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## ***Living Water***

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## Recent Ministry

### “LOVE THE LORD THY GOD” – THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Luke 23: 39-43

1 Corinthians 2: 9-16

Matthew 22: 34-40

I want to speak about something that the Spirit of God does for us. I want to give you an example to start with and one to finish with.

Luke’s gospel chapter 23 is one of the accounts of the crucifixion. It is one of my favourite scriptures. It has all the ingredients of the message that explains how you and I come to have peace with God. Two thieves had been hanged on crosses alongside Jesus; both of them spoke insultingly to Him. Luke’s account says one of the thieves did so, and Matthew tells us that both of them did. The people standing around the cross said, *“Let him descend now from the cross, and we will believe on him” (Matthew 27:42)* and the two thieves said the same (see Matthew 27:44).

Then one of the thieves changed his mind. He felt guilty and said to the other one, *“Dost thou too not fear God, thou that art under the same judgment? and we indeed justly, for we receive the just recompense of what we have done”*.

Right then he was facing death with no hope of escaping it; he was nailed to a cross and he said, ‘I deserve it’. That is one of the ingredients of the gospel message that you have heard week by week. One thief changed his mind and acknowledged he deserved what was coming to him. He acknowledged it openly, not just some secret down inside his heart; it was heard by the other thief, it was heard by the Saviour. Then he looked at Jesus – on the cross alongside him – and said. ‘But this man has done nothing wrong’. And there you have another ingredient of the gospel message: someone who knows his guilt and knows he

## How did that thief know that Christ was a King?

deserves death and lifts his eyes to look at Christ and sees in Him a Man who has never done anything wrong at all.

Then at some point he stopped just looking, he stopped just talking about Jesus. He spoke to Jesus; he said *"Lord"* and bowed his heart. There you have another ingredient of the gospel message. You and I have each come this way. At some point we have stopped looking; we have bowed our hearts and surrendered to Jesus and owned Him as our Lord. Then he said something else; he asked for mercy. 'Lord, remember me when You come in Your kingdom'. *"Remember me, Lord"*.

Forget the other thief now – there were two men dying alongside each other on crosses and one said to the Other, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom'. The answer is wonderful: *"Verily I say to thee"*. Or, if you like, in today's language, 'I promise'. 'Today you will be with Me in paradise'. I love those words: 'Today you will be with Me in paradise, with Me on the other side of death. Today we will be together in paradise'.

Here is my question, though, and this is why I read this passage from Luke. How did that thief know that Christ was a King? Here is a thief, hanging on a cross, physically unable to move, but he goes from being an enemy of Christ to knowing that Christ is a King, and not just any king but, as you can see from his words, a King on the other side of death.

Did he listen to the taunts of the crowd? He must have done because he said the same things. But the crowd did not teach him that Christ was a King. Who told this man, there on that cross, in the last hours of his life, that Christ was a King, and a King beyond death, far greater than the mocking inscription above His cross? Because he was right about that; scripture tells us that Christ is the King of kings. There is a title of God in the scripture, *"King of the ages"* (1 Timothy 1:17). There could not be a greater King than Christ. But, 2000 years ago, on that cross, how did that thief know?

I think that the answer is to be found in the scripture in Corinthians. Paul is writing to a Christian company in Corinth which was in trouble but nevertheless he wrote some wonderful things to them. He says that there are things which the human eye has not seen and the human ear has not heard and which have not come even into man's heart – man has not even thought about – which God has prepared for those that love Him. Then Paul adds that God has revealed them, not will reveal, but has revealed them to us by His Spirit (vv 10-11). I think he is talking about the things that were revealed to the apostles and to those who wrote the New Testament, which has not been added to since.

These scriptures tell us what the Spirit has revealed. Do not misunderstand me. I am not about to suggest to you for a moment that He will reveal to you something which is not in the scriptures. However, read on. He says that there are these things that no one has thought of or imagined, that had not even come into man's heart which God has prepared for those that love Him and that God has revealed to us by His Spirit, *“for the Spirit searches all things even the depths of God.”*

I think Paul expected the Corinthians to pause at that moment and ponder what this meant, because Paul goes on to explain, *“For who of men hath known the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?”* Think about that. Who knows what you have been thinking, deep down inside you? We may know, if you have told us or we may guess by the way you behave, but Paul says that only the spirit of the man knows, only you yourself know, the things that you have been thinking deep down inside.

He is using it as an example because he says, *“thus also the things of God knows no one except the Spirit of God.”* Only the Spirit of God could know the things that God had not yet revealed. In all those Old Testament times there were hints and prophecies; there was the whole range of Old Testament scripture prepared, ready for the day when God would reveal by His Spirit to the writers of the New Testament the hidden things of God.

Only the Spirit can do it and Paul says in verse 12 that great though that is and deep though these things are, *“we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God”*.

**As believers we  
have received the  
Spirit of God**

As believers we have received the Spirit of God. If you are not sure about that, the simple thing is to ask the Father. Tell Him that you are not sure if the Spirit is in your heart and He will show you. We have the Spirit, Paul says, which is of God, so *“that we may know the things which have been freely given to us of God”*. So you can receive the things which are written, complicated and difficult though they may seem at times in the scripture, especially the way Paul writes; you can receive them because you have the Spirit within you.

Paul says we have received these things that God has hidden from the past ages and has now revealed. The Spirit of God has searched out the depths of God and shown them to us. Then we have been given the Spirit, he says, so that we might receive them. Now Paul and the apostles and the teachers of the time are taking those things and teaching them, *“not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, communicating spiritual things by spiritual means.”* God communicates spiritual things by spiritual means. What does that mean? It means that the things of God – spiritual things – are communicated to us by the Holy Spirit, and then we receive them by the Spirit.

So think about those three things:

- the Spirit takes the things of God,
- then He communicates – shows them to us
- and thirdly we receive – understand – them by the Spirit.

Now, I know that thief died long before Paul wrote these words. He was long since gone to paradise but you can apply this scripture to what happened then. Who told that thief that Christ was a King, a King beyond this world, a King beyond death? Christ is a King. He is God’s King. That is a spiritual thing to be understood

in a spiritual way. Christ is God's King and the Spirit took that fact and communicated it to that thief on a cross. That man could not read anything, could not go and listen to a teacher. But the Spirit took that wonderful spiritual truth, that Christ is the King of the ages, King of kings, King beyond death and brought it to that thief on the cross. He communicated it to him and by the Spirit he received it, believed it and acted on it. He spoke to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom'. See there the work of the Spirit, then see the fruit.

The Spirit still works like that today; He works like that for you and me if we will let Him. He searches the revealed word of God, here in the scriptures; He finds the things that you need and if you let Him He will show them to you. If you let Him you will receive them.

Now, if you learn things in the normal way in this world it helps to do quite a bit of reading. I am not for a moment suggesting that you do not need to work at learning the things of God. He has given you the scriptures so that you might read them, and you will learn from them. I am not for a moment suggesting that you will not learn by example from others; you look at other Christian believers and learn from their example. Then you can learn from experience; you and I need to think about the experiences we pass through and see what God is teaching us from them. We can learn from suffering and from service towards God; in fact there are many ways in which we can learn. But here is the difference: most of those things I have mentioned you can do to learn the things of this world. When you do them towards God, when you do them for Him, there is something else that is needed and that is the service of the Holy Spirit. He will take the precious things of God and He will make you understand them and receive them. It is the Spirit's work and He gladly does it.

Many of you have been believers for far longer than I have and our experiences are all different; our lives are all different but I imagine that you will have found what I have found: the Spirit is not revealing to me or to you something that is new which is not



already in scripture. But what He does is He takes something from scripture and makes me see and understand it in a way I have never done before. It is like being blind and having your eyes opened. As you read the gospels you will find that there is a huge emphasis on blind people who were made to see; there are at least eight accounts in the gospels of blind people who were healed. Even in the last week of the Lord's life here, when there are hardly any miracles recorded, we find that immediately after the cleansing of the temple, the lame and the blind come to Him and it says *"he healed them"* (Matthew 21:14). My point is, that I find, as a Christian, that this happens time and time again.

When I first came to Christ He opened my eyes and gave me His Spirit so that I can see and understand things that I could not see before. I find, though, that as I go through life, from time to time He opens my eyes to understand something else that I had not seen before. I find myself thinking 'Oh, I had not seen that, I could not see it, I was blind and now I see'. It is the work of the Spirit and He is teaching me, taking the great things of God, some truth, some thought of Christ and bringing it to me Himself, showing it to me by His power and making me to understand it, so I *"receive"* it. This is as different as possible from the way we learn in this world.

Why is it that God teaches us in this way? I often find it helpful to look at things in the scripture and to see what God does and then to ask, Why? Well, it tells you in this chapter (1 Corinthians 2:3). He says to the Corinthians, *"I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling; and my word and my preaching, not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"*. Why by the Spirit? Paul gives the answer, *"that your faith might not stand in men's wisdom, but in God's power"*.

*"So that your faith..."* He gives you some truth by the Spirit; you receive it by the Spirit, so that your faith might stand in God's power. Think of that thief just one more time. Around him were crowds mocking and laughing; in the distance were apostles and other disciples. The wisdom of man would not have told him that

Christ was a King. It would have told him that He was finished, His life ended; it had been a disaster, ended in a cross. But the Holy Spirit told this thief to look beyond and see the glory of the King. Christ died before the thief. The thief was left hanging on that cross to die on his own with just the words of Christ, 'Today you will be with Me in paradise', to cling to by faith. Paul says, *"that your faith might not stand in men's wisdom, but in God's power"*. Think of that thief hanging there on the cross after Christ had died, holding on by faith to the words that Christ had given him, his faith standing in God's power!

This week, with one of my sons, I went to the British Museum in London; it has treasures there from all over the world and some of the exhibits interact a bit with some of the people that you read about in the Bible. The parts I like best though are the rooms where they have things that have been found here in Britain. There is a collection of gold bracelets, for instance, known as the Snettisham Hoard; they are of incredible craftsmanship dating back to about 75 BC and they lie there gleaming in their display case. It is the richest Iron Age treasure ever discovered in Britain. Some of the treasures in the British section had been buried in the ground, others were found lying on the surface. I guess people had walked by and not recognised what they were until someone picked them up and examined them. I thought about the Bible, because it is full of treasures that God has put there for you and me to find.

We read here that the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. How deep are the depths of God? The Spirit searches them and He has found things and reveals them and has put them in the scripture. Sometimes you are going to have to dig deep and think and pray about things before you really begin to understand them. At other times you will find that the treasure is just lying on the surface where it can be seen by anybody who reads the scriptures – but remember that *"the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him; and he cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned"*. I am going to give you an example in a minute. Paul

is saying that there are things in the scriptures that everybody can read and see, but to the natural man it is just folly; it does not make sense to him nor can he really see what there is to be seen. But Paul says to the Corinthians – ‘You can see it’ and he says to us now, in our day, ‘You can see it’. You have the Spirit of God and He wants to take the things of God and show them to you. He wants to work in your heart so that you receive them.

So I read that scripture from Matthew 22 because it is one example of a glorious treasure in the Bible that is lying on the surface. This incident was part of a long day, in the last week of the Lord’s life here. His day had started early in the morning and He started hungry; there was that fig tree and He looked for something to eat and there was nothing there. Then, when He got to Jerusalem there were people in the temple challenging His authority. ‘By what authority’, they said, ‘are You doing these things?’ (see Matthew 21:23). In reply, Jesus asked them what they thought of the baptism of John the Baptist and they fell silent.

He started warning them. He talked to them about the vineyard owner who having gone away sent his bondmen for the fruit and they killed them. In the end he sent his heir and they said, “*come, let us kill him*”. Then He talked to them about the cornerstone that was rejected. Then He talked to them about the kingdom of the heavens being like a king who had made a wedding feast for his son and every one refused to come. The Pharisees understood that He was talking about them. In verse 15 of this chapter it says, “*Then went the Pharisees and held a council how they might ensnare him in speaking,*” how they might catch Him out in what He said. They started by sending someone who asked Him, “*Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?*”

Then the Sadducees joined in; they came and asked their stupid question about the resurrection and the woman who had multiple husbands and which husband she would have in the resurrection.... the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection and did not believe in angels! I love the Lord’s reply because He says in verse 29, “*Ye err,*” you are wrong, “*not*

*knowing the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as angels of God in heaven”* You are wrong, He said, Sadducees, on both fronts – there is a resurrection, there are angels, God is the God of the living!

**Why is it that loving the Lord your God is the greatest commandment and loving your neighbour is like it?**

Then we get this where we read; in the midst of this busy day, in the midst of all these challenges, one of the Pharisees who was a lawyer came and said to Him, *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”* Now, if I remember rightly, the Pharisees are said to have made some 613 commandments out of the five books of Moses, 613! Some of them they thought were more important than others but they argued and debated which they were.

That is the background to this question, *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”* And Jesus said to him, *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy understanding. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments the whole law and the prophets hang”.*

Mark’s gospel adds the word *“strength”* to *“love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thine understanding”*. Jesus cut away the arguments and debate and said something which is so clear and true that they could not argue. Of all the things that God asks us to do, from Old Testament times to the present, these two remain the most important. Why is it that loving the Lord your God is the greatest commandment and loving your neighbour is like it?

I would like you to look at Leviticus 19 because there we are told about loving our neighbour: *“Thou ...shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am Jehovah” (Leviticus 19:18)*. In that chapter you

find other commandments as well. The chapter starts by saying, *“Holy shall ye be, for I Jehovah your God am holy”*. It says, *“Ye shall reverence every man his mother, and his father, and my Sabbaths shall ye keep: .... Ye shall not turn unto idols, and ye shall not make to yourselves molten gods: I am Jehovah your God”* and so it goes on.

As you read the list you find that if you loved the Lord your God – if you did – with all your heart and soul and strength and understanding, with everything that you had and you loved your neighbour as yourself, if you kept those two things, you would also be fulfilling all these other commandments. What the Lord said is entirely logical. If you love the Lord your God with all your strength then you will have no idols. If you love your neighbour as yourself, as it says in this chapter, when you reap the harvest of your land, you will not reap the corners of your field but leave them for your neighbour. And so it goes on; you can look at it for yourself. There is a logic to the Lord’s saying that this is the great commandment and the second is like it and there is none greater and *“on these two commandments the whole law and the prophets hang”*.

But there is another greater thing to see in this, treasure for the Christian’s soul. If you go back to before the beginning of the world, there was God. There was no Adam and there were no plants nor trees, nothing, no creation, no universe. But there was God; He was God and He could do anything He liked, anything at all. What He chose to do is to make this world and to put people in it like you and me, with living souls which never die, with eternity in our hearts. That is what He chose to do. Now, remember this is a God who knows everything. He knows the end before the beginning and when He decided to make this world, He knew exactly what would happen, the whole story of the world, including the years we have not yet had; He knew the whole history before it happened, yet He went ahead with it. So of all the things He could have chosen to do, why did He do that? I think the answer is in this first commandment. Scripture tells us elsewhere that God is love. He is holy, He is righteous,

He cannot have sin in His presence, but above all, God is love. You can see it in what He is like. He loves mercy, loves loving-kindness, and is slow to anger. It is all a result of the fact that God is love.

But love looks for an answer. That is what this commandment is about. God is saying to each of us, 'Above all else I want you to love Me'. If you wonder at times what you are meant to do with your life or with your time, remember this: God says, 'Above all else, I want you to love Me'.

You cannot love someone you do not know. I know you can love a stranger; there are examples of that in scripture such as the account of the good Samaritan. But that is not the kind of relationship God wants. He knows you through and through, and He loves you. That is the message of the whole Bible; God loves you. He wants you to love Him. His request has not changed. Do not dismiss that as an Old Testament commandment; it comes from the heart of God. Do not misunderstand me but, above righteousness, above keeping the law, above anything else that He has asked you, He says, 'I want you to love Me'. It is not about trying to be right or trying to be holy so that you can love God – you have it the wrong way round.

You came to God originally, did you not, as a sinner and you came as you were. You came to Him and you found He forgave you and He welcomed you as a Father and He loved you. And now He wants you to love Him – and to be holy because He loves you, to be righteous because you love Him, and to stop sinning because you love Him, because He loves you.

He says, 'I want you to love Me with everything you have', *"with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your understanding, and with all your strength"*. 'I want you to love Me like that'. And no one has been able to do it. I have not loved the Lord my God with all my soul, with all my strength and all my understanding.

But it is what He has been looking for since the beginning of the world. He looked for it in Adam. He looked for it in Noah, in

Abraham, in David, Solomon, count them down. He looked for it in all of them, a man who would love Him like that. And it is a countdown because it ends in Christ. In Him God finally had a Man who loved Him with all His soul, with all His understanding, with all His strength. He finally had a Man who, because He loved His God, loved His neighbour as Himself. He had a Man who was in perfect communion with Him

You know what God wants with you. He wants a relationship where you walk with Him, where you talk with Him, where you delight in Him and He delights in you – because of Christ and because of the Spirit's work in you. That is what He wants and with Jesus that is what He had!

Jesus said, My Father *"has not left me alone, because I do always the things that are pleasing to him"* (John 8:29). *"I am not alone, the Father is with me"* (John 16:32). There He had a Man who loved Him. He paid a terrible price so that you and I might be cleansed and have the Spirit in us, that you might have your eyes opened, that you might be able to hear and see and understand what your God really wants from you as a Christian believer – which is that you love Him.

This is my simple request to you. This week, as you go to work or as you come home or as you go to the shops or as you walk somewhere or as you garden or whatever it is you are doing, just from time to time this week, pause and remember that what your God says to you is, 'Love Me'. If you let it, this will affect the way you think, the way you live; it will affect what you do and what you say.

Your God will open this Bible and make it like a treasure chest to you. He will show you thing after thing if you have the appetite and you want it – and He will do it by the Spirit.

Tim Pons

*An Address at Warley, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2014*

## Poetry Selection

### **BE STILL MY SOUL**

Be still my soul: the Lord is on thy side;  
Bear patiently the cross of grief and pain,  
Leave to thy God to order and provide –  
In every change, He faithful will remain.  
Be still my soul: thy best, thy heavenly Friend  
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still my soul: thy God doth undertake  
To guide the future as He has the past.  
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;  
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.  
Be still, my soul: the wave and wind still know  
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.

Be still my soul: when dearest friends depart,  
And all is darkened in the vale of tears,  
Then shalt thou better know His love, His heart,  
Who comes to soothe thy sorrow and thy fears.  
Be still my soul: thy Jesus can repay  
From His own fullness, all He takes away.

Be still my soul: the hour is hastening on  
When we shall be forever with the Lord,  
When disappointment, grief and fear are gone,  
Sorrow forgot, Love's purest joys restored.  
Be still my soul: when change and tears are past,  
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

Be still my soul: begin the song of praise  
On earth, believing, to thy Lord on high;  
Acknowledge Him in all thy works and ways,  
So shall He view thee with a well-pleased eye.  
Be still my soul: the Sun of life divine  
Through passing clouds shall but more brightly shine.

Katharina Amalia von Schlegel (1697 – 1768)  
*Translated by Jane Laurie Borthwick (1813 – 1897)*



## Testimony Section

### A MIRACLE OF BIRTH AND OF NEW BIRTH

I was a Muslim and I believed in Allah. Allah to me was god but I had no relation with him. I was really, really empty inside and had no peace at all even though I was raised in a very comfortable and loving family. I only came to hear about Christ because I suffered a series of miscarriages. I lost my first child but I got pregnant again and everything was fine and I had a really lovely daughter. Then I had a further miscarriage and after that I got really depressed and thought of suicide. I did not want to talk to my husband or my three year old daughter. Then I conceived again but a few months into the pregnancy I started bleeding again and it looked as though I was going to lose the baby.

At that time I met a Christian lady called Sandy. She shared the gospel with me. She knew about my problem and she said, 'Nadera, why do you not ask God to show you the truth'? I did not understand, but she repeated, 'Just ask Him to show you the truth'. I was really surprised at that suggestion but that night I cried out to God to show me the truth, 'Who You really are'. I fell asleep and when I woke up in the middle of the night, my bleeding was completely stopped. The next day I went to the doctor. The doctor checked me and said there was no detachment of the placenta; there was nothing wrong with me and the baby was okay. He said, 'I do not know what happened to you'. It was a miracle to me for it was an answer to my prayer.

I called Sandy and said, 'What is your faith? I want to hear it'. So I went to her house and she shared the gospel about Jesus, how God became flesh and died on the cross for me, for my sins, for my sorrow, for my pain and everything. He paid the price for my sins. I was really touched and said, 'Sandy, I do not have that God. Allah is so different. I want to experience that loving God that gave Jesus to die for me. I want to ask Him in my heart. What should I do? Should I go to church, learn the whole Bible like we have to learn the Koran?'

'Oh no', she said, 'Just ask Jesus into your heart and you will be free from your sins; you will be saved and you will be healed'. So together we prayed a simple prayer, asking Jesus to come into my heart. As soon as I was done with the prayer I felt a peace I had never experienced in my life before.

I have been a Christian 18 years now. Jesus changed my heart and everything else: my relation to my husband, my relation to my children, my relation even to my friends and other people. Everything that I had had to struggle with was changed. Jesus changed me completely because He is God. He came in my life and transformed it.

I came home from Sandy's house but I was afraid to tell to my husband what I had done. It was two weeks before I could tell him. I prayed with Sandy for help to tell him and when I did so he told me that he had seen the change in me.

My daughter, my younger one, was born a strong healthy girl, and now both of my daughters are strong in Christ. They love the Lord and they are the joy of our life.

Jesus said: *"By their fruits ye shall know them"*. There was no fruit in my life with Allah – no peace or joy, only emptiness. Now in Christ there is peace, assurance and blessing, a blessing I want to share with others. Muslim people think you want them to change their religion but I tell them, 'I am not talking religion, I am talking about salvation'. When they see the salvation, it is different. Mohammed brings religion. Salvation is alone to be found in Jesus Christ. He brings words of salvation and the truth sets us free.

Nadera

## **A voice from the past**

### **THE CHRISTIAN CIRCLE**

**"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them cloven**

**tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” Acts 2:1-4.**

When the Lord Jesus was here on earth, there gathered around Him a small company of men and women who loved Him, and who continued with Him until that awful day when, refused by Israel and betrayed by one of His disciples, He was delivered into the hands of the Roman power, tried, condemned, and crucified. His body was taken down by loving hands, prepared for burial, and laid in a new tomb closed by a heavy stone which was sealed by the authorities.

To men it seemed to be the end but for God it was the establishment of a new and living system of things, for on the third day Jesus was raised, a living Man out of death, *“who is the Beginning, the Firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18)*. The same day He appeared to His own who were gathered in that upper room in Jerusalem, and stood in their midst (see Luke 24:36 & John 20:19) – a circle of which He, and only He, was the centre. Forty days later, He ascended to heaven and *“sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3)*, while those who had seen Him go up returned to the upper room and continued in prayer and supplication (see Acts 1:13-14).

Ten days later, as they were together, *“suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:2-4)*. That was the inauguration of what we may call the true ‘Christian circle’. The centre of that circle was a risen and glorified Saviour in heaven: God has made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ (see Acts 2:26) and those upon whom the Holy Spirit came formed the circle. From that point, believers were constantly added (see Acts 2:41 & 47), and thus the circle continually enlarged. Every person who has received the holy Spirit, as believing in Jesus risen, belongs to that circle and forms part of the body of Christ, as Scripture says, *“by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body...and have been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13)*. What God

has established still remains today in its blessedly essential character, as the Scripture says, *"the foundation of God standeth sure"* (2 Timothy 2:19).

Such is the Christian circle. A glorified Lord in heaven is its centre and its Sun – in all things He is to have the pre-eminence (see Colossians 1:18). Every member is eternally linked by the Holy Spirit to the Head in heaven (see Colossians 2:19), and the atmosphere of the circle is divine love, *"the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:39).

Every believer on earth belongs to that blessed circle, and all may experience what is the proper abiding portion of believers as gathered together. By the holy Spirit's power the presence of the Lord Jesus spiritually in the midst of His own can be known and enjoyed according to His promise in Matthew: *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20).

B. G. Hardingham (1894 – 1973)

*Extracted from "Bible Ministry of B. G. Hardingham" published by Words of Peace and Truth, Coulsdon, Surrey, and used with permission.*

## **A word for today**

### **HOW TO KNOW THE WILL OF THE FATHER**

People would like a convenient and comfortable means of knowing God's will, as one might get a recipe for anything; but there exists no means of ascertaining God's will without reference to the state of our own soul. Moreover, we are often of too much importance in our own eyes; and we deceive ourselves in supposing some will of God in such a case. God perhaps has nothing to tell us thereon, the evil being altogether in the stir we give ourselves. The will of God is perhaps that we should take quietly an insignificant place.

Further we sometimes seek God's will, desiring to know how to act in circumstances in which His only will is that we should not be found in such circumstances at all; and where, if

conscience were really in activity, its first effect would be to make us leave them. It is our own will which sets us there, and we should like nevertheless to enjoy the comfort of being guided by God in a path which we ourselves have chosen. Such is a very common case.

**The Lord must be known intimately if one would walk in a way worthy of Him**

Be assured that, if we are near enough to God, we shall not be at a loss to know His will. In a long and active life it may happen that God in His love may not always at once reveal His will to us in order that we may feel our dependence, particularly where the individual has a tendency to act according to his own will. However, *"If thine eye be single, thy whole body will be full of light"* (Matthew 6:22); so it is certain that if the whole body is not full of light, the eye is not single. You will say, 'That is poor consolation'. I answer it is a rich consolation for those whose sole desire is to have the eye single and to walk with God. *"If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him"* (John 11:9-10.) It is always the same principle. *"He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"* (John 8:12). You cannot exempt yourself from the moral law of Christianity. *"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing by the knowledge of God"*(Colossians 1:9-10) . The mutual connection of these things is of immense importance for the soul. The Lord must be known intimately if one would walk in a way worthy of Him; and it is thus that we grow in the knowledge of God's will. *"And this I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve the things that are more excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till*

*the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:9-10). Finally, it is written that the spiritual man, "judgeth all things, yet himself is judged of no man" (1 Corinthians 2:15).*

It is then the will of God, and a precious will, that we should be able to discern it only according to our own spiritual state. In general, when we think that we are judging circumstances, it is God who is judging us – judging our state. Our business is to keep close to Him. God would not be good to us if He permitted us to discover His will without that. It might be convenient just to have a director of consciences; and we should be spared the discovery and chastisement of our moral condition. Thus, if you seek to discover the will of God without that, you are seeking evil; and that is what we see every day. One Christian is in perplexity; another, more spiritual, sees as clear as day, and he sees no difficulty, and ends by understanding that it lies only in the other's state of soul. *"He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off" (2 Peter 1:9).*

As regards circumstances, I believe that a person may be guided by them. Scripture is clear about that. It is what is meant by being *"held in by bit and bridle" (Psalm 32:9)*; whereas the promise and privilege of him who has faith is: *"I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (Psalm 32:8)*. God who is faithful has given the promise of directing us, thus our concern is to be near enough to God to understand by a single glance from Him. He warns us not to be as the horse and the mule which have no understanding of the will, thoughts, or desires of their master. It is needful to hold them in with bit and bridle. Even that is better than to stumble, fall and run counter to Him who holds us in; but it is a sad state, and such it is to be guided by circumstances. It is merciful on God's part to hold us in, but very sad on ours.

Here, however, there must be a distinction drawn between what one has to do in certain circumstances, and being guided by them. He who allows himself to be guided by circumstances always acts in the dark as to knowing the will of God. There is absolutely nothing moral in it; it is an external force that

constrains. Now it is very possible that I shall have no judgment beforehand of what I shall do: I know not what circumstances may arise, and consequently I can make no

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the Lord's will is**

decisions. But the instance the circumstances are there, I judge with a full and divine conviction what is the path of God's will, and of the Spirit's intention and power. That demands the highest degree of spirituality. It is not to be directed by circumstances, but to be directed by God in them, being near enough to God to be able to judge immediately what one ought to do as soon as the circumstances are there.

As to impressions, God can suggest them, and it is certain in fact that He does suggest a thing to the mind; but in that case, the propriety of the thing and its moral character will be as clear as the sun at noon-day. In prayer God can remove from our heart certain carnal influences, which, being destroyed, leave room for other spiritual influences taking their entire place in the soul. Thus He makes us to feel the importance of some duty, which had perhaps been entirely obscured by pre-occupation caused by some desired object. A particular individual may not have enough spiritual discernment to discover what is right; but the moment another shows it to him, he understands it is the truth. We are not all engineers, but a simple wagoner knows a good road when it is made. Thus the impressions which come from God do not always remain simple impressions. But they are ordinarily clear when God produces them. I do not doubt that He often makes them on our minds, when we walk with Him and listen to his voice.

When obstacles raised up of Satan are spoken of, it is not said that God Himself may not have allowed these obstacles to some good desire – obstacles caused by an accumulation of evil in the circumstances that surround us.

Again, the case should never exist of a person acting without knowing the will of God. The only rule that can be given is, never act when we do not know what the Lord's will is. The

will of God ought to be the motive as well as the rule of our conduct; and until His will is in activity, there is an absence of any true motive for ours. If you act in ignorance in this respect, you are at the mercy of circumstances; however God may turn all to the good of His children. But why act when we are ignorant of what His will is? Is the necessity of acting always so extremely pressing?

If I do something with the full certainty that I am doing the will of God, it is clear that an obstacle is no more than a test of my faith, and it ought not to stop me. It stops us perhaps through our lack of faith; because, if we do not walk sufficiently near to God in the sense of our nothingness, we shall lack faith to accomplish what we have faith enough to discern.

When we are doing our own will or are negligent in our walk, God in His mercy may warn us by a hindrance which arrests us if we pay attention to it, while the *“simple pass on and are punished”* (Proverbs 22:3). God may permit, where there is much activity and labour, that Satan should raise up hindrances, in order that we may be kept in dependence on the Lord; but God never permits Satan to act other than on the flesh. If we leave the door open, if we get away from God, Satan does us harm; but otherwise it is a mere trial of faith to warn us of a danger or snare – of something that would tend to exalt us in our own eyes. It is an instrument for our correction. That is, God allows Satan to trouble the mind, and make the flesh suffer outwardly, in order that the inner man may be kept from evil. If it is a question of anything else, probably it is only our ‘buts’ and ‘ifs’ that stop us, or possibly the effects of our own carelessness, which has opened the door to Satan to trouble us by raising doubts through the apparent difficulties between God and us, because we do not see more clearly. For *“he that is begotten of God keepeth himself and the wicked one toucheth him not”* (1 John 5:18). In a word, the question is wholly moral.

If any particular question is raised which at first blush we cannot solve, we shall find that often there would be no such question there at all, if our position were not false – if we had previously



been in a good state of soul, and a true spirituality had guarded and kept us. In that case all we have to do is to humble ourselves for the whole affair.

Now let us examine whether Scripture does not provide some principle suitable to direct us. Here evidently spirituality is everything. The rule that we should do what Jesus would have done in such and such a circumstance is excellent, when and where it can be applied. But how often are we in the circumstances in which the Lord was found?

In the next place it is often useful to ask myself where a desire or thought of doing this or that comes from. I have found that this alone decides more than half of the difficulties that Christians meet with. The rest of those which remain are the result of our haste and of our former sins. If a thought comes from God and not from the flesh, then we have only to address ourselves to God as to the manner and means of executing it, and we shall soon be directed.

There are cases where one has need of being guided, not always without motives; as suppose, when I hesitate about a visit to make, or some such other case. A life of more ardent love, or love exercised in a more intelligent way, or set in activity in drawing near to God, will clear the motives on one side or another: and often, perhaps, we shall see that our part in the thing was but selfishness.

If it be asked, 'But what if it is not a question either of love or of obedience?' Then I answer, that you ought to show me a reason for acting. For if it is nothing but your own will, you cannot make the wisdom of God bend to your will. Therein also is the source of another numerous class of difficulties that God will never solve. In these cases He will in His grace teach obedience, and will show us how much time we have lost in our own activity. Finally, *"the meek he will guide in judgment and the meek he will teach his way"* (Psalm 25:9).

I have communicated to you on this subject all that my mind can furnish you with at this moment. For the rest, remember

only that the wisdom of God conducts us in the way of God's will. If our own will is in activity, God will not bend to that. That is the essential thing to discover. It is the secret of the life of Christ, who did

**If our own will is in activity, God will not bend to that**

the Father's will in everything. I know of no other principle that God can make use of, however He may pardon and cause all to work out for our good. If there be still a query as to His direction, He directs the new man which has no other will than Christ. He mortifies and puts to death the old man, and in that way purifies us that we may bear fruit. *"Lo, I come to do thy will, O God...I delight to do thy will"* (Psalm 40:7-8). It is the place of the porter to wait at the gate; but, in doing so, he does the will of his master. Be assured that God does more in us than we do for Him; and that what we do is only for Him in proportion as it is He Himself who works it in us.

I add with regard to a principle expressed above, that we are sanctified (set apart) to the *"obedience...of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:2). Now He came to do the will of the Father, without which He did nothing. Thus in the temptation in the wilderness, Satan tried to make Him act according to His own will, in things where there was not even an appearance of evil. The Father had just owned Christ as His Son: Satan tempted Him, saying, *"If thou be Son of God, command that these stones be made bread"* (Matthew 4:3). But Jesus was a servant, and His answer consists of doing nothing, because there was wholly no will of His Father in the matter: *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4). As there was no word from God for the actual circumstances, Jesus did nothing. Satan could do nothing more. Although ever active to do good, He did not stir, when Mary and Martha sent to tell Him *"he whom thou lovest is sick"* (John 11:3). His Father had not sent Him there. When He goes later, the wisdom of God is thus manifested, in that a testimony to the divine power of Jesus as Son of God was rendered by

the resurrection of Lazarus. So then, when the will of God is not manifested, our wisdom often consists in waiting until it should be. It is the will of God that, zealous of good works, we should do good always, but we cannot go before the time, and the work of God is done perfectly when it is He who does it.

J N Darby

*Extract from a letter, translated from the French*

*In the next issue (God willing) "I will guide thee with my eye"*

## From "Living Water" No 27

### **CHRIST – THE BEARER OF OUR INFIRMITIES**

In Matthew 8 the Lord is seen as bearing infirmities and sicknesses. I am not going to turn this address into faith healing but I believe it is a matter we need to keep in perspective. We are thankful to God for every help that we get in the way of physicians; in the ways of God they alleviate present circumstances. But I do say: let us look beyond the tablets and the palliatives to see the fact that the Lord is concerned about our bodies. We are very fortunate if we have got a good doctor; it is something in the ways of God for our good. But, even in regard of our bodies, let us keep the Lord in view.

I say to the young people that you are living in days of great wickedness. Persons are using their bodies in a most abominable way: fornication, drug taking and the like. It is all a corruption of men in the use of their bodies.

There is a large section in 1 Corinthians which speaks of the way that believers ought to use their bodies. The bodies of believers are even said to be the members of Christ. That is the real thought of the "body of Christ" here on earth. Our bodies are necessary for the practical expression of the truth of the body. So, as to our literal bodies, Paul warns us that "*the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body*" (1 Corinthians 6:13). The two thoughts are brought together; that we are members of Christ, and the way that we are to use

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to commend the name  
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our bodies. The Lord not only claims our souls and spirits; He claims our bodies.

We use our bodies to commit sins. We have used them to dishonour the name of God. But now, as believers, we are to use our bodies for the Lord. He feels every sickness and every disease that comes upon His people. Use the doctor by all means but let us keep the Lord in view; He is concerned about our bodies. What are we doing with them? Think of the wicked and cruel things that have been done in the use of the tongue!

The Lord used His body to commend the name and grace of God. In Matthew 5 the Lord Jesus comes down from the mountain where He had given His legislation and the first thing that He is recorded as doing is to use His hands and heal a leper. He handled him freely. He could have spoken a word and healed him but He gave an impression by the hand. Oh, it is a grand thing to get a touch from Christ.

His bearing our sicknesses is different from His bearing our sins but it is especially part of His service towards us. As we use our bodies in relation to the testimony we will find that the Lord will be for our bodies to help us in our responsibilities and in keeping things going in the Christian company so that there is an actual physical representation of persons being together in the light of the church. It is seen in the bodies of the saints as we are together; the Lord is for the body.

J. O. T. Darton

*Extract from an address at Yeovil, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1969*

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Ed.***