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THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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Editorial

The speed with which society is changing leaves one speechless. Attitudes are changing, accepted rules of behaviour are being bent or discarded altogether.

There are two questions which this raises, and the beginning of a New Year seems a good time to raise them. One is, *What is the church's attitude to these changes?* Obviously, if we appoint ourselves the mouthpiece of protest against every conceivable change, we invite the world's laughter at our expense. We also forget the warning of a wiser man than we: 'Say not thou, *What is the cause that the former days were better than these?* for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this' (Eccles. 7 : 10).

But many of the changes taking place *do* affect faith and morals. So when the world asserts The Myth of God Incarnate, the church of Christ must defend The Truth of God Incarnate. And when a powerful campaign is being mounted to establish the acceptability of homosexual relationships, the church must be prepared to employ all spiritual and practical means to oppose this campaign.

The second of the questions raised is this: *What is the church doing to help her young face these changes?* They are being told that nobody believes the Bible any more; they are being constantly instructed that man was not created, but simply evolved; they are being pressurised to reject any concept whatever of absolute standards. The world is expressing its views attractively, it is putting over its approach with persistent thoroughness. What has the church to say? There is no use ignoring the problem. There is little use approaching it in a heavy, old-fashioned way; only confirming what the world has already firmly planted in the minds of the young, that the church is a thing of the past.

The church must help her young to face these issues. She must discuss their problems with that directness which the young demand. And the church must not merely say *what* she believes, but *why* she believes it, in terms that the young can fully understand.

It might be unrealistic to think that we can do much to fulfil this function in *The Gospel Magazine*. But if there are young people—we are thinking especially of those in middle and late teens—who would wish a problem discussed, we would like to hear from them.

Studies in Mark

Chapter 4 : 1-2

(Read also Matthew 13 : 1ff and Luke 8 : 4)

A new approach

The Sea is the same, the prominent figure beside it is the same, perhaps even the boat is the same boat as that mentioned already in 3 : 9. The crowd is as great as before. And yet there is a change.

That there is a change is probably reflected in Mark's words, 'He began again to teach by the sea side'. He had been teaching for some time, but now He began with a new approach. Perhaps we should have expected this from 3 : 13, where Christ was seen to concentrate His attention on a particular section of the crowd. Perhaps we should have expected it from 3 : 22-30, where the attitude of the scribes was seen to harden into open and blasphemous renunciation of the Saviour.

The style of His opening ministry, as indicated by Mark in 1 : 15, had been plain and direct. 'Repent ye and believe the gospel.' But now there is a new note; a fresh chapter in His ministry is opening. 'He taught many things by parables' (v. 2). 'And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them' (v. 33-4). That the disciples were struck by the change in approach seems indicated by Matthew. He shows us the disciples coming to Christ after hearing the parable of the sower and asking 'Why speakest thou unto them in parables?' They had noted the change, but they had not understood the reason for it.

The widening gulf

The great gulf which was now opening up between those receiving Christ and those rejecting Him is seen most clearly of all in vs. 11-12. Reading this passage at first sight we might think that, at this stage, Christ was to use the parabolic style of teaching to obscure His meaning. That this was not His intention is clear from Matthew 13 : 11-15. Here it is evident that Christ was now taking stock of something which had already taken place; He was taking account of a situation which had already developed. Many people had heard His early preaching, when He had presented the gospel with all possible simplicity and directness. But they had rejected it, as He says (Matthew 13 : 15) 'this people's heart is waxed gross; their eyes they have closed'. They had already closed their minds against the truth, 'lest they should

understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them'.

The object of Christ's change in approach can now be understood. The people had already adopted their respective attitudes to His message; but now He was to present His message in such a way as would bring out these contrasting attitudes into the open.

Some had evidenced faith, by which they had received the initial truths of the Kingdom. Such would now go on to receive deeper instruction in the mysteries of the Kingdom by means of these parables. Then would be fulfilled Christ's words (Matthew 13 : 12) 'Whosoever hath, to him shall be given'.

The others, however, who had not evidenced faith to receive the gospel in its first plain presentation, would now become more open in their opposition to it. Perhaps till now they had not said anything; perhaps till now they had maintained an appearance of having received the gospel. But now, even that appearance which they had would be taken quite away: 'But whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath'.

Interpreting the parables

How is it that Christ employs this mode of instruction so naturally? When we hear Him speaking of a farmer sowing seed in different grounds, or of two builders choosing different foundations for their houses, we cannot but say, 'A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver' (Proverbs 25 : 11). How is it that these natural scenes provided such perfect illustrations of spiritual truths? Is it not because the God of grace is also the Lord of creation? Nature and grace are two aspects of an integrated whole, two expressions of His one harmonious will.

In interpreting the parables, we must not rush to attach a spiritual meaning to every single detail. And certainly we must be careful not to build any doctrine on the basis merely of a detail found in an obscure corner of some parable. To be sure that we are not dragging these details out of context and imposing on them a meaning which is really foreign to them, we must ensure that our doctrinal interpretation of the parables has full support elsewhere in Scripture.

Our approach to the peripheral details must be determined by their relationship to the main theme of the parable. The main theme or lesson is the centre of a circle, and all minor details must be seen to relate to that as the circumference relates to the hub of a wheel.

It is clear, then, that our first task in approaching a parable is to

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Speak, Lord

PAUL TUCKER

THE CHURCH

THE MISSION AND ULTIMATE DESTINY OF THE CHURCH

Read Ephesians 1 : 1-23

Many people have an entirely wrong understanding of the nature of the church. They expect it to engage in promoting programmes which are political, social and economic, e.g. the church ought to make a united pronouncement concerning nuclear war and do something about the rising figures of unemployment. They are talking of the church universal and it is impossible for that church universal to have any centralised authority; any one voice to speak to the nation or to the world. This sort of talk reveals an abysmal ignorance of the true nature and mission of the church of Jesus Christ. Let us look at what the New Testament has to say concerning the mission of local churches. Are they to make pronouncements upon the world situation or to be engaged in direct political activity? Although slavery abounded in the Roman Empire, none of the New Testament writers directly speaks a word against that social evil. The mission of the church is something higher than to make a particular pronouncement against a particular evil.

I. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

1. *The church exists to glorify God.* 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.' What is true of an individual believer is also true of the entire church fellowship, because the entire church is made up of individual believers. See Rom. 15 : 6, 9; 2 Thes. 1 : 11, 12; Eph. 1 : 6, 12, 14, 18. 'The glory of His inheritance in the saints.' How often that verse is misunderstood. It means the Lord's inheritance in the believer. The life of a person becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit so the Lord has a portion in His people. We are not only to think of the glory of our inheritance in Christ, but we are to remember that the Lord desires an inheritance in His people. There are various ways in which we can honour and glorify God.

(a) We glorify Him by worshipping Him. Ps. 50 : 23 (R.V.). If the believer does not glorify God, who else on earth is going to? The Lord

is looking for the homage and worship in His people which is due to His holy name.

(b) We glorify Him by living a godly and useful life. John 15 : 8. When a man really does give glory to God, it affects everything else he does.

2. *The church exists to edify itself.* The church is a family of the redeemed who are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For this reason, the Lord has given ministers of the Word. Eph. 4 : 11, 12 (R.V.). The function of the pastor or teacher is so to edify the church that believers in turn can edify each other and also minister to the unconverted and reach out with a message. The minister has to do the work of an evangelist, but his primary call is a ministry to the church. The pastor does not work in the factory or office; he is given to this ministry of edifying the church 'unto the work of ministering'.

3. *The church exists to purify itself,* see Eph. 5 : 27. The church will be finally presented, every believer, faultless before the Presence of His glory. In Rev. 19 : 7, we have this picture of the marriage supper of the Lamb, 'The Lamb's wife hath made herself ready'. This process of purification has to go on now. There is a personal holiness that we have to safeguard and pursue in our daily lives. There is also a sanctifying influence that should be brought to bear upon us as a company of believers when we come together. The New Testament talks of discipline within the local church in order to purge and purify the church. Titus 2 : 12-15. Paul in writing to the Corinthians says that his ministry is a ministry for their transformation, 2 Cor. 3 : 18.

4. *The church exists to educate her members.* We should assimilate any knowledge that contributes to our usefulness as believers and strengthens our witness in the world, e.g. 1 Tim. 4 : 13. Paul is not simply speaking of the reading of the Old Testament scriptures but of other literature which could be of help to Timothy in his ministry. 2 Tim. 4 : 13: here he is referring to secular books. When he speaks of the parchments he is referring to portions of the scripture and therefore he emphasises those above all else '... but especially the parchments'. There is this emphasis upon a pursuit of a worthy knowledge. In Phil. 4 : 8 'these things' that are mentioned may be outside the realm of scripture, but they may be in the realm of art, poetry or history. The Word of God does not in any place minimise the value of genuine knowledge. Of course, the Grace of God is available to all of us, and salvation is not dependent upon head knowledge at all.

5. *The church exists to evangelise the world.* Peter says 'Ye are a chosen generation ... that ye should show forth the praises of Him

Who hath called you'. The word 'show' means to diffuse, exhibit and make visible. We are here to make visible the glories and the praises of the Lord. The church is in debt to all men, for we have a responsibility under God to take the gospel to all people. Our Lord said to His disciples, 'Lift up your eyes and look on the fields'. We must be prepared to engage in intercession for the world and for men and women to be converted: see Rom. 10 : 1; Matt. 9 : 38. It is also our responsibility to contribute to the support of those who have gone forth with the Name of the Lord Jesus upon their lips. Further, it is the responsibility of every member to be a missionary, and to engage in Christian living and Christian witness. This whole world is a mission-field; our immediate neighbourhood, as much as any other country overseas. If we do not engage in any kind of Christian service and witness, then probably we need evangelising ourselves, for we have not understood the first principle of Christian responsibility. This is the great function of the church and believers within the church, to evangelise. The New Testament talks about 'The fulness of gentiles coming in'—the great number of the elect from among the gentiles to be saved before the end of the age and the gathering up of the purpose of God for Jew and Gentile. When it will take place we do not know, but we are to contribute to the fulfilment of God's purposes by our practical living and witnessing.

6. *The church exists to be a restraining and enlightening influence in the world.* The world is full of sin and increasing lawlessness. There never was any era when there was greater cruelty abroad among men and nations. The teaching of the New Testament is that the church of God is left in the world to exercise some kind of restraining and enlightening influence. We will never finally arrest this lawlessness, that is not the function of the church, but there would be far more of it if God did not have His people in the world. 'Ye are the salt of the earth.' Salt is intended to stave off and arrest corruption. 'Ye are the light of the world'; light is intended to give illumination. This is the twofold function of the believer and of the local church in society. God holds back judgment because of the presence of a godly remnant in the earth. Judgments of the recent world wars were severe enough, but things would have been even worse but for the fact that God had and still has His people in the earth. God told Abraham that if there had been but ten righteous men in Sodom He would have spared not only Sodom, but all the cities of the plain. An astounding word is found in the Old Testament concerning Lot. Although he was a rather unreliable believer, yet the Lord urged him to get out of Sodom, and this was the ground of His urging, 'Haste thee, escape thither, for I cannot do any-

thing till thou be come thither'. God was saying that He could not bring final judgment on the place while Lot was still there. People may despise the church; but we may be sure of this, that final judgments of God are held at bay because God does have a people in the earth and He is going to keep covenant with them. He is going to refine them and bring them forth as gold. Many people have no time for the church at all, but they would not like the world to be empty of all churches and Christians. They like to have this comfy feeling inside them: at least there are such people and places as Christians and churches.

7. *The church exists to promote all that is good in the world.* The believer is to be distinct from ungodly alliances. 2 Cor. 6 : 17. But the Christian is to support everything that he can which is to the wellbeing of man, whether economical, political, social or educational. Gal. 6 : 10 (R.V.). Primarily our responsibility as believers is to our fellow believers, e.g. if people are in financial straits, and I know of genuine believers who are in grievous difficulty, then because I cannot possibly help everybody, my first responsibility is to my brother or sister in Christ. This does not, however, relieve me of a general responsibility to *all men*. The Lord Himself is the supreme example here. He went about doing good, but all that He did was subordinated to His great spiritual mission. He fed the 5,000 and afterwards He spoke to them about His Deity. In John 6 we have His amazing exposition of His Incarnation which followed the feeding of the 5,000—'I am the Bread of Life', 'Labour not for the bread that perisheth'. Our Lord did help people physically, but He always had this spiritual purpose in mind. We should love people for themselves, but our highest regard for them will be seen in our longing for their eternal salvation. It is not the church's function in any way to identify itself with one particular point of view or one particular programme. These things are secondary to the main purpose of the gospel. The Christian is to live to the glory of God; to be engaged in witness, and concerned about spiritual things. But in the process of these things, if he can the better contribute to the glory of God by helping men and women in their personal needs, then as he has the opportunity, he is to do good unto all men.

II. THE DESTINY OF THE CHURCH

What is the prospect for the church of Jesus Christ? 'In the world, but not of the world', 'My Kingdom is not of this world'. The church is related to eternity. The true church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned to bear a witness and to evangelise, because God is calling out a people for His Name. Eph. 1 talks to us about the predestinating

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For Younger Readers

RAIN FROM BELOW

Last time I told you about Abraham, and of how he and Mr. Paton had to leave Tanna because the people were set on killing them. Mr. Paton never went back to work on Tanna again; though other missionaries did, and their work was blessed by God.

It was on Aniwa that Mr. Paton next settled. On this island, to the North East of Tanna, he lived and worked for fifteen years. The very fact that he and his helpers came at all amazed the natives. They knew how he had been treated on Tanna, just twenty miles away, and they could not understand how he could stay in the islands. One thing they knew. The missionary had not returned to make money or any such thing. He had come back to carry on his work of preaching the gospel. The fact that the love of God was so clearly seen in the lives of His servants moved the hearts of these natives, and made them ready to hear.

Do you know that rain tends to fall where there are hills, more than over flat country? Then you will not be surprised that, because Aniwa is a flat island, it does not get much rain. And because it is made up almost completely of a kind of rock in which there are little holes, what rain does fall seems to go straight through the island and leave it as dry as ever. If it was not for a certain dampness in the air, and for the heavy dews, Aniwa could hardly be able to yield a blade of grass.

There were no wells or springs or streams on Aniwa. The people must have got used to drinking very little. What fluid they did take was mostly provided by coconuts.

There was a water hole near the village beside Mr. Paton's house. But this hole, which held rain water for a short time after rain fell, was situated in the ground of two evil men. These men pretended to have the power to fill the hole with water, and the poor people came to pay them when the hole went dry.

Mr. Paton and the others with him felt the lack of fresh water very much. He also did not like to think how the Aniwans were kept in fear of their so-called Sacred Men, believing that they had power to make their water-hole fill up. One morning Mr. Paton announced to Chief Namakei, who had begun to show an interest in the gospel, 'I am going to sink a deep well down into the earth, to see if our God will send us fresh water up from below'.

The old chief was very sorry to think that here, in Mr. Paton's plan, was the first sign of the missionary going mad, 'O Missi!' he pled,

'wait till the rain comes down, and we will save all we possibly can for you. . . . Rain comes only from above. How could you expect our island to send up showers of rain from below? . . . O Missi! Your head is going wrong. You are losing something, or you would not talk like that. Don't let our people hear you talking about going down into the earth for rain, or they will never listen to your word or believe you again.'

But Mr. Paton would not give up his plan. He explained to Namakei that, if no fresh water could be found on Aniwa, he and his helpers would have to leave the island. Praying to God for guidance, he gathered a pick, a spade and a bucket, selected a spot beside the road near the mission, and began to dig. About sinking a well he did not know very much, but with every blow of his pick he sent up a prayer to God.

Old Namakei was fussing about, staring at the missionary turned water engineer, and muttering, 'Poor Missi! That's the way with all who go mad. There's no driving of a notion out of their heads. We must just watch him now. He will find it harder to work with pick and spade than with his pen. When he's tired we'll persuade him to give it up.'

The old chief was right on one point: the missionary soon got tired. But he was wrong on the other: Mr. Paton would not give up. He held up some fishhooks before the watching natives, and promised one to every man who shifted three bucketfuls of earth out of that hole.

The work went on for days. One evening Mr. Paton was walking home after a hard day's work under the tropical sun. He was thinking to himself: *I am getting a bit low on fishhooks, but at least the hole is now twelve feet deep.* It was a comforting thought to take to bed with him that night, but next morning he found a shock awaiting him. One side of the shaft had given way: the hole was as good as filled in again.

After that, there wasn't a native on Aniwa who would go down the shaft. He had to go on alone, and do all the picking and shovelling by himself. But then he thought of a way by which the natives could help. He fitted up a beam across the mouth of the shaft and passed a rope over the beam. Then he tied his largest bucket to the bottom end of the rope, and got some men to take hold of the upper end. Mr. Paton worked inside the hole, filling up the bucket with earth, and when he had filled it up he rang a little bell. This was the signal to the men at the mouth of the shaft to start pulling the rope. As they moved away from the shaft the bucket came up, and when it appeared at the top one man tipped out the earth: then the bucket was let down the shaft again.

He got down to a depth of twenty feet, twenty-five feet, thirty feet: still he found no water. But he kept slaving on, and then he noticed a change. The earth and coral rock were not now dry but damp.

He said to the chief in the evening, 'I think that Jehovah God will give up water tomorrow from that hole.' Namakei seized the chance to reason again with the 'mad' missionary. Do you know what he was afraid of? That if Mr. Paton came to water at all it would be the sea. This could mean that he had reached the bottom of the island, upon which he could easily fall through the hole he had made into the sea and be eaten by sharks! But Mr. Paton believed that God was leading him to expect fresh water the following day, and said so.

At dawn he was down his shaft again. He concentrated on the centre of the bottom and began to dig a narrower hole there. It was not very long before he saw, trickling into the bottom of that hole, what he had come down thirty-two feet to find.

What was going on in that hole? The men at the top began to look at one another in wonder. Surely now Missi had really gone mad! He seemed to have fallen on his knees away down at the bottom of that hole, and he was shouting excitedly. Ah! now he was starting to climb up the ladder. But what did he hold in his hand?

A jug. A jug he had taken down empty in the sight of all, and now he had taken it back with something in it. They crowded round and stared. Could it be water? Old Namakei took the jug in his dark hands and shook it. Whatever was inside, it *looked* like water. He put his finger in. Whatever was in the jug, *felt* like water. Then the final test. He plucked up all his courage and put the jug to his lips. The stuff in the jug ran into his mouth. He made it go round and round his mouth and finally swallowed it. 'Rain! Rain! Yes, it is rain!'

Now all the men were as frightened as little mice. They did not understand how rain could come up through the earth, and they would not go near that hole. Then after a while they formed a line, all joining hands, leading away from the hole. The man who was nearest the edge took a quick peep and then passed back to the rear. The next man, held by his neighbour, then looked down the shaft and saw the wonderful sight. They who had never seen water come but from the sky were quite confused. 'The world is turned upside down', they said.

But after a time they got used to the idea. Not only did they help 'Missi' Paton to line the sides of the deep well with coral blocks; they also set about sinking shafts themselves in different parts of the island. But though the six or seven sites seemed perfectly suitable, not one hole led to a well. In every case, the natives came against solid rock, or the water they found was salt. Then they learned what was one of

the lessons of Missi's well: 'Missi not only used pick and spade, but he prayed and cried to his God. We have learned to dig, but not how to pray, and therefore Jehovah will not give us rain from below!'

And there was something else which engraved the sinking of the well on the minds of the natives of Aniwa. The old chief, who had thought that Mr. Paton was going out of his mind when he started to sink the well, said after it was finished, 'Missi, I think I could help you next Sabbath. Will you let me preach a sermon on the well?'

It was a surprising offer, but Mr. Paton accepted it. When Sabbath came, a great crowd of islanders came together in expectation of hearing their old chief preach. Mr. Paton began the service, then looked over to Namakei. The chief leapt to his feet. Dressed in a shirt and a kilt, he made a colourful figure. Armed with a tomahawk, he was ready to enforce his message with emphatic gestures.

'Friends of Namakei,' he began, 'men women and children of Aniwa, listen to my words.' He went on to confess before his people how that, when Missi had come to Aniwa and told them of many things, they had not believed his words. But most of all they had laughed when Missi had spoken of digging in the earth for rain. There was a nodding of heads. His voice rose:

'We mocked at him; but the water was there all the same.' The tomahawk was swishing through the air, the crushed coral covering the floor was flying in every direction. Now this liveliest of preachers came to the point of his message. He beat his chest and exclaimed:

'Something here in my heart tells me that the Jehovah God does exist, the Invisible One, whom we never heard of nor saw till the Missi brought Him to our knowledge. The coral has been removed, the land has been cleared away, and lo! the water rises. Invisible till this day, yet all the same it was there, though our eyes were too weak. So I, your chief, do now firmly believe that when I die, when the bits of coral and the heaps of dust are removed which now blind my old eyes, I shall then see the Invisible Jehovah God with my soul, as Missi tells me, not less surely than I have seen the rain from the earth below.'

He challenged the people to fetch their idols and cast them at the missionary's feet. Then his voice rang out with the thrilling words: 'Namakei stands up for Jehovah!'

The people listened in astonishment. They had come to hear their old chief preach, and he had certainly not let them down. The blessing of God was resting on the successful sinking of the well in answer to Missi's prayers; and on the simple, powerful preaching of Namakei. It was the beginning of a break with centuries of heathen worship. It was the dawning of the day after Aniwa's long dark night.

Revive Us Again

P. E. HUGHES

IV

THE INSTRUMENTS GOD USES

God uses human instruments in revival, and God uses only *holy* instruments. Prayerfulness is not merely a preparation for revival, but also a preparation of the instruments of revival. God does not send revival until He has at His disposal 'vessels unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work'. Otherwise revival would be untimely. Herein we see the wisdom of God. But the fitting of vessels for this high privilege is the work of God in the human heart: it is not the work of man, any more than revival itself is a work of man. Robert Murray McCheyne had grasped this truth when, three years before the glorious revival at Dundee had its commencement, he remarked to Andrew Bonar that perhaps one reason why they were not favoured with a revival was that they were not ready for it: the ministers would not be able to direct the people in their alarms. This points us once more to the absolute necessity of holy living on the part of Christians if they honestly desire to see an outstanding work of the Holy Spirit in this day. Prayerlessness and carelessness are two fearful hindrances in the way of revival, for which God will require an account.

Prayerfulness leads to holiness, and holiness leads to usableness and fruitfulness. This is the true and only sequence in Christian effectiveness; yet how prone we are to attempt madly to reverse this order: how futilely we struggle to be fruitful, without being holy; how vainly we clutch after holiness, when we are cold strangers to the power of prayer! These are not artificial aids and adjuncts to the Christian life: they are the life itself. 'He that abideth in Me, and I in him,' says our beloved Master, 'the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.' Constant communing with God results in the shining face of sanctity and Christlikeness. Only thus shall Christ be formed within us. Only thus may we see with the eyes of Christ, feel with the heart of Christ, and speak with the mouth of Christ. Thus alone shall we weep with Christ and rejoice in Him, love Him and desire Him above all else, rest in Him and toil for Him, and uplift Him so that He may draw all men unto Himself. This is the way: God have mercy upon us and turn us, that we may walk always in it!

A remarkable example

In William Chalmers Burns we have a remarkable example of a man who, as a young minister of the Gospel, was used of God in a very special manner as an instrument of revival; and it will not be without profit to our own souls to inquire into the secrets of his usability. He was, first of all, a man of deep and devoted *prayerfulness*. He would spend whole days and nights in prayer. Indeed, we are told that prayer was as natural to him as breathing. 'William Burns,' wrote Andrew Bonar, 'is used as the instrument where others have been labouring in vain, because he is much in prayer, beyond all of us.'

He had a reverent *love of God's Word*. The Bible was ever the supreme book for him, and its study was truly his daily bread. During perilous times in China he became known as 'the man of the Book', trusted and allowed to pass freely among the people, while other Europeans, for the sake of security, were confined to their quarters. 'His love for the Word,' testified Hudson Taylor, 'was delightful, and his holy, reverential life and constant communings with God made fellowship with him satisfying to the deep cravings of my heart.'

He was a man who practised *holy living*. He wrote of himself as 'seeking personal holiness, the fundamental requisite for a successful ministry'; and his memorable dictum that 'the work of God would flourish by us, if it flourished more richly in us', carries a foundation truth that we need to take to heart today.

William Chalmers Burns was characteristically a man of *complete humility*. 'In private he is deeply prayerful, and seems to feel his danger of falling into pride,' observed his friend Robert Murray McCheyne. 'He trembled daily,' says Alexander Smellie, 'lest he should be tempted to abandon the Valley of Humiliation, where the Lord once had His country house, and where His servants are most sure of meeting Him still.' He Himself used to say that 'to be in union with Him who is the Shepherd of Israel, to walk very near to Him who is both sun and shield, comprehends all a poor sinner requires to make him happy between this and heaven'.

The heart within him was at all times filled with *compassion for the perishing*. Two days prior to the outbreak of the great revival at Kilsyth, at the conclusion of the Sunday communion service, he was overwhelmed with an uncontrollable anxiety for the eternal salvation of the people who were congregated before him; and his fervent entreaties on their behalf were answered when, on the following Tuesday morning, the rain of blessing began to fall from heaven. 'Always the sight of the multitudes moved him to compassion,' writes Alexan-

der Smellie. 'Always he was unworldly, and what most of us would reckon an impossible sacrifice was no sacrifice at all in his estimate of things. Always he distrusted himself, and had no honour and no friend but Christ, and lived only to blazon abroad the sufficiency of the Lamb of God and the Saviour of souls.'

He was a man remarkable for his *full and fearless preaching*. Andrew Bonar, who shared with him in the joys of the harvest, recorded that the effect of his very voice seemed to be to testify to backsliders, and to remind saints to pray for the blessing of old days. 'He is certainly a very remarkable preacher,' we read in Robert McCheyne's letters. 'The plainness and force of his statements, and his urgency, I never saw equalled. He has a very clear view of divine things, and an amazing power of voice and body. But, above all, God seems really to accompany his preaching with demonstrations of the Spirit . . . His manner is very powerful—so much so that he sometimes made me tremble.' There is the pleasing story of the old Highland woman who, although she could not understand a word of English, would come in day after day to hear William Burns preach: when asked to what purpose it was for her to listen to a man preaching in a tongue which was foreign to her, she at once responded, 'Oh, I can understand the Holy Ghost's English!'

And, lastly, Burns was a man of *inflexible zeal* in the cause of Christ. 'The single-mindedness, intense zeal, yet calmness of William Burns, has often spoken to my heart with indescribable power,' testified Andrew Bonar not long after the death of this saint of God, whom he described as 'one of Christ's great missionaries to earth in our day'. William Burns was indeed a man of unflinching conviction, with a single eye to the glory of Christ, and a burning desire to be engaged only and always upon the main things. He himself once gave expression to the intensity of his fervour, when he said, 'The longing of my heart would be to go once all round the world before I die, and preach one Gospel invitation in the ear of every creature'.

We court the easy way

How could such a holy man fail to experience blessing in himself and in his labours? Alas, where are the mighty men of God today? The fault is not in God, but in ourselves, that we are deprived of deeper blessing. The mighty power of God, than which nothing can be more powerful, is still there at our disposal in all its amazing fullness. And yet we fail to ask for it; we seek it not; we hesitate to knock. *Why?*—that is the question which we must ask ourselves. Is it because we do not want the comfortable tenor of our Christian lives disturbed? We

wish to be good Christians, church-goers, keepers of the law, frequenters of religious assemblies, observers of social conventions; but we do not wish the placidity of our Christianity to be ruffled. We court the easy way.

In a word, our lives are largely self-centred—centred in our homes, our denominations, our bread-winning, our friendships; but not in any truth centred in Christ, for we really know little of 'the fellowship of His sufferings'; we are not like the Apostles, who forsook the easy way, and who 'rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's Name'; we have not learnt, as they did, that 'we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God'; our smug respectability has not permitted us to discover that 'all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution'. Oh, how we need to write upon our hearts the words of the prophet Hosea, spoken to a people that was slumbering in self-righteousness: *'Break up your fallow ground: for it is high time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you'*.

Let us be well assured that, if we desire a revival in our midst, we must be prepared for our fallow ground to be broken up: there will be upheavals in the usual course of our private life, and in the normal flow of our church life. Spiritual demands will be made upon our time and energies which will interrupt in a drastic manner the customary pursuits of our daily walk. Many of our favourite foibles and pet ideas may have to be set aside. Revival is revolutionary! Are we willing for such an overturning? If we really wish to see our Saviour's Name glorified, we should earnestly long for it and welcome it with all our heart. In fact, such willingness should be a sign of all who are truly the Lord's people, as David says: 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power'. We should pray to be made fully willing; for this, too, is a work of the Holy Spirit.

What mean these dispatches from the Battle-Field—'Last night fourteen souls were under conviction, fifteen were justified and eight received full sanctification'?

I am weary of this public bragging, this counting of unhatched chickens, this exhibition of doubtful spoils. Lay aside such numberings of the people, such idle pretence of certifying in half a minute that which will need the testing of a lifetime.

C. H. SPURGEON.

Calvin and Calvinism

WILLIAM YOUNG

The papers given at the 1976 Westminster Conference were arranged under the general theme The Puritan Experiment in the New World. These papers were published some time ago, and we understand that copies are still available (£1.10 incl. post) from the Conference Secretary, The Rev. D. Bugden, at 75 High Street, Warboys, Huntingdon, Cambs., PE17 2TA.

Readers may well have seen reviews of these interesting papers in other periodicals. The following article is not a review of all the Conference papers—which, on the whole, we warmly recommend—but an examination of the views expressed in the Paper by Dr. R. T. Kendall.

The title of that Paper is John Cotton—First English Calvinist?, and even those who have not read it can deduce the substance of it from what follows.

In footnote 10 of this Paper, Dr. Kendall informs us, 'The details of what follows may be found in my D.Phil. thesis, "The Nature of Saving Faith, from William Perkins (d. 1602) to the Westminster Assembly (1643-1649)", on deposit in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The serious student should consult this before making a final judgment on my assertions. I regret that I do not have the space in this paper to develop this argument more fully.

The writer of the following article—who teaches philosophy at the University of Rhode Island—studied both Dr. Kendall's Paper and his D.Phil. thesis when passing through this country last August. That he is competent to give a reasoned response to Dr. Kendall's assertions would not be questioned by anyone who knows Dr. Young. To those who do not yet have that privilege, we can only mention that his degrees are: B.A. Columbia University; Th.B., Th.M. Westminster Theological Seminary; Th.D. Union Seminary (N.Y.); B.Litt. Oxford.

Observations on Dr. R. T. Kendall's Account of Calvin and Calvinism

Dr. Kendall's paper at the 1976 Westminster Conference is based on sections of his D.Phil. thesis, 'The Nature of Saving Faith, from William Perkins (d. 1602) to the Westminster Assembly (1643-1649)'. Both in the conference paper and in the thesis, an antithesis is drawn between the teaching of Calvin and later Calvinism, a partial exception being made in the case of John Cotton's teaching in New England.

Two claims made by Dr. Kendall will be examined here:

I. That Calvin held that Christ died indiscriminately for all men (*The Puritan Experiment in the New World*, p. 39)

II. That the experimental predestinarian Calvinism of Perkins and the Westminster Assembly is foreign to the standpoint of Calvin (*Ibid*).

I. The allegation that Calvinism from the time of Beza deviated from Calvin in teaching a limited rather than a universal atonement is no novelty. The absence of explicit definition by Calvin, together with a selection of detached statements from Calvin's commentaries and sermons, may be calculated to produce such an impression. The subject has been dealt with in a masterly fashion by William Cunningham in his article on Calvin and Beza in his work on the theology of the Reformers. A few observations on Dr. Kendall's procedure in quoting Calvin and in drawing inferences from the quotations must suffice.

(1) Even in the D.Phil. thesis quotations are made, not from Calvin's Latin and French originals, but from English translations, with occasional insertions of expressions in the original language. This can hardly be considered a scholarly procedure for dealing with a controverted point of interpretation.

(2) The selection of quotes from Calvin is decidedly tendentious. Context is disregarded, even when the context sets the quotation in a more balanced perspective. In appealing to the commentary on John 3 : 16, neither the conference paper nor the D.Phil. thesis takes note that Calvin begins by stating, 'Christ opens up the first cause and, as it were, the source of our salvation and he does so that no doubt may remain; for our minds cannot find calm repose, until we arrive at the unmerited love of God'; and that immediately prior to the quote (*Ibid*) which, Dr. Kendall claims, 'reveals why Calvin feels so strongly about a universal expiation by Christ's death'. Calvin has referred to Ephesians 1 : 5 and spoken of 'the secret love with which the Heavenly Father loved us'. It clearly appears that Calvin has the special love of God to the elect in view as the source of 'the reconciliation which was procured through Christ'. (*Comm, on John 3:16, Pringle Translation*).

(3) The inference from Calvin's use of general expressions such as Scripture itself employs to the conclusion that he taught that Christ died indiscriminately for all men is a non sequitur. Calvin may be best read as simply repeating Scripture expressions without reflecting on the question of the extent of the atonement. That this view is reasonable should be evident upon consideration of Calvin's treatment of universal locutions in his 13th sermon on 1 Timothy. After stating that 'God wishes (veut) to make all men participants of salvation', he goes

on to observe: 'Nevertheless let us note that St. Paul does not speak of each individual (chacum) in particular, but of all states and of all peoples. However, Saint Paul does not understand that God wills (vueille) to save each man, but he says that the promises which had been given to a single people, now have their extensions everywhere.' (*Writer's translation from Sermon on 1 Timothy 2 : 4 in Corpus Reformatorum text*).

II. In the D.Phil. thesis, considerable attention is devoted to what Dr. Kendall terms 'the experimental predestinarian tradition' which, he states, 'is given creedal sanction by the Westminster Assembly of Divines' (*Abstract, p. i*). We are also told that 'the "Antinomians", like John Cotton, are nearer to Calvin's position than those in the experimental predestinarian tradition (of which the Westminster divines are a part)'. (*Abstract, p. ii*).

There is good reason to maintain that Dr. Kendall has forged a false antithesis between Calvin and the later Calvinists who emphasised experimental religion. Kendall is compelled to recognise that Calvin taught that the reprobate may have a temporary faith, a doctrine later developed by Perkins. At this point, Kendall commits himself to a denial of this doctrine in language which hardly befits a hearty adherent to the doctrines of grace. He expresses his own views as follows:

'The doctrine of temporary faith is the scandal of Calvinism. Neither Calvin nor Perkins seems to sense a need to apologise for a teaching that obviously borders on cruelty. This teaching depicts God as tantalising the reprobate, whom he never intends to draw effectually, with a taste of his work. But these men feel they must teach this doctrine simply because they find it in Scripture; to them moreover it best explains passages as Matthew 7 : 21-23, Hebrews 6 : 4-6, and the Parable of the Sower.' (*D.Phil. Thesis, p. 8*).

Surely Calvin and Perkins are to be commended for teaching the doctrine they found revealed in Holy Scripture. Allegations of cruelty and profane caricatures of this solemn doctrine betray a man-centred perspective and an unwillingness, to subject carnal reason to the authority of the infallible Word of God. Furthermore, the fact that Calvin propounded the doctrine of temporary faith shows that the experimental religion of Perkins and the later Puritans is a development from original Calvinism, and that the alleged antithesis between Calvin and historic Calvinism is fictitious. Calvin's view as to the relation between saving faith and assurance does not affect this point.

This false antithesis occasions certain remarks which savour of arrogance in the attitude expressed toward the Reformers and the

Puritans. With respect to Calvin's doctrine of temporary faith, we read: 'It is to be regretted that Calvin the theologian is at work here and not Calvin the pastor.' (*Ibid*, p. 22). The Westminster Assembly and its Confession are scornfully repudiated: 'Westminster theology hardly deserves to be called Calvinistic—especially if that term is to imply the thought of Calvin himself.' (*Ibid*, p. 253). In a footnote, basic approval is given to Holmes Ralston's outrageous calumny: 'Had Calvin been a member of the Westminster Assembly, he would have been first to cast his vote against the Confession.'

These attacks on the Westminster Confession are deplorable. They are clearly not founded upon sound scholarship; we fear that they stem rather from an aversion to the Puritan doctrine and experience embodied in the Westminster Standards. In our view, therefore, readers ought to disregard the opinions expressed on these points by Dr. Kendall. They should rather study the relevant passages from the writings, for example, of Dr. William Cunningham, where they will find sound scholarship of lasting value.

REDEMPTION

That doctrine is repugnant to the Scripture, and unsound, which teacheth the Redemption by the second Adam to be as universal as the sin of the first; it is so, indeed, for value and sufficiency, it is not so for communication of the benefit.

The 'world' is taken in both the better sense and the worse: 'the world is reconciled', 2 Cor. 5:19, and the world is not reconciled, 1 John 5:19; who can reconcile these speeches? Saint Augustine thus: 'Christ redeemed a little world out of the great'. So we speak in common phrase, emphatically 'a world of saints' and yet we know there is 'a world of sinners'.

THOMAS ADAMS.

As the Roman sentinel in Pompeii stood to his post even when the city was destroyed, so do I stand to the truth of the atonement though the Church is being buried beneath the boiling mud-showers of modern heresy.—C. H. SPURGEON in 1887.

The Barren Fig Tree

DONALD MACDONALD

Mr. MacDonald, a native of Ness, in the Island of Lewis, was minister of Free Greyfriars, Inverness. He preached this sermon to his congregation in April, 1976—almost exactly a year before his death. It presents a solemn challenge to the whole of the Reformed Church, reminding us that doctrinal orthodoxy is not enough.

The sermon was taken from a tape, and slightly edited.

The Gospel of Mark, chapter 11, verse 13

Let us think of these words especially—‘When He came to it He found nothing but leaves’. There are certain things in the Bible which should make us all afraid. There is nothing I am more afraid of, myself, than that when Jesus will come to call me away He will find that I have no fruit. The thought of being fruitless, the thought of disappointing Jesus, for me personally, weighs on me more than anything else that I know of in this world.

Now, here we have an incident showing the manifestation of divine power. Jesus, of course, was not mere man. But He was man. He was hungry, just the same as we are hungry when we don’t get food to eat. He had spent all day working. He had been in Jerusalem all day. Then He had walked about two miles to Bethany, and early in the morning He took His way back to Jerusalem again, and He was hungry. He saw this fig tree with leaves on it. Now the manner of the fig tree is to bear figs before it bears leaves. But when Jesus came to take figs from this tree, to give to Himself and to His disciples, there were no figs—there were leaves only. And He cursed it; not capriciously—we mustn’t think that—but justly. Jesus never does anything, never did anything, in a capricious way, in a fit of temper, but He did this because there was promise of fruit, but no fruit. It was what we would call a sham, a show, but no reality.

And Jesus taught a valuable lesson by it; He performed a miracle and He spake a parable at the same time. As He was human to be hungry, He was also divine to answer that tree and speak to it and curse it and dry it up from its roots—it was of no use anyway. But He also spake a parable when He did this. It was an exhibition of a moral truth, and by doing what He did He taught a valuable moral lesson: and we are going to try and speak of it for a wee while this night.

Notice that in all His life He never performed a miracle of judgment but this one. Of all His miracles, this was the only one that wasn't done in compassion and mercy and kindness. This was the only one that exhibited His wrath and, strange to say, it wasn't performed on a human being but on a tree. He cursed the tree for no other reason than to teach us a lesson that we should never forget.

God expects fruit from us all

Now then, to come to the main lesson of the miracle and parable. God expects fruit from us all, whoever we are, and if we don't yield it He is bitterly disappointed with us. Now, it would not be too much to say that, as a nation, the generation in which Christ lived was the most fruitless generation since the Exodus from Egypt. These were a people who had every advantage, by way of religion; yet, speaking generally, the Jewish church was corrupt, barren, fruitless. In spite of the cultivation and care and all that God did for it, all that it brought forth was leaves and no fruit. And when Jesus came to the Jewish nation, when He came to lead those who were the spiritual leaders of the people, He told them that they were hypocrites, that they were whited sepulchres, appearing fair from the outward but within full of rottenness. He told them that they were vipers and that they could not escape the damnation of Hell.

Now, friends, Jesus did not say that to the common people; He said it to the spiritual leaders—what we would call the ministers and the elders and the deacons. These were the people to whom Jesus spake and it was they who brought judgment upon the people as a whole. It was they who led them astray. Not because they taught anything wrong; they did not. Oh! they had their traditions, but on the whole they were correct in their teaching, they were orthodox enough. But they were as barren as this tree. They bore plenty leaves, but they had no figs.

And it would not be wrong to say, I am sure, that since the Dark Ages there wasn't so much spiritual barrenness in our nation as there is at the present time. Yet God made us to glorify Him. That's why He made us. But there are thousands who don't believe that He exists and there are thousands more who do not accept Him as their Judge. I wonder if you do. I know you believe that God exists. 'King Agrippa,' said Paul, 'believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.' I know you believe in the existence of God. But do you believe in this—do you believe that this very night, before the morning light comes, He may judge you at the bar of His judgment seat? Who are we, friends, more than others? Have others not been cut down suddenly in the twinkling of an eye? But whether He comes to you tonight or

tomorrow night, it matters not. One of these days God is going to judge us and He is going to judge us on our fruitfulness or on our lack of it. Now then, how will you stand on that day and how will I stand? Will there be anything but leaves? Will it be like this barren fig tree—the promise there but yielding no fruit? God will tell. We can't hide anything from Him. And those people who are barren deserve the immediate judgment of God. Those people who bear no fruit deserve nothing else, and you can't but admire and adore and marvel at the long-suffering of God with us as a nation and with us as a people, with each one of us. How does God bear with us so long? For we are so fruitless, so barren—how does He bear with us?

To take but one instance, He has cultivated you; He placed you in a Christian home; He placed you in a God-fearing Church and congregation where you saw people converted; you know all about the Bible, and yet tonight, whatever age you are, up until tonight you have spurned His only Son. My friends, it is astonishing, amazing, mysterious, that God is not striking you down as with a sudden thunderbolt and casting you to Hell. For forty years, fifty years, spurning and scorning Jesus Christ and refusing to make Him your Lord and your Master and God bears with you. What a God He is! But remember, friend, your day is coming—your day is coming. He is going to come to you as He came to the fig tree and He is going to examine what you are. Do you believe in Him, then, as your judge? Do you believe that He could destroy you at any moment, with the multitude of messengers that He has? You saw in the papers not so very long ago how four young people were coming from a wedding in the Island of Lewis, during a night of lightning and thunder, and in the twinkling of an eye one of them was struck down dead by the lightning. We see lightning—probably we're not even afraid that it will harm us, but this is the kind of thing God does. Now remember I'm not referring or taking anything whatsoever to do with this young man. I would like to add that what Jesus said about those upon whom the tower in Siloam fell is true in this case. 'Think ye that they were sinners more than others? I tell you no, but unless ye repent ye shall likewise perish'. All I'm trying to say to you is that God has millions of messengers, winds and fires, lightnings and thunder, He has all messengers in His hand and He could strike us down at any moment.

Now, according to our advantages will be our responsibility, so then let me ask you a question—you who have been brought up in a Christian home, who never went to bed without seeing your father taking the Bible and reading it, who never went to church but heard an orthodox sermon preached to you inviting you to Christ, telling you

of Heaven and Hell, you who come, maybe, to the Prayer Meeting, who attend church regularly every Sabbath day. I am not going to enquire into your life. I am not going to ask if you are a drunkard or if you are a person who never got the taste of whisky. I am not going to ask if you are an adulterer or fornicator or if you are a clean person, but I'm going to ask this, 'Are you tonight spurning the love of Jesus Christ and refusing to come under the covering of His shed blood?' Well, my friend, if you are, God is going to curse you as He cursed this tree and then it would be better for you if you had never been born. I am terrified of it. That is why I speak about it. I don't know when I was so awed as when I began to think on these words some time ago and I thought of that tree with nothing but leaves and I began to say, 'Woe is me! Woe is me!'

Show without substance, talk without walk, form without power

Now, the terrifying thought is that God expects fruit especially of those of us who profess to be Christian people. That is the very thing that is taught here. Here were leaves without fruit. There was a profession without the practice. There was no fruit, nothing but barrenness. But there was promise of fruit, and there should have been fruit. You see, as I said, the figs come before the leaves; and if the leaves were there Jesus had every right to expect that fruit should be there too.

Now, have we got a creed without a faith? We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that He is the Saviour of the lost. We are orthodox in our outlook. But all these things can be leaves, and the question I have for you is this: 'Have you got faith and have I got faith that has put us into a vital union with the Lord Jesus Christ? Do we know what that is? Are we one with the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts? Never mind our profession, if we are not that. Never mind our sitting at the table of the Lord. Never mind our orthodoxy. I could preach for fifty and sixty years and never make a mistake in my doctrines and yet be nothing but a man with leaves and no fruit. 'Lord,' they will say to Him on the Day of Judgment, 'we have preached in Thy name; we've gone out at week-ends; we've done preaching in Thy name; we have done wonderful works in Thy name; we've cast out devils in Thy name.' And He will say to you, 'When I came to visit you, there was nothing but leaves—the leaf of preaching; the leaf of working miracles, but no fruit. I don't know you and you never knew Me'. Show without substance, it was; talking without the walking; talking, but the walking inconsistent with the talking; form without power. And yet—'I have ordained you,' said Jesus, 'to bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.' This is why He ordained us; this is

why He picked us out, in order that we might bear fruit and that our fruit should remain. 'Herein,' He says, 'is my Father glorified, that ye should bear much fruit.'

Now, friends, when you think of what follows barrenness, no wonder we are afraid. I think it was the introspective poet, Cowper, who tells of incidents in the word of God that terrified him and he gives this one in particular—the barren fig tree. He says that he thought of it and that he could picture it as himself, and see Christ coming to him step by step. He of whom people thought so much! And then Jesus coming and being disappointed with him, finding nothing but leaves. And he said, Night after night I would lie in my bed and wet my pillow with my tears and fear that at any moment the sword of His justice would come up against me, as a result of His cursing me. I had no peace day nor night'. I'm only giving the substance of what he says.

And the tragic thing about this tree was that it did bear fruit at one time; so we gather from the word, '*Hereafter* let no man eat of thee'. Now surely that must mean that this tree had figs before then and that it stopped bearing figs and it put all its sap into leaves, but not into fruitfulness. Oh, that can happen to the Christian also. Friends, just in case you think I am wrong, or in case you think I am too hard on you, I am as hard on myself as I am on anybody else and harder still. And I challenge you, friends, as I come to the end of my ministry, I challenge you to stand up and testify publicly that I have taught anything wrong by way of doctrine. I challenge you to say that I have made the standard too high. No, friends, let me just tell you how one man taught his own people and how he spoke to them. I was reading this the other day and I thought it would be a good thing if I gave it to you so that you would know that this kind of thing was done before my time. This is what this man says, and he was a good man and a successful preacher:

'When I see a man, a Church member, when I hear him engage in prayer, I expect to see in him holiness; the character and the image of Christ. I have a right to expect it, because the man has solemnly avowed that he is the partaker of divine grace. You cannot join the Church without taking upon yourself very solemn responsibilities. What do you declare when you come to see us and ask to be admitted into fellowship, when you want to come to the Lord's table? What do you declare and promise? You tell us that you have passed from death unto life; you tell us that you have been born again, that there has been a change in you the like of which you never knew before—one which only God could have wrought—you tell us you are in the habit of private prayer, that you have a desire for the conversion of

others. If you did not so profess, we dared not receive you. Well, now, having made these professions, it would be insincere on our part if we did not expect to see the character holy and the conversation correct. We have a right to expect it from your professions; we have a right to expect it from the work of the Spirit, which you claim to have received. Shall the Holy Spirit work in man's heart to produce a trifle? Do you think that the Spirit of God would have written us this book and that Jesus Christ would have shed His precious blood to produce a hypocrite? Isn't a consistent Christian the highest work of God? I suppose God's plan of salvation to be that which has more exercised His thoughts and wisdom than the making of all worlds and the sustenance of all providence. And shall this best, this highest, this darling work of God produce no more than a poor, mean, talking, inactive, fruitless deceiver? You have no love for souls, no care for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom and yet think that the Spirit has made you what you are; no zeal, no melting bowels of compassion; no cries of earnest entreaty; no wrestling with God; no holiness, no self-denial, and yet you say that you are a vessel made by the Master and fitted for His use. How can this be? No, if you profess to be a Christian, from the necessity of the Spirit's work we have a right to expect fruit from you. Besides, in genuine professors we do get the fruit. We see a faithful attachment to the Redeemer's cause, an endurance to the end. In poverty, in sickness, in shame, in persecution, we see other professors holding fast to the truth. They are not led aside by temptation, neither do they disgrace the cause they have espoused, and if you profess to be one of the same order, we have a right to look for the same blessed fruits of the Spirit in you. And if we see them not, you have denied us.'

My friends, I never spoke to you as hard as that, never in my life. I read that paragraph word for word—the words of a faithful preacher to a much larger congregation than I have here tonight. There it is spoken to professing Christian people, people who had nothing but leaves; people who do nothing wrong actually, but who are useless in the cause of Christ. Ah! you know what Jesus will say to those people, who are going to plead their sinless inactivity on the day of judgment? 'Lord,' they will say, 'we have done nothing wrong. When did we see Thee hungry and didn't feed Thee, or thirsty and didn't give Thee drink, or in prison and didn't minister unto Thee?' And He will say to them, 'Inasmuch as ye did it *not*'. That's it, you see. He is not charging them with having done anything wrong; He is not saying, 'You did this

or you did that and you shouldn't have done it'. All He is going to say to them is, 'You did *not* do that when you should have done it; and therefore depart from Me into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and for his angels'. Remember, friends, there is a way to the eternal destruction from the very gate of Heaven, there is a way to it from the very Lord's table, there is a way to it from the prayer house; and I am speaking to the minister whose word's you're hearing, I'm speaking to the elders and to the deacons and to every one of you, who is a professing Christian, and I am asking you, 'Have you got fruit in your heart and in your lives to God, or do you bear only leaves?' Well, my friend, you had better find out, you had better find out tonight, you had better find out before you go to bed; because Jesus may come to see you, to visit you, any time, and to decide your final judgment.

The fruit required

There are two kinds of fruit, or a two-fold kind of fruit, required of us all. One is the fruit of personal holiness, which is more important than all; and, my friends, what we are before God, that we are and nothing else. Remember, I am not going to be judged for what I am in the pulpit, or what I was in the pulpit. God is not going to judge me on that. If I had the eloquence of a Baxter, if I had the success of a Whitefield, the attractive power of a Spurgeon, the might of a Luther, God is not going to judge me on these things. God is going to judge me and you on our personal holiness. Have we got a heart right with God; have we faith in Christ; have we love to Christ; have we hope in Christ? It's a matter of personal holiness, friends, and as that man was saying, we have a right to expect personal holiness of every one of us who professes Christ. We say that He wrought a good work in our hearts, that He brought us from death to life. We say that we are Christians, distinct from the world. *Are* we distinct from the world, then? Or do we just live like the world between ourselves and God?

The second thing is, there is the fruit of service for the Lord Jesus Christ. There can be activity, remember, without prayer. Oh, yes, we can have plenty of that. We can have our meetings—yes, we can have even our prayer meetings without the Holy Spirit activating us. We can have our Sabbath services and they can be arresting and attractive and well pleasing and there may not be one single drop of the Holy Spirit from beginning to end. Yes, my friends, I know that I could hold you for an hour, or two hours, on end, and one could hear the pin fall on the carpet in the passages. I know that, and I know that it could be devoid of the Holy Spirit from beginning to end. That's my danger. I know that you can attend the services regularly every Sabbath and

that you can do far more than that. These are *leaves*, if we don't bear the fruit of activity by the Holy Spirit. And then there is dependence upon the Holy Spirit. For what can we do? We can do nothing without Him. If we speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not the Spirit, we are nothing. My friends, I tremble when I come to pray, when I come to the prayer meeting and I call on our men members to lead us in prayer. I feel sorry for them with all my heart, I tremble for them. I tremble lest they get up, lest they get up stale and cold-hearted, without the Spirit of the Lord enduing them—and if they do, they were better sitting down and so would I be too.

The judgment

What, then, was the judgment? There was the judgment here of judicial withering—just like the judgment that came upon the Jewish nation. The Jewish nation had a monopoly of the Gospel in its day. And what good did it do? None whatsoever to the nations round about it—none at all, not to itself either.

And what about our churches? What about our own congregation? You see, friends, we can gather, we can gather in our hundreds and bear no fruit unto the Lord. Time alone will tell what fruit we are bearing unto the Lord, but it is not the number that counts at all. What counts is—are we bearing fruit unto the Lord? Is what we're hearing made a means of good to our hearts? Does it work good in us? Are we true Christians? I try to impress this upon you—we are on the way to eternity, and we shall be weighed according to the fruit that we bear or to the barrenness that we have. That will be the standard of judgment.

There were congregations, just like the Jewish Church, that suffered from judicial withering. Surely there were very few spots ever on earth more blessed than St. Peter's at Dundee, or like Ettrick in the days of Boston, or Dunfermline in the days of Ralph Erskine, Alloway in the days of Samuel Rutherford, Irvine in the days of David Dixon, and I could go on and on and on mentioning the illustrious names in the Church of Christ; and what has become of them all? They have been judged. They bore nothing but leaves in the end and God judged them, and there is nothing now but judicial withering.

And this, my friends, is the most terrifying thing of all—that we might be subjected to this judicial withering. God might have visited us already. God might have visited you five years ago, ten years ago; you, an elder or a deacon or the minister. He might have visited us and seen that we bore nothing but leaves, and He might have cursed us. Perhaps that is why we have no conversions among us; perhaps that's why we are so stale and dead and cold and formal and indisciplined. He might

have withered us judicially. He might have said, 'Let no man eat of thee any more hereafter. You did bear fruit but now, no, there's no fruit. You are neither cold nor hot. Therefore I will spue you out of my mouth, because you are neither cold nor hot'. This, my friend, is a terrible thing.

And how does judicial withering manifest itself? Ah, you remember when the sap of the Holy Spirit ran through your heart and mind? Do you remember when prayer was such a delight? Do you remember when you thirsted for the Lord as the hart thirsts for the water springs? And now all your sap seems to have dried up and there is no heart for prayer nor for the means of grace, nor for service to Christ, and your heart is cold, my friend. I hope that it has not been that Jesus cursed you. I hope that's not why. I hope the sap has not been withered up because of this judicial sentence on the part of the Redeemer.

It is not too late

The disciples were amazed as they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots, and Peter said, 'Master, behold, the fig tree which Thou cursedst is withered away', and Jesus answered and said unto them, 'Have faith in God'. What Jesus meant by that was—'If you want to escape the fate of the fig tree, *have faith in God*. This generation among which I dwell, they have no faith in God; and this is a parable—this is what's going to happen to them. As I have cursed this fig tree and no man shall eat hereafter of its fruit, I shall curse this nation and they shall be fruitless'. And that was uttered nearly two thousand years ago and the Jewish nation has been fruitless ever since.

It's like this, then. 'You have faith in God,' He said, 'Have faith in Me.' And if tonight we feel that we have met our doom in this way, it is not too late. It is not too late to come with confession and say to God—'God, I am afraid I am a barren fig tree. I am afraid I have no sap. I'm afraid I have nothing but the leaves of going to Church whenever it is open and of reading the Bible summarily at night, bending my knee in prayer, but never getting into communion with Thee. Lord, I am afraid that my sap is dried up'. Come to Him, friend. It is not too late. This is what I thank God for tonight—that I have life, that I can pray. You know what the psalmist says?—'He restoreth my soul'. You know what He says Himself?—'Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings'.

The secret of holy living lies in the doctrine of the union of the believer with Christ.—DR. CHARLES HODGE.

Soul Sickness Healed

J. K. POPHAM

This sermon was preached at a mid-week meeting in January, 1921. It has been slightly reduced in length. The passage of Scripture read before the sermon was Judges, chapter 2.

'I said, Lord, be merciful unto me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee.'—Psalm 41 : 4.

When God deals with us for our sins, we see them, we feel them, no matter what means He may be pleased to use. The thing He intends is, that we should see our sins, and feel them. Nature says, 'O but I do not deserve this'; faith says, 'You do, and hell afterwards'. Then says the contrite soul, 'Let me but get at the Redeemer's feet, let me but look on His cross; may the Spirit bring the blood of the everlasting covenant to me, and all will be well, and I can take this cross up and follow the Master, who is teaching a poor, ignorant disciple to profit, by painful means'.

Beloved friends, when trouble comes and God speaks to you, you are greatly favoured. Let conscience talk to you, listen to it. If it tells you of shameful things that no human eye ever saw, but which you knew to be wrong, listen to it. . . . Mark God's dealings with you. The Lord told David that because of a sin, his *great* sin, one may say, the sin of his whole life before men, the sword should never depart from his house. You may sometimes say, 'Is this cross to be with me all my days?' The Lord may show you a good reason for it, and I will add, a loving reason, a reason of His mercy, for your humbling, that you may have your hand on your mouth as long as you live, and say, 'I am wrong, I have been wrong; where men have not seen it, I have been wrong'.

Now this fits us for mercy. Said this afflicted man David, 'Lord, be merciful to me'. Nothing but mercy will do; you will never prosper in soul by self-justification, you will never be delivered by your own arm, you will never recover yourselves. This is the only thing for us—mercy infinite, spreading itself over our cases, coming to our sore places, touching us, smiling on us, helping us. When mercy comes, the heart moves, the spirit relents, and bends, and stoops under God. It is a wonderful help in trouble when your spirit stoops under God, when you have nothing to say but, 'I need mercy'; when no sinner is before your eyes but yourself; when you say, 'What I have done has procured all my trouble'; and you can answer the Lord's question, 'Hast thou

not procured this unto thyself?' Now I will here affirm, and I am sure no gracious person will contradict me, that here is true liberty. Here the Lord does not hold you at a distance, here you have no hardness, no self-justification, you are just a poor, helpless, self-condemned creature, crying for mercy. 'Lord, help me' will suit you well; 'Lord, heal me, for I have sinned against Thee'. This is a great confession and a free one, a very true one, a very full one; it comprehends the whole case, 'I have sinned against Thee'.

Joseph's brethren took the right course, the only proper course: they went back to Joseph with the charge on them, with the proof of their guilt, as it would seem; they went straight to him whose servant had charged them. Now, my brethren, may we follow that, go straight to the Lord, 'We are guilty'. It was a good, open, honest course they took, and it brought Joseph—the recognition of him, that is—to them, and his kiss. Go and do likewise in the spirit, you people of God, when you have aught to acknowledge before Him. It is a good course, go to no other place, go straight, put your hand on your mouth, and agree with God, as you are enabled to confess to Him. 'I said, Lord, be merciful to me.'

Do you feel as if you cannot lift your face up to Him? Do you feel as if you have not courage to lift up your eyes to Him? O then, may He give you the courage, which He alone can do, teach you by the Scripture and by His Spirit. See how often He forgave Israel: 'Yea, many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath. For He remembered that they were but flesh.' Think on it, infinite mercy, more mercy than our sin, more pardons than we can imagine, belong to Christ, the Angel of the covenant. He deals blows, so to speak. O, it brought out tears and made a Bochim of a place, when He represented to them their sins, as we were reading*. Now they wept before Him, and what else did they do? They sacrificed unto the Lord.

What have you to go with as a sacrifice?

There are two sacrifices which are acceptable to God; may we mark them by faith standing in the power of the Holy Spirit. The first is the *Sacrifice of Christ*. It is written, 'When thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall His seed'. If you can by faith take the offering of Christ, and mention it to the Father, that is pleasing. God is pleased with Christ, pleased with His Sacrifice, and pleased with the sinner who takes it, mentions it, relies on it—pleased with you, poor sinner. If you can go straight with your guilt to God, and not try to make a covering

* See Judges 2 : 1-5.

Adam-like, but go naked, bare, guilty, poor, helpless, and say, 'Mercy, have mercy on me, Lord', and mention that Sacrifice, you will be very pleasing to God; ah, more pleasing than all that Pharisees and deceived people may take—more pleasing. This goes well with God, the mention of Christ's merit; this goes well with the sinner; He shall see in that sinner the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. This is the way to heavenly merry-making, this is the way to the ring and the best robe and the shoes and the dancing and the fatted calf. Mercy, well, you must be miserable to need it, and if God deals with you for sin, you will be miserable. He comes off well who feels sometimes that he is in no better a place than Jonah, who said, 'Out of the belly of hell cried I'; but God brought him up. His soul fainted in him under the judgments of God, and God was terrible to him in those judgments; but out of that low dungeon a fainting man cried, and got a good hearing and a good deliverance.

The Lord give us His Holy Spirit to take that course. If you cover your sins, you will not prosper; if you confess them, you will have mercy; for confession of them here is always a forsaking of them. It is said in Hosea, 'Come, let us return unto the Lord'. Why? Is there courage to do it? Yes, God gives courage, which is grace. 'Let us return unto the Lord.' What is the condition of these people? 'He hath torn.' God tore Jonah. It was a solemn, a tearing providence that Jonah got. When all his schemes were dealt with, and his rebellion dealt with, then he turned to the Lord. 'He hath torn, and He will heal'; and He does heal, blessed be His Name; and you will find it.

The second sacrifice is this, *a broken heart and a contrite spirit*. Under the Levitical dispensation the psalmist found that for his sin no sacrifice was ordered; therefore he said, 'Sacrifice and offering and burnt offering and offering for sin Thou wouldest not'. All that David should have had under the law was stoning. And what have we under the law but stoning and death? But then he found this: 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise'.

And go back to the chapter I read*. What did the Lord, the Angel, do when He saw the miseries of Israel? Why, He raised them up judges. And what does He do when He sees a poor sinner condemned, self-condemned, and with a heart broken, grace having broken it; and a heart contrite, grace having produced the contrition? Why, He says, 'I am pleased with that poor sinner'. If ever you get that sacrifice, you will get access. If a man goes hard, angry, proud, bold, and thinks he

* See Judges 2 : 16.

will get access, what a woeful deception is he labouring under! But if he goes with his spirit weeping, though his cheeks be dry, and confesses and mourns before God, how pleased the Lord is with him! The Father welcomes the prodigal; music and dancing welcome and attend him when he comes back. Everything good attends a returned prodigal, because the Father orders it all. 'I said, Lord, be merciful unto me.' Nothing else will do, nothing less will satisfy.

'Heal my soul.' Do you know what soul sickness is? What is soul sickness? A sense of guilt, distance from the Lord; bruises made by divine chastening, the letting out of a sinner's false strength and false hopes, and saving him from his wrong ways and things. Here he is, a sick soul, sick of self, sick of sinning, sick of wandering, sick by divine smiting. Sin hardens, it never makes people feel themselves sick; sin goes this way—hardens, emboldens, and makes proud, presumptuous professors; but grace, smiting grace, piercing grace, humbling grace, the sword of God in providence, the rebuke of God in your conscience, grace in all these things melts and softens, inwrought by the Spirit. These come from grace, they come from love: 'As many as I love I rebuke and chasten'. Well then, you will go along with the psalmist, 'Heal my soul'. We have plenty of self-justification in us, our hearts are full of it by nature, we wish for nothing better. But grace says 'No', and grace makes us say, 'No, we will put our hand on our mouth'.

Poor David got a good deal of trouble out of his sin, by God's mercy to him. You remember how his unnatural son Absalom rebelled, and David might have said to him and to his friends, 'You know how I loved Absalom, you know how I dealt with him. I never gave him any cause for this at all'. But that was not David's spirit now. Said he, 'If the Lord take pleasure in me, He will bring me again, and I shall see both it'—that is, the ark—'and His habitation; but if He say, I have no pleasure in thee—I will not bring thee back to Jerusalem and to thy throne—here am I; let Him do as seemeth Him good'. He was a poor, sick man. When Shimei cursed him, it was a sore thing; and there were people then about David who would soon have made an end of Shimei. 'Let us cut off this dog's neck,' said one. 'No,' said David, 'the Lord has done it. Let him curse, the Lord has bidden him curse.' Here was a poor, sick soul who could not defend himself, and would not at the time—just a poor, sick man needing mercy, needing healing. Do you know him? David is in heaven, do you know David's counterpart? Were you ever with him? Some of us can say, 'Yes, we have been in his company'. Well then, what will do for us? 'Heal my soul.'

'For I have sinned against Thee.' David sinned against men, he sinned against Uriah, he sinned against Bathsheba; but said he, when God dealt closely with him, *'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight; that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest [against me], and be clear when Thou judgest [me for this sin]'*. It is all here, my friends, just wrapped up in this, you and God, nobody else; God rebuking you, you at His footstool, hearing as a man in whose mouth are no reproofs. If you follow me, you can unite in this confession: *'For I have sinned against Thee'*. *'Not against men,'* you may say. God may have enabled us so to live as that we can look at men, and say we have not done wrong here and there; but that is not the point. If God is dealing with us, then we are guilty. *'For I have sinned against Thee.'*

Now what is the healing? Let us look at that. Healing is a great thing. Healing is *by a kiss*. *'Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth; for Thy love is better than wine.'* A kiss is given because the Lord is near you, and because He loves you; He is never far from one whom He kisses; and whom He kisses He heals by the kiss. It is great to get that, very great; very wonderful for God to look on you, and just impress on your soul a sense of His forgiveness: this is the kiss. *'Let Him kiss me—let Him tell me that He has nothing against me.'* You say He never can do that. O yes, He can. He can say this, *'I have cast thy sins behind My back'*. He can say, *'I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins; return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee'*.

Did you ever watch the sun blotting out clouds, just absorbing them, as it were, removing them? so that after a while, the clouds you looked on you see no more about the sun or on the sky; all cleared away? Did you ever have a tablet with a quantity of things written on it, and did you take a sponge and wipe them all out? That is just what the Lord does with His children's sins; He blots them out, blots out the handwriting of ordinances that was against them and contrary to them, taking it out of the way, and nailing it to His cross, and does not leave a sign of it. That is the healing. You will never get true healing anywhere else, never get true peace anywhere else. You will not get peace by assuring yourselves of your sincerity. Not many of God's people can assure themselves of sincerity. As to certain acts, they may say they did right; but when they come before God, and when they are under His light, then they can understand that word, *'The heavens are not clean in His sight'* (Job 15 : 15); and how can a man, whose heart is a piece of sin, say that he is pure and sincere? You will not

get peace in that way; you will have peace in no way, nowhere, but in this place and in this manner—the cross of Christ. That beautiful hymn that we were singing, which some of us love,

‘Peace by His cross has Jesus made’,

expresses the truth of this matter.

‘Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee.’ What is this healing? Why, it is *the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost*. That is healing. You cannot be sore with the love of God in you, you cannot be sick with the love of God in your heart. Everything is right; the soul is healthy and strong, and this love the Spirit of God sheds abroad; sheds this precious, eternal love, in the heart. ‘Heal my soul by Thy precious love.’ O, if God should say to any of you tonight, ‘Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee’, there would be no sickness left. All the sickness and the pain and the wounds and the grief and the shame and the trouble would be gone, and you would bless the Lord with a humble, contrite heart, because of His healing mercy.

What is this healing? It is *the Lord’s presence*, that presence that is so wonderful, so glorious that it covers all, embraces all. It protects, it guides, it enlightens, it preserves, it supplies you. You can lack nothing if God is with you, nothing. ‘The Lord God is a Sun and Shield’—a Sun to enlighten, a Shield to preserve and protect. And this takes away sickness, soul sickness; you are healed. ‘I am the Lord that healeth thee.’ The presence of God takes away plagues. The plagues of Egypt were not to cleave to Israel; they were to be delivered. The plague and the reproach of famine God takes away by His presence; for you have plenty of nourishment when He is with you. You eat His flesh, and drink His blood when He is with you; for eating the flesh of Christ and drinking His blood, must be this—receiving Christ into your soul; and you receive Him when He comes to you and visits you. So all things of an evil kind are removed by the presence of God.

He heals by *His word*. ‘He sent out His word, and healed them.’ The word of God heals a sinner. Suppose you are sick of His absence, sick because He is absent from you, and He says to you, ‘I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee’, well, you are healed. He is not absent now, and the weakness that was felt when He was absent, and the fears that rose because He was absent, and the temptations that had power because He was absent—all have gone. Nothing of that kind can remain when God speaks to a soul. O my beloved friends, the word of God spoken with power is everything, it is life.

The disciples knew something of safety and pleasure and peace and comfort when they had the Lord with them. And when He told them He was about to leave them, their minds would run to this contingency and that trouble, and the weakness that would come to them, and their defencelessness. 'What shall we do when He our Friend and Master and Lord and Protector, whose rays of divinity we have seen, and whose power we have felt—when He has gone from us?' Perhaps you enter into that in your spirit. 'I am exposed, I am troubled, I do not know what will become of me. Enemies will overcome me, sin will be my destruction, if the Lord continues away from me.' Then when He says, 'I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee', you are covered. It is just like that word that covers a sinner, that you have in Isaiah, 'Thy God thy glory'; and you cannot be sick with that, nor be troubled, nor rebellious. It is all well with you when He is present. It may not affect your circumstances, they remain as they were for some time; but that does not enter into the case at the moment; you are blessed, the rest you can leave, you are healed. His word is a healing word.

There is a sickness of *ignorance*, and the Lord only can heal this. The Lord can show you the way you should go; no one else can really. The sickness of our ignorance is very great and very affecting; it makes us afraid of taking a step. The Lord provided for this when He brought Israel out of Egypt. The cloud by day abode with them, the pillar of fire covered them night by night, spread its protection and light over them; and when they were to move, the cloud went before them; when they were to stay, the cloud abode above them; they were covered. And you, if the Lord is pleased to go before you in some gracious way, are healed of the sickness of ignorance as to the way you should go.

The psalmist knew this would heal him on an occasion, when he said, 'Show me the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto Thee'. 'Lord, is this right? will this be right? wilt Thou be with me if I go here, if I go there? Let me live at the Throne of grace, and show me what I ought to do, and there deal with me, deal mercifully with me, and heal me.' There is a sickness of ignorance that is healed by the Lord, and He alone can heal it. He says to some, He has said it to some here, 'This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left'. That will heal you.

And may I say here, how little a person is, how truly humble he is in this place. 'I walk,' says he,

'... depending on my Lord

By faith and not by sight.'

'Confirm'd by one soft, secret word,'

the soul goes on, assured that the way he is walking is the right way that the Lord will have him go, to the city of habitation. His tears are dried, his soul is healed, his faith triumphs; he says, 'I walk by faith now, not by sight; I depend on Christ. He has made peace by His cross, and brought a measure of that peace into my soul; my infidelity is cured, my rebellion is forgiven, my hard heart is softened, I have a sacrifice that God accepts, I weep in my spirit blessed tears, O blessed tears! I would not, if the Lord would keep me from it, ever again be hard-hearted.' The sweetness of a melting spirit, the sweetness of contrition, the sweetness of getting into the dust, no tongue can express. O to be melted, to be dissolved! O to be truly little in your own eyes!

My brethren, this is the way to walk. I can tell you that God is with people who walk like this, and they will get well through. 'Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee.'

STUDIES IN MARK—*concluded from page 3*

establish what is in fact the central theme. In this task let us remember that we are seldom left to our own devices. Frequently Christ gives us the key to the parable Himself, either at the start or at the close. Frequently also the writer of the Gospel in question informs us what the Saviour's purpose in telling the parable was. Failing either of these, we ought still to examine the context in which the parable appears, to see if we find any pointer to the key there. Finally, having made use of every scrap of evidence we have as to the real teaching of the parable, we must then test our explanation rigorously. If we have to force the explanation through the parable, we must ask ourselves if we have not picked up the wrong key. Our key ought not to grate in the lock. Our interpretation ought to bear a clear relationship to all the main points requiring interpretation.

SPEAK, LORD—*concluded from page 7*

purposes of God and the final gathering up of all things in Christ, whether in heaven or on earth. The church of Jesus Christ is spoken of as the Bride of Christ. See 2 Cor. 11 : 2. The church is to reign with Christ. If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him. The final destiny of the church is to be an eternal testimony, an everlasting monument to the love and glory and power of God. Eph. 2 : 6, 7, and Eph. 3 : 20, 21.

TRUTH

H. P. WOTTON

Pilate said to Jesus, 'What is truth?' Whether he was asking a question, or implying that there is no such thing as truth, we cannot conjecture; we would need to have been there to hear the expression he put into the words. But if Pilate was asking a question he was apparently unaware of the fact that he was speaking to truth personified in the man Christ Jesus, who is 'the Way, the Truth and the Life' (John 14 : 6).

Everybody is interested in truth in some area of life; they are interested in true weights and measures; they want to know the truth about their friends. But it is by refusing truth that many are deceived. They do not want to know the truth about themselves. Of course, there are certain aspects of truth we cannot fail to know; for instance, that we belong to the human race. Some people, however, must be a little dubious about even this, seeing that they prefer to look on monkeys as their ancestors, leaving the poor monkey that hasn't made the grade impaled on the horns of a dilemma, not knowing whether to look up or look down.

But it is in the area of moral truth that we are more likely to deceive ourselves. This is because we see the sins of others, but often fail to see our own. It is, however, more important to know the truth about ourselves before we contemplate the truth about others.

The truth about God

John Calvin said that the two great branches of Christian knowledge are, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves.

We cannot know God apart from the revelation He has made of Himself. He has been pleased to reveal Himself both in the things He has made and in the Scriptures, as they are contained in the Old and New Testaments.

In the things He has made God is glorious, for if there is glory in the heavens and in the earth, how much more glorious must He be who created them! But though we see God revealed in His works, He is Himself completely separate from them, just as a man is completely separate from the things he has made.

In the Scriptures God has revealed Himself to be a trinity of three persons in one God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is mystery beyond our comprehension, and this incapacity of the finite to comprehend the infinite is in keeping with the greatness of God and the small-

ness of man, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts.

Among the many things revealed about God in His word is the wonderful truth that the second person in the trinity, who is the Son of God, has condescended to become the Son of Man also; so uniting Himself to our nature, yet without sin, that He has become Immanuel, God with us, the only way by which we may come to God.

The truth about ourselves

John Calvin seemed to be in two minds as to which came first—the knowledge of God or the knowledge of ourselves; but concluded that we could not know the truth about ourselves without some light from above.

The revelation of God to our souls often comes with a revelation of our sin to ourselves. This is seen in the experience of some Biblical characters. Isaiah records in the sixth chapter of his prophecy that ‘in the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple’. What his reaction to this was, he himself tells us. He says, ‘Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts’ (Isaiah 6 : 1, 5).

When the Lord appeared to Daniel in a vision, he had the same kind of experience. He said, ‘I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned into corruption, and I retained no strength’ (Daniel 10 : 8). Likewise, the apostle John, when he had a vision of his risen Lord, was so overwhelmed by the glorious sight, and the revelation it gave him of his own weakness and unworthiness, that he said, ‘When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead’ (Revelation 1 : 17). God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all; and in His light we see the truth about our fallen nature.

Truth in the inward parts

Some people think that what we believe is of no importance, seeing that everyone has a right to his opinion. That people have a right to their opinions is taken for granted by most people, but when we remember that the universal opinion was once held that the world was flat, we may well question the right to hold an opinion that is not in accordance with truth. Surely no one has a right to a lie; no one has a right to an opinion that is not according to facts.

Of course, we have a right to use our reasoning powers, and conclude that if this is so that must be so also; but if in our reasoning

we conclude that two and two make five, we have no right to this opinion because it is not according to facts.

God requires truth in the centre of our being, in our hearts. How important this is, is seen in the fact that Satan brought about the downfall of the human race by robbing man of the truth by which he lived, and replacing it with the lie by which he died. And since that time the lives of men have been governed by lies concerning God and man—the lie that there is no God, and that consequently He has not spoken to man. The lie that the Bible is the word of God only in parts, and that man is not a fallen creature. These are a few of the deceits by which many lives are governed.

But how can we be governed by truth when there is in us so much of the remains of sin, all of which is opposed to truth? The answer is that He who is in the lives of His people is greater than everything that opposes them. He is THE TRUTH who dwells in the heart. From the centre of government He shows us the vile nature of the sin that opposes us, and enables us so to live that sin does not have dominion over us. In the final analysis, truth cannot fail to win the day, for only truth has a positive being, a lie being no more than a negation of the things that are.

Take away the gospel from a Church and that Church is not worth preserving. A well without water, a scabbard without a sword, a steam-engine without fire, a ship without compass and rudder, a watch without a mainspring, a stuffed carcase without life—all these are useless things. But there is nothing so useless as a Church without the Gospel.—BISHOP RYLE.

Do you wish to be great? Then begin by being little. Do you desire to construct a vast and lofty fabric? Think first about the foundations of humility. The higher your structure is to be, the deeper must be its foundation. Modest humility is beauty's crown.—AUGUSTINE.

Labour to come as hungry to this duty of prayer, as to eat thy dinner and supper. I know no expedient for this like a holy watch set about thy heart in the whole course of thy life . . . Loose walking breeds lazy praying.—WM. GURNALL.

An hour should never pass without looking up to God for forgiveness and peace. This is the noblest science—to know how to live in hourly communion with God in Christ.—R. M. MCCHEYNE.

Milestones

Nobody with any discernment would pretend that the Church of Scotland as a whole is the spiritual body which it ought to be. This is why the following Report may come as a pleasant surprise.

After the last General Assembly, a powerful appeal went out to the Church at large. Presbyteries, Congregations, and Assembly Committees were instructed 'To take further steps to strengthen the life and witness of congregations'. It seems fairly clear that the immediate cause of all this concern was the financial difficulties facing those in charge of the Church's affairs. However, we hear that the Presbytery of Edinburgh have appointed a Committee to deal with the issues raised by the Assembly, and that this Committee has expressed a 'unanimous conviction that the crisis we face in the Church today is not primarily a crisis of finance, but a crisis of faith'. The Committee's mind was further expressed as follows:

'We propose that the Presbytery declare its conviction that the issues are spiritual by issuing a call to prayer to all within the bounds. It is our conviction that it is a time for prayer, for corporate prayer, for humbling before God; it is a time for repentance, for an acknowledgement that we have "lost the place". We are decent, hard-working men—some of us are killing ourselves—but it is perilously easy to become so busy in our work that we lose the vision, and lose the edge off our spiritual lives. The barrenness of a busy life is a terrible thing, if it keeps us from seeing what we do not want to see or acknowledge—our spiritual bankruptcy. Yes, we are decent, hard-working men—but we lack the fire of God in our pulpits, we lack the inspiration that will ignite our people to heroic endeavour and self-sacrifice. This is why there is a need for prayer. The Chronicler said, long ago:

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Let us put God to the test. Take Him seriously when He says this. Let us who are ministers lead the way. Let *us* humble ourselves, and seek His face, and pray that God will give us back the vision that we need.'

In response to this Report from its Committee the Edinburgh Presbytery agreed to certain measures, and readers will be interested to learn what came of these. By the kind permission of the minister,

Rev. James Philip, we therefore reproduce here the 'Minister's Letter' from the October Congregational Record of Holyrood Abbey Church.

Dear Friends,

I want to report on the progress that is being made in the Presbytery's ongoing concern about the programme for renewal throughout the Church in relation to the crisis that faces it at the present time.

There have been a number of encouragements in the responses congregations are making to the Presbytery's injunction. One Kirk Session reports that it 'gladly receives the Presbytery's call to Prayer and Rededication', and has instituted a series of special evening services on different aspects of membership, and a series of meetings for congregational prayer.

Another Kirk Session has instituted special Sunday evening services devoted to intercessory prayer and Bible study. Behind this, their Congregational Magazine comments, 'there is the feeling that the most dynamic element in Christian life—i.e. prayer and the growth of spiritual awareness of, and relationship towards, God—is sadly absent from many churches', and it expresses the hope that there will come about 'through prayer and study, the realignment of our spirit with God's spirit providing the direction and motivation for our Christian life and witness within our parish and the world'.

A series of meetings for united prayer has been arranged among interested congregations. This letter is being written the day after the first of these meetings was held, in St. David's Church, Broomhouse, when upwards of 150 people filled the Church Hall and maintained an unbroken flow of prayer, characterised by a seriousness and awareness of the Church's need for revitalisation and renewal. It was, to say the least, a heartening and encouraging experience, and one which we hope and trust will increase and deepen in the gatherings that are yet to take place. . . .

It is doubtless early, as yet, to feel confident about the outcome of all this. As one elder indicated in his prayer at the united gathering, it would be naive to suppose that a few prayer meetings will be sufficient to solve the problems facing the Church at the moment; rather, what is needed is a deep, painful and costly spirit of penitence and seeking after God. How true this is, and how needful for us all not to fall victim to wishful thinking and sentimentalising in such a serious situation. But at

the same time, it is probably true to say that it is not within the living memory of many that there has come such a call to prayer from the courts of the Church. And we must concede to ourselves, as others must also, that it is just possible that the living God purposes a work in our midst at this time. It is something, after all, that people should be wanting to come together to pray. The history of our own Scottish Kirk, to look no further, bears out that this is generally how the renewing of spiritual life has begun, and that in gathering for prayer and waiting upon God we are simply being true to our own earlier traditions in the Church of Scotland.

Peter White, of St. David's, Broomhouse, in his introduction to the first meeting for prayer, instanced the Cambuslang revival in the eighteenth century as a case in point: a great burden of prayer preceded the work of grace in that great forward movement of awakening. Martin Luther, the great reformer, once said, 'The prayers of the saints are the decrees of God beginning to work'.

Doubtless there will be—indeed there already have been—those who with some disdain dismiss the whole idea of prayer meetings as a relic of pietism, unrelated and irrelevant to the needs of today. This is, to say the least, an unfortunate misreading and misunderstanding of the reformed tradition itself. We hardly suppose that they would brand Calvin as a pietist, and here are some of the things he says on the subject:

'God in His Word ordains common prayers for believers.

'We do this openly, that all men mutually, each one from his brother, may receive the confession of faith, and be united and prompted by his example.

'This (i.e. fixed and prescribed hours for the public services of the church) does not preclude each church from being both repeatedly stirred up to more frequent use of prayer, and fired by a sharper zeal *if it is alerted by some major need.*'

Well, the major need is upon the Church at this time, and the alarm call has sounded to alert God's people and summon them to prayer. It remains to be seen whether heeded and acted upon in a way that will invite the quickening mercy and power of God to work deliverance in our midst.

Book Review

EXPOSITIONS OF ST. PAUL. Richard Sibbes. Published by the Banner of Truth Trust; 540 pp., £4.

This book is vol. 5 of *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, published in 1863. The Banner published vol. 1 of this series in 1973, and in the *Publisher's Preface* to vol. 5 they say that 'the steady demand for volume 1 has encouraged us to proceed with another'.

That there is a steady demand for a book by Sibbes is encouraging. There are those who denigrate the Puritans, who say that they gave an introspective cast to Calvinism. It may be that some followers of the Puritans, misunderstanding the spirit and purpose of the Puritan movement, developed a religion which was unhealthily introspective. But, reading vol. 5 of Sibbes' works, we find puritan religion here to be in the best possible health, vibrant with life and vigour.

Here Sibbes provides expositions of passages in Philippians, Colossians, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and I Timothy. In this review we would especially draw attention to his handling of the doctrine of assurance, appearing under the text, 'And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption'.

As to the soul's coming to rest in the efficacy of Christ's blood, Sibbes writes (p. 440), 'The Spirit persuadeth to look unto blood, convinceth the heart of the efficacy of it, and then quieteth the soul, which giveth itself up to Christ wholly and to whole Christ; and thence feels his heart established against carnal reason, so as he can and doth oppose Christ's blood to all the guilt that doth arise. And this witness of the Spirit comforting the soul is the most familiar, and affects most.'

Coming on then to the sealing of the Spirit, Sibbes writes (p. 450), 'Then am I sealed, when I do not only believe, but by a reflecting act of the soul know I do believe; and this reflection, though it be by reason, yet it is by reason enabled by the Spirit. Our spirits by the Spirit only, can discern of spiritual acts. It is not for us to know things above nature; without a cause, above nature. None can know the meaning of our broken desires, so as to help us in our infirmities, but that Spirit that stirred up those desires. Again, none knows the grievances of our spirits but our own spirits and the Spirit of God, who knows all the turnings and corners of the soul.'

By this witness of the Spirit, then, the soul comes to have assurance. As to whether or not it is desirable for believers to be thus assured of their interest in Christ, Sibbes is outspoken (p. 453):

'It hath been an old cavil, that certainty of salvation breeds security and looseness of life. And what is there that an ill-disposed soul cannot

suck poison out of? A man may as truly say the sea burns, or the fire cools. There is nothing quickens a soul more to cheerful obedience than assurance of God's love, and that our "labour should not be in vain in the Lord", I Corinthians, 15 : 58. This is the Scripture's logic and rhetoric, to enforce and persuade to a holy life, from knowledge of our present estate in grace. "I beseech you by the mercies of God," saith St. Paul, Romans 12 : 1. What mercies? Such as he had spoken of before—justification, sanctification, assurance, that all shall work together for good, that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ. All duties tend to assurance, or spring from assurance.'

In fact, he says (p. 454-5), 'The apostle would have them to labour not only for assurance, but for the riches of it. That will bring rich comfort, and joy and peace. Times of temptations and trial may come, and such as, if we have not strong assurance, we may be sorely troubled and call all in question. This may be the condition of God's own children: and from this, that in times of peace they contented themselves with a lesser degree of this assurance and sealing.'

Perhaps, in reaction to the type of religion ably described by William Young in our last issue as 'a pretentious piety that abounds in high assurance, frothy joy and premature victory', the Reformed Church has not always placed enough emphasis on this doctrine of assurance. If this is so, the road back might well begin in the study of this volume of Sibbes' works.

J.T.

BOOKS

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