

LIVING WATER

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Recent Ministry

**"THE THINGS THAT ARE SEEN ARE FOR A TIME,
BUT THOSE THAT ARE NOT SEEN ARE ETERNAL".**

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

1 Peter 1:6-9

Hebrews 11:8-10, 24-27

1 Corinthians 2:9-12

2 Peter 1:12-18

I would like to speak about things which are unseen. The scripture we read in 2 Corinthians 4 says, *"we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen"* (v.4). We are living in a very material age, where people have a craving for what is material, and we have it in our own hearts too, but as we look around there is much instability and incredible change. Politically things are very unstable and there is tremendous change in the social structure, especially in this country where God's order has been overturned and things that have been set since the beginning of time are being changed. Look at the religious world — what confusion abounds. Then people are worried about climate change. All these are things that can be taken account of, things that can be seen, but the things that are seen are coming to an end. Peter tells us that, *"the heavens will pass away with a rushing noise ... And the earth and the works in it shall be burnt up"* (2 Peter 3:10). The Lord Jesus said, *"the heaven and the earth shall pass away, but my words shall in no wise pass away"* (Matthew 24:35).

I want to encourage us to lay hold of what is eternal, and what is lasting, things that are not seen by the natural eye but which the Holy Spirit would delight to engage us with. I have read of four people that I would like to refer to, men who saw these things that are beyond natural vision:

- Abraham, who it says, *"looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (KJV)
- Moses, who *"left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; ... as seeing him who is invisible"*.
- Paul who tells us about, *"Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, ... which God has prepared for them that love him,"*. Then finally,
- Peter and his account of what occurred on the mount of transfiguration.

But firstly, I would like to say something about Peter's word in his first Epistle where it says, *"Jesus Christ: whom, having not seen, ye love (1 Peter 1:7)*. Now, that is a remarkable thing – Someone whom myriads of people have never seen and yet they love. The apostle Peter had seen the Lord, none of us have seen Him, but as believers we love Him. The last the world saw of the Lord was hanging on a cross at Calvary. The cry was, 'Away with Him, we will not have this man to reign over us' (see Luke 19:14). The world has no place for Christ but if any of us has place for Christ in our hearts it is because of the wonderful work of God that has taken place in our hearts and souls. We should bow our hearts in thanksgiving to the blessed God who has given us an appreciation of this glorious Person. Naturally we would not have any appreciation of Him but God has worked in our hearts and brought us to realise the need that we have of a Saviour and we have repented, given our hearts to Him, by faith and He has now given to us of His Spirit that we might enter into the gain of these eternal things.

What a disciple and apostle Peter was. Scripture records many of his failures and mistakes and I certainly would not want my failures to be recorded for all to read, but who of us has not failed? But what a change took place in Peter when we see how he shines later as the Spirit took control of him on that first preaching on the day of Pentecost. Think of Peter writing his

epistles: how full he was of Christ. He came into the gain of what the Lord said to him at the end of John 21 in regard of caring for His sheep and feeding His lambs and it comes out in his writings; he is full of the glory and greatness of Christ.

These Jewish believers to whom he writes had been persecuted and scattered abroad; when persecution and trials come our faith is likely to be tested; maybe these believers were being shaken in their faith so he writes this epistle to stabilise and encourage them.

He speaks of *“various trials, that the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be proved by fire, be found to praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7)*. Yes, we may go through trials; I do not know what trials or problems there might be in the lives of people here today but the Lord knows. He may allow things in our lives for the proving of our faith. Gold has to go through the fire to bring out its preciousness but even that eventually perishes, but if the Lord is allowing some pressure upon your heart or into your life, it is to bring out the preciousness of that faith that is in you, which does not perish.

Peter writes, *“whom, having not seen, ye love; on whom though not now looking, but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (v9)*. What matters is the end, the salvation of your souls and God may bring you through trials but it is that you might become more attached to the Lord Jesus.

May our affections be stirred up after this blessed Person who is our Saviour and Lord. We have not seen Him but we are going to see Him soon and He is coming for us; we are going to be called into the presence of the Lord. What joy will fill our hearts when we see Him for the first time. May our hearts be affected by these things by not looking at what is around us, or by being unsettled by all the changing uncertainties of the world, but looking at the things that are eternal.

In Hebrews we read about these two Old Testament saints, Abraham and Moses, and I marvel when I think of these men. What faith Abraham had! He heard the call of God and responded to it. It says, *"By faith*

Abraham, being called, obeyed" (v.8). This is how we all start in the pathway, when we obeyed the glad tidings and came into blessing.

Abraham obeyed God and he went out in faith into the place which he was to receive for an inheritance. In verse 10 it says that, *"he waited [or he looked] for the city which has foundations, of which God is the artificer and constructor"*. How did Abraham know about the city that God was building?

There is an experience of Abraham's recorded that had a profound effect upon him, in Genesis 13 when Abraham and Lot separated from one another. They both had very large possessions and there was conflict between Lot's herdsmen and Abraham's herdsmen and Abraham said that it was not good for there to be this strife among them; so he said to Lot, *"Separate thyself, I pray thee"* (Genesis 13:9). Note the difference between Lot and Abraham at this point because it says that Lot looked — he looked at what could be seen. It says, *"Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan that it was thoroughly well watered"* (v.10). It was like the land of Egypt. It was a good place, naturally, to the eye and that is where Lot settled, *"he chose for himself"* (v.11). If you read the history of Lot, you realise the sorrow that he came into, as a result of his choice. Dear fellow Christian, just because circumstances might look outwardly beneficial that is not necessarily what God would have in mind for you. Have faith in God — ask Him. It does not record that Lot made any reference to God whereas Abraham was one who was prepared to trust God to guide him.

How did Abraham know about the city that God was building?

We read of Lot that he pitched his tent as far as Sodom and Sodom was the place that came under judgment from God, and Lot was not a happy man while he lived in Sodom because it records that he *"tormented his righteous soul day after day with their lawless works"* (2 Peter 2:8). We will not be happy Christians if we find our place in the things of the world, but we will be happy if we have our eye on the Lord and what He would have in mind for us.

After they had separated God said to Abraham, *"lift up now thine eyes and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that thou seest will I give to thee, and to thy seed for ever"* (v. 14-15). The remarkable thing about Abraham and these Old Testament saints is, that they never actually received the promises, but he (Abraham) looked for a city which has foundations.

Is that what we are looking for today, dear fellow believer? Are we looking for the city? Where is the city found? Look in the book of Revelation: *"I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God"* (Revelation 21:2). That is what Abraham waited for and this is what we are all waiting for by faith. It is what God is working out at the present time and even Abraham had the light of that in his heart.

I read of Moses. He is another very interesting person for us to take account of. Think of the faith of Moses' parents in putting the child into an ark in the river. The decree had gone out from the king, to kill all the sons that were born to the Israelites; Pharaoh felt that Israel was getting too powerful a people so he took measures to wipe them out. Well, that has been repeated down through the course of history; people have tried to destroy the Jews and think how much they have been persecuted down through the ages, but God has preserved them. It says in Exodus 2, *"God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them"* (Exodus 2:25). He took knowledge of their state, and still takes account of His earthly people even now

despite their apostasy. Soon Israel, His earthly people, will come into prominence and have their rightful place in their land, but what I wanted to focus on is that it was the faith of Moses' parents that led them to hide him for three months and then to conceal him in an ark.

We who are Christian parents have a great responsibility to protect our children from the influences of the world. Moses' mother wanted him kept alive, as she saw he was fair, so she hid him for three months and then when she could no longer hide him she put him in the ark she had prepared and laid it in the sedge of the river. It is amazing the way that God worked to bring Moses into the court of Pharaoh. Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river and there found the babe. Then Moses' sister (who had been watching to see what happened to him) said to Pharaoh's daughter, *"Shall I go and call thee a wet-nurse...?"* (Exodus 2:7) So Moses' own mother was called to nurse him and he was brought up by her until he took his place in Pharaoh's court. I wonder what instruction Moses received from his mother in those years? Mothers have a very important place in the bringing up of their family. What instruction she would have passed on to Moses, but the time came where it says, *"she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son"* (Exodus 2:10).

But we read in Hebrews, *"By faith Moses, when he had become great, refused to be called son of Pharaoh's daughter ...choosing rather to suffer affliction along with the people of God"* (Hebrews 11:24-25). Think of that! When he had become great he refused; it was not when he was of little account in Pharaoh's court. Many strive for success or position in this world, maybe in business or in their profession, or look for some prominence here, but Moses refused it. It shows that something of moral fibre and character had been built up in his life. He refused what Egypt offered. *"Choosing rather to suffer affliction along with the people of God than to have the temporary pleasure of sin"*.

Yes, there is pleasure in sin but it is temporary, it does not last and ends in disappointment. We need to be occupied with what is eternal, what is lasting and that is what Moses had; he had *"respect to the recompense"* (v28).

Then I was thinking of what we read here that, *"by faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king"* (Hebrews 11:28). What could have led him to not fear the wrath of Pharaoh? If we go back to Exodus 3 we find that Moses came to *"the mountain of God, to Horeb"* (v2) and there he saw a thorn-bush that *"burned with fire"* but the bush was not consumed so Moses turned aside to see this wonderful sight and God spoke to him out of the thorn-bush. Moses had an interview with God and it resulted in him getting an impression of the greatness and the power of God.

Think of that sight; the fire would normally burn the bush up in an instant. I believe fire would represent divine judgment, but the thorn-bush not being consumed, would speak of the grace of God, and He was acting in such a way, not to consume but to deliver a people for Himself, and so God was calling Moses to lead His people out of Egypt.

Moses had attempted, earlier on in his life, when he was in Egypt, to act on behalf of his own people in what we may say was in a natural, or fleshly way, when he intervened in a dispute between an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew man. Thinking that no one was watching, he then killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. On another day he then tried to resolve a quarrel between two Hebrew men; when the man who acting in the wrong challenged Moses as to his intervention, he asked if he intended to kill him as he had the Egyptian. So then Moses fled from Egypt and Pharaoh, into Midian, where he remained until this time. He had to learn as we all do that we cannot serve God or work things out amongst His people in our own unspiritual and worldly power and strength; we need to come under the control and authority of the Lord if we are to be of any help.

Well, after God had spoken to him from the bush, Moses says, 'Who shall I say that appeared to me?' And God said, *"I AM THAT I AM. And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: I AM hath sent me unto you"* (Exodus 3:14). So when Moses comes into the court of Pharaoh he does not fear the wrath of Pharaoh; he had had an interview with the eternal, almighty God; the I AM had sent him. I believe that revelation set his eyes on things that were eternal. Pharaoh, although a powerful monarch, was just passing, whereas God and His things are eternal. He did not fear the wrath of the king.

So the scripture says, *"seeing him who is invisible"* (Hebrews 11:27). You might say that that is a contradiction in terms; how can you see what is invisible? But he saw God, he saw Him who is invisible, by faith. So what we are speaking about is faith; we apprehend these things by faith and at the beginning of chapter 11 it says, *"faith is the substantiating of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"* (v.1). Let us get conviction in our hearts today as to things that are not seen, the things that are eternal.

**we cannot serve
God in our own
unspiritual and
worldly strength**

Now I read of Paul. In first Corinthians chapter 2, he says, *"according as it is written, Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love him, but God has revealed to us by his Spirit"* (v 9-10). How did Paul come into the gain of these things? How could he speak about these things, that eye had not seen nor ear heard? Well, all believers can enter in some way into this since Christ is made to us *"wisdom from God"* (1 Corinthians 1:30) but the apostle Paul had particular revelations and he tells us about one such experience that he had in 2 Corinthians 12. Whether he was in the body or out of the body

he did not know. In the Acts we read of a time when Paul was stoned and he was taken out of Lystra as they thought he was dead (see Acts 14:19-20) and it has been suggested that this might have been the moment when he had this extraordinary experience of being caught up into paradise, *“and heard unspeakable things said, which it is not allowed to man to utter”* (2 Corinthians 12:4). I wonder what he heard. What revelations were given to Paul? I think something of it is to be seen in the letters he wrote to various assemblies speaking of the heavenly and eternal blessings. He wanted believers to go in for these things.

So he wrote to these Corinthian believers, but they were worldly and unspiritual. He was encouraging them to pursue what was eternal and what was lasting. He says, *“Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard”*. What wonderful things he must have experienced when he was caught up to the third heaven! Paul tells us in Philippians that he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees: he speaks about his credentials as a religious man and at the end of that list he says that he counted such things to be filth, *“on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Philippians 3:8). Have we arrived at that — that everything here is of little consequence — our careers, businesses, our material possessions and whatever else compared with the *“knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”*?

Paul came to an end of himself, the end of everything here that he might come into the gain of being with Christ. He even says that he did not know whether it was better to remain to be with the brethren or to go to be with the Lord, but he knew what **he** preferred; he would rather go to be with the Lord *“which is very much better”* (Philippians 1:23). He had an insight into that glorious, heavenly sphere that he delighted to tell the saints of. May our hearts and our minds be engaged with that heavenly sphere, with the Man who is in the glory.

Finally I refer to this passage in Peter. What an encouraging

apostle he was. His course here was coming to an end very soon: he speaks about the putting off of his tabernacle, that he was about to die, as the Lord had made that known to him. He was not worried about it, but was full of

confidence he was just putting off his earthly body that he might be go to be with Christ. What *did* concern him was that he was leaving the saints here, not leaving any apostolic succession, but he wanted the believers to whom he was writing — the same Christians that he wrote to in the first epistle — to be absolutely convicted of what they believed.

I would just like to say to my older brethren — what legacy, what can you leave to the brethren to remember you by? What can you tell them of your experience, of your knowledge of God? What can you pass on to younger hearts to encourage them and stimulate them in the path of faith?

Peter was going away, and he was concerned *“to put you always in mind of these things, although knowing them and established in the present truth”* (v 12). He wanted them to be established in the reality and the conviction of what he had come into, and by extension they had too. He says that it is not a fairy story, not *“cleverly imagined fables”*; it was and is real. It certainly was reality with Peter and the concern I have is that these things might be real, precious and living to us, and that we might be in the gain of them, that by the Holy Spirit we might enter into the reality of the truth of these things for ourselves.

So Peter, as long as he was in the body, was going to stir them up and put them in mind of these things. Dear older brethren, I would encourage you, stir up the brethren, stir up the younger

What can you pass on to younger hearts to encourage them and stimulate them in the path of faith?

ones, tell them what you have gained. Tell them of the knowledge you have of God and you dear young people, soak it up, the experience that older brethren have had with and in the knowledge of Christ. So Peter says, *"I will use diligence, that after my departure ye should have also, at any time, in your power to call to mind these things"*(v 15).

Well, what could he tell them about? He says, *"We have not made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, following cleverly imagined fables"* (v 16). In Matthew's gospel we are told of a day, I would say it was a momentous day in Peter's life, when the Lord Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mount of transfiguration. He saw the glory of Christ on that mountain and he heard the voice of the Father. Peter says, *"such a voice"*. What a voice — the voice of God from heaven! *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight: hear him"* (Matthew 17:5). There is no other One to hear! There is no other Person to be occupied with than Christ Himself. Peter wanted to invigorate these believers, suffering as they were, to lay hold of these things, something that they would remember. May our hearts be established in the truth of these things, things which are not seen by the natural eye, but with the eyes of faith, but these things are eternal and lasting. Where is your hope? Dear fellow believer, where is your life? Is it in Christ or is it in something else? We are challenged as to these things. Peter had a wonderful link with the Lord. He says that we have not been *"following cleverly imagined fables, but having been eyewitnesses of his majesty"* (v 16). He saw the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Soon the Lord is going to come in His kingdom to set everything right in this world. What a mess the world is in. It is a world that does not want God; it has rejected Christ. So much is coming in now that is anti-God and contrary to His word. Soon God is going to come in by His Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, and He will come in power where His kingdom and His administration will be known. The politicians are fumbling about and do not know what to do.

When the Lord Jesus comes in, His sway will be absolute and there will be perfect administration. What a time it will be on the earth; there will be blessing for men. But before that time of blessing the Lord Jesus will come to call all His own to be with Him for ever (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Well, 'Whom, having not seen, we love'. Soon we shall see Him. Is that your hope? Is that a reality in your heart? Or are these just words? May every one of us today realise their link with the Lord and how living and vital it is to be looking on these eternal realities. Peter says that we were "*with him on the holy mountain*". What a scene filled Peter's view on that mountain. If you read the account of the transfiguration in Luke we find that the disciples had actually fallen asleep but suddenly they were woken up and saw His glory. Maybe some of us need waking up. Maybe believers today need to be woken up as to the reality of these things. May we lay hold of them in our hearts: the things that are not seen that are eternal. May we be encouraged, dear brethren, for His name's sake.

Michael Bond

An Address at Aberdeen, 23 September 2017.

Poetry Selection

HYMNS OF JOSEPH HART (1712 – 1768)

The 24th May 2018 marks the 250th anniversary of the home-going of Joseph Hart. He was born in 1712 and brought up in a Christian home, a fact that later in life he gave thanks for, but at the time he often found it irksome. He lived a somewhat dissolute life but in middle age he became concerned about his soul and started to go from one London church to another. Then on Whitsunday 1757 he heard George Whitfield preach in the Moravian Chapel, Fetter Lane, and gave his heart to the Lord.

Some time afterwards he became Minister of the Wooden Meeting House in Jewin Street, London EC3. He also wrote a large number

of hymns and published his “Experience”, an account of his life and of his coming to Christ. He is buried in Bunhill Fields, London. An obelisk marks the grave. The inscriptions on two of the panels tell his story.

Joseph Hart

**WAS BY FREE
AND SOVEREIGN GRACE
AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD RAISED UP
FROM THE DEPTHS OF SIN
AND DELIVERED FROM
THE BONDS OF MERE PROFESSION
AND SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS
AND LED TO REST ENTIRELY
FOR SALVATION
IN THE FINISHED ATONEMENT AND
PERFECT OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST**

**THOUGH I AM A STRANGER
TO OTHERS AND A WONDER TO
MYSELF YET I KNOW HIM (CHRIST)
OR RATHER AM KNOWN OF HIM.**

**WHERE SIN ABOUNDED GRACE
DID MUCH MORE ABOUND**

**OH BRING NO PRICE!
GOD’S GRACE IS FREE
TO PAUL, TO MAGDALENE, TO ME**



BLESSED IN HIM

Blessed is he whose guilt is gone,
Whose sins are washed away with blood
Whose hope is fixed on Christ alone;
Whom Christ hath reconciled to God.
Though travelling through this vale of tears,
He many a sore temptation meet,
The Holy Ghost this witness bears
He stands in Jesus still complete.
This act of grace no works can claim,
He that finds this is rich indeed,
This pure white stone contains a name
Which none but who receives can read.
This precious gift, this bond of love,
The Lord gives to His people here;
But what we all shall be above,
Does not, my brethren, yet appear.

THE WONDROUS WORKS OF GOD

How wondrous are the works of God
Displayed through all the world abroad!
Immensely great, immensely small!
Yet one strange work exceeds them all.

He formed the sun, fair fount of light,
The moon and stars, to rule the night;
But night and stars, and moon and sun,
Are little works compared with one.

He rolled the seas and spread the skies,
Made valleys sink and mountains rise;
The meadows clothed with native green,
And made the rivers glide between.

The wondrous works of God (cont.)

But what are seas, or skies, or hills
Or verdant vales and gliding rills,
To wonders man was born to prove,
The wonders of redeeming love?

Almighty God took human flesh,
The Lord of life went into death,
And with His blood He paid sin's debt
God's holy claims forever met.

Blest with this faith, then let us raise,
Our hearts in love, our voice in praise;
All things to us must work for good,
Who put our trust in Jesus' blood.

THE LAMB OF GOD

Lamb of God we fall before Thee
Humbly trusting in Thy cross;
That alone be all our glory
All things else are dung and dross.

The Lamb of God (cont.)

When we live on Jesus' merit
Then we worship God aright;
To the Father, Son and Spirit,
Our true praises we unite.

Testimony Section

LETTERS FROM BENIN

During last year a number of enquiries and testimonies were received from Benin City, Nigeria. A selection of these is given below. Though names are omitted or have been changed, all the items are from named individuals.

1. A testimony to a changed life

In November 2016 I rededicated my life to Jesus Christ. I wanted to tell people I was saved so one day I went forward at church and told everyone publicly that I had repented and wanted to

rededicate my life to Jesus Christ. Since then the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit has changed my life.

Life is good now that I know I am saved by the grace of God and the blood of the Lamb. I have had many days that the old self has shown its ugly face but it is great to know that Jesus died for my past, present and future sins. I am so glad the Lord changed me because I know I could not have done it myself. I still have a long way to go and know that I will never be perfect until the Good Shepherd takes me home to be with Him. I am presently trying to spend as much time as I can seeking the Saviour as I know that the more time you spend with someone the more you will start acting like them.

I was and still am very excited and enthusiastic about the fact I am going to spend forever with the Lord Jesus Christ - the One that bought and paid for me with His very own blood. I look forward to the day that He will call His Church from this earth to be with Him. This encourages me every day as I think about it.

I am married. My wife and I have been married since 8 years ago. We have three daughters. I praise the Lord for blessing me with both my wife and daughters. He was good to send me such a help mate and wonderful daughters

2 Mormons are quite active in parts of Africa and several enquiries were from people who were wondering whether to go to Mormon services. The following testimony is from a lady who, while brought up as a Mormon, eventually came to real faith in Christ.

My pathway to faith was not an easy one, especially as I was once member of the Mormons. For those who have come out of Mormonism, lack of trust is one of the biggest obstacles to overcome. When reaching the conclusion that the teachings of Mormonism are not true it becomes a dramatic shock to those who grew up in the Mormon system. An unquestioning trust

in the Mormon prophets and leaders and their teachings is practically mandated and vigorously taught at a very early age. When Mormons are brought to the point that they must reject the teachings of Mormonism, it is heart-wrenching. The experience of utter betrayal typically leads an ex-Mormon down the path of unbelief. Who can they trust to tell the truth? Finding truth is the story of my journey from Mormonism to the Christian faith.

I was raised as a Mormon and was a devoted follower. I was married in the Mormon temple, but my husband left the Mormons over an incident with a bishop. Wanting to stay loyal to my husband, I also left but continued to fervently pray that if Mormonism was true, God would lead me back some day. Though I was torn and distressed in leaving, the Lord used this event and other challenging circumstances in my life to lead me to the risen Christ of the Bible.

My journey had already begun when I was a teenager when a Baptist preacher spoke to me about the truth of God's Word, but I could not understand what he said. It was like listening to Greek. Ten years later I started attending a women's Bible study. I was very arrogant in my knowledge of the Bible. I could not connect with the group and I felt I was just a project to those ladies. Then I attended a church evangelism meeting. The Lord used that meeting to bring me to faith.

It has taken over fifteen years to sort out my thinking. The Lord has used a number of different circumstances to teach me first to trust the Bible to be true and then to understand what He really means in His Word and not what I was told that it meant. The fact is that the Devil has taken the Bible and put a distorted meaning to it amongst the Mormons. One of my favourite scriptures is, 'Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' (John 8:32) That truth isn't always pretty, but it is liberating in the Lord.

I praise the Lord that the Holy Spirit has brought me to faith in

the Jesus of the Bible. I am thankful that I can fully take Him at His word. Finally, I am encouraged again to see the power of God's word at work in people's hearts – even those lost souls who have been terribly misguided in their perceptions of God. I am thankful that I found a loving Christian ministry in my village and glad to be part of it.

3 The next three contributions are included to give an insight to the pagan background of some who have now come to faith in Christ

Here in my village in a mountainous region there is a house set apart from the others and owned by a tribal chief priest. The entrance is smeared with the blood of a goat and it is said that to escape death, judgement and hell one needs to go inside and pray. I have seen many people who are aged and far wiser than myself going into this house and even my closest neighbour goes into this house to worship. I am considering going there too but quickly the thought came to me to ask, 'Is this in agreement with what the Bible teaches?' Please let me know.

Let me share my short testimony with you. My parents taught me to pray to a god before going to bed and to blow a horn or trumpet to communicate with the goddess on the help I needed from her in a temple on a mountain in my village. But when the true gospel of Jesus Christ arrived in my village through some local missionaries I truly embraced it — it was the gospel of salvation in the Person of Jesus Christ- the Son of God. Today it is Jesus Christ that I serve in truth and believe in Him.

Sometime ago I purchased an icon — a picture of the face of Jesus - from a witch doctor who had a great reputation where I lived. He told me to fix it to the door of the bedroom to make this a 'door to paradise'. If I died in the night the door would spiritually open and I would go to heaven straight away.

Years later I met a missionary who counselled me on the true word of God and I believed all he said about the True and Living God and trusted in Jesus for myself. Days later I returned the picture to the witch doctor but this caused me to lose favour with the village chiefs and with the witch doctor, who tried to harm me and told me that I would not live very long. Well, till today I am alive and the witch doctor's predictions about my life never came true. Thank God - who has the power of life in His hands.

4 Here is an exchange of e-mail with a man who asks what many people ask today: 'Is the Bible out of date?'

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I am 65 years old. I hope you are able to help me. Recently I received a gift from a group of people (probably Mormons [Ed.]) for my daughter on her birthday. I loved this book with its front cover showing a picture of Jesus Christ, but later I discovered many things in the book contradicted what the Bible said, and also comments that the Bible was outdated. Please tell me:

Are there lost/missing books of the Bible

Can a changing world make the word of God in the Bible to change also?

Here is the reply he received:

Dear Ben,

Thank you for writing. It is good to hear from you. You are wise to be wary of books which say that the Bible is out of date. The Bible is God's written word and therefore does not date like other books. God has not changed in His love for us and we have not changed in our need for cleansing from our sins, which have brought in a distance between us and God. The words of Isaiah are still true: that all have sinned and all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned each to his own way. It is because we have each turned to our own way and done what

pleases us that the world has got into the state it is as away from God.

If we have turned away from God, God has not given us up. He sent His only beloved Son (Jesus) to suffer at Calvary and bear the judgement of our sins so that every one who trusts in Him will be saved. If you are troubled about your sins and want to be right with God, you need to ask the Lord Jesus to come into your life, cleanse you from your sins and be your Saviour. If you pray like this and really mean it you will find peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The attachment “Forgiveness of Sins” sets out the gospel more fully.† There are no lost books or books missing from the Bible, though there are references in the Bible to other books which are not included in the Bible. The New Testament is full of quotations from the Old Testament and this is a proof of the oneness and wholeness of the Bible.

5. Finally, a cheering message from a lady who has known the Lord for some years

Hello, dear ! I’m a sinner saved and changed by the wonderful grace of God. Years ago, God reached down from heaven and changed the heart of a confused, undeserving young wife and mother - me. He used a gentle, sincere Christian to explain the good news about the grace of God in a way that went straight to my heart. I asked God for forgiveness that night, gave my life to Christ, and I’ve never been the same since. Oh I still mess up, but as I turn to God, He gets me right back on my feet and moves me forward with His amazing unconditional love. I also began a consuming desire to know the Bible—and God’s Word has been transforming my life ever since but do not have a personal copy so I make request for a copy, as this Bible will be my spiritual nourishment and daily guide. I know - reading the Bible will keep me closer to God, reminding me that He is my heavenly Father and I am His child.

This lady was sent a Bible early in January 2018.

† See “A Word for Today” in this issue of *Living Water*

A Voice from the Past

PERFECTION IN PROSPECT

If we could arrive at perfection as creatures here, what would it be in comparison with being conformed to the image of God's Son in glory? (See Romans 8:29) It is blessed to see Christ, after purging our sins, seat Himself on high. But He has entered there as our Forerunner and the magnificence of grace is that we are to be with Him and like Him there. We shall, however, never be thinking, 'How glorious we are', but –

Spotless in that heavenly light
Of all Thy sufferings talk

The glory will enable us to view the sufferings of Christ in a way all its own.

T. H. Reynolds (1830 – 1930)

A Word for Today

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

"If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" Psalm 130:3-4.

Introduction

I want to speak about forgiveness of sins – a simple and elementary subject but one that should be of concern to everyone. All may not care to consider it. Alas, we know that there are some who never will. The Lord Jesus speaks of such three times in the eighth chapter of John's gospel.

He says to the unbelieving Jews: *"I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and ye shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come" (John 8:21).* And again: *"I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24).* Solemn words those!

Death is never a light thing, even the death of a believer in the Lord Jesus, where all is marked by a sense of victory and you know that their departure is *“to be with the Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:23)*. As you stand around even such a death bed there is a hush on everyone’s spirit; but to see a man or a woman dying in their sins – who can describe it?

Is there one here tonight, a persistent rejecter of Christ? You have got to die. What is the prospect before you? You must leave this world. Where are you going? I ask in all solemnity – is it to be with Christ? Impossible if you abide in your sins, for of such He says: *“Whither I go, ye cannot come” (John 8:21)*. For you there is only the dark, outside place, where the rejecters of Christ are cast. But while I speak thus, forgiveness of sins is available to all. The most advanced saint that ever lived (even Paul or John) entered the pathway of Christianity by the door of forgiveness. That door is still open, and all need to enter by it *“For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)* .

Now I want to look at forgiveness in four ways:

- the necessity for it;
- the source of it;
- the basis of it; and
- the extent of it.

What is sin?

Before I speak of the necessity of forgiveness, I would like to ask you, ‘What do you think sin is?’ I do this because there are many standards and ideas current in regard to sin. What is sin? The Bible answers that question:

“The thought of foolishness is sin” (Proverbs 24:9)

Did you ever have a foolish thought? It is sin.

“All unrighteousness is sin” (1 John 5:17)

Who has not committed an unrighteous act? Such an act is sin.

“Sin is lawlessness” (1 John 5:17)

What is lawlessness? Pleasing yourself! Did you ever please yourself? That is sin.

The first act of sin ever committed in this world, what was it? It was not, as we may estimate it, a very drastic thing. It was a woman pleasing herself. Sin is lawlessness.

The necessity of forgiveness

Sin can only be measured by the holiness of God, because every sin is against God. David recognised this in Psalm 51. He had committed adultery and murder but, conscience stricken, his thoughts rise to God in regard of his guilt. He does not think of how he had wronged Bathsheba and Uriah. No! He says: *“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned” (Psalm 51:4)*. Sin can only be measured by the holiness of God. I know that men make standards for sin and talk of venial sins and those that are not venial, but in doing so they expose their folly for they minimise the character of sin and degrade the holiness of God.

You may say, ‘If these things be true, you leave no standing for any man’. That is true, and it is exactly what the Psalmist says in the scripture we read: *“If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand?” (Psalm 130:3)*. The Psalmist says later, *“Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins” (Psalm 90:8)*. Young man, young woman, how about those secret sins? They are not hidden from God. The Bible says, *“Thou hast set ... our secret sins in the light of thy countenance” (Psalm 90:8)*.

You must face the truth sooner or later. Why not face it now? Before I was converted I had committed enough sins to send me to hell a thousand times, and any man honest with himself would admit the same thing.

Is there anyone who would dare to stand up and say that they had never committed one sin? I tremble for you if you do. It only proves you to be one of the biggest sinners on the face of the earth. The Bible says: *“If we say that we have not sinned, we*

make him (God) a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:10).

For one sin, Adam lost the Garden of Eden. For one sin, Moses was forbidden to enter into the land of Canaan. If you die with one sin on your soul unpardoned, heaven is closed against you for ever.

For one sin, Adam lost the Garden of Eden

The law of Moses proved all to be sinners. There were ten commandments in that law. What was the bent of it? Did it forbid certain overt acts only? No! It did more than that. Had it been a question of overt acts only, Paul could have stood before the law. *"Thou shalt not kill"*. He had not killed. *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"*. He had not done that. *"Thou shalt not steal"*. He had not stolen. He could stand before such commandments and say, 'Not guilty'. But when he came to the tenth commandment, he was exposed. What is the tenth? *"Thou shalt not covet"*. That commandment forbade the least movement in regard to what was evil. The sting of the law was in the tail. There it was! *"Thou shalt not covet" [or lust] (see Exodus 20:13-17).*

You might as well tell a healthy person not to breathe as tell a fallen child of Adam not to lust. It searches everyone out. When Paul reached the tenth commandment it exposed him.

Years ago in this city, a man said to his little boy, 'Run and wash your face, and I will take you to Lincoln Park to see the bears.' By and by the boy came back but his father said, 'Your face is still dirty', but the boy insisted he had washed it properly. Eventually his father just picked him up and held him in front of a mirror. The boy could see for himself that his face was dirty! The law is like that mirror. *"By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20).* It proves our need of forgiveness.

The source of forgiveness

What can be more delightful to a man preaching forgiveness

than to trace it to its source? Most of the rivers in the world have been traced to their source. In some cases the source may be difficult to be sure of, but, thank God, the stream of forgiveness can be traced to its source, right to the heart of the blessed God. Years ago, when I had not been long converted, I used to preach in the street with a man who had a most remarkable history. He had been a clergyman but he had given way to drink and had been degraded. I doubt whether he had been a believer at this time but later he was brought to the Lord and had a most remarkable grip of the truth. The last Sunday night he spent on earth, I remember standing with him on a street corner preaching the gospel. The next day I had an urgent call to go and see him in hospital. When he saw me he said, 'I am going to die'. I replied, 'My dear brother, you can't be going to die, I could not spare you.' 'Yes', he said, 'I am going to die, and if they put a tombstone over my grave, see that they inscribe on it these words:

A monument of grace,
A sinner cleansed by blood,
A stream of love, I trace
Up to the fountain – God.
And in that stream, my soul can see
Eternal thoughts of love for me.

He passed away the next day. That dear man had navigated the stream of forgiveness right up to the fountain head. Have you? How beautifully the Psalmist puts it here: *"If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who should stand?"* But he says to the very God in whose presence you and I have no standing room, *"there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared"* (Psalm 130:3-4). Is it not wonderful?

The prophet Micah tells us: *"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity...He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy... thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea"* (Micah 7:19). It is God's prerogative to forgive.

It is a stream that flows from God's heart to us.

The basis of forgiveness

God must have a righteous basis if He is going to forgive sins. There is a passage in Exodus which puzzled me for years and I am sure that the passage is inexplicable apart from the cross of Christ.. It says: *"the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"*. And then what? *"And that will by no means clear the guilty"* (Exodus 34:6-7). You say, 'That is a flat contradiction!' The first part is music to my ears. Repeat it! I will, *"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful, and gracious, longsuffering"*. Oh, you say, 'That is just the kind of God I need. *"Abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin."* Yes! And then? *"And will by no means clear the guilty"*. Here is a paradox that can only be explained in the light of the cross of Christ. But in the understanding of this paradox you will have a basis laid in your soul by which you can understand the righteousness of God, the ground on which He is free to forgive the greatest sinner on the face of the earth.

Yes, God delights in mercy, but not in the way that people often speak of mercy. A godless man dies and people say, 'Oh, he will be in heaven for God is very merciful'. What do they mean by that? I will tell you. They think that God regards sin as lightly as they do. That is the common thought as to God being merciful. God is merciful but He can overlook nothing! Every sin you ever committed must either be judged in you or in Christ.

God must have a righteous basis if He is going to forgive sin and that basis has been provided in the death of Christ. We read in Romans: *"Whom God has set for a propitiation (or mercy seat) through faith in his blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God"* (Romans 3:25).

It is the solemn fact that God can *“by no means clear the guilty”* that makes the cross of Christ what it is! I am certain that we do not dwell sufficiently upon the sufferings of Christ. If we dwelt upon them more, we would hate sin more, and love Christ more. How poverty stricken I feel when I come to say a word on the sufferings of Christ.

Look at Gethsemane. How solemn it is! Satan is allowed of God to do his worst against Christ, in pressing on His holy soul all that was involved in going to the cross. And how deeply Christ felt in all! In absolute human perfection, He shrank from it. With great drops of sweat falling from His body, He cries, *“Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done”* (Luke 22:42). Yet in perfect obedience He goes forward. He goes through the conflict of Gethsemane – in spite of all the pressure – in perfect communion with God. There is no cloud on His spirit there.

He even acknowledges an angel’s support. Think of it, I appeal to you! The One who created the universe, there He is in weakness and sorrow, accepting the support of an angel. He would have welcomed the support of the disciples, but they slept! Oh the solemnity of Gethsemane. Let us stand in awe as we contemplate His sorrows, and these are only in anticipation of the cross.

Would to God my spirit, would to God your spirit might be touched more deeply with the sufferings of Christ! I repeat it, we would love Him more and hate the sin that brought Him there with an intensity that we have never done before. Well, that is the character of Gethsemane. It is Satan’s power – Satan and Christ. But the Lord goes through in perfect communion with God.

When you come to the three hours of darkness at the cross, there is no communion. There was absolute forsaking! There was never such a moment on earth, in heaven, or in hell, and

in time or eternity there will never be such another. No sinner, no lost soul in the lake of fire, will ever taste what Christ tasted at Calvary, for a sinner in the lake of fire will suffer in regard of sins in which they had pleasure, and will never fully realise what sin is in God's sight. But at Calvary there was One who hated sin, who shrank from it, feeling in perfect holiness what sin was to God. Yet He becomes the sin-offering, and the God *"That will by no means clear the guilty"* must deal with Him as though He was the offender. Although He had passed through the sorrows of Gethsemane in perfect unbroken communion, in the deep gloom of Calvary's cross there was nothing for Him but judgment. Not a ray of light! Not one drop of comfort in that bitter cup. It was that which caused the deep cry to break forth: *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34)*

I see the Saviour there alone, forsaken. No angel to strengthen Him. God hiding His face from Him, and yet (may I use the language) in the solitary dignity of His complete forsaking, great enough to bear the full weight of divine judgment against sin, and at infinite cost to Himself, securing the glory of God. If ever God could have passed over sin, it would have been then, but He has given proof to the whole universe that He can *"by no means clear the guilty"*.

Do you wonder that God has exalted Christ to the highest height, for through Him He has secured what delights His heart – the fullest right to dispense, in perfect righteousness, the forgiveness of sins.

Some years ago I read a story about Emperor Nicholas of Russia. One night he was restless and took a walk around the officers' quarters and was surprised to see a light still burning in the officers' mess. He went in and sitting at a table, all alone, was a young officer; he had led a wild and dissipated life and contracted gambling debts that he could never pay, so there was nothing before him but disgrace and dismissal. He had been totalling on a piece of paper his debts. They were very great

and he had no hope of meeting them. Wearied with anxiety he had written on the paper, 'Who will meet these debts?' Then he had fallen into a hopeless

God has only one thought for every person—forgiveness

sleep. The Emperor took in the situation at a glance. He took up the list of debts and underneath the question, 'Who will meet these debts?' he signed 'Nicholas' and walked out. Those debts were as good as paid, for there was the Emperor's signature. But it cost him no sorrow. It did not cost him his son. There was no Gethsemane, no Calvary. But from the heart of the blessed God tonight there flows down by way of Calvary's cross a stream of forgiveness. And at the foot of all your terrible liabilities God can subscribe His own name, as we read in Ephesians: *"Be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you"* (Ephesians 4:32).

The extent of forgiveness

God having raised up Jesus from the dead addresses Himself to every individual as a forgiving God. He has only one thought for every person – forgiveness. That is His thought for you.

There is a parable in Luke of a certain creditor who had two debtors, the one owed him five-hundred pence and the other fifty; when they had nothing to pay he frankly forgave them both (see Luke 7:40-42). I was never in business for myself and consequently never had the misfortune to fail in business but I have the greatest sympathy for those that do. Some of them have to do with the most exacting and unreasonable creditors. But if I never failed in business, I failed hopelessly in my responsibilities in regard to God, and when God by His Spirit awakened me, and I saw I was an utter bankrupt, I got the surprise of my life. God could have fastened my liabilities upon me. He could have hailed me to the judge and have the judge deliver me to the officer, and the officer could have cast me into

prison, from whence I would not emerge until I had paid the very last penny (see Matthew 5:25-26). But what did He do, that wondrous Creditor? Instead of casting me into prison, He went Himself into the prison house of death for me! He paid the last mite in His precious blood, and He said to me 'I have nothing against you!' *"When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both"* (Luke 7:42). That is the message that God in Christ speaks to you.

What are you going to do with it? Are you going out of this hall refusing such an offer, despising such a God, such a Christ? May God give you tonight to avail yourself of the grace of such a wondrous Creditor as that.

In the incident in Luke chapter 7 referred to above, you may remember that there was one who appreciated that Creditor. She showed it by what she did; her tears of contrition and kisses of affection showed that her heart appreciated such a Saviour and she went out of that house with those words of His: *"Thy sins are forgiven... Go in peace"* (Luke 7:50).

'Ah', you say 'That is just what I need. I wish you would explain to me the plan of salvation' There is no plan. It is all in a Person – our Lord Jesus Christ. It is all that blessed Man whom God raised up (see Acts 5:30-31). I commend Him to you, God's Christ, the Head of every man, the One whom God has raised from the dead and in whom He announces forgiveness to whosoever will. I commend Him to you tonight. Will you have Him as your Saviour? If you will invite Him into your heart and life, you may go from this hall conscious of this: *"Thy sins are forgiven... Go in peace"* (Luke 7:50).

Herbert Gill

A preaching of the gospel, Chicago, January 1918

Bible quotations in this article are taken from the Authorised (King James) Version of the Bible.