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Living Water

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LIVING WATER 122

(March – April 2014)

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Recent Ministry

PATIENT CONTINUANCE IN WELL-DOING

For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, subsisting in the form of God, did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself, taking a bondman's form, taking his place in the likeness of men; and having been found in figure as a man, humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and granted him a name, that which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of heavenly and earthly and infernal beings, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father's glory. Philippians 2:5-11

This was our sister's favourite Scripture which she requested to be read..

Christianity has been built on sacrifice. That is totally true of the giving of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself – His sacrifice was the greatest that this world has ever seen. There is nothing to compare with it.

Paul, writing to the Philippians, sets out very clearly that the steps of the Lord Jesus were descending ones. Even in manhood He took the lowest place - a bondman's form. He took a condition to which, as to us, death attached, so that He could die for the sins of mankind and remove the sins of every one that would trust in Him.

His precious blood that was shed at Calvary was shed to remove sins entirely from the sight of God and cleanse totally the conscience of sinners, who came to a conclusion in their own lives that they were sinners and needed a Saviour. That is wonderful and that is what our sister enjoyed immensely. She lived in the peace that flowed from trusting in the Lord Jesus for her forgiveness, the knowledge of eternal peace and the certainty of the promise that she would see Him—glorified, as the scripture we have read points out.

Salvation is very comprehensive. The believer that trusts Jesus personally knows Him as his own Saviour and through trusting in

His finished work at Calvary delights in the fact that one day Jesus is going to be universally acclaimed. There will not be a single knee in the universe—be it of heavenly, earthly or infernal beings—that will not bow to Christ.

We live in a day of grace when we can know the Lord Jesus for ourselves as our Saviour. He loves us and He loved us so much that He took this tremendous journey down into manhood and then even to death *“and that the death of the cross”*. He says Himself, *“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13 KJV)*.

The second thing that comes out of this chapter is that those who are affected by the Lord Jesus and His love, walk in the graciousness of Christian life. I have a very great personal respect for our sister. She met with us here for nearly 20 years and we observed features that came to light:- quietness, dependence, acceptance of the Lord’s will. She maintained quite a large correspondence base. I know there are Christians, who are not here today, who through seeing the constancy of her letters, her love, her support and booklets about Jesus, realised how much she cared for them. She loved her family very dearly and cared for them all. She did not complain or murmur. In the detail of her life as we knew it for 20 years, she accepted things from the hand of the Lord and from the hands of the Father. She always accepted divine timing in every aspect of life. There was a deep confidence and peace in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus and of the Father. I said to her several times, when she was widowed, ‘Will you be all right tonight?’ She replied ‘I commit all things to my heavenly Father’. Her soul was at peace. That was the way she was.

There was a piety about her; she adorned the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ. The doctrines in Christian teaching can be very demanding but our sister not only accepted them and bowed to them but her pious life adorned them. I am sure that those of us who knew her and indeed all of us would have a very great respect for such a pious sister.

May we be blessed for His name’s sake.

Philip Robinson

Word at a burial, 9 October 2013

CALLED ACCORDING TO GOD'S PURPOSE AND GRACE

...to them who, in patient continuance of good works, seek for glory and honour and incorruptibility, life eternal. Romans 2:7

God; who has saved us, and has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time, but has been made manifest now by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings; 2 Timothy 1:9, 10

We have heard a testimony of a remarkable life of service and I read the verse in Romans 2 because it speaks of those "who, in patient continuance of good works, seek for glory and honour and incorruptibility, life eternal". Our sister was marked by a lifetime of service and care. Care for her parents, care for her husband and family, care for the Christian believers that she met with and care for those she came in contact with.

It is a wonderful thing to have a testimony like this. We are not here to eulogise but it is right to take account of features of the precious work of God in those who are called home to be with the Lord so that we can take encouragement from their lives and also be challenged by them. Because, "*we the living who remain*" have a life still to follow and the challenge to me today is how much the features that marked our sister are found in my life. Our sister was not occupied with herself, she was occupied with the Lord, and it is a great matter to take account of the closing events of a long life of service, and challenge ourselves as to where we may measure up to it.

We have been saved by a wonderful, glorious Saviour. The Lord Jesus has been into death and has come forth triumphant. He has gone into heaven and has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we might follow Him here and seek, not merely the things of this life which pass away, but that which is abiding and eternal. We are passing and changing too, as we get older. This happens to every one of us but there is still opportunity to spend our time in service to the Lord as did our beloved sister.

I read in second Timothy, because everything that we enjoy and have comes from God. He has saved us and has called us with a holy calling. Everyone who knows the Saviour has been called. It is *“Not according to our works”*: we do not earn our way into heaven. The precious blood of our Lord Jesus has cleansed us from every sin and given us the right to be there, but it is *“according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time”*. The calling of the Christian is a most blessed matter; it goes back before the foundation of the world!

The Lord Jesus has come into this world and has been into death and He has annulled death — He has annulled the power. That which has held the human race in bondage is no longer a power against the believer in Jesus. We have a hope beyond death and our dear sister has passed into the presence of the Lord. What a blessed end it is that she has passed into the rest and enjoyment of the presence of the Lord!

The Christian way is a wonderful way; it leads from earth to heaven and the Lord Jesus is coming very soon for those who are on it; *“we the living who remain”* (1 Thessalonians 4:15). It is a great comfort and hope.

Our Lord has annulled death; it has been made of no account. Our sister is now in the presence of the Lord. Weakness of body, suffering and pain are finished for her for ever. We can rejoice in that hope though it is a time of sorrow for those who remain.

There is a word in Ecclesiastes: *“It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting”* (Ecclesiastes 7:2.) That may appear difficult to understand but as we contemplate the life of service, devotion, and love of our sister and her commitment to the Saviour who meant so much to her, we can perhaps be helped to understand it.

May it be that we should desire that our lives should be marked by the features that marked our sister.

Marcus Chapman

Word at a burial, 9 October 2013

THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD JESUS

Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30

To whom coming, a living stone, cast away indeed as worthless by men, but with God chosen, precious, yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:4-5

Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe on God, believe also on me. In my Father's house there are many abodes; were it not so, I had told you: for I go to prepare you a place; and if I go and shall prepare you a place, I am coming again and shall receive you to myself, that where I am ye also may be. John 14:1-3

My desire in reading these scriptures is to speak about the presence of the Lord Jesus. What a wondrous and wonderful blessing we have in coming to Jesus and knowing Him as our Saviour and Lord: the Son of God.

He has taken us up as sinners, having come short of the glory of God, giving us to see His grace and mercy. How wonderful that is: bringing us into the very presence of God in peace. We stand justified before a righteous God and sanctified before a holy God, *"For by one offering he has perfected in perpetuity the sanctified"* (Hebrews 10:14).

May we see the wonderful, eternal value of the work of Jesus:

- on His part there is no more offering for sins;
- on God's part there is no more remembrance of sins; and
- on our part there is no more conscience of sins.

We stand before God without a spot. As the hymn says:- *Not a cloud above — not a spot within.*

The Lord Jesus, therefore, has bought us with His precious blood and redeemed us to God. We are His and His forever.

Nothing can separate us from Him:

- on the cross He died to save us;
- on the throne He ever lives to intercede for us; and now,
- He waits in patience to receive us into His presence for ever.

Now we, too, wait in patience for Him from the heavens. In the meantime the Holy Spirit is our Comforter, the One who sheds abroad God's love in our hearts, forms us in the divine nature, gives us to see all the blessings that we have in our Lord Jesus: the unsearchable riches that He has. Is that not wonderful? But especially the Holy Spirit links us with Him so that we might know that we are one with Him above and prove His presence down here. The desire of the Lord Jesus is that we might know the joy and the comfort of His presence while going through the wilderness of this world.

**the Holy Spirit links us
with Him so that we
might know that we are
one with Him above**

Where we read in Matthew the Lord Jesus invites us come to Him. We are drawn to Him so that we might know the rest that He gives. In this world we labour and are burdened about many things, the cares and the sorrows of the way. How the Lord Jesus knew the sorrows of the way. He was a *"man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief"* (Isaiah 53:3). He had nowhere to lay His head, nothing to rest on in this world (see Luke 9:58).

The background to these verses in Matthew is that the Lord Jesus began to reproach the cities in which most of His mighty works of power had taken place, because they had not repented. He felt the rejection keenly, but answering says, *"I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes. Yea, Father, for thus has it been well-pleasing in thy sight."* How wonderful that the Lord Jesus had rest. Here I see the secret of His rest: His pillow was in the bosom of the Father's love.

He brings us now to enjoy the Father's love. The Lord tells us that the love wherewith He is loved is the same love with which we are loved (see John 17:26). This is rest. So we can each sit under His shadow with great delight and His fruit is sweet to our taste (see Song of Songs 2:3). It is the good part to be alone with Jesus and to be taught of Him.

He says, *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"*. As we learn of Him we take His yoke. His yoke was submission to the Father's will: *"Yea, Father, for thus has it been well-pleasing in thy sight."* Perfect obedience. He took all from His Father's hand and had perfect rest.

As we learn of Him we learn that the will of God is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2). So we find in the presence of the Lord Jesus rest and a love that never fails. I am drawn to the four gospels for there I see One who is divine and yet pleased to come as Man, the meek and lowly One. What beauty God saw in Jesus. The Lord had rest in His life down here in His communion with the Father; now He has rest at God's right hand in the glory. We now are to feed on Him and live by Him.

In 1 Peter we are exhorted to taste and see that the Lord is good. It is, *"To whom coming"*. We have to do with a Person who holds our affections. At the end of John 6 we find that many of the Lord's disciples had gone away back and walked no more with Him. The Lord turns to the twelve and says, *"Will ye also go away? Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go?"* Peter was occupied with a Person!

Christianity is all about a Person and my heart being attached to that Person, the Lord Jesus Christ who was cast away as worthless by men but with God chosen and precious. And He is now precious to me. So I draw near to Him and I find, as I draw near to Him- the One who is the living stone- that I also am a living stone being built up, with all believers, *"a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ"*.

He is the builder and the corner-stone and we are being built on Himself. In Matthew 16 the Lord Jesus says, *"on this rock I will build my assembly, and hades' gates shall not prevail against it"*. He is the rock, the Son of the living God, and we are living stones, the product of God's workmanship. We see this in perfection in Revelation 21 where John is shown the bride, the Lamb's wife, seen as the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her shining was like a stone most precious. Yes, she is like Christ, the One who is precious. He gives us a view of this, the building that is complete but we are being built up now.

So it says in Hebrews 2, of the Lord Jesus, *"I will declare thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises"*. The Lord Jesus has secured us as worshippers and now leads us to where we can worship the Father. How wonderful that is! His Father and our Father: His God and our God. By the Holy Spirit's power we enter into sharing with the Lord Jesus the praises to the Father, now and eternally. It is the Lord's joy that we should enter into this with Himself. It is the Lord who touches our hearts and praises flow which are acceptable to God, by Him.

When we come to John 14 the Lord Jesus had looked on the hearts of His disciples and seen that they were troubled at His soon leaving them. Nothing could satisfy them but the presence of the Lord Jesus. Their happiness was being with Himself. So He comforts their hearts. He says, *"Let not your heart be troubled ... I am coming again and shall receive you to myself"*. It is only the presence of the Lord Jesus that could satisfy their hearts: it is only the presence of the Lord Jesus that can satisfy our hearts and the Lord Jesus will not be satisfied until He has gathered all His own into His presence eternally and then, *"He shall see of the fruit of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied"* (Isaiah 53:11).

Think of it! The Lord Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us in the Father's house. He gives us the assurance that it is Himself that will come and receive us. He is our hope.

I would like to say a word about the sleeping ones, those who are asleep through Jesus, the dead in Christ. Their portion at this moment is most blessed; they are *“absent from the body and present with the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 5:8). Their spirits and souls are with Him and they are in the full enjoyment of the Lord’s love, having proved that underneath are the everlasting arms (see Deuteronomy 33:27 KJV).

The Lord said to the thief on the cross, *“To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise”* (Luke 23:43). The apostle Paul says, *“being with Christ, for it is very much better”* (Philippians 1:23). What a comfort and what a joy to know that those who are fallen asleep through Jesus, their spirits and souls are in the presence of the Lord Jesus.

When He comes to receive us the first thing He does, in His tender love, is to raise the sleeping ones. Let us meditate on the tenderness of Jesus. It is the first thing He does. Their spirits and souls are reunited with their bodies; this time it is glorified bodies and we, the living, are changed in the twinkling of an eye into His image and caught up together. Wonderful joy, we are going to be caught up together, that vast company, to meet the Lord in the air and so to be ever with the Lord, to be in His presence eternally (1 Thessalonians 4:17). It will be joy unspeakable. It is the blessed hope of our hearts. The Lord shall be satisfied and we will be satisfied in His company forever.

May the Lord give us to realise just how much He loves our company. The more I know His love and love Him, I long for His presence.

May the Lord bless the word. Amen.

George Laing

An address at Worthing, 9 November 2013

Poetry Selection

CALVARY AND THE KINGDOM

To Calvary, Lord, in spirit now
Our weary souls repair,
To dwell upon Thy dying love,
And taste its sweetness there.

Sweet resting place of every heart
That feels the plague of sin,
Yet knows that deep mysterious joy,
The peace of God within.

There, through Thine hour of deepest woe,
Thy suffering spirit passed;
Grace there its wondrous victory gained
And love o'er all surpassed.

Oh suffering Lamb, Thy travail there,
With cords of love divine,
Has drawn our willing hearts to Thee,
And linked our life with Thine.

Our longing eyes would fain behold
Thy bright and blessed brow,
Once wrung with bitter anguish, wear
Its crown of glory now.

Why linger then? Come, Saviour, come
Responsive to the call;
Come, claim Thine ancient power and reign,
The heir and Lord of all.

Edward Dennett.

CALVARY

There is a spot so real to faith,
Unseen by mortal eye,
Where for my sins the Lord of Life
Came in love to die:
Where Jesus died to set me free.
O wondrous place called Calvary.

There is a spot where tears oft flow,
As I my Lord adore
Where oft I'm lost in love and praise
And reverential awe:
Where I His great atonement see
The sacred place called Calvary.

There is a spot from whence I look,
To realms of light on high,
To see the One who suffered there
Raised and exalted high:
The crucified, enthroned I see,
The Victor great of Calvary

A. Gardner

Testimony Section

JOHN VINE HALL AND “THE SINNER’S FRIEND”

In March 1821 John Vine Hall, a printer and stationer in Maidstone, Kent, felt led of the Lord to start writing a tract – *The Sinner’s Friend*. The first printing was only one thousand copies but eventually over 2.5 million were printed in thirty different languages.

John Hall was born in Diss, Norfolk. When he was twelve his father’s business failed and he was sent to Maidstone where he had been offered a job as an errand boy to a stationer and wine merchant.

He had a wild youth, in particular being prone to drunkenness. Writing of it years later he said, “I could take the head of the table, and sit all night, drinking, swearing, playing cards and every abomination... But Oh, how does my heart now grieve to think of these things; and how astonished I am to think that God did not cut me down in my horrid blasphemies and daring rebellion against Him. Then to think of the wondrous change:

- The blasphemer – an ambassador for Christ!
- The prayer-less rebel – presiding at the prayer meeting!
- The companion of the licentious – the friend of the pious!
- The bawler of profane songs – the author of “The Sinner’s Friend”!

Oh, how does this exalt the glory of the grace of God, for nothing else could possibly effect such a change”

In 1802 a curate in Maidstone, hearing him blaspheming and advocating infidelity, begged him to read Porteus’ “Evidences of Christianity”. He did so and was moved enough as a result to burn his infidel books, but his conviction went no further. Yet God was at work and John began to feel tired of his sinful life and decided to reform. He thought that if he could get away from Maidstone all would be well, so he applied for a job in a Worcester bookshop and moved there in February 1804.

Soon after he got to Worcester he attended a funeral and was so impressed by the sermon that he decided to go regularly to the church where it had been given. It has to be admitted that this resolution was only partly to do with the sermon. Church attendance also provided a meeting place with Mary Teverill, whom he later married!

Marriage and the beginnings of a large family did not lead to a change in his life-style and he was often drunk. On his thirty-eighth birthday on 14th March 1812 he was working in the bookshop when a deep feeling of the awfulness of his life came upon him and he burst into tears. He ran upstairs, grabbed a Bible and tried through his tears to read Isaiah 53. God was working with him and he records, "I instantly fell on my knees and poured out my soul to God, and confessing my sins, and implored most fervently and with heartfelt sighs and tears, that He would have mercy upon me. I never knew – to my shame – what it was to pray with the heart till now."

While his trust in Christ was real, his drinking remained a problem. Almost immediately the Worcester race week, the music festival and then the celebrations following the Worcester elections in October 1812, drew him back into drunken ways. It was only six hard years later that he was able to overcome his love of wines and beers. In the end he had some medical help but he recognised that he would never have got the victory but for the work of the Lord. The 19th November 1818, when he at last got delivered from the snare of drink, was something he celebrated with thankfulness every year thereafter.

"I never knew what it was to pray with the heart till now."

In April 1814 John Hall was able to buy the shop in Maidstone where he had first been employed as errand boy. That, together with his deliverance from drunkenness in 1819, opened a new phase in his life

as a Christian. He had been greatly helped through a Christian book called Bogatzky's "Golden Treasury" and he wanted to make this type of material available to others, especially the poor. He selected thirty extracts from the "Golden Treasury" with the idea of binding them into a booklet. He soon realised that they needed editing and in some cases re-writing. He then added some new material of his own.

On 29th May 1821 one thousand copies of the booklet were ready and Mr Hall set out, somewhat hesitantly, to give them out. The following Saturday he walked to Barming, a village near Maidstone.

There were no letter boxes in those days. The idea of a regular postal delivery was still in the future. Accordingly, he threw the booklets through any open door or window that he saw, praying that the Lord would bless them to those who found them. Copies were left in local shops and the Chaplain of the Maidstone prison took a supply. By April 1830 John Hall had distributed nine thousand copies and over five thousand had been sold.

In 1838 translations were made into Welsh and twenty-thousand copies were printed in Tahitian at John Hall's expense. The American Tract Society also printed 64,000 copies. As time went on extra sections were added to the booklet. In 1841 "Salvation through faith and not by works" was added as a result of Mr Hall reading Acts 16. At the same time Mary Hall, his wife, wrote "A word to the poor" which was also added.

The Sinner's Friend was translated into 23 languages during John Hall's lifetime. Late in 1848 he sent copies to Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort. On 16th January 1849 a reply written by George Anson, Secretary to the Prince Consort, expressed in formal terms the Queen's gratitude but interestingly, George Anson added:

"You must allow me sir, to bear my humble testimony to the practical usefulness of your little work, several cases of which have come under my own personal observation. There is no tract which I have more pleasure in distributing than that whose title and text refer to *The Sinner's Friend*."

The circulation of the tract within the Queen's household was to have an unexpected consequence: eight days before he died King Edward VII expressed a wish to read *The Sinner's Friend*, which he had seen many years before, and a gentleman-in-waiting was sent to obtain a copy. What the result may have been is known only to God.

The effect of the tract on King Edward may not be known but there is no doubt about the effect on a lady who on the 2nd May 1849 told Mr. Hall, "About six years ago you were travelling with me on a 'bus, when you gave passengers copies of *The Sinner's Friend*. On reading the words 'Sinner, this book is for you', I felt offended, because I then thought myself to be a Christian; but on

reading the little book I discovered my mistake, which led me to seek the kingdom of God in right earnest, and ultimately to unite myself with the church of Christ.”

In his diary for September 1850 John Vine Hall records a visit to the Maidstone Almshouses:

“Visited Mrs. S — at the almshouse. Found her ill in bed. Spoke to her of Christ, the only way to heaven. She wept exceedingly, and for some time could not speak distinctly, sobbing, ‘What shall I do?’ Directed her to look to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose blood cleanseth from all sin, and that none who come to God by Him shall be rejected. She had known me from the time I was twelve years old, and had witnessed the follies of my youth. We had often danced together at balls and private parties, at which time it was not at all probable that I should ever come to speak to her about salvation. She had been for many years a professed Unitarian, therefore it was trying work to speak to her of Christ as the only way to God. Told her of what God had done for my own soul, and that He had sent me to tell her the way of acceptance by His Only-begotten Son – no other way. Oh may the Lord make my visit useful to her soul.”

In 1854 the Halls left Maidstone to live in Kentish Town to be near two of their sons. Exactly six years later, following a fall from a ladder, John Hall, in the words of his son, Newman, ‘passed into the presence of the Sinner’s Friend’. He was buried in Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington. The grave stone reads simply:

In Memory
OF
JOHN VINE HALL
THE BELOVED AND HONOURED AUTHOR OF “THE SINNER’S FRIEND”,
WHO ENTERED INTO THE JOY OF HIS LORD,
SEPTEMBER 22, 1860
IN HIS EIGHTY-SEVENTH YEAR
“REDEEMED WITH THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST”

It is intended to reproduce several extracts from “The Sinner’s Friend” in this magazine. The series starts with the next item.

JOY IN HEAVEN OVER REPENTANT SINNERS

“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” Luke 15:10

“I will arise and go to my father... but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him” Luke 15:18-20.

“This my son was dead, and is alive again... was lost, and is found.” Luke 15:24

Here is a fullness of encouragement for every poor wandering outcast sinner to return to his Father – to his God. The vilest wretch under heaven may embrace the offered mercy of the Lord, whose tenderness and compassion are most beautifully detailed and set forth in the parable of the Prodigal Son (See Luke 15:11-24).

We are all prodigals by nature, and should all be lost for ever were it not for divine grace softening the heart, and bringing us to the footstool of mercy - to our Heavenly Father who waited that He may be gracious – full of pity, full of love!

Try the experiment, thou poor tempted, tossed, and heavy laden sinner! Try the experiment, cast thyself before the Lord, and ere thou canst even reach His feet He will bend forward to embrace thee in His arms of mercy and forgiving love.

The writer of this portion knows, by happy experience, the power of redeeming love; he who was once a great way off – within a step of being lost for ever – has now (as a monument of mercy) been brought nigh by the blood of Christ, and can safely recommend such a Saviour to the vilest of the vile.

You cannot be deceived – cannot be mistaken. Our gracious God will never break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax (Isaiah 42:3). The name of Jesus is too dear to Him to reject the sinner’s cry (John q16:23). Try the experiment, and heaven is yours. May the Lord give you courage, strength and faith, that your soul may be saved, and His name be glorified. Amen.

John Vine Hall (1774 -1860)

This is intended as the first of three extracts from “The Sinner’s Friend”.

In the next issue (DV): “The Knowledge of our salvation”

A word for today
From Living Water No 22

A PEOPLE WHO KNOW THEIR GOD

“...but the people that know their God shall be strong, and shall act.” Daniel 11:32

Introduction I am going to attempt to speak about knowing God in simple and practical terms.

If we go further back from the verse read in chapter 11 of Daniel we get the context and find it refers prophetically to the awful situation that was to come about through a wicked and cruel man, Antiochus Epiphanes. It refers also to the coming of evil powers after the church has been called away, and God works out His great counsels and purposes with regard to His people, Israel. It is in such a crisis we find a people who knew their God. I suppose it would be right to say that it is the crises of life that bring out whether we know God or not. People who know God are marked by:

- power
- purpose
- peace of mind
- the presence of God, and
- prayer

In speaking of the verses read and from other passages in Daniel I want to draw out these features.

Power

Where we read it speaks not of the man that knows his God—that is true of course—but it is the people; it is collective. Such people are strong and they act. They are practical in their lives, and they will be pure. There will be wise people among them. People who know their God are not easily overthrown; they are not easily diverted out of the path of truth and they do not allow themselves to be robbed of their prayer time, meditation time, scripture reading, and their private worship. They never think of beginning the day or any of the undertakings of the day without prayer to God and the enjoyment of communion with Him. They are strong; they resist the devil.

Knowing God in this wonderful way does not make us unpractical people; we act. This knowledge of God can be seen. It shows in the way that the Christian does their work, the way that a young woman dresses, the way a wife acts and how the husband exercises headship and wise direction in his home. The people who know their God act; if you know God you are a practical, sensible person. That is what makes knowing God so blessed. Is not that what is needed in a crisis? Alas, when a crisis comes into a Christian company or into our business we are often found running round in circles; people who know their God do not panic.

Our scripture then says- *“they that are wise among the people shall instruct the many”* (verse 33). Wise instruction is an absolute necessity among the people of God. How can you live according to God unless you know how He requires you to live? There is nothing that so deeply searches the conscience and heart as the doctrines of Holy Scripture. But what is so interesting is that instruction is connected with Psalms—that is the worship of God and His praises are to be marked by wise instruction. It is to deliver us from dead phraseology. People who know their God speak meaningfully; they mean something to God—and in addition what they say becomes instruction to the believers who hear them. That is why we have in Ephesians and Colossians the expression, “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:15); not only voicing the affections of the heart to God, which is immensely important, but they are educational. We learn from worship.

**We learn from
worship**

Read the Lord’s prayer in John 17 and Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1 and 3, Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple (2 Chronicles 6) and Nehemiah’s prayer when he established the people in separation to God (Nehemiah 9). You will see that not only are they prayers and worship but there is instruction in the truth. There is more profound truth in Paul’s prayers than in his epistles, profound as they are. The Lord in John 17 brings out things most profound, very far reaching, deeply penetrating—so the very worship of wise persons among the people who know

their God is a means of education.

Let us put into New Testament language what these people spoken of in Daniel were doing. In the first epistle of John chapter 5 we read: *“For all that has been begotten of God gets the victory over the world; and this is the victory which has gotten the victory over the world, our faith”*. Not your personal faith; our faith is the body of Christian teaching—that itself is the victory and therefore gets the victory over the world. What were these faithful men recorded in Daniel 11 doing in the terrible circumstances they were in? They were getting the victory over the world through knowing God.

Is it not a deplorable sight to see believers conquered by the world and seemingly totally unable to get disentangled, so fast are they held by the attractiveness and drive of the world. Young brethren, do not think that we elderly brethren are unaware of these worldly things. What I am telling you is the truth of God and if you wish to live faithfully to the God who created you and who has redeemed you, give your life entirely over to Him and you will find happiness beyond your wildest imagination. I know what I am talking about; in God’s mercy I have known it for over 50 years. I have failed in that pathway, I say to my sorrow, but I thank God for the way He has brought me. Young people, now is the time for you to begin to tread this way, value what God has put within your grasp in your early years. It is said to Timothy, *“from a child thou has known the sacred letters”*(2 Timothy 3:15).

Purpose

From Daniel chapter 1:8 we learn that *Daniel “purposed in his heart”*—right from the very centre of his being—not to pollute himself with the king’s delicate food. If a person is progressing in the truth it is because they love God. If someone appears to be slipping back, there will be those who make excuses: ‘Well, things are not too happy at home’, ‘Think of all the troubles amongst Christians’, or even, ‘We cannot expect much of these young folk!’ Yet the real reason for all retrogression with any of us, old or young, is a lack of, or lessening of, personal love for Christ.

Daniel purposed in his heart (his three friends were with him in this) that he would not pollute himself with the king's delicate food, nor with the wine which he drank. That was a bold stand to take—he was on the threshold of a wonderful career, captive though he was. The despotic, heathen king saw that he could use such fine young men. He gave instructions that they for three years were to be trained in knowledge, learning and wisdom, the etiquette and manners, the frivolities and artificial behaviour of an eastern court. We can imagine people saying to him, 'Daniel, your future is assured—you just concede a bit here. Make some concession; it is harmless but helpful. Just talk it over and seek a formula of mutual arrangement with Nebuchadnezzar.' That kind of thing is being pressed today when we separate from the world.

Daniel was not having that; he had purposed in his heart that he would not pollute himself. It is purpose in heart, that is the great need today. Fearlessly he said, 'No!' and requested that he might not have to pollute himself. The eunuch said that if he permitted this refusal of the king's food he would be endangering his head. Daniel's answer was 'just try for ten days'—you will observe Christianity at work. Give us pulse and water instead of all these wines, these well laden tables of Babel, this social round mixing with royalty and cultured men and women of the court, and their empty way of life with its falsehoods so necessary to hold such people together.

What I see in the pulse and water is the need to live a simple life. We can be deceptively attracted by certain features of the world, the bright-eyed uninhibited throng, the round of supper parties, the animated chatter of cultured people. As followers of the Lord Jesus, we have to say 'No'. John's exhortation is: "*Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him; because all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father (1 John 2:15-16).*" Pride of life is dangerously near to everyone of us. Simplicity of life is to be our objective. A people that know their God act; they have purpose in heart and they are simple in practice. Piety with contentment is great gain.

Peace of mind and the presence of God

Our next consideration is the question of persecution. Let us read from Daniel chapter 3. The three companions of Daniel are worthy of our close study in their faithful stand against idolatry. Nebuchadnezzar had been told by Daniel that he was the “head of gold” but nothing would satisfy him but being the whole image of gold and he built one of himself. When this was done then of course it follows that he must be worshipped. This is present day idolatry—man worshipping himself and getting men to worship man and his achievements. Naturally, if away from Christ, this is what we think of ourselves. There were those around the king who wanted their king honoured and made an object of worship; it would also reflect their estimation of themselves.

The refusal of this type of idolatry brought ruthless persecution to the early Christians in Rome. They were commanded to sprinkle incense on the altar of Emperor worship—in itself a simple act. I can imagine people saying to those resolute Christians, ‘But you are silly. You have only to sprinkle a little incense and at the same time say within yourself, ‘I do not mean it’’. But Christianity is observable. You will find that when you are faced with the practicalities of separation from evil unto God that these subtle suggestions will come to you. That insidious whispering to our consciences, ‘are you going to spoil all your life for this?’ Ah! but a man who knows his God would never listen to this. The greatest claim, the greatest pull, the greatest driving force in the heart of such men is to serve their God, their Creator and Redeemer.

Nebuchadnezzar is told of these three and he enquires of them, ‘Is it so that ye serve not my god?’ ‘If ye worship not, ye shall be cast that same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is the God that shall deliver you out of my hands?’ And they answered, “*O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter*”. There is no arrogance in that reply. You do not have to be arrogant to stand for Christ—those who stand and suffer for the crown rights of their Redeemer are humble and courteous. “*Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us*

from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image that thou hast set up” Noble language this; people that know their God are strong.

I do not know whether these were the only three Jews who objected to this. We have no record of whether they were concerned about support; we are not told that they looked for support; faithfulness to Christ demands your own heart, your own mind, and if the whole world forsakes you and you know what you are doing is right then stand. It is very interesting that in this book these three young men stand alone and later on Daniel does also. In so writing His word, God highlights these men without any human support facing this great despot faithfully and they were within yards, within minutes of the burning fiery furnace. So the people who know their God are powerful, have purpose and they have peace of mind. They were cast into this extra-heated furnace, bound, and the king looked and to his amazement saw four men loose walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt. The king saw *“the appearance of the fourth as like a son of God”*. The people who know their God enjoy the presence of the Son of God, their great Protector in every crisis. In the scriptural annals of faith, Hebrews 11, we read of those who quenched the power of fire. Our minds will run to Philippians 4: *“Be careful about nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanks-giving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses every understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).*

When the Lord Jesus was in the wilderness, tempted of the devil, the devil showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and said to Him *“all these things will I give Thee if falling down Thou wilt do me homage” (Matthew 4:9)*. Had not the Lord come here as a Man to win the kingdoms of men? Could this be the way? But the Lord Jesus knew, and He has taught us too, that these things are gained only by way of the cross. He addresses the devil; it is written *“thou shalt do homage to the Lord thy God, and Him alone shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10).*

That is what these three young men were saying, ‘We are not going to worship man in his greatness, we worship God only.’ Remember John’s closing words of his first epistle, “*Children, keep yourselves from idols*” (1 John 5:21). That is not an empty word; what is an idol?—anything, anyone, any circumstance that has the place in my heart that Christ should have alone. It could be your family; it could be your job; it could be your education, your commercial powers; if any of these have supplanted Christ then you are a worshipper of an idol.

**Daniel refused to give up
or alter his prayer life**

Prayer

I refer again to Daniel because he was a man of prayer which is another feature of a people who know their God. Daniel refused to obey the king’s command to cease praying to his God for a month. Philippians 4 says, “*Let your requests be made known to God*”. People who know their God will not pray to kings or governments. What do you expect from government? Democracy is not the divine method of government. It might be the best that man can devise in an apostate day but do not let us place our hopes in it. God’s government is an absolute monarchy—“*I have anointed my king upon Zion*” (Psalm 2:6). There are things political that I pray against. God would have His people pray against the workings of evil. Note those who have brought in or suggested some of the wicked laws passed of recent years. We stand for the rights of our Redeemer and wait for Him to come. Let us trust God.

Daniel refused to give up or alter his prayer life. He prayed three times daily as was his custom. The jealous enemies resented Daniel’s promotion. Daniel suffered this. His enemies viewed him at work and no fault could be found there with him. A man who knows his God is diligent and meticulous in his work. His enemies decided they would attack his relationships with his God. So they moved the king to decree this law about praying. Daniel heard that and he went to his home with his windows open as usual and prayed. Now we see these jealous snoops,

creeping round his chambers and saying to one another, 'There he is. Let us come back this afternoon—yes, there he is praying again; see what he is doing tonight. Yes, praying—three times a day, flouting the King's command—a most insubject man. He ought to be subject to the powers that be.' Yes! until they interfere with our relations with God. He was then dragged off to suffer punishment by being flung into the den of lions. We do not read of any other Jew, at that time in captivity, being flung into a den of lions; there was no outward support for Daniel; it might have been a little encouragement if he had seen two or three of his compatriots around.

Remember how Ridley and Latimer encouraged and comforted one another when being burnt at the stake. If you are isolated in your sufferings for Christ it is a tremendous test indeed. You may have to walk alone, but I trust that none of us will have to. Daniel was prepared to and did. Daniel was cast to the lions. Early in the morning the king with a mournful voice cried, "*O Daniel, servant of the living God,... hath thy God whom thou servest continually been able to save thee from the lions?*" Ah! Daniel was there alive. What has happened? "*My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths*" (Daniel 6:20-22). Who is this angel? Those who know their God have peace of mind and protection in the presence of God as He accompanies them in their sufferings.

There is only one more feature of a people that know their God to which I want to draw your attention; it is prevailing prayer, which is perhaps the most important of all. We have it in chapter 9 of Daniel; he is in prayer. Read down the chapter and you will discover there is something prominent which is often missing from some of our prayers — that is confession. There is none here who can enter into the presence of God in our private prayers without confession. A people who know their God are a praying people. Their prayers are fervent. They are not just mere words but they flow from the heart in pleading and supplication. The fervent supplication of a righteous man has much power. The believer's armour is seriously incomplete if praying at all seasons with all prayer is missing.

Daniel was confronting the whole general situation. Look at verse 4 (of chapter 9). *“I prayed unto Jehovah my God and made my confession”*. Look at verse 7: *“With the Lord our God are mercies and pardons, for we have rebelled against him and have not hearkened unto the voice of Jehovah”*. Look at verse 14: *“And Jehovah hath watched over the evil, and brought it upon us; for Jehovah our God is righteous in all His works which He hath done; and we have not harkened to his voice.—And now, O Lord our God, who broughtest thy people out of the land of Egypt with a strong hand, and hast made thee a name, as it is this day,—we have sinned, we have done wickedly. Lord, according to all thy righteousnesses, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain; for because of our sins, and because of the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all round about us”*.

Do we pray like that? Are our private prayers and our public prayers so real, so fragrant? People who know their God pray fervently; they plead powerfully; they reason with God in their prayers; they are humble; they have a broken and contrite heart. They know they have been wrong. We have been wrong and our forbears, we confess, were wrong. God never fails to hear such confession. Let us pray, dear brethren, with fervency. Begone the cold, formal prayers!

May it be that it can be said of us today, *“a people that know their God”*.

Tom Gratten

Extracted from an address at Edinburgh, March 1974.

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If there is an article, or part of an article, from a back number of “Living Water” that you would like to see reprinted I would be very glad to hear from you. Ed.