



# *Living Water*

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## **SPRITUAL GROWTH**

**1 John            2: 12-24**

**1 Peter           2: 1-10**

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These scriptures illustrate spiritual growth. Scripture shows that it is expected that a christian would make progress while we are left here. We should be growing in our souls, in affection for our Lord Jesus Christ and growing in likeness to Him. No other growth is really worth having, except that which makes the believer more like Christ Himself. These scriptures illustrate different aspects of growth.

### **Children, young men, and fathers**

John, in his first Epistle, speaks very specifically to three classes of person: fathers, young men and little children. It is very touching that, first of all, he gathers all the people of God together, "I write to you, children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake". That sets us together as redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. That is where we all begin on one common basis.

Then John speaks to the three classes. When he speaks to the fathers he speaks twice but he says the same thing to them each time: "ye have known him that is from the beginning" (vv. 13 & 14). For those of us who might be thought to have reached years of at least some discretion it would be a question why the apostle speaks in that way and whether it is true of us that we know Him that is from the beginning, even our Lord Jesus Christ. John opens his epistle with the words: "That which was from the beginning...that which we have contemplated and our hands handled..." (1 John 1:1). That is a reference to the Lord Himself. While it would be true, as spoken of in John's gospel, that the Lord was the beginning of anything in this scene, in his epistle John is speaking particularly of what is from the beginning of the testimony of our Lord and what He has set on.

We might expect that it would be the youngest soul that knew the Lord and the most experienced soul that had come to a knowledge of the Father, but that is not what the apostle says at all. He shows that it is a mark of maturity to have a personal and appreciative knowledge of the Lord Jesus and that it is a mark of having begun the christian way to have known the Father. The

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Father has been revealed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ; that is where we learn His heart and nature. It is by the Spirit that we cry “Abba, Father”. “Abba, Father” is a very simple way of addressing God.

John was writing to christians of varied experience who had not had the advantage of knowing Christ after the flesh. But they had received the apostles’ testimony and were to make progress in their souls as they held the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship. It is vital for us too that we should trace in scripture what the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship is and stand by it. What they have to say has divine authority and should carry conviction with anyone indwelt by the Spirit of God, because what they have to say was given to them by the Spirit of God. As we cling to what they have said we find the right path through a very confusing scene. So it is not only right but there is every advantage for the christian in clinging to what the apostles have said and the spirit in which they said it.

We are to grow in our knowledge of Christ by contemplation. As we think about the Lord, who He is, what He has done, what He has said and what He now is to us we see a great variety of features that are worthy of contemplation. The Father values our appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the gospels, He said, “This is my beloved Son, hear Him”. He called attention to the Lord as having all that the disciples needed. They needed no one else and there is a full revelation of God to us in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do I believe this and act upon it? Do I read what the Lord had to say and take account of what He would say to me now as being His revealed mind?

The knowledge of the Lord is not something we can pretend about - it is a reality if it is anything. It will show in our likeness to Him, because if we have appreciated Him and been taught by Him we will be formed after His pattern so that what is like Christ will be truly a work of God in us.

This line of things will keep us stable. There is a lot that leads to instability in these days. Ephesians warns us against being tossed about by winds of doctrine. Firmness and security lie in the way that the Lord has revealed God to us, and the way that His servants, the apostles, have shown us a safe way into the truth.

Now John speaks to the young men and he credits them with having overcome the wicked one. They have met him and faced him; young men and we might say young women too, would be persons who are capable of taking up the

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Lord's interests and defending them. John continues, "ye are strong, and the word of God abides in you". Then he provides a warning, "Love not the world, nor the things in the world". If there was a temptation then, in the first century, the temptation is no less now. There are three things that John lists that mark the world: "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life". It goes right back to the fall of Eve. The woman saw that the tree was good for food, that is the lust of the flesh; it was a pleasure for the eyes — the lust of the eyes; then the tree was to be desired to give intelligence, so that she could have the pride of knowledge apart from dependence upon God. That is the world. Nothing has changed.

The devil offered the Lord the world, but at the price of acknowledging him as the prince of this world and submitting to him. The Lord would have none of it; that was not what He came for and never could have been. He shows the true ownership of the world when He says, "I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth" (Matthew 11:25). The devil is a usurper who has claimed the world and the world has been very ready to yield to the claim. We are in that world and the temptation to be conformed to it is a very powerful one. It may very often show itself in apparently innocent ways. Not far behind these ways are the corrupting ways and compromise over basic morality. Believers have to be on their guard about that.

We read verses 22 and 23 so as to take note of some tests of the christian. The liar denies that Jesus is the Christ. So if we are to keep within the truth we must confess Jesus as the Christ. Anyone who read the Old Testament would know that the Christ was to come. The great test was that Jesus was the Christ. Then John tells us, "He is the antichrist who denies the Father and the Son", that is, to contradict the great truth of christianity that Jesus is not only the Christ but is also the Son of God. He came here to reveal the Father to us from His own knowledge of the Father. It is worth noting this because it is part of the second address to the little children. We get started on a right road by being perfectly simple and clear as to the Lord Jesus that He is the Christ, God's Anointed, and that He is the Son of the Father.

### **Growing up to salvation...living stones... being built up a spiritual house**

Peter in his first epistle is speaking of how we grow - growing up to salvation, and being built up as a spiritual house. That would be initially on individual

lines, how the believer finds his or her place in the house, the dwelling place of God.

Peter commends a good beginning, “as newborn babes desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word”. Yet it is clear from what he writes next of “growing up to salvation” that he does not have in mind that we should stay as babes.

The first verse of the chapter speaks of malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking. These are all things which have no part in christianity and which have to be definitely and deliberately laid aside on the basis that they do not belong to the “new man” at all. It would be a very happy thing if we had truly laid them all aside, but later Peter comes back to this matter and exhorts to “abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul”. This is one feature that distinguishes the old man from the new. The old man was crucified with Christ. We each need to see that he ended there not only for God but for us as well. The new man is created in “truthful righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). What we are speaking of is not something so lofty that we can leave it to those who are more spiritual. We are each expected by the Lord to have put on the new man and to walk accordingly.

Then as formed according to the new man we will seek this “mental milk of the word”. That is, that the word of God instructs us so that we may make progress in our souls. The scriptures are the revealed mind of God brought to bear upon each one of us in reality and in that way to affect each of us individually in our souls. Peter presents the word as “milk”; elsewhere it is presented as “water” which has a cleansing effect, “the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26). The practical effect is that we are changed from what we would otherwise be. As we yield to God’s word the corruptions, impurities and defilements that we meet along the way will be overcome.

Peter goes on to speak of the spiritual house to which every believer, indwelt by the Spirit, belongs and in which they have a place to fill. In God’s mind every stone is being built in now and forms an irremovable part of this building. If we read this passage alongside Ephesians 2 we see that the Ephesians were being built into this same house. This is where we belong, “yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”. These converted Jewish saints would have known something about the

sacrifices of the Old Testament, but as christian believers they had come to see that the one great sacrifice for sin had been offered once and for all, and that spiritual sacrifices according to the mind of God show themselves in appreciation of Christ.

It is worth noting that Peter is writing in the main to Jewish converts, persons who knew Old Testament scriptures and would therefore readily see how these speak about Christ. They would also recognise his references to Exodus, “A kingly priesthood, a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). So he is helping them to see that what was foreshadowed in the Old Testament has now become a living reality. It is a reality for us as well.

Peter continues, “if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good”. We need to be rooted in that. Whatever the Lord does is good and right. We do not question it; we may not understand it but it is always good. If we do not believe this and hold to it there will be disaster. But it is not just a formality; we each have to say from our own experience that we have been that way and found that it was true. It will carry no conviction with anyone else if we do not plainly believe it on the basis of experience. That is what “tasting” means, that you have proved it for yourself.

The cornerstone is a vital part in this house. It is the Lord Himself. “I lay in Zion a corner stone”. That is where God begins and all the other stones have to fit in around Him. Now, from God’s side that is, we might say, not a difficulty, because He has taken perfect material in Christ and it is perfect material that is built into it. Then there is our side, whether we easily find a place as built into this structure in harmony with the corner stone. That is the side of our responsibility. There is what God has done and there is what we are to do.

We look back on these Old Testament scriptures and see that God had something very definite in mind in a heavenly structure, which would all take character from the Lord Jesus Himself. The Lord quoted these scriptures Himself and it is a very great blessing to acknowledge His place, for it is one that God has given Him and it would be good if we were all just concerned to fit in around the corner stone. This building is going on; souls are being added constantly and it is important that we, too, are finding that we are needed there and have a part to play in it.



**Until we all arrive at...the full grown man...growing up to Him in all things...who is the Head**

Ephesians 4 speaks of the provision that the Lord has made so that there might be growth amongst the saints and in His church while it is still down here. As we read here, it is until we reach the full-grown man, the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ.

The Lord has made provision for His people. He has set helps here for a particular purpose, “for the perfecting of the saints; with a view to the work of the ministry”. That is what ministry is for; it is to build christians up and any true ministry is for the whole body of Christ: “with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ”. Then we get the object in view, “until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God”. None of us would claim to have arrived but like the apostle Paul we are to be pressing on towards the goal.

The earlier part of chapter 4 spoke about keeping the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace. It is there in the Spirit, our responsibility is to maintain it. Then there is “the unity of the faith”. That shows that there is one true faith. I may not perfectly appreciate it but there is still only one faith. We cannot take our understanding of the faith and make that the standard; the standard is what it is, the faith, and we should be pressing on towards that, until we all arrive.

There is only one faith. “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5) and when we reach the knowledge of the Son of God we are reaching the full-grown man. We are not exactly speaking of little children, young men and fathers, although the fathers may be nearer to this than others. But this is for all the saints and what God has in mind is that the believer should be mature and fully like Christ.

We are to hold the truth in love so that we may grow up to Him in all things who is the Head, the Christ. It is where we take pattern. Then there is this picture of the body, with every part contributing. The apostle spoke earlier of the measure of the gift of the Christ. Now he speaks of every joint of supply “according to the working in its measure of each one part”. We would all feel that our measure is small, but we should each contribute to the self-building up of the body in love.

## Poetry Selection

All growth in divine things is by love; it arises from a desire to please the Lord. We can read and read, and listen and listen but if we are not attracted to the One who is the subject of the ministry and the word we will not get much growth. That is why Peter says, “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”. That is the only way of true growth. The goal is perfectly clear; it is “the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ”, that which will fully express Him. If we look to ourselves we may find plenty that does not express Christ, but we can also see in scripture plenty that does do so. Mr Darby expressed it in a hymn:—

‘And thus Thy deep perfections  
Much better should I know,  
And with adoring fervour  
In this Thy nature grow’

That was a personal prayer: to grow after the pattern of Christ.

*David Burr*

*Based on a Bible reading at Basildon, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2007.*

### **HIS NAME IS JESUS**

The holy One, who knew no sin,  
God made Him sin for me;  
The Saviour died my soul to win,  
He lives, and I am free!  
His precious blood alone availed  
To wash my sins away;  
Through weakness He o’er hell  
prevailed,  
Through death He won the day.  
His beauty shineth far above  
A seraph’s power of praise,  
And I shall live and learn His love,  
Through everlasting days.  
The knowing that He loveth me  
Hath made my cup run o’er;  
Yes, Jesus all my song shall be  
Today and evermore

*Hannah K. Burlingham (1842 - 1901)*

## HOW I FOUND THE LORD

For twenty years, I believe, I was about the most thorough-going young worldling you could have met with. My first real spiritual impression was when I was a schoolboy. I had a brother going out to the Crimean War in 1855. He was passing where I was at school and I was to have met him at the train but I missed it. I had gone off to buy some new stumps for a coming cricket match and had spent too long over that. I was very sorry, I know, at being a minute or two late, and the thought entered my mind, We may never meet again, perhaps he will be slain in the Crimea. I thought he was a Christian, and I knew that I was not, and the thought made such an impression on my mind that it led me to do something that I then considered very meritorious. I set to work to read the Bible, as a sort of offset to my sins. I chose Isaiah as being the most difficult part of the Bible, and therefore the most meritorious thing that I could do. But when I had got to the end, I was just where I was before I had begun — an unsaved sinner in my sins.

School life passed and I got into a solicitor's office but my main interest was to enjoy myself. There was not a ball or a concert, a regatta, or a worldly entertainment of any kind within twenty miles of where I lived that I was not in if I could get to it. I just want you to see where I was before Christ met me.

God spoke to me again when I was about nineteen. A fine young Christian came to see my father. I went down with him to the gate and he said to me, "Well, Walter, are you a Christian?"

"No!" I replied.

"Well", he said, "Had you not better come to the Lord?" I got very angry with him for talking to me in that way and quickly closed the gate.

On Tuesday 4th December 1860 I went from my home in Devon to London to pursue my legal studies. It was only going to be a short time since I had a number of engagements for Christmas. The national volunteer movement had just sprung up, and I flung myself heart and soul into the organisation of the local artillery corps. We wanted a band and we were going to raise money for this by a concert. I recollect how tremendously I threw my heart into the concert and I was set down for the comic songs. We had one concert and it was a great success, so we arranged to have another at Christmas, because so many people could not get seats at the first. We arranged a new programme and I well remember the conductor said to me, "If you go to

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London, you will not come back”. I promised him that I would come back and sing. “Remember we cannot put another in your place”, he said.

“Have no fear”, I replied, “I will be down, for I have a lot of other engagements for Christmas week that I must keep”.

I was leaving home for the first time and I felt that I was taking a serious step in life. I found some lodgings in Islington and settled in there. My mother had written to me asking me to go and hear the gospel so on the evening of Sunday 9th December I set off for Blackfriars Road for I had seen a notice in the newspaper that Richard Weaver was going to speak in the Surrey Theatre.

I shall never forget the scene outside the theatre. The street was crowded. God was working in those days and souls were being saved in hundreds of thousands; and I believe that the man I went to hear was the means of awakening thousands of souls to their real condition before God, and of bringing them to knowledge of Christ. When the doors were opened, the flood of people poured in. I got into one of the stage boxes. The theatre was crammed, and to 3,500 souls did that simple collier preach the blessed gospel of the grace of God. I still remember some of the things he said that night, as from the crowded stage he read Mark 5:25-34, and then told us the simple story of the woman with the flux of blood, and how all her disease and distresses were healed, when she simply touched the hem of the garment of Jesus. I saw clearly enough that salvation was by the simple touch of faith; but then, he was only a common man, I thought, and I was a gentleman, and a common man could not convert me. Such was the pride of my poor sinful heart. Yet God had His eye upon me that night, and I was in measure impressed.

At the close, any who were anxious were invited to go to the pit. I went to the pit, not because I was anxious, but because I was curious. I was only there for a few minutes when a young man asked me, “Are you a Christian?”

“No, I am not”, I replied

“Would you not like to be one?” he next asked me.

“I do not know”, I said.

“Oh, surely you had better be a Christian, it is very easy to become one. I became one last Sunday evening. I went to Exeter Hall and there I was converted by Richard Weaver’s preaching.” He then said to me, “Will you not pray?”

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“ I never could pray”, I replied. He then told me that he would pray for me and there and then got down on his knees in the theatre and prayed most fervently to God to bless and save me. At this point another young man came over and spoke to me. As he lived near where I lodged we set off to walk back to Islington together. He asked me if I was a Christian and when I said that I was not, he asked whether I would like to be a Christian and I said that I would for I was beginning to think that it was worthwhile being a Christian. Then he said. “You must be in earnest about it”.

“I hope I will be”, I replied, “But what must I do to become a Christian?”

“You must give up the world”, he replied. Give up the world! The thought horrified me. How I clung to it when he made that suggestion, but earnest as he was he did not yet know the gospel clearly. Then my mind filled with all my engagements for Christmas week and my uppermost thought was, how could I give them up?

The next day I got a Bible and began to read Matthew’s gospel. The week was a remarkable one; in the morning I read the Bible and prayed most earnestly for I had a deep sense of my sins; but in the evening I should be ashamed to tell you where I went. I was fresh from the country and wanted to see London life, so London’s various hells tempted me at night and God only kept me from being engulfed that week.

The next Sunday came round. My mother had written again to me asking me to go to a hall in Islington and hear her friend Andrew Miller preach, so on 16th December on a cold murky night I set off to find William Street in North London. It took ages to find the place and when I got there I found that Mr Miller was not at home and that Charles Stanley was preaching.

The place was crammed and I stood in the aisle. The preacher was speaking very simply from the story of Solomon building the temple. Stones three hundred tons in weight were taken to build the temple. He told us that they came from a cavern below Jerusalem, and how they were hewn out of the quarry, and then taken out and built into the temple. Then he pointed out that God was building a spiritual temple, that the world was the quarry, and sinners were the stones. They were so deeply embedded in the quarry, however, that a good deal of blasting was needed to get them out. It often took trouble and distress and sorrow to break up a man and dislodge him from the world. Then, again, his sins had to be pressed on him, and by and by he got a little bit anxious. Just as Hiram shaped the top and sides of his stones, so did

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God's Spirit act on the sinner, to shape him to receive the gospel. Now how were those stones, three hundred tons in weight, got into position? I shall never forget the preacher's remarks as to this. Suppose Hiram had gone to these stones and said, "You great stones, I want you up out of this quarry, get up this ladder with ten steps and into the temple." How could these stones move? They were lifeless. The application was easy. The ladder was the law, the Ten Commandments. Could I keep them? Could I reach God's temple now, and heavenly glory thereafter, by keeping them? I saw that I could not. I began to get convicted; I began to get really anxious. \*\*

I was serious that night; I was a downright awakened sinner. I saw my sin; I saw the holiness of God; I knew if there was anyone on earth who deserved hell, I was that man.

Then the preacher told us that, just as Hiram brought tackle and purchase, and lifted his big stones out of the quarry and put them into the temple, without sound of hammer or chisel, so God was building His temple, composed of sinners, saved by grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. He showed us that God's Son had done the work for us, and that His Spirit wrought in us, that the blood of atonement had been shed, and the Saviour on the cross had met all the claims of God. Jesus had died that the sinner might live. Christ's blood had been shed that the sins of the sinner might be washed away. I began to think, Could this be for me? I was deeply convicted of sin.

The meeting closed. Then the preacher said, "I will be glad to see anybody anxious in the side room". I went down to the little vestry and there I met Tom who, after a few words of introduction asked, "Are you a Christian?" I told him I was not and he then said, "Do you not want to be a Christian?"

"Yes, I should very much like to be a Christian", I said

"Well, how are you going to become a Christian?" Tom asked.

"I suppose, by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ", I replied.

"Yes, there is no other way", said Tom. Then he added, "Do you believe in Him?"

"Of course", I replied, "We all believe."

"What do you believe?" he asked. I was very puzzled by that question and after a short pause, I told him that I believed that Jesus Christ came into the

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\*\* If you want to read the preaching Walter Wolston heard that night turn to page 13

## Testimony Section

world to save sinners. “Quite true”, said Tom, “And are you a sinner?” I readily agreed that I was a sinner, so Tom asked, “Did Jesus come to save you?” I could only reply that I hoped He had, but this did not satisfy Tom who pressed the question until I told him that I was not saved because I did not feel saved. Tom’s response took me by surprise, for he said, “You have not got to feel saved; all you have to do is to believe what the Lord tells you. Do you believe that Jesus is able to save you and are you willing to be saved?” I told him I was most anxious to be saved, but I could not be expected to believe something that I did not feel. Tom’s reply was, “I expect you to believe because God says that the one who believes on His dear Son is forgiven and saved”. I still found this very difficult. Finally, Tom said to me, “I see where you are” and he quoted to me that remarkable verse in the Epistle of James: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble” (James 2:19). Then he added, “That is where you are”.

That verse was a revelation from God to me. Though there is no gospel in it, it was used for the blessing of my soul. I saw that I was on the same ground as the devils. My traditional beliefs would not save me. I shook all over. I saw myself to be what God knew me to be, a man going to hell in his sins. Tom saw the effect of the scripture on me and cried out, “Stop, there is a difference between you and the devils. They are past mercy; you are still on the ground where mercy will meet you, if you will take God at His word”. He then exhorted me to believe, saying, “Fling your feelings away. If you trust in your feelings you will wake up in hell some day. You are not told to feel, you are told to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. You must take God at His word”.

I was just at the point of believing when the thought came to me of all the things that I had promised to do in Devon over Christmas week; there were the comic songs to sing, and a ball to go to and a few delightful dinner parties. The devil whispered in my ear, “Go down to Devon, fulfil all your engagements like a gentleman and then come back to London and be a Christian”. The devil rounded off his advice with the words of the Bible: “No man can serve two masters”.

That settled it for me. I had a bad master and I would serve him no longer. I got saved there and then, thank God. The words, “Lord, I believe” sprang from my heart and I was saved on the spot. There and then I got the knowledge that I was forgiven. I met the blessed Saviour who had overcome death for

## A Voice from the Past

me. He filled my heart with peace and joy. I went home to my lodgings that night, as happy as a man could be.

I did not mention my conversion in the office on the Monday as I thought it might be excitement, for I was not a little moved. On Tuesday I had to go to Lincoln's Inn with a message for another lawyer. As it happened I had to wait there for some time and while I was there I got some paper and wrote to the conductor of the concert, the man to whom I had promised faithfully that I would come down and sing, and I told him of the very remarkable thing that had happened to me. I told him the story as briefly as I could, how God had met me, a hell-going sinner, and saved me and blessed me. I said that if I went down to sing, I must sing about Christ. If I could not sing about Christ, I could not sing at all. All my songs had been changed. I gave him all the gospel I knew and at the end of the letter I wrote, "Be sure and read this letter to all the Glee Club".

Did he do it? Not he. He just told people that I had become religious and had gone wrong in my head! I had not gone wrong in my head, but I had got right in my heart that night. I can never forget December 16 1860; I keep it as my birthday. I am 37 years old today. I look a good deal older, I admit, but it was 37 years ago when I really began to live!

*Walter Wolston*

*16<sup>th</sup> December 1897*

## GREAT STONES AND COSTLY

**"... and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house" (1 Kings 5:17)**

**"And he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God" (1 Chronicles 22:2)**

The building of Solomon's Temple is one of the most interesting studies of antiquity and when that building on Mount Moriah is seen as the type of God's present heavenly building, it becomes infinitely more interesting.

In this building, then, the first thing that presents itself is this: David, the father, provides beforehand the materials of this Temple; even the stones, the iron, and brass in abundance, without weight. He says, "I have prepared for the house of the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand



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thousand talents of silver”. [Sums that would be of immense value in the present day.] This was David’s provision for this building, in addition to an incalculable quantity of brass, iron, wood, and stone. Besides this, the riches of Solomon, the son, were quite equal to those of his father, David. 1 Kings 10 gives some idea of Solomon’s riches.

More than 150,000 men were employed in the rearing of this wondrous building. (1 Kings 5: 15.) “And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house” (Kings 5:17).

Now, what do “great stones” mean? A builder would consider a stone three feet every way a great stone. But we find these great foundation stones, sawn and hewn, were indeed “costly stones, even great stones, stones of ten cubits, and stones of eight cubits” (1 Kings 7:10-11). A cubit is approximately one foot six inches; it is the measure from the elbow of a man to the end of his fingers. Thus, these great stones were about twelve feet every way, and fifteen feet every way. If you just figure it up, you will find they weighed about two hundred and fifty tons each. There was one stone in the Temple, after its restoration, thirty feet by thirteen by seven and a half feet. There are similar great stones in the ruins at Balbec, which may have been built by Solomon, called the “House of the Forest of Lebanon”

For many centuries there has been a difficulty as to where and how these great stones were obtained but it is likely that they came from caverns below Jerusalem. These great stones were hewn out of the quarry and got into the temple. Just think of the greatness of the labour required, in raising these great stones of the pit out to daylight, and moving them, and putting them in their place. Isaiah may have referred to these caverns when he speaks of the stones of the pit (Isaiah 14:19).

The Temple was built on a rock, by the side of a frightful drop. Historians tell us that six hundred feet of foundation-work had to be built to the level, on one side, where Solomon’s porch stood. The foundation stones were dovetailed, or mortised, in a most wonderful manner into the very rock. The joint was so finely wrought that it could scarcely be found. Thus they were rooted, and grounded, and built into the very rock.

And the house, when it was building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither; so that “there was neither hammer nor axe nor any

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tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building” (1 Kings 6:7). Thus the silent growth of this earthly Temple set forth the heavenly building of God. As David, the father, gave the materials to Solomon, the son, even so Jesus says, “My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:29). And again, “As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given Him” (John 17:2). “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me: and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” (John 6:37) “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (6:39). He would be a foolish builder who began to build, and did not know whether he had materials to finish and it is blessed to remember that God, the great Master builder, foreknew every stone chosen, and precious, that is built and shall be built in the heavenly temple.

Is it not most plain that those great stones, two hundred and fifty tons weight, never got out of the pit by any effort or work of their own? As we say, they would never have seen daylight if they had not been drawn out. Yet you might just as well have put a ladder of ten steps, and told these stones to climb up it and get out of darkness, as to set the ten commandments before a dead sinner, and tell him to try and climb them, and so get out of the pit of sin. Jesus said to those who had long been trying this plan, “No man can come to Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

There would be no way of getting those great stones out of the pit, but by going into the pit, hewing and drawing them out. Now, does not the cross of our Lord Jesus reveal God’s judgment of this matter as to sinners? If David counted the cost of this earthly Temple in gold and silver, God also counted the cost. The price was the blood of the Lamb. “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1: 18, 19).

If those stones of the temple were great and costly, surely believers are great stones and costly. God spared not His only begotten Son, but gave Him up for us all. I am not much of a mason, but I should say a fifteen-foot

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cube of stone would cost no trifle. And, fellow-believer, fellow-stone in the living temple, think what you have cost.

Thus God saw no way of raising sinners from being dead in offences but by sending His Son to die for them. “We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead”. And having died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was numbered with the dead. There was the end of all judgment due to our sins. The full ransom price was paid. Despised, indeed, He was of men: yes, never was a stone so rejected by masons, as was this stone by Judah’s builders. But what were God’s thoughts of His blessed Son as He lay in the grave? God saw Him the foundation stone. As our substitute, all our sins had been laid on Him. So Christ bore the sins of many. And now, infinite atonement being made by His precious blood, this stone, rejected by man, was raised from the dead by God. Therefore “this is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:11-12). Language cannot find words to express “the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead” (Ephesians 1:19, 20). The raising of those great stones was, indeed, a grand figure of this; but what would have been the power required, if every stone of the Temple had to have been raised up together with the first foundation-stone.

This heavenly temple, blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Yet every stone in this living temple was once dead in trespasses and sins - dead as stones. “But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-6).

Now, whether we think of what we were as lost sinners, or what it was for One to stand our substitute, and bear the full, unmixed wrath of God due to our sins, or what we shall forever be as living stones in the heavenly temple—surely the raising up of Christ, the foundation-stone, from the dead was the greatest work that ever God wrought. Oh how strange that God’s greatest work should be so little thought of in our day!

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Now, the Temple was built on the rock of Moriah, the place where divine judgment was stayed by the altar of burnt-offerings and peace-offerings; for there the Lord answered by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering (1 Chronicles 21:26). In the same way the offering of Jesus, and the shedding of His precious blood, is the foundation of every sinner saved by grace from the deserved wrath of God. One thing is certain, that where the foundation stone was laid, there the Temple was built.

“The house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnificent, of fame, and of glory, throughout all countries”. Now, when God raised Jesus, the foundation stone, from the dead, where did He place Him? Ephesians gives us the answer, “Far above all principality and power” (Ephesians 1:21). “And He is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence” (Colossians 1:18). God did not raise Him from the dead to improve the old creation, but to be the beginning of the new creation, not to build an earthly house, or earthly society, but a heavenly temple. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;” “Hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”.

That word, “in Christ Jesus” is very precious. All the great stones in the Temple were covered on the inside with cedar-wood: “And the cedar of the house within was carved with knops (gourds) and open flowers: all was cedar; there was no stone seen” (1 Kings 6:18). Thus in the heavenly building the sinner is not to be seen. Every saved one, though once a great sinner, is now hid in Christ. Then not only was the stone covered with cedar-wood, but this overlaid with pure gold. “So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold... And the whole house he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the house” (1 Kings 6:21-22).

It is written, fellow-believer, “Ye are complete in Him who is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2: 10). It was not the stones themselves that were seen, but the gold upon them: so it is not ourselves, but Christ upon us. Yes, the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ, in whom we are complete. And all within, how perfect - beautiful carvings of gourds and of open flowers; all covered with pure gold.

You observe all was done to these stones. Not one atom did they do. They

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were hewn, they were drawn out, they were built in the Temple, they were covered with cedar and the pure gold was put upon them. It is so with the sinner. Salvation from beginning to end is all of God.

Look at the prodigal son (Luke 15). He has not an atom of merit but the father met him as he was, fell upon his neck, and kissed him. He had not to buy a new robe. No, the robe was ready, the shoes were ready, the ring was ready. Like the gold that covered the stones, so with this new best robe, he had not even to put it on. No, the father said, "Put it on him". Yes, the new creation-work is all of God. "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new; and all things are of God" (2 Corinthians 5:17, 18).

The fact is, all this seems too good to be true, and the poor heart is so slow to believe God. Yet true it is, and if the earthly Temple was for glory throughout all countries, this heavenly building of God is for God's glory throughout all ages, "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus," (Ephesians 2:7); yea, "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3:10).

If the change was great, as every stone was drawn out of the pit of darkness and placed in that Temple of splendour and dazzling light, what is the change when a sinner is taken from the dungeon of darkness, and "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:20,21).

Oh, what thousands of poor sinners have been built into this heavenly temple of late! Silently and swiftly is God taking out the appointed stones.

'View the vast building, see it rise;  
The work how great! The plan how wise!  
Oh wondrous fabric! Power unknown!  
That rears it on the Living Stone.'

To every believer God does not say, 'Ye shall be built'; but, "Ye are built". Oh that every believing hearer may enter into the full joy of being complete

in Christ! For God has made such a blessed finish of it, within and without. It may be asked, 'If salvation is so entirely of God, what has the person so saved to do?' Well, certainly you can do no more for your salvation than the great stones and costly could do for their hewing and drawing out of the pit. Let us turn to a passage in 1 Peter 2:4-10: "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, by Jesus Christ." It is God who has laid this chief corner stone, elect, precious, "And he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded." Oh, surely, the more I see what God has made Him to be to me, the more precious He will be; as it is written, "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner". Yes, here is the grand test to every heart-what is Christ to you? Can you say that He is everything to you? I do not ask what profession you make. Every religious builder who is trying to improve humanity, in one way or another, makes light of Christ. This whole world is one vast pit of darkness, sin, and death. God has no more thought in the gospel of improving this dark pit, than Solomon had when taking the great stones out of the cavern of perpetual darkness. He took out the stones. God is now taking out of the world sinners for Himself. Now in general people will not have this; they see no need of a new creation and say, 'Why not build up and improve the old?' Therefore the new-creation temple, built on the risen Christ, is almost forgotten among the builders; and instead of waiting for the coming of the Lord, and the manifestation of this heavenly building, men are vainly dreaming that Christianity will gradually improve this dark cavern of sin. The masons of Solomon would not have made a greater mistake if, instead of going on hewing and drawing, they had commenced building in the dark cavern.

I ask you to look at yonder risen Christ, raised from among the dead. There see God's chosen foundation stone. Is He precious to you? Are you built on Him? The faith that rests in Him shall never be confounded. To believers the Spirit of God says, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter

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2:9). This is what the saved sinner should do.

Nothing can be more pleasing to God than thus to show forth His praise, who has taken us, like the stones of the pit, out of darkness: and as they bore the shining plates of gold that reflected and displayed the riches and magnificence of their great builder, even so may Christ be seen on each of us, reflecting and showing forth the exceeding riches of divine grace. Oh, what grace shone in all the ways of Jesus! Even when crucified still grace shone forth: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”. Then there was a bright reflection of Christ, when Stephen was stoned to death. He said, “Lay not this sin to their charge.” Oh for more of the bright shining of Christ in all and on all our ways! God would have us enter into the full joy of being able to give Him thanks, “who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son: In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:12-14).

Is this your joy? Can you thus give God all the glory? Are you in the pit or in the temple? Are you covered with sin, or covered with Christ? I was of no use, though cut and hewn and sawn, if still left in the pit - no place in the Temple and no plates of gold. Those half-cut stones left in the caverns of Jerusalem are solemn warnings. You may have long felt the axe and saw of conviction, but are you out of the cavern? This must be the work of God. Paul planted, and Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. “So, then, neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase”. God is the builder. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:5-16). “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”

Now God’s way of getting stones is like this: the Spirit of God takes the axe of conviction and strikes deep; the Word of God is the power unto salvation to everyone that believes. The Spirit works to awaken the sinner to his need. Often it takes a good deal of hammering and chiselling to get a sinner to see the need of a Saviour. Yet God works in grace so that we may be drawn out of the pit of sin. “Be it known unto you, therefore ... that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that

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believe are justified from all things.” Oh, I love to see great stones, great sinners, drawn out of the pit! If you have never done so before, God grant that from this moment you may yield yourself up to God, as a stone in the hands of the mason.

We must not, however, carry the figure too far; for, while a sinner is, as to that which is good, as dead as stone, yet for that which is evil he is terribly alive. Yes; a live rebel against God—a voluntary, wilful rejecter of Christ, the only foundation stone. “Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?” “And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Matthew 21:42-44).

In the Day of Judgment you will not be condemned because you had been in the pit of darkness, but because you refused to be taken out. “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, [the dark pit] and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” The remembrance of the love of God in sending His Son to this dark pit of sin will be like the worm that dies not. O what unutterable remorse!

Was it not in love to the bitten Israelites that God bade Moses lift up the serpent in the wilderness? Even so has the Son of man been lifted up. For sinners Jesus died, lost, ungodly sinners. Yes, it was these God so loved. If He had only bidden you get out of the pit yourself, you might have said, How can I, since I am as helpless as stone. But He sent His Son, and you have rejected Him: you have refused to be saved. Oh, it would have been blessed had your heart been broken with the sense of His love! But if not, it must be crushed before Him in the judgment with the sense of His everlasting wrath. A very little while, and the end of the present scene shall come. The stone cut out of the mountain shall smite the nations, and they shall become “like the chaff of the summer threshing floor” (Daniel 2:34-45) This terrible day is closed by those solemn words, “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal” (Matthew 25:32-46).

There is one point of contrast, however, between the earthly Temple and the heavenly building we must notice. To see those huge blocks of stone so



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built in the rock, one would have thought they would have stood forever. But the time came when the Chaldeans prevailed against them. And, again, when restored in later times, as our blessed Lord foretold, the Romans prevailed, until not one stone was left upon another and not a trace of this wondrous building remains. But Jesus, speaking of Himself, the only foundation, says, "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Jesus did not say to Peter, Thou art this Rock; but, Thou art a stone. Yes, Peter, a stone, needed to be built on the rock as much as any man. He found this need as much in the high-priest's hall as on the swelling billows. Christ is the foundation-rock; and that Rock is not at Rome, but in heaven. And where the foundation is, there must the building be. Yes, God is not building His Church at Rome, but in heavenly places in Christ. Against the Church, so high, so blessed, so secure, the gates of hell shall not prevail. How can they? The Church is built in Christ, so that "We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" (Ephesians 5:30).

There is but one point more, and I close. David, as recorded in 1 Chronicles 22:17-19 commanded the princes of Israel to help Solomon, saying, "Is not the Lord your God with you? and hath He not given you rest on every side?" How much more has God given us rest and perfect peace through the blood of Christ and He says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." "And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end." If you have not got this "rest on every side," then do not think to get it by preaching or doing; let me point you to Him who gives it, even to Jesus. But if you have peace with God, then "set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God; arise therefore, and build." There is work for every one who has found rest to his own soul. Do not say, I can do nothing. "Is not the Lord your God with you?" "Arise, therefore, and build." God give us more willingness of heart, more singleness of eye, more simplicity of faith; and as the building grows in silent power, yes, when the top stone shall be brought with shouting, to Him be all the praise!

*Charles Stanley*  
*December 1860*

## **THE ABSENCE OF CHRIST**

The Lord, knowing that nothing would so specially affect His own on the earth as the fact of His going away, records for us fully in John 13 to 17 how He will provide for us during His absence from this scene and our journey through it. He knew every feeling and need that could be awakened by the blank and reckoning on our faithfulness and affection He provides accordingly. Consequently, as there is faithfulness and affection for Him, as One known, so is there an understanding of the gracious and marvellous provision for His absence in these chapters. Yet as there is indifference and denial of His absence, so are they unappropriated and inapplicable. I do not propose to comment on these chapters, but simply to draw attention to the fact of Christ's absence, and some of the consequences of it. Nothing betrays more the meagre nature of our love to Christ than the little practical sense we have of His absence. The true evidence of how we have valued anyone is the extent of blank we are conscious of in the absence of such a one. If we can go on as usual, it is very clear that the presence was not necessary to us; but according to our value of the presence is the greatness of the blank caused by absence. Now nothing can fill or repair the blank but that which has caused it. In simple language, the blank that is caused by the absence of anyone can only be repaired by the presence of that same one. Hence, if I feel the Lord's absence and the blank here occasioned by it, nothing can repair that blank to me but His presence. Consequently, as His absence is felt, so is His presence sought. The latter proves the genuineness of the former.

The disciples had known Him as present with Him, and they at once felt the blank and loss that His absence entailed. To them every word that He said which indicated how the blank would be repaired was of all importance. Saints now have never known Him down here personally, as the first disciples did; but according as they know Him, they have at every turn the painful sense that He is not here; and as this sense is deepened and sustained, so is there in them a retreating from things as they are here, because His absence is so felt. It is as we know the blessedness and the power of His presence now, that we feel the blank and desolation caused by His absence. His absence is a fact, and He repairs the blank, assuring us that He will not leave us comfortless, but that He will come to us.

## A Word for Today

Now this coming to us does not mean the same thing as His coming for us. The coming for us is when He comes to receive us to Himself, that where He is, there we may be also. His coming to us is by the Holy Spirit to repair the blank of His absence. If I feel the absence of Christ from this scene, and if my heart be truly set on Him, nothing can make up or repair for me this grievous blank, but His coming to me, His manifesting Himself to me; and this must be by the Holy Spirit. Hence, if I feel the absence of Christ, my only resource is the Holy Spirit, who is on the earth, sent down to manifest to me the absent Christ. What relief to a true and faithful heart! How simple it is that nothing can repair absence but presence; and if we do not feel the absence of Christ, it is only too evident that we have never yet known Him as present with us. Where is there a heart for Christ, in a day like this, which does not feel that it is vain to hope to find Him even in things avowedly dedicated to Him? The fact is, souls are satisfied with relief of conscience, and there stop, instead of going on to the satisfying of the heart. Nothing but His presence, as we see in the case of Mary Magdalene in John 20, will satisfy the heart; no amount of gifts or communications will do for the heart. Nay, all these only intensify the desire of the true heart to have His presence. If gifts or communications would make up for the presence, then they are greater than the presence. This cannot be; nay, their value consists in being expressions of that presence, which is the more desired as it is kept fresh by these expressions before the heart and mind.

The moment my heart delights in the presence of Christ, it is unsatisfied elsewhere; and then His coming to me by the Holy Spirit is my relief and comfort here. And here it is that I first begin to find my true place for Him on the earth. If I do not feel His absence, I do not value the reparation of it. If Christ's absence is not felt, the Holy Spirit's presence is proportionally not regarded. My true place for Him here begins with loving Him; for it is as I find Him satisfying my heart that I am led and empowered to occupy the place here which pleases Him, one in fellowship of the Spirit. Then as I am satisfied with Him, I am in heart dissociated from everything not of Him. Nothing ministers to my heart where He is not; and where this is so, I begin to realise that He is not only absent from the place in which I walk, but that He has been rejected from it, refused a place in it; so that

I am not only isolated here because of the blank of His absence, but I am also repelled from association with things here because He has been refused His rightful place. His absence affects me in this place; but His rejection makes the place fearful, and separates me from every work and way of man, because of the guilt of His rejection and the consequent judgment of this world.

If it were merely a question of His absence, things would remain unaltered to me, only with this feeling, that none of them could fill up the blank. Nay, the more lovely and attractive they were naturally, the more would they evoke desolation of heart, because inviting my admiration where the one object of my heart no longer was. The order of nature and scenery indeed remains unaltered, but the fact that none of these things ever could revive His presence — nay, that as His presence is enjoyed by the Spirit, they are all in abeyance, closes the eye to them. The creation remains in all its native beauty, but it can never repair the blank of Christ's absence; and the spiritual one knows it to be so, and that it is with the eye closed to everything here, and the heart absorbed in Him, that one enters through the Spirit into the joy of His presence. The works of nature cannot repair the blank of His absence; the Holy Spirit alone can and does. My prospect is Christ's coming for me; in the interval I know His coming to me by the Holy Spirit.

I need not add more, but nothing is clearer than that, if the absence of Christ be not fully apprehended, there is really no power to walk here for Christ, because there is no acknowledgment of the Spirit, who only can fill the blank and lead us here according to His mind. Consequently there must be unhallowed mixture and diverse false efforts to make up for the absence of Him who is the sole fountain and supply of all our blessings.

Oh for a true heart for Him! Nothing but His presence by the Spirit could then satisfy our hearts here, and every other thing would only have its relative value.

*J. B. Stoney*

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