice and open the door”. The knocking might awaken the conscience but His voice is to stir the heart. His great desire was that the overcomer should come to light. In the Song of Songs we read: “The voice of my beloved! he knocketh: Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, mine undefiled” (Song of Songs 5:2). There the spouse

was moved by the Lord's voice even though sometimes her response was inadequate. She was moved by His call and regretted the fact that at times she had not done more in answer to it. The Lord's call is to revive our affections for Him.

The Lord speaks of Himself as the One who has overcome. It refers to His pathway on earth, as He said to His disciples, "be of good courage: I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The world consists of everything that is independent of God and includes all the features found in Laodicea that the overcomer there would have to meet. The Lord would strengthen the overcomer in this way.

We must beware of the danger of thinking that Laodicean conditions apply only to others. These messages were to be read by all of the companies. Therefore, the word to Laodicea was a word of warning to those in Philadelphia or in Ephesus or anywhere else. We need to take account of these words to the churches that way. John, at the end of Revelation, when the holy city comes down out of heaven from God, shows what the church is in the divine mind and all should learn from it.

There is a challenge to all these companies; even to Ephesus the Lord said 'I will take your lamp out of its place'. What came in at Laodicea is a moral condition that can arise in a company if the Lord is disregarded and pride in our own ability and resources gets the first place. It would seem, from Paul's instruction that the letter to the Colossians was to be read at Laodicea, that the Laodiceans had once been a far better company than they now were. That is a challenge we all have to face.

Based on a Bible reading at Bromley, March 2003

Laodicea, known today as Eski-hissar, is in ruins. It is sited near Hierapolis and Colosse. Laodicea was very wealthy and was a centre of banking in the ancient world. Aesculapius, god of healing, was worshipped here and there is some evidence that eye salve was produced.

(This concludes this series on the Lord's word to the assemblies.)

OVERCOMERS — OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

“He that overcomes, to him will I give to sit with me in my throne; as I also have overcome, and have sat down with my Father in his throne”
(Revelation 3:21)

The Lord in His word to Laodicea says of Himself, “I also have overcome, and have sat down with my Father in his throne”. One of the glories of the Lord Jesus Christ is that of Overcomer.

Before He began His public service after fasting for forty days He was tempted by Satan in three different temptations. Others in these circumstances would have succumbed but Jesus overcame Satan skilfully and carefully, quoting the exact scripture that met the challenge Satan brought forward. What an overcomer Jesus is! What an example to us He is as a blessed Man.

During His three years of service Jesus overcame in all kinds of situations. His natural relatives at one time reproached Him and said, “He is out of His mind” (Mark 3:21) He met that challenge. He always held natural relationships in a right way, in a balanced way that put God’s rights first.

Jesus met tremendous opposition from the doctors of the law and the Pharisees. They asked Him all kinds of questions to trip Him up. As a christian, I often find it hard to answer people that ask awkward questions. Sometimes, I lose my temper. Sometimes I say things that I should not say. Jesus gave perfect answers. We all need to feed our souls on the way Jesus met such challenges. At the end of His public service He could truly say, “I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Before our Lord’s betrayal and crucifixion the awfulness of what lay before Him as He was about to go to the cross and be made sin pressed upon him. Yet, He says to His Father: “not my will but thine be done”. When He was on the cross He overcame “him who has the might of death, that is, the devil” in order that He “might set free all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14-15). How wonderful to be set free by Christ! He said: “If therefore the Son shall set you free ye shall be really free”

(John 8:36). Jesus came to set men free so that they themselves might be overcomers in whatever situations they might have to face.

As having overcome He has sat down with His Father in His throne.

Ken Hollands

This is the final extract from an address in Glasgow, 8th September 2001

LIGHTING THE LAMPS

Numbers 8: 1-4

Luke 11: 29-33

Luke 15: 8-9

Revelation 21: 23

These scriptures speak of lamps, the first three of lighting lamps, and the fourth of a lamp that will not go out. On the first day of creation God said, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). Paul tells us, "Because it is the God who spoke that out of darkness light should shine who has shone in our hearts for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:6-7). It is God's intention that from feeble, earthly vessels here, the light of the knowledge of this glory in the face of Jesus should shine out.

When Jesus came into this dark world John tells us that, "The true light...lightens every man" (John 1:9). Every soul that came into contact with Him found themselves totally exposed with that pure light that shone on them but with it the knowledge of God. That is true today. The light of Jesus in the gospel brings all into conflict with their conscience and God, as each is exposed in the true light. Jesus (the Light of the World) went on to suffering and death at Calvary... "The sun riseth and goeth down" (Ecclesiastes 1:5).

In Numbers 8 Aaron is told to light the lamps. I suggest that the application of this scripture is that when Jesus went on high, raised from the dead, ascended and glorified, the lamps were lit down here. Through the

outpouring of the Holy Spirit, light as regards Christ in glory shines through vessels down here. The wonderful light of Christ glorified shone through the twelve apostles and Paul and the other believers. The lamps are still burning today. They have never gone out!. The face of Christ is the point from which the knowledge of the glory of God is focussed into the hearts of earthen vessels so that the magnificence of His glory and beauty should shine here through His own. The Holy Spirit, dwelling in those that belong to Christ, bears witness to the glory of the Man in heaven.

The believer is to shine in the assembly and outside. Paul says, “that ye may be harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation; among whom ye appear as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life...” (Philippians 2:15-16). We are to be witnesses of His glory in heaven and of the knowledge of God in testimony to all.

Jesus here was the light of the world. Yet, too, He had come to the house of Israel and, as He said, “no one having lit a lamp sets it in secret, nor under the corn measure, but on the lamp-stand, that they who enter in may see the light”. The light of God, His love, purposes and blessing shone in Christ for the house of Israel. It was not concealed. Jesus said that He did nothing in secret. All that enter in may see it. Luke was a gentile, but he entered in and the light shone for him! What a wondrous light Jesus is and what wonderful shining there is in Him.

Then when this shining appears in one of us, in an earthen vessel, it is not to be hidden under the corn measure (i.e. at work), nor under the bed (through lethargy and laziness); it is to be set in centre of the house on the lamp stand, so that all who come in may see it. Let our homes be filled with the shining of Christ and His glory. Our homes should be known as places where the Lord Jesus is honoured.

In Luke 15 we read of a lamp being lit as part of that diligent search that was made for a lost silver coin. Part of a Jewish bride’s dowry included silver coins to adorn her bridal head-dress. They were there as a resource and reserve should she come into need during her life. “What woman”,

says the Lord, “having ten drachmas, if she lose one...”

In application, that silver piece speaks of a person who knows what it is to be redeemed, who has the head of the realm on them (understands something of the authority and lordship of Christ) and knows what it is to be part of the bride to a husband who loves her. These three things are suggested in this silver piece (person) that is lost in the house.

In the lamp being lit and the house being swept, lies the suggestion of the word of God being opened and applied to that person by the Holy Spirit’s gentle and gracious service. The lamp of God’s word would cast a light upon everything. The sweeping is not like a tornado with a large broom, but the Greek word suggests a gentle winnowing action. How sensitive and gentle is the service of the Holy Spirit.

If a Christian has become cold, disinterested and lost in the house, skill and care is needed to apply God’s word in a sensitive and gentle way, to attempt to effect a remedy. Let us ever remember the value of one soul to the Lord. Each one cost His life and blood.

Revelation 21:2-3 shows the holy city filled by the light of a lamp that never goes out. It is not a question of its being lit. Jesus ascended and filled heaven with His radiance, love and glory. The city come down from God, having His glory, illuminates the whole scene. There is no need of the sun or of the moon “for the glory of God has enlightened it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb. And the nations will walk by its light...”(Revelation 21:23-24).

The whole glory of God focussed through the Lamb (the One who suffered and died in ignominy and shame) will illuminate the scene for the divine pleasure and that light will never go out. The saints will be full of joy and praise. As the hymn puts it:

‘There only to adore,
Our souls their strength shall find’

Philip Robinson

Extracts from an address at Chippenham, 17th November 2001

HYMN TO THE FATHER

Father now as to Thy praise,
Joined in soul the voice we raise:
Of Thine own we bring to Thee,
One in heart and melody.

Great Thou art, exceeding thought!
Great the wonders Thou hast wrought!
Greatness heaven and earth declare,
Great in love beyond compare.

Father, tis in Christ, Thy Son,
Love has triumphed, Thou hast won,
For Thy joy eternally
Those He leadeth home to Thee.

A. W. Roach

SONG FOR THE LORD'S DAY

Lord Jesus, love has drawn us
Aside, to think of Thee,
Afresh Thy grace to ponder
Thy love, so rich and free.
In rest as set together
Thy peace upon us here,
The objects of Thy favour,
Invite Thy drawing near.

We think on Thee, Lord Jesus,
The Holy One of God
Made sin: from sin to free us
On Thee was laid the load.
O grace supreme, expressing
A love beyond compare,
Vast, infinite, the blessing
Our spirits now may share.

Lord Jesus, we shall gather
Enraptured to Thy side,
No longer shame, but glory,
Thy love then satisfied.
There, stilled each earnest longing,
Each one shall utter praise,
The saints around Thee thronging
Complete the tale of grace.

A. W. Roach

WHO WOULD BE GREATEST?

“And a reasoning came in amongst them, who should be the greatest...And Jesus...said to them...he who is the least among you all, he is great.”
(Luke 9:46-48)

Amongst themselves they strove – Who shall be chief.
A little child His choice, His mind to teach.
Whoso of you is great, a servant shall be;
The first be last – ‘Ye needs converted be’.

Let this mind be in you, nor reputation seek;
He, who, though very God, as Bondman meek
Came but to serve – His life a ransom give –
Was humbled here; yea, died that we might live.

A. W. Roach

A SERVANT OF THE LORD TAKEN TO REST

The midnight hour had passed, the dawn was waking,
The labourer freed from toil was soon to be.
This, this alone would stir the silence breaking:–
‘The Master comes, is calling now for thee’.

‘I’m coming!’ Just this note of exclamation
Escaped the lips, the spirit then had flown –
With Christ to be, to wait the jubilation
Of raptured saints when Christ claims all His own.

Fond memory weaves in thread of recollection,
The fellowship enjoyed in days of yore;
For wisdom's word – which cometh of reflection
He often spoke: his was indeed good store.

This faith be ours, his joy (tears notwithstanding)
The Lord Himself e'en now would have us prove –
His perfect wisdom, grace, His understanding –
His excellent, surpassing way of love.

A. W. Roach

WHAT IS BELIEVING

“Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:28-29)

‘You say, Believe and be saved’, said a man in a railway carriage to whom I had given a gospel tract. ‘Your tract says that all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will certainly be saved and that all who receive Him by faith are made free from the eternal consequences of their own personal transgressions.’

‘Do you believe this yourself?’ I asked.

‘I have thought about it but I cannot understand it’, he replied. ‘If we are told only to believe and we shall be saved, how can I know that my faith is of the right sort? There is such a thing as an assent of the mind. Will that save?’

‘The Bible’, I replied, ‘says, ‘If thou shalt believe in thy heart’ (Romans 10:9). True belief causes us to receive God’s gift with thankfulness; it is followed by love and obedience. Not that we are commanded to love and obey God in order to be saved; but these effects – love and obedience – will surely follow a true faith’.

‘But what I want to know is, Have I true faith?’ he replied.

‘If you were in debt, and I had money, and gave you leave to draw on me for all you needed, it would not pay your debt to say, ‘I hear there is money at the bank for those who apply in a proper manner,’ while you yet went on struggling with poverty and increasing your debts every day, and yet refusing to apply for the money. In that case I should know that either you were indifferent about your debts, or that you were too proud to accept a favour at my hands.’

‘That seems clear; but still the Bible speaks about working out our salvation with fear and trembling. That seems to imply that something is required of us beyond merely believing’

‘You quote correctly’, I replied, ‘but if you look at the epistle to the Philippians, in which this passage occurs, you will see that it is not addressed to unbelieving sinners, but to “the saints which were at Philippi”; persons of whom Paul says, that they had always obeyed in his presence, but now much more in his absence. He says “work out your own salvation”; so that salvation was already their own: as though he had given them a sketch, and had bidden them fill it up; or had given them a garden, and encouraged them to work in it, because it was their own. They were to work out their own salvation, because God was working in them by His Holy Spirit, to will and to do of His good pleasure.’

‘But’, said my companion, ‘I want to feel all this’.

‘People often do’ I replied. ‘They want to feel before they will believe God. When they have received God’s word simply, they will soon feel happy; but feeling is not believing. A man that has true faith takes God at his word, and believes he is saved because He has said, “He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life”. A simple heart says ‘I am a lost sinner; God has given His Son to die for sinners: all He requires is that we should come to Him.’ Believing this, accepting Jesus as my Saviour, according to God’s free gift, I will come to God, saying, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!” God would not have made me this offer if He had not intended to fulfil it. I believe that the blood of Christ is of sufficient value to wash away all the sins of ten thousand worlds, but that nothing that I can do is of any value in this respect.’

‘It is so difficult for us to believe that there is nothing for us to do’, said my companion

‘There is plenty for us to do’, I replied, ‘when we are once admitted by faith into God’s family; but we can do nothing acceptable to God till then.. If you had a large establishment and offered to receive me as your servant, would it not be folly for me to stand at the door, and try to do little odd jobs for you, in order to entitle me to be your servant? It is more than doubtful whether you would accept my work, or pay me for it if I did it in that way. God is willing to bring you into the favour of sonship and to have you as His servant; but you must begin by the right way’.

‘Christ is the door by which you must enter; faith is the hand that knocks at the door. Knock at the door; but do not knock and run away. Stand at the door, expect to be admitted; knock, and knock again, if there seem any delay; do nothing else. Do not go away! Do not think so much about whether you knock properly, as about what Christ has promised’.

‘Promised what?’

‘Why, that whosoever believeth on Him shall have everlasting life; that they who ask, shall receive; and they who seek shall find, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.’

Here the train stopped and my companion alighted. I was sorry to part from his company but I besought the Lord to give him faith to receive what had been said to him from the Bible and what was contained in the tract that I had left with him. Our conversation lasted only a few minutes; but I hope it contained words whereby he might be saved.

I have put in a plain manner on paper what passed, that others who know not clearly what faith is and what God requires of a sinner, may be led to seek and find salvation, by faith in the blood of a crucified and risen Saviour.

There is no mistake made by those who are concerned about salvation more common than this – the lack of perception of what parts of the Bible are addressed to those who are unsaved sinners and those who are saved sinners. All mankind are divided into two classes: those who are in Christ and those who are not. If I am in Christ there are abundant instructions for

my behaviour as a child and servant of God; I am expected so to walk as to please Him and I am furnished with a power to do this, in the Holy Spirit that is given to me.

But, if I am not yet in Christ, God has but one word for me – He invites me to come to Him through Jesus. He assures me that there is a hearty welcome for me if I will only come to Him. This is the single point at issue – Will I come to Christ? If you will, you instantly become His child and His servant; you are within the house and the rules of the house are given to regulate my conduct. If you will not, God solemnly warns of the inevitable consequence – wrath to come.

Emily Gosse (1806-1857)

The first of three articles

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THE CALL OF THE LORD

Every servant of God has to face the fact that God has called him or her out of darkness into the light, out of the world into the kingdom that is not of this world. From Genesis to Revelation it is the story of God calling men and women. From the early faith of Abel, Noah, Abraham, David, Elijah and of thousands of others all known to God right down to the present time, there are those who have known and trusted in God.

Always the marks of a true servant of God have been the scars of suffering and loneliness in this world. True, some have claimed and expected God-given success on becoming Christians but the greatest glory to God has always come from the patient faith of a suffering believer.

Christ came for us along a road that was tough and hard. He warned all His followers, “He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:38). The cross is not an ornament, nor something that anyone would want to carry in a procession – I think that is nearly mockery. It was a terrible, awesome, cruel method of publicly executing the worst of men.

Perhaps one of the hardest things for a Christian to bear today is the loneliness of being out of step, not only with the world but even with other professing Christians. Naturally people, young and old, are reassured and inspired by a crowd of others together but the Holy Ghost speaks to individuals personally and does not sway crowds. Satan sways crowds and claims the authority as the prince of this world.

Christ was alone at home. His family did not believe on Him, the Bible says, and certainly the Jewish religious leaders not only rejected Him but also demanded His crucifixion. Christ came to call us out from amongst the rest, not to unite us with the world.

Increasingly Christians who really believe God's holy word and who sincerely seek to walk with Christ, seeking Him and His presence, are finding themselves separated from those who seem to be content to walk in a very wide fellowship. God predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son (see Romans 8:29). The searching of the Scriptures is much more important than reading good books or commentaries. Praying that the Holy Ghost will teach us what we are and show us Christ in all the scriptures is so important.

There is only one remedy for loneliness in the heart and life of a Christian and that is Christ Himself. He loves us and longs for our love and personal fellowship. The need today, as ever, is Christ in you and me, and only Christ can satisfy our hungry and thirsty spirits. Would that we really hungered and thirsted after Him!

Remember that the world and the worldly Christian has no more room or love for Christ than the Jewish religious leaders had for Him two thousand years ago. He is still "despised and rejected" of men today. If Christ is really seen in you then the devil will surely attack you viciously and maliciously from all directions with bitter hatred, as well as seeking to get you off guard with charming pleasantness, for he can use psychology in his efforts to draw us from Christ. Our safety, our assurance comes from Christ in the scriptures and we each need Him daily afresh, as the children of Israel gathered the manna fresh each morning.

Keith Ensor (1982)

THE STORM ON THE LAKE

“And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship... And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?”

And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?”
(Mark 4:36-40)

The enemy would raise up a storm against them. Apparently Christ took no notice of their situation. They call upon Him, and awake Him by cries, which He answers in grace. He speaks to the wind and the sea, and there is a great calm. At the same time He rebukes their unbelief. They should have counted upon Him and His divine power, and not have thought that He was going to be swallowed up by the waves. They should have remembered their own connection with Him – that, by grace, they were associated with Him. What tranquillity was His! The storm does not disturb Him. Devoted to His work, He took His rest at the moment when service did not require His activity. He rested during the passage. His service only afforded Him those moments snatched by circumstances from labour. His divine tranquillity, which knew no distrust, allowed Him to sleep during the storm.

It was not so with the disciples; and, forgetful of His power, unaware of the glory of Him who was with them, they think only of themselves, as though Jesus had forgotten them. One word on His part displays in Him the Lord of creation. This is the real state of the disciples when Israel is set aside. The storm arises. Jesus appears to take no heed. Now faith would have recognised that they were in the same ship with Him. That is to say, that if Jesus leaves the seed He has sown to grow until the harvest, He is, none the less, in the same vessel; He shares, not the less truly, the lot of His followers, or rather they share His. The dangers are the danger He and His work are in. That is, there is really none.

And how great is the foolishness of unbelief. Think of their supposing, when the Son of God has come into the world to accomplish redemption and the settled purposes of God, that by, to man's eye, an accidental storm, He and all His work should be unexpectedly sunk in the lake! We are, blessed be His name, in the same boat with Him. If the Son of God does not sink, neither shall we.

J. N. Darby

Extracted from the "Synopsis of the Books of the Bible" Vol. 3 pp 160-161.

Have you thought of Mark 4:35-39 as a figure of the present time? The Lord is asleep; that is, He is not intervening in any outward way to quiet the wind or waves that buffet His own. The question is, 'Are we content to trust Him asleep?' To bear the buffetings of the storm in the quiet rest of knowing that He is near, even if He moves not to still the tumult? To do so is the present triumph of faith. How often, alas! unbelief wakes Him, instead of the soul being subject to the charge addressed to the daughters of Jerusalem: "I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, or by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake, till he please (Song of Songs 3:5). The gazelle and the hind suggest the swiftness with which He can move when the suited moment comes, and He pleases to arise and deliver His own. Till then it is our wisdom to trust Him in all His love and power so near to us, though outwardly He gives no sign of moving on our behalf. Depend upon it, though He may be asleep as to outward intervention, His heart wakes with deep and abiding interest in His own and all their testings and sorrows.

C. A. Coates

Extracted from the "Letters of C. A. Coates" pp 59 -60

“A GREAT CALM”

Mark 4:39

Fierce rushed the winds in sudden blast
Down from the hills of Naphtali;
The twilight sky was overcast,
With foaming crest arose the sea.

‘Master, awake! We perish all!’
To Him who calmly sleeping lies;
But louder shrieked the mountain squall,
And darker seemed the lowering skies.

He spoke, and the shrill, piping gale
The Master’s voice divine obeyed,
Subsiding to a feeble wail –
And the proud billows low were laid.

Then o’er the lake, from east to west,
The last faint ripple softly dies,
The winds sink, whispering, to rest,
And smooth as glass the water lies.

“Where is your faith?” we seem to hear,
As heard that trembling crew of yore;
One word – and all is calm and clear
Where all was rage and doubt before.

Edward Bevir.

The extracts from J. N. Darby and C. A. Coates in the article were suggested by Gavin Simpson

THE WILL OF GOD, THE WORK OF CHRIST, AND THE WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

HEBREWS 10

There are three things brought out in this scripture:

firstly, the source from which all blessing springs;
secondly, the means by which it is accomplished; and,
thirdly, the testimony by which it is known.

This last is a most necessary part of the matter, because, unless we know sin to be all put away, it would be absolute madness to attempt to enter into the presence of God: a Jew even would not have thought of such a thing, much less a Christian. If I am not as clean as an angel, the presence of God is no place for me; and the attempt to appear in it would be to follow the example of Cain, who thought to stand before God as a worshipper without blood. We may cry to Him from the depths, of course, and He will ever hear; but if the conscience is not perfect, we cannot go into His presence to worship.

With the Jews in the Old Testament dispensation, this perfection was only ceremonial; with us it is real: with them the veil hid God; now that it is gone, and since we enter into the holiest of all, there is the greater need of perfection of conscience. This is why the apostle insists so strongly on the word "once". "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many". "Once in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself". "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all". If the sacrifices under the law could have wrought perfection of conscience, would they not have ceased to be offered? Christ was once offered, thereby proving the perfect result of His work; it needed no repetition. The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. Therefore God changes the whole thing. "He taketh away the first that he may establish the second"

The will of God

This brings out the first principle to which I alluded, namely, the source of all blessing. It originates in the divine will. “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God”. It originates in the will of God, and not in the will of man: man’s will is only sin. As a creature, man should have no will of his own, just as Christ had none. The principle of Christ’s obedience was not a controlling power, hindering the operation of His own will; but, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God” . This was perfect obedience as a man. God’s will was Christ’s will; and God’s will alone brought salvation and life, where man’s will had brought only sin and death. This gives stability and perfection to everything, to find its source and origin in the will of God. If it had been the result of my will, all would have been vacillating and changing as man’s will is; and, moreover, if we had earned heaven by our own will, there would have been no love of God in the matter, and we should lose the sweetness of holding everything as fruit of divine love.

This will of God is not presented to man to do; it is the Son of God who says, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God”. Men could never have done the will of God; the second Adam does it. As belonging to the first Adam, our place is to confess that we have not done, and never could do, the will of God. When brought back to Him, of course we have nothing else to do, for we are sanctified unto obedience; but as regards acceptance, it is the result of the work of another. “By the obedience of the One shall many be made righteous”. God does all for man in grace, and leaves man out in both the will and the work. Salvation is the result of God’s will and Christ’s work. And it gives quietness and confidence in this work, to see that it was not a work done to turn God towards us, but that from all eternity it was counselled by Himself. We have the source of all in the unchangeable purpose of God.

The work of Christ

Secondly, we have the work itself. It is a wonderful thing for us to be thus let into what passed between divine Persons before the world was; and most blessed to see the freewill offering of Christ. If it were God's will to be the author of our salvation, it was equally Christ's to be the instrument of it; and whilst He, in order to be so, makes Himself a servant, His divine power is still evinced in the very expression, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God". That could be said by none but by one competent to execute any command of God. Supposing that command had been to make a world, instead of to save one, Christ was the only one who could do such a will; and in fact, both divine power and divine love were shown in redemption and resurrection, in a higher degree than in creation.

In verse 5, where the quotation is from Psalm 40, the verbal difference is considerable but the sense identical "A body hast thou prepared me", and "Mine ears hast thou opened" are both expressions of one taking the place of a servant. The ear receives commands and the boring of the ear was making one a servant for ever. So when a body was prepared for Christ, He took on the form of a servant. Thus far we have the will of God working in grace, and Christ undertaking to accomplish it.

Then in verse 11 we have the contrast between the priest standing, and Christ sitting. Christ's work is finished – there is nothing further to do; and He sits down till His foes be made His footstool. "For ever" in verse 12 means 'continually' or 'constantly'. It does not mean that Christ will never rise up again; but as regards His sacrifice for sins He will never have to rise again to do anything more. Having offered one sacrifice for sins, He sits down till His foes be made His footstool. As regards His friends, all is done – not as to intercession of course – but as to acceptance and perfecting of the conscience. But He has still to deal with His enemies; therefore He is waiting, still retaining His servant character, until God makes His foes His footstool. We too are expecting, till Christ rises up from His throne and judges His enemies. This is not done yet: else wickedness would be purged from the earth; and it explains the call for vengeance in the Psalms, which sometimes puzzles people, "Let God

arise, let his enemies be scattered” etc. These surely are not the cries of the church. She does not want to see her enemies judged, but saved.

In verse 12 we have seen that Christ’s one sacrifice was such that He has sat down for ever. So in verse 14 we read, that “by one offering he hath perfected for ever” – or ‘continually’ – “them that are sanctified”. Thus the work of Christ makes the conscience constantly perfect. “The worshippers, once purged, should have no more conscience of sins”. Thus we are brought into the presence of God, never to have any more conscience of sins. “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified”. We are called so to know Christ’s work, as to see that it is quite impossible for us to have sin on us before God. Sin cannot be in God’s presence. There is nothing but perfection there; and we are there because we are perfected forever by the one offering of Jesus. We are in God’s presence because we are clean, as clean as He could wish us to be. “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

It is quite true we have to keep a conscience void of offence, and not to grieve the Spirit; but we are sealed of God unto the day of redemption; and there can be no mistake. The Holy Spirit could not dwell in us unless we were cleansed by the blood of Christ, and then He is the witness to the virtue of that blood.

The witness of the Holy Spirit

We now come to the third point. Having seen the source of it all in the divine will, and the accomplishment of all in the divine work, we get the testimony to it all in the divine witness. “Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us; for after that he had said before, This is the covenant” etc., then he said, “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more”. And here is the secret of settled peace. If I think that God will remember sin, I am denying the will, the work, and the witness of God. In short, if I am a believer in Jesus, it is a sin to have the least thought of God’s ever imputing sin to me. Such thoughts are just as much a work of the flesh as to commit the sin. He does not now impute sin to the believer in Jesus,

and He never will. The words, “Where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin”, lays the blessed foundation for full confidence. “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus”, shows that the very way we enter into God’s presence proves that the very thing that shut us out is gone for ever.

“Our bodies washed with pure water”, refers to the priests of the Jewish dispensation, who were washed with water, sprinkled with blood, and anointed with oil. The latter, typical of the presence of the Holy Spirit, is not mentioned here. After they were once washed, the priests needed only to wash their hands and their feet. The anointing with blood of the ear, the thumb, and the toe, was the application of the work of Christ to the whole moral man. The work of Christ is always set first, then follows the work of the Spirit. In Ephesians it is said, “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word”. Therefore in the tabernacle of old the first thing you meet is not the laver, but the altar. As a sinner, I must first meet the blood; then I am fitted for service, by the removal of all that is contrary to God: but I cannot skip the altar to reach the laver; I must own myself a sinner first; then I can delight in the holiness of God, and understand it, too.

J. N. Darby

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