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Living Water

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What is a Christian?

By A. A. Elliott

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Recent Ministry

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS – CHAPTER 3

The chapter commences with a reference to Paul's imprisonment. The physical limitations were no hindrance to the enjoyment that he had in what God has in mind for us in Christ. Paul writes that he was, "a prisoner of the Christ Jesus for you nations"; he looks on himself as the prisoner of the Lord. He fully accepted what the Lord had allowed in his life, and despite the conditions continues with what he was commissioned to do – to preach "the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ" (v.8). What was uppermost in his mind was what God had given him to fulfil.

The epistle to the Philippians expands on what is meant for Paul to be a prisoner "for you nations". Paul tells the Philippians that his "bonds have become manifest as being in Christ to all in the praetorium" (Philippians 1:13). Later in our chapter (v.13) Paul appeals to the Ephesian believers "not to faint through my tribulations for you which is your glory". He did not want them taken up with his troubles, but they were to see them as a proof and the fruit of the glorious position that God had given them and of which the Jews were so jealous that they had got Paul imprisoned.

We can understand how the Ephesian Christians would have been concerned for Paul in prison. Think of how we might feel if one who had been a great help to us was shut up in that way, but Paul did not want them occupied with that. It is a remarkable fact that the epistles that bring us the fullness of his ministry were written from prison.

Almost the whole of chapter 3 is taken up with the unfolding of the mystery. This was what Paul had by revelation, "that by revelation the mystery has been made known to me" (v.3). Paul was given a gift to bring in the teaching as to the mystery of the church that had been hidden through the ages. Paul was specially gifted of God to communicate His counsels and His ways in

Christ, as John was gifted to reveal God's nature and life as it was manifested in Jesus.

The mystery primarily, at least in the early part of this chapter, is given to us in verse six: "that they who are of the nations should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings". In the past it was impossible to put the Gentiles on the same footing as the Jews because God had Himself established a division through the "middle wall of enclosure" (Ephesians 2:14). The revelation of the mystery showed that this was set aside. Jew and Gentile are brought together in one body with Christ as Head. All the earthly distinction is set aside; we are all one in Christ as risen with Him. This is the marvellous purpose of God, that the redeemed should be united to Christ – as a body is united to its head – giving the redeemed a place in heaven.

This mystery has now been revealed "to his holy apostles and prophets in the power of the Spirit" (v.5). Since it could not be known before, this must refer to the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. Paul's prayer (verse 14 and onwards) is that we all should come into the gain of what he and those holy apostles and prophets enjoyed.

While recognising the distinctive service of the apostle, it is striking that he claimed no credit for himself. Paul had become a minister of these things, "according to the gift of the grace of God given to me according to the working of his power" (v.7). It placed a great responsibility upon him and he was very conscious of that, so he did not shrink from announcing the whole counsel of God. It was a necessary service to the believers that this teaching was spread amongst them.

Jew and Gentile are brought together in one body with Christ as Head. All the earthly distinction is set aside

While we are to have respect for ministry as Scripture speaks of it and for those who minister the word, we are not to lose sight

**angels are to
take account of
the outcome of
the wondrous
counsel of God**

of what “minister” actually means – the minister is a servant and one is called to that service by the Lord. It is noticeable that it is at this point that Paul speaks of himself as “less than the least of all saints (v.8). He was very conscious of that. It was not something that he said because it sounded good and humble. He believed it for himself as being the truth.

In verse 10 we get a very striking thought: “in order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the assembly the all-various wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages...” We may apply that as meaning that the angels are to take account of the divine wisdom to be seen in the actions of the church at the present time. That is challenging and casts us on the Lord that we might truly draw on the heavenly wisdom that is available and that it should find its expression in us.

However the prime meaning is that the angels are to take account of the outcome of the wondrous counsel of God. They had seen the creation arise, they had seen the government of God in action, and they had witnessed the birth of Christ, His crucifixion and His resurrection. Now they were to see the great end in all this. Up to this time the secret purpose had been kept in God’s own heart. Now to these heavenly beings – the principalities and powers in the heavenlies – the wisdom of God, according to His settled, eternal purpose, was revealed.

Paul turns at this point in heart and affection to the Father, “bowing my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named” (v.14 –15). Under the name of Jehovah in the Old Testament, God was only known in relation to the Jews, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2). Yet now, to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, all the families – the church, the Old Testament saints and others – all range themselves. What a blessed answer of God’s ways that all should be brought into

this relation to the Father. The powers in the heavenlies take account of it, and so should we.

The immediate need of believers in the present day is to be “strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man” (v.16). We read elsewhere that the inner man is to be renewed day by day (see 2 Corinthians 4:16). The result of this strengthening is that “Christ may dwell through faith in your hearts”. That is the present reality of Christianity. Paul is really saying that the way into an appreciation of what he is ministering is to have Christ in our hearts. This is a day-by-day test. Has Christ got a place with each one of us? Without this we will not be on firm ground and will certainly not have any practical understanding of the truth as set out in this chapter. We need faith and we need to be rooted and founded in love. That provides us with a solid base.

What a blessed thing it is that Christ should dwell in our hearts! He who fills all things with His glory above all fills our hearts with a love more powerful than all the glory of which He is the centre. This is a love that truly passes knowledge, yet it is to be known.

Paul’s thoughts lead him to praise here. He had an appreciation of these things and it brings forth a response towards God. “But to him that is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen” (v.20 – 21). We too can raise a song in the light of this chapter:

“Our God, from Thy blest heart and mind has spread
The heav’nly light of wisdom all divine,
That we might know in Christ, our living Head,
That which shall e’er all other light outshine.

And wider still, that to the powers above,
Through the assembly, might be now made known
All-various wisdom of that searchless love,
That yet shall bind the universe in one.

Before Thee, Father, we would bow our knees,
That, strengthened by Thy Spirit, Christ may dwell
Within our hearts; and by the love that sees
That all-divine domain, Thy praise we tell.

O love well-known, surpassing all our thought,
Love of the Christ, the climax of all good!
Into eternal sunshine we are brought,
Filled unto all the fullness of our God."

Joseph Pellatt (1843 – 1913)

Based on a Bible Reading in Bromley, June 2008.

DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew 10:24, 25

Luke 14:25-35

John 6:53-69

I should like to draw upon these scriptures to say something about discipleship. I do not take it up as being better qualified than others to speak about it but I see the need for discipleship in scripture and the need, as the Lord may help, to say something about it.

When the Lord Jesus was here He selected 12 particular men to be His disciples. They followed Him and kept company with Him. One of them, of course, was not a satisfactory man; that is another matter, but the Lord had His disciples. The word does not just mean a follower; it means someone who is learning, one who is ready to learn from the teaching and the example of his teacher and Lord.

When we come to the Acts of the Apostles we find that these men, the 11 and one added to them, were still disciples. Yes, we find them spoken of as apostles, but they were disciples; they still had to learn and they learnt as they went along. Then we find that other disciples are added to them, and that being a disciple of the Lord Jesus is not just something that was for when He was here but it is something that needs to continue to the present day.

That is why I have sought to call attention to it in these verses. In Matthew 10 the Lord is giving some warnings as to what conditions

His disciples would find as they went out to spread the word concerning Him. Now in the verses that we read He gives us some reminders of who the disciple is and what the master, the teacher, is expecting of him. "The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the bondman above his lord". That is, the disciple always has to accept that his teacher knows better than he or she does, which is a wholesome lesson for us all. As we go through life we will not be very long finding out that the Lord knows better than we do.

Then there is something else, "It is sufficient for the disciple that he should become as his teacher, and the bondman as his lord". That is really what discipleship is about. It is to draw us after the Lord Jesus, to build us in affection for Him and to make us serviceable in perhaps a small way as under His direction. The Lord will teach us so that we learn to be like Him. That is a great encouragement to persevere in the way after Him. If we love and, if I may use the word rightly, admire this beloved Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, then we would be glad to think that His teaching and His work in our souls was bringing about some greater likeness to Himself.

With that I turn to the gospel of Luke chapter 14. The earlier part is often used in preaching the gospel. The last few verses, which I read, are some which you might want to pass over quickly because they are a painful reminder of what being a disciple may cost. Mr Raven made an interesting remark regarding this chapter that the life of a Christian is spent either as a guest or as a disciple. The first part of the chapter tells us something about being a guest and the latter part tells us something about being a disciple.

At this point there are great crowds following the Lord Jesus but while He cared for everyone in that crowd the Lord Jesus did not make anything of the crowd and He certainly did not want anyone to be there under any illusion. If we know that our sins are forgiven and acknowledge Jesus as Lord, then we must seek to follow Him.

Yet the Lord Jesus has something severe to say here by way of a warning. He puts it as strongly as possible, "If any man come to me, and shall not hate his own father and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters". Well, it would be hard enough to go through those. And then, He says, "yea, and his own life too". So it is no good saying, I am prepared to let other people go;

you will have to let yourself go.

We are not to use these verses to justify being indifferent to the claims of nature. When we come to the second epistle to Timothy we find that being without natural affection is a sign of the last times. That is not what the Lord is speaking about. He is speaking about how easily false claims can be made by nature that are a diversion. In the Old Testament God's earthly people were constantly beset by other nations like the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites and so on. Those were all, in some way, connected with Israel, but it did not make them good friends. Far from it, most of them turned out either to be enemies or those who would take the opportunity to be on the line of corruption. That is the kind of thing I believe that the Lord has in mind.

And then He said, "whoever does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple". There is an idea that your cross is something you would rather not have, like a bad temper or a disease but that is not what the Lord is speaking of. His cross was what He was going on to, that would terminate His life here. He was always on the way to the cross. Scripture speaks of it as "the way". We read of some of His disciples being very fearful when they were in that way (Mark 10:32). But the Lord pressed on. It says, "Therefore have I set my face like a flint" (Isaiah 50:7), which is taken up in the New Testament, "he steadfastly set his face" (Luke 9:51).

He now comes to two interesting illustrations. One is about someone sitting down to build a tower, thinking he would like to have a tower to make something of his life. The danger is that they will not be able to finish it. These scriptures clearly do not have to do with our being saved for eternity. As to that, you and I cannot do any building. The Lord Jesus has done all that ever can be done. But we are all building our lives here, we cannot help it. Even if we decide just to opt out, we are saying what we are doing with our life.

Here is someone who is doing a particular kind of building and he needs to reckon up whether he will be able to finish it. It is all very well having got the foundation laid: for the believer, "other foundation can no man lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). But how are you going to build on it and are you going to be able to see it through? None of us has the resource in

ourselves to be able to see this building through.

Then we have a king, who was on his way to engage in war with another king. And he, too, needs to work out whether he will be able to see it through. That is something for Christians to remember, that there is some warfare going on. We always have Satan as the great enemy and he has got some impressive looking resources which he will use against us. Your temptations will not be the same as mine but he has got good resources. Now, have you got enough resource to see you through?

Do not send an embassy to strike terms. All too many people do that; they make a kind of bargain with Satan that he can have part of their life and the Lord can have the rest. That is a very real and present danger. We need to be quite sure that we have the resource and the resource is to be found in Christ alone.

The Lord says, and this is a repeated verse in scripture, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear". That means, you and I have to work it out for ourselves. Ministry can help so far and be a signpost but we have got to find out what the Lord is saying to us about our life. I am sure that in the circumstances of life the Lord Jesus has a good deal to say to us. Have I ears attentive to what it is the Lord is saying and learning the lessons He would teach?

Now we often think of these verses as bearing particularly on outward persecution. And that is a reality, particularly so for some of our fellow believers in other parts of the world. You and I in the ways of God may not be facing that kind of persecution but I read in John six because the issues are not always in regard of outward persecution. John six is a good chapter for disciples to see whether they are going to listen to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a chapter full of very serious teaching. You can read it and read it and still feel that you have not fully understood it, let alone acted upon it.

The chapter began with this multitude being fed and they were so grateful that they were going to make Him King. The Lord was not having that. But the time came when He began to show that the purpose of this feeding had been to engage their interest in food for the soul and what God's dealings with His people meant when He provided them with the manna.

Unless we take up the death of the Lord Jesus Christ for ourselves we have nothing of our own at all

They all knew the story of the manna but the Lord says, 'Let us bring it up to date as to what the manna is and what this food is which comes down from heaven'. So He says, "Unless ye shall have eaten the flesh of the Son of man, and drunk his blood, ye have no life in yourselves". Unless we take

up the death of the Lord Jesus Christ for ourselves we have nothing of our own at all.

We come first to the goodness of God in giving the Lord Jesus for us, and His own goodness in giving Himself to die for us. But we also come up against something which is not easy and is not at all easy for the flesh and that is, to say, as the apostle came to it, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell" (Romans 7:18). It is of the essence of Christianity, that nothing about me as a person in the world has anything for God at all. It is just the plain word of scripture, that what I am by nature is not for God and there needs to be an entirely new beginning. We have to see that if Christ has died to everything here, then we, as trusting in Him, have died as well. We have to make the death of the Lord Jesus our own and find that the life that we have — "the life which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:1)—is to be enjoyed on the basis of forsaking ourselves and cleaving entirely to Him and to His word.

It is very fine, what He has to say, "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal". "Has", you have got it now. That resolves the question as to whether eternal life can only be for the future: if we make the Lord's death for us our own then we have life eternal. And there is a promise, "I will raise him up at the last day". Then there is something more, "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me and I in him". There could not be a closer relationship to the Lord Jesus than that.

Now, in verse 60, "Many therefore of his disciples having heard it said, This word is hard; who can hear it?" Here are some who started to build the tower and had not the resource to complete it. And, sadly, they had no intention of looking for the resource. They just said, 'It is all impossible'. They did not like it, of course. That is

what often makes things impossible, that I do not like them. And none of us likes it naturally - that the best that is in me is not what God is looking for, that God is only looking for what is like and formed of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord says, "Does this offend you?" Is the real problem that you do not like what is being said? So He says, 'If that is a stumbling block, how are you going to get on with the next one, which is that the Lord Jesus, the Son of man, is going to ascend up where He was before?' The One whom God has approved and anointed and who has done all His will, that One is to be received up in glory. He ascends up where He was before and He ascends there as a Man. He adds, "It is the Spirit which quickens, the flesh profits nothing". That brings home the fact that what I am by nature has nothing in it for God. But there is what is for God; it is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is often mentioned in John's gospel and I often give thanks for the book of the Acts which shows so plainly what the result of the coming of the Spirit is, and how the apostles, as they became, proved the help and the support of the Holy Spirit in doing what they could never have done for themselves. A man like Peter did not become perfect - no one does - but he did not make the kind of mistakes that are recorded in the gospels. He is a new man and he is serviceable to the Lord because he is now trusting in God and not in himself.

The Lord says there is a reason for all this, "no one can come to me unless it be given to him from the Father". It is an important principle that I cannot do things of myself. Yes, the appeal is to come to Christ, and it will be, as long as the gospel goes out. But never think that I make a decision for Christ and do Him some honour by doing so. It is purely the grace of God, the goodness of God that leads you to repentance (Romans 2:4).

"From that time many of his disciples went away back and walked no more with him". I am well aware that a true disciple does not go away but we have to take note that in verse 60 and in verse 66 there are those who were said to have been disciples who went away back, and we hear no more of them. I am not now going to apply that to whether they were real believers or not. I just draw upon this passage as a reminder that there is a cost to be counted,

and it does not confine itself to persecution, though that can be real, but it includes the question of where I stand in my soul before God as to the truth that He has ministered through His Son and through His apostles, the fact that in my flesh good does not dwell and that my only life before God is to be found in Christ.

Thank God there were those who did not go away. Jesus said to the twelve: "Will ye also go away?" Simon Peter, speaking for the others, "answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast words of life eternal; and we have believed and known that thou art the holy one of God". Peter knew that the Lord had something which he needed, "words of life eternal". And thus they could say, "We have believed and known that thou art the holy one of God". In the address to Philadelphia the One who speaks is the holy, the true. Speaking to Laodicea He is the faithful and true witness, but to Philadelphia He speaks as the One who is the holy, the true. Many of us walk a long way behind Christ and a long way behind the apostles, but we still know One who is holy, true and faithful and we love and trust Him on that account.

There are three short references I want to make to some disciples spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles. The first is in Acts 9 where, "in Joppa there was a certain female disciple, by name Tabitha, which being interpreted means Dorcas". A good deal has been said about Dorcas but I only want to call attention to one thing: she was a female disciple. This is good authority for encouraging all of us, brothers and sisters, men and women, boys and girls, all alike to be found among the disciples of the Lord Jesus. Scripture just plainly says that she was a female disciple.

Then, there are two other people, not directly called disciples but they certainly were. We find them first in chapter 18, Aquila and Priscilla, who are an interesting illustration of a husband and wife both being disciples. They found their place in the church in Corinth and in Ephesus. But where they are first spoken of, Paul the apostle stayed with them and joined them in making tents. Paul evidently had learnt a trade. We might think it extraordinary that a man who had sat at the feet of Gamaliel would be found tent making but that is what he could do and he joined them. That was where some of the discipleship had to be worked out.

**Thank God there
were those who
did not go away**

I venture to say from experience, that it is a good thing for husband and wife to be minded to be disciples together. Peter says they are heirs together, "fellow-heirs of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7).

It is a most happy thing to find that you

are like minded about the things that are most important to you in life. It does not mean that you never have any problems or even that there may be things about which you are not always, to start with, of one mind. But underneath your real concern is exactly the same, you are both minded to be disciples of the Lord. I commend it to us all to value the links between husband and wife that are found, not only in the fellowship, but being disciples together.

They were a good household and by the end of this chapter they have a man like Apollos put into their hands and the two of them set to work together to help him. Their work was very fruitful. In the epistles we find that they have a gathering of the Lord's people in their house (1 Corinthians 16:19). So it worked out very well, two, we might say, model disciples working together in the things of the Lord.

One other reference that I want to make is in Acts 21:16 "And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing with them a certain Mnason, a Cyprian, an old disciple, with whom we were to lodge". Mnason is not mentioned anywhere else but he is said to have been an old disciple. However aged he actually was, it certainly means he had been a disciple for a long time. I draw on that for the encouragement of us all, but particularly, perhaps, for those of us who have been on the road for a while, not to forget that there was an old disciple who was available for the help of Paul at a difficult time.

There can be female disciples as well as men, there can be husbands and wives, and there can be old disciples. May we all be found in the way of discipleship, for His name's sake.

David Burr

An address at Hampton, 27 September 2008

Poetry Selection

THANKSGIVING

Thanks to Thee, who dost bestow
All the happiness I know,
And with hope dost cheer the way,
Soon to end in cloudless day.

Thanks to Thee who dost impart
Heavenly knowledge to my heart;
Love, to warm it; faith, to guide,
Whatsoever may betide.

Thanks, eternal thanks, to Thee
Who has shed Thy blood for me;
This of all Thy gifts the best,
Crowns and sanctifies the rest!

PSALM 106

Give thanks unto the Lord,
His holy name adore;
O sing ye to His praise
Ye saints, for evermore.
For gracious is our God,
His promises are sure,
His mercy, truth and love
For ever shall endure.

O who can half recount
Thy noble acts, O Lord?
Thy deeds in olden time
Are endless to record;
He who to count them o'er
Would dedicate his days
Still would not mention all,
Nor show forth half Thy praise!

How blessed is the case
Of those, whate'er betide,
In upright paths of truth
Dare firmly to abide;
Who, scorning crooked ways,
Do what is just and right,
And while in earth's dark vales,
Keep heaven within their sight.

This be my portion, Lord,
With them may I be blessed!
With them I grieve and toil,
With them, O let me rest.
Remember me, O God,
And let me share the grace
Which Thou didst shower of old
Upon Thy favoured race.

Yes Lord, though we have sinned,
As all our fathers have,
And oft Thy laws transgressed,
O look on us and save!
Preserve and gather us
From those who now oppress,
That we may boast in Thee,
That we Thy name may bless!

Emily Gosse (née Bowes)

(Born 10 November 1806 – Died 10 February 1857)

The poems were written when Emily was about 23/25

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Testimony Section

THE WRECK OF THE THETIS

Seventy years ago, on 1st June 1939, H.M. Submarine Thetis set out from Cammell Laird's shipyard in Birkenhead into Liverpool Bay on its acceptance trials. There were a total of 103 people on board, 53 crew plus a number of contractors' employees and about 16 other naval and Admiralty personnel.

About 1.40pm the submarine signalled that it was about to carry out a trial dive. During this process, an officer who did not realise that the bow cap of No 5 torpedo tube was open released the rear door of the tube. Seawater immediately rushed into the submarine at a rate of about two tons a second, causing the submarine to nosedive to the bottom. Unfortunately the alarm was not raised until much later but by midnight eight planes were searching for the submarine and a rescue fleet of seven minesweepers, eight destroyers and six vessels from the 1st Anti-submarine flotilla were steaming to the rescue. Various other ships from Scotland and Liverpool itself were dispatched to Liverpool Bay. Senior naval staff arrived in Liverpool to take charge of the rescue.

Despite all these efforts it proved impossible to bring any help to the submarine. Only four men were able to get out using the escape hatch; the rest must have died slowly of suffocation as the submarine ran out of air. At 4.10pm on 3rd June the Admiralty announced: "It is regretted that hope of saving the lives in the Thetis must be abandoned", sad news which had to be conveyed to the crowd of about two thousand relatives and friends of the men on the submarine who were gathered at Cammell Laird's yard.

Several weeks later the submarine was salvaged and the bodies of ninety-nine men recovered. Many homes in Liverpool and Birkenhead were in mourning.

J. G. Mathison, a Liverpool man, wrote a tract for distribution that same June. It is given below.

H.M.S. THETIS

Ready, but not able to save.

Anxiety has given place to consternation, followed now by grief and despair. The sympathy of all cannot fail to be extended to those now sorrowing as a result of the loss of dear ones, involved in the disaster so fresh in our memories, which took place in Liverpool Bay, when H.M.S. Thetis made her final dive, plunging ninety-nine souls into eternity, and so many homes into mourning.

Every man in all the ships engaged in what proved to be futile rescue work would readily have risked his life in an attempt to save the entrapped crew of the Thetis. The scene has been vividly described. Men capable enough and ready to face the greatest danger, the best apparatus that could be collected in the time, lifeboats, salvage ships, divers – all standing by waiting an opportunity to start their life saving operations; but it never came, and while salvation was so near to those poor fellows in the Thetis, yet they were doomed.

If all these most earnest desires proved so unavailing in saving their lives, the question must be asked, What about their souls? The destiny of all on that ill-fated submarine has now been sealed, but until their last breath was drawn, salvation was available; the Saviour was waiting, willing, ready and able to save their souls. Nothing but the blood of Jesus could make atonement for the soul. No matter with what fortitude they may have met the end, or the unselfish bravery displayed toward each other, all this could not meet the need of their souls and prepare them to face eternity in view of meeting God. The salvation of their souls depended solely on the atoning work of Jesus, which was available to the last moment to each. The work of Jesus, the blood of Jesus, is alone all-sufficient, so that even the faint, feeble, and last sobbed out sigh to Christ would be heard and answered by Him with eternal salvation, for "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). Every effort failed to release the crew of H.M.S. Thetis. Many were waiting ready to make the attempt, but none were able to do so.

And what of us who still live? Is the voice in this tragedy to be passed unheard, unheeded? Assuredly for all, both reader and writer alike, God would use this as a most solemn warning, for the voice is for the living, not the dead. Disasters happen, and some of the lessons may

soon be forgotten, and the incident may pass out of our memories, only remembered by those who have suffered loss. Some disasters are recorded. The Lord Jesus drew attention to one, evidently recent occurrence, in His day. The Tower of Siloam fell, and eighteen persons met an untimely death. The Lord made use of the accident as a warning to those He was addressing: "Think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:4-5).

So God would speak to all in this calamity, as in grace He gives opportunity for all to be prepared, for it is He who calls attention to the salvation that can be secured, so "today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts". You may have those who are anxious as to the welfare of your soul – parents, brothers, sisters, friends, etc., and even this unknown writer – we all combine in entreating that you may receive the Saviour – God's gracious provision, a Saviour who is ready and able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him; ready to save because of who He is; able to save because of what He has done.

You may not be just about to face an agonising death, you may be in the best of health, but eternity may be near at hand, and unprepared as you are, it will be sure and certain doom, without hope, without God, without Christ. Salvation can be had now; the Saviour waits. Oh, be wise; accept that which is so freely offered. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6), near with salvation, the glorious results of His finished work. Near in all the compassion manifested, as having borne the penalty and suffered under the just judgment due to us as sinners. He will not always be near, not always be at hand, and when He is not, no amount of crying, no beseeching, or entreating, can in any way avail. We earnestly beseech you to accept the blessing, which at present He is so willing, able and ready to bestow.

J.G. Mathison (Liverpool, June 1939)

FROM DEATH TO LIFE

My name is Peter Kmety Jnr. I live in Romania. I was born on 19th February 1979 and was brought up in a Christian household.. From an early age my parents took me regularly to hear the gospel message of Jesus. I was not interested and as I grew up I took less and less

interest. By the time I was fourteen I did not want to go to Christian meetings with my parents. I wanted to find happiness in the world, but somehow I was never really happy.

My parents constantly prayed to the Lord to save me and did all that they could but I continued to practise evil and blasphemed God. I ordered my Mother never to mention the name of God to me but she constantly warned me what would happen if I did not change my ways. Sometimes, when I was driving the car Satan would often whisper to me to do evil to someone or something and that no one would find out and everything would be alright. In these situations sometimes my conscience would be stirred and I would realise that I could not do it because my mother was praying for me.

When I was eighteen I wanted to saw some wood but mother warned me that the ground was too wet after a lot of rain and the electric saw that we had was not very good. I went against her will. She said, 'Do not play with electricity because it can kill you'

I replied, 'Well, if I die, I die'

'Yes', she answered, 'and where will you go?'

"There will be plenty of others there," I answered cruelly.

A few minutes later it happened. I was alone with my youngest brother because my mother had gone out. There was a great bang and I fell unconscious to the ground. When my brother saw that the electricity had knocked me unconscious, he remembered what he had been taught at school a few days previously and ran to turn off the electricity, and then ran for mother.

When my mother came hurrying back, it appeared to be too late and in despair she asked God to give me back because I was not saved.

When the current hit me it was as if I left my body and went down a long narrow tunnel. There was a terrible fire at the end and I began to ask God to save me. There was a crowd of other people there, who were all crying for help too. When I got near the fire God's hand reached out and drew me back out of the tunnel. It was a terrible experience. When I started to breath again everyone was amazed. God had given me another opportunity to be reconciled to Him.

Be assured, heaven and hell are real. Do not waste your life because you never know if you will be given another opportunity to be saved.

It is my wish that all who read this may repent, be reconciled to God and ask the Lord Jesus into their heart.

Peter Kmety

Translated from the Slovak by Lorraine Holling

A Voice from the Past

GOD'S GLAD TIDINGS

Christ came into the place where the sinner is, He was beside the thief on the cross. The light from God shone into him, and he could see in Jesus One who had done nothing amiss, and that He could deliver him from all his misery.

God in His wonderful, unaccountable mercy, comes out in grace to forgive you your sins, setting forth His own Son to be a propitiation through faith in His blood; and, more, He says as it were, 'You would not give Him a place on earth, but I will turn even that to your benefit, and you shall share with Him His place in heaven'.

When you believe that God has raised Christ from the dead, you are justified, and being justified by faith you have peace with God. Now you are on new ground before God, you are before God in Christ.

God not only delights in saving us, but in having us (with Him). Nothing can satisfy love but company. I could suppose a great man driving by and seeing a man drowning would pull up and throw himself into the water to save a fellow creature, and be glad to do it. But where did you ever hear of a great man, after saving one from a watery grave, saying to him: 'You must come home in my carriage and share all that I have, I wish for your company!' Never – until the gospel of the glory came!

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". And who was the Lamb of God? He "who knew no sin". He has been made sin for us, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21), and He will eventually take away the sin of the world; there will be an end to it. If you belong to Him you have to do with the Person who removes everything that is contrary to God.

Now the righteousness of God is established in the cross of Christ –

He bearing in Himself the judgment on man, so that there is an end of that which offended against God. He was made sin for us, that we should be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Gethsemane. In a few words is told the greatest occurrence that ever took place on this earth. The Lord went through it first with God. Only a holy person could have any idea of what distance from God is. The holy Son of God, taking the place of the sinner's distance, Satan was here seeking to crush Him, by presenting to Him what death would be to Him – the character of Satan's assault (as also with us) is first to seduce us and afterwards to crush us. He had sought to seduce the Lord in the beginning of His course here and was foiled – at the end he sought to crush Him.

See how Paul presents to the awakened jailor a Person. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). The jailor might have said, 'I do not know who He is'; but Paul put the right Person before him. So Philip and the eunuch. He preached, he evangelised, Jesus to him. Peter says in Acts 10, "through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins".

Sin has caused the greatest distance between God and man; grace has brought the believer in Christ into the greatest nearness to Him. You must be conscious of the greatness of the distance; if you do not understand the greatness of the distance, you will never understand the greatness of the grace.

...by the work of Christ you are delivered from the judgment which is due to you, and which rested on you. Secondly, you receive the Holy Spirit from the very Person who delivered you. Thirdly, the Holy Spirit leads you to the place where Christ is. The magnificence of it should arrest your heart.

The above is extracted from a chapter from "Encouraging Words", a book of extracts from the ministry of J.B. Stoney, selected by Gavin Simpson and arranged into 61 subject headings

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A Word for Today

SIMON PETER: HIS LIFE AND ITS LESSONS

Part 2: Denial and Repentance

We have now to follow Peter into the darkest and most humbling scene in his entire history—a scene which we could hardly understand or account for if we did not know something of the infinite depths of divine grace on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of the terrible depths into which even a saint of God or an apostle of Christ is capable of plunging if not kept by divine power.

It seems very wonderful to find on the page of inspiration the record of the fall of such an eminent servant of Christ as Simon Peter. We, in our wisdom, would judge it best to draw the curtain of silence over such an event. Not so the Holy Ghost. He has seen fit to tell us plainly of the errors, and failures, and sins, of such men as Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul, in order that we may learn holy lessons from such records—lessons of human frailty, lessons of divine grace, lessons full of solemn warning, and yet of most precious consolation and encouragement. We learn what we are, and we learn what God is. We learn that we cannot trust ourselves for a single moment; for, if not kept by grace, there is no depth of sin into which we are not capable of falling; but we learn to trust the eternal stability of that grace which has dealt with the erring ones and sinning ones of other days, and to lean with ever-growing confidence on the One who is “the same yesterday, today, and for ever”.

Not one of the four evangelists omits the fall of Peter

Not one of the four evangelists omits the fall of Peter. Let us open at Matthew 26, “And when they had sung a hymn they went out into the Mount of Olives. Then saith Jesus unto them, “All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it written. I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto Him, Though all shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended”.

In these few words Peter lets out the real root of the whole matter. That root was self-confidence—alas! alas! no uncommon root amongst

us. I do not in the least question Peter's sincerity. I feel perfectly sure he meant all he said; and, further, that he had not the most remote idea of what he was about to do. He was ignorant of himself, and we generally find that ignorance and self-confidence go together. Self-knowledge destroys self-confidence. The more fully self is known, the more it must be distrusted. If Peter had known himself, known his tendencies and capabilities, he never would have uttered the words that we have just read. But so full was he of self-confidence, that when his Lord told him expressly what he was about to do, he replied, "Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee".

This is peculiarly solemn. It is full of instruction for us all. We are all so ignorant of our own hearts that we deem ourselves incapable of falling into certain gross sins, but we should, every one of us, bear in mind that if not kept each moment by the grace of God, we are capable of anything. We have materials in us for any amount or character of evil; and whenever we hear any one saying, 'Well, I certainly am a poor, failing, stumbling creature, but I am not capable of doing the like of that', we may feel assured he does not know his own heart; and not only so, but he is in imminent danger of falling into some grievous sin. It is well to walk humbly before our God, distrusting self, and leaning on Him. This is the true secret of moral safety at all times. Had Peter realized this, it would have saved him his terrible downfall.

Now Peter was self-confident, and, as a consequence, he failed to watch and pray. This was another stage in his downward journey. Had he only felt his utter weakness, he would have sought for divine strength. He would have cast himself on God for grace to help in time of need. Look at the blessed Master! He, though God over all, blessed forever, yet being a Man, having taken the place of the creature, and fully entering into His position, was agonizing in prayer while Peter was fast asleep. Yes, Peter slept in the garden of Gethsemane while his Lord was passing through the deepest anguish He had yet tasted, though deeper still lay before Him.

"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And He took with Him Peter and the sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with Me. And He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me:

nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt. And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What! could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

What tender grace! What readiness to make allowance! What moral elevation! And yet He felt the sad want of sympathy, the cold indifference to His sore agony. "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." How much is involved in these words! He looked for comforters. That perfect human heart craved sympathy but, alas there was none for Him. Even Peter, who declared himself ready to die with Him, fell asleep in view of the agonies of Gethsemane.

Such is man — yea, the very best of men! Self-confident, when he ought to be self-distrusting — sleeping, when he ought to be watching: and, we may add, fighting, when he ought to be submitting. "Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus." How incongruous, how utterly out of place, was a sword in company with the meek and lowly Sufferer!

"Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which My Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Peter was entirely out of the current of his Master's spirit. He had not a thought in common with Him in reference to His path of suffering. He would fain defend Him with carnal weapons, forgetting that His kingdom was not of this world.

All this is peculiarly solemn. To find a dear and honoured servant of Christ failing so grievously is surely sufficient to teach us to walk very softly. But, alas, we have not yet reached the lowest point in Peter's downward course. Having used his sword in defence of his Master, we next find him "following afar off". "Then took they Jesus, and led Him, and brought Him to the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them."

What company for an apostle of Christ! 'Can a man touch pitch, and not be defiled by it? Can one walk on burning coals, and his feet not be burned?' It is terribly dangerous for the Christian to sit down among the enemies of Christ. The very fact of his doing so proves that decline has set in, and made serious progress. In Peter's case the stages of

decline are strongly marked. First, boasting in his own strength; secondly, sleeping when he ought to have been praying; thirdly, drawing his sword when he ought to have been meekly bowing his head; fourthly, following afar off; fifthly, making himself comfortable in the midst of the open enemies of Christ.

Then comes the last sad scene in this terrible drama. "And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest; and when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I, what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them, for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto. But he began to curse and to swear, I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice thou shalt deny Me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept" (Mark 14: 66-72).

Luke adds a most touching clause: "And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."

How deeply affecting is all this! Only think of a saint of God, and an apostle of Christ, cursing and swearing that he did not know his Lord! Does the reader feel disposed to question the fact that Peter was, spite of all this, a genuine saint of God? Some do question it, but their questioning is a gross mistake. They find it hard to conceive such a thing as a true child of God falling so terribly. It is because they have not yet thoroughly learnt what flesh is. Peter was as really a saint of God in the palace of the high priest as he was on the mount of transfiguration. But he had to learn himself by as humiliating and painful a process as any soul could well be called to pass through.

Doubtless, if anyone had told Peter, a few days before, that he would ere long curse and swear that he did not know his Lord; he would have shrunk with horror from the thought. He might have said, like one of old, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" Yet so it was. We know not what we may do until we are in the circumstances.

The great thing for us all is to walk humbly with our God day-by-day, deeply sensible of our own utter weakness, and clinging to Him who is able to keep us from falling. We are safe only in the shelter of His presence. Left to ourselves, we are capable of anything, as Peter found to his deep sorrow.

The great thing for us all is to walk humbly with our God day-by-day

But the Lord was watching over His poor erring servant. He never lost sight of him for a single moment; He had His eye upon the whole process. The devil would have smashed the vessel in hopeless fragments if he could, but he could not. He was but an instrument in the divine hand to do a work for Peter, which Peter had failed to do for himself. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted (or restored), strengthen thy brethren." Here we are permitted to see the root of the matter. Peter needed to be sifted, and Satan was employed to do the work - just as in the case of Job, and in the case of the man in 1 Corinthians 5. It seems very wonderful, very mysterious, and very solemn, that Satan should be so used. Yet so it is. God uses him "for the destruction of the flesh". He cannot touch the spirit. That is eternally safe. But it is terrible work to get into Satan's sieve. Peter found it so, and so did Job, and so did that erring Corinthian.

Yet, oh, the grace of those words! "I have prayed for thee" - not that he might not fall, but, having fallen, that his faith might not fail. Nothing can surpass the grace that shines out here. The Lord knew all that was to happen—the shameful denial—the cursing and swearing; and yet, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not"—that thy confidence in the eternal stability of My grace may not give way.

It is perfectly marvellous! Then think of the power of that look! "The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." It was this that broke Peter's heart, and drew forth a flood of bitter, penitential tears.
Charles H. Mackintosh