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Living Water

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Recent Ministry

LIFE IN JESUS

John 11:33-44
20:19-20, 24-31
Revelation 1:17-18

Last Saturday I had a call at home from some of the people investigating the aircraft that crashed a week ago Thursday, at Heathrow. Later I went to review the flight recorder data off the aircraft and spent several hours going through the last few seconds of the aircraft's flight. I thought about that crash during the week but perhaps most of all I thought about one of the passengers, a man who was reported as saying that having had such a narrow escape he would now live his life to the full.

**I find it a challenge,
whether I am living life
fully as a believer**

I do not want to talk about that man; I wanted to talk about living

our life more fully as Christians and our life being in Jesus. Those people on that plane were very close to eternity; a few seconds difference or just a gust of wind would have been sufficient to bring disaster. It was only through God's goodness they survived. That man was going to live his life more fully because he had been saved from death. Every one here, if you have put your trust in Jesus, has been saved for eternity. I find it a challenge, whether I am living life fully as a believer and how I am living each day. In our life we have perhaps 25 or 30,000 days, what do we do with each day? Are we, through God's grace, taking each day at a time? Then is the Lord Jesus the centre of our life?

I read about Lazarus, because the incident shows how Jesus entered into a situation that was beyond anyone to control and brought in life. John wrote his gospel that we "might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing we might have life in his name" – that we might become believing believers. John looked back nearly 50 years and wrote the gospel that we might believe and that our hearts might be filled with joy and that others might

take account of us and that there might be a witness here to a living Saviour.

Lazarus was with his two sisters and the Lord Jesus loved all of them. The Lord's love is the same tonight. Now, Lazarus grew ill and died. We can think of his sisters worrying about him, caring for him and finally seeing him sink into death and they turned to the one Person who could do something about it. Tonight, if there is anything that is burdening you, there is one Person you can turn to and there is only one person you should turn to. Maybe we turn to other Christians; they are a blessing and a help to us, but first of all there is one Person you should turn to and that is Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ in His life here experienced everything that we experience apart from sin. Think of His loneliness and grief, think of His sufferings, His agony of mind. Think of Him in the Garden of Gethsemane as facing up to all that it meant to be made sin. It is beyond us to take in. It was love for us that made Him go through, even going into death that we might belong to Him. The epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the joy lying before Him. Think of His joy in being back in the Father's presence. Think of His joy that you and I should belong to Him for ever.

When Jesus came to the grave of Lazarus He was deeply moved in spirit, and He wept. The Lord Jesus sympathises with us, knows all about us, knows every thing that we face, the anxieties, the frustrations of life here.

The Lord called to Lazarus to "come forth" out of death. The Lord is the Resurrection and the Life. He can bring life into any situation. The Lord is the only one in Scripture who is called, "the originator of life" (Acts 3:15). Peter contrasted that with what the Jews had done; they wanted a murderer, and "the originator of life ye slew".

The Lord cried, "Lazarus, come forth" and Lazarus came out of death. When we first come to trust in Jesus, it is like coming out of death, it is like being set free. When Lazarus came forth he was bound with grave clothes. I wonder whether you as a christian have ever been like that, bound with grave clothes – the marks of death and failure and misery associated with death still marking you in your life. Well, my concern in speaking tonight is that we

might be marked by life. The Lord Jesus said, "Loose him and let him go".

When Jesus Himself came out of death

His clothes were in a distinct place; He was not marked by death. He came out glorious and victorious, praise be His name. My desire is that we might be liberated in the praise and service of the Lord Jesus. It is easy as a Christian to get down, worried about the future, worried and filled with anxiety. The Lord Jesus said, "Loose him and let him go".

In John's gospel we read, "If therefore the Son shall set you free, ye shall be really free" (John 8:36). Lazarus was brought into life; he was loosed and let go. But then, just a little later, we read of those that wanted to kill Lazarus (John 11: 53). If you are a bright believer, if you are here in the Lord's work, if you are filled with His joy, Satan will set himself against you. Peter says, "Your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). If you belong to Jesus you cannot be lost. "No one", says the Lord, "shall seize them out of my hand" (John 10:28). The Lord says, "those whom thou hast given me, I have not lost one of them" (John 18:9). If you belong to Jesus, if you put your trust in Him you are in His safekeeping forever. Here we need hope and we need faith, but in glory we will see Him face to face. We shall be like Him and see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

Where we read in John 20, the disciples were in a place and the door was locked because they were fearful of the Jews. The One that they loved had been taken away and put to death. Think of them with the fear of man sapping their strength and joy but the Lord Jesus alters that as He comes into the midst and says, "Peace be to you".

On the cross He said, "it is finished". His work was finished. I have been to the Middle East, more than once and in the middle of the day the sun is very bright, it shines virtually from straight above. In the middle of the day that Jesus suffered God's wrath against sin, there was total darkness. His perfect sacrifice met all God's holy

**I have been to the Middle East...
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claims; He completed the work in those three hours that He came to do. At the end of those hours there came His cry of

triumph, "It is finished". Well, here He says, "Peace be to you". He could say that because the work was done. Do not question the work of Jesus. Enter into the joy and blessing of knowing that it is done. These men were fearful and anxious and when we are like that we find it difficult to be full of joy and life.

Now Thomas was not there and did not hear that message. He said, "Unless I see...I will not believe". It is easy to be critical of Thomas but Thomas is like us: sometimes doubting, sometimes anxious. What did Jesus do? How gracious He was. He understood Thomas' weakness and met his need exactly. He showed him His hands and His side, a witness to His suffering love. Thomas saw and believed! The Lord said, "Blessed is he that has not seen and has believed". That is a blessing, and I say this for the encouragement of every one of us here, that applies to us. God has given His Holy Spirit to shed His love abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5) and give us the certainty that Jesus is living. Thomas says, "My Lord and my God". I see a man like Thomas was sceptical and doubting but he saw Jesus and believed.

In the last passage we read in John 20, John writes: "these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life in his name". You need to believe to have life. And that is not just once for eternity but every day. The Christian is challenged every day.

How will we each be able to shine forth the joy of the Saviour, the humility of the Saviour, the grace of the Saviour? Every moment of every day, there were not only those who loved the Lord, but there were those who came and questioned Him and belittled what He said, sought to cast Him out, sought to cast Him down the side of a mountain (Luke 4:29). Every day the Lord "endured so great contradiction from sinners against himself" (Hebrews 12:3). He is a wonderful model and He has the same power to help us through, each day of our life.

**Towards the end
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Towards the end of his life, John saw the Lord as he had never seen Him before. He saw Him in judicial glory as the One who sees everything and sees it perfectly. He records the experience in the Revelation. He became as dead, he became very frightened and fearful and the Lord Jesus says, "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living

one". It is the same Jesus that John had known for three years here on earth. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and to the ages to come" (Hebrews 13:8). The Lord touched him. John says, "He laid his right hand upon me, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end and behold, I am living to the ages of ages". Alpha and Omega is the beginning and the end of the Greek alphabet. Someone has said of that, that in the English language there are 26 letters and we communicate everything through just those letters organised in different ways. Everything we need to communicate with each other by writing or speaking is just in those 26 letters. Everything we know of God, everything we know of His love, is in Jesus; He is the Alpha and Omega. Everything is there encompassed in Him – the answer to every question, the love of God, all seen in Jesus. He is also the First and the Last. The Lord Jesus was there before we ever thought of Him. He will be there for us throughout eternity.

I have been thinking recently of a hymn written by Thomas Chisholm:

'Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!'

Thomas Chisholm lived to the age of 93 and he had known the Lord for 77 years. Just before the Lord took him he wrote these words, 'I must not fail to record here the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God'. What a witness! I encourage you older brethren; your joy in the Lord is an encouragement to those who are younger. Certainty, steadfastness and joy in the Saviour is a wonderful blessing.

I trust that we all as having been saved from the judgment to come

and an eternity without God and brought into the most wonderful blessing will live each day at a time. We are told to “redeem the time”. Paul told Timothy that, “piety with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6). It means having God in your circumstances, drawing Him into each day of your life and being happy with that. Well, my simple concern is that we might consider what John said. Why did John write the gospel? Because he saw there was a need for it. At the end of the first century he had seen churches grow, then there was scattering, he had seen attacks from outside, attacks on the truth about the Person of Jesus. He had seen all kinds of things and he saw a need to write a gospel, a gospel about the love of God seen in Jesus, to write a gospel to draw our hearts towards Jesus, to appreciate who He is and who He was when He was here.

Jesus Christ is the same; He is the same Jesus, there is the same power, the same life that comes from Himself. May we find life in Him and may we in each day demonstrate some of that life in our love for others, our joy in the Saviour, and our worship of Him. May our eyes be heavenward looking out for the glory to come! May it be so for His name’s sake.

Simon Burr

An address at Wolverhampton, 26 January 2008

Poetry Selection

THE GOD OF MY SALVATION

Thou art my joy, Lord Jesus!
For the Father joys in Thee.
Thou art my peace, Lord Jesus;
Thou gave'st Thyself for me.
Ere the closing race be run,
Ere the crown of life be won,
Thou art my joy.
Thou art my shield from condemnation,
Thou art the rock of my salvation.

Thou art my bread, Lord Jesus;
 Evermore I live by Thee:
Thou art my wine, Lord Jesus,
 For Thy blood was shed for me.
In the battle's deadly fray,
In the coming glory day,
 Thou art my bread.
Thou art my wine of consolation.
Thou art the Strength of my salvation.

Thou art my strength, Lord Jesus;
 For all power belongs to Thee:
Thou art my song, Lord Jesus,
 And Thy grace sufficeth me.
Till the tears of time be o'er
Till the tempter tempt no more,
 Thou art my strength.
Thou art my song in tribulation,
Thou art the home of my salvation.

Thou art my Light, Lord Jesus.
 And I love to gaze on Thee;
Thou art my life, Lord Jesus,
 Thou art throned on high for me.
Though the lesser lights may pale,
Though my flesh and heart may fail,
 Thou art my Life.
Thou art the sun of God's creation,
Thou art my Light and my salvation.

Thou art my hope, Lord Jesus:
I am waiting here for Thee.
Thou art my gain, Lord Jesus.
Thou art all in all to me.
Thou art my joy and food and might;
Thou art Peace and Life and light:
Thou art my hope.
Thou art my Lord, mine adoration;
Thou art the God of my salvation.
Hannah K. Burlingham

HIS TABLE

“For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death until he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26)

In spirit, Lord, we dwell with Thee above
The changing scenes of time;
We rest beneath Thy canopy of love,
Within Thy house of wine.

Oft as Thy day returns we love to find
Thou dost the feast prepare;
We leave the din of conflict far behind,
That holy joy to share.

We muse upon the marvel of Thy cross,
Thy love beyond compare;
O depth of woe! O, all unfathomed loss
That Thou for us did bear!

Beholding Thee, the lowly One who came
To this dark world in grace,
We give Thee thanks, now gathered to Thy name,
A large and wealthy place.

Sweet to Thine own redeemed to feed on Thee,
In whom we died, we live;
Sweet the remembrance cup must ever be
That Thou, O Christ, dost give.

The loaf we share proclaims our happy lot,
One loaf are we, and Thine;
Poor as we were – our need is now forgot,
Exchanged for bliss divine.

One loaf, one cup, their witness should be heard,
E'en were our voices dumb;
Yet to Thy praise be every bosom stirred,
Lord Jesus, till Thou come!

Hannah K. Burlingham

Testimony Section

A PAGAN PRIEST RECEIVES CHRIST

In the Spring of 627 AD Edwin, king of Northumbria – an area stretching in those days from the Humber River in the South to the Firth of Forth in the north and coast-to-coast, east to west – called a conference at Londesborough and invited Paulinus, one of those who had come to Britain with Augustine, to preach. Edwin was married to a Christian and for two years he had been pondering whether to trust in Christ as his queen had done. Paulinus spoke and then there followed some debate. The main source for what occurred is the Venerable Bede in his history of the English Church and Peoples

Bede however does not tell us what Paulinus said but from other accounts of Paulinus' work amongst the Anglo Saxons we know the approach he took on such occasions. He spoke of God's eternal purpose in the creation, that mankind had a special value in the sight of the Creator, that Christ came into the world His hands had

made and that His crucifixion was a sacrifice through which we can be reconciled to God. Christ is our hope of resurrection and He is always present in the life of His disciples.

When Paulinus had finished, one of the king's Councillors spoke. Realising, as so many since his time have also discovered that faith in Christ provided the answer to the meaning of life, he likened his life to the flight of a sparrow through the King's hall on a winter night. In the midst of the hall there is a comforting fire, outside the storms of winter rain or snow are raging. The sparrow flies in through one door and out through the other. While the bird is inside it is safe from the winter storms, but after a few seconds of comfort, it vanishes from sight into the wintry world from which it came. In just the same way, man appears on earth for a little while, but of what went before this life, or what follows, we know nothing. In contrast, he said, what Paulinus had spoken about answered his need to know what his life was for, and what he might hope for after death.

Coifi, the High Priest of Woden, followed. He might have been expected to defend the old ways of pagan worship, but instead, as Bede records, he said, "I have long realised that there is nothing in our way of worship; for the more diligently I sought after truth in our religion, the less I found. I now publicly confess that this teaching of Paulinus clearly reveals truths that will afford us the blessings of life, salvation and eternal happiness". Coifi then proposed to ride to the nearby shrine of Woden and destroy it.

Mounting a warhorse and with a large axe in his hand and calling all those who wished to join with him, he galloped to Goodmanham, two miles away where the shrine of Woden was, and hurled the axe into the shrine. It was a remarkable evidence of his new-found faith in Christ and had a most powerful effect on those who had come with him from Londesborough. They joined him in burning the shrine to the ground. Following this public demonstration, many believed and trusted in Christ. So the truth of the gospel was established in this part of England.

Over the next six years Paulinus continued with his preaching and God was pleased to use it for blessing of many souls.

A Voice from the Past

EXTRACTS FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE VENERABLE BEDE (673 – 735)

Bede wrote a number of commentaries on the books of the Bible as well as a carefully researched “History of the English Church and Peoples”. The extracts below are just a small sample of what is contained in his commentaries. They provide an insight into the thoughts of a believer at a time when there was much darkness.

“I composed the first discourse, O Theophilus, concerning all things which Jesus began both to do and to teach...” Acts of the Apostles 1:1

Theophilus means lover of God, or beloved of God. Therefore, anyone who is a lover of God may believe that this work was written for him, because the physician Luke wrote it in order that the reader might find health for his soul. Note also that he says, “which Jesus began both to do and to teach” – first ‘did’ and then ‘taught’, because Jesus, establishing the pattern of a good teacher, taught nothing except those things which He did.

“And a cloud received him out of their sight.” Acts 1:9

Everywhere creation offers obedient service to its Creator. The stars indicated His birth, darkness shrouded His suffering, clouds received Him in His ascension, and they will accompany Him when He returns for judgment.

“But seeing the boldness of Peter and John, and perceiving that they were unlettered and uninstructed men, they wondered...” Acts 4:13

Unlettered men were sent to preach, so that the faith of those who believed would not be thought to have come about by eloquence and teaching instead of by God’s power. As the apostle says, “...not in wisdom of word, that the cross of Christ may not be made vain” (1 Corinthians 1:17).

Thus saith the Holy Spirit, The man whose this girdle is shall the Jews thus bind in Jerusalem..." Acts 21:11.

[Agabus] is imitating the ancient prophets who were accustomed to say, 'The Lord God says this', because the Holy Spirit is Lord and God in the same way as the Father and the Son are, and it is impossible to separate the operation of those whose nature and will are one. Hence too we read: "the Holy Spirit said, Separate me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them". And Paul himself writes, "Paul, apostle, not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Galatians 1:1). I have said these things that no one might believe that the Holy Spirit is a creature, or of less authority than the Father or the Son.

"...and she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes and laid him in the manger because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2:7

Here we must look upon the great condescension of our Redeemer... For He to whom we truthfully chant, "Great is the Lord, and exceedingly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable" (Psalm 145:3), was born as a little one for us so that He might make us from little ones into great ones... He who sits at the right hand of God the Father in heaven stood in need of a place in the inn so that He might grant us an abundance of happy mansions in His Father's house... He who in His majesty, as the prophet says of Him, is covered "with light as with a garment" (Psalm 104:2), is covered with paltry swaddling clothes... He whom "the heavens, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain" (1 Kings 8:27), was contained by the narrowness of a small manger so that He might bestow upon us the amplitude of seats on high.

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes forth from with the Father..." John 15:26

The will and the operation of the holy Trinity is one and the same... This will be proven by very ready examples from sacred scripture. For the apostle says this concerning the Father, "God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Galatians 4:6). The Son Himself says this concerning the Holy Spirit, "But when the Comforter is

come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes forth from with the Father..." (John 15:26). The apostle says this concerning the Holy Spirit, "But all these things operates the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each in particular according as he pleases" (1 Corinthians 12:11). The Father therefore sends the Spirit, and the Son sends the Spirit, and the Spirit Himself blows where He will (see John 3:8), for as we have said, unquestionably there is one will and operation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

"And I also, I say to thee that thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly." Matthew 16:18

Peter, who before this was referred to as 'Simon', received from the Lord the name 'Peter', because of the strength of his faith and the constancy of his confession, for he clung with a stable and tenacious mind to Him concerning of whom it was written, "now the rock was the Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). And upon this Rock the church is built – that is, upon the Lord and Saviour... as the apostle attests when he says, "For other foundation can no man lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11).

"And lo, two men talked with him, who were Moses and Elias, who, appearing in glory, spoke of his departure which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem." Luke 9:31 - 32

Moses and Elijah, who talked with the Lord on the mountain, and spoke about His passion and resurrection, represent the oracles of the law and the prophets, which were fulfilled in the Lord...By Moses and Elijah we can see represented those who are going to reign with the Lord. By Moses, who dies and was buried, we see those who are going to be raised up from death; by Elijah, who has not yet paid the debt of death, we see those who are going to be found alive at the Lord's coming. At one and the same moment, both of them having been "caught up together...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17) will be led into eternal life...

It is appropriate that Moses and Elijah are reported to have been seen in glory. The mark of the favour with which they are to be

crowned is shown by the pre-eminence of their majesty. It is also appropriately recorded that they spoke about His departure, which was to be fulfilled in Jerusalem. The Redeemer's passion has become a unique subject for praise to His faithful, since the more that they remember that they could not be saved apart from His grace, the more they should always ponder in a faithful breast the memory of this grace, and bear faithful witness to it.

The Venerable Bede

The extracts are taken from "Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles" translated by Lawrence T. Martin, published in 1989 and "Homilies on the Gospels" translated by Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurs, published in 1991.

THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT

"She said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole" (Matthew 9:21)

This woman with an issue of blood had suffered for twelve years, both with the disease and the treatment of the physicians. An issue of blood rendered her 'unclean' according to the law of Moses (see Leviticus 15). All the remedies had failed and she had spent all. She is a picture of the sinner with no remedy for sin.

Hearing of the Lord Jesus Christ she decided to trust Him, to commit herself to Him. Her faith was strong and genuine, "If I may touch but his garment, I shall be whole". She really believed that He was able secretly to heal her of an illness that in all modesty she could not publicly name.

When she had heard of Jesus she came in the crowd behind and touched His garment. Straightway she knew she was healed, after years of worry, disappointment and despair. It was all over so simply, so freely. She touched the hem of His garment with faith. When Christ saves the sinner, he or she is totally saved from sin. There can be victory over sin – not only is there "no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" but also "sin shall not have dominion over you". It was not the physical contact with His garment, but the

spiritual contact between her spirit and Christ simply expressed in that touch.

Immediately Jesus knew in Himself – and rejoiced! Amid the crowd and the curious, the doubting, even the determined enemies – there was someone who really believed He could help her; she trusted Him and wanted Him.

He always knows what is in our hearts. We try to keep up appearances with the world, but He knows in Himself the real truth. A lot goes on between Christ and the sinner – between Christ and me – between Christ and you – that nobody on earth knows anything about.

“Immediately Jesus knew” – not that He had lost something; He came to give His life and through the Holy Spirit is still available to give life, eternal life. All that is lacking is the “hand” of faith to stretch out and as it were “touch the hem of his garment” – to make that direct personal contact with Him. A relationship with Christ is the secret of living.

Hers was a testimony that was vitally important – what about yours? Sometimes Jesus said, “tell no man”; others He told to tell everybody. This was the latter case. Sometimes a Christian has a testimony that is very painful to confess, but very glorifying to God, and infinitely helpful to others. This testimony was needed otherwise it would not have been written out in three of the four gospels.

How many came secretly to Christ as she did? Yet their secret will, sooner or later, be revealed. He will see that it is. When the Lord Jesus is believed in, loved, honoured and obeyed it will be evident. “He could not be hid”.

Is there something that bothers you in your spiritual life, some spiritual haemorrhage? Perhaps you have tried all ways to overcome it. Reach out in faith and touch the hem of His garment. “If I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be whole”. Reach out to Him and take His blessing.

Keith Ensor (1972)

A Word for Today

THE REALITY OF CHRISTIANITY

Acts 9:1-21

This chapter, so far as I have read it, shows us how real a thing Christianity is: that there are people on earth who are disciples of the Lord Jesus, who is in heaven, and there is also connected with it a well-defined way that is spoken of in this passage as "this way" or "the way". Also what comes to light is that the Lordship of Jesus is a very real thing, so that those who are truly disciples of His are available to Him for any service that He wishes them to perform. He knows them by name and speaks to them, and they call Him Lord genuinely as loving Him. There are persons of whom the Lord Jesus speaks who say 'Lord, Lord' but do not the things that He says, and He tells us, that as to them, He will say, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity". It is of no value at all to speak of Jesus as Lord, to say, 'our Lord', as people sometimes do, if in fact He is not Lord to you.

Christianity in the eyes of many people is just a religion, a religion that they compare with Judaism, Mohammedanism, Buddhism, and other things. They will tell you that it consists in the teachings of Jesus Christ and they will perhaps claim that it has been an influence for good in the world; but I think you will agree, if we are honest about these things, that in its public aspect it covers a great deal that is not pleasing to God. Publicly Christianity in general, condemns anything that is grossly immoral or evil but it makes room for almost every conceivable variation of teaching and doctrine, and it accommodates itself very easily to the ways of the world. That is what Christianity is in the eyes of most people, but that is not what Christianity is in God's sight. Christianity according to God is found only among those who personally know the Lord Jesus in heaven and own Him as their Lord.

Now there are today many already in this position of being disciples of the Lord. It was so when Saul of Tarsus was converted. The

conversion of Saul of Tarsus is of great interest, because Scripture tells us that he was the “chief of sinners” and his conversion was very real. That is why I did not stop at the end of verse 20, but read verse 21, because it shows how real his conversion was. It was a complete change round, and conversion is an essential if we are to have part in a living way in Christianity. You may say, ‘I have not been a persecutor’. That may be, but the Lord Jesus said, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven”. There must be a change round, a yielding of the heart to the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, if there is to be any part vitally in Christianity.

Well, it is a very interesting matter that, when the chief of sinners was converted, there were already a large number of disciples of the Lord. He himself on conversion became another disciple of the Lord. He was just added to what was there. There were some in Jerusalem, some in Damascus and many other places, and as Saul was converted and yielded himself to the Lord Jesus he was added to the disciples of the Lord; and the position is still the same. As a kind of background to the preaching of the gospel there is the company of the disciples of the Lord and, if you are in touch with them, you will find, in so far as they know the Lord Jesus and are subject to Him, that they are moving together in a well-defined way, and that they know what it is to have to do with the Lord Jesus personally, and the Lord Jesus knows what it is to have to do with them. You will find, also, that they carry in this world a testimony to His name. All these things enter into this chapter.

Saul, it says, was “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord”. I have no doubt that behind the energy of animosity against the disciples of the Lord that marked this man was the energy and power of Satan, though he himself was unaware of it. He had obtained letters to Damascus to the synagogues from the high priest, that if he found any of the Christian way, the way that is trodden by true disciples of the Lord, he should bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed, he was suddenly arrested by a light from heaven and he fell to the earth and heard a voice. I am not suggesting that the way Saul of Tarsus was converted is

necessarily the way that everyone is converted, for it is not so. Indeed, I suppose that everyone who is converted is converted in a different way. There is endless variety in the way souls are converted, but there is

There is endless variety in the way souls are converted

no difference as regards the One to whom they yield themselves. They are all brought to the same Lord Jesus, to the same God.

So Saul heard a voice. Behind that voice was a Person. He “heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” There was a living Person, having a personal interest in Saul and addressing Himself to his conscience, and asking him a simple question that he must have found extremely difficult to answer. “Why persecutest thou me?” It was a voice from heaven. There was irresistible power in the hands of the Lord Jesus. We read at the end of the gospel of Mark, “After the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God”. That is a place of power. The right hand always speaks of power in Scripture, and the right hand of God means irresistible power, and Jesus is sitting there. He could have struck that chief of sinners dead, and who would have said it was undeserved, for he was persecuting those whose only offence was that they loved the Lord Jesus and that they knew Him as their Saviour, but the Lord did not speak in judgment to Saul.

This is not a day of judgment – not that God has not the right to exercise judgment; He has. There are times when He does come in with judgment, but in the main the character of this present day is one of grace and salvation. God at the present time is longsuffering and the Lord Jesus is longsuffering. He has not yet taken up His rights or been vindicated; the last this world saw of Him was when He was crucified. The day is coming when He is going to be vindicated publicly, and He is waiting for that day patiently, because there may be someone here who has not turned to the Lord and come into salvation. That is what He is waiting for. So with Saul He says, “Why persecutest thou me?” Saul said, “Who art thou, Lord?” Who taught him to say Lord? He was constrained to say it! The

light shone from heaven. We are told from the Scripture that follows, that he actually saw the Lord Jesus. He did not know who it was. The last that had been seen of Jesus by those who were not disciples was a Man crucified as a malefactor, a Man whose visage was marred more than the visage of any man. The Lord Jesus is not like that now, but He is still a Man. Scripture speaks of His body of glory. He is in a condition suited to the exalted position He fills at the right hand of God and Saul was constrained to say, "Who art thou, Lord?" The Lord says, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest". He was persecuting the disciples of the Lord, and now as the Lord spoke to him from heaven He said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest".

There is a great deal of meaning in the name of Jesus. It means 'Jehovah, the Saviour'; that is, God Himself, the Saviour of mankind. God must become Man in order to become the Saviour. That is the glory attaching to the name of Jesus. In the first chapter of Matthew when an angel came to Joseph and said Jesus was to be born, he said, "thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins". Saving from our sins is a very complete salvation. Jesus had to die in order to save us from our sins, for how could the judgment attaching to our sins be lifted from us unless someone died for us? Who could do it save the Lord Jesus? Thank God He has done it. The very One who was crucified is now on the right hand of God, and while it was by the hands of wicked men that He was slain, it was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. The men were only the instrument to carry out God's own will, that His Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus, should come into this world and die for sinners, giving Himself a ransom for all.

It is one thing to be cleared by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ from every imputation of guilt, "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus". That is one very great blessing open to us now in the gospel through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but then you want more than that. You want One who can save you completely from the power of sin, from wanting to go on in sin and doing your own will. That is what God proposes. In Proverbs 16 it says, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a

man" – that is, his own will – "but the end thereof are the ways of death". But there is one who can save us from our sins and that is the Lord Jesus.

There are thousands of disciples of the Lord Jesus on the earth who are saved from the kind of thing that marked them before they were converted, and they are saved by subjection to Jesus as Lord. It is a great thing to come under the sway of the Lord Jesus. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". The blessing for everyone who believes does not depend on the depth of their repentance, nor on the strength of their faith, but simply on the abiding value of what Christ has done and on the blessed grace of God that desires that we should be saved. But this I say: to enter into the full gain of the gospel we need to be yielded to the Lord.

Joseph was told to call His name Jesus because He would save His people from their sins but in Luke's gospel we read that the angel spoke to Mary, and told her that she was to call His name Jesus but the angel did not say to her that He should save His people from their sins, but "thou ... shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest." Think of the greatness of Jesus! The Highest is a title that applies to God, and

The One who has come out from God is the perfect expression and representation of what God is

refers to the exceeding moral excellence found in God. It says, "God is love", and that He is "rich in mercy", and He delights in grace, and Jesus is the Son of the Highest. The One who has come out from God is the perfect expression and representation of what God is as the Highest, the One who is supreme in every moral excellence found in God. It says, "God is love", and that He is "rich in mercy", and He delights in grace, and Jesus is the Son of the Highest. The One who has come out from God is the perfect expression and representation of what God is as the Highest. Think of it being possible for you or me to have as an object of affection

one so great as the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what is proposed in the gospel. Christianity is a great system of affection, and that is why it holds genuine Christians. Christianity is a system of affection in which all those who are truly converted are bound in affection to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the Lord Jesus Christ has brought the love and blessing of God to light and made it available to us, even to the chief of sinners who was "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord". The Lord Jesus brought to him all the moral excellence of righteous grace, with a view to his being brought into the reality of knowing God as He is revealed. Scripture speaks, and it is known by those who are true believers in the Lord Jesus, of the possibility of our dwelling in love and dwelling in God. Having God Himself so blessedly known through our Lord Jesus Christ you find you can dwell in God. That is possible, but yet before that can be known this question of our sins must be settled, and there is no other way of its being settled save through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As Scripture says, "for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved", save the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well now, Saul said, "Who art thou, Lord?" and the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest". I am sure Saul's course of persecuting the disciples of the Lord must have risen up before his eyes as a most terrible thing. The One whom he was persecuting was there at the right hand of God with all power in His hands, and there was a poor puny man daring to persecute the disciples of the Lord Jesus, and there was the Lord Jesus speaking to him in grace. The redemption in Christ Jesus was there waiting for Saul of Tarsus to claim it. God's right to show mercy to that dreadful sinner had already been established by Jesus dying and rising triumphant in order that Saul and every other sinner might understand that the work is absolutely finished and nothing needs to be added to it.

The Lord, as rightly representing God and expressing what is in His own heart, spoke tenderly to Saul and said, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do". It is a question of the Lord. The Lord Jesus is wonderfully gracious, but He is Lord –

You are either, unknown to yourself, under the influence of Satan, or you are under the influence and control of the Lord Jesus

Saul is told what he must do. It is the King speaking. It is not a question of our being free agents, it is a question of coming into subjection to the Lord. There is no one on earth who is a free agent. You are either, unknown to yourself, under

the influence of Satan, or you are under the influence and control of the Lord Jesus and of God through Him. That is not an extravagant statement for, in chapter 26 of this book we find Paul giving an account of his conversion to king Agrippa, and he said that the Lord Jesus sent him to open men's eyes that they might turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. It is one or the other; a person is either in darkness under the power of Satan, or else in the light and knowledge of God. There is no such thing as a free agent in this world, and the Lord Jesus is announced, in all the grace connected with His name and the graciousness of His administration, in order that souls might come through repentance and faith under His blessed control, and be found among the disciples of the Lord.

Now it says that there was a certain disciple at Damascus. I invite attention to this for it is really the very root of the gospel, that behind the preaching there is a background consisting of those who are already disciples of the Lord; there are such on earth, there are those in this place Rangiora, where we are today, disciples of the Lord. Saul, as yielding himself to the Lord Jesus, had to identify himself with them, but first of all he had to learn that the disciples of the Lord were available as usable by the Lord to serve him, to serve Saul, and so we are introduced to a disciple of the Lord named Ananias. "And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord". See how personal Christianity is! The Lord called Saul by name, then He made Himself known to Saul by name. He said, "I am Jesus". That is the distinctive feature of Christianity

that it is a personal matter. So here the Lord says, "Ananias", and he says, "Behold; I am here, Lord". It is a great thing to say "Lord Jesus" from the heart. It means that you yield yourself to Him and your affections now are free to embrace Him; and, on your part, as you call upon His name it means that all the power of that name and the gracious administration of it too are available for your protection and support. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

So Ananias says, "I am here, Lord", and the Lord said, "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth". Every detail is known by the Lord Jesus: the street called Straight, the house belonging to one named Judas, and a man called Saul of Tarsus and the fact that he was praying. How God loves to see a person praying! Someone here perhaps wants to pray and does not know how to pray. Scripture gives us an indication how to pray. There was one man who smote upon his breast and would not lift up his eyes to heaven, and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner". There is a sample prayer! Another young man is given us in the parable who is recorded as saying, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son". It is a great thing to speak like that to God. In the last chapter of Hosea it says, "Take with you words"; not mere words, but words that speak the truth. That is what God loves to hear. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light". God loves to see a soul coming to the light and speaking words, committing himself to the truth.

Ananias raised his difficulties. He says, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name". Over against authority from the chief priests there is the authority of the Lord. The Lord said to him, "Go thy way". No one else has authority in these matters. Governments have authority from God in secular matters, and we recognise that and pray for them, but when it comes to spiritual matters it is a question of the Lord. The Lord says to Ananias, "Go thy way for he is a chosen

vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel". The disciples of the Lord Jesus have the great privilege of bearing the name of the Lord Jesus in this world. That is what they are taken up for, among other things, to bear the name of the Lord Jesus in this world.

Ananias comes into the house and lays his hands upon him and calls him by name. What a personal matter Christianity is. He says, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared to thee in the way as thou camest hath sent me". The bond is established; the bond is the Lord Jesus. Ananias, so to speak, is saying, 'I have known the Lord Jesus a good many years. You have just come to know Him; and I can embrace you as a brother. He is Lord to me and now He is Lord to you'. Then he goes on, "Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit". That is the characteristic blessing of Christianity. It is very important that that is brought in here. What makes Christianity such a matter of real enjoyment to those who have believed on the Lord Jesus, is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and God has nothing less in mind for those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, than that they should receive the Holy Spirit. There is forgiveness of sins and deliverance from all condemnation but far above that is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It says of Saul that he preached Jesus in the synagogue that He is the Son of God. How great it is! The Lord Jesus is becoming greater and greater before the heart of this man who has become converted. Think of his preaching that He is the Son of God! Do you really apprehend that the Lord Jesus Christ your Saviour is the Son of God? He answered to God for all that attached to you in your guilt, and by His precious death has taken out of God's sight all your history as in flesh, as sinful. That is what the Lord Jesus has done. There is marvelous depth in the death of Christ. It is not only the means by which propitiation has been made for our sins, but in His death there was the ending of each one of us as in the flesh. As you receive the glad tidings it means that you are entirely free from all

that to which condemnation attaches, and God, by the Holy Spirit, sets you up in life in the Man that is in His presence. That is a delightful position of favour from which you can never be removed. Taken into favour in the Beloved, and set up in it with the possession of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God's Son in your heart. Paul, in writing to the Galatians, said, "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons". God gives sonship to those who believe, gives it to them as a gift. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba Father". It produces in you liberty with God, so that you call Him Father gladly as in the consciousness by the Spirit that His grace has set you in sonship before Him.

That is Christianity. Saul of Tarsus was brought into it thoroughly and happily. He found his place among the disciples of the Lord and he preached Jesus in the synagogue that He is the Son of God, and there is no reason why everyone of us should not be brought into the same blessing, into a place of present salvation free from every influence of this world as subject to the Lord Jesus and as finding our life and portion among the disciples of the Lord. You will find that there is a way in which the disciples of the Lord Jesus walk, a way of complete salvation from this poor world, a way of deep satisfaction in the things of God and in the fellowship of the love that is found in the circle of the disciples of the Lord, and, more than that, the glory of the Lord Jesus becomes greater and greater to you as the days go by. As the angel said to Mary, "He shall be great." You may rest assured of that, that if you go on in the Spirit of God the Lord Jesus will become greater and greater to you as the time goes on. God grant it may be so.

Alfred Gardiner

A preaching of the gospel, Rangiora, New Zealand (1947)