

Living Water

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Recent Ministry

THE HOLY ARK AND WHAT WAS IN IT

Exodus 25: 10-22

Hebrews 9: 1-5

The Ark

We need to see what the ark represented as speaking to us of Christ. Very specific instructions were given to Moses in regard of how all the tabernacle system was to be constructed. He was repeatedly told that he was not to depart from the pattern. Instructions were given for the ark first of all. This was because of the way that it spoke to God of Christ. You have in the wood the perfection of His Manhood and the gold speaks of His divinity. Then the mercy seat was on it. That was the place from which God would speak to them and where He would meet with them. Blood was to be sprinkled on and before it, speaking of the way that the rights of God have been upheld by the death of Christ.

There is a wonderful blending in the ark. Think of the perfection of Christ's Manhood. He was, "the holy thing also which shall be born shall be called Son of God" (Luke 1:35). This was a different kind of Man, One who derived nothing from the surroundings in which He was. "And they shall make an ark of acacia-wood". That is intended to bring home to us the incorruptibility of the Person we are speaking of. Acacia is a very durable wood. Our Lord could say, "the ruler of the world comes, and in me he has nothing" (John 14:30). There was no point of attack. The devil tried everything; we have three of the temptations recorded; there were others that we do not have, but there was no point of attack. That was established right at the beginning of the Lord's public service. Then over against what Satan did not find, God found His all in Christ.

Christ was a tried stone (Isaiah 28:16), He was tried in every department. Man had failed every way. Man in the flesh had been tried: in innocence, without law and under law; he failed in each

but Christ was proved victorious in every way. Even in death He was incorruptible.

The acacia tree flourishes in adverse conditions; it will grow in the deserts. We are reminded of Jesus of whom it is said, "For he shall grow up before him as ... a root out of dry ground" (Isaiah 53:2). The Lord Jesus flourished in adverse conditions. Adam was placed in the very best that God could provide and yet he failed, he disobeyed God. Thank God for the obedience of the one Man by which the many shall be constituted righteous (Romans 5:19).

God could proclaim His delight in the Lord. During those secret years from the age of 12 to 30 of which we have no scriptural record, there was perfection there and the Father could declare, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight" (Luke 3:22). Think of a life that was studied by heaven and every step of it found to be perfect. How different from the lives of any other man or woman before or since. He was, "tempted in all things ... sin apart" (Hebrews 4:15). His strength was weakened in the way (see Psalm 102:23). The reality of His Manhood is brought home in the gospels. We read that He was weary with the way He had come. He was truly and really Man. He felt things as we feel things but He was sin apart.

Well, that is the wood in its durability and strength, but the wood was overlaid with pure gold. It speaks of His divinity and the perfection there. Every way that you looked at the ark it was perfect. Inside and out it was overlaid and I think the two are just brought together; the perfection of His Manhood and His divinity are brought together in the ark. Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Flesh and blood had not revealed it to Peter but the Father (see Matthew 16:17).

Now the ark was to be carried on the journey through wilderness. God said that the Kohathites would carry the ark, the holy things. The other two families of the tribe of Levi, the Merarites and the Gershonites, were given carts, but the ark was specifically to be carried. In our day it is a question of the testimony being carried. It would bear on what is carried of Christ in testimony. The gold is

connected with the carrying. The bars, the rings, they are all gold. The testimony is something that is very great. It is Christ, who He really is.

When the ark was carried it was covered with the veil, then badgers' skins and finally a cloth of blue. The ark was the only piece of furniture of the tabernacle where the outer covering was blue, as we are told in Numbers 4. Even the Kohathites would be impressed with the holiness of what they were carrying because they were not allowed to look upon it. The priest had to cover it first before the Kohathites could go in and lift it. Then the people had to keep at a distance from the ark. It all brings out its distinctiveness and holiness.

Nothing of God's thoughts and holiness is surrendered. We understand how near Christ has come and what He has done for us but we need to understand the glory of the Person as well, as to who He is. We have to keep that before us. It would hold us in reverence for Him if we remember who He is. The disciples, in a time of difficulty, said, "Who then is this" (Mark 4:41). They had to come to it that the One who was there was the Son of God. John, especially, laid hold of that. How thankful we are for the presentation of Christ in John's gospel.

Christ came to fulfil God's will, "Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do, O God, thy will" (Hebrews 10:7). It involved His coming into manhood. One of the Godhead came into manhood in order that God's will might be fulfilled. It involved His death because He had to come into manhood in order to die. But in drawing so near to sinners – "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2) – all God's glory has been maintained.

Psalm 40, from which the passage in Hebrews 10 is a quotation, ends up with the Lord Jesus. Having come to do the will of Him that sent Him, the last verse says "But I am poor and needy" (v. 17 KJV). That was the condition into which the Saviour came to do the Father's will, a poor and a needy Man. He had nowhere to lay His head; He had a borrowed tomb and had to beg a drink of

water from the woman at Sychar's well. He who had created all waters became "poor and needy". It was in keeping with the position of dependent Manhood that He took up in order to be that perfect sacrifice. The thrust of Satan's attack was to divert Him from dependence. If He had not remained as dependent Man, He could not have gone to Calvary's cross and met our lost condition.

His wonderful dependence is shown in Psalm 40, "I waited patiently for Jehovah ... And he brought me up out of the pit of destruction..." He could have gone up from the grave at any time but He was dependent on the timing of the Father. He was raised "by the glory of the Father" (Romans 6:4).

He could have gone up from the grave at any time but He was dependent on the timing of the Father

How often we are impressed by the death of the Lord Jesus; the battle was fought in Gethsemane and the victory won at Calvary. Gethsemane brings out the perfection of the Manhood of Christ. As a blessed perfect Man, He shrank from the cup which the Father was about to give Him because of the awfulness of what lay in it. He knew what was in it. We will never know what was in it. We read that "being in conflict, he prayed more intently" (Luke 22:44). An angel appeared from heaven strengthening Him. How real His Manhood was. There was never a shred of doubt that the work would be carried out. He says, "I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it" (John 17:4). In His mind it was complete. We need to approach all that side of things with unshod feet in the presence of such stupendous Manhood before God. One who shared the Father's abhorrence of sin went that way in love. We were without hope unless there was a sacrifice and a perfect sacrifice was made. That is what the mercy seat brings home to us. The claims of God have been righteously met in one blessed Man. Therefore God can be known in mercy. In the New Testament we read of Christ, "whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood" (Romans 3:25).

What was in the Ark

The Scriptures we read in Hebrews tell us what was carried in the ark as it went through the wilderness to the land.

The golden pot that had the manna

The first thing is the golden pot that had the manna. Manna is God's provision for food for the wilderness. It speaks of Christ once humbled here. The golden pot comes to light in Exodus 16. The manna was to be gathered up and put away for the generations (v.33); it speaks of the fragrance before God of the lowly life of Christ and we are to feed on that. It is the glory of the Person as One who came down and humbled Himself as is spoken of in Philippians 2. He "did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself..." (vv 6, 7). He emptied Himself in coming into Manhood; as a Man He humbled Himself. Can we really take in what that means for the Lord of glory? Humbled Himself and then became "obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross" (v 8). Feeding on Christ in this aspect is to provide us with a constitution for our wilderness path, to preserve us from all self-importance and all the false glory of the world.

**feed on Christ ...
before the rush
of the day**

The manna had to be gathered before the sun became hot. For us it means that we need to feed on Christ in this way before the rush of the day begins. Then it had to be gathered daily, except on the Sabbath; it shows that we need that food every day. It is not food that is palatable

to the flesh. If you look into the history of the manna, there came a time when the children of Israel were doing things with it; they were baking it, changing it (Numbers 11:8). They were tired of it, "our soul loathes this light bread" (Numbers 21:5). What a dreadful day that is, if you loathe the blessed truth of the One who was humbled here.

Then there is something more in this. The manna was preserved in the ark. It was the "hidden manna". The reward for the

overcomer in Pergamos was to have the hidden manna (See Revelation 2:12-17). It is the lowly life of Christ as Man here as it was in the eye of God and it is to be before us.

Aaron's rod that budded

Then there was Aaron's rod that budded. There was an attack on God's sovereign choice in the priesthood (see Numbers 16). God indicated His choice in the fact that Aaron's rod budded. All the princes were to take a rod for each tribe; the rods were laid up before God and in the morning it was found that it was Aaron's rod that budded. It would speak of Christ in resurrection, because it was an almond and the almond tree is the first to bud after the winter. Christ is the first fruits for God in resurrection. We need to understand what fruit has accrued from the Man in resurrection.

**Christ is to
outshine every
other for us**

A Prince for each one of the tribes was to take a rod but it was Aaron's that budded and it not only budded but it flowered and it fruited (Numbers 17:8) showing really what fruit has accrued to God in the resurrection of Christ. Then this was to be the answer to the murmuring of the people. They were to see Christ as the One with whom none could be compared.

The man of God's choice was established in this rod; it was the answer to the envious murmurings of the children of Israel. So Christ is to outshine every other for us. The fact that He is the Man of God's choice will be demonstrated to a wondering universe shortly.

The stone tables of the law

Finally, there are the tables of stone on which the law had been written. Moses in his wisdom put them in the ark when he brought them down the second time. Their being in the ark speaks of the way that everything for God was carried through in Christ. It speaks prophetically of Him that God's law was hid in His heart (see Psalm 40:4).

When Moses carried down the first tables of stone he found that the camp of the Israelites was given up to idolatry and in wisdom he broke the tables of stone. Had he carried them in to the camp there would have had to be immediate judgment. The law was holy, just and good but man could not keep it. But one Man was able to meet every requirement of God in absolute righteousness - the "better things" spoken of the epistle to the Hebrews are all exemplified in Christ. We need to value what is set out in the Old Testament order as we see it from the standpoint of the New Testament and how Christ came to give effect to all these things that God gave His people of old. They were all gathered up in Christ. So it is great for all of us to look into the offerings and to look into the tabernacle system and see Christ in these things.

In Chronicles we see that when the ark was carried into its rest in the land, it was only these stones containing the law that were found in the ark. When the church is called to glory to be with Christ, there will be no need then of manna and no challenge to Christ's distinctiveness, but the wonder of what He did in upholding gloriously all the holy claims of God will remain for ever.

David McIntyre

Based on a reading in Belfast, 22 April 2007.

Poetry Selection

HEAVENLY FAVOURS

Love proved on the cross of shame;
Love worthy of God's great name;
Love, eternally the same,
Wins a heart like mine.

Grace, knowing my every sin;
Grace, dying to make me clean;
Grace that ran to bring me in
Suits a heart like mine.

Peace, still as the sea of glass;
Peace, knowing the judgment's past;
Peace that will forever last,
 Calms a soul like mine.

Joy, fruit of the Father's kiss;
Joy, foretaste of heavenly bliss;
Joy that springs from love like this,
 Fills a heart like mine.

Lord, while in this world below
Still more of Thy love I'd know,
So shall sweeter praises flow
 From a heart like mine.

George Cutting (1843 – 1934)

ACCESS

O Favoured hour, the hour of praise,
 By Thee foreknown, our God, when we
From gladdened hearts in answering lays
 Now worship Thee.

For this Thine own blest Son has come,
 To lead our hearts to know thy grace;
To bring us satisfied and won
 Before Thy face.

Thus hast Thou sought us for Thyself;
 As sons in whom Thou hast delight;
To manifest Thy glory's wealth,
 Its depth and height.

And Thou hast found us, made us rest
In a deep sense of holy love;
Through Jesus, who revealed Thee, bless'd,
Here and above.

How great the fullness which He brought,
What springs of grace, what truth declared!
Rich is that love, beyond all thought;
Now by us shared.

Edward Rubie (1846 – 1942)

Testimony Section

KEPT GUARDED BY THE POWER OF GOD

Dear Brian

Thank you for sending me a copy of the New Testament that I received on 12th January. I am finding great comfort from its teaching. I am currently reading Hebrews 11:1-40 as I am trying to gather strength at the moment and find great power and wisdom from the knowledge of God's word.

Let me tell you a bit about myself. Twelve months ago I was released from prison for petty shoplifting and I am now on a Drug Rehabilitation Order but since it was imposed in February 2006, I have been able to turn my life round and the weekly test results show that I have managed to stay off heroin. How I came to have these problems was mainly down to my being very weak at the time, but I am now 32 years of age and I need to start my life with a whole new meaning.

I found one of your leaflets at Christmas time in a telephone box and took it home. I did have a Bible but unfortunately it had pages missing. When I got the Bible from you I immediately turned to John 10:9, as your leaflet suggested, and I found the words, "I

am the door; if anyone enters in by me he will be saved, and will go in and out and will find new pastures”.

So now I am a living proof of what the New Testament says, that our sins can be forgiven, and that we can live a new life through Jesus Christ. Through the Bible we can gain knowledge, and with knowledge comes wisdom that helps us to do what is right and to keep God’s commandments.

I will set my goals from day to day by reading God’s word that I have before me, and I will give praise each day, and thank the Lord for granting me wisdom, strength and righteousness. He fills me each day, as I pray to Him, and He grants me my prayers.

So thank you once again for sending me the New Testament, and I also pray for you Brian for spreading the Lord’s great words and letting people like myself know that there is a better quality of life when we bring the Lord into our life!

May God bless you always and may He always watch over you

Many thanks

David

A Voice from the Past

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

Part 3

Continuing the series on the features that mark the true believer.

In previous articles a Christian was shown to be a person who is: born again, forgiven, justified, has peace with God, has the Holy Spirit, is reconciled and brought to God, and who is one of God’s children. In this article A.A. Elliott continues to show from the Bible some further features of the true Christian.

A CHRISTIAN IS A MEMBER OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

When Christ was still on earth, He said, "On this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). It is clear from this that the church, or assembly, did not exist before the death and resurrection and ascension of Christ. The Lord also said of John the Baptist, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11: 11). That is to say, John the Baptist had the highest place among saints who died before the resurrection of Christ, but there was something new about to be established, and believers who should comprise this new circle would have a much higher and more privileged position than the Old Testament saints occupied.

In Old Testament days God had a "people"; now also He has a people, and they are called the church or the assembly; but in that day His people consisted of one nation; now the assembly of God consists of believers out of all nations. The concept of a national church is not really according to God's mind, for of those who compose the assembly Scripture says, "Where there is neither Greek, nor Jew, circumcision, nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:11). The church consists of all believers of all nations, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In the fullest sense it is composed of all believers from the day on which the church was formed, as in Acts 2, to the day when the Lord will take it out of the world, as spoken of in 1 Thessalonians 4. The expression is also used with a local meaning; there was, for example, the assembly at Corinth or at Jerusalem.

In connection with the present and future position of the assembly, Scripture speaks of it as:

- The house of God — 1 Timothy 3:15
- God's temple — 1 Corinthians 3:16
- Christ's body — Colossians 1: 24
- The bride and the wife of Christ — Revelation 19:7 and 21:9
- The holy city — Revelation 21:

God has only one house on earth, and He dwells there by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:22). This house is built of living stones, and every stone, i.e., every believer having the Holy Spirit, has their appointed place in that spiritual house.

In the church, looked on as the temple, God is made known, the light of God streams from the temple in the form of ministry when Christians meet together. When Christ was on earth He was the light of the world, and He could speak of His own body as the temple—He said, “Destroy this temple”, speaking of the temple of His body. Christians are said to be light in the Lord; the Lord said to His own, “Ye are the light of the world”, and it is from Christians that people should learn the character of God.

As the bride the church is looked at as the object of the love of Christ, to be His companion for ever.

In the church, looked at as the body of Christ, the character of Christ is continued on earth so that it can be seen by God and man. The Head is in heaven and the body on earth, and every believer has a definite position assigned to them in that body.

It is accordingly the duty and the privilege of every believer to learn their own place in that body (1 Corinthians 12), and to draw from the Head all that is needful to enable them to set forth the character of Christ. The body builds itself up in this way in love (Ephesians 4: 15-16)

The church is presented as a city in the millennial day coming down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21). It will be the centre of administration and benign influence over the earth during the thousand years of Christ’s reign.

Scripture speaks of only one body and one assembly and every believer in whom the Holy Spirit dwells is a member of that one body. We have to admit that these great privileges are but little understood by Christians. We so easily follow worldly principles, and in the world men form associations of all kinds and there is a danger of Christians imitating this. We must emphasize the fact

that the assembly of God is no product of man; we can establish no assembly; it has already been established by God and built by Christ, and Christians are brought into it. No unbeliever can be a part of the church or assembly of God or a member of the body of Christ, but every simple believer who is indwelt by the Spirit is a member of that body. If he truly acknowledges and understands this, it will exercise the greatest influence upon his whole spiritual life, and he will avoid everything that is in opposition to this wonderful truth.

A CHRISTIAN IS A CITIZEN OF HEAVEN

The Jewish religion was a religion for earth. Almost all the blessings that God promised to Israel were of an earthly character. If they obeyed His commandments, He would give them a good land, large flocks of sheep, good health, and such like things. His people were a favoured nation who had privileges superior to those of other nations, and who enjoyed those privileges as long as they walked in the pathway of obedience. Riches were thus an indication of God's favour, and poverty a token of His disapproval; but after the rejection of Christ the position was entirely different. If the Jews had accepted Him when He came into the world, He would have been their King and have established an earthly kingdom, in which every earthly blessing would have been enjoyed to the full, but the King was rejected and a heavenly kingdom has been established. The character and experience of the subjects of this kingdom are described in Matthew 5-7. We see there that they would be despised and persecuted by the world.

If we read the epistles of the apostle Paul, we learn still more of the results of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ in connection with the heavenly character of the Christian. This comes to light very fully in the epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians. We shall not attempt to explain these epistles, but we would urge every christian to read them carefully, in order to understand the high calling wherewith we are called, Ephesians 4:1.

In the epistle to the Colossians the Christians are looked upon as on earth but as "risen with Christ". They are urged therefore to set their minds on things above and not on things on the earth (Colossians 3: 1). In the epistle to the Ephesians Paul goes further and says God "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). This is the destined place that God would have us to occupy, Jew and Gentile together, as the companions of Christ in the place that He occupies as the heavenly Man.

So, too, Paul says to the Philippians, "Our conversation is in heaven"(Philippians 3: 20). The word translated "conversation" here means "citizenship," i.e., a christian is a citizen of heaven, and his duty is to attend to the interest of his heavenly land although here on earth, which is not his country. "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13: 14).

It is perhaps well to remember the great difference there is between the Old Testament and the New in this respect. The Jews were God's earthly people, and for this reason we find in the Old Testament many rules and laws to guide kings, and other leaders of God's people. We find also instructions as to how they should treat other nations, and how the land should be governed; but if we read the New Testament we shall note that it is quite different. We find that the Lord took no part in the political questions of His time, that He never gave instructions to His disciples how to improve the condition of the world, that He never told them to oppose the tyrannical and wicked rulers of the day, with a view to compelling them to establish a better condition of public affairs; on the contrary, He instructed them to give to Caesar the things of Caesar.

So also in the epistles we never find instructions telling us to teach kings and rulers how they must rule the world, but we do read a great deal about obedience and subjection. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise

of them that do well" (1 Peter 2:13-14). It is well known that the Roman Emperor at that time was not a righteous man, but that made no difference, Christians were to obey him. To-day similarly, Christians are not to be disobedient, unless, of course, the king, or the government, orders them to do something that is clearly opposed to the expressed will of God. In such a case a Christian must be prepared, not to offer opposition, but, if necessary, to suffer for righteousness and for conscience sake (1 Peter 3:14-17).

This represents simply the correct attitude of the Christian towards the rulers of this world, but heaven is where our citizenship is and we are to be walking on earth as pilgrims and strangers. We are not on the earth to promote the interests of any special part of the world but to maintain the interests of heaven and to work for the prosperity of the kingdom of God. A Christian who understands heavenly citizenship will do good to all assuredly, but will particularly seek their eternal blessing, occupying himself with the work of God in the soul. In this way a real and lasting good is brought about, in contrast to those who work only for the temporal improvement of the world, doing much outwardly and obtaining praise and honour in the world, but whose labour in God's eye is of little account. The Christian is to work with an eye upon eternity and is occupied with the upbuilding of what will last into eternity. When a Christian forgets the high calling and becomes engaged with the outward improvement of the system of this world, spiritual growth is retarded.

The Christian is to work with an eye upon eternity

It goes without saying that a christian must perform their daily work and must be concerned to care for the true welfare of those around. The believer will find many opportunities to help the poor, to visit the sick, and to comfort the sorrowful, but this is done to reflect the character of God and the features of Christ with a view to drawing others to Christ. A christian knows that the world as a whole can never be improved, but that each

individual will be happier not only for eternity, but also in his temporal circumstances if he believes the gospel and owns the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. We enjoy God's goodness and grace and seek to act to others as God has acted to us.

Let us therefore, beloved Christians, remain true to our high calling and not waste time on what is perishing. Let us spread abroad the light of heaven, as in this way, and in no other, shall we cater for the true prosperity of our fellows. By so doing we shall follow the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ, who always did the will of His Father, and who has attracted the hearts of His precious, although poor, people away from this passing world to Himself in heaven.

A CHRISTIAN AWAITS THE COMING OF THE LORD.

The apostle Paul laboured for only three weeks at Thessalonica (Acts 17: 2), yet in that short time he spoke so much to them about the Lord Jesus and His work that their hearts were attracted to Him and they were awaiting His return from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

The Lord said Himself, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also" (John 14:3). The way in which this will take place is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; further particulars with regard to the resurrection of the dead and the change of the living are given in 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. His return can take place at any time; there is nothing that must take place before our Lord comes for us to take us to the place He has prepared for us. Glorious thought! Blessed hope! What joy it will be for us to see Him, and what joy for Him to have with Himself His beloved people, for whom He shed His precious blood.

Are we expecting Him or are we thinking that there is plenty of time, He is not returning yet? The Thessalonians said no such thing; they were expecting Him to return very shortly; in fact they seemed to think that no believer would die before He returned, and they were disappointed that some among themselves had died. The apostle had consequently to write to them to comfort

**Let us expect
Him daily!**

them, and in his epistle explained that when the Lord comes those who have fallen asleep in Jesus will be the first to feel His resurrection power, and then all together we, the living christians, "shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord". At a later date we shall come back with Him to reign over this earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4). Finally, there will be a new earth and a new heaven wherein righteousness shall dwell forever.

Let us expect Him daily! We shall then be most anxious to behave ourselves in such a way that when He comes He may find us occupied with what is well pleasing in His sight at the moment of His return.

A.A.Elliott

This concludes this series. A booklet containing all three articles as published in "Living Water" 85, 86 and 87 is available from the Stone Publishing Trust free of charge. Write to the address on the inside front cover of this magazine.

THE CHRIST

We have no need to be ashamed. I quite admit that everything outwardly is in a state of most deplorable confusion, but I know a Man in heaven, and you know Him too, and that Man is God's power and God's wisdom. In due time He, the anointed Man, will come out, and no one will need to be told in that day that He is the power of God and the wisdom of God. But it is your privilege and mine to know it now before He comes out.

God's glory is secured in Him and we know that there is a day coming when the enemy will be absolutely silenced. Moreover the same Christ is, "Made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption". We have a resource. If Christ is God's wisdom, He is wisdom to you and me; if Christ is God's resource, so is He yours and mine.

D. L. Higgins

A Word for Today

THE COUNSEL OF PEACE

“Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both”
Zechariah 6:13.

An understanding of prophetic Scriptures

This chapter, written after the return of the Jews from Babylon, and when they were seeking to rebuild the temple, was intended to encourage them in that work. But, “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20) and although a prophecy may forecast some event, in the history of Israel or of the world, the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is always looked forward to as the main point.

Christ is the great object of the love of God, and the Spirit of God in inditing Scripture always looks on to Him. No matter what the subject of the prophecy, the Holy Spirit looks forward, seeing all things as they relate to Christ and His glory. The Jews, for instance, had many deliverers raised up for them in time of need: – “saviours who saved them out of the hand of their enemies” (Nehemiah 9:17), but the moment the Holy Spirit begins to speak of these many “saviours” He ever looks on to “the Saviour”.

When Adam fell and judgment came in, Christ is promised. The woman’s Seed is the bruiser of the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15). After the trial of Abraham’s faith in being called to offer up Isaac, the promise is made unto his Seed, “which is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). Again, “Out of Egypt have I called my Son” (Matthew 2:15), we are taught referred to Christ. So here: “He shall build the temple of the Lord... and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne.” It is the “man whose name is The Branch” (v.12) who shall do this. Zerubbabel, the governor of Judea at the time, was merely a figure – all looks on to the ultimate purpose of the glory of God in Christ. Prophecy may speak of the

destinies of humanity, of Israel, or of the church, but it all looks on to and is centred in Jesus.

It must have been a great comfort to the faithful Jews of old to have future glories thus shown to them. They had much to thank

Never, till Christ appears, will the full desires of our hearts be given to us

the Lord for, but there was always the actual presence of evil, or the fear and danger of evil with them. It is the same with the church now. We have greater blessings and clearer revelations than Israel of old, but still there is evil, for we are yet in the body. In times of the greatest

revivals, there has ever been that mixed with them that tended to evil. We have much to thank God for but nothing really to satisfy. Never, till Christ appears, will the full desires of our hearts be given to us; never, until “we awake in his likeness”, shall we really be “satisfied” (see Psalm 17:15). Nothing less will do, because the Spirit of Christ is in us. We go on with constant dissatisfaction, yet also with constant thanksgiving. If we know Christ risen, nothing short of the full power of His resurrection can satisfy us. Our hopes run on to God’s ultimate purpose of complete blessing.

In this way we have a unity of hope with the Jews. They, indeed, are looking for earthly glory, their city and temple being rebuilt, for the fulfilment of what Psalm 72 speaks of. We also look forward to see the earth, “Filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14); although Christ’s own proper portion in heavenly glory is our particular hope. Both the earthly and the heavenly glories meet in Jesus and will be manifested when He comes! He is the Head of both.

The Counsel of Peace

“The man whose name is The Branch”, the One who is the “priest upon his throne” – does not yet rule. Peace is not yet established upon the earth, for Satan is yet exercising his power. All will be established on earth in a time yet to come. Yet there is a throne upon which Christ does sit. He has sat down upon the “Father’s

throne" (Revelation 3:21) – He has "sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high", and He does this "when he had by himself purged our sins" (Hebrews 1:3). There on the throne He is the High Priest of His people. In this we see the revelation of the "counsel of peace". Peace is our portion now. Through faith we know, and have, this peace in our souls, while waiting for its establishment on the earth, and the time of its manifested glory on earth.

There is a "counsel of peace" that belongs to us, an assured peace, peace indeed in the midst of present trouble, and it is God's peace. If it were not God's peace, it would be of little value. My spirit may be much disturbed and know much trial, but still I have the title

to perfect peace amidst it all. Not only peace with God, but peace concerning every circumstance, because God is "for us" in it all (see Romans 8:31).

If man had not been in rebellion against God, there would have been no need for "the counsel of peace". Adam in paradise did not need it but rebellion against God is the characteristic feature of the unconverted heart. Such was the rebellion that peace between God and man seemed impossible. But now, wondrous grace, we see that there is not only peace, but also a "counsel of peace". "Counsel" relates to God's own thoughts of peace – thoughts that Jesus alone could meet. "Lo, I come... to do thy will, O my God" (Psalm 40:7&8).

Supposing God had made peace with Adam, the peace could not have lasted; the enmity in the heart of man, or the enmity produced by circumstances that thwarted man's will, would very soon have broken out again. Look at Israel. They were placed in outward peace with God, owned as His people and favoured in every way; yet what was the result? There was continual murmuring on their part, and constant rebellion. They had scarcely undertaken to keep His law when they set up a golden calf to worship and thus failed directly. It is always the same. It must be so, for the will of man

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is altogether wrong; “the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be” (Romans 8:7).

Now, “the counsel of peace” is between God and Jesus, and therefore brings total security. It is not merely peace, but “the counsel of peace”. The word “counsel” implies deliberate purpose. How sure and solid must be that peace that God had a “counsel” about and where all the arrangements of it Jesus fully accomplished! I have said that peace is our proper portion as the children of God – peace both as to sin and as to circumstances. Now it is true that we do not have the latter outwardly yet, but God is taking up all that concerns us, and has taken upon Himself to make “all things work together” for our good (Romans 8:28); and the knowledge of this gives peace in all circumstances, even those of trial, perplexity and sorrow. We see it so perfectly with Jesus. Who was so tried as He? “Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:3). Yet He had always peace. And so might we: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee” (Isaiah 26:3).

But then it is important to see that “the counsel of peace” is entirely between God and Jesus. The moment we rest our peace on anything in ourselves, we lose it. That is why so many Christians have not settled peace. Nothing can be lasting that is not built on God alone. How can you have settled peace? Only by having it in God’s own way. By not resting it on anything, even the Spirit’s work within yourselves, but on what Christ has done entirely without you. Then you will know peace; you will be conscious of great unworthiness, but you will have peace. In Christ alone God finds that in which He can rest, and so it is with those that belong to Him. The more you see the extent and nature of the evil that is within you, as well as evil without and around, the more you will find that what Jesus is, and what Jesus did, is the only ground at all on which you can rest.

God could no more rest in anything here, than Noah’s dove could find a rest for her feet amidst the wrath and destruction that

deluged the world (see Genesis 8:9). But Jesus comes in, and here – on this earth where God was dishonoured – He glorified God. When God’s eye rested upon Jesus, He was perfectly satisfied. Till that moment God had not seen anything in this earth of which He could say, as of itself, in this “I am well pleased”. He had gone on, it is true, dealing with man in love and grace, but God could find nothing in which to rest. “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Romans 3:12). This was what God saw when He looked down from heaven. But with Jesus nothing was found but perfect love and perfect devotedness to God. Even when He was forsaken of God, He shows that God had to forsake Him because He was holy; “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me... thou art holy” (Psalm 22:1-3). Had it remained as only Christ’s own perfectness, all that would have been demonstrated is our own sinfulness and ruin but according to “the counsel of peace”, Jesus gave Himself to meet our need. Peace was ever His; He had no need to make peace for Himself. It was for us that He “made peace by the blood of the cross” (Colossians 1:20); and thus is He unto God, “a sweet savour of rest” for us (2 Corinthians 2:15).

Our peace is established in what He did, and “the counsel of peace” is between God and Jesus. Jesus has accomplished that which God purposed towards us. In order to do this, it was needful that He should “bear our sins” (1 Peter 2:24), and this He did as the “sin-offering”. He who knew no sin was “made sin for us... that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 2:21).

In the sacrifices, when the offerer laid his hand upon the head of the victim, there was in that act the complete identification of himself with the victim. Now there are two great aspects in the sacrifice of Christ: the burnt offering and the sin-offering:

- In the burnt offering we lay our hands on Christ, thus identifying ourselves with Him. We are “accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6), all His perfectness, all His “sweet savour of rest” unto God is ours.

- With the “sin-offering”, it is just the reverse with our hands laid upon the victim; it became identified with my sins, charged with my guilt.

The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus had this double character. He has completely accomplished the purpose of God, all that which was in “the counsel of peace”. This “counsel of peace” was not between me and God, though I have, as the fruit of it, the enjoyment of peace. All is done, and Jesus, in proof that all is finished, has sat down on the throne of God.

The Priest upon His Throne

It may perhaps be added, ‘Why, if the work is perfectly accomplished, is He yet a priest upon the throne?’ He is not there to work out righteousness for us: He has done that and done it completely: “this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12). His sitting down is the proof that He has nothing more to do in that way for His friends and now He only waits “till his enemies be made his footstool (see Psalm 110:1).

But then, in order that we may have the enjoyment of these things, He is acting in another way as Priest. Because the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, we consequently see many things in ourselves that are contrary to God – many things that would hinder fellowship with God. Now here it is that the present ministry of Christ comes in. We need His priesthood in order to maintain our communion with God: we need Him in our daily sins. We need His perfect righteousness on our behalf before God, for God always has His eyes on the One who accomplished “the counsel of peace”, “Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:3).

Here then is the “counsel of peace” which was purposed between God and Jesus. Here, and here only, have we peace. If ever our souls have any idea of rest except in that which is the perfect rest of God, if ever we are looking for peace anywhere else, we have got out of God’s way of accomplishing peace, off the ground of this “counsel of peace”. He has not called us into the “counsel”, which really is entirely independent of ourselves – it is “between

them both" accomplished, sure, and everlasting. Nothing can ever touch it. God has publicly owned His acceptance of Christ's work, by seating Him at His own right hand. The Holy Spirit is sent to witness to us that Jesus is now "on the throne of God", having "by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14).

We may have a great deal of trial now (we know we shall), trial from circumstances around, trial from within, exercise of conscience, and the like; but we still have the perfect certainty of God's favour; and "if God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) "Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). Again, the word is "be careful for nothing": if one single thing were excepted, God would not be God. Well, if we are tempted to be "careful", let us go to God about it. Our wishes may possibly be foolish wishes; still let us go and present them to God; if they are foolish, we shall very soon be ashamed of them.

We have need of this "counsel of peace", because all that we are in ourselves is enmity against God. I cannot go out of this "counsel" to look at my own heart for a moment: this peace is "between them both". On that alone our peace can rest. The moment we seek to add a single thing, we are adding to, or rather taking away, something from the perfectness of the "counsel of peace".

Who or what shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord? Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, these things shall, as a means of mortifying the flesh, only minister to Christ's glory. Shall death? It will only bring us into His presence. Shall life? It is that by which we enjoy His favour. "Nothing shall separate"! He is "on the throne" as the eternal witness of peace accomplished, and thence He ministers it to us.

The Lord give us grace to look at Him alone!

J. N. Darby

End Piece

THE PEACE OF GOD

“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

(Philippians

4:6-7)

Recently I read of an experience told by John George Carpenter. He tells of how he and his wife had to part with their daughter, a lovely girl of whom they were so fond and proud and who had dedicated her young life to the service of the Lord. Suddenly she was taken ill with typhoid fever. Of course they began to pray, but John Carpenter and Mrs Carpenter somehow felt, although they could not explain it, that they could not pray for their daughter's recovery. They went on praying but their prayer was – ‘Thou canst heal her if Thou wilt’ – they could not positively ask God to heal her, only – ‘Thou canst if Thou wilt’. They could get no further. They went on like that for six weeks and then this beautiful girl died.

The very morning she died John Carpenter said to his wife: ‘You know, I am aware of a strange and curious calm within’, and Mrs Carpenter replied and said, ‘I feel exactly the same’. Then she said to him, ‘This must be the peace of God’. And it was the peace of God keeping the heart and mind quiet. There they were, they had made their request known to God in the right way, and to their amazement and astonishment – they were almost chiding themselves because of it – this amazing calm and peace had come to them. They could not understand it, and that was the only explanation – ‘it must be the peace of God’. It was. Thank God for it. You and I cannot explain these things, they overpower us; but He is almighty.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1963)