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LIVING WATER

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Recent Ministry

FROM DARKNESS TO GOD'S WONDERFUL LIGHT

The transformation brought about by receiving the gospel

“For we were once ourselves also without intelligence, disobedient, wandering in error, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and love to man of our Saviour God appeared, not on the principle of works which have been done in righteousness which we had done, but according to his own mercy he saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, having been justified by his grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The word is faithful, and I desire that thou insist strenuously on these things, that they who have believed God may take care to pay diligent attention to good works. These things are good and profitable to men.” Titus 3:3-8

This is the last day of 2017. There have been various comments in the press about people's assessment of the year, some looking back and giving an assessment politically, others economically, others from the sports point of view. I have also read a few letters sent out around Christmas time where persons give an account of their families and friends, the things they have done and what they have not done over the past year.

In this scripture Paul, writing to another Christian called Titus, is looking back. He is looking back to what he had been like and what Titus had been like. He says, *“we were once...”*. But what a change had taken place in their lives!

They were from very different backgrounds. The apostle Paul was a Jew, a very particular Jew. He calls himself a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He would have been very careful about the

tinest details of the law and what had been added to it by the Rabbis, but he was actually quite far from what was pleasing to God. Jesus described the Pharisees of his day as being like whited sepulchres because they appeared beautiful from the outside but inside they were like ravening wolves. They devoured the houses of widows, He said, *“and as a pretext make long prayers”* (Luke 20:47). Paul was one of these. I am not saying that he was literally in the company of Jesus when He was here, but that describes what Paul was like. He was a Jew, brought up to be very zealous for the commandments of God as he then understood them.

Titus was a different kind of man. He was not a Jew, he was a Greek. He would be very, very different from the apostle Paul. I do not know where he came from. I do not know quite how he came to faith in Jesus.

We know how Paul came to faith in Jesus because we have three accounts of it in the Acts. Paul describes it twice and Luke describes it as well. We do not know how Titus came to faith but Paul calls him ‘his child’ so I think that Titus would have been converted through hearing the apostle Paul. We know that Titus was closely associated with Paul in Christian ministry.

Paul refers to Titus a number of times when he is writing his letter to the Christians at Corinth. We also know from this book that he had been working with the apostle Paul in Crete. But Titus and Paul were very different: one was a Greek, one was a Jew. We do not know what Titus was like before he was converted – but, if we go to Acts 17 we find what many of the Greeks were like then. Many of them were very cultured people, they had knowledge of philosophy but they also worshipped idols; they had all kinds of gods. Virtually every human lust became a god to the Greeks. When Paul was in

Athens he saw all kinds of shrines to different gods. His spirit was painfully excited within him seeing these people given up to idolatry. Titus would have been one of those folk.

So Paul and he were very different people naturally but in Christ they became unified. The gospel changes people like you and me and make us different from what we had been like.

Paul writing here to his friend Titus gives him a commission. Titus was a kind of apostolic delegate, left in Crete to help the Christian believers there. He was to make sure that believers there were genuinely under the Lordship of Christ, doing what pleased God. This was necessary for Christian witness because those living in Crete were surrounded by a culture that was alien to Christianity.

Visitors to Crete today can view artefacts from the Minoan civilisation but it was a civilisation that did not know the true God. The people of Crete in Paul's time were just like people in Glasgow or Paisley or where I live, people doing all kind of evil things and with wrong ideas; many of them were atheists without the knowledge of God.

Now Paul writing to Titus looks back over what he and Titus once were like. He associates himself with Titus: two people with different upbringings, different personalities and with different ways in which they had lived. But Paul says of himself Paul and Titus, *"we were once ourselves also without intelligence"*. That does not mean to say that they had no brains. It meant they were both without the knowledge of the true God as revealed by Jesus.

Titus we can understand; he worshipped false gods, he worshipped idols, bowed down, perhaps, to gods of wood or stone. Paul had been brought up as a Jew to worship the One True God; he knew about the Law of Moses, but he did not

recognise Jesus. He did not know that Jesus was the Messiah. He did not know that the Jesus who walked here and served here and died here was the Son of God. He was without intelligence as to these facts. This was demonstrated at the death of Stephen when Paul stood by and allowed a man to be martyred. Angry people picked up stones and stoned Stephen to death because he was a witness of Jesus. Paul was responsible for his death. It does not say that he threw any stones himself but he looked after the clothes of people who had stripped off to have power in their elbows and arms to throw stones and kill the martyr Stephen. He says, *“we were once ourselves also without intelligence”*.

But then he also says, *“disobedient”*, disobedient to God, disobedient to the word of God. Jesus said later to Paul, *“it is hard for thee to kick against goads” (Acts 26:14)*. I am sure that when witnessing the death of Stephen he was kicking against the goads that pricked him in his conscience. How powerful is the witness in the lives of genuine believers in Jesus!

Disobedience, of course, is described in the Bible, right from the start. In Genesis 3: man became disobedient to God. He was told ‘You are not to eat from this tree; you can eat of all the other trees in the Garden of Eden, enjoy the fruit, enjoy the scenery’. Eden was a very attractive place. But they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man disobeyed God and disaster came into this world.

“By the disobedience of the one man the many have been constituted sinners” (Romans 5:19). Disobedience describes you and me and Paul and Titus and everyone else. And what came about through disobedience was man’s inhumanity to man. In Chapter 3 of Genesis, man became wrong in relation to God: in chapter 4 of Genesis man did wrong in relation to

others: Cain killed his brother Abel.

What else does Paul say? Some things that are not very pleasant are listed in this letter. He says they were *“Wandering in error”*. Have you ever wandered in error? I know what it is to wander in error. Wandering in error means they came off the rails in relation to the plan of God.

All the Jews should have realised that Jesus was the Messiah. He was born according to a divine timetable in Bethlehem. He did the works of the Messiah. He opened the eyes of the blind. He caused the deaf to hear. Read Isaiah chapter 35. The Jews should have recognised that Jesus was the Messiah. As foretold by the prophet Zechariah Jesus came into Jerusalem on the foal of an ass. All these scriptures were fulfilled. They should have known who He was. Paul was wandering in error as well as Titus.

Paul says, *“serving various lusts and pleasures”*. I understand that serving means serving as a slave — a slave to various lusts and pleasures. This world is full of addictions. People have addictions to drink, to drugs, to gambling and the like. Society is plagued with addictions. Paul writes about *“serving various lusts and pleasures”*. Then he adds, *“living in malice and envy”*. How much we know of envy and malice: people trying to do bad things to one another!

He says, ‘We were like that’. We: Paul, Titus, *“we were once ourselves...”*. Here is Titus being left in Crete to set things among believers and encourage them too. Paul is reminding Titus that we ourselves were once; *“living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another”*.

We were talking earlier today about how Christians should be in relation to one another: this is how Christians should not be in relation to one another – hating one another. That is what it says here, *“hateful, and hating one another”*. Yet

that is what had marked them both once upon a time. Paul had hated the name of Jesus and had hated Christians. He had tried to do everything he could against the spread of Christianity.

Then he writes, *“But”*. Thank God for these ‘buts’ in the Bible. What a change! *“But when the kindness and love to man of our Saviour God appeared”*. Here is Paul looking back over his own history, looking back over the history of Titus and then saying, *“But... God”*.

“But when the kindness and love to man of our Saviour God appeared”. I love this expression *“our Saviour God”* that appears three times in this letter! *“The kindness and love to man of our Saviour God appeared”*. Where did it appear? It appeared when Jesus was here.

Jesus showed kindness to all types of people. He was kind to the beggar who was sitting by the roadside begging. He was kind to rich Zacchaeus who was up a tree; He told him to come down and that day He brought salvation to that man’s house. Jesus brought salvation to the fellow in the gutter and brought salvation to the man who had loads of money. He was kind. *“The kindness and love to man of our Saviour God appeared”*.

Think of the way Jesus showed kindness and compassion when He was here. Think, for example, of the widow of Nain. What a disaster had happened to her: she had lost her husband, then she lost her son. What devastating circumstances! Jesus drew near to Nain and there she was, her son being carried out to be buried. Jesus had compassion on her. The kindness and love to man of our Saviour God appeared in an outstanding way in Jesus as it had never appeared before. The days of the Son of man on earth were special days.

Paul reminds Titus that, *"The kindness and love to man of our Saviour God appeared, not on the principle of works which have been done in righteousness which we had done, but according to his own mercy he saved us"*. We do not get saved by works; nobody gets saved by works. *"Ye are saved by grace, through faith; and this not of yourselves; it is God's gift:"* (Ephesians 2:8). Salvation is not by works, not by our own merits.

It was not the merits of Titus or Paul that brought them salvation. However zealous Paul was for the Lord after his conversion, he was not saved through his fervent service; he was saved through the mercy of *"our Saviour God"*. It was not through works that he had done in *"righteousness which we had done, but according to his own mercy"* that Paul was saved.

God had mercy on Adam and Eve after they sinned. They had tried to do works to merit God's favour. They covered themselves with fig leaves they had sewn together and thought that would do for God. Some people think today that if they do this or that good deed they might merit God's favour. No human works are sufficient for God!

God provided. *"According to his own mercy"*. It says He made coats of skin. Animals had to be killed in order to provide coats of skin. That was God's provision to clothe Adam and Eve. A symbol, we might say, of what God has done through the death of Jesus. *"He who, yea, has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all"* (Romans 8:32). Think of the sacrifice of Jesus.

It was according to God's own mercy that He saved us *"through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit"*. There are different ideas about what this 'washing of regeneration' means. Obviously, we have to be born again;

we have to be regenerated inside. However, I think the footnote in the Darby Bible is correct in saying that it refers to the way that people are completely changed, delivered from the whole world system through the death of Christ; but it is according to His own mercy that God did it.

The *“washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour”*. Is that not wonderful? God’s gospel is a full gospel; it is a rich gospel. God is a generous God, He provides in a full way, He has provided a Saviour in Jesus and He pours out the Holy Spirit to indwell people who believe in Jesus; it is all part of His abundant provision.

So it says, *“...the Holy Spirit, which he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour”*. It is wonderful to be enriched. These are true riches. Any riches that we might have in the bank or in property or in anything else we will one day leave behind. But when you have riches in Christ they will last for all eternity. It is wonderful to have wealth that abides eternally.

Paul tells Titus, an apostolic delegate left in Crete to help Christians and make sure that they became obedient to Christ, to remind them of what God has done through Jesus to provide an enriched provision – *“poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour”*.

When you think about the pouring out you think of what Jesus said when He instituted the supper, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you”* (Luke 22:20). Think of the death of Jesus – the blood of Christ poured out to cleanse you from your sins, to cleanse me from my sins, to cleanse Titus and Paul from their sins, – available now to cleanse any one from their sins, because, *“whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Acts 2:21).

And then he says, *“that, having been justified by his grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”*.

‘Justified’ means that we are cleared of every charge against us.

Wonderful! *“Who shall bring an accusation against God’s elect? It is God who justifies: who is he that condemns?” (Romans 8:33, 34)*. A hymn says: -

*Happy and justified, free,
Saved by my blessed Redeemer.*

It is wonderful to know what it is to be justified, cleared in God’s sight of everything against us.

Sometimes Satan brings to our minds past sins, things we are ashamed about. It is quite right to be ashamed about wrong things we have done. Titus and Paul would have been ashamed of some things they had done. But each had been justified, cleared of all the charges before God, because Christ bore the entire penalty for each on the cross at Calvary. The result is that anyone will go free by trusting in Jesus.

So it says, *“having been justified by his grace”*, the grace of God, *“we should become heirs”*. The expression “heirs” reminds me of Luke chapter fifteen. We are brought to enjoy something that we never had before. The younger son must have thought he had lost everything through his profligacy, going away from his home, ruining his life and wasting his wealth. But he came into something he had never had before; it says, *“they began to make merry” (Luke 15:24)*. You come into something in Christianity that is not just for this life, not just for a few years but for eternity. What we have in Christ will abide, and abide for ever.

So he says, *“having been justified by his grace we should*

**It is wonderful
to know what it
is to be justified**

become heirs according to the hope of eternal life". I thank God I have a hope. I know people who do not have a hope. They try to make the best of this life. People talk about their bucket list, things they want to do before they die. I thank God that there is something better before me than just doing a few things before I die. I have a hope that centres in Jesus. I am going to be with Him for ever. I am going to be like Him for ever. I am going to be in His presence for ever. I am going to see His glory and share with Him, share with Him as part of His bride. What a hope Christians have! The life we have in Christ through repentance of our sins, through faith in Him, we are going to have in eternity. It is not going to end. It is not going to stop. Some things stop, death finishes them, but what Christians have in Christ is for eternity.

People wonder about what is going to happen in this world, what the effect of Brexit is going to be, what may happen internationally and the like. The Christian has a hope that centres in Jesus — the Man in the glory, the Man who has done everything for the pleasure of God. *"The hope of eternal life"*. Think of all we have in Christ.

Now Paul says, *"The word is faithful"*. I can say 'Amen' to that. The word is faithful, it is true. Paul wanted Titus to insist strenuously on these things. The gospel therefore works out into effect in people's lives. And so he says, *"I desire that thou insist strenuously on these things, that they who have believed God may take care to pay diligent attention to good works"*. That is a word for me. I am one of those who have believed God. What about my life? Am I living in accordance with Christianity? Am I following the example of Jesus? That would work out in obeying things that are enjoined at the beginning of the chapter: *"Put them in mind to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient to rule, to be ready to do every good work, to speak evil of no one, not to be*

contentious, to be mild, shewing all meekness towards all men". These would be part of paying attention to good works. We all can become careless Christians. I have been reading through the books of Kings in the Old Testament recently, in detail, because somebody suggested the books as a subject for a Bible study in prisons. One of the things that struck me was the differences in their lives. Some of these kings started off very well, but they did not end well. Solomon started off very well as a king. He recognised he was just a little child, he felt he needed wisdom, he asked God for wisdom and he received it and initially reigned wisely. How did he end up? He ended up turning away from God. Uzziah was mainly a good king. He did many good things for God but then he became proud, his heart was uplifted against God and he sinned badly.

On the other hand there was Manasseh who led an ungodly life and had a dreadful reign — fifty-five years of a mostly bad reign. He did evil against God. He promoted idolatry among the people. He brought altars for worshipping false gods into the temple and defiled it. But then he was taken as a prisoner to Babylon and was in chains. What did he do? He turned to God. He repented. God then helped him and his life was changed for the better.

Do not give up hope for anybody! There are many people you will know, many people that I know, who do not believe in Christ. Do not give up hope for them. They can turn to God. You and I should be an example to them of what Christ has done in our lives. Then pray for such people and leave the rest to God. Manasseh as an older person turned to God in repentance and God changed his life. He came back to Israel and started to undo some of the dreadful things he had done. God can change us but let us be concerned, each one of us

who believe in Jesus, that we take care to pay diligent attention to good works. May the Lord bless us as we end this year and help us to be here for His glory for His name's sake.

Kenneth Hollands

A preaching of the gospel, Glasgow 31st December 2017.

Poetry Selection

THOU REMAINEST

Ernest Helyar and Emily Gertrude Whittuck were married in London on 13th January 1879 and lived at "Halsdon House", Luppitt, near Honiton, Devon. Their married life was quite short, since Mr Helyar died of heart problems in a nursing home at Seaton, Devon, on 11th August 1882 when he was 35. He was buried on 15th August 1882 in Luppitt churchyard. Dr Willey records that the hymn below was "written as a result of Mrs Helyar's widowhood after four years of marriage".

THOU REMAINEST

Hebrews 1

On that eternal love of Thine,
O Lord and Saviour, we recline;
Thou art our rest, and Thou alone,
Remainest when all else is gone.

Yes! "THOU REMAINEST"; sea and land,
E'en Heaven shall pass, but Thou shalt stand;
Undimmed Thy radiancy appears,
Changeless through all the changing years.

Lord, on the throne, Thy love's the same,
As once upon Thy cross of shame;
Not only didst Thou come to die,
Thou livest still for us on high.

We see Thee there, the Lamb once slain,
Thy loss was our eternal gain;
We see Thee crowned with glory now –
No shade on Thy victorious brow.

The shadow dwelt on Calvary's tree,
And now Thine unveiled face we see;
Praise be to God for that blest word,
That "THOU REMAINEST" blessed Lord

Gertrude Helyar (1849 – 1913)

This is how the hymn first appeared in print in the
September 1899 issue of "The Christian Friend and
Instructor", edited by Edward Dennett

The grave of Ernest and Emily Helyar at Luppitt Churchyard
records:

White in the blood of the Lamb

ERNEST OCTAVIUS HELYAR

Born September 19th 1846

Fell asleep August 11th 1882

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so them

Also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him

And so we shall be ever with the Lord

1 Thess. 4:14, 17

Also

EMILY GERTRUDE wife of the above

And also eldest daughter of

Joseph Whittuck Whittuck

Of Hanum Hall, Gloucestershire

She died February 8th 1913 aged 64 years

Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me may
be with me where I am.

Testimony Section

A WITNESS IN STITCHES FROM THE USA

Samplers were often prepared by young women and girls as evidence of their skill in needlework. Many such samplers expressed the personal faith of those who stitched them, or perhaps the prayerful desires of their parents for their children.

Samplers are often very beautiful embroidery and they can be seen in many museum and collections. All of the examples below were collected by Marsha Van Valin of The Scarlet Letter, Wisconsin, USA and are reproduced here with permission.

Common wordings

The two examples below show a common form of words often repeated on samplers.

Hannah Breed is my name
New England is my station
Lynn is my dwelling place
And Christ is my salvation
Hannah Breed, Age 9 1756
Lynn MA

Jesus, permit Thy gracious name to stand
As the first effort of an infant's hand
And when her fingers on the book cloth move,
Engage her tender thoughts to seek Thy love.
With Thy dear children let her have her part
And write Thy name Thyself upon her heart.
Mary Lawson, Age 8 (Scotland) 1810.

This verse is believed to have been written by John Newton, the converted slave ship Captain, for his niece, Elizabeth Catlitt. It is found on many samplers.

Texts from Scripture

Teach us to number our days that we may
apply our hearts to wisdom
Betty Manchester, Providence, R. I. July 31, 1793

This is a quotation from Psalm 90:12

For as by one man's disobedience many were
Made sinners, so by the obedience of one
Shall many be made righteous
Ann Wimp 1819

This is a quotation from Romans

A Gospel Appeal

How sweet to the soul are the breathings of peace
When the still voice of pardon bids sorrow to cease.
When the welcome of mercy falls soft on the ear:
Come hither ye laden, ye weary draw near.
There is a rest for the soul that on Jesus relies,
There's a home for the homeless prepared in the skies,
There is a joy in believing, a hope and a stay,
That the world cannot give, nor the world take away.
Elizabeth Holmes, Age 14, 1839

Statements of confidence

Life is uncertain – death is sure
Sin's the wound – and Christ's the cure
Christian Hutchenson, Macduff, 1833

While I am a pilgrim here
Let Thy love my spirit cheer
Be my God my guide and friend
Bear me to my journey's end.
Teach me what I have to do,
Every hour my strength renew;
Let me live the life of faith,
Let me die Thy people's death
Elizabeth A Goshen, Pennsylvania 1825

Personal samplers

The next two samplers seem to show that Harriet Kay and Jane Gurson had found out something about themselves.

Give me a house that will never decay
And garments that will never wear away,
Give me a Friend that will never depart,
Give me a Ruler that can rule my heart.
Harriet Kay 1813

As hatred to God and His laws mark the carnal mind,
So love to God and delight in His law are marks of a
spiritual mind.
Elizabeth Jane Gurson 1819

The Cross and the Coming of the Lord

Behold the Saviour of mankind
Nailed to the shameful tree,
How vast the love that Him inclined
To bleed and die for thee
Sarah Stavelly 1827

Life like a rapid weavers shuttle flies,
Or like a tender flower, fades and dies.
Our castles are but weak and strong the foe.
Our time is short, our death is certain too.
But as His coming is a secret still
Let us be ready, come where'er He will!
Honnor Morgan 1833

In conclusion

The Lord my Shepherd is,
I shall be well supplied
Since He is mine and I am His,
What can I want beside?
He leads me to the place
Where heavenly pasture grows
Where living waters gently pass,
And full salvation flows
Hannah Alley, 1826

The silken cord with blameless art
Joins the sampler in each part
So may we join both heart and hand
To send God's word to every land
Harriet Brown, Age 14, Massachusetts, 1822

A voice from the past

ON THE ECLIPSE OF THE MOON

Having seen the eclipse of the moon John Newton made the following note for July 30 1776:

Tonight I attended an eclipse of the moon. How great are Thy works; with what punctuality do the heavenly bodies fulfil their courses, and observe their seasons to a moment. All things obey Thee, except fallen angels and fallen man. My thoughts would have taken a serious turn, but I was not alone. I thought, my Lord, of Thine eclipse – the horrible darkness which overwhelmed Thy mind when Thou saidst, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me'. Ah, sin was the cause – my sins. Yet I do not hate sin, nor loath myself as I ought.

A few days later he wrote to his friend John Thornton, and sent him a poem on the subject:

4 August 1776

John Newton to John Thornton, Director of the Bank of England

I observed the Eclipse of the Moon on Tuesday night, till it was wholly covered by the shade, and endeavoured to draw some meditations from it, which gave rise to a hymn that was the subject of my discourse last night at the Great House – our Saviour's passion, the motions of the heavenly bodies being a pledge of His faithfulness to His promises (Jeremiah 33:20-21 & 25) and the dark seasons to which

believers are liable in this present life, were the principal points. I take the liberty to send you a copy of the hymn for no other reason than that the subject is not common, and that you have been pleased often favourably to accept what I have sent of this sort.

Yes there is a better world, where our sun shall no more go down, neither the moon withdraw its shining – or rather, both moon and sun shall be needless, for the Lord Himself shall be the Everlasting Unclouded Light of His people. Oh how different is the land we are going to, from this wilderness through which we are now passing.

I remain

Dearest Sir

Your most obedt. And obliged Servant

John Newton

ON THE ECLIPSE OF THE MOON

The moon in silver glory shone,
And not a cloud in sight;
When suddenly a shade began
To intercept her light.

How fast across her orb it spread,
How fast her light withdrew!
A circle, tinged with languid red
Was all appeared in view.

While many with unmeaning eye
Gaze on Thy works in vain;
Assist me, Lord, that I may try
Instruction to obtain.

Fain would my thankful heart and lips
Unite in praise to Thee;
And meditate on Thy eclipse
In sad Gethsemane.

Thy people's guilt, a heavy load
(When standing in their room)
Deprived Thee of the light of God,
And filled Thy soul with gloom.

How punctually eclipses move,
Obedient to Thy will
Thus shall Thy faithfulness and love,
Thy promises fulfil.

Dark, like the moon without the sun,
I mourn Thine absence, Lord!
For light or comfort I have none,
But what Thy beams afford.

But lo! The hour draws near apace,
When changes shall be o'er,
When I shall see Thee face to face,
And be eclipsed no more.

Note: Provided the sky is clear, a total eclipse of the moon should be visible in London (UK) on the night of 27th July 2018.

THE SECRET OF FAITHFULNESS – A PARABLE

A traveller discovered a beautiful villa on the shores of a lovely lake in Switzerland, far from the tourist trail. On ringing a bell at the garden gate an elderly gardener appeared. The aged man seemed glad to see a visitor and

allowed the traveller in and showed him round the well kept garden.

'How long have you been here?' the traveller asked.

'Twenty-four years', was the reply.

I suppose your master often comes to this beautiful place', said the traveller.

'No', the old man replied, 'He was last here twelve years ago'.

With some surprise the traveller asked, 'Does no one come here?'

'No, it is very seldom that even a stranger visits', said the old man.

'Well,' said the traveller with some amazement, 'You keep the garden in such perfect order as if you expected your master to come tomorrow.'

'Today, Sir! As if he were coming today!' exclaimed the old man.

"Surely I come quickly, Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

Your heart's a garden God has sown
To give your life the work it needed.
Some day He'll come to pick His flowers,
So mind you keep your garden weeded.

Anon.

(Extracted from "Things Concerning Himself" – January/February 1965 issue – a magazine edited by Charles Nunnerly.)

A Word for Today

THINGS THAT LAST

(A word at a marriage)

THE LOVE THAT LASTS

“Husbands, love your own wives, even as the Christ also loved the assembly and has delivered himself up for it.” Ephesians 5:25

THE JOY THAT LASTS

“...the feast master calls the bridegroom, and says to him, Every man sets on first the good wine, and when men have well drunk, then the inferior; thou hast kept the good wine until now.” John 2:10.

THE BEAUTY THAT LASTS

“...whose adorning, let it not be that outward one of tressing of hair, and wearing gold, or putting on apparel; but the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price.” 1 Peter 3:3-4.

Both Paul and Peter take up the subject of marriage. Paul takes it upon the heavenly line – Christ and the church. He has before him the man and the woman in the Garden of Eden. The woman was deceived by the serpent, but the man was not deceived (see 1 Timothy 2:14). Prompted by his love he went down and shared the shame and ruin of the woman. But the first man, Adam, could not bring the woman up again, or even reinstate himself. Only Christ

could do that. He went down to where the sinner lay that we might be cleansed, raised up and fitted to form His bride.

He was the Merchantman *"seeking beautiful pearls"* and He found *"one pearl of great value"* (Matthew 13:45-46). *"One"* – that showed the unity of the church. *"One pearl"* is the beauty of the church, and the *"great value"* indicated the value of the church He went down so that the church might be placed by His side, to share all His glory as Man when He has worked out all the purposes of God (see Ephesians 1).

Peter takes up marriage on the earthly line, on the line of the kingdom. John in the sign – the significant miracle at the marriage in Cana of Galilee – seems to combine both. We get there the wine run out and the empty water pots, representing the worn out and empty system of Judaism. Then death is rolled in; the water pots are filled to the brim with water and out of death comes the joy of the kingdom, the new wine, the joy which never runs out.

Now when we face the marriage condition we need to be practical. Peter's is the practical line, for he was a married man and perhaps had a family. We know that he had a mother-in-law, and no doubt when Peter's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, his wife was greatly concerned, and Peter, no doubt, too, was greatly concerned (see Mark 1:30-31). Peter knew the experiences a man may go through in the marriage condition, so he can speak feelingly about it.

Peter appeals to the wife first. The weaker vessel (see 1 Peter 3:7) is appealed to first. That is invariably the case

in Christianity – the wife before the husband, children before parents, bondmen before masters – because the point of attack of the devil is always the point of least resistance. We know in the Garden of Eden he came in through the woman – arrant coward that he was!. He did not assail the man, he assailed the woman. If she had been in the good of headship she would have gone and told her head and relied on him. But she lost the sense in her soul that she was the weaker vessel.

Peter speaks of the wife as "*the weaker vessel*" Weaker is the comparative of weak; so if the wife is the weaker vessel the husband must be the weak vessel. Both are weak, so both are dependent on the grace of God, and thus Peter speaks of them as "*Heirs together of the grace of life*" (1 Peter 3:7). So the husband is to give honour to the wife because she is the weaker vessel. He has to consider her, her individuality, her likes and dislikes. He should honour her, nourish and cherish her. The wife needs to be considered. She has a great deal to try her in the household.

How essential it is for the husband to consider the wife and to remember that she is the weaker vessel; then their prayers will not be hindered. How sad it is when the husband and the wife cannot kneel down and pray together. The husband has got the hard part in this matter, because he has to do the praying. Perhaps the wife says, 'You must be in a bad state of soul if you cannot pray with me.' It is all very well for her to say that. She has only to get down on her knees, but he has to pray and that is the harder part.

Peter shows how beautifully and beneficially a wife may influence her husband for good. We have plenty of

instances in Scripture where a wife may influence her husband for bad. The wife has a wonderful influence over the husband. There is a saying that if the husband is the head, the wife is the neck that turns the head, and there is a good deal of truth in that. Even an unconverted man may be won to God by the behaviour of his wife. The wife influences her husband more by what she is than by what she says.

The woman should be very careful in influencing her husband in regard to divine things, and specially as regards assembly matters. The wives of deacons are spoken of, because a deacon's wife may help him in his diaconal work but nothing is said of the wives of elders. The wife has nothing to do with the rule and ordering of the house of God. She should not influence her husband in these things. But she has a proper sphere of influence and can influence him for good. So Peter speaks of the behaviour of the wives. He shows that the beauty that wins her husband's affection and keeps it is not skin deep, and does not need to be augmented by what is outward. We know how many women seek to maintain their beauty by outward adornment. But what fosters and maintains the husband's affections is distinctly moral. True and abiding love between a husband and wife comes after marriage. There is a bond made then that was not made before. So Peter tells us of the beauty that lasts.

Paul takes up marriage on the love line, not the love which is simply natural, but the love which is spiritual, the love that lasts. I suppose that on the other side of death everything that is natural will be dropped, "*They neither*

**Peter shows the beauty that lasts...
“the hidden man of the heart”**

marry nor are given in marriage” (Mark 12:25).

Paul speaks of the love which lasts: *“Husbands, love your own wives, even as the Christ also loved the assembly and*

has delivered himself up for it.” (Ephesians 5:25).

John speaks of the joy that lasts, the good wine of the kingdom. All other joy will die out as the first wine did at the feast. But that which has God as its source lasts — that joy will never run out. The joy that we can trace up to God is the joy that is unfading.

Peter shows the beauty that lasts. What is that? *“the hidden man of the heart ..., which in the sight of God is of great price.” (1 Peter 3:3-4).* It is Christ. *“The hidden man of the heart”* must be Christ – Christ formed therein and therefore Christ characteristically coming out. It is that which gains and maintains the affections of the husband. Skin deep beauty fades. The wrinkles and the grey hairs must come. The form gets bent and weak, but the hidden man of the heart – that which in the sight of God is of great price – never loses its beauty. The unselfish love, the unwearied love that come out in a true wife to her husband in a hundred and one words and deeds never loses its attractiveness. It is the beauty that lasts.

S. J. B. Carter