

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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Editorial

THE MOST WONDERFUL WORDS ever to fall upon human ears must surely have been those of the angel on the morning of the resurrection — “He is Risen” (Mark 16:6). What a wealth of significance is contained in those three simple words!

This simple announcement, “He is risen”, transformed the followers of Jesus and made them buoyant, confident and exultant. They had been “begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

The resurrection was God’s seal of approval upon the work Christ did upon the cross. The disciples came to realise that the cross was not a martyrdom but a sacrifice for sin. The cross became the ground of all their hopes and confidence. If Christ had not risen, men would never have triumphed in the cross; we could never have sung,

“In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o’er the wrecks of time. . . .”

The empty grave tells us that He was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification. Whilst other tombs are evidence of death and decay, Christ’s tomb is the evidence of life.

The disciples would never have braved a hostile world had Jesus remained in the grave. The certainty that He was alive abolished their fears. The world was against them, but what did that matter? — they had a living Lord beside them.

The tasks that confront us today are vast, if not appalling. We may well ask, “Who is sufficient for these things?”. The fact that He is risen should inspire us with new confidence and make us adequate for all that life may bring.

“Could ye not watch with Me one hour?”

A Sermon by the Editor

“And Jesus cometh unto His disciples and findeth them asleep and said unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”
(Matthew 26:40)

“COULD YE NOT WATCH with Me one hour?” Here is a question that is both gentle and compassionate even in its rebuke, “Could ye not watch with Me one hour?”. The scene, of course, is set in Gethsemane and it occurs in one of the most solemn passages in Scripture. The night before the crucifixion the Lord Jesus Christ set His steps toward Gethsemane. The crisis had now come. He entered into Gethsemane not to hide from death but rather to prepare Himself for it by a special time of prayer and intercession and, of course, our Lord often availed Himself of secret and solitary prayer. You remember at the beginning of His ministry when He was delivering what we know to be the Sermon on the Mount He gave instruction regarding prayer and He said to the disciples, “When you pray don’t be as the hypocrites praying at the street corner, but rather withdraw into your own room and shut the door and pray to your Father who sees in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly”, and that counsel He gave to the disciples He practised Himself. I am sure the fact that He went to dark Gethsemane that night shows at once His serenity of mind and His great courage. He went to His usual place even though His going there was known because John tells us that Judas knew the place for He often resorted there with His disciples. He was conscious that the end was imminent and He withdrew to Gethsemane with His disciples to seek strength in prayer. So the eleven went with Him. Judas had already gone to do his desperate deed, but only Peter, James and John were permitted to draw nearer to Him, and even they had to keep their distance and Luke tells us that He was parted from them a stone’s throw. He had to tread the winepress alone, and so we see in dark Gethsemane the solitary Christ. I am sure there is a marked contrast between the revelry of the Passover pilgrims in the city and the sadness of the garden. The clamour of the crowd had died away yet on the other side of the valley His enemies were plotting His end, but scarcely a sound reached the garden to break the silence — the solitary Christ.

But if we see the solitary Christ in the garden we see also the praying Christ and He was in deep, mysterious trouble. None of us can ever fathom the depth of the Lord’s suffering that night. The Scripture, you see, was being fulfilled,

“Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow which is done unto Me in the day of His fierce anger”. And so you remember how He prayed so earnestly and intently, “Oh My Father if it be possible let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt”. But there was no faltering of purpose, there was no wavering of will, but He was there under tremendous strain. He was not afraid to die but He shrank from the terrible experience of bearing the burden of the sins of many, and in after days Paul was inspired to write that “God made Him to be sin for us Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”. Yes, we see the solitary Christ and we see the praying Christ.

But we also see the agonising Christ, and Luke tells us that “praying He was in an agony and He prayed more earnestly and His sweat was as great drops of blood falling to the ground”. Oh what a soul-subduing picture is painted for us in the Gospels of the agonising and the submissive Christ. He shrank from the horror of being abandoned by God, so He said, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death”, or, as we might translate it literally, “My soul is ‘ringed around’ with sorrow”. The agonising Christ.

But notice: He had posted, as it were, the disciples to **keep watch and to pray**. What He wanted them to do was really in itself no great thing. It was to watch against surprise and to pray for strength to endure whatever may be at hand, and will you notice, they were to watch *with Him*, not *over* Him. He had to go through this agony alone; He never at any time asked the disciples to pray for Him. He did not now ask them to intercede for Him, but only to pray for themselves. Oh yes, He often asked for their faith, their love, their sympathy, their very presence, but He never asked for their prayers. He only showed them by word and by example how to pray, but this was the commission delivered to them that night, “Watch and pray”. How sad His heart was under the olive press they could never know, but the sadness was deepened and quickened when He came back to them for a moment and found them asleep and He said, “What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?”. Here is a loneliness that surpasses wonder. “Could ye not watch *with Me*?”. He felt keenly their desertion from duty. His desire for the presence of His friends reveals His sense of desolation. Of course, the tension had worn them out. It had been a very full and demanding day culminating in the meeting for the last time in the upper room. Here are the Lord’s last words of instruction. They had been there at the institution of the Lord’s Supper and then there was the final walk to the garden and it just proved too much as they sat down under the olive trees. The cool breeze sends them off to sleep, but, if weariness had weighed down their eyelids, surely love ought to have kept them open, and our Lord clearly expected something better of them, and His disappointment is scarcely concealed. Surely there is an accent of surprise in His question to Peter, “Could ye not watch with Me one hour?”.

These three disciples, Peter, James and John, were greatly privileged. You remember they had been with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration where they

saw His glory and heard the voice from the excellent glory and, strange to relate, they fell asleep even there. And then they were able to be with Him and to be witnesses of His power in raising the daughter of Jairus. One of them, Simon Peter, had made a great profession of willingness even to die for Him, "Though all men should forsake Thee, yet will not I. I will go with Thee," he said, "even unto death". And another who had most profoundly loved Him, had leaned on His breast at supper, he too succumbed to sleep. They were completely ignorant of their own weakness. They accredited themselves with a strength they did not possess. They were full of self-security and self-confidence, and Peter said that he was willing to die for Him, and yet he couldn't even keep himself awake for Him. "The flesh," says our Lord, "was indeed weak, although the spirit was willing."

And so it was that the disciples watched for a while until their grief and weariness got the better of them and overtook them and their eyes closed in slumber, and we wonder, do we not, at their insensitivity, but it is not for us to criticise. We can only regret that in one of the saddest moments of our Lord's life He was deprived of every vestige of comfort and came to them with this most searching question, "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?" "It is not very much," He said in effect, "I am asking of you, and yet you cannot meet Me, even in this."

He had need of loyal support and yet they slept. And what a lot they missed because of their sleep. They missed out on the Mount of Transfiguration by dropping off to sleep, and they missed out now. Had they remained awake during the agonising conflict in the garden, their appreciation of the price that was to be paid for our redemption would have been even greater. Yes, and what comfort would it have been to the Lord Jesus Christ if they had watched with Him and shared as well as they were able this tremendous time through which He was passing? Is it any wonder that Mark says that "When He came to them the second time they did not know what to answer Him"? They were speechless. They could not give account of their action. "They knew not what to answer Him." So it was that Peter, James and John slept when they ought to have watched and prayed. Do you remember another Scripture says, "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none"? Those who loved Him most lay curled in slumber within earshot of His prayers, but they ought to have watched and they ought to have prayed. Though He asked them to watch with Him, they slept, though a short time before He had warned them that danger was at hand and that their faith was likely to fail they still slept, and though they had come fresh from the Lord's Table with its touching solemnities, they slept, and all this shows that the best of men are but men and that there is much weakness even in the best of Christians.

But does it not come to us that we also ought to be on our guard against slothfulness and against indolence. Notice our Lord went on to say, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak", and how true that is! We have within

us a double nature, a ready spirit and a weak flesh, a carnal nature inclined to evil and a spiritual nature inclined to good, and so the Apostle Paul says, "These two are contrary the one to the other" and the one is striving for mastery over against the other. So our Lord says, "Watch and pray". And these two things are inseparable. The one discerns the dangers and the other arms against them. Watching by itself is not enough, because we are not able to keep ourselves in the hour of trouble and in the hour of trial, and hence also we need to pray for God's enabling grace. We are to watch like soldiers on active service. We are on enemies' ground. We must therefore always be on our guard. You remember what Paul's word was to Timothy: "Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life."

We are also urged to pray, to pray regularly, habitually and carefully. The Lord Jesus conquered in the garden with prayer. The disciples, on the other hand, succumbed to their temptation because they met it without prayer. Prayer would have made them conquerors as it had made Him, and power was given Him to fulfil His mighty task. You remember at the end of the conflict He arose and wakened the disciples and said, "Arise, let us be going. Behold, he that betrayeth Me is at hand", and the Lord advanced with majestic steps to meet Judas and his traitor band.

We need to watch and pray. We must pray as well as watch, and watch as well as pray, and the man who knows his own weakness and, knowing it both watches and prays, that man will be held up and not allowed to fall. "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?" "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

And so there comes to us this challenge to watch and pray. You remember how well it is put in one of the hymns we often sing:

"Christian! seek not yet repose,
Cast thy dreams of ease away;
Thou art in the midst of foes:
 Watch and pray.

Principalities and powers,
Mustering their unseen array,
Wait for thine unguarded hours:
 Watch and pray.

Gird thy heavenly armour on,
Wear it ever, night and day;
Ambushed lies the evil one:
 Watch and pray.

Hear the victors who o'ercome;
Still they mark each warrior's way;
All with one sweet voice exclaim,
 Watch and pray.

Hear, above all, hear thy Lord,
 Him thou lovest to obey;
 Hide within thy heart His word,
 Watch and pray.

Watch, as if on that alone
 Hung the issue of the day;
 Pray that help may be sent down;
 Watch and pray.

“Could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”

That word is as relevant to us today as it was when the Lord gave it in dark Gethsemane. Amen.

M.H.

For Younger Readers

CARINE MACKENZIE

MISSED OUT

WILMA HAS WORKED HARD over the last year to gain a Bronze Award under the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. She spent time in a children's ward at the local hospital, learnt to look after pigs, improved her badminton playing and made an expedition in the mountains, camping out overnight.

The award ceremony was arranged in the Town Hall and the Provost (or Mayor) of the town and other civic officials were gathered to present the awards to about fifty people. There was naturally quite a bit of excitement with all the youngsters looking forward to receiving their certificates and bronze or silver badges.

Name after name was called out and one by one the girl or boy went up to the stage amid the applause of parents and friends. Wilma sat patiently in her seat, waiting for her name to be called. Eventually the announcer said, “And lastly James Macdonald from Highland Outdoor Centre”. Wilma's name had not been called yet. What had happened? What a disappointment! Two or three speeches were made — a vote of thanks was given. Yes, the ceremony really was over. Everything was finished. Everybody went to the back of the hall for tea and refreshments.

We went to the man who had read out the names. Was Wilma's name not on the list? “Oh, I am so sorry,” he said, “I forgot to turn over the page.” Two names had been omitted. The man reading out the names had made a mistake.

How easy it is for someone to make a mistake — to miss out a name or to forget to turn a page. God never forgets. He never makes a mistake. At the Day of Judgment every name will be called out. No one will be omitted. All will appear before the Judgment seat of God. To some He will say, "Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels".

But to those who love and trust Him He will say, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world". No one who belongs to Jesus will be disappointed at the last day. Jesus said to His Father, "Those (people) that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost". His people are never forgotten. "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me," He said.

Wilma's story has a happy ending. Her father was concerned about the situation and spoke to the Provost at the end. "I did enjoy giving all these boys and girls their awards," he said. "Well," said Wilma's Dad, "there are two young people here who were missed out."

"That will never do," said the Provost. "We will re-convene the meeting and give them the awards right away."

So with a great many apologies, Wilma and her school-friend were presented with their awards after all.

PUZZLE

Find the missing words. Clue — the answers spell out the word AWARD.

1. Fear not _____ I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward. Genesis 15.
2. The labourer is _____ of his reward. 1 Timothy 5.
3. Thine _____ may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. Matthew 6.
4. The Lord _____ thy work and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust. Ruth 2.
5. God is a rewarder of them that _____ seek him. Hebrews 11.

Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God's judgment, hating what He hates, loving what He loves, and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man.

Christ Fights the Dragon

PETER KING (Stanford, Beds)

Revelation Chapters 12-14

WE NOW MOVE ON to the fourth of the seven visions in the book of the Revelation. The first three visions concentrate on the conflict of Christ with the world. Christ and His Church confront the evils of the world as seen in day-to-day Christian life. Vision four is the first of four visions of the comparatively secret conflict of Christ and the dragon; that is, the seat of evil in the world which is unseen and yet has a tremendous effect on the world.

The writer is deeply indebted to William Hendriksen and his great insight into these and other parts of the Revelation.

Chapter 12 opens with the great wonder in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun, being in travail, and ready to deliver her child. Then appeared another wonder, a red dragon, who is waiting for this birth and attempts to seize the child as He is born. Having failed to do this the dragon turns on the woman who is protected by the wilderness where God has prepared a refuge for her.

That thumbnail sketch of the first six verses needs a little explanation. The woman is the Church waiting for our Lord to come. Please remember we are back now at the start of the last days in a new vision. This was the time when it was said of Simeon in Luke 2:25, “. . . *the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel*”. The woman had on her head a crown of twelve stars. We have seen before that this represented the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles; i.e. the whole Church. The great red dragon is Satan himself. He had seven heads and ten horns. Arrogant authority so awful that one third of the stars of heaven are pushed aside as he moved.

The dragon is sitting waiting for the momentous time when the Saviour of the world is to be born, so that he can make his greatest move and destroy the Son of God. It is interesting to observe that Satan knew that Jesus was the Christ although the Jews, God's chosen people, did not. The woman is delivered of her child, and Christ is born and caught up to God and His throne. The preservation of the Child is very carefully recorded in the Gospel account. He was protected from Herod: “. . . *bring me word again. . . And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way*” (Matthew 2:8, 12). He went down into Egypt and returned to live in Nazareth when the times were safer. The woman fled into the wilderness and God had prepared a place where she is nourished for 1,260 days (the last days). We have seen that number before and it is the same as 42 months and times and times and half a time. This represents the care and protection God is giving to the Church today and will do so until the end of the age. The result

of this incident is that the dragon is cast out of heaven and so goes about to deceive the whole earth.

This attempt to destroy the Christian Church at its birth was only the culmination of a history of such action. Those who wish to read this in more detail are highly recommended to read Hendriksen's *More than Conquerors*, pages 137-140. We will only outline the main features in this article.

Genesis 3:15 gives the first hint of the Messiah. The seed of the woman. It is noteworthy that it is the seed of the **woman**. During Old Testament history it is always recorded that the descendants came from the **man**. Noah begat Shem, Isaac begat Jacob, and so on. Here it is the seed of the woman. Joseph was not the father because Jesus was from before of old. He had a body prepared by the Father under the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit on Mary. As the earth became populated it is recorded, "*the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose*" (Genesis 6:2) and the result was the flood, from which only Noah and his family survived. Satan almost won that battle. It seemed that Sarah having no children would stop the line to Christ but Isaac was born. Moses' intercession saved Israel. "*Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them. . . . Turn from thy fierce wrath. . . . And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people*" (Exodus 32:10, 12, 14). David was protected from Saul, and Joash from the fury of Athaliah. Haman's treachery all but succeeded in destroying the Jewish nation and then Herod went for the children in his fury to kill the Christ.

The Christian Church was born and continues today and will continue until the end of the age.

Great joy is expressed in heaven at verse 10 as Satan is cast out, but two verses on there is a certain sorrow for the earth that it now has the dragon to contend with, especially as he knows that his time is short. Now that Satan had been cast out "*he persecuted the woman that brought forth the man child*" (verse 13). That is, he persecutes the Church. The woman is given two wings to enable her to fly away for protection, and she is nourished for two and a half years, i.e. the last days. Satan's malice continues to the extent of attempting to carry her away with a flood of water, but the earth swallows the water. "*Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life*" (Isaiah 43:4). Again Satan is frustrated so he "*went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*" (verse 17). He will not give up, but tries to pick us off one at a time. How important it is that the Church keeps together.

Do we not see here the wonderful provision that God has provided for His people? The power of Satan is great but God is greater. The enemy may "*come in like a flood*" but we must lift up a standard against him, knowing that God is for us, so no one can be against us.

Before we move into chapter 13, let us remind ourselves that this vision is showing Christ's conflict with hidden evil. This is the hidden world of spirits and it is an increasing danger today. The occult is no myth. Many are deceived by it and go to hell because of it. Lord save our children from such a deception.

We are now, in chapter 13, introduced to two beasts, the beast of the sea and the beast of the land. From what follows it seems that the first is Satan's actions and the second Satan's mind or motive. The first beast had seven heads and ten horns with ten crowns. This could illustrate world powers in league with Satan. There is no doubt he uses politics to further his cause. The attributes of the beast are described as a leopard, quick in action; a bear, formidable strength; and a lion of great voice. Even conflict and deadly wounds are healed (verse 3). Great empires are destroyed but the beast surfaces again in some other dynasty. The beast derived its power from the dragon (verse 2). We have often seen so-called religious orders in league with evil politics. The Roman Catholic church has moved its allegiance around in our lifetime to gain political advantage. Notice how the people bow to this beast. Nations put their trust in systems such as communism and capitalism, but we know they will all fail. The saints were in fact overcome themselves (verse 7) and we must ever be on our guard not to be overtaken by the age in which we live. The 42 months is mentioned again, so we can be sure the time is the last days. In this Gospel age the only ones who worship this beast are unconverted, "*whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*". The patience of the saints is not to be caught up in retribution and leading into captivity, or killing with the sword (that is metaphorically). How easy it is to try to resist when it is our strength to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.

The second beast came up out of the earth and had two horns and spoke as the dragon. Verse 12 gives the clue to the identity when it "*causeth the earth and all that dwell therein to worship the first beast*". This is, then, the evil mind of Satan, the total deception of all the anti-Christ's. We see this all around us today, from nodding madonnas to Hindu gods and Islamic fundamentalism. The worship of images even to the point that the images "*speak*" (verse 15). Those who were so persuaded receive a mark in their foreheads; that is, they are owned by the beast and so again the saints are separated. Verse 18 has caused much speculation as to what the number of the beast means. Hendriksen suggests that 6 being short of 7 illustrates failure, so consequently 666 is failure upon failure upon failure. This is the ultimate end of the dragon and all around him.

Having established the existence of Satan's kingdom and the conflict Christ wages every day, the vision now turns to paint the picture of the victory of the Church, the warnings to mankind, and the final harvests at the end of time. So the vision covers very clearly the time from the birth of Jesus to His coming again.

Chapter 14 opens with the triumph of the Church. Each vision has this same event but seen from a different position. Here it particularly relates to what has gone before. In chapter 13 we saw how that those who worshipped the beast had

a mark in their foreheads. The first verse here says, “. . . a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads”. The Lamb is standing in mount Sion, unmoveable, with the Church around Him. The followers of the Lamb sang a new song and only they can sing it. This is the song of redemption, for they are redeemed from the kingdom of Satan. There are some interesting features attributed to those redeemed of the Lord. They are pure (verse 4); they are the firstfruits to God; they have no guile; they are without fault. What a redemption, that sinners should be so considered by God. A mighty Saviour we have who is able to save to the uttermost. Surely we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

The preaching of the Gospel goes on during this time. Despite the evil around and the seemingly most unsuitable time, the angel (verse 6), “*flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto all that dwell on the earth, and to every kingdom, and kindred, and tongue, and people*”. Some say this is not the time to preach the Gospel, but this is not the teaching here.

Another angel now gives the prediction of the fall of the evil powers illustrated in the earlier part of the vision. Babylon, the seat of all evil, is fallen, is fallen. Satan's base is overthrown and those who worshipped the beast are now to drink of the wine of the wrath of God. It is not diluted but poured without mixture in the presence of the Lamb. So the eternal destiny is described over the next few verses. In the middle of this terrible prophecy there is still that little note of encouragement to those who die in the Lord. “*Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth*”.

Now comes the final judgment of mankind. Our Lord Himself coming to reap the earth, the great harvest at the end of time. First the harvest of redeemed souls (verses 15-16) and then the harvest of the wicked. The clusters of grapes of the multitude of the evil are gathered and thrust into the winepress of the wrath of God. Complete and utter destruction is then foretold. So the righteous are gathered to everlasting life and the wicked to everlasting death.

As we see this great, final overcoming of our Lord, we must be reminded of how Christ Himself stood for us in His great atonement. Had it not been for His vicarious death, we as believers, would have been included in that winepress of wrath. But He went through that for us. “*Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. . . . I have trod the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me*” (Isaiah 63:1, 3).

So the vision is completed. We have been given a vivid account of the conflict of good against evil, our Lord acting as our mediator and protector as He sits at the right hand of God on high.

IF ANY MAN HAVE AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR

“I have a Baptism to be Baptised with”

FRANCIS WILLIAMS (Abbots Langley, Herts)

“I have a baptism to be baptised with and how am I straightened till it be accomplished” (Luke 12:50)

JOHN THE BAPTIST preached the baptism of repentance in preparation for the new factor that had come into Israel. John’s requirement was urgent, for with the coming of Jesus the “fire” of the Holy Spirit would make possible and demand more than formal obedience. The acceptance of the need to be changed was symbolised in John’s baptism by the washing in water. Why then should Jesus insist that John baptise Him? “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptised of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.”

This encounter is of great scriptural importance; it is needful to understand the significance of John baptising Jesus when Jesus needed no baptism of repentance and how in the doing of it all righteousness was fulfilled. The understanding is to be found in the first mention of symbolic washing in water; that is, baptism. Exodus and Leviticus (Exodus chapters 39 and 40; Leviticus 8:1-9) record the institution of Aaron as the first high priest of the Aaronic order; a priesthood still fully operational at the time of our Lord, but as John preached, “the axe was laid at the root of the tree”. “And Moses said unto the congregation, This is the thing which the Lord commanded to be done. And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water. . . . And he poured of the anointing oil upon Aaron’s head, and anointed him, to sanctify him” (Leviticus 8:5, 6, 12).

There is not space to go into the symbolic meaning of the Mosaic institution, but it is in essence separation for a ministry ordained of God for the wellbeing of His people. A ministry of example and exhortation, of praise and thanksgiving, of the loving kindness of God. Aaron was washed; separated from his brethren (Hebrew = Nazar) and sanctified to the holy office. He was robed in a new authority; that of high priest of Israel. He was anointed with the holy oil of anointing which signified, with the acceptance of the following sacrifices, God’s approval. We might compare this with the baptism of Jesus, the Nazarene: “And Jesus when He was baptised, went straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw (that is, John saw) the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo, a voice

from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16-17).

Thus Jesus, like Aaron, was washed with water; legally separated and installed as the first and only High Priest for the ministry to Israel, which was to fulfil the Aaronic institution. Jesus was no usurper but the awaited promised Messiah. As Moses washed Aaron so John baptised Jesus, but it was the Father that robed Jesus with the anointing Spirit of God coming in the form of a dove and remaining on Him, the signification of authority and peace. This was followed by the voice of approval from the Father of His Son. Jesus came in His Father's name to effect His Father's will. Thus was all righteousness as demanded by the law fulfilled.

The ministry of the Messiah to Israel was initiated in all the righteousness demanded by the law and the prophets. John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets or the first of the New Testament prophets, was unique in that he was indwelt by the Holy Spirit and he had acknowledged the Messiah before he was born, and by this Spirit saw Jesus in all truth, the begotten Son of God (John 1:32). "And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptise with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."

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of this incident is that the dragon is cast out of heaven and so goes about to deceive the whole earth.

This attempt to destroy the Christian Church at its birth was only the culmination of a history of such action. Those who wish to read this in more detail are highly recommended to read Hendriksen's *More than Conquerors*, pages 137-140. We will only outline the main features in this article.

Genesis 3:15 gives the first hint of the Messiah. The seed of the woman. It is noteworthy that it is the seed of the **woman**. During Old Testament history it is always recorded that the descendants came from the **man**. Noah begat Shem, Isaac begat Jacob, and so on. Here it is the seed of the woman. Joseph was not the father because Jesus was from before of old. He had a body prepared by the Father under the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit on Mary. As the earth became populated it is recorded, "*the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose*" (Genesis 6:2) and the result was the flood, from which only Noah and his family survived. Satan almost won that battle. It seemed that Sarah having no children would stop the line to Christ but Isaac was born. Moses' intercession saved Israel. "*Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them. . . . Turn from thy fierce wrath. . . . And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people*" (Exodus 32:10, 12, 14). David was protected from Saul, and Joash from the fury of Athaliah. Haman's treachery all but succeeded in destroying the Jewish nation and then Herod went for the children in his fury to kill the Christ.

The Christian Church was born and continues today and will continue until the end of the age.

Great joy is expressed in heaven at verse 10 as Satan is cast out, but two verses on there is a certain sorrow for the earth that it now has the dragon to contend with, especially as he knows that his time is short. Now that Satan had been cast out "*he persecuted the woman that brought forth the man child*" (verse 13). That is, he persecutes the Church. The woman is given two wings to enable her to fly away for protection, and she is nourished for two and a half years, i.e. the last days. Satan's malice continues to the extent of attempting to carry her away with a flood of water, but the earth swallows the water. "*Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life*" (Isaiah 43:4). Again Satan is frustrated so he "*went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*" (verse 17). He will not give up, but tries to pick us off one at a time. How important it is that the Church keeps together.

Do we not see here the wonderful provision that God has provided for His people? The power of Satan is great but God is greater. The enemy may "*come in like a flood*" but we must lift up a standard against him, knowing that God is for us, so no one can be against us.

Before we move into chapter 13, let us remind ourselves that this vision is showing Christ's conflict with hidden evil. This is the hidden world of spirits and it is an increasing danger today. The occult is no myth. Many are deceived by it and go to hell because of it. Lord save our children from such a deception.

We are now, in chapter 13, introduced to two beasts, the beast of the sea and the beast of the land. From what follows it seems that the first is Satan's actions and the second Satan's mind or motive. The first beast had seven heads and ten horns with ten crowns. This could illustrate world powers in league with Satan. There is no doubt he uses politics to further his cause. The attributes of the beast are described as a leopard, quick in action; a bear, formidable strength; and a lion of great voice. Even conflict and deadly wounds are healed (verse 3). Great empires are destroyed but the beast surfaces again in some other dynasty. The beast derived its power from the dragon (verse 2). We have often seen so-called religious orders in league with evil politics. The Roman Catholic church has moved its allegiance around in our lifetime to gain political advantage. Notice how the people bow to this beast. Nations put their trust in systems such as communism and capitalism, but we know they will all fail. The saints were in fact overcome themselves (verse 7) and we must ever be on our guard not to be overtaken by the age in which we live. The 42 months is mentioned again, so we can be sure the time is the last days. In this Gospel age the only ones who worship this beast are unconverted, "*whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*". The patience of the saints is not to be caught up in retribution and leading into captivity, or killing with the sword (that is metaphorically). How easy it is to try to resist when it is our strength to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.

The second beast came up out of the earth and had two horns and spoke as the dragon. Verse 12 gives the clue to the identity when it "*causeth the earth and all that dwell therein to worship the first beast*". This is, then, the evil mind of Satan, the total deception of all the anti-Christ's. We see this all around us today, from nodding madonnas to Hindu gods and Islamic fundamentalism. The worship of images even to the point that the images "*speak*" (verse 15). Those who were so persuaded receive a mark in their foreheads; that is, they are owned by the beast and so again the saints are separated. Verse 18 has caused much speculation as to what the number of the beast means. Hendriksen suggests that 6 being short of 7 illustrates failure, so consequently 666 is failure upon failure upon failure. This is the ultimate end of the dragon and all around him.

Having established the existence of Satan's kingdom and the conflict Christ wages every day, the vision now turns to paint the picture of the victory of the Church, the warnings to mankind, and the final harvests at the end of time. So the vision covers very clearly the time from the birth of Jesus to His coming again.

Chapter 14 opens with the triumph of the Church. Each vision has this same event but seen from a different position. Here it particularly relates to what has gone before. In chapter 13 we saw how that those who worshipped the beast had

a mark in their foreheads. The first verse here says, “. . . a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads”. The Lamb is standing in mount Sion, unmoveable, with the Church around Him. The followers of the Lamb sang a new song and only they can sing it. This is the song of redemption, for they are redeemed from the kingdom of Satan. There are some interesting features attributed to those redeemed of the Lord. They are pure (verse 4); they are the firstfruits to God; they have no guile; they are without fault. What a redemption, that sinners should be so considered by God. A mighty Saviour we have who is able to save to the uttermost. Surely we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

The preaching of the Gospel goes on during this time. Despite the evil around and the seemingly most unsuitable time, the angel (verse 6), “*flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto all that dwell on the earth, and to every kingdom, and kindred, and tongue, and people*”. Some say this is not the time to preach the Gospel, but this is not the teaching here.

Another angel now gives the prediction of the fall of the evil powers illustrated in the earlier part of the vision. Babylon, the seat of all evil, is fallen, is fallen. Satan's base is overthrown and those who worshipped the beast are now to drink of the wine of the wrath of God. It is not diluted but poured without mixture in the presence of the Lamb. So the eternal destiny is described over the next few verses. In the middle of this terrible prophecy there is still that little note of encouragement to those who die in the Lord. “*Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth*”.

Now comes the final judgment of mankind. Our Lord Himself coming to reap the earth, the great harvest at the end of time. First the harvest of redeemed souls (verses 15-16) and then the harvest of the wicked. The clusters of grapes of the multitude of the evil are gathered and thrust into the winepress of the wrath of God. Complete and utter destruction is then foretold. So the righteous are gathered to everlasting life and the wicked to everlasting death.

As we see this great, final overcoming of our Lord, we must be reminded of how Christ Himself stood for us in His great atonement. Had it not been for His vicarious death, we as believers, would have been included in that winepress of wrath. But He went through that for us. “*Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. . . . I have trod the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me*” (Isaiah 63:1, 3).

So the vision is completed. We have been given a vivid account of the conflict of good against evil, our Lord acting as our mediator and protector as He sits at the right hand of God on high.

IF ANY MAN HAVE AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR

“I have a Baptism to be Baptised with”

FRANCIS WILLIAMS (Abbots Langley, Herts)

“I have a baptism to be baptised with and how am I straightened till it be accomplished” (Luke 12:50)

JOHN THE BAPTIST preached the baptism of repentance in preparation for the new factor that had come into Israel. John’s requirement was urgent, for with the coming of Jesus the “fire” of the Holy Spirit would make possible and demand more than formal obedience. The acceptance of the need to be changed was symbolised in John’s baptism by the washing in water. Why then should Jesus insist that John baptise Him? “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptised of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.”

This encounter is of great scriptural importance; it is needful to understand the significance of John baptising Jesus when Jesus needed no baptism of repentance and how in the doing of it all righteousness was fulfilled. The understanding is to be found in the first mention of symbolic washing in water; that is, baptism. Exodus and Leviticus (Exodus chapters 39 and 40; Leviticus 8:1-9) record the institution of Aaron as the first high priest of the Aaronic order; a priesthood still fully operational at the time of our Lord, but as John preached, “the axe was laid at the root of the tree”. “And Moses said unto the congregation, This is the thing which the Lord commanded to be done. And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water. . . . And he poured of the anointing oil upon Aaron’s head, and anointed him, to sanctify him” (Leviticus 8:5, 6, 12).

There is not space to go into the symbolic meaning of the Mosaic institution, but it is in essence separation for a ministry ordained of God for the wellbeing of His people. A ministry of example and exhortation, of praise and thanksgiving, of the loving kindness of God. Aaron was washed; separated from his brethren (Hebrew = Nazar) and sanctified to the holy office. He was robed in a new authority; that of high priest of Israel. He was anointed with the holy oil of anointing which signified, with the acceptance of the following sacrifices, God’s approval. We might compare this with the baptism of Jesus, the Nazarene: “And Jesus when He was baptised, went straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw (that is, John saw) the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo, a voice

from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16-17).

Thus Jesus, like Aaron, was washed with water; legally separated and installed as the first and only High Priest for the ministry to Israel, which was to fulfil the Aaronic institution. Jesus was no usurper but the awaited promised Messiah. As Moses washed Aaron so John baptised Jesus, but it was the Father that robed Jesus with the anointing Spirit of God coming in the form of a dove and remaining on Him, the signification of authority and peace. This was followed by the voice of approval from the Father of His Son. Jesus came in His Father's name to effect His Father's will. Thus was all righteousness as demanded by the law fulfilled.

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It is to be noted that immediately following this baptism Jesus was both led by the Spirit, and driven into the forty days of fasting and testing in the wilderness. The Lamb of God was proved worthy to minister in the task His Father had appointed; Messiah to Israel. How is it then that we come to these words in the Gospel of Luke 12:50? "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how I am straightened till it be accomplished!" Is the Lord to be baptised twice? Yes, according to His own words. If so, why, and where is the record of it? The mission to Israel was at an end. In spite of the three years of preaching and teaching, and all the mighty signs and wonders that witnessed to the truth of Jesus Christ, He was still only seen with the eyes of the flesh; as Jesus the carpenter's son whose brothers and sisters were among them. Now at the end of His ministry to Israel Jesus would allow the desire of Satan to be accomplished through the children of darkness. In this their day the Son of Man had even less place to lay His head than when He began His ministry. The poison of the enemy had leavened Israel and accomplished its work; the Kingdom and its King were rejected, even as the prophets had foretold.

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The scripturally lawful legal triple asking, and the silent affirmation that confirmed that there was no alternative option for mankind, put the action squarely on the shoulders of the Son of Man. Jesus allowed Himself to be betrayed into the hands of sinners, the final chapter in the destruction of the works of the devil was commenced.

“Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth” (Isaiah 63:1-6).

The prophecy covers both advents, the victory is total and it belongs to Christ. The Lamb of the Father's choosing, Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, to destroy the works of the devil. It was indeed a baptism for suffering, suffering and victory for the salvation of souls.

The Dying Thief

A Sermon by the Rev. Geoffrey Thomas (Aberystwyth)

Luke 23:19-43

EVERY ONE OF YOU HERE has heard about the dying thief who hung alongside our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. It is one of the most memorable incidents in the life of our Lord and it is, of course, remembered that the dying thief was saved at the moment of his death. It is always quoted as a case of salvation at the eleventh hour. Indeed, it is that, and I do not want to deride that concept. I was told by a good brother from Lewis a story which probably you know of a man who was driving his horse and cart on a cliff-top road on the Island of Lewis and strayed with that horse and cart and fell off the edge of the cliff and as he was falling he cried to God for mercy.

“Twixt the saddle and the ground
I mercy sought and mercy found.”

That was something of his experience as he was falling — he asked God to save him. His fall was cushioned as he landed on sand, seaweed and bushes and he lived for many years adorning the Gospel, but the point he made was this, that, if he had landed on rocks and been killed, people would have said, “Oh! poor Donald, he perished in his sins and went to hell”. They would not have known that as he was falling and before he hit the ground he was crying to Christ to save him, and he found that mercy in a loving Saviour. We do not know in what state our loved ones die. We do not know what is going on in their hearts in those hours as they perhaps to us seem to be in a coma. We do not know what transactions are taking place. God knows. A dying thief was saved that no one should despair but, one only, that no one should presume.

But there are a number of lessons that we can learn from this great word to us:

First — God is sovereign in saving sinners

W. G. T. Shedd has a wonderful sermon whose title is “The Exercise of Mercy Optional with God”, from the text “He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy”. We always remember that there were two criminals that were crucified together, one on the right and one on the left, both equally near Christ. Both saw and heard all that happened that unforgettable day — the six hours’ darkness, the prayer “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”. They both heard the cries of Jesus from the cross, they were both dying men, both in acute pain, suspended by nails from that cross. They were both alike, convicted criminals, both needed forgiveness, yet one died in his sins with no sense of guilt, blind to the person of the Saviour that was alongside him, never pleading for mercy or one gesture of grace from the loving Saviour. He died as he lived, hard and impenitent and unbelieving. The other believed and cried to Jesus for mercy and was saved. Why is this? Why was one saved? Not because he was better. Why was one lost? Not because he was worse. Yet their destinies were as different as hell and heaven. It is a tremendous warning to us. Many here have trusted in the Lord Christ, have repented of their sins; others have not. They have come to church, to the means of grace the same number of times, heard the Gospel preached, heard the Word that says, “Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as wool”, but one receives the Word and another rejects it. Look at Saul and David, both had Samuel as their preacher, both had great privileges, both reigned for the same number of years, one went to heaven and the other went to hell. Look at two of the disciples of the Lord Christ, Judas and Peter. Both saw Lazarus raised, both heard the Sermon on the Mount, both were sinners, one went to heaven and the other went to hell. Children from the same Christian home come under the same Gospel influence, are recipients of the same instruction and affection, one rejects and one believes. We cannot explain it. We can only say in the words of the Saviour, “I thank thee, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast

revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” How is it that two could come to a meeting like this and one know a surge of assurance in his heart that he indeed belongs to Jesus, another go away as indifferent as he came? We only know it is so. It is useless to argue. Salvation is of the Lord. It is of His grace from beginning to end; in its conception, continuance and consummation; it is all of grace. I am saying to you, sinner, don’t abuse His mercy. Don’t abuse His compassion. We are to use the means of grace God has given us, to heed the Word of God to do our souls lasting good, for “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”. Don’t abuse His mercy; don’t presume upon His grace. One thief was saved, but one was lost.

Second — The marks of a saving interest in Christ

Again, this is something that is so often ignored. Thousands know of the dying thief but they fail to see that there are evidences and marks of repentance and faith in the life of this man. For example:

(i) *There was concern for his companion’s condition.* This is a mark of grace, those that are concerned for their friends and families yet in their sin. “Don’t you fear God?” he said to his friend as he cursed and railed on the Saviour. Don’t you in these circumstances, absolutely wretched, soon to die, so godless a man, don’t you fear God? He did not say, “Aren’t you afraid of men?” because what could men do any more to this man than they had done so cruelly to him already? There was nothing left to fear from the hands of men. “Don’t you fear God?” There *is* a God. He knew it — a God that we should come to with reverence and godly fear, a God who is a consuming fire, a God to whom we must give an account. Men and women, this is a moral universe. We live and move and have our being in God. The dying thief knew it and he feared that, above the condemnation of men, there was a far wider condemnation — a throne of perfect equity where every exigency would be known, everything would be evaluated by the eyes of Omniscience. If only that man had seen it earlier how different his life would have been! But he sees it now and he is moved with compassion for his friend. “Fear God,” he says, “Fear God.” “Don’t you fear the living God?”

(ii) *Another mark of grace was that he fully acknowledged his sin.* “We indeed justly.” We are punished justly. There is no attempt to bluster, to attempt to cover up, no attempt to say, “I am an innocent man”. He is open — looks at his life — looks at his past. “I have sinned,” he said. “We are justly condemned. We are getting what we deserve.” “Two men went up to the temple to pray,” Jesus said, “one prayed with himself” and thanked God for all he was. The other said, “God be merciful to me a sinner”. Jesus said that he went out of that place justified. There is no salvation without an acknowledgment of sin. Have you seen you are a sinner? You will never come to the Saviour unless you have seen

your sin. You will remember how "Rabbi" Duncan said to the weeping woman who was hesistant to come to the Lord's Table, "Take it," he said, "It's for sinners".

(iii) *Another mark of grace in this man is that he openly confessed that Jesus was the holy Lamb of God*, that He was impeccable, that there was no sin in Him. "This Man," he said, "hath done nothing amiss." There was no sin in His life. The centurion says later on, "Surely this is a righteous Man". When He turned the money-changers' tables over and made a whip of cords, He did no wrong. When He rebuked the Pharisees He did no wrong. When He made wine out of water He did no wrong. When He claimed to be the Christ, when He claimed pre-existence, when He claimed equality with God, "I and my Father are one", He said no wrong. When He said He was the Bread from Heaven, when He said He could give all who came to Him rest, He said no wrong. All His preaching, when He spoke of the wrath of God that abides on the children of disobedience, when He said that one day all the world would stand before Him and some would hear the most fearful words it is possible to hear, "Depart, ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels", He was saying no wrong. In all His life He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners". This thief had seen it, the uniqueness, the impeccability of the spotless Lamb of God, "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh", yet without sin — the uniqueness of the glory of Christ, His glory as the Lamb of God who bears away the sin of the world.

(iv) *Another mark of grace is that he prayed to Him*. God only is to be prayed to. We are not to pray to angels; we are not to pray to spirits. God only is to be prayed to. But this dying thief said, "Lord, remember me". He prayed — he cried to Him. He asked Him to help him. He made Him the object of his prayers. What is this mark of grace? It is that we look away from our sins to our Saviour Lord and we come to Him for His help and His comfort to be with us, to cleanse us and to renew us day by day. We pray to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

(v) *Another mark of grace is that he believed in Christ's power and readiness to save sinners*. "Lord, remember me," he says. Speaking to *this dying Man*, this agonizing Man alongside him, "Lord," he addresses Him. "Lord, Jehovah," he is saying, "remember me." There is life after death. Death is not annihilation; life goes on after death. "Remember me. Remember me!" The Lord would remember all that happened that day, that memorable day, the crucifixion, the mockeries, the taunts; He would never forget it. "Lord," the thief prayed, "remember me too," he says, "especially when You come into Your Kingdom." He knew that this One would be given a name that is above every name, that all authority in heaven and earth would be given to our Jesus, that He would be the King of kings and Lord of lords. "Remember me," he says, "when You come into Your Kingdom." So great a view he had of Christ! He believed in His power to save sinners.

(vi) *Another mark of grace is humility.* “Remember me. Remember me” — that’s all. It was not, “Let me sit at Thy right hand in glory; let me reign with Thee”. Nothing of that. Just, “Don’t forget me. As You superintend all the myriad hosts of angels and give them their daily orders and hold the rolling spheres in Your hands, ineffably sublime Redeemer, as Head of all things and Head over the Church, don’t forget me.” That was his prayer. I am saying to you where a saving work is done in the life of a man, grace shows itself. There is no such thing as the power of grace without a change of life. No such thing as secret holiness — no such thing as repentance without marks. Thousands die every week ignorant of that; they fancy they have been saved because the dying thief was saved at last — if they say a prayer, if they repeat some formula. My friends, it is not so. There must be marks of a change, and the nearer death we come, the more evident our desires are focussed in Him, in our Saviour.

Third — How did this man come to such a faith?

You think of that day as he walked behind the Lord Christ, how he saw the professional mourners wailing and weeping, and Jesus stopping and saying, “Weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves for the days that shall come to you”. The dignity of Christ at that time! How, when they were nailing Him to the cross He did not scream and curse, but could pray, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”. The thief saw it; he heard it; he saw the sign above the cross on Jesus’ head there, “*The King of the Jews*” — the *King*. He heard the taunts that men in disdain spat out, all of which contained so much truth, “If thou be the Son of God”. “He saved others.” “He trusted in God that He would deliver Him.” That was the One hanging alongside him, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. All these broken fragments he gathers together as he hangs in his agony on the cross and the Spirit illuminates them and gives them coherence and pastoral blessing, saving power in his life, and he concludes, “This is the Lord, the One they are mocking, the appointed King”.

Oh, how much knowledge have you? How many sermons have you heard? What meetings you have been to! What explanations of Christ’s Gospel you have had! How He has been exalted before you! This man had none of these privileges; you sit amongst a whole worshipping community of those in whom Jesus dwells, those who have been washed, those who have been sanctified, those who have been justified, with their persuasive witness to you day after day and year after year. You have the whole counsel of God opened up before you so winsomely. This man had none of these privileges, *but oh how he used the privileges he had*, and what a change was effected in him! Acknowledge, my friends, that we are without excuse. We are to take advantage of every opportunity that is given to us to improve it and mix it with faith. See, this man who had one opportunity in his life to speak a word for Jesus, one chance to witness to Him *and he seized it*. No one else in all the world was speaking a word of

tenderness, of confidence in Jesus, save this man — it was his one chance and he took it.

Fourth — See the amazing power and willingness of Christ to save sinners

“Wherefore He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him” and if you search all the Bible from Genesis to Revelation you will find scarcely a greater proof of that. You think of the time in which Jesus saved him. Our Lord was bearing our sin. He was at His greatest weakness. Our Lord was suffering the anathema and entering the darkness. Our Lord was surrounded by the bulls of Bashan, He was taunted and torn. He was enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself, was tasting the judgment that we deserved, was experiencing an alienated Father because of sin not His own, but yet, at that time of weakness, He heard the prayer of this man and He saved this man.

Fifth — Salvation is all of grace

He heard this man — He saved this man. *Think, then, how much more does He now!* Today He is exalted at the Father’s right hand, He is Head over the Church. He determines that “All that the Father giveth Him shall come to Him”. How much more now should we believe in His saving power to change us. Consider the utter unworthiness of this man whom He did save. The world looked at him and the people of Jerusalem looked at him and said, “Well, he’s got what was coming to him. Remember how he lived — he’s nothing.” And they condemned him as a criminal with no compunction. His was not a life of usefulness that Christ might invest His gifts and graces in to plant Churches and spread His name abroad. There was nothing of that; he would never come down alive from that cross. Yet he was saved. This criminal was saved; he did receive mercy from God. Surely, my friends, if you want proof that salvation is of grace and not according to our deservings for a life past or a life future, you see it in this life. He was nailed hand and foot. He could do nothing to earn salvation and yet Christ’s grace touched him. Salvation is of grace. He was not baptized and he did not come to the Lord’s Table. He repented of his sin and acknowledged Christ to be the heavenly Holy One. He cried to Him just that he might be remembered, and he went to heaven.

Christ never changes. The way of salvation never changes. *He lives* whom the dying thief sought and found. The fountain is still open:

“Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more.

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there have I, though vile as he
Washed all my sins away."

Sixth and lastly — How near a believer is to glory

"*This day* shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." "Tomorrow," Satan says. "Tomorrow; do it tomorrow." "Tomorrow," the world says, "we will think about it tomorrow." "Tomorrow," the unbeliever says. "*Today*," Christ says. "*Now* is the appointed time; *now* is the day of salvation." The only day we have, the only time we are guaranteed is now. *Today!* There is a *body of divinity* in that word "Today". What a *systematic theology* in that word "Today". You can turn it two ways. You can turn it this way — from the very moment a man ventures in faith in Jesus Christ his soul is saved. He is as ready for heaven that moment as at the moment of his death. The dying thief was as ready for glory that moment as the Apostle Paul was after years of service and toil in the cause of the Gospel. The moment a man believes in Jesus Christ he is united to the Lord Jesus Christ. "For in Him all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily *and ye are complete in Him*." He trusted in Christ and he was complete in Christ. Christ was "made unto him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption". He was complete. "*Today* shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." That was the promise. Heaven does not depend on our lives; *it depends on His life*, not on our good works, but on that *great work* that Jesus achieved upon Golgotha.

"Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law's demands.
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow —
All for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and Thou alone."

"*Today*," and he was ready.

Or, again, we can take it this way — "Today" was the day he became "absent from the body" and "present with the Lord". That day he was "presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy", fully cleansed, fully washed from every sin — sin past, sin present, sin future. Every crime, even the most enormous, the most unspeakable, the most unthinkable, that which a man might feel in his conscience as unforgettable as he comes into a congregation like this and say to himself, "If only they knew what I've been; if only they knew what I have done, they would move away from me in horror". But the blood of Christ is sufficient to pardon *you*, to cleanse you, to give you an entrance into His kingdom. The thief looked to Jesus and he was saved. He was ready for Paradise. No need to suffer further. Christ didn't say, "Well, break

your heart a little bit more; squeeze a few more tears out of that stony heart of yours, suffer a little longer on the cross." He said, "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, today, today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise*". What authority! With what authority does Christ speak! *Men and women, that is the salvation of the Bible*. I feel some of you can scarcely believe it. That is the salvation of the Bible. It is a perfect salvation; from the depths of sin Christ raises us to Paradise. What the first Adam lost for us the last Adam regained — Paradise restored. He has recovered it. It was *all done that day* and by Christ alone. *What a day!* Sometimes you say, "What a day I have had!". What a day this man had had! What a day from its opening to its close. What a day from its morning to its night. That morning he breakfasted with the devil in this world. He dined with Christ on earth, and that night *he supped with Him in glory*. That morning he was a culprit found guilty before the bar of earth's justice. That evening he stood before heaven's bar *acquitted justified*. That morning he went out of the gates of Jerusalem jeered and hooted at by the crowds that taunted him never to return. That evening *the everlasting doors were opened*. He entered that heavenly Jerusalem never, never to leave that place again. *That day it was all done* — that glorious day in the life of this man!

Oh, how wonderful is this salvation!

THE BRANCHES AND THE VINE

Jesus, immutably the same,
Thou true and living Vine!
Around Thy all-supporting stem,
My feeble arms I'd twine.

I can do nothing without Thee;
My strength is wholly Thine;
Withered and barren should I be,
If severed from the Vine.

Quickened by Thee, and kept alive,
I'd flourish and bear fruit;
My life I'd from Thy sap derive,
My vigour from Thy root.

Each moment watered by Thy care,
And fenced with power divine;
Fruit to eternal life would bear,
The feeblest branch of Thine.

Augustus Toplady

The Blood of Jesus

EDWARD CARR (former Minister of Providence Chapel, Bath)

THAT RELIGION which testifies of the blood of Jesus from an experimental acquaintance with its efficacy is derided and despised in these latter days; hence it is very necessary to be well grounded in the truth concerning the fundamental fact and central story of the Church that His blood was the purchase price for her redemption. Several important points must be noted. The blood of Jesus is:

1. Precious (1 Peter 1:19). It is precious in its source — the holy body of Jesus yielded its life (“the blood is the life”) and the fountain from whence it came was His pierced, broken heart. His blood is precious in its flowings; the thorns, the nails, the spear all opened this fountain of blood, freely and fully the blood of Jesus flows for needy sinners. Above all, it is precious in its application. Sprinkled before the Throne it gives access; applied to the heart it heals and softens. Applied to the conscience, it cleanses from the guilt of sin. Then this blood is:

2. Prevailing. They overcame by the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 12:11). Satan is vanquished and sin conquered. Further, Christ’s blood is the ground of Christ’s intercession, and gives His prayer its prevailing power, for by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place having obtained eternal redemption for us (Hebrews 9:12). His blood is also:

3. Purifying. It cleanseth from all sin (1 John 1:7) and purgeth the conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14), removing the guilt of our unrighteousness and that defilement and guiltiness which clings to our best works. Through His blood there is a pardon for sins of omission and commission. It is moreover:

4. Purchasing blood — the price of redemption to those redeemed (i.e. bought again) with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:19). The Church of the first-born was saved by the blood of the Paschal Lamb, and the antitype is the Church which He hath purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Again, the blood of Jesus is:

5. Pardoning blood. Forgiveness is the result of redemption. “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Without shedding of blood is no remission (Hebrews 9:22), but the blood so completely removes sin from those happy souls for whom He died that the Lord cannot but abundantly pardon. Lastly, the blood of Jesus is:

6. Peace-bringing. It makes peace (Colossians 1:20) by removing the cause of variance; and it speaks peace (Hebrews 12:24) as applied to the conscience.

An Easter Meditation

W. J. PARKER (Colwyn Bay)

AT MY BEDSIDE I keep a *Golden Thoughts Calendar*, published by the Trinitarian Bible Society. When I was a youth I was delighted by the teaching of Bishop Taylor-Smith. One thing he taught me in spiritual self-discipline was to read a verse of God's Word as a thought for the day on waking up. For many years now I have found the use of this calendar most helpful, as it follows the theme of the Christian seasons throughout the year. Often it inspires thought for further study.

Last year on Easter Sunday I read: "Now is Christ risen from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20). The consequences of this followed every day through the week and form the substance of this meditation.

I. The fact of Christ's resurrection is the most powerful sign God could ever have given us of the truth of Christ's teaching, of His divine and eternal Sonship, and of the message and meaning of the Christian Gospel. At the time, it was attested by the contemporary records of the first Christians, of the Jews, of the Romans, and of the Arab nations. Such was the impact of this event that the Apostle Paul could quote a contemporary hymn or poem: "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Timothy 3:16). Bishop Ellicot, in his commentary, points out that most surviving ancient religions have appealed to a single nation or race, but Christianity alone from the beginning has been declared as the truth for all nations. This marks its origin as divine rather than ethnic. It is also in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy of the coming Messiah: "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

II. The following day's text gives an explanation of the consequences of the resurrection of Christ.

(a) "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54). This is an emphatic statement that death is cancelled for every man. We shall all rise again to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Paul goes on to say, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they they are Christ's at his coming" (vv. 22-23).

(b) Next I read, "Who gave himself for our sins" (Galatians 1:4). The apostle faithfully reported the teaching of Jesus, who repeatedly said, "The Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45). What does this word ransom mean? Quite simply it means He was paying the price for our sins in the highest Court of Judgment, and that as a result our sins

(that is, believers') will not be put to our charge. As Toplady wrote in the hymn: "Payment God will not twice demand, first at my bleeding Surety's hand, and then again at mine." We are justified by our faith alone in our Saviour.

III. The next day's verse was a corollary of this: "That he might redeem us from all iniquity" (Titus 2:14). There is no injustice in justification by faith alone, because in the Covenant of Grace, "whom he foreknew, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he predestined, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified them he also glorified" (Romans 8:29-30). God gives us His Holy Spirit to work in us the moral and spiritual necessities which Christ in His teaching, His death and His resurrection, has made clear to our hearts and consciences.

IV. The fourth day's text after Easter was, "The chastisement of our peace was upon him" (Isaiah 53:5). The chastisement that a kind father lays upon his sons is intended to guide their footsteps into righteous living. That also Christ bore for and with us in order to show that He was the first among many brethren that should be born to God through His redeeming work. Christ learned the hard way, and so must we in the school of grace. We become one with Christ as we learn from Hebrews chapters 1 and 2. "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he who sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren. . . . Inasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. . . . He took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted."

V. Our final text in this sequence is from 1 Peter 5:7: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." The Lord Jesus is now in heaven as our High Priest, our Advocate with God the Father. Therefore let us hold fast our confession, our faith, and come boldly to the throne of grace in prayer, "that we may find mercy and grace to help in time of need".

"He who bore all pain and loss
Comfortless upon the cross,
Lives in glory now on high,
Pleads for us, and hears our cry;
Alleluia!"

Infallible Proofs

HORATIUS BONAR

*“When the Lord had thus spoken, He shewed them His hands and His feet”
(Luke 24:40)*

CONSIDER THE LORD’S WAY of meeting the doubts of the disciples. “He shewed them His hands and His feet.” That which they doubted was, whether this Stranger who had come to them and who looked so like their old Master were in very deed Himself. If He were, then He must have risen from the dead; for they saw Him die, nay, they had buried Him. If this were He, then all had come true which He had spoken of Himself and which the prophets had spoken concerning Him. He was now doubly demonstrated to be the Christ. That which He had spoken to them concerning His rising from the dead was no vain thing, and now they saw in Him, not only all that they had seen before, but much more. As the *dying* Christ, He was much more to them than the *living* Christ; but as the *risen* Christ He was more than the *dying* Christ. The seed had not only been sown and taken root, but was now springing up into a glorious tree.

His object then, in shewing them His hands and His feet, was not only to convince them that He was no spectre, no shadow, but that He was the very Christ who had been crucified. The nail-prints were the proof, not only that He had died, but that He had triumphed over death; that though “crucified through weakness, He lived again by the power of God”. The sin had been borne; the blood had been shed; the sacrifice offered up, the penalty paid, the law satisfied, righteousness honoured, Satan baffled, death overcome. Of all these things the nail-prints assured them. They were the chief of the “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3) given to His disciples of His true resurrection.

Strange as this kind of recognition, this way of fixing the doubted identity, may seem, it was satisfactory. The mother in the story knew her long-lost child by the scar on the shoulder received in infancy; so was the Son of God recognised by the nail-prints and the bruises of the cross. But did the disciples need this? Were the loved features not the same as ever? Were the eyes that wept over Jerusalem not the same as before, or had the grave robbed them of their tenderness and lustre? Were the lips, from which came the gracious words of parting love, not the same as in the upper chamber at the Last Supper? Was the voice so altered, that they did not know its tones? No. These resemblances might all be recognised, but so many things threw doubt upon these recognitions, and they were so slow of heart to believe what the prophets had spoken that, instead of reasoning in favour of His identity from the fact that He professed to be risen from the dead, they stumbled at this stumbling-stone, and raised doubts out of the very events which ought to have dissipated all. It was not till they had seen

Him die that they would believe that He could die, and now not even their own eyes will convince them that He is risen, so little did they understand what Messiah was to be and to do and to suffer. Their one redeeming point was attachment to His Person. Of His sacrificial work they knew but little; of His blood-shedding they had but slenderly felt their need; into the profound significance of His death they had not yet entered. But to His *Person* they were attached, with all the warmth of true-hearted friendship. And it is of this personal attachment that the Lord is making use, to lead them into the deeper, truer knowledge of His mighty work.

They were to be made to recognise Him by His wounds; His healed, but still visible wounds, the scars of the cross, the marks of suffering and death. Their unbelief was to be allowed so to come out that nothing would remove it but that which proved Him to be the very kind of Person they had all along shrunk from acknowledging — One who must *die* in order to bless them. Their former faith in His Person had been shaken (founded as it was on very imperfect knowledge), and that which was to reassure them was *His wounds*. The old cords that fastened them to His Person had been shaken and strained, till they had almost snapped, and the new link which was to knit them more firmly than ever to His Person was that which fastened itself, not so much to His Person as to His *work* as the Substitute. They had known Him as the seed of the woman; they were now to know Him as the Man with the bruised heel, “the Lamb as it had been slain”.

It was with this same blessed evidence that the staggering faith of Thomas was held up when nothing save the sight of the nail-prints could reassure him, and it was on similar ground that the beloved John was comforted in Patmos when he fell at the feet of the glorious One. This same Jesus laid His right hand on him and said, “Fear not, I am the First and the Last; I am He that liveth and was dead”. It is thus that He approaches us still, and shews us His hands and His feet, that by these scars we may be made to feel that He is in very deed the Christ that we need. And in doing so, He shews us the true way of dispelling doubt, of whatever kind it may be, viz., the fuller knowledge of Himself, as the dead, the buried, the risen and living Christ. It is this that is the cure of all unbelief, the death of doubting, the cherisher of faith, the perpetual source of stability and peace, for the real cause of all doubting is imperfect knowledge of the Lord.

Nor let any one say, “I know all that I can know, both of Himself and of His work”. He that says this knows nothing yet as he ought to know. When doubt arises and unbelief gets the mastery and estrangement comes in let the first thought be — “Could this have taken place had I fully known Him whom I profess to have believed, and will not another look at Him, another glimpse at His glorious Person and deep-scarred wounds, fully reassure me, and rebuke all alarm or distrust?”

He shews you once more His hands and His feet that through them you may know Him by these “infallible proofs”, to be the very Christ you need, both for heart and for conscience. The Christ we need is such a Christ as will not only

reveal the immeasurable love of God, but convince our consciences as to the *lawfulness* of that love by shewing us the life, the death, the resurrection of a divine Substitute, through means of whom this love to the sinner is enabled to give itself out *lawfully and righteously* to man.

He is the Christ of Bethlehem; the Child that was born, the Son that was given. But this is not enough. Mere incarnation falls short of our wants and fails to pacify the conscience.

He is the Christ of Nazareth, the Man that dwells among sinners, and shewed the love of God to sinners. But this is not enough.

He is the Christ of Capernaum, the great Worker of miracles, the Healer of the sick, the Raiser of the dead, the Feeder of the hungry, the Utterer of the most gracious words that ever fell on the ear of man. But this will not purge the conscience or secure our peace with God.

Accordingly, He shews Himself as the Christ of Gethsemane, the Christ of Golgotha, the Christ of Joseph's tomb. And what shall we more say? Who, after the proof that is given of death and resurrection, can persist in doubting, or refuse to be comforted? And, if these gracious facts will not cheer and revive, what is there that will do it in earth or heaven? Look at Him with prolonged gaze. See Him as He was and is, as the dead, the buried, the risen One. Look at His hands, His feet, His side. These scars, though healed, are allowed to remain, just on purpose to meet your doubts and banish your distrust. He who raised Him from the dead left these scars still visible, these marks of death and weakness, these memorials of the cross and its nails, in order, by means of them, to speak to you, to give you demonstration of His true death and true resurrection, that thereby you might be comforted exceedingly, nay, be like those of whom it is written, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord".

Times and Seasons

JOHN H. ALGAR (Tipton)

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

IN THESE VERSES in Ecclesiastes, there are thirty references to time so we might expect that there is something especially relevant for us there.

It is a very striking list we are given there. People often quote them without even realising that they come from the book of Ecclesiastes or even that they come from the Bible. The purpose of the list is clearly to cover the whole range of human activity —

A time to be born;
 A time to die;
 A time to plant;
 A time to pluck up what is planted;
 A time to kill;
 A time to heal;
 A time to break down;
 A time to build up;
 A time to weep;
 A time to laugh . . .

and so on. It is meant to be very wide-ranging indeed.

What does it really mean? What is the practical application to our lives? We have a list here of what the hymn calls “the changing scenes of life” — “For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

Some people think the passage is telling us to do the right thing at the appropriate time. For instance, a time to keep silent and a time to speak and we know that this can be our experience. But when we look at the list more closely, we see that can't really be the meaning of it. Verse 2 says, “a time to be born and a time to die”, but it is no good exhorting people in that way, saying you must make sure that you are born and die at the right time — *these things are beyond our control*, as are many others on the list. So we cannot say that the Bible is telling us here to do the right thing at the right time. No! I think it is telling us that God has appointed a time for every experience, and in particular for His own children. “For everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (verse 1).

I think that this interpretation is confirmed in verse 11 when it says: “He hath made everything beautiful in his time.” Now I don't think that this is referring to the beauty of the world; it is referring to the beauty of God's providence, the beauty of God's arrangement of things. It is saying that God has done all things well — His arrangement is beautiful beyond description. He has made everything to occur — past, present and future — at *exactly*, without any kind of mistake, or second best at all — *exactly* the appropriate time for His people; He has made everything beautiful in its time.

We see this referred to sometimes in the Bible referring to the coming of Christ into this world. We are told by the Apostle Paul that at the very right and appropriate and climactic moment, Christ came forth from heaven: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Galatians 4:4). How often when we read in the Gospel about the life and ministry of Jesus that they tried to hurt Him but they couldn't. Why? “Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, *because his hour was not yet come*” (John 7:30). Jesus Himself said to them: “My time is not yet come” (John 7:6). Then as His Passion approached, He said: “But this

is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). Jesus was conscious all along, you see, that God had His appointed moment for everything. So this is the truth which lies behind these words and we have to try and grasp, with God’s help, that *every detail of the believer’s life is under God’s control*.

In Ephesians, Paul writes: “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (1:11). Notice that — *all things!* We shouldn’t be surprised at this! It is strange really that some people find that so hard to believe because that is what it means to know that God is God. If God’s purpose could be thwarted, if God could be taken by surprise, or any thing like that, then He would no longer be God! We must try to have God-like ideas of God; we are so dragged down by our human estimate of things; God’s knowledge of all things is a glorious part of what it means for God to be God!

Well, you might say, what about prayer? What does the chorus mean which says, “Prayer changes things”? Dear friends, we have to realise that that providential control of God does not just control the end — *He controls the means to the end* — and if God is purposing to do something, then it may well have pleased Him to purpose that someone should pray or a company of people should engage in prayer for that thing. He has made everything beautiful in its time as only God can do.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Now just to try to grasp more clearly that truth, I want to add this — we must try to understand that this is something different from a dark or blind faith. I say this because quite often I meet people who, when someone has died, say something like this: “When a person’s time has come, that is it.” But often this is said without any reference to God, showing that they seem to have this idea of a predetermining power or force. What they say is right, but they do not refer it as they should to God — the good and great and gracious God of the Scripture.

Muslims speak about everything being ordered and predestined. But they are *not* referring to Christian predestination or ordering of all things. This includes God’s gracious purpose for bringing in His kingdom and His gracious purpose to save all His elect and bring them to heaven through Christ. The Muslim’s view of predestination is not the same as the Christian view of control over all things, a control which covers the means as well as the ends. God’s purpose is to bring many sons to glory, or as it is put in Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

Now let us remind ourselves, that this purpose of God —

Cannot be changed!
 Cannot be thwarted!
 Cannot be hurried!
 Cannot be delayed!

I think that is something of what is meant in these verses 9 and 10 of Ecclesiastes: “What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?” — What can man do with all his toil and anxiety and running hither and thither? — “I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.” So they should realise that this purpose of God stands firm.

It is also very important to bear firmly in mind that this purpose of God (apart from its broad end which we have mentioned) is *hidden to us*. *God’s providence to us time and time again does not make sense!* Now that is not just true for unbelievers, it is true to believers too. How often have you thought that you knew what God was doing and said, “Ah, yes, God is giving His blessing” or “God is punishing” — then the whole thing has been proved wrong. Now I think it is important to realise that God has hidden His purpose from us — not His broad purpose to save His people and bring them within His kingdom, we *know His broad purpose*. But the working of His providence and what the individual purpose of His workings are is quite hidden from us. As Moses said long before: “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God” (Deuteronomy 29:29). You will see that put very clearly in the prophecy of Jeremiah 10:23: “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.”

God’s purpose is hidden to us in all its intricate details. In verse 11 of our text it says: “He hath made everything beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart.” We have that sense of eternity and sense of purpose, that sense of something to come. It is God-given so that we cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. Even as believers, we cannot understand the providence and mysterious working of God.

Now let us see what the practical application of it might be to us. The providential working of God is hidden to us, it is just like a confused mass of threads and events time and time again — we cannot understand what God is doing. Yet the believer does have the advantage of knowing that whatever God is doing, their experience, their time or season is in God’s hands — “For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

David was able to say: “But I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my God,” and so he was able to add, “My times are in thy hand” (Psalm 31:14-15). So you see, even when we don’t understand, the assurance should be supportive of the Christian believer that this is part of something that God has made absolutely beautifully appropriate for them. “My times are in thy hand.” Notice the plural — times. Let us come back to Paul’s famous words: “And we know that *all* things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28). Or think of the parting promise of Jesus to His disciples: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . and, lo, I am with you always . . .” (Matthew 28:19-20). That word “all” in the text means literally *all* the days — through *all* the changing scenes of life — there is a position in God’s plan for every time and season. Or again, as David said: “All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such

as keep his covenant and his testimonies" (Psalm 25:10). So I think that this must be one application we seek to make by God's grace, whatever the time or season we may be passing through.

Then because of this great truth — "For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" — a Christian's comfort and peace does not depend on being kept in a certain kind of time or season. We seem to get into an arrangement or way of life, or position or way of doing things that suits us and then we desperately cling to this to keep things the same. It is very natural to do this because we can cope with this, it seems to be a happy arrangement. Now this fails in the end, by the mercy of God, and we are moved on into another situation. But you see, we don't have to cling to a way of life if we believe in the plan and providence of God. We don't have to try to cling onto a favourable situation which suits us best — that will lead to trouble.

Let us look at some very well-known words of Paul which we don't always apply to this situation. He says: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Philippians 4:11-12). Paul had learnt, by the grace of God, how to cope with these different situations. In all things, he had learnt the secret of facing all things and he concludes by saying: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:14: "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him." We don't know what the purpose is, we are confused, but the point being made is that *everything does have a purpose*. In the day of prosperity — enjoy it! God has given it to you, it is part of His blessing to you, enter fully into it. But in the day of adversity — there is a purpose in that too. That is another season, another kind of time which God has brought you into. Learn to deal with that — *consider! It is a time for reflection and consideration!* Don't think of it as a blank time that we have to get out of and back to the other time as soon as possible — each time, by the grace of God, is to be constructively used. In the words of the hymn:

"Take what He gives
And praise Him still,
Through good and ill,
Whoever lives."

So we must deal constructively with these times and seasons through which we pass. Make it a positive thing! There is no need to feel that there are great blank periods in your life which are unprofitable, periods perhaps of illness or of mourning or unemployment or when plans have gone wrong. They are not blank periods; we are just entering into another season, another time. Remember,

God has made everything beautifully appropriate for His children — “For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.”

So let us ask God to give us that positive approach *but* it will require something from us. “. . . a wise man’s heart discerneth both time and judgment” (Ecclesiastes 8:5). In other words, it is very important that we have spiritual discernment as to what is happening. Remember the words of Paul: “And that, *knowing* the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep . . . let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armour of light” (Romans 13:11-12). Notice that — “*knowing* the time”, be aware of the situation even when we don’t understand what God is doing (because we shall not know), but know what the season requires. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their lack of discernment. He said: “O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?” (Matthew 16:3). They could see what the weather was going to be like by looking at the sky, but they could not see what was happening around them, that the Messiah had come.

If we are to respond to the times and seasons, we must have some discernment as to what they are, whether it is in our individual lives or the life of the Church. You can understand, can’t you, that the state of the Church may call for a time of mourning, a time of weeping or a time of cleansing. It may be a time for pulling down stones perhaps, or a time of rejoicing or of thanksgiving, or building or looking at our own lives. There may be a time to kill — a time when things need to be put to death in our lives — our lives need to be purged of certain things and perhaps that is what God is doing in our lives. Remember that this is the providence of God which is being spoken of! But we must try to understand what He is doing, what He is calling us to do so that we can co-operate with Him. We may be being called to prayer, to penitence, to a greater zeal, to cleansing of our lives. It is up to us to discern, as far as we can, with God’s help, what He is doing and so act responsively in our lives. It would be a dreadful thing, for example, if God was calling the Church to mourning and repentance and yet His people were just going on laughing happily and enjoying themselves as if nothing were wrong. Or again, if He were blessing them richly and they were just being sad and cast down and not being thankful to Him for His blessings, and this applies to our own individual lives as well.

And then there is just one more practical application which arises here. Now this very fact — that there is for everything a season and a time for every matter under heaven — is a great encouragement to hope and faith in the believer. For instance, when a person comes into that season when perhaps God is chastening them or God has brought them low or into a season of sadness or sickness or bereavement or whatever it is, we can come back to this verse and we remember that for *everything* there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. The very fact that things are, as it were, constantly under the control of God, means that He will in due course bring His people out of that time and season into another. That is why the Bible, I think, tells us that those people who wait

upon the Lord are blessed. They go on trusting Him, not just gritting their teeth, but waiting for Him expectantly, knowing that He has other things in store for them and not just the mourning or weeping or breaking down or whatever it is.

Jeremiah says: "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (Lamentations 3:26). Also the words of Peter are very relevant here: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6). In due time, when the time comes round, God, in His ongoing providence, will exalt you — you will pass into another experience. Remember: "Casting all your care upon him; for He careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7). But at the same time: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Remember that this same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. Peter says: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Peter 4:12). But after you have suffered a little while: "... the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Peter 5:10). Now that is the picture that you can see in those lovely words of Peter.

And incidentally, perhaps we should mention at the same time, that the thing is true the other way! We should not become complacent and over-confident when we find ourselves in a happier time or season. The believer will not say, "Ah, now I have come home and found my rest. Now I will place my confidence in this situation, this is what I want." That would be very unwise because the true believer has learnt about this constant ongoing providence of God and will realise that those times will change and sometimes there will be darkness after light, just as after darkness there will be light. And all this is meant to teach us not to find our happiness in this constantly moving and changing world. We need to remember that as Paul says: "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). And we need to try, as far as we can, to put aside anxiety which spoils people's lives. Anxiety is worse in a way than bodily trials because it affects both body and mind. As Jesus said: "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature" (Matthew 6:27). Being anxious will not extend your life in any way or change the purpose of God. Jesus is telling us to remember that all these changing scenes are in God's hands and He is making them all work together for good.

So these changing scenes of life through which we pass are something very positive, something full of potential for the true believer. For *everything*, remember, whatever it may be: "... there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (verse 1) and "He has made everything beautiful in his time" (verse 11).

May that faith and experience sustain us. Amen.

Book Reviews

***The Everlasting Righteousness.* Horatius Bonar. The Banner of Truth Trust. pp. 211. £3.50.**

This paperback is a reproduction of a book first published in 1874. Its full title gives an insight to its content: *The Everlasting Righteousness or, How Shall Man be Just with God?*

The theme of this book is "the righteousness of God" and how it is applied to sinners through the cross of Calvary. "The justifying work of Calvary was God's way, not only of bringing pardon, but of securing security. It was the only perfect thing which had ever been presented to God in man's behalf; and so peculiar was this perfection, that it might be used by man in his transactions with God, as if it were his own."

In ten chapters the reader is introduced to an important Gospel question — How can the law of God and the love of God be reconciled together? Bonar answers the question by expounding the Biblical principle of substitution, starting with the Old Testament sacrifices being symbolic of the final substitution — that of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. Because Jesus Christ obeyed the law for His people and paid the penalty for their sin the righteousness of Him is accounted by God as belonging to them. The means by which believers receive this righteousness is by faith in this finished work of redemption. The writer then concludes the book with chapters on the benefits of the resurrection for believers, assurance, and living the holy life.

In conclusion, this is an excellent book on a very important subject. It is easy to read, easy to understand and full of application. This book can be recommended for use in evangelism, for building up new Christians in the faith, and for affirming the faith of mature Christians.

P.J.R.

***Spirit of Truth.* John R. Broome. Gospel Standard Trust Publications. pp. 50. £2.50.**

This very attractive booklet describes the work of the Holy Spirit, in the new birth, in the preaching work of the ministry, in prayer, and in sanctification, according to the teaching of the New Testament. The Apostolic gifts in the early Church, including tongues, miracles, prophecy, and direction (usually called guidance), are explained.

The continuance of these gifts in the history of the Church is considered, and two errors are unmasked. Firstly, the errors of the Church of Rome derived from the apocryphal Jewish additions to the Canon of the Old Testament, namely the concept of purgatory, and prayer for the dead, the papal declaration of the sinless conception of the virgin Mary, and the titles of Queen of Heaven, and Co-Redeemer with Christ. Secondly, the error of some Protestants who teach

a "second blessing" by the Holy Spirit which bestows powers and miracles, only in fact given to the Apostles.

W.J.P.

Fulfilling the Great Commission. Papers read at the 1992 Westminster Conference. pp. 147. Copies are available from the Conference Secretary, Rev. John Harris, 8 Back Knowl Road, Mirfield, West Yorkshire WF14 9SA.

The "Great Commission" is the name given to words of the Lord Jesus Christ found in Matthew 28:19: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Our primary source of information of how to fulfil this commission is to be found, of course, in the pages of Holy Scripture. A useful secondary source is to look carefully at the people and events that Almighty God has used in the past to fulfil the commission. This was the aspect that was covered in the six papers presented to the Westminster Conference in 1992. The papers take the reader to "John Calvin and the Spread of the Gospel in France"; "Spurgeon's Gospel Preaching"; "William Carey and the Origins of the Modern Missionary Movement"; "David Bogue and Missionary Advance"; "Witchcraft in Salem" — an unusual and interesting paper — and "Comenius: 'That Incomparable Moravian'".

P.J.R.

Basic Fundamentals of the Faith. T. L. Danson Smith. B. McCall Barbour, Edinburgh. pp. 92. £2.50.

A vigorous statement of the Gospel and some of its essential principles — The Bible as God's inspired Word to mankind, the vicarious and atoning death of Christ for the salvation of all believers, the blessed hope of Christ's return, the need for separation from false teaching in some Churches, the real meaning of sanctification — set apart for God — the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus, and why it is essential to the Gospel, the literal truth of Christ's victorious resurrection and its consequences of forgiveness and justification. These are among the truths faithfully upheld by Mr. Danson Smith in these heart-warming chapters.

He closes with a two-fold challenge to the faithful. Every Christian is called by Christ to "Go" (Matthew 28:19-20). But "Go" has a special meaning for each of us — abroad, or at home, we must all witness for Christ. We have great news, we are to tell all those who need it! This earnest Gospel fire will bring blessing to every reader.

W.J.P.

By entertaining of strange persons, men sometimes entertain angels unawares; but by entertaining strange doctrines, many have entertained devils unawares.

John Flavel