

Living Water

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“TO OPEN THEIR EYES”

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Introduction

Tonight I want to speak about spiritual vision, about our eyes being opened; the four Scriptures I have read speak in different ways about our seeing.

In the first case, in Mark 9, there was a man who was blind who had his eyes opened by the Lord Jesus. It was a literal thing. It actually happened. The things recorded in the Bible really happened! This man’s eyes were opened, but he needed a second touch from the Lord Jesus for him to see properly. We too, may need a second touch from the Lord Jesus so that we may see clearly, and distinctly.

Then in 1 Kings we read of Elijah. He is a great man of Scripture and a great prophet. When we come to the New Testament we see that he appeared on the mount of transfiguration with the Lord Jesus. Yet, here where we read, Elijah became very miserable and unhappy. He spoke of himself as being the only faithful man left. He had to have his eyes opened to see that God had thousands of other people as well. God is never at a loss. In our day, there are always going to be those that love the Lord Jesus until He comes. If we are miserable tonight because we think that we are on our own, perhaps God will open our eyes to see that great work He has and to see those that belong to Him. It is wonderful even to see a company like this tonight of those that love the Lord Jesus and wait for His coming.

I also read about Ananias in Acts chapter 9. He was to be used of the Lord Jesus to be a blessing to another, to open the eyes of someone else to see the beauty and joy of Christian fellowship. That is a wonderful thing too, and I just suggest to us tonight, that we might be a blessing to others and that we might be used of the Lord so that the eyes of another are opened to see the joy of christian fellowship and of being loved by the Lord’s people.

Then, finally, there is what is yet to come — something that will not happen until we see Jesus. When we see Him, we shall be like Him. That is a wonderful

thing; our eyes will be fully opened then to take in His love and the blessedness of His Person.

The blind man who needed a second touch (Mark 8:22-26)

Now, first of all, in this Scripture there was this man who was blind. We used to have a neighbour who was blind. He used to work his way down his garden by holding on to the washing line. How dreadful it is not be able to see. People who have not the Lord Jesus in their heart are like that; they are morally blind and they do not know what they are missing in being without Christ. I hope that you have the certainty of the love of Jesus in your heart. It is a wonderful thing. Once you have it, it can never be taken away.

Now this man that Mark tells us about had to do something. Some other people brought him to Jesus. Maybe in your life, other people care about you and have perhaps prayed for many years that you might be blessed. That is christian love, dear friend, christian love for you and for me, so that other people care about you so much that they pray for you.

Those who brought this man to Jesus wanted him to be healed. There is nothing we desire more tonight than that every one's heart should be filled with the love of Jesus, that the eyes of their heart might be opened to see the worth there is in Him. Those who brought this man to Jesus asked Him to touch him. Then Jesus took him by the hand. Think of that! Jesus took him by the hand and led him away from the crowd and that man went with Him. He trusted the Lord Jesus to guide him.

I put it to us all that we might do the same thing. Whether we are young or old, whether we have been a christian for a long, long time, or a very short time, let us once again put our hand in the hand of the Lord Jesus and trust Him to lead us. This man trusted the Lord Jesus and he was taken away from everybody else. The Lord wanted to deal with him personally. You might be in a great room like this, but the Lord may have something to say to you alone.

There is a man where I work and he went to a football stadium to hear the gospel. He told me afterwards that although there were thousands of others there he had no consciousness of the others but just that God was speaking to him. You do not have to go somewhere private for God to speak to you. It can be in a company like this that you can have a sense of God speaking just to

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you. It is a wonderful thing that God should want to speak to us, and speak to us as individuals, but He cares for us each as individuals.

So the Lord took this man and He laid His hands upon him, spit on his eyes and asked him if he could see anything. I wonder what we can say as to whether we see anything about Jesus? What can we say individually about the Lord Jesus? What does He mean to us? What He has meant to us in the past week? What can we say about His care for us? There was an old believer I knew who used to speak of over a hundred titles of the Lord Jesus in the Scripture. I could not speak about a hundred titles but there is something for every one of us there. All of us can have some wonderful thing to say about the Lord Jesus. Is He the One who is occupying our thoughts every day that we might speak to Him and of Him? Let us be simple; by the Holy Spirit we see Jesus when we read of Him in the Bible and then we can speak to Him because He is alive. We can speak to Him about the things that burden us and about the things that give us joy.

Now this man in Mark saw men, but as trees walking. There was a terrible distortion to his sight and we, too, can easily be distracted by what other people have to say. Now, the Lord could have healed him right away, He could have made it so that he could see distinctly right away. A little earlier in Mark we are told some of the things that people said about Jesus, and one of the things they said was: “He does all things well” (Mark 7:37). That is something that I firmly believe — Jesus does all things well! I do not always understand the way the Lord takes but I believe He does all things well.

This man had another touch from the Lord and he saw distinctly. He saw the Son of God. He maybe had not taken in what he could see but he saw Jesus. It is a wonderful thing to know in my heart that the Lord has spoken to me. I can still remember the joy of conversion nearly thirty years ago. Maybe you cannot remember the time of your conversion in a distinctive way, and the time itself is not important, but you should have the joy of knowing that the Lord Jesus is your Saviour and that He lives for you in the glory.

Maybe we need a second touch! Think of Lazarus as coming forth from the tomb, bound with the grave clothes. Well, we do not want to be bound with the grave clothes. If we are miserable as Christians maybe we need a second touch. The Lord said, “Loose him and let him go” (John 11:44). If you are bound with grave clothes, if you are affected by sin, the Lord Jesus would

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desire that our eyes might be opened and that we might see Him, that we might have a sense of His glory, love, care and compassion for us.

In the epistle to the Hebrews it speaks of laying aside every weight and sin that so easily entangles us and of running with endurance the race that lies before us, looking steadfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith. It speaks of “weight” as well as “sin”. We might think of sin entangling us — wrong thoughts, evil things we have said, all those kind of things, but there are also weights — the pressures of life, the pressure of our jobs, school, or whatever; there are lots of things that draw us down. The Lord Jesus would have us to look on Him and keep everything in its right proportion.

After the second touch from the Lord “he saw all things clearly”. Well, my impression about this man is that he would be amazed when he had his sight. Elsewhere it speaks of those who were astonished above measure (Mark 7:37). I wonder about us, whether christianity becomes just a matter of fact, a way of life — that is all right — but our hearts should be amazed at His love.

Stuart Hine, the man who wrote the hymn, How Great Thou Art, was in the Carpathian Mountains of Romania in 1934 and he came to a village where there was a woman reading aloud to others from John’s gospel using a Bible that had been left behind some nineteen years earlier by retreating Russian soldiers in the First World War. She was coming to the portion of John’s gospel about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus on the cross. Stuart Hine saw the emotion of these villagers as they heard about the love of Christ in giving Himself for us and it led him to write:

*‘And when I think that God His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die — I scarce can take it in:
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died, to take away my sin’.*

I can scarce take it in either, that God loved me so much that He sent His only Son for me.

If Christianity has become in any sense ordinary to us, may the Lord stir up our hearts, that our eyes may be opened to see His glory and to rejoice in His love. If our affections become dulled with time let us look at the cross and see the Lord Jesus crucified for us. Paul spoke of the Son of God, “who has loved me and given himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). He never forgot the greatness of it.

Elijah who needed to see the greatness of God's work (1 Kings 19:12-18)

God had wrought great things by Elijah but the queen of Israel, Jezebel, hated him and as a result he became frightened and miserable and he desired to die. Though God fed him and provided for him Elijah became oppressed by the evil around him.

It is easy in Britain today to become oppressed by the evil around us. Many people seem given up to what is worthless. Where I work there is a lot of talk about lottery tickets and reading the future in the stars and all this sort of thing. Someone said many years ago that when people give up believing in God it is not that they believe in nothing but that they will believe in anything! That is what is happening in Britain today and it is easy to become miserable and oppressed by things around you. It was like that for Elijah, he became oppressed — he began to think that he was the only man left. It is easy to get into that state. Well, God gave three demonstrations of His power in the earthquake and the wind and the fire and we are told that God was not in any of these. Then God spoke to him in “a soft gentle voice”.

Maybe we would like God to speak in Britain today in great power; to shake things up and make people change their minds but God is persuading people in their heart with a soft, gentle voice. You might have preached the gospel for years or done something else for the Lord and not seen a result and become despondent. Someone said to me in connection with the parable of the sower (Mark 4:3) that there was nothing wrong with the seed, for the seed is the word of God. There is nothing wrong with the seed and where it falls into the good ground in God's own time it will bring blessing. I firmly believe that. Near where I live they dug up the roads to widen the motorway. In digging they stirred up some seeds that had lain dormant for years, back perhaps to the nineteen twenties and those seeds sprang into life! God will bring His work to light but He often works in ways that we cannot see.

Here, when Elijah was thinking that he was the only one left, God's word to him was, “I have left myself seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed unto Baal”. Baal means literally ‘master’ or ‘possessor’ and that is what the world is like. It wants to possess people; it wants to fill their minds with things the whole time and leave them with no time to consider the things of God and eternity. God had these seven thousand. Think of Obadiah – he was steward to a most evil king, Ahab — yet he belonged to God. Think of

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those in the household of Caesar that we read of in the New Testament. Think of those who live under evil dictatorships and yet who are trusting in God. I was reading in a book recently about an Iraqi general who is a Christian. In many places God has those that truly trust in Him, those who belong to Him. In Ahab's day there were in Israel seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal and Elijah did not know, or had forgotten, about them.

A few weeks ago I was coming home on a plane from the USA and a lady got talking to me. She was coming to stay somewhere near where I live and she asked, 'How many people go to church in Britain? How many people are Christians? Is it about ten or fifteen per cent?' I sat there and I thought, and I had to say, 'It does not feel like very many, perhaps about two percent'. I felt very ashamed, and then I discovered that the two men sitting next to me were Christians and there I was thinking in my own mind that there was hardly any and I discovered that there were some more. It is a wonderful thing to discover that God has many more in reserve than perhaps I think. Let us encourage each other in the knowledge that God will gain the victory.

Christianity is not going to die out. The Lord will have those who are His on earth until He descends with archangel's trump. It is encouraging to remember that even in the days of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, four hundred and fifty years after God's last recorded speaking in Scripture, there were those who were interested in what God had to say to Zacharias. It has always been so.

So there were those who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Well, Elijah got this word from God and maybe we need encouragement too, to see the great work of the Lord even in the present day. All will be revealed in a coming day. There will be those from every tribe and tongue and nation. In a hotel recently I picked up the Bible that was in a drawer in the room and in the introduction I read that John 3:16 had been translated into nearly a thousand languages and dialects. Think of what it will be when the whole work of God comes to light!

God's work is wonderful. It is hidden from the world. Do not believe what you read in newspapers and magazines when they tell you that Christianity is dying out. God will gain the victory. We need to pray for the people of our country. I feel burdened about it. People who do not seem to care about God and are heedlessly going on to destruction surround us. Let us pray for those people who are about us in our streets, at work or those that are our neighbours

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that the word of the Lord might come upon them. Oh that we might be able to be a witness so that they might take account of something different about us. It is fine to preach the gospel, but people are also to see the gospel in our way of life.

Ananias, who was used to bring blessing to someone else (Acts 9:10-19)

We read in Acts of Ananias who was a follower of the Lord Jesus. The Lord asked him to go and meet Saul of Tarsus who had come to Damascus to persecute the Christians there, and Ananias really did not understand what was happening. Ananias is a wonderful example for us in Scripture. He was burdened about something and instead of chasing off to seek advice he spoke to the Lord about it. He said, “Lord, I have heard from many concerning this man how much evil he has done”. Yes, Saul was an evil man. Perhaps we have read many times what it says of Saul, that when Christians were put to death he gave his vote. Saul had seen Stephen slain; he had stood there and watched him being killed. He was a man filled with evil anger; he had cast Christians into prison and compelled them to blaspheme! That was the kind of man that Ananias was asked to go and welcome!

Well, Ananias did more than he was asked. He not only put his hands on him but he called him, “Saul, brother”. Think of Saul hearing those words for the first time: “Brother”. Saul was learning what a wonderful thing it is to come into the Christian company. What a wonderful thing it must have been for Ananias to see the power of the Lord’s work, and for Saul to feel a love and affection in his heart that he had never felt before.

Ananias said, “... Jesus that appeared to thee in the way in which thou camest, that thou mightest see”. It is a wonderful thing that the Lord waited until Saul was in the company of another Christian before his eyes were opened. The first thing Saul saw was someone else that loved the Lord Jesus. It is a wonderful thing to experience the love and affection of other believers. May we, as being those who love the Lord Jesus, show the same to others.

Some twenty years ago I came out of the house on Christmas day. I only mention that because the streets were empty, but I got into the street and a man in his twenties called out to me asking when the church nearby would be open. He went on ‘I used to steal cars and was into all sorts of bad things and I have just come out of prison. The Lord Jesus spoke to me in prison and I

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was let out yesterday and I want to thank Him.’ That young man did not know I was a christian yet he came out with all these things.

I told him that I was a christian as well. We spoke together for a few minutes. He said to me, ‘Whenever you think about me, will you pray for me?’ That was twenty years ago. I have prayed for that man many times. One day I will see him in heaven. I have never forgotten those few minutes that I spent with a man that I will probably never see again in my life now. May we be amongst those who bring a blessing to others, bring the blessing of being able to open someone’s eyes to see something they have never seen before, the love of God shining out in our hearts.

What we will see (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Chapter thirteen of the first epistle to the Corinthians is very well known. The beginning of the chapter says that if I have not love “I am nothing”. It is not that ‘I have nothing’ but “I am nothing” Then Paul, in the context of this scripture says, “we see now through a dim window obscurely”. Now, in this hall there is frosted glass in the windows and when you look through the window you cannot really make out what is beyond, but just the shape of things. That is what Paul was meaning about the love of God — we can only appreciate it in a small way now. It is not like looking through plain glass.

Think of what it will be when we actually see the Lord Jesus for ourselves. We will be like Him and see Him as He is. Then, and only then, will we experience the fullness of His love. Today, everything that we do, and the world in which we live, is affected by sin. It affects us so much we often do not think of it. I have some keys in my pocket. Why have I got keys? Keys are needed because of sin. Why are there locks on the windows? Because of sin. Keys and locks are there to discourage people from doing what is wrong. Now, there is a day coming when there will be no more consciousness of sin. We will see the Lord Jesus face to face and we will be like Him.

Lay hold of that in your heart! We read here that, “we see now through a dim window obscurely, but then face to face”. The thought of seeing the Lord Jesus should be something that fills our hearts with joy. When we see Him it will be better than anything we have experienced here now. We experience wonderful things now of God speaking to us but then we will have our eyes fully opened to see Him and to be with Him and to be like Him. That is my hope.

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Well now, if we feel we need another touch from the Lord so that we may see things clearly, let us appeal to the Lord. The Lord does not exactly force Himself upon us; He speaks to the church in Laodicea, “Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking”. He is not pushing the door open, He is knocking. The Lord Jesus would like us to draw Him into our hearts that we might see “all things clearly”. If we are down or have the sense of how small we are, the Lord would encourage us and lift us up to know that He will gain the victory. He gained the victory over death and over Satan when He died on the cross and rose again. Blessed be His name! May we be like Ananias, ready to help another into the joy of christian fellowship and, above all, may we be amongst those who eyes are opened to see the wonderful glory of Jesus, for His name’s sake.

Simon Burr

An Address at Bromley, June 2006.

HERE AND THERE

Here, bliss is short, imperfect, insecure;
But total, absolute, and perfect There.

In a weak, simple body here I dwell,
But There I drop this frail and sickly shell.

Here, my best thoughts are stained with guilt and fear,
But love and pardon shall be perfect There.

Here, my best duties are defiled by sin —
There, all is ease without, and peace within.

Here, feeble faith supplies my light;
There, faith and hope are swallow’d up in sight.

Here, love of self my finest works destroys;
There, love of God shall perfect all my joys.

Poetry Selection

Here, things as in a glass are darkly shown;
There, I shall know as clearly as I'm known.

Frail are the fairest flowers that bloom below —
There, freshest plants on roots immortal grow.

Here, wants and cares perplex my anxious heart,
There wondrous calm shall be our part.

Here, disappointments my best schemes destroy —
There, those that sowed in tears shall reap in joy

Here, vanity is stamp'd on all below —
Perfection There on every good shall grow.

Here, error clouds the soul and dims the sight;
There, all is knowledge, purity, and light.

Here, on no promis'd good can I depend,
But There, the Rock of Ages is my friend.

Here, if some sudden joy delight inspire,
The dread to lose it damps the rising fire;

But There, whatever good the soul employ,
The thought that 'tis eternal, crowns the joy !

Here, Christ for sinners suffered, groaned, and bled;
But There, He reigns, the great, triumphant Head.

Here, mock'd and scourg'd, He wore a crown of thorns:
A crown of glory There His brow adorns.

Anon.

“LET US NOT BE WEARY IN WELL DOING, FOR IN DUE SEASON, WE SHALL REAP IF WE FAINT NOT”

Our days are becoming more difficult if we hold fast to the truth of the Holy Scriptures and faith in our blessed Lord. It is therefore good to remind ourselves of the One in whom we trust and of His protection from that which we fear. Fear is the great barrier that fills us with inertia when we seek to do something for the Lord. Many believers down the years have had to battle with fear to a greater or lesser extent. The hymn reminds us:

*‘Fear Him, ye saints; and you will then
Have nothing else to fear,
Make you His service your delight,
Your wants shall be His care’*

When we go out amongst the people of London with the Scriptures we know that there is a spiritual battle going on in the heavenly places, but our fears are quelled by the knowledge that the battle is the Lord’s. We have to put on the whole armour of God, and trust His grace and strength for each day.

Our major focus is on the Jewish people and the distribution of the Hebrew/English Scriptures. Recently we began work in a new area over which we had prayed for nearly a year. We were thankful that there were very few refusals, although the area is very densely Jewish. We give thanks to the Lord for answered prayer and for the encouragement of seeing many young families with children being open and willing to receive the Scriptures.

These are especially trying times with Israel being in the forefront of world attention. ‘Why does the whole world hate us?’ is a question that is often asked. We tell them that their very existence defies the atheistic world and the false gods of the nations. We also assure them that many people are praying for them.

Constantly in our witness we use a booklet called “Pure Gold”. It is a small booklet in a plastic sleeve and is a collection of Bible verses with an

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offer on the back for the reader to write for a New Testament. On London's streets we often meet with people who sit on the pavements begging. It is not wise to give much money since we do not know how it will be spent so we pass on one of these books with a few coins tucked into the plastic sleeve.

Near the Elephant and Castle we met a young woman sitting with a dog in an underpass begging. She was given one of the booklets and when we came back that way she was still there but she was enthusiastic in her thanks for the booklet which she had read several times and she said she was going to write for a New Testament. As we went on we prayed that the Lord Jesus would open the eyes of this young woman and give her the new and abundant life that He has promised to all who simply trust in Him.

Our Australian Representative told us of a Jewish man who had bought a house from another Jew. While digging in the garden of his new home he found a package which, when unwrapped, was a Hebrew/English New Testament. He read it and through this came to know the Lord Jesus as his own personal Saviour. It may seem very strange that someone should find the Scriptures in this way but Jewish people if they do not want the New Testament sometimes bury it rather than destroy it. They do not like to destroy it because it contains the name of God. This is what could have happened in this case in Australia. How glorious are the Lord's ways!

We pray for the Lord's help to be courageous and give out His Word as much as possible in these apostate days. They are the very Words of Life, speaking of One who alone can bring true peace into our hearts.

Based on an article by Joy Browning

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**THE PURPOSE OF GOD — TO MAKE MY LIFE
BEAUTIFUL.**

“And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.” (Mark 5:15)

Does it strike you, beloved friends, that the ending of this verse is very odd? “And they were afraid”. Why were they afraid? They had known this demon-possessed man in his past condition which is described so graphically earlier in the chapter. He had been under this awful domination, living among the tombs, crying night and day; poor, restless creature. They had sought to reform him, to restrain him; they had bound him with fetters — reformation fetters — but the devil was too strong for reformation fetters; he had broken the bands asunder and they could do nothing for him. They had known him under those distressing circumstances but now they saw the man under a new domination, and in a new condition entirely. He was no longer restless, but sitting, no longer naked, but clothed, and his brain was no longer railing as it had been all those years—he was in his right mind. That is what they saw and they were afraid. What were they afraid of? The fact is, men are more at home with the power of Satan in destruction than they are with the power of God in blessing. You will find that is so. There is a passage in Psalm 14 that says, “There were they in great fear: for God is in the generation of the righteous”.

Here is a man who has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love. That is what this verse sets forth—it is a beautiful miniature picture of the kingdom of God. Jesus was now his Lord; he had come under a new domination; he was delivered from the power of Satan and had come into God’s kingdom and was under the subduing influence of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is a christian. Are you one of those? Have you known the subduing power of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you know what it is to be delivered from the power of Satan, from the kingdom of Satan, and brought into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love? That is what this passage sets forth most wonderfully.

A Voice from the Past

In the previous chapter we find the parable of the sower sowing the seed; the seed was sown and the seed is the word of God, the revelation of God. If that is sown in a person's heart he begins to know God. Now in this chapter we have the deliverance through the Son of God. The narratives given here set forth the true condition of man in the flesh as he is. Now such persons need deliverance, and the Deliverer is the Son of God. He has been into death and has risen again. There is no other Christ to preach to you than a risen Christ.

In the early days of the Acts when they preached the gospel — Peter or Paul, for instance — the culminating point was a risen Christ. He has been through death and has risen again, or there would be no Saviour for us. He is a mighty Victor, the Son of God. You remember the story of Jonah? A lady said to me some years ago, as I was travelling with her and speaking about Jonah. 'Mr. Johnson, surely you do not believe in the story of Jonah, I thought that was exploded years ago'. My reply was, 'Madam, I believe in God'. If you believe in God you must believe the account of Jonah.

Dear friends, if you do not believe the story of Jonah you have lost Jesus, and there is no Saviour for you, for the blessed Saviour said, "As Jonah was..." Was He mistaken? Do you remember what He said, "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth". Do you not see that if you do not believe the story of Jonah you have lost Jesus and there is no Saviour? I could not believe in a Saviour who was mistaken, who was fallible.

You remember the story: Jonah was on the ship fleeing from the presence of God. He was not a type of the Lord Jesus in that; he was God's sent one, and in despondency embarked on that voyage with the heathen mariners. A storm came up, the sea was white with foam, and the poor heathen mariners cried to their gods to deliver them. Jonah was asleep in the side of the ship. The sailors thought of their Jewish passenger and roused him from his sleep, saying, 'Call upon your God; do you not know we are in peril?' And Jonah came on deck, and said, 'I know what

A Voice from the Past

this is for, it is on my account; the only way out of the difficulty is to throw me overboard; the storm will never cease until you do'. Now sailors are very tender with their passengers—I was a sailor once myself, and I know—passengers always get the first chance. So they called upon their gods, but the ship was sinking; they threw overboard all the cargo and the tackling, and then at last they called up Jonah and threw him over. He sank beneath the waves and there was a great calm.

Time was when Jesus, the Son of God, stood on the deck of our sinking ship; His eye surveyed it, and His heart was filled with divine compassion—that blessed Jesus, the Son of God. He surveyed it—it was white with foam—the wrath of God was deserved, righteously deserved—and He knew it, and He went beneath those waves and those billows. We read, “All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me”. He measured sin’s distance in that bitter hour. Are you so familiar with the fact that it has no place in your heart? Do you know the facts? How are you affected by the fact that Jesus died, that Jesus went underneath the wrath of God? He exhausted it, but He has reached the other side. There is no other Christ to preach than a risen Christ and a glorified Christ.

Where is Christ now? This blessed Man, the Son of God, Maker of heaven and earth, yet truly Man, where is He now? Do you ever think of that? He is at the right hand of God. He has been through death; He has reached the resurrection shore and now He is exalted at the right hand of God. Beloved friends, my eyes have never seen Him; my fingers have never touched Him; my ears have never heard His voice; but He stands out before my soul in the living reality of what He is more than any living person on this earth.

I love to think of the Lord moving through this chapter of Mark’s gospel. Remember, these gospels were written some years after the death, resurrection and exaltation of Christ; the Spirit of God wrote the narratives of the gospels years after, and in view of what Christ has done and where He is; so that when we read the gospels we have it livingly before us, and what He is in this chapter, He is tonight. He is as available to you now as He was here. Remember the words of our Lord to Thomas, “Because

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thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed”.

Now there are three narratives in this chapter. There is the man under the dominion of sin—under Satan; there is the woman weakened and defiled by sin; and there is the little child of twelve years of age in the grip of death. Can any of you dare to say that these things are not current now? Satan’s power, the defilement of sin, and the power of death; they are here. You will do well to take heed to it; but if the ruin is dire—and it is—the remedy is greater. Yet you will not appreciate the remedy unless you are first made to feel the ruin. I cannot make you feel it, but the Spirit of God can. In Mark 5 there is this man under this frightful domination—held by Satan—he is the mouthpiece of Satan, and dwelling in the place of death and restless. Are not people restless today? Oh, yes, they are restless in heart and growing more restless as the years go by, living in excitement away from God. Religious, perhaps, but religion often means only the respectful recognition of God at a distance on certain occasions to appease the conscience. There is nothing in that.

Christianity is that God proposes to come into my life to make my life beautiful. That is it. “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; let not the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me.” The glory of a man lies in the knowledge of God. I was never truly happy until I knew God, and God has become my exceeding joy.

There were moments in my history when I was glad to forget Him, to forget that I was responsible to Him, and to go my own way; I was glad to shut God out but now through grace I am never happier than when I am thinking about God. I am speaking also for other christians of what is proper to a christian, not simply of myself, but as a christian, and I never knew happiness until I knew God, and for fifty-three years He has been my exceeding joy.

Let me tell you, dear friends, I have known the value of these things in hours of peril. My life has been very varied; I have been near to death. I

have been covered up for dead, and I have been on the Atlantic when we expected to go to the bottom at any moment; the waves were dashing over us, and I remember rolling myself up in my blanket, dead tired and hungry, for we had had no food for thirty-six hours, and saying to myself, 'I shall see the Lord directly', and closing my eyes and sleeping as quietly as ever I slept in my home. I remember saying 'I shall see Jesus now'. There was not one bit of trepidation in my heart. I have been taught the value of these things and can speak of them to you.

In the passage we read this former demoniac besought the Lord that he might be with Him, but the Lord said, 'No, you go home to your friends and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you. I send you on a mission now; by-and-by you shall come and dwell with Me, but I send you on a mission now'.

Now, what about the people here? May I point out to you the two extremes—on the one hand there was a man raving like a maniac in opposition to Christ and on the other hand you see the people preferring their pigs to Christ. That is of the devil. They prayed Him to depart out of their coast. What an awful thing. They say, 'Go out of our coast, you are disturbing our commercial values, we have lost two thousand pigs; go away'.

What have you preferred to Christ? It is an awful thing to slight Him.

I remember a poor woman at Canterbury who seemed to be anxious about her soul, and I said I would go and see her. The next day I called at her house; she knew I was knocking at her door, and she just opened the door a little bit and said, "Mr. Johnson I have thought it all over. I know what you will tell me, to come to Christ; but if I do, I shall have my husband against me and my children against me, and I could not bear it", and she shut the door. How awfully solemn. Here they preferred the man to be a wretched maniac, and they preferred their pigs to Christ.

Now, I go on in the chapter and come to what I trust will be of blessing to many here. There is a woman brought before us as the Lord is passing along—Jairus had begged the Lord to come to his house because his child was sick—and as He went His way to Jairus's house He met this woman.

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She had been twelve years in this sad condition. She had spent all that she had, but instead of getting better she grew worse. All these weary years of disappointment, trying to be better, but only growing worse and worse. So it is with the sinner, the more you try to be better, the more you find out the badness. So at last she comes to the end of her resources.

She hears of Jesus; there is a great crowd passing through the street, and pressing through the crowd the woman comes to Him. What brings you to Him is your need. Jesus only commits Himself to your need, He never commits Himself to your brains. He did not come here to be discussed. No. It says at the end of John 2, "He did not commit himself unto them, because he knew. . . what was in man". He will not commit Himself to anything but need. You cannot understand Him by knowing Him mentally; it is through the conscience and the heart. It is no use trying to argue people into christianity; there must be the living power of it in the heart and the conscience.

This is an engaging story and I hope some will get help from this point. She says, 'If I may touch but the hem of His garment'. She pushes her way through; her need makes her earnest. She had been ill twelve years, think of it. I think I can see her timidly going behind Him. Her need was great and she put out her hand and touched the hem of His garment and she was made whole. That is faith. She needed Him. She never used the words, 'I need Thee' but her touch said it all, and He knows that touch. He says, "Who touched me?" The disciples are astounded at such a thing. A vast crowd and the Lord said, "Who touched me?" Why, everyone is! but the Lord says, 'There is a touch I know'.

Have you touched Him? May you do so tonight in the need of your soul. He is here as much tonight as He was in this chapter. As you sit there with a sense of your need and in the sense of the glory of this blessed Person and how He can meet your need, you may say, 'Lord, I trust Thee'.

I see a vast crowd around Christ by way of creed, and creed never saved a man yet; it is personal faith that is needed. I often think of it, of the vast crowd around Christ by way of profession and creed, and among them are those who have really trusted Him. No matter what their creed, whether

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Lutherans, Greek Church, Romanists, or Protestants, there are in these vast bodies those who have come to Christ; they have given the touch that the Lord knows. I hope you are one of them. It is real, personal faith.

What does this garment mean that the Lord wears? It has no seam, it is woven from the top to the bottom. What does it mean? The fulness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily. All that God is, He is in Christ. When you touch Him, all that He is, is for you; you may have to learn it bit by bit, but all that He is, is for you. Thank God. It is all for you, that garment which had no seam. She touched the hem of His garment. The woman would have slipped away into the crowd, but the Lord does not allow her to do so. She came and she fell down before Him and told Him all. He loved to be told it. He knew all about her, He knew every bit of the disappointment, but the tale of soul history is interesting to Christ. I am glad to say that on behalf of my Master.

She told Him all the truth. The truth about God will make you truthful about yourself. I think I can hear her saying, 'For twelve years, Lord, I tried this, that, and the other'. How He listened with the deepest compassion. What a blessed Saviour He is, the Son of God. She told Him all the truth. Then He said to her, "Daughter". If she touched Him by faith He touched her by the Holy Spirit. If she said, 'Lord, I need Thee'; He said, 'I need you'. There is a christian!

Let us look for one moment at Ephesians 1, the epistle that gives us the highest character of christian blessing and where the glorious future is unfolded in wonderful language. In the first twelve verses of that chapter you get the blessings of christians, and then you get the simplest idea of a christian as setting forth what is here in Mark 5. The simplest idea of a christian occurs in this epistle. It reads, "who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted" (Ephesians 1:12). Are you a 'Truster in Christ'? If you are, you belong to this vast kingdom. I have thanked God that in the epistle in which there is the highest christian blessing, the simplest idea of a christian on the faith side is presented.

How admirable scripture is! It does not require a theologian to understand this. Have you trusted Christ? "After that ye heard the word of truth, the

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gospel of your salvation”. The “word of truth” answers to the garment that had no seam. The truth about God is in Christ, so that is your salvation. What God is, is your salvation. They trusted Christ in whom the word of truth was, and the word of truth was their salvation. “In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.”

That presents the idea. The woman touched Jesus in faith, and in her touch she said, ‘Lord, I need Thee’. He said, “Daughter” to her. He is saying, ‘I will never forget you. You are an object of interest to Me; there is a link between you and Myself that can never be severed’. You are welcome to the blessing He would give, and it gives Him the greatest possible pleasure to bless you. Just trust Him as you sit there. He has done everything necessary for your blessing and His heart is full of compassion. Is there one sad and weary heart here? You have tried to be good, tried to be better, tried to love God and your neighbour as yourself; you have been here and been there, been to everybody but Christ. Come to Him; trust in Christ. “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth.”

I was preaching at M— some years ago — and all at once there came something to me, and I said to the people, ‘I am going to get off the desk and sit on a chair, I feel I am in the way’. I did so, and sat down; there was great silence, and during that silence five souls came to Christ as they sat there. You may come to Him now. May you feel by the Spirit that He is near to you. May you in faith say, ‘Lord, I need Thee’. He will answer back; He will tell you that He needs you, and it gives Him the greatest possible pleasure to bless you.

I will put a question to you, and then close. I remember going to see an old gentleman down in Devon; he said to me, ‘Did you observe that beautiful wood as you came up the road? I planted it specially to keep my privacy, I did not want any neighbours here’. I said, ‘Yes, I observed it’. He said, ‘Did you see the beautiful sea view I have here?’ I said, ‘Yes, I stood and admired it’. Then I said, ‘I am a servant of Christ and am going to visit others, so cannot stay with you long, but I want you to put a question to you to think about after I have left. I want you to ask yourself,

‘What do I possess outside the reach of death?’ Put the question to yourself, all of you! I sit in my room and ask myself that question. You say ‘What a miserable man you are!’ No! It gives me the greatest possible joy to think of that question. I look round on those who love me and my death would give them sadness as their death would to me. I cannot look on anyone here outside the reach of death, but my heart gives a leap, for I have got Christ, and He is outside the reach of death. I have looked up through tears into His blessed face in the hour of bereavement and have said, ‘Lord, I shall never lose Thee’. Splendid! Have you ever told Him that? Let them be living realities in your soul. Vitality lies in nearness to Christ and in knowing Him. What a happy thing for a christian to ask the question, ‘What do I possess outside the reach of death?’

My story is over, poorly I may have presented it, but I plead with you, as I may never see you again—do you not see how you need Him? If you have a grave in front of you—one step more and you are in it, you do not know how soon; you may be full of health and vigour, but one step and you are in the grave—have you got anyone the other side? Christianity gives you Someone the other side of death, the blessed Jesus, the Son of God, May your heart trust in Him for His name’s sake. Amen.

William Johnson

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

The cross has two aspects, one with regard to God, the other with reference to the believer. From overlooking the former aspect there has arisen the most serious misapprehension of the truth. When the blessed Lord came into this world, John, the Baptist, His witness, looking on Him said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”. This was plainly with reference to the altered position in which all things here would be placed by the cross of Christ. Sin had entered on this scene, but the Lamb of God would take away the sin from the world. We can hardly estimate the extent of the work here devolving on the Lamb of God, or the effect of it. It comprises the removal by sacrifice of that which was contrary to God and offensive to Him. It is not that God annihilates

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everything here and starts elsewhere; but that He, through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, can reinstate everything in an entirely new order and degree, and that in righteousness because of the sacrifice. The cross enables Him to continue His creation in a new order.

If there had been no cross, there must be judgment on the creation as it stands; but now, peace having been made by the blood of His cross, God can by Him reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven (see Colossians 1:20). Surely we little apprehend the greatness of the work, or the effect of the cross, unless we see the extent of the judgment, and how everything was involved in it.

If the soul grasps the extent and severity of the judgment, with what wonder and satisfaction must the eye rest on the cross and see judgment so borne there, peace so made, that God can reconcile all things to Himself. If the fall of Adam has occasioned the universal judgment, if from that point one traces the widespread deluge of death and distance from God, with what rapture and praise can we behold the cross, and see there the tide of judgment not only rolled back, but also exhausted. All of its demands have been met and God is now at liberty in righteousness to reconcile all things to Himself.

Do souls really regard the cross in this singular and unparalleled scope? From the moment of Adam's sin until the cross, there was no rest for God on earth. He did not forsake His people, but He had not a Sabbath here, nor could He until His Son, our Lord, could say, "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). How little do we regard the cross in this light – even as that one great moment when God, according to His own mind, is at liberty to deal with the world, so that He can reconcile all things to Himself.

In the history of the universe there is nothing so great or admirable as the cross. If at Adam's fall the sun went down at noonday, at the cross Jesus went down into the depths of blackness and darkness, combated all their strength and despoiled them, and inaugurated for us the endless day of heavenly glory.

Yet more than this, the cross of Christ has enabled God to reconcile us,

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who hitherto were enemies in mind by wicked works, “yet now has it reconciled” (Colossians 1:21). It is through the cross of Christ that God is enabled to reach the prodigal, for there the distance between God and the sinner was repaired; the judgment resting on man was there borne by the Son of God. He took away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. God Himself rends the veil from top to bottom; there is no longer any obstruction to His dealing with man – once under judgment – because, the judgment being borne, grace can reign through righteousness.

Who can estimate what the cross has effected for God? So great was the effect that our Lord declared when Judas went out, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him” (John 13:31). God was glorified in the fullness and completeness of the answer now rendered in the cross to all His claims. Thus the sin of the world has, through the cross, redounded to the glory of God. The Son of man is glorified in the cross, and God is glorified in Him. He has done the will of God and finished His work. If the ruin were great, the manner in which all has been set right is immeasurably greater; the “free gift” (Romans 5:15) is beyond all comparison greater than the condemnation.

Now let us see what the cross effects for the believer. When Adam sinned he fell under the judgment of death. Nothing can relieve of this judgment but substitution. The judgment must be borne; the righteousness of God requires it. Man, who is under it, cannot be relieved of it except through another bearing it. It cannot just be cancelled or overlooked. Righteousness demands judgment and if man fall under it he could not rise out of it; and if God recovered him out of it He would compromise the righteousness of His own sentence. Man cannot be exonerated but through one who was not chargeable with his guilt bearing the judgment of it. This Christ did at the cross. He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). He bore the judgment in His own body on the tree. Our “old man was crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed” (Romans 6:6). There was no way of rescuing us but by undergoing the judgment; and this is the cross. Christ would ever have abode alone if He had not died on the cross. The Son of man must be lifted up; otherwise eternal life

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could never have been given to us. There was only one way in which we could be saved. Without the cross there could be no escape from judgment, no entrance into life.

The blessed Son spent thirty-three years here, and after all He says in reference to Himself, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone”. He had not up to this brought anyone to His own ground before God. There was judgment on man, and there is no righteousness until that is removed. The blessed Son of God goes down into the depths of judgment. The cross opens a way out of the dungeons of eternal torment into the rest of the Father’s house.

The cross has not only secured the way of escape for man, but on it has been crucified the “old man, that the body of sin might be destroyed”. I do not see the cross truly if I see it as opening a way of escape for me, yet allowing that in me which has incurred the judgment to also escape. This is one of the ways that the effect of the cross is limited in many minds. The ending of the old man may not be denied, but it is not insisted upon as important to the understanding of the cross.

In Romans chapter 7 it is the will of the flesh, the law of it working in the members, that the apostle cries out to be delivered from, and not, as is often supposed, the works, and the sins of the flesh. Both are removed at the cross. “If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin” (Romans 8:10). The cross opens the door of escape for me from the state in which I am, but it does not admit the continuance of that state. That state has been judged at the cross. What is judged cannot be continued. The moment that I see by faith my escape from judgment, because of the cross of Christ, that moment, I am, because of that same cross, set on entirely new ground, even as fruit of Him who died; and I must leave my old man behind, crucified, so that, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). If I do not accept this, I have limited the cross, and in fact, have assumed that I can be freed by Christ’s work on the cross from the judgment that rests on the old man, and yet be allowed to retain that which caused the offence – in short, that I escape through substitution the penalty for my offence, but

that the state in which the offence placed me is allowed to continue. In effect, a man may be saved through the intervention of another from the penalty under which he lies – for forgery, for instance – and yet may retain the position acquired by it! Righteousness requires that not only should the full penalty be paid, but that there should be a discontinuance of the state of the offence; in fact the offending state must cease. The cross effects all this, and the one who truly understands it can say with the apostle, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). Here the question of sin is not alluded to, but everything which was in any degree unsuited to God. The cross had cleared all away, and in this the apostle gloried

Some speak of the cross nowadays as if it were something to allow the offender to remain as he was, as if it were a continual sacrifice, continually answering for an offending state which is not set aside; and thus there is no real peace. Again, others see that the cross has removed their sins before God, and rejoice in it; but they do not see the extent of the action of the cross either with reference to God or to themselves. Hence, in practice, while they place the cross in faith between themselves and their sins, and know that they must not return to them, and that they are freed forever from them, yet they can sanction and enjoy many worldly things, just as if there was no cross at all.

If Christ died for me, I am bound by every good and right feeling to lay aside that for which He died, and which needed His death. Without that death I could not be delivered from judgment, but how dreadful to retain the condition for which my Saviour was judged! Nay, I must now hate my own life (see Luke 14:26 & John 12:25); and I may well do so, since through faith I have life in the Son of God.

May we increasingly know that the cross of Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

J. B. Stoney

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