

**135**

# *Living Water*

'Living Water' is published by the Stone Publishing Trust  
(Registered Charity 1034689)

Stone Publishing Trust  
33 The Floats,  
Riverhead  
SEVENOAKS  
TN13 2QT

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Cover Picture: Two streams meet, Val d'Ultimo, Italy - J.E.Casavecchia

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Printed by Lakeside Printing,  
Unit 4A, Munday Industrial Estate, Morley Rd, Tonbridge, TN9 1RA, UK

# ***Living Water 135***

***(May – June 2016)***

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## Recent Ministry

### PSALM 23: A MEDITATION – 2

*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.*

*“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over.”*  
*Psalm 23:4-5*

The psalm changes here. Up to this point David has been telling us about the Shepherd but in verse 4 he starts speaking to the Shepherd. David has been thinking of the paths of righteousness and he pauses and he says, *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”*. I think David was a mature man when he wrote this Psalm. He was looking back on his life and he trusted the Shepherd so much that he could say, *“though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil”*.

He says, *“Yea, though I walk...”*. I think that gives added emphasis. In one sense all our lives are spent in the valley of the shadow of death. In John Bunyan’s book ‘The Pilgrim’s Progress’ the valley of the shadow of death comes quite a way before Pilgrim reaches the river Jordan. Yet, in another sense, the valley is when we come to the end of our time here. In our pathways here there are those that go before us and, if the Lord tarries, we too will have to face the valley.

But it is the *“shadow of death”*. It is not death. There might be the shadow of a fierce dog but a shadow cannot bite you, the shadow cannot harm you. Well, in the same way, it is the shadow of death because the Lord has met death Himself. For the Lord it was not a shadow, it was dreadful reality. In one sense it is a reality for you and for me as well but the sting is gone (see 1 Corinthians 15:56). The Lord Jesus has entered into death and come out of it triumphantly. *“...that through death he might annul him who has the might of death, that is, the devil; and might set free all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage”* (Hebrews 2:14-15). How many fear? The devil uses that to keep men in bondage.

The Lord Jesus has broken the power of death and He has set us free, He has set us free in liberty. *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”*. Someone has said, Psalm 22 is Mount Calvary, Psalm 24 is Mount Zion and Psalm 23 is the valley. We are passing through the valley.

**he did not say something just to save his skin**

There was a sister in Chester who had lived with her natural sister for a number of years; then her sister died and she was left alone. Towards the end of her life she went into a home for the elderly. I used to visit her most weeks and on one occasion I asked her whether she would like me to read a scripture to her and she asked for Psalm 23. Then, about a month later, I went in again; I went up to her room and she was in bed. She did not respond; whether she was in a deep sleep or whether she was unconscious, I am not sure. But I read this Psalm to her and then I prayed with her and left. The next morning we heard that the Lord had taken her. Whether she knew anything of my visit I do not know, but what I can be sure of is that in that valley of the shadow of death she was not alone. That is the precious thing about this: *“for thou art with me”*. The Lord had to go alone. He says, *“But I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it shall have been accomplished!”* (Luke 12:50). He was forsaken that you and I might never be.

When Paul writes to Timothy he says, *“at my first defence no man stood with me”*. Did Paul feel alone? No, he writes, *“But the Lord stood with me... that through me the proclamation might be fully made”* (2 Timothy 4:16-17). That impresses me, that the Lord did not just stand with Paul for Paul’s comfort but that the proclamation might be fully made. Think of that proclamation. There was Paul, standing in Caesar’s court; he had stood before other kings and Roman governors; he stood before Herod Agrippa, Festus and Felix and many other important people. But now he was called to his first defence before Nero’s court. Nero was a very wicked, cruel and anti-Christian Emperor. But the proclamation was fully made. Paul was not turned aside, he did not fear, he did not say something just to save his skin. The proclamation

was fully made that *“all those of the nations should hear”*. Paul was not alone: John was not alone on Patmos. None of us is alone, *“for thou art with me”*.

And so here we see, *“for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me”*. The rod, that was to provide protection from enemies. The staff? Well, the Lord Jesus sometimes has to use the staff to draw us back. I understand that the top of a shepherd’s crook fits around the lamb so that if a lamb is going astray it can be gently brought back. It also fits around the neck of a mature sheep which may need to be pulled back. The Lord Jesus is set to keep us and to guide us.

Then there is a table prepared *“before me in the presence of mine enemies”*. Here we come back to feeding. The shepherd had to go before. Sheep are poor at distinguishing good from bad: they will eat grass but they will eat weeds and things that are poisonous. The shepherd had to go before to make sure that there were not those sorts of weeds that the sheep might eat that would be bad for them. He would look out for little snakes and things that might bite the sheep. Sheep stay where they are familiar with and they will eat the grass until the grass becomes stubble and they will keep eating the stubble until effectively they are eating dirt before they will move on to find something that is more wholesome. The shepherd is there to lead them to fresh grass. He prepared a table for them: he went before to prepare what was nourishing for them. *“Thou hast anointed my head with oil”*. Again, I understand that the shepherd would anoint the sheep. If they had injuries the shepherd would have oil that he would use to anoint them to help heal the grazes and bruises that the sheep had. It all provides a beautiful picture of the Lord caring for His own.

*“My cup runneth over”*. Hospitality was an important custom in the East. If there was a stranger it was beholden upon you to make sure that that person had a meal. I understand that at the end of the meal if you filled up their cup partway that was an indication that, ‘I have fed you, this last drink is an indication that it is time for you to be on your way’. But if the host kept pouring until the cup overflowed that was an indication to them that the guest was welcome to stay the night.

How precious that the Lord has pleasure in our company. He has loved us so much. We are only suited for His presence because of His righteousness. But it is precious that the Shepherd loves us so much that He desires our company. *"My cup runneth over"*. In a more general way it gives a sense of the abundance of blessing. There is no rationing with this Shepherd. Any limit is from my side – how little of the food He gives do I eat, how little of the drink that He gives do I drink? But from His side there is no shortage. What a blessing it is to know the love of the Shepherd and to respond to it.

Peter Wallach

*Extracted from an address at Aberdeen 27<sup>th</sup> June 2015*

*To be concluded in our next issue DV*

## **THREE VISIONS OF THE CHURCH –PART 2**

### **Peter's Vision – The Great Sheet**

I come now to Peter's vision. Peter had been with Jesus. Jesus said to him that He would make him a fisher of men. When Jesus rose from the dead He commanded Peter and others to spread the gospel. He said that *"Repentance and remission of sins would be preached in His name to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:47).

When Peter preached in early Acts he makes known to his Jewish audience that forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit was available through the Lord Jesus Christ to those who were listening to him and to *"as many as the Lord our God may call"*(Acts 2:39). Peter then was quite clear in his mind that God intended him to take the gospel not only to the Jews but to non-Jews as well.

But Peter was a Jew, a devout Jew, who had been brought up in a Jewish culture. It was very, very difficult for him to understand how Gentiles could possibly be brought into blessing on the same basis as Jews.

I was reminded of this Scripture recently when sitting in a restaurant on a ship and there was a party of Jews on board. They sat by themselves with a special table of kosher food to make sure they would

not be contaminated by taking some of the food that I might eat. Peter would have understood their concern because that was the way he felt. While he was awaiting his own meal, he received this vision of a sheet being let down from heaven containing quadrupeds, fowls, creeping things, creatures that a Jew who understood Leviticus 11 would never put into his mouth. Yet he was told to rise and to kill them and to eat them, an activity revolting to him as a godly Jew. He had to be told, *"What God has cleansed, do not thou make common"*.

I think two very important aspects are brought together in this vision. One is that God is working, not only amongst Jews but among Gentiles as well. The vision helped Peter to adjust his thinking because as he was pondering over the significance of the vision servants sent by a Roman centurion arrived to meet him.

Once you become a Christian you do not know everything! We Christians need, from time to time, adjustment by God so that we are brought more clearly into the thoughts and ways of the will of God. I have had to be adjusted many times in my life. No doubt if I live a little longer I shall need further adjustment. Peter required adjustment in his life in relation to his own personal service to the Lord. Through being told to eat these creatures God showed to him *"to call no man common or unclean"* (v.28).

Thank God the gospel is for everyone. Thank God it is preached in this city as it is preached in many places. We can tell anyone that Jesus is the Saviour of the world. Anyone who repents and puts their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ receives the gift of the Holy Spirit and thus is a member of the body of Christ. It is in the power of the Spirit that we are all baptised into one body, *"wherein there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman"* (Colossians 3:11) .

Some of these creatures in this sheet would not be very nice, would they? You wonder how they could possibly get on with one another. Not only are we Christians different as part of the body of Christ but we all have done wrong and have bad tendencies in us. God intends that God's people might live in harmony with one another under the



rule of Christ and with the help of the Holy Spirit. When Paul writes to the Corinthians about evil practices, he adds *“these things were some of you but ye have been washed, but ye have been sanctified, but ye have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Corinthians 6:11). He says all these changes have happened in persons as a result of the wonderful work of Jesus and as a result of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So Peter went to the Gentiles and God miraculously worked among these Gentiles and they became part of the body of Christ. They were in this sheet and Peter was able, we might say, to feed on them and to rejoice in them, rejoice in the grace of God that had reached them as it had reached him.

There is another interesting aspect about the sheet. It was let down from heaven and it returned to heaven. Down from heaven: back to heaven. To me this indicates that God has a purpose in relation to His church. As others have said, the church is heavenly in origin, it is heavenly in destiny. The sheet came down from heaven. It was in the plan of God that there might be a bride secured for His Son. This sheet came down from heaven and where did it go? It went back to heaven.

All real Christians belong to the church. The church is here like an exotic plant. It does not belong here. It is now here in testimony. Jesus said of His disciples, *“They are not of the world, as I am not of the world”* (John 17:16). Christians do not belong here, they belong to heaven. *“Our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens”* (Philippians 3:20). The church comes from heaven and is going to heaven. It is vital to search the Bible and see the church as it is in the mind of God.

Peter’s vision during his service brings together two aspects. One aspect is the grace of God in selecting us, fallen creatures who are disparate, evil, with bad tendencies. The other is the purpose of God before time to secure in time persons to have part with Christ for ever and ever.

Kenneth Hollands

*Extract from an address at Chester, March 2015.*

*In the next issue DV: John’s vision of the church*

## CHANGED BY THE GLORY OF THE LORD

*And remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, of which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; before... the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit return unto God who gave it.*

*Ecclesiastes 12:1, 7*

*For our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens, from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory, according to the working of the power which he has even to subdue all things to himself.      *Philippians 3:20-21**

I have a very simple impression to share about the changes that occur in life. We are reminded today of the change from life to death. One whom we loved, and whom the Lord Jesus loved, is now without life. But the change that has occurred with our sister was preceded by an earlier change that affected her in her younger days - she remembered her Creator before the days of evil came.

Now our sister wanted the Lord Jesus to be glorified in this occasion. She had that feeling in her heart when she first trusted in Him as Saviour and she carried it on all through her life. So, at the end she left this desire that this occasion should be centred on the Person of the Lord Jesus.

Her trust in Christ changed the whole of her life. She had the hope of the Lord's coming in her heart and of the Lord's power in changing things for her. That is why we are exhorted to remember our God, as made known in the Lord Jesus Christ who came here to bear our sins upon the cross and be our Saviour. He is available as Saviour to each one of us.

We have already spoken of the real living hope of the believer, but here in Philippians 3, where we read, it says that our commonwealth - or, as it could read, our associations of life - are in the heavens. That means that while we walk down here, as believers in Jesus, we can already enter into something that will last for ever, something that is based on knowing our precious Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. He is

depicted in this verse as a Man that has all power. He has power to subdue all things to Himself. He subdued our sister's heart. He subdues our hearts, He is available for us if we submit to Him so that we too may really have this change that our sister knew in our hearts before the evil days come. There is still time to have our hope in Him.

Now, note what is going to happen. It is a great act of power that cannot be hindered. He will transform *"our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory"*. We have seen it in many cases, a body subject to suffering and deterioration; our sister knew something about all that. But that body is no more to be in that way. It will be transformed according to His body of glory.

This is the hope that is bright before us. May we really use the time that is still available to us to grasp this hope which is so certain in our Lord Jesus - the perfect Man who is before us and who has done everything for us. He is going to perform this great transformation! It is the final change for the believer. There are no more changes after that. There are no changes in the Lord Jesus and there will be no more changes in the believer after that. May the Lord help us and encourage us.

Piero Casavecchia

*Word at a burial at Worthing, May 2015*

## **THE WONDERFUL WORK AND PERSON OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST**

***"The heart is deceitful above all things, and incurable; who can know it"*** ***Jeremiah 17:9***

***"But thou art a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great loving-kindness"*** ***Nehemiah 9:17***

I want to speak about two extremes. On one side, our hearts are *"deceitful above all things"* and then on the other side we have, as I read in Nehemiah, a God who is *"gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great loving-kindness"*. I want to talk tonight about those two very separate extremes.

The first side: *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and incurable;*

*who can know it?"* The Bible spends a lot of time, and devotes a lot of words, to making sure that you and I know that we are sinners. The first few chapters of Romans set out quite clearly that all *"have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). In Jeremiah in the Old Testament, we have *"the heart is deceitful above all things"*. That is your heart and mine as away from God. That is where we stand tonight – the heart is deceitful above all things.

Our hearts are evil beyond compare because of one thing that happened right back at the beginning. You can read about it in Chapter 3 of the book of Genesis in the Bible. It shows how sin came into the world and into our hearts and the whole of the human race fell from God's standard. Earlier in Genesis we see that God created this world as a perfect world, and a perfect place for man to live. He provided, too, a wonderful garden for Adam and Eve to live in.

For a short time they lived there and it was perfection: sin was not a part of Adam and Eve's set up. Yet, despite the perfection - you can read about it in the first few chapters of Genesis - they both sinned and from that point onwards every single person has come under this same condemnation - we are all sinners. Even now, thousands of years down the line, it is no different. You might say, 'My heart is not that bad. Okay, maybe I do a few things wrong but I would not say that it is deceitful above all things'. Well, that is your take on it. God's take on it is different. Yes, your heart *"is deceitful above all things"*.

Now, God is holy and righteous and cannot have sin in His presence. That is one reason why, as recorded in Genesis, God had to send Adam and Eve out of the garden. In the same way that Adam and Eve had to be cast out of God's presence, we cannot enter into God's presence in our sinful state. There is nothing in us that allows us to come into God's presence. God is holy. You might say, 'I have only sinned a few times, maybe lied a few times, maybe I have been a bit horrible to some people – they are only little tiny things'. But God is so holy that any sin is a complete abhorrence to Him.

I think perhaps — certainly as speaking for myself, I get some sense of how bad a sinner I am — but I do not get anything like enough of a sense of how perfect and righteous God is, how completely abhorrent

sin is to Him. I challenge myself that I do not understand that well enough: that God cannot abide sin in His presence at all. We cannot enter into His presence in our sins.

## **There is something ...fundamentally wrong in your life,**

So this is where we stand, the heart is *'deceitful above all things'*. It is not about what you do or about the sins you commit, it is what you are! There is something ingrained in you that is sinful, something that is fundamentally wrong in your life, something that is fundamentally wrong with your heart. It is our sinfulness. You can trace everything back to that terrible error of judgment that Adam and Eve made in the garden when they ate the fruit from the one tree that they had been told not to eat. .

It says in Romans, *"By one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death"* (Romans 5:12). You can see the effects of sin today. You can look at the newspapers, you can look around you. Sin is all around us and sin is at the very heart of what we are as away from God.

So, that is God's assessment of where we are tonight. That is where we must come to first of all. We must accept that we are sinners, that we are in a position where we are away from God, that we can do nothing to affect our situation with God. That is the first step that we need to take. That is what the Bible teaches.

Now, it would not be good news if I left it at that. The gospel is not about the negatives, the proof that we are sinners — there is a great positive. That is why I read in Nehemiah where we find that though we are sinners and at a distance from Him, God has moved in His grace to meet our need. We read, *"thou art a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great loving-kindness"*. That is the other extreme. God in His great love has come out towards us in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is who I want to present to you tonight: this Person, this Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. As I said, we are sinners who can do nothing to affect our position with God and yet God has done everything so that we can come into His presence. It is all done from God's side. *"Thou art a God*

*ready to forgive, gracious and merciful*"; it is a wonderful thing that God has done everything. He sent His own Son the Lord Jesus Christ here, to this very world that we are in now. Two thousand years ago the Lord Jesus was here as a real Man and yet He was also God. He was the Word made flesh (See John 1:13). He came with one purpose and that was to bring us to God.

**such a great  
sacrifice ...  
deserves a  
response**

The Lord Jesus Christ, through His death, through His sacrifice and the shedding of His blood, enables God to move in mercy and forgiveness in a way that was completely in accord with His own holiness and righteousness. The Lord Jesus came here and He died on the cross. He died one of the most horrendous deaths that the human mind has ever thought up. We can read about it in the gospels and it is horrifying. Yet the physical suffering was not the main part of it. It is the part, perhaps, that we can understand but the main element of the suffering of the Lord Jesus at Calvary was during the three hours of darkness when Jesus was *"made sin for us"* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

As a result, the Lord Jesus was forsaken of God. God had to turn His face away because the Lord Jesus Christ was made sin. That is something that is almost impossible for us to understand, that the holy, sinless Son of God could be made sin, yet that is what the Bible teaches: *"Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus took the judgement that should have been mine. *"The wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23) – the Bible makes it clear – but the Lord Jesus Christ died in my place. He was my substitute. He shed His blood where I should have been. He was there because of me.

He was there, too, because of His obedience to His God and Father. He was there because of His great love for me and He was there because of His great love for you. The offer of forgiveness and salvation is open to everybody. Jesus Christ died so that whosoever will can come into the great blessing of knowing God's forgiveness and love. There is nobody who is exempt from it. It is available to the entire world, to anybody that will believe.

It is such a great sacrifice that it deserves a response. Think of the Lord Jesus Christ hanging on that cross so that you might be saved. He had done nothing to deserve death and such an outpouring of God's wrath against sin. Neither have we done anything to deserve such a wonderful offer of salvation. In fact it says in the Bible that we were enemies of God (see Colossians 1:21). We were not just neutrals, we were completely against God in our sinful state.

Yet God sent His Son to die for you, for me. What a humbling thing it is to think that Someone you hated would die for you because He loved you. That is God's love. It is a tremendous thing and we see it expressed in the death of Christ. But it did not end there because the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

After He said, "*it is finished*" He bowed His head and He died (*John 19:30*) but three days later He rose again. That proved that God was fully satisfied with the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. That meant that God could now move out in perfect righteousness towards the sinner.

We read in the Old Testament about the blood of goats and other animals that were sacrificed. Those sacrifices looked forward to this one great sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Israelites, year by year, had had to repeat the various sacrifices - it was not a permanent thing. But the sacrifice of Christ is a permanent thing. His sacrifice on the cross was once and for all and never needs to be repeated again. What a tremendous thing it is.

Well, that is where we are tonight. We are sinners, our hearts are deceitful above all things but God is merciful, God is loving and God is forgiving. God can forgive and bless you because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. But it requires a response from you. You have to actually come into it yourself. It is an individual, personal thing. It is not something that you can say, 'Oh well, I was brought up in a Christian home and that is fine, I read my Bible, I go to Christian meetings, I go to church'. You have to accept Jesus Christ as your own Saviour. It is not just that you believe the Bible, or even believe that Christ died; you have to accept that He died for you and that you need Him as your personal Saviour. You cannot come into God's forgiveness any other

way. You cannot come into it on the basis of your friends or your family. You can only come into it as trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work at Calvary. That is the only point of entry into this great blessing: the Lord Jesus and His shed blood.

We are sinners but God has provided a wonderful way for us to come back into His presence. It is a great thing to come into. You will never meet a Christian who will regret accepting the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. You will never meet a Christian who will look back on the day they came to Christ and think that was a mistake.

When you become a Christian everything changes. You have a different outlook. You have a great hope. You are given so much by God. You are not just saved but you are given the Holy Spirit and He makes the Bible become a living word to you. Then, too, you have this great hope in your heart that one day you will see your Saviour face to face. One day He is coming back and will call all those who have trusted in Him to be with Him for ever.

That is the hope of the Christian, but it is a solemn warning to those who are not saved. It is a day that I am looking forward to and it is a day that I know many in this hall are looking forward to. But is it a day that you look forward to, or is it something you are rather frightened about?

One day the Lord will come back to claim those that are His and the gospel, as it is preached today, will not go out any more. Your opportunity to receive Christ into your heart will have passed. The Bible says, *"now is the well-accepted time; behold, now the day of salvation"* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

You can often think of many excuses not to put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus. The devil will give you 101 excuses not to come to the Lord Jesus now. The devil will tell you to leave it for a while, till next week, till after your exams, till after you are married. My friend, there is nothing more important than the eternal salvation of your soul. The time to trust Christ is now! I cannot promise that tomorrow is going to be here. I cannot promise that 7 o'clock is going to be here. I cannot promise that this time next week there will be a preaching going out. But I can say that right now there is the opportunity to accept the Lord



Jesus Christ as your Saviour. That is the only guarantee that the Bible gives that *“now is the well accepted time”*.

This is important – it is more than important, it is vital, that you should come to Christ now. God has given so much – even to giving His own beloved Son. God has given you every opportunity. God has you given everything that He can do so that you can come into forgiveness and blessing. It demands a response. You need to respond to it.

The Bible says in Acts chapter 4, *“neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved”*. You must be saved, dear friend. There is no other option: there is no other way. The Bible says that there is no other name; it is the name of Jesus that I am presenting to you tonight. It is the Person and it is all that He has done.

He is a wonderful Saviour and He is Someone that I commend beyond my vocabulary to explain. He is the Highest that I can commend to you tonight: the work and the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is all you need. God has provided all you need and it is all found in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I pray that everybody here tonight may have put their trust in Him now. For His name’s sake. Amen.

Tim Noble

*A preaching of the gospel, London, 2014*

## **Poetry Selection**

### **REST**

In peace the fruit of righteousness is sown;  
From worried heart no precious thing is grown.  
God works in calm, let His calm fill the breast.  
So shall thy rest be work, thy work be rest.  
To know the Father’s heart is rest divine,  
Folding her wings around that heart of thine,  
To know the Father’s heart from cares release,  
Acquaint thyself with Him and be at peace.

Joseph Pellatt (1843 – 1913)

## ON ADOPTION

Amazed with God's love  
I would His wonders tell,  
That I am rescued from the Pit  
And from the snares of hell.  
But to be called a son –  
Still makes the wonder rise,  
May every grateful thought hereof  
Fill me with thankful praise.

Joseph Ryder (1695 – 1768)

### Testimony Section

## FROM THE DARKNESS OF RESPECTABILITY TO THE LIGHT OF LIFE

*John Charles Ryle, who is best known today for his books of staunchly Bible-based teaching was born on 10th May 1816. The 200th anniversary of this event seemed an appropriate time to include the story of his conversion in this magazine. The account below is based on what Ryle himself wrote in 1873, as a record for his own family. Ed.*

About the end of 1837, when I was twenty-one, my character underwent a through and entire change. Up to that time I had no true religion at all. I do not mean to say that I did not go to church, or was not a professed Christian but I was perfectly careless, ignorant and indifferent about my soul and the world to come. From the time I was seven to the time I was twenty-one, I never prayed or read my Bible. If I had died before I was twenty-one, I should have been lost forever. I never plunged into the immorality that many young men do, because I had no natural taste for it. I was never led into drunkenness, gambling, theatre going, race-going, betting, or other things into which young men run; I really had no taste for them. But I was altogether without God in the world, though many thought me a proper, moral, respectable young man.

My parents went to church and took us with them on Sundays, but the

service was regarded as a mere form. Conversation on Sunday went on much as on weekdays. Letters were read and written, newspapers read just the same as on weekdays. The elder members of the family on Sunday evenings in winter used to read sermons to themselves in separate corners of the room. But they all used to look so unutterably grave and miserable over them, that I privately made up my mind that sermons must be very dull things, and religion must be a very disagreeable business.

The utmost teaching our mother ever gave us was very occasionally to hear us say our Catechism, which she did in a very grave and rather gloomy manner. As to my father, the utmost he ever did was to show us pictures in an old Bible. The picture I specially remember being shown us was the devil dancing over the ruins of Job's house. Then he used to tell us this was what we would come to if we were not good. Poor dear man! He ought to have known better. His own father was a friend of John Wesley and the great evangelist came to stay at the house on more than one occasion.

The plain truth is that neither in my own family nor among the Hurts or the Arkwrights with whom I was most mixed up when young can I remember that there was anything of what may be called real spiritual religion. We never heard the gospel preached on Sundays and vital Christianity was never brought before us by anybody from the beginning of the year to the end.

Perhaps one of the first things that ever made me think seriously of the sinfulness of sin was a rebuke for swearing which I had from my friend Coote, about a year after I left Eton, when I was nineteen. I do not for a moment mean to say that it did more than startle me and made me think, but certainly it was one of the first things that I can remember that made a kind of religious impression on my soul.

I do not pretend that there was anything like a real change in me at this time. I still neither read my Bible nor prayed. I continued in this state of mind for two years until I was twenty-one, then about mid-summer an inflammation of the chest confined me to bed for some days and brought me very low. This was the time I distinctly remember I began to read my Bible and to pray.

[It was after recovering from this illness that J C Ryle strolled into a church in Oxford in the middle of a service and heard a passage from the epistle to the Ephesians being read in a very unusual way, with a pause between each clause: "For by grace...ye are saved...through faith...and that not of yourselves...it is the gift of God...not of works...lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) God spoke to him in that reading and God-given faith sprang up in answer to God's speaking.<sup>1</sup>]

The time from midsummer 1837 till the end of that year was a turning point in my life. I had many struggles and inward fights and I am sure I was guilty of many gross inconsistencies but by the beginning of 1838 I was fairly launched as a Christian. The leading things that seem to flash out before my mind as clearly and sharply as the picture on the photographic plate when the developing liquid is poured over it were such as these:

- The extreme sinfulness of sin, and my own personal sinfulness, helplessness and spiritual need
- The entire suitableness of the Lord Jesus Christ by His sacrifice, substitution and intercession to be the Saviour of the sinner's soul
- The absolute necessity of anyone who would be saved being born again by the Holy Spirit
- The indispensable necessity of holiness of life, being the only [external] evidence of a true Christian
- The absolute need of coming out from the world and being separate from its vain customs, recreation, and standards of what is right, as well as from its sins
- The supremacy of the Bible as the only rule of what is true in faith, or right in practice, and the need of regular study and reading it
- The absolute necessity of daily private prayer and communion with God if anyone intends to live the life of a true Christian
- The unspeakable excellence and beauty of the doctrine of the

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<sup>1</sup> This account is not given in J. C. Ryle's narrative but is based on an article by Ryle's friend Alfred Christopher, written immediately after Ryle's death, and published in "The Record" for 15<sup>th</sup> June 1900.

## Second Advent of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

- The unutterable folly of supposing that baptism is regeneration or formal going to church is Christianity, or taking the sacrament is a means of wiping away sins, or clergymen to be mediators between God and men by virtue of their office

All these principles seemed to grow upon my mind about the winter after I was twenty-one. I am quite certain I knew nothing of them at all before, and I am as certain as I am of my own existence that they rose up within my mind without the instrumentality of any particular person. People may account for such a change as they like; my own belief is that no rational explanation can be given – it was what the Bible calls conversion. Before that time I was dead in sins and on the high road to hell, and from that time I have become alive and had a hope of heaven. Nothing in my mind can account for it, but the free, sovereign grace of God. It was the greatest change and event in my life and has been an influence over the whole of my subsequent history

The consequences of this change were very great indeed. It made a complete breach with all the friends and relatives I had ever had before. I mean by this that there was a kind of gulf between us and there was a kind of tacit understanding that my tastes, likings, and habits had undergone a complete change. It made an awkwardness and an insensible kind of estrangement. For between three and four years I had a daily amount of discomfort and painful feelings that my friends thought me wrong, and I thought them wrong, that they were annoyed with me and I was sorry for them and could not alter them. It was a miserable state of things.

On the other hand I must freely admit that the change in my religious character brought me many friends and made me acquainted with many kind hearted, excellent Christians. These were a great help to me in one way and another, strengthened me in my principles, encouraged me in my practice, solved my difficulties, assisted me by their advice, counselled me in many of my perplexities, and cheered me generally by showing me that I was not quite alone in the world. For the acquaintances I formed at that period of my life I shall always

thank God, for I am sure that they did me a great deal of good, and mightily helped my soul.

John Charles Ryle (1816 – 1900)

### **A voice from the past**

#### **Reprinted from “Living Water” No 35**

#### **WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE FOR GOD**

***“Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour”***  
***(Ephesians 5:2)***

I have read this scripture that we may not lose sight of the infinite preciousness of the work of Christ to God. Christ was under judgment and in death but He was there for the glory of God and there in the perfection of divine affections. His devotedness to God and His love to the Father were never so expressed as when He gave Himself for us. He brought the obedience and affections of the Son into the place of sin and judgment and death and this made His work an offering and a sacrifice of a “*sweet smelling savour*”.

The hymn expresses it:

Love, that on death's dark vale  
Its sweetest odours spread,  
Where sin o'er all seemed to prevail,  
Redemption's glory shed.

Christ has been offered up and by His death sins have been purged, sin in the flesh has been condemned, the believer perfected for ever and God glorified. Perfect assurance and peace must be the portion of everyone who looks by faith on that scene of holy judgment and learns that everything has been settled thus according to the glory of God. In view of that scene, and the risen Saviour who is now triumphantly out of it, darkness, doubt and fear are banished from the heart and the conscience is filled with perfect peace.

C. A. Coates

*This article is reprinted from “Living Water” No 35.*

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## **A word for today**

### **REPENTANCE**

Allow me to present my thoughts on repentance, as I believe scripture presents it to us. The character of the gospel now commonly preached calls for a distinct scriptural statement of what repentance is:

- It is not conversion – that is the turning of heart and will to God through grace;
- It is not faith – that is the divinely given perception of what is seen through the revelation of it to the soul by testimony in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Repentance is literally an after or changed thought, a judgment formed by the mind on reflection, after it has had a previous judgment. Habitually, its use in scripture is, 'The judgment I form in God's sight of my own previous conduct and sentiments, consequent on the reception of God's testimony, in contrast with my previous thought and feeling.' Of course this may be more or less deep. It is not the sorrow itself; that works repentance if it is godly sorrow. Not the regret or remorse; Judas had remorse and hanged himself, he had no repentance. Godly sorrow works repentance never to be regretted (see 2 Corinthians 7:10).

Repentance is the judgment we form — under the effect of God's testimony — of all in ourselves to which that testimony applies. Hence it is always founded on faith: I do not say the faith of the gospel. That may be its source; but we may repent through the testimony of God to the soul, and afterwards receive the glad tidings of the gospel.

Conversion itself may follow repentance; that is, conversion as the full deliberate turning of the heart to God. "*Repent*", says Peter, "*and be converted*" (Acts 3:19). Conversion is the turning of the will to God. Repentance is the changed thought, or judgment, we have of things, bringing in with it often, the sense of a change of feeling.

In the New Testament we have John the Baptist's well-known testimony. He preached the baptism of repentance for the kingdom

of heaven was at hand. Christ's first testimony was the same, (see Matthew 3:2, 8 & 11; Mark 1:4, 14 & 15; Luke 3:3 & 8). The result was, that they went out from Jerusalem and all Judaea confessing their sins (Matthew 3:5-6). Surely this was a judgment of themselves and of their sins produced through the testimony of the word. There was a change of mind – an after thought on reflection, light being let into their conscience as to their state: and fruits were looked for suited to this change of mind as evidence of its reality.

Again, this force of the word is clearly seen by contrast, *“There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine that need no repentance”* (Luke 15:7,10). Where there is nothing to judge, repentance has no place; where sin is, this judgment of one's own state is called for. So the Lord came to call sinners to repentance (Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). Again, the Lord upbraids the cities where most of His mighty works were done, because they had not repented. Tyre and Sidon would have repented if they had seen them. Is it not a practical change and self-judgment on the testimony before them (Matthew 11:20-21)?

Again, the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonas (Matthew 12:41). We cannot say they were converted. Fear caused it, but they believed the testimony, judged themselves, fasted and put on sackcloth. Again, if a brother wrong me, and seven times a day come, saying 'I repent', I am to forgive him (Luke 17:4). Here there is no question of conversion; he is not converted seven times a day. Again, we see by many of these passages it refers to their previous state of sin. So Acts 8:22 – *“Repent of this thy wickedness”*. So Revelation 2:21-22 and 9:20-21. The same principle is contained in Matthew 18:2 & 5: so, in its fruit in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 – godly sorrow worked repentance. Here they were converted long ago, and had believed long ago. But they had been in a bad state, and had repented.

How it showed itself may be seen in verse 11: *“For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves...yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal...”* Now these I admit are the proofs



and fruits of repentance – how it showed itself. Still they teach us what it is. In the same way in Hebrews 6:1, we have *“repentance from dead works”*.

## **It is not that repentance precedes faith**

The only place in the New Testament in which I believe it means simply a change of mind, without reference to the judgment of ourselves and our sins, is in Hebrews 2:17. Esau *“found no place for repentance”* – for going back from his previous way of acting – though he sought it, the blessing, not repentance, with tears. Here it has nothing to do with repenting of sin but only in the sense of changing his mind.

One text remains which gives its character and full force to repentance: *“repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Acts 20:21). Paul looked, not merely that crimes and wickedness should be judged, but that man should judge all his state in the light of God’s own presence, and in reference to His divine character and authority over him, and in the thought of God’s goodness. This is true repentance; man judged and judging himself in the presence of God, to whom he belongs and to whose nature he has to refer with mercy before him. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ meets this; because there God has judged sin according to His own nature and authority, and His love is perfect, and we are reconciled to God according to that nature and righteous claim. But this requires a word of explanation.

It is not that repentance comes first by itself and then in an absolute way faith, but that repentance, the judgment of what we are before God and in God’s sight, is one great effect of the truth; it refers to God as the God with whom we have to do; whereas faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is faith in that sovereign intervention of God in which in grace He has met our state by the gift of His Son. Repentance is not a change of mind as to God, though this may produce it, but self-judgment before Him, the soul referring to Him who is over us, and with whom we have to do. It is not that repentance precedes faith. We shall see that it is not so: but it is first the heart returned

into divine light, and then faith in the blessed intervention of God that fitted the state it finds itself in.

Practical repentance then is the estimate a man forms of sin, of his own ways as a sinner, on reflection, through the light of God penetrating in to his soul, and with some sense of goodness in God and the need to accept His divine authority. This may be through divine warnings as in the case of Jonah, or the lamenting of John the Baptist announcing that the axe is applied to the root of the trees. It is always mercy. God:

- gives repentance to Israel (Acts 5:31);
- grants repentance unto life (Acts 11:18); and
- His goodness leads us to it (Romans 2:4). That is, instead of visiting sins according to man's desert, He opens the door to return to light and grace through grace.

Therefore, when grace is fully announced, when the truth is there, repentance is on the footing of God's perfect revelation of Himself in grace, in Christ. Repentance was to be preached in His name, and remission of sins.

In coming to God it is always the first effect in the soul when it is real, and the turning of the will to God, and faith in the redemption and forgiveness the gospel announces comes after. Hence it is said, *"Repent therefore and be converted"* (Acts 3:19) and *"Repent and believe the gospel"* (Mark 1:15). But this just shows us how faith is the only and necessary source of repentance. It is by the testimony of the word. Be it prophets, or Jonah, or John, or the Lord Himself, or the apostles who taught that men should repent and turn to God, it was wrought by a testimony of God, and that testimony believed.

Now this testimony is the testimony to Christ Himself. Repentance, as well as remission of sins, was to be preached in His name. It is by revelation of God - whether in judgment or in grace - grace in any case working in the heart, that repentance is brought about.

When the prodigal (Luke 15) came to himself, he repented. He is

converted when he said, *"I will arise and go to my father"*; the gospel is realised when he meets his Father and gets the best robe. But *"he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (Hebrews 11:6).; and there is always in true repentance some sense of the goodness of God. *"How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare"*, says the prodigal in the far country. There would be no returning if there was not hope, it may be very vague, but still a hope of being received, and goodness trusted in. Even the Ninevites say, *"Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"* (Jonah 3:9).

In the gospel the full grace of God is made the very ground of a call to repentance, still in view of judgment. God now calls all men *"everywhere to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained"* (Acts 17:30-31). Goodness leads to it, the door to flee is open, but to flee from the wrath to come, to flee to God, who assures of forgiveness in coming through the perfect work of Christ.

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My object was to give a scriptural statement of what repentance is. I add a practical word.

In practice, the true working of the gospel in the heart is to bring first of all to repentance. As we have seen, warning such as Jonah's may lead men to repent, likewise a John the Baptist ministry may have a similar effect. But the fullest gospel does the same. It brings into the light, though it tells of love, for God is both, and that love makes us judge ourselves when God is really revealed. It cannot be otherwise. If men have been already concerned, the preaching of a simple and clear redemption will, through grace, give peace. It answers the soul's need, which having already looked to itself, is now enabled to look to God through Christ, learns that God is for it, and learns divine righteousness.

If a man has not been previously concerned, wherever there is a true

work, the effect of the fullest grace is to reach the conscience, to lead to repentance. Not to give peace as the first thing, but to bring the soul into that light, in which it discovers that state which makes it need a peace-making for it. It has lived without God, perhaps openly flown in His face, and it does not merely discover He is holy and good, that is, change its mind as to God and learn to love Him, but it casts its eye on itself, on its past ways, has a reflective after-thought in which it judges itself in the presence of God as known, judging sin by the great work which has put it away. It repents. The soul feels it has to do with God responsibly, has failed, been evil, corrupt, without God, is humbled, had a horror of itself and its state; may fear, will surely hope, and eventually, if simple, very soon find peace. But it will say, *"Now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes"*(Job 42:6-7). If there is not this – though the degrees of it may be various, as also may be the form it takes in the soul – there is no true work wrought.

If revivals (so called) be examined, it will be found that previously concerned souls have got happy if a plain gospel has been preached. Those who have not previously been exercised about their state before God, and rush into peace are found after all to have no root at all. And if there be a superficial work and hasty peace, the work of reaching the springs and foundations of the conscience has to be done afterwards, and often through much sorrow.

We cannot preach the gospel too clearly or too fully. Grace abounding where sin has abounded, grace reigning through righteousness; but the effect of this when fully received, the effect we ought to look for in souls, is repentance – I mean the present first effect. It will be a deepening one all through our course.

J. N. Darby