

144

Living Water

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

Stone Publishing Trust

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TN13 2QT

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

Editor: Mark Lemon

Printed by Lakeside Printing,

Unit 4A, Munday Industrial Estate, Morley Rd, Tonbridge, TN9 1RA, UK

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(November – December 2017)

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Recent Ministry

THE BALANCES

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Over the Royal Courts of Justice in London stands a statue of Justice; she holds a pair of balances in her hand. I want to speak of balances tonight. God's word to Belshazzar was "*Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting*" (*Daniel 5:27*). If we have to face God and have not trusted in Christ, our deeds will be weighed in His balances. On the one side there will be the righteousness and the holiness of God and on the other the deeds committed here on earth. The weight of that Scripture in Romans "*for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*" (*Romans 3:23*), will be very visibly demonstrated at that time. Even the best person you know, if they are put in God's balances the scales will always fall the wrong way. Such is God's holiness.

We read of Belshazzar who was a thoroughly wicked man. The verses I read in Daniel show what he had done; he had brought into his house the vessels of gold that had been taken from God's temple at Jerusalem and he was using them for his own drunken purpose. Nothing could be further from the way that God intended them to be used. In the middle of Belshazzar's feast the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote on the plaster on the wall near to the candlestick.† The words written were "*MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN*" (*v. 25*), words which meant that Belshazzar was weighed in God's balances and was found wanting.

†Possibly this was the seven-branched candlestick taken from the Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians

Each person weighed in those balances will be found unacceptable to God. That brings me to the message of the gospel. If God's standard is such that every one is found wanting how will we find acceptance before a holy God? Well, the answer is contained in the verses read in Romans:

"...righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ towards all, and upon all those who believe: for there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood" (Romans 3:22-25)

God has set forth the Lord Jesus as a mercy seat, as the Saviour of sinners. God has *"no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live"* (Ezekiel 33:11); He *"desires that all men should be saved"* (1 Timothy 2:4). God sent His own Son here in the form of a Bondman, *"come of woman, come under law"* the Scripture says (Galatians 4:4). He came by way of Bethlehem's manger, as we know. He came into the humblest of circumstances; He was not born in a palace; He came in the lowliest way and yet He was God's Son. He was *"holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners"* (Hebrews 7:26). He was perfect and acceptable to God in every way and through Him we can approach to God. So He is set forth as a mercy seat. The Jews living amongst those to whom the apostle Paul was writing in Rome would have known quite well where the physical mercy seat was originally put; it was on the ark of the testimony in the holy of holies in the temple

Under the law of Moses, the high priest could enter the holy of holies only once a year and he had to take in the blood of the sin-offering and sprinkle it on and before the mercy-seat. It is a picture for us of the way that, sinners as we are, a way

back to God has been made through the shedding of the blood of Jesus. The precious blood of the Lord Jesus has been shed. That blood has paid the penalty of my sins. Christ's blood can pay the penalty of your sins if you will accept Him. That is the key — will you accept Him as your own Saviour?

That is what brings me to the verse I read in Hebrews, *"To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts"* (Hebrews 3:7-8). If you will hear His voice — that is the important thing. Our ears may not be closed, exactly, but they perhaps have become hardened. We become used to hearing the message of the gospel. The reality does not always come home to us in the way that it should. But let us just consider the way the Lord has come into this scene and moved in such a humble way that He might bring us to God, having shed His precious blood that we might know what it is to enjoy salvation.

These things are a reality. When you come to realise how brief life is then the reality of a Scripture like this, *"Today if ye will hear his voice"*, comes home to you. We hear sometimes of people who pass from life into eternity in a second, because of an accident, or a heart attack or other similar unexpected happening. God is able to work in that way. So it says, *"To-day if ye will hear his voice"* and I just desire that our ears may be opened to hear the word of God's grace today.

The Lord could stand up in the synagogue in Nazareth and say, 'Today these words of grace are fulfilled in your ears'. Those hearers in the synagogue heard for just a short time and they wondered at the words of grace coming out of His mouth. He could speak in such a wonderful way of grace, *"To-day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears"* (Luke 4:21, 22). So there are words of grace that the Lord would speak to us even today. He does not speak in judgment: judgment is coming but before the time of judgment He came to be the Saviour.

I read in the Acts because there we find an Ethiopian man who acted immediately on the message he had heard. You might have thought he would have waited until he got home but such was the force of Philip's message to him that he realised he needed to act quickly. That is the importance of the gospel message. When it finds a resting place in your heart, act quickly; you do not know how much time you may have.

Philip, the evangelist, who brought the message to this Ethiopian acted quickly, too. On being told by the Holy Spirit to "*Approach and join this chariot*", he did not prevaricate — he ran to do so. He did not know whom he was going to meet; it turned out to be this Ethiopian eunuch and Philip was able to bring in the necessary word of salvation. The eunuch was reading Isaiah chapter 53, a scripture that we know very well but it did not mean a great deal to him. Philip was able to bring in the gospel message. How wonderful it is that Isaiah speaks so much as to the gospel. I used to think that the gospel was something you only read of in the New Testament but Isaiah is full of passages as to God being a Saviour. And He certainly is. Isaiah also tells us that "*His arm is not shortened that it cannot save*" (*Isaiah 59:1*). His arm of salvation was toward this eunuch and the eunuch, for his part, desired to avail himself of that salvation. This was a message that came directly from the Holy Spirit. The eunuch felt the weight of it, he felt the import of it. It was like a shaft going into his soul and he acted upon it. How wonderful.

He says, "*Behold water; what hinders my being baptised?*" And the result is that both Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch go down to the water and the eunuch is baptised. Then it says, "*he went on his way rejoicing*". That is the effect of the glad tidings. God's power and God's righteousness brings peace and if you are at peace you are joyful. There is nothing that is going to snatch that away because it is God-given, it is from

the Holy Spirit. It resides in the heart of the believer and it causes the believer to be glad.

Philip was caught away at this point but that did not seem to trouble the eunuch; he continued on his way rejoicing. He had found a peace and joy in Christ in his heart that was a reality to him. He had been to Jerusalem and had found nothing very much there. Probably his visit there had been very disappointing. But here was a message directly from God and he had found eternal salvation based on faith in the Person and work of Christ and he took it immediately. That is what I want to get home to you today.

Remember, if we do not trust in Christ then we will be weighed in God's balances and found wanting. But this is the time when God is propitious towards you and me. Take the opportunity, do not make light of it. It is God's offer of salvation. Seize it and make it your own. Be sure that you are saved. Be sure that you know the cleansing power of Christ's blood in your soul.

The Lord was crucified publicly and publicly a soldier pierced His side. Those who stood around saw the precious blood of the Lord Jesus and they would have heard the centurion on guard duty there say, *"Truly this man was son of God"* (Matthew 27:54). I do not preach anything which cannot be substantiated: there were witnesses. This is not something that is in any way made up. This is the truth. This comes from God Himself. Every page of the Holy Scriptures is indited by the Holy Spirit. This is the message that should come home to every heart.

I cannot say as some of the writers of the scriptures did, that they were eyewitnesses of these events but there were such. John saw the blood and water flow from the side of Christ and he says he *"who saw it bears witness and his witness is true, and he knows that he says true that ye also may believe"*

(John 19:35). Then Peter can say that we have not been “following cleverly imagined fables, but having been eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16). Peter was, of course, also at the house of the high priest. And he was the one who, at that time, denied the Lord Jesus. Peter had a history very much like our own, up and down. Sometimes very keen, sometimes desirous of hiding away. But the Lord could say to him, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to have you, to sift you as wheat; but I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not” (Luke 22:31, 32). And Peter’s faith did not fail; Peter was able to describe what he saw and what he saw caused him to rejoice in our Lord Jesus Christ. What the eunuch heard caused him to rejoice in the same blessed Person. I just desire that what you hear this evening may cause you to rejoice in Him as well.

May it be so for His name’s sake. Amen.

Mark French,

A preaching of the gospel, Sevenoaks, 22 January 2017

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT – MATTHEW 7

(Highlights of a Bible reading)

Introduction

The final part of the Lord’s teaching on the mount can be summarised as:

- Verses 1-6 The spirit of the disciples in relation to others
- Verses 7–12 The confidence in God which was appropriate to them.
- Verses 13-23 The energy which should characterise the disciples in order that they may rightly enter into the kingdom.
- Verses 24-29 Real and practical obedience to His word.

The Lord’s revelation of the Father is continued in this chapter, building on what has been opened up in chapters 5 and 6. 1

1 See J.N.Darby, “Synopsis to the books of the Bible” Vol. 3 pp. 41-42

The spirit of the disciples in relation to others.

Chapter 7 begins with a warning about judgment and hypocrisy. It is important to keep things in proportion. It is easy to see a fault in someone else without realising that there is a far greater fault with me. James, in his epistle, reminds us: *“complain not against one another, brethren, that ye be not judged” (James 5:9)*. We need the help of the Holy Spirit in this and the help of one another. An understanding of how gracious the Lord has been with us would preserve us from being critical of others.

Hypocrisy does a great deal of damage. If I say one thing and do another, or where we pretend to something that we are not, we bring discredit on the testimony of the Lord. The same applies to *“not casting your pearls before swine” (v.6)*. As believers in Christ we have some immense blessings and privileges from God. Such things are not to be spoken about in godless company. They will only lead to derision. Preaching salvation through Jesus Christ is quite another matter. Christ *“died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6)* so however ungodly people may be, that very fact should encourage us to commend our Saviour.

The confidence in God which was appropriate to them.

This section is about “asking”, “seeking” and “knocking”. We will make spiritual progress if these three features are found with us. These things show that we feel a need. If someone asks they want an answer; if someone seeks it means that they are actively looking for something. We may not get quite what we expect but the assurance that the Lord gives is that the Father is going to give exactly what is best for us. Just as a natural father will not give his son a serpent if he asks for a

fish, so our heavenly Father will answer our requests with deep understanding and grace.

James says, *“let him ask in faith nothing doubting”* (James 1:6). In the previous verse he exhorts us to ask the Father *“who gives to all men liberally, and upbraideth not”*. That is encouraging – the Father is not going to condemn us because we should have asked a long time before, or anything of that kind. Jesus tells us in our chapter that the heavenly Father *“will give good things to those that ask him”* (v.11).

The energy that was to characterise the disciples in order for them to rightly enter into the kingdom

The first exhortation that the Lord gives in this part of the chapter is to *“enter in through the narrow gate... that leads to life”* (v.13 & 14). The narrow way is contrasted with another very different way – the broad way that leads to destruction. This scripture is often used in preaching the gospel but it is also an illustration of the moral route that as Christians we come into as following the Lord. There is a choice that we make in answer to the gospel; we come to Christ, or we do not; we get into the narrow way, or we remain in the broad way. But once we are trusting in Christ there is a challenge about following Christ and it is that challenge that these verses also speak about.

The Lord on His pathway through this world was on the narrow way. It was a way of rejection and reproach but it was also the way of His Father’s will. The Lord said, *“I have a baptism to be baptised with and how am I straightened until it be accomplished”* (Luke 12:50). His path was one of sorrow, reproach and even hatred from those around, for we read prophetically of Christ that *“they hated me without a cause”* (Psalm 69:4). If we follow Christ closely we will find it is a way of reproach in this world and it is a narrow way. Yet we

find that the Lord sustains us and it is truly the way to life according to God. The nearer we keep to Christ the more truly we are in the narrow way.

However, we also know that while truly trusting in Christ for salvation we may be drawn away from commitment to Him and start thinking and acting in a similar way to those on the broad way. At such times there may be little to outwardly distinguish a believer from an unbeliever. This does not mean that such a one is lost eternally. That is impossible. Our eternal security is based on the work of Christ at Calvary and nothing that we do changes that, Yet, morally, if we become like the world, we are on a path that leads away from the will of God and, in that sense, it becomes not a way to life, but to destruction.

We find an example from the Old Testament in the history of king Solomon. He started well in his reign. We read: *"Solomon loved Jehovah, walking in the statutes of David his father" (1 Kings 3:3)*. When God asked Solomon what he wanted, he did not ask for a long life or great riches but for wisdom to rule Israel properly and God gave him *"a wise and understanding heart" (1 Kings 3:12)*. But as time went on Solomon got away from God; he fell into idolatry and he ignored the instructions in God's law not to multiply wives and horses (see Deuteronomy 17:16 & 17), and his *"heart was turned away from Jehovah" (1 Kings 11:9)*. As believers we probably all know something of this. We love God but we love our own wills more. May the Lord preserve us from it and help us to keep in the narrow way despite the reproach and the difficulties.

The disciples are next warned to *"beware of false prophets" (v. 15)*. These are people who appear to be right and even godly but within are ravening wolves. Very early in New Testament times what was false began to appear in the church. Paul tells the elders at Ephesus that there would come in amongst them *"grievous wolves, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves shall rise up men speaking perverted things to draw*

away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30).

We are all tested as to our discernment. A faithful disciple is to judge things by the fruit. A good tree

produces good fruit but a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. Waiting for the fruit to show may test our patience. The Lord says *"by their fruits ye shall know them" (v. 16)*. One of the fruits, and one that often comes to light very quickly, is the spirit shown by a person in the way they do things. Is the "prophet" marked by self assertiveness and self-importance, or is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in evidence? The fruit of the Spirit are the moral qualities set out in Galatians: *"Love, joy, peace, long-suffering (patience), kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23)*. These things challenge us; they are the direct product of the work of God in the soul. They are the features in which in so far as they show with us we can reflect something of the meek and lowly spirit of Christ.

The Lord told His own, *"Without me, ye can do nothing" (John 15:5)*. Then before He ascended to heaven He said, *"do ye remain in the city till ye be clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49)*. They had to learn that they were nothing on their own; they needed to rely on Christ and the Holy Spirit.

As we read through the Acts we can see that as moving in dependence on the Lord and the Spirit there was help in discerning what was false:

- Peter discerned in respect of Ananias and Sapphira, and again in relation to Simon Magus (see Acts 5 and 8).
- Paul at Philippi discerned that the woman who followed him crying *"These men are bondmen of the Most High God who announce to you the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17)* was activated by an evil spirit and cast the demon out.

We are all tested as to our discernment

- The Christians in Jerusalem, together with others, were able to rightly discern between those who claimed that circumcision was necessary for Christians and those, like Paul, who held that it was not (see Acts 15).

Sadly in our own times many of us have known what it is to be drawn away by false prophets. The tree not producing good fruit is to be cut down (v.19). We need to cut down the tree in our own hearts, judging in ourselves that which turns us away from the things of the Lord. Then, as a practical word, we need to have *"an outline of sound words... in faith and love"* (2 Timothy 1:13). We do not get such an outline apart from the study of the scriptures, pondering and praying over them and seeking the help of the Holy Spirit to open our understanding.

There are persons mentioned in the chapter (v. 21-23) who claim to have prophesied in the Lord's name and done many works of power but to whom the Lord will say at the end. *"I never knew you. Depart from me, workers of lawlessness"*. Acts of power in themselves are no proof that someone is acting in the power of the Holy Spirit but, as was noted earlier, the kind of spirit displayed is often a sure guide. After Peter had healed the man at the Temple gate he said to the wondering crowd, *"Why do ye gaze on us as if we had by our own power and piety made him to walk"* (Acts 3:12). Peter was trustworthy; he recognised that he was only a channel for God's power.

Real practical obedience to His word.

The Lord says, *"Whoever hears my words and does them, I will liken him to a prudent man who builds his house on the rock"* (v. 24). He asks us very simply to listen to Him and do what He says. Such an injunction would apply to the Lord's word in many connections but in the context here it must relate to the course of instruction begun in Chapter 5. The Lord's teaching had

covered a vast range of things:— love for enemies, prayer, the danger of lust, the confidence His own were to have in their heavenly Father, and many other things. Now He says, ‘Do not just listen but put these things into practice’. It should be just as though the Lord had spoken to us personally. If we hear and do what the Lord says that results in something being built up in our souls which will withstand the winds and waves of trials and difficulties which come along.

The wisdom of the world changes by the day but the Lord’s words are stable and do not change in accord with the changing ideas of the times. He is the *“same, yesterday and today and to the ages to come”* (Hebrews 13:8). It is only by listening to Him and doing His word that we reach solid ground.

As we come to the end of this course of instruction we should, perhaps, just note the words with which the Spirit of God closes this section:

“...when Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as having authority and not as their scribes” (v.28-29).

*Highlights of Bible readings at Bromley, August and September 2016.
This concludes the series.*

Poetry Selection

THE FOOTSTEPS OF THINE ANOINTED

How beautiful, Lord Jesus,
Thy pathway here below,
From Bethlehem’s lowly manger,
To Calvary’s cross of woe!
Beneath the eye of heaven –
Of angels and of God,
That path was all perfection,
By Thee, O Saviour, trod!

In childhood Thou wast subject,
In God's appointed way,
The Model for all children,
Their parents to obey:
And still a higher breathing,
Within Thy bosom lay,
To do Thy Father's business,
E'en in Thy childhood's day.
Thine early years of manhood
Did wisdom not see fit
To give, as sacred record,
On page of Holy Writ:
But sure to all in heaven,
As incense sweet and pure,
Their record in its fragrance,
For ever will endure.
But there must be recorded,
For men on earth to trace
Those years of public service
Seen in Thy path of grace:
And when Thou wast anointed
As Prophet, Priest and King,
Twas right Thou shouldst be provèd
As right in everything.
And so the Spirit leads Thee
And to the desert brings,
And there was proved in fulness
In God were all Thy springs.
And then was true most surely
Words later said by Thee,
'The prince of this world cometh
And nothing has in Me'.

Came Satan with temptations
 More subtle than to Eve,
 But never could the tempter
 God's Second Man deceive:†
 Came answer, "It is written"
 And all men must observe –
 'God only shalt thou worship,
 Him only shalt thou serve.'
 And now is sent God's Prophet,
 Pre-eminent as such,
 With healing in His preaching,
 And virtue in His touch.
 O Bringer of glad tidings,
 How beautiful Thy feet!
 Into Thy lips as Preacher,
 The grace poured in – how sweet.
 Then wast Thou Priest to offer
 One Sacrifice to God –
 Thyself, the spotless Victim,
 Thine ever precious blood:
 And still we see Thee, Jesus
 As God's great Priest above,
 Now interceding for us –
 The objects of Thy love.
 And soon Thou'lt be acknowledged
 As Zion's rightful King,
 When Thou wilt come in glory,
 And myriad ransomed bring;
 Meanwhile with heart adoring,
 Let us Thy praises sing,
 And own Thee glorious Saviour
 As Prophet, Priest and King.

Henry S. T. Bullock (1858 – 1938)

† "...the second man, out of heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:47),
 a reference to our Lord Jesus Christ

TRIED, PRECIOUS, SURE

*“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever
(Hebrews 13:8)*

*“A stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure
foundation” (Isaiah 28:16)*

Through the yesterday of ages,
Jesus, Thou hast been the Same;
Through our own life's chequered pages,
Still the one dear changeless Name,
Well may we in Thee confide,
Faithful Saviour, proved and tried!

Joyfully we stand and witness
Thou art still today the Same;
In Thy perfect glorious fitness,
Meeting every need and claim.
Chiefest of ten thousand Thou!
Saviour, O most precious now!

Gazing down the far forever,
Brighter glows the one sweet Name,
Steadfast radiance, fading never,
Jesus, Jesus, still the Same.
Evermore “Thou shalt endure”
Our own Saviour, strong and sure.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)

*This poem comes from “Life Chords” a memorial volume put together
by Frances' sister and published in 1880.*

Testimony Section

FIRST WORLD WAR 1914 – 1918 CENTENARY

WOUNDED FOR ME

In the autumn of 1917 just after experiencing some of the air raids on London, I went to live in a small country town. In bed one night I took up a magazine and read the following story.

‘During the war an elderly clergyman was staying at a London hotel. Walking down the street one day he came upon a wounded soldier who was painfully making his way along on crutches. The clergyman stopped. ‘Thank you’, he said earnestly, ‘for being wounded for me!’ The soldier looked surprised. Many people sent cigarettes or organised concerts for the wounded, but few thanked them! The clergyman quietly went on: ‘I can tell you of One who was wounded for you!’ The soldier was even more surprised. ‘Yes’, said the clergyman, ‘*Wounded for our transgressions (yours and mine), bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed*’. Then he told him very simply the wonderful story of the cross.’

As I read that account in bed that night it seemed to thrill me. Losses and terrible war experiences seemed to fade and the simple gospel story shone out brighter than ever. I had heard the gospel often, and believed it years before, but that night it gripped me afresh. I felt that I would like to sing for ever: ‘Wounded for me!’ He, the Son of God, was wounded for me! The words of the chorus came to me, and fearing that I

would forget them in the morning, I got out of bed and wrote them down:-

Wounded for me, wounded for me,
There on the cross He was wounded for me;
Gone my transgressions and now I am free,
All because Jesus was wounded for me.

Later Gladys Watkin Roberts (1888–1983) of the North East India General Mission added the following verses:

Dying for me, dying for me,
There on the cross He was dying for me;
Now in His death my redemption I see,
All because Jesus was dying for me.

Risen for me, risen for me,
Up from the grave He was risen for me;
Now evermore from death's sting I am free,
All because Jesus has risen for me.

Living for me, living for me,
There on the throne He is living for me;
Daily He's pleading and praying for me,
All because Jesus is living for me.

Coming for me, coming for me;
Soon in the air He is coming for me;
Then with what joy His dear face I shall see,
Oh how I praise Him! He's coming for me.

W. G. Ovens (1870 – 1945)

A LAST LETTER HOME

One more Sunday in France. I wonder when I shall be meeting among you again! I am especially thinking of you today and believe I felt a real soft heart. We had a service and sang a lovely hymn on the sufferings of Christ, the wounded side and the crown of thorns. 'Oh', I thought, 'what love, what indescribable love to those who desired Him not!' How I love these times when I feel all my troubles are very light compared

with His, and He bore the awfulness of the forsaking. Oh how we ought to love Him!

I do pray He will keep me from grumbling, and yet how hard is my heart oftentimes, to prove *“that in my flesh dwelleth no good thing”*. Yes, your text, *“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:6)* will do for us. I do want Him to direct all my steps. I often have prayed, ‘Decide this or that way for me, I am too ignorant to choose for myself.’

I had another letter from Tom (Ebenezer’s brother). He is better and is returning to the battery, and seems on good ground, for he says, ‘Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life’.

Ebenezer Burfoot

This letter is dated Lord’s Day, November 4th, 1917. Ebenezer Burfoot was wounded just over a month later on 8th December, and passed into the presence of his Lord on 15th December 1917. At home he attended the Zion Chapel in Newick, Sussex and the above is taken from the last letter he wrote to the pastor of the chapel.

This is extracted from “With Mercy and with Judgement: Strict Baptists and the First World War” by Matthew Hyde, published by Gospel Standard Trust Publications 2016 and reproduced here with permission.

A Voice from the Past

MAKING KNOWN OUR REQUESTS

“The Lord is at hand. In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”

Philippians 4:5-6

The word ‘anxiety’ comes from the same root as ‘anger’, and suggests the idea of choking. Worry chokes the life of faith.

It does not help us to overcome our difficulties, but unfits us for dealing with them. God will perfect that which concerns us, and His goodness and mercy shall never cease. Roll thyself and thy burden on the Lord, and leave them there. Too many take them back again!

“The Lord is at hand”. Let us dwell on these words amid the commonplaces of life, as well as when anticipating His near return. Say it when you are irritated and think that there is no reason why you should accept rebuffs and slights so meekly! Say it when you are worried and anxious! Practise the presence of God! Hold fellowship with Him! Even in business, or in the midst of daily toil, often lift your heart for a moment into the atmosphere of His presence!

There is a great difference between true faith and its intellectual expression. We must rise above the intellectual into spiritual fellowship with God. Our business is the surrender of our hearts to Him. Not the rapture of the mystic but to be ever tranquilly, joyously and strenuously seeking to be at one with the will of God. Each of us, by His grace, may walk with Him, as Enoch did of old, and then we can make known our requests!

F. B. Meyer (1847 – 1929)

A Word for Today

THE LORD’S SUPPER - 3

As the expression of fellowship

“I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of the Christ?

The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

For we being many are one bread and one body: for we all are partakers of that one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:15-17).

The chapter from which these verses are taken seems to be much less familiar to most Christians than the chapter which follows it. There may be two reasons for this: first, its true meaning is but little understood owing to the present public state of the church; and secondly, it is in some respects much more searching than what we get in chapter 11, and if accepted, would involve a breaking loose from unsuitable associations and links.

It is one thing just to sit down and partake of the Lord's Supper as a formal and proper and enjoyable matter, and quite another to accept the fact that our doing this really touches our daily life and path in all its details, and affects all our associations and surroundings. It is a blessed moment for us when we are prepared to admit this. We shall see, as we glance at the chapter now before us, how all this comes out, and may the Lord make it very simple and plain to each reader, how much the enjoyment and understanding of what is presented in chapter 11 depends upon the honest and hearty acceptance of what we have in chapter 10. There is always in Scripture a definite principle of order in the unfolding of truth, and perhaps nowhere is it more apparent than in the case now before us.

It is evident, on reading the verses quoted above, that the main thought contained in them is "*communion*", or, as the same word is more correctly translated elsewhere, "*fellowship*" In "*the cup of blessing which we bless*", or give thanks for, we express the fellowship of His blood, and in the bread which we break there is that which is expressive of the fellowship of His body.

A little explanation of the terms in which this is set forth will help us to grasp the meaning. The simplest idea of "*fellowship*" is that of "*partnership*". In fact, in most cases

'partnership' would not be at all an incorrect translation of the word. This idea is actually conveyed elsewhere in the New Testament, as we see in the following instances, where the word used is substantially the same, varying only in the form:

"Which were partners with Simon" (Luke 5:10)

"He is my partner and fellow-helper"

(2 Corinthians 8:23).

"If thou count me therefore a partner" (Philemon 17).

A partnership, as we all know, is the combination or association of those who are partners. The idea is too familiar to us in daily life to need explanation, beyond saying that while it involves a common participation in whatever benefits are to be derived, there is also the very important point of sharing in the responsibilities which attach themselves to the position.

If we apply the principle just stated to the passage before us, the meaning becomes immediately clear. The cup of blessing of which we drink, and the bread of which we partake, set forth in a twofold way the fellowship or partnership of believers; and that which characterises or marks this bond, and is indeed the seal of it, is the death of Christ. On the one hand, we have the immense gain of it, as that which glorified God and set us free from the dominion of sin and death. On the other hand, as being identified and bound up together, as it were, with Him who was rejected and put to death here, we have to be separated from the course of things around us in which we used to find our pleasure.

It is not that we cannot do our work here but that the link that has been set up between us and Christ now puts us as much outside the things of the world in their social or religious

aspect as was the case with the Lord Himself when He was refused and put to death.

Now the object of chapter 10 is to make this great truth a reality amongst the company of believers. It is not merely the presentation of a doctrine to be accepted, but something to be practically worked out in the path of the Christian. In the earlier part of the chapter Paul carries our thoughts back to the journey of the children of Israel through the wilderness. There was that amongst God's ancient people which answered in some respects to what we understand by fellowship. They had all come out of Egypt under the value of the Passover lamb, they had all been under the cloud and had all passed through the sea. (See verse 2.) The Passover lamb set forth their own deliverance from death and judgment, the cloud was the visible sign of God's presence, indicating that He had brought them to Himself (see Exodus 19:4), and the Red Sea was God's way of their deliverance from Egypt and the destruction of the enemy's power.

Moreover, the Israelites had had the manna from heaven and the water from the smitten rock (see verses 3 and 4). At every point they had had the benefit of God's intervention on their behalf, just as we have had. That was one side of the fellowship or partnership, but now what do we see as to the other side? How about their accepting the responsibility to walk here for God, in testimony for Him, and in separation from evil? It is a sad exhibition of what is in the human heart. The brief and pointed summing-up of it is contained in verse 5: *"But with many of them God was not well pleased: but they were overthrown in the wilderness"*.

The details of their failure (verses 6-10) present one of the most humiliating pictures within the compass of Scripture, and the Spirit of God uses it, through the apostle Paul, as the

basis of an affectionate and earnest appeal to the Christians at Corinth to be faithful to their fellowship, and to do nothing, or link themselves with nothing, which would in any wise bring their fellowship into reproach.

This serves to bring out a point which is of interest and importance, namely, that while the actual partaking of the Lord's Supper, or the breaking of bread, is only of weekly occurrence (evidently, in scriptural usage, the first day of the week), the fellowship of Christ's death is maintained perpetually. A Christian is always in it. It is that which marks him off from the course of things around, and he cannot get out of it, though he may shirk his responsibility and grieve the heart of Christ.

**the fellowship
of Christ's death
is maintained
perpetually**

It is in connection with this that the expression "*The Lord's table*" is used in verse 21. It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It sets forth figuratively that with which the Christian is in fellowship—his place of fellowship, so to speak, in contrast with "*the table of demons*", which was expressive of that with which the heathen were identified. So that it is correct to say—and it is well worthy of consideration—that a Christian is always at the Lord's table, though of course he is not always breaking bread. If this fact were accepted and remembered, what a mighty influence it would have over our associations and our ways generally, and how careful we should be to be faithful to our fellowship!

With what different feelings we should meet together for the breaking of bread on the Lord's Day if the fellowship of Christ's death were practically and faithfully maintained day

by day in our pathway through the world. Oftentimes we are painfully conscious, when we come together, that there is but little in our hearts that is in real unison with the Lord. Perhaps there has been much in our associations—or, it may be, in our service—during the week with which we would not like to link His name, and we can hardly expect, when we come together in assembly, that there can be that freedom of heart which will enable us to enjoy His company.

Nothing really helps us so much in maintaining this faithfulness to our fellowship as an intelligent grasp of the true significance of the Lord's Supper. This is evidently what Paul means when he says to these Corinthians: *"I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say"*—verse 15. He invites them, as it were, to enter intelligently with himself into what is divinely meant by *"the communion of His blood"*, and *"the communion of His body"*.

In this two-fold view of Christ's death we have, first, His blood shed—that which was for God in expiation, and at the same time the expression of God's love, for it was *"the blood of the new covenant"*, in which the great purposes of God's love are set forth (see 2 Corinthians 3); and secondly, His body given—that is, the whole condition of man as in Adam judged and set aside when the blessed Lord Himself in perfect grace took upon Himself our responsibilities on the cross. We who believe in Him can with grateful hearts see in His death the closing-up of our history here before God as men in the flesh. Many other scriptures illustrate this, as for example:

- *"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ" (Romans 7:4)*. That is, the condition to which the law applied (man *"in the flesh"*) had been ended for God by Christ's death.

- *By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once”(Hebrews 10:10).* Here, as in the previous passage, His death was the removal before God in judgment of the whole condition for which the Old Testament sacrifices had been provided.

An intelligent entrance into these wonderful realities awakens in the soul the response of affection to Him who gave Himself in order that the purposes of God’s love should be carried into effect.

Then we are prepared to accept a path of separateness and devotedness to Himself. This path is, no doubt, in some respects hard and distasteful to ourselves naturally, but it becomes easy and delightful as we learn to appreciate the immense gain which comes to us through the death of Christ, and the greatness of His love who *“endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).*

As a result of taking up for ourselves, heartily and with distinct purpose, this path of testimony, we begin to enjoy the sweetness and attractiveness of the Lord's Supper itself, as we partake of it week by week.

T. Willey

In the next issue (DV) The Lord’s Supper – In relation to the assembly (or church).

Scripture references in this series are taken from the Authorised (King James) Version as given in the original publication.