



Ruth-A Woman of Excellence

The story of the life of Ruth is a favourite of many, especially Christian and Jewish women. Many of us know the account as recorded in the Book of Ruth. We observe how the Lord God dealt with His servants of olden times and find them refreshing and faith inspiring. So we aim to examine the story of Ruth and glean the meaning, lessons and examples for us to live by. This godly woman especially portrays the many graces that we are all to strive for in our consecration. Her life was blessed by God despite the severe hardships that she endured. We will note her special relationship with Naomi and Boaz, and we can meditate on several other passages of Scripture that are similar to the beautiful words in Ruth.

‘Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from following you, for wherever you go I will go, and wherever you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me and worse if anything but death part you and me.’ (Ruth 1:16,17) These are the beautiful words of the Maobitess, Ruth, to her mother-in-law, Naomi. This is Ruth’s heart-devoted prayer to stay with Naomi in the land of Judah following the death of her husband and brother-in-law, and in this period Naomi’s husband had died also.

The account gives little hint of what caused the death of Eliminech, Mahlon and Chilion other than there was a severe famine in the land, perhaps affecting the whole region including the land of Moab where Eliminech had sojourned. It was in this neighbouring country to the north when the judges governed that Eliminech and Naomi and their two sons lived for about ten years. Bible commentators suggest that the countries of Israel and Moab were living peaceably during the years of around 1250 BC, the time when Gideon was the Judge of Israel. Now the two sons of Naomi were to marry young Moabite women. This must have been a real blessing to Naomi, to have Ruth as a daughter-in-law.

Ruth was obviously learning and observing the Israelites’ faith and customs. How much she must

have wished to seek the Lord Almighty in those early years we do not know. However, after her loss and sadness and vulnerability as a widow and perhaps many other hardships in a time of famine, this affected her. Just to provide food and water, and to dwell in safe and content living arrangements, would mean there would have to be many personal sacrifices. In her trials, she turned to the God of Israel.

This brings us back to the well-known words of Ruth to Naomi: ‘For wherever you go I will go, and wherever you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God my God.’ Indeed, Ruth must have loved Naomi. Despite her mother-in-law’s advice to return to her mother’s family, Ruth clung to her and did not return. We find in chapter 1, verse 14, that Ruth and the other widow, Orpah, wept and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law but Ruth clung to her. The meaning of the word translated ‘cling’ (Heb **dapaq** Strong’s No.1692) is given by Vine as – ‘to join fast together, to glue, cement’. The idea here is of devotion and affection, just as is meant when a man shall cleave unto his wife. We have a promise of the restoration to Israel in Deut.30:20 – ‘That thou must love the Lord thy God and that thou mayest obey His voice that thou mayest cleave unto Him, for He is thy life and the length of thy days.’ Yes, we indeed need this loyalty and loving devotion to our Heavenly Father.

The Barley Field of Boaz

If we continue with the account of Ruth we see that Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem. Naomi was

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feeling afflicted by the Lord due to the losses in her family. However, she still had the young woman, Ruth, to support her. As a widow also, they could understand each other and have some compassion one with the other. The time of the barley harvest came, an all-important time to gather the grain into the barn. It is interesting to note that various writings refer to corn instead of barley, yet it is explained in Smith's Bible Dictionary that 'corn' included wheat, barley, spelt or rye, and millet. The Indian corn was unknown in biblical times. The barley was an important cereal grain for baking into bread, especially among the poor, and it was also used as fodder for animals. Ruth was a hard worker and sought to glean in the fields.

It was known that Naomi had a wealthy kinsman, Boaz, who was a close relative of Eliminech. Boaz was addressing his servants working in his field reaping when Ruth had been observed gleaning. Boaz sought her name and welfare, then he showed immense favour towards Ruth, allowing her to be with the maids and to have protection from the men. When we understand that the gleanings were only for the poor or foreigners of Israel, it shows us the kindness of Boaz and his obedience to the Lord's instruction given in Deut.24:18,19, which reads: 'Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this. When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it; leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.' There we see Ruth, the widow, and how Boaz was fulfilling this commandment of the Lord.

Boaz instructed Ruth to stay on in his fields and to drink from the servants' water jars. Perhaps one of the most submissive actions performed by Ruth is in chapter 2, verse 10 - 'Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, Why have I found favour in your sight?' And Boaz acknowledged Ruth's great care and devotion and sacrifice to Naomi, and for this he prayed a blessing from the Lord to be upon Ruth: verse 12 - 'May the Lord reward your work and your wages be full from the Lord, God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.' Ruth had taken great comfort from Boaz and returned to Naomi with a bountiful amount of barley she had gleaned that day. Ruth was to stay in Boaz's field for the whole harvest period. Thus Ruth and Naomi were receiving favours from the kinsman, Boaz. Naomi saw that it was good and asked for a blessing of the Lord on Boaz.

Boaz Redeems Ruth

The account of the event that follows brings about more social interactions with Boaz and Ruth. Naomi encourages Ruth to have security or to confide in someone. So with some detail to physical appearance

and apparel, she went and secretly approached Boaz down at the threshing floor and did all that Naomi had instructed her by uncovering his feet and lying down. Boaz acknowledged that he was a redeemer. He was impressed that Ruth did not seek young men, either rich or poor. Ruth's character is praiseworthy in this regard as with her love shown to Naomi and for her submissiveness and gracefulness. In Ruth 3:11 Boaz says, 'Now my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in this city know that you are a woman of excellence.' The other translations say 'virtuous, noble or worthy woman'. What a beautiful expression this is to honour the woman Ruth. How would it make you feel if you were known for such traits? Abounding in the graces should rightly develop and purify them even more by humility and patience.

Ruth was granted six ephats of barley to take to Naomi, while Boaz sought to settle his redeeming rights to the young woman. The interest Boaz had in Ruth was very honest and sincere. We may see a romantic element between them, and this is perhaps in the zeal and promise he gives her that he would seek to redeem her in that day. Boaz sought out the closest relative with wisdom and friendliness. They then took ten elders of the city and announced before the witnesses that Boaz would buy the field from Naomi and redeem Ruth by means of marriage to her. This agreement was blessed, and the Israelite custom of removing one sandal was practised. The redeemer was giving much to Naomi and Ruth. This was the way of raising up the name of the deceased. Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife.

The union was blessed by God. The Lord God enabled Ruth to conceive and it was that she gave birth to a son. In Ruth 4:14 the women say to Naomi: 'Blessed is the Lord who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in all of Israel. May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you and is better to you than seven sons has given birth to him.' The child was named Obed. Naomi would become a nurse for him. Oh, what love Ruth had for Naomi and for Boaz. She was indeed a holy woman of Israel.

Ancestor of Christ our Redeemer

Obed was born into the royal line and his son was Jesse, and Jesse had the son named David. We see in the description by Ruth that she was used by the Lord to bring forth the promised seed. Obed was a blessing to her and Naomi, yet the verses speak prophetically of the genealogy of Christ, the Redeemer of all time and Redeemer for all, Jesus Christ, some 1200 years later. He will become great and famous in all Israel.

We know our Deliverer has bought us with His life

and will restore and sustain us. It is interesting that Ruth is mentioned with Boaz in the listing of the generations in Matt.1 where we have the genealogy of our Saviour, Christ. We see the wisdom from above evident in the lives of Boaz and Ruth – Boaz in his dealing with his servants in the field and his maid was fair and reverential. He also took the steps in redeeming Ruth, showing mercy and submission to the elders. Reading from Proverbs 2:1-10: ‘My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding, for if you cry for discernment lift your voice for understanding. If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures, then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom. From his mouth comes knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright. He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice, and he preserves the way of his godly ones. Then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course for wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.’

May we take this path to find wisdom from our God and daily live the words of Proverbs 3:1-6: ‘My son, do not forget my teaching but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness

and truth leave you. Bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart so you will find favour and good repute in the sight of God and man.’ And ‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.’ May we learn to dwell safely under His wings, as Ruth did, in our Heavenly Father’s care. Do we have this love and affection and holy devotion to Him and cleave unto Him, unto our brethren and to the truth? Yes, we must obey His voice, for He is life and length of our days. Today we still see His work in the hearts of the faithful in this end of this Age. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God is drawing His people to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and we still have the gathering into the barn of the ripe grain as each one finishes their course. May we all be faithful unto the end. May we have a faith like Ruth.

Psalm 128 fits very nicely into the life of Ruth: ‘How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands you will be happy and it will be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house, your children like olive plants around your table. Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord blesses you from Zion, and may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life, indeed may you see your children’s children. Peace be upon Israel (DG/05)

THE TWO PART SEED OF ABRAHAM

In Romans 4:16 the Apostle Paul presents to us an interesting topic: ‘Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.’ In this verse Paul makes it clear that there are two parts to the seed to whom the promise is made sure or guaranteed. These are (1) that which is of the faith of Abraham, and (2) that which is of the Law. Three main questions arise in relation to this verse. At this time, the first two questions will be addressed, particularly as they have relevance to that part of the seed of Abraham designated ‘that which is of the Law’. The third question will be the subject of a future presentation. The questions are:

1. What is the promise referred to here?
2. Who constitutes the two parts of the seed?
3. How will this promise be fulfilled?

Firstly, we need some background information before addressing these questions specifically. We are all familiar with the phrases ‘the Abrahamic covenant’ and ‘the Abrahamic promise’. These are usually taken to mean the same thing, namely, the unilateral promise

by God to Abraham that his seed would bless all the nations of the earth. We also understand that a covenant is an arrangement between two parties, in this case between God and Abraham. Biblical covenants are usually ratified by a sacrifice. This particular covenant, specifically this arrangement, involves the promise that something will occur without conditions or requirements made of the other party, namely Abraham. Given that the promise was made by God, and God is of course all powerful and cannot lie, the thing promised must therefore come to pass. God made this promise to Abraham ‘because Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws’ as Genesis 26:5 shows when God was speaking to Isaac, Abraham’s son.

We talk about the Abrahamic covenant or promise in terms of one promise, but in fact God promised a number of things to Abraham at various stages. God promised to Abraham:

1. That he and Sarah would have offspring, a seed, despite his advanced years and Sarah’s barrenness.
2. His seed would be multiplied as the stars of

heaven and as the sand of the seashore.

3. That the seed of Abraham would possess the gate of his enemies.
4. That he would be the father of many nations.
5. The land of Canaan would be his and his seed's possession forever.
6. In Abraham all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.
7. Finally, that in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

We note that Genesis 28:14 makes clear that there would be two sources of blessings for the nations of the earth, namely, Abraham himself as well as his seed. The possible significance of this will be addressed shortly. These last two promises have the most far-reaching consequences. It is inclusive that, unlike the previous promises which refer to promises for Abraham and his seed, this promise pertains to all nations or all peoples of the earth. In essence, God declares unilaterally and in fact swore by Himself since there was none greater that He would bless all peoples of the earth and that Abraham's seed would be the avenue for this blessing. It is worth emphasizing that it is this promise that is usually synonymous with the Abrahamic unconditional covenant or promise. An explicit example of this is given to us in Acts 3:25, and we note the three elements contained in this covenant: (1) Abraham's seed, (2) shall bless, and (3) all the kindreds and families of the earth. At the same time, one is impressed by the number of references in the New Testament to some of the other promises made to Abraham, and it is also reasonable to include them as being part of this overall Abrahamic covenant. The other promises appear to have less inclusive aspects and indicate sometimes purely earthly fulfillments, but because they carry the same weight of certainty they should not be overlooked or undervalued. Therefore the Abrahamic promise or covenant can be regarded as including these other promises under the main far-reaching umbrella promise of 'in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed'. Some of these references will be mentioned now.

We will note shortly in Galatians 3 that Paul applies 'in thee', that is 'in Abraham shall all the families of the earth be blessed', to the Gospel Age blessings for Christians. In Romans 4 we have reference to God's promise to Abraham that he would have a fleshly seed and that he would become the father of many nations. Acts 7 mentions God's promise that his literal seed would be multiplied, using the narrow definition of the Abrahamic promise, namely as referring to 'in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed, unless otherwise stated. Many Christians understand that the Abrahamic promise is fulfilled in the Gospel Age blessings of Christians who demonstrate the faith of Abraham in Christ Jesus. Certainly Galatians 3

gives that impression, that it is only Gospel Age Christians who are justified by faith, and Paul equates this with the promise that 'in thee shall all nations be blessed'. We notice, however, that Paul does not say 'in **thy seed** shall all nations of the earth be blessed'. He, in fact, says '**in thee** shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' No reference is made to the seed blessing the families of the earth. This omission appears to be significant. In the enumeration of Abrahamic promises earlier, a distinction was noted in Genesis 28:14 where all the families of the earth are blessed **in thee**, ie Abraham, **and in his seed**. In other words, all the families of the earth will be blessed in Abraham **and** in his seed.

Paul's lesson in Galatians 3 appears to be a direct reference to the blessing of Gospel Age Christians as expressed in their connection with Abraham, namely, they have the same important faith. In this regard, the common union of faith justifies and fulfills the prophecy that in Abraham all the families of the earth shall be blessed. The corollary of this is that the blessing of all the families of earth by Abraham's seed is something different and something awaiting fulfillment. It is different because the blessing is done in the seed and not in Abraham, and it awaits fulfillment because if we are right and the **faith-seed** has not been completed then the **seed** cannot be blessing all the families of the earth as yet. We understand and feel the blessedness of our position of not having our sins imputed to us because of faith in Jesus. This provision by the grace of God qualifies as 'good news' or 'the gospel' as Paul puts it, particularly for heathen or Gentile nations because formerly God only knew the Jewish nation.

In some ways it would seem reasonable that this blessedness of a small number of truly faithful followers of Jesus be mentioned in the Abrahamic covenant, which we understand is a general statement of God's plan for all of mankind. If we are of that true faith-seed of Abraham, we, like Abraham, are truly blessed. Not only have we been given a much more detailed view of God's plan than Abraham had but we, like Abraham, have been justified before God, and not just under friendship but under sonship. He was called the friend of God, we the sons of God. To be called the sons of God implies blessings too numerous and stupendous to mention. We have been made to sit in heavenly places and given the guarantee of our heavenly inheritance. This is a truly blessed position and, as Paul suggests, is referred to in the Abrahamic promise by that part expressed by 'in **thee** shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' Therefore, this distinction between Abraham and his seed blessing all the families of the earth appears important. It is important because the grandest and most far-reaching promise made to Abraham does not refer just to the relatively

small number of Christians during the Gospel Age but to the entire human family.

The Faith-Seed of Abraham

We see then that the faith-seed of Abraham is firstly the object of God's blessings but, once complete, becomes the subject of God's blessings for the whole world. In other words, the seed is blessed and yet will also be the avenue or the conduit by which the blessings of the whole world will flow. This flow-through nature of God's blessings in relation to a perfect creature is to be expected since God cannot use an imperfect creature to bless others unless the Adamic creature is firstly brought into relationship with God. This can only occur if that creature is made righteous, whether this be actual or imputed. This flow-through nature of God's blessings is also shown in God's dealings with Abraham. Abraham became the friend of God because righteousness was imputed to him for his faith, and it was only after this blessed state was achieved that he could become the focus of God's blessing for others, Gospel Age Christians for instance. It goes without saying that all of these blessings originate with God so that when we speak of the seed blessing all the families of the earth, the real origin of them is with God and they merely flow through the seed to the world. This flow-through nature of God's blessings is mentioned because the same thing in such as the seed may be both the subject and object of God's blessings. This also reflects the abundance of God's blessings inherent and implicit in the Abrahamic promise.

In our key verse, Romans 4:16, we need to be clear about which of these promises the Apostle Paul is alluding to, and this is the first question that will be addressed. Which promise our key verse refers to is given in Romans 4:13, a few verses prior to our key verse: 'For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.' Here we have a direct reference to the promise that Paul is talking about in our key verse. The problem is that the phrase 'heir of the world' or something similar is not found elsewhere in the Scriptures. It also, at first glance, does not appear to correspond to any of the promises made by God to Abraham as enumerated before. So what does Paul mean by 'heir of the world'? When we look through the list of promises, one would assume that possessing the gate of his enemies and the seed blessing all the families of the earth would have to be closest to what Paul means by 'heir of the world.' The Greek word translated 'heir' also carries the thought of 'possessor, or one who possesses something'. The Diaglott translates the word 'possessor'. Most other translations also carry that thought of inheriting or possessing.

We understand that to bless all peoples, the spiritual seed needs to subjugate or rule over the nations. This can, of course, only occur through the much-promised worldwide Kingdom of God. Paul may have had Psalm 2 in mind when he used the phrase 'heir of the world' showing that the world would have to be subject to the seed before the blessings could flow. Paul knew that the Kingdom that Jesus preached meant possessing the world before blessing it. The whole seed would be included here, which is made clear in the promise made to the church in Revelation Chapter 2. We note the similarity of the promises here and in Psalm 2. The key feature is that nations are subjugated and become subject to the seed. Psalm 82 also refers to inheriting the nations, this time however by God.

The Kingdom is, of course, ultimately God's. This is why we call it the Kingdom of God. The spiritual seed will reign a thousand years and then the direct rulership will be handed back to God. Another clue linking inheriting all nations in Psalm 82 to the Kingdom and thereby its blessings is the reference to judging the earth, which we also understand occurs only in its ultimate sense in the Kingdom. It seems fairly clear then that Paul's phrase 'heir of the world' probably reflects the main Abrahamic promise that the seed shall bless all the families of the earth.

Now we will examine the second question in relation to the key verse in Romans 4, the two parts of the seed. Who does 'that which is of the law and that which is of the faith of Abraham' refer to? Let us address the second group first since this seems most straightforward. The answer is given to us in Galatians 3:7 and 29: 'Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham....And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.' In other words, those that are in Christ have the same faith as Abraham and are Abraham's seed. Does this group of 'those of the faith of Abraham' refer to Gentile converts only or Jewish converts as well? The verses above are not exclusive and do not speak of just Gentiles, and therefore all that show Abraham's faith in Jesus are counted as being part of the seed. This would then suggest that Jewish and Gentile converts would be referred to collectively. This thought that Jewish and Gentile converts are included together is supported by Galatians 3:23,24. Those under the Law and taught correctly by it were brought to the faith in Jesus. These are styled 'the Jewish remnant' for as a nation the Jews were rejected and stumbled at Jesus, but those few, like Paul, came to have Abraham as their spiritual father and not just a father according to nature. So this category 'which is of the faith of Abraham' appears to refer to all Gentile and Jew who have come to develop Abraham's faith in Jesus.

That Seed Which Is of the Law

Having clarified who constitutes this part of the seed, we need to answer who constitutes that part of the seed styled 'which is of the Law'. It has been suggested that it refers to Jewish converts through faith in Jesus, but we have already seen that these would have to be included amongst those of the faith of Abraham, and therefore it appears that Paul had something else in mind. The fact that this group is 'of the Law' suggests those of natural Israel who have not died to the arrangement of the Law Covenant. Jesus, of course, made an end of the Law Covenant by nailing it to the cross. This provided an opportunity for imputed righteousness by faith in Him and became established once His perfect sacrifice was completed.

We note, however, that faith in Him is required before this imputed righteousness can be provided and death to the Law Covenant could occur. Those still under the Law Covenant who do not have that faith remain under the Law until now. Romans 4:13,14 makes it plain that faith is required in order to inherit the promise 'heir of the world' which we have seen is, in Paul's mind, equivalent to blessing all the families of the earth. This suggests that in order to inherit the promise those making up this category, ie those still under the Jewish Law or Covenant at present must come to a position of faith in Jesus; but not during the Gospel Age, for then they would qualify as Jewish Christians and be counted under that which is accounted the faith of Abraham and become part of the spiritual seed. Therefore this conversion would have to occur after the spiritual seed has been completed.

But what evidence is there that religious Jews convert and see Jesus for what He was and is, namely their Saviour? Romans 11:25, 26 speak of this event in the right timeframe. We note that at this time that the full number of the Gentiles has come in, this event referring to the full number of spiritual seed being gathered during the Gospel Age. So what is being talked about occurs at the end of the Gospel Age not during it. That this is the correct timeframe is confirmed by the reference to the Deliverer coming out of Zion. This suggests that true anti-typical Zion at this point exists as a total rather than as a partial entity. In type literal Zion is a reference to the typical seed of Levitical power of Jerusalem on Mt. Zion, and the anti-type refers to the establishment of the spiritual rulership of the Kingdom. Acts 3 tells us that Jesus is first and foremost the anti-typical David. We also note that the whole seed, that is Jesus and His 144,000 body members, are included in this picture. They stand together on Mt. Zion, as we read in Revelation 14; the whole seed being the anti-typical David and thereby fulfilling the sure mercies of David. This again points to a time at the end of the Gospel Age when the spiritual seed is complete and it is only after this that Israel will be

saved by the Deliverer banishing ungodliness from Jacob.

Romans 11 refers to the lack of faith in Jesus as a hardening (or blindness, as the King James puts it). This hardening occurred because of unbelief. Jesus was and is still a stumbling block and a rock of offence for the majority of Jews, but we note that this will end when the full number of Gentiles comes in producing faithful, natural seed. Zechariah gives us much more information concerning these events. We are familiar with Zechariah 12:10. This verse describes the stupendous conversion of the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and is associated with the events which we understand will occur at the very end of the Gospel Age, specifically the destruction of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem – sometimes referred to as Jacob's trouble. This again confirms the right timeframe. There are many details in these chapters concerning these points and soon to come to pass events which time does not permit us to examine. However, some of the more salient features are as follows.

In Zechariah 13 we are told about the cleansing of the house of Jacob and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This corresponds to Paul's 'banishing ungodliness from Jacob'. This cleansing process is likened to a refining process in verse 9. We note Zechariah 13:7-9 and the first two verses in Chapter 14 are given in poetic form. It is to be noted that only one-third are left and refined like gold. Previously some have taken these poetic verses as referring to spiritual Israel, however the context is that of Jacob's trouble at the end of the Gospel Age, indicating that it refers to natural Israel. So then, it appears that those of the natural seed that have been cleansed and have had ungodliness banished from them and pass through the refiner's fire will come to have the necessary faith to qualify for the promise as outlined by Paul, namely, to become heirs of the world or, in other words, to become part of the seed that shall bless all the nations of the earth. Given that the spiritual seed has been completed by this time, this natural part of the seed would have earthly bodies and consequently constitute the earthly seed of Abraham. Since this earthly part of the seed is gathered after the spiritual seed has been selected at the end of the Gospel Age, it is appropriately styled 'that which is of the Law' because it is future by Paul in our key verse because during the Gospel Age they properly remain shackled by the Law Covenant.

In much the same way as the spiritual seed, this natural seed will be blessed first in order to become useful and qualified to bless the nations of the earth. This order of blessing, like the order of tribulation and anguish which has been fulfilled historically, is alluded to by Paul in Romans 2:9-11. Again we see this flow-

through nature of God's blessings, this time the conduit being the faith-seed according to the Law. It is worth emphasizing that this faith-seed according to the Law is a highly selected group. They will have come through much cleansing and refining to be part of this faith-seed. Like Nathaniel, they will be Israelites indeed. It has been suggested that it would be unfair for a faith-seed according to the Law to be favoured with such a prominent position and role in the Kingdom. However, we note that as touching this selection they are beloved, for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. The promises made by God to Abraham and reiterated to Isaac and Jacob are sure. Not only this, but also God is no respecter of persons, i.e. there is no favouritism with God. The nations of the earth will receive their blessings of true life, but all in good time, according to God's own counsel expressed in His plan of the Ages.

This thought of faithful Jews blessing the nations of the earth is supported by various Scriptures. We note in Zechariah 8:13 that the time will come when the house of Judah and Israel will no longer be a curse among the heathen nations but, in fact, a blessing. In Zechariah 8:23 we have a clearer picture of how this will occur. The nations will actively seek the guidance and help of the true Jew in order to access divine blessings because God will first dwell with that nation. Isaiah and Micah speak similarly. The nations will actively seek the blessings of the Kingdom of God which will be set up and have its earthly seat in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be the conduit for the word of the Lord. Every nation that will not worship God by not recognising the seat of God's Kingdom in Jerusalem will have its blessings withheld, shown by the rain

being withheld. These verses therefore support the notion of the natural faith-seed role of blessing the nations of the earth.

In conclusion, it seems the Abrahamic covenant and the promise in relation to the Abrahamic seed blessing all the families of the earth is complex and far-reaching in its scope. The Abrahamic covenant is a general statement of God's Plan of Salvation for all of humanity. It seems it cannot only be regarded as including earthly blessings for natural Israel but specifically includes a faith-seed made up of earthly natural descendants styled by Paul as 'that which is of the Law' which will bless all the families of the earth like the spiritual faith-seed. Both parts of the seed of Abraham are selected according to their faith, the spiritual part being selected during the Gospel Age proper, whereas 'that according to the Law' once the spiritual seed has been finished. We have also noted the flow-through character of God's blessings in relation to both parts of the seed and even of Abraham himself. It also seems that the promise to inherit or possess the world is assured to both parts of the seed. Both will be conduits for God's blessings for all nations.

We stand with the Kingdom in sight. The spiritual seed appears to be all but complete and the selection, cleansing and refining of the natural faith-seed will soon take place and be completed, allowing the Kingdom to be set up and for the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Let us lift up our heads as we see these things taking place for our deliverance draweth nigh. Let us see that the time is truly short and make every effort to make our calling and election sure. (ES:12/03)

We Have This Treasure

The Apostle Peter had a very clear objective in mind when he wrote his second epistle. In 2 Peter 1:12,13 we read: 'Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things though ye know them and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance.' And then in the last chapter, that is, 2 Peter 3:1 he says 'This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you in which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.' And those words are equally applicable to us today. The very large majority of our spiritual activity today is stirring up our minds by calling into remembrance the things that we already know. So it is, over the last few months, I have been reflecting upon the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor.4:5-7 which read: 'For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined

in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.' As I reflect upon those verses I realise that there are many deep and precious truths in them. So it might be profitable if we stir up our minds just by reflecting on three points that Paul raises in those three verses.

(1) What is the Treasure?

First of all, just what is the treasure that the Apostle Paul referred to, why does he call it a treasure and not give it some other name, and then close with just a few thoughts about earthen vessels – 'we have this treasure in earthen vessels.' What, then, is this treasure that the Apostle Paul refers to? I can still remember the first time I read these verses for myself. At that time I had just become convinced about the calling of the church and the idea of joint heirship and living and reigning

with Christ for a thousand years. Those thoughts were pre-eminent in my mind. What else could surpass those concepts? So, when I read these verses for myself, straight away I assumed that the treasure was the hope of joint heirship. It wasn't until many years later that I realised I was wrong. What I was doing was imposing my preconceived idea on what the Apostle's words were rather than sitting back and reading what the Apostle was saying and understanding what he said. Let us again read what he said in verse 6: 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels.' So it now comes through to me that the treasure to which the Apostle is referring has already been defined in verse 6 – the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. That's the treasure.

When we ponder those words, we realise that Paul does not say God has given the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, and stop there. He adds the qualification that God has given the light of the knowledge of the glory of God **in the face of Jesus Christ**. That qualification is necessary and very important because there are other things that tell us about the glory of God. In Psalm 19:1 we are told that the heavens declare the glory of God, and don't they? It has been said that if the heavens were available for humans to view on only one night in a year, not one person would miss the spectacle, but because they are so freely and continuously available, then we tend to take them for granted and don't always appreciate the majesty and glory which are manifest and apparent from the heavens. Not just from the celestial heavens, either. We also see in our terrestrial environment the glory of God is apparent all around us. Let us read Romans 1:20 – 'For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and godhead.' They are available to mankind to see, and they reflect the glory of God, the invisible things of Him, His eternal power and godhead. Nature, using that general expression, is there for anyone who observes and thinks about it; that creation reflects the glory of God. The nation of Israel also reflects the glory of God. In Isaiah 43:1 & 7 'But now, thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, fear not for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine....For everyone that is called by my name, for I have created him for my glory.' When we understand even something of the role of Israel is God's plan. I believe we can now see something of God's glory manifested in them and eventually the whole world will see God's glory manifested in them.

So we see there are several things that reflect the glory of God, therefore the qualification that Paul adds in 2 Cor.4 is important. He has given us 'the light of the

knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Why did he say the face of Jesus Christ? The face is a very indicative member of the human anatomy. We can tell lots of things by looking at a person's face. Observe the colour: white and pasty –unhealthy; rosy - well, healthy; red – angry, pulsed up. I believe a sensible and logical interpretation or understanding of this expression 'in the face of Jesus Christ' is consistent with the use of the face in biblical symbolism. After all, these verses are written for us to understand, and in Ezekiel 38:18,19 we read: 'And it shall come to pass that at the same time that Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord God, that my fury will come up in my face.' That's a very meaningful expression, isn't it, when we relate it to our everyday observation? Nothing mystical about it! 'My fury will come up in my face!' We can always tell when someone is angry, furious, hot and bothered.

Another attribute of the face is that it indicates favour or disfavour. I recall seeing Idi Amin on television when he attended a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. He was shaking hands with all the dignitaries and came to Prince Charles who was there representing the Queen at that time, and Charles turned his back on Idi Amin, refusing to shake his hand. That symbolism is also used in the Scriptures. In Ezekiel 39:22,23 we read: 'So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword.' Then in verses 28 and 29 the contrast: 'Then shall they know that I am the Lord their God which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them.' Showing the face is an act of favour, wanting to be greeted, acknowledgement, but turning the back is an act of disfavour. So we see the face is a very important part of our make-up and we can tell lots of things by seeing a person's face - does he show us his face or does he not, is he furious, angry, healthy, and so on? In 2 Cor.4 we learn that God has shined in our hearts, the light of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. Not in the back, no, He has turned His face to us as an act of favour. We see His face, and we can learn so much from the face of Jesus Christ about the glory of God.

What do we see in the face of Jesus Christ that really reflects the glory of God? First of all, let us turn to Hebrews 1:1,2 – 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.' We can debate the meaning of 'worlds' there but it comes through quite

clearly that to understand that God created the ages, fleshed out the heavens, made the earth, modified the earth for man's existence, all through His Son, elevates His Son to a very high and important position. And understanding the status He had helps us to see the glory of God. On the other hand, those who don't understand the significance of Jesus' initial position are unable to understand the glory of God. When we look at some Aboriginal monuments and places of tourist attraction with their technologically brilliant displays, we can feel sympathy with the people because entwined amongst their decorations, illustrations and exhibitions we never see credit given to the fact that the world was created by God's Son. These people at the present time have absolutely no chance of seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ because they do not recognise Him. But, of course, people today looking out on the world don't see any glory in creation, particularly in man's plight, as we read in Romans 8: 'The whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.'

What do we see? We see that the whole creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into His marvellous light eventually, the same as Christians. They do not have the same reward, but they will be delivered from corruption. And how will that be brought about? By Jesus Christ, who gave Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time. If we don't see Jesus Christ in God's working, then we can't see the glory of God. But if we understand that God has subjected man to this present situation but that He has given His only Son, the One who was with Him and through whom He made the worlds, to be man's Redeemer who gave Himself a ransom for **all**, then we can start to see something of the glory of God. Of course, if it was just limited to those who see and understand now, it would still be a very shallow and perhaps cruel organisation. So doesn't Acts 24:15 become important, that 'there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust.' We can't see that unless we understand that Jesus Christ gave Himself a ransom for all. After man has been condemned to death as he is now, and goes through the death condition, bondage and corruption, when he is resurrected (both the just and the unjust) then the world of mankind will start to rejoice in the glory of God. But we can see that now in the face of Jesus Christ, and aren't we privileged to see that?

In Isaiah 35:10 we are told that 'the ransomed of the Lord shall return.' Who are they? Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all, and there will be a resurrection of all the dead, both the just and the unjust. The ransomed of the Lord will return and come to Zion, not in the bondage of corruption but with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall come in joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. So, we start to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. How privileged we are to see that at this time! But let us give credit where credit is due, and that of course is giving

credit to God, because in 1 Cor.1:22-24 we read: 'For the Jews require a sign, and the Greek seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock and unto the Greeks foolishness. But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Yes, God's great plan of salvation is totally dependent upon Jesus Christ, as we all know by stirring up our minds, and putting ourselves in remembrance of these things that we already know.'

(2) Why is it Called a Treasure?

Paul says we have this treasure in earthen vessels. Why does he call it a treasure? A treasure is something to which we esteem **value**, and something might be a treasure to one person and it is a treasure to that person because they attribute value to those particular items. Paul says we have 'this treasure'. I would like to suggest that there are three characteristics of any particular item which might cause us to attribute value to it and therefore regard it as a treasure. The first one is that the object might be rare, and this is evident when looking over the gem fields in Coober Pedy. An enormous quantity of overburden and mullock had to be processed and they might find one little gemstone. That was regarded a treasure, and rightly so. That's in the material world. In the material world it also refers to the field of knowledge. Once during my working life I had to attend the Victorian Government State Library. I hadn't been there before. I walked into the front room and was shown to the reception desk, and I just could not believe my eyes. Altogether there were six storeys of books. Books, and books, and books, and books! I just couldn't believe that! I wanted to find a piece of information, which I eventually found with the help of the assistant, but not once during our searching did I see anything spiritual in the six storeys of books. That to me was just like the minefields or the gemfields at Coober Pedy. Oodles and oodles and oodles of stuff, but was there a gem there? Not really. So Acts 4:12 to me always is important. There is salvation in none other. There is no other name by which man can be saved other than by Jesus Christ. So really, in the field of knowledge in the world today, knowledge about our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, is indeed very, very rare. Therefore, that is one reason why I think it is a treasure.

Another reason why it might be regarded as a treasure is that we **recognise** it. Now at the gemfields, we went and saw them being polished and put into settings or mountings, some people there were really impressed with the actual mounting of the gemstone. To them it meant a lot. To me, it meant nothing really. I didn't have the ability to recognise the value of that piece of jewellery. So the ability to be able to recognise that it is something very precious and we can attribute value to it is a privilege. I was observing the overburden and not being able to recognise the privilege. That's the way it

is with Jesus Christ, isn't it? In all these displays and scientific learning, so called, how much value is attributed to Jesus Christ? In simple terms I would be inclined to say He was a loser. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Indeed, 'foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head'. So, in temporal terms, mankind does not attribute any value to Him. They don't appreciate His value. It is very important, of course, because we are able to appreciate that value, that we recognise where the valuation comes from. It says in 1 Cor.1:30 'Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' So it is God who has given appreciation of the value of Christ Jesus. Yes, and that is in the face of Jesus Christ.

A third attribute which would cause somebody to regard something as being a treasure is **heritage**. Something that has been handed down to us from our forebears. We had nothing to do with it. It probably was not available to us while the previous person was alive. We only became aware of it after their death. And that's the same with Jesus Christ, isn't it? If we go to Galatians 3:22-24 we read: 'But the scripture hath concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. For before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.' So before faith came, we were shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. It wasn't available. As we read in 1 Peter 1:7, 9-12: 'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.....Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you. Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.' Yes, the prophets enquired and searched diligently, but they were shut up at that time. It wasn't until after the death of Christ that faith came. So here we have a characteristic of the face of Jesus Christ which we can now see, just because we are living in the Christian era.

(3) In Earthen Vessels

Just a few comments about the next part of our text

where Paul says 'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels'. For many years I accepted that the significance of that expression was that earthen vessels are leaky, we need continual replenishment, continuously stirred up. Let's read what the Apostle says: 'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.' Then I asked myself some questions: Are earthen vessels necessarily leaky? We have some china vessels at home which are merely baked clay, and they don't leak. So again, I feel I was superimposing on these words my pre-conceived idea rather than listening to what the Apostle said. What is the scriptural significance of 'earthen vessels'? Are they meant just to be leaky? In Jeremiah, chapter 18, we have the account of the potter's house. Reading just a few verses from Jeremiah 18: '1The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, 2Arise, and go down to the potter's house and there I will cause thee to hear my words. 3Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. 4And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. 5Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying 6O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? Saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mind hand, O house of Israel.' No mention of leaky vessels there. The vessel was marred in the hand of the potter. So what did the potter do? He made it again. In Romans 9, as we know, He is able to make one vessel unto honour and another vessel unto dishonour. Does it mean that it leaks? No. It simply means that we are as clay in the potter's hand and He does the work.

And isn't that what Paul has been saying to us? In the face of Jesus Christ, it is not of ourselves but of Christ crucified, that the excellency of the power may be of God, not of us. So we see this treasure, the treasure of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in Jesus Christ, not because of our own doing, we are simply the clay. But we see it in the face of Jesus Christ because God has so designed it. **He** has shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ 'who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' Indeed, this knowledge that we have is a great treasure, something we are all aware of. I have discussed nothing new, I am sure, but maybe it has been a time of refreshing to recognise just what a great treasure we have in the knowledge that we have, however partial it may be. (GS/05)

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” Rom 11:33

IN BRIEF

“DAVID ENCOURAGED HIMSELF IN THE LORD”

1 Samuel 30:6

This was at a time when David was sorely pressed; Saul was trying to destroy him. It seems strange that Saul, the once anointed of God, should do this. The background of events leading to the words of the text is found in the earlier chapters of this book. The question that arises is – How did David “encourage himself” in this chain of events, and so be able to successfully perform his difficult task? One may help to encourage another person, but how encourage oneself? Surely it was by waiting upon his God and by the exercise of faith.

Trust is the Old Testament term for faith. David trusted in his God; he recognized that God was everything; he exalted His name, and declared a knowledge of his own insufficiency. “He knoweth our frame’ He remembereth that we are dust.” David’s knowledge of God and God’s knowledge of him combined to make great events possible. If God should be for him, all would be well, and how did David assure himself that this would be so?

He prayed to God and then obeyed His direction in answer. Thus God showed Himself the help and strength of David, In the circumstances of the time, we would think it would have taken tremendous courage, for instance, in earlier times for David to go out against Goliath. But David had faith – “I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts; He will give you into our hands.” We may ask – Does faith make courage unnecessary? Rather, it would seem that each is supplementary to the other; each supports the other. “Wait upon the Lord and He will strengthen thine heart.”

When David went out against Goliath, he went with courage in faith. David could have exercised faith on the sidelines and God could have done it all of His own will. But David knew someone had to go out for the Lord and co-operate with Him in what He wanted done. So it is for us to profit – How do we encourage ourselves in occasions of need? Let us remind ourselves of what God is and what He can do. We have more revealed to us than David had. We can rejoice in the promise of blessings to all the families of the earth. We can face things as they are now because we know what they are going to be. Jesus tasted death for all mankind and God’s blessings will flow to all as a result.

But there are still things for us to do; God requires our

co-operation. How can we strengthen ourselves in the Lord/ By studying God’s Word to learn His will. By becoming doers of it not hearers only, and through communication in prayer. By acknowledging Him in all our ways so that He shall direct our paths, Let us work out our salvation with great carefulness, believing that God is all-powerful to accomplish His will. With courage let us face realities; look through the difficulties; realize our weaknesses; in full confidence in His power to work through us.

SOJOURNING WITH GOD

Psalm 15:1

The opening verse of Psalm 15 poses two questions - "Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" (Verse 1 margin) Christians are pilgrims or "sojourners" in this present world, the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness pictured this. As they drew their succour from the tabernacle which travelled with them, so do we; it kept them, and it keeps us in touch with the Infinite

Our sympathetic High Priest keeps us cleansed from sin, and provides food from the "holies", if we continue faithful in the way. Some of the requirements of those who would sojourn with God are summed up in verse 2 of the psalm - firstly "he that walketh uprightly" ;The real meaning of the word is "consistency, careful at all times in what we say, what we do and where we go. Then follow "he that worketh righteousness" and "he that speaketh the truth in his heart."

Barnes comments that the psalm "contains a statement of what real religion is; one of the most explicit and formal which we have in the Old Testament." Micah 6:8 lists the requirements as "to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God." If we seek earnestly to do so, we will enjoy the blessing that issues from the tabernacle of God, those holy things provided for our sojourn through "wilderness" conditions.

After the Israelites reached the promised land, Solomon built them a temple - "a settled place for them to abide in forever." (1 Kings 8:13) The temple on the holy hill of Zion pictured the eternal kingdom of God. If we complete satisfactorily our sojourn with God's tabernacle through the wilderness of the narrow way: during this Gospel Age, we shall dwell everlastingly in God's holy Zion above.

"In thy presence is fullness of joy. At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16:11)

LOVE IS ...GREATER THAN PROPHECY

In secular circles the desire to know what the future holds is so strong that considerable resources are expended trying to predict it. Areas in which these efforts are made include the weather, financial markets, consumer preferences for various goods, traffic density and outbreaks of disease. Additionally, many who might not directly expend resources to obtain predictions of the future nevertheless base many of their decisions on such information, for example weather forecasts. Also, at a personal level, if one of our kin is sick we are anxious to know the "prognosis", that is, what their future is expected to be. So anxious are some to know what the future holds that they employ "fortune tellers" - card readers, palm readers, astrologists and the like.

Likewise in the religious world. Many aspects of religious faith are concerned with the future, and motivate its adherents to strive to better prepare for it.

The desire to know what the future holds has been with mankind since early days and prophets have always played an important part in God's dealings with mankind. There are several instances recorded in the Old Testament where people were curious to know what the future held. In Genesis 15:2 Abram asked the Lord "... what will thou give me .", a seemingly innocent request but nevertheless one that shows that Abram wanted to know what God had planned for him.

Another example is Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar had "*magicians and astrologers . in his realm*" to interpret his dreams and predict what lay ahead. (Daniel 1:20; 2:2) However they could not interpret one of his dreams and eventually he called on Daniel (a prophet - Matt. 24:15) to interpret the dream. God revealed to Daniel "*what shall be in the latter days*" and "*what should come to pass hereafter*". (Daniel. 2:28,29) Nevertheless Daniel was not given to know everything about the future, and on another occasion he was commanded to "*shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end.*" (Daniel 12:4, 9)

Daniel was not God's only prophet, but Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos and others "*...in old time ... spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*". (2 Peter 1:21). These prophets also yearned to know what the future held, as we read in 1 Peter 1:10 - 11: "*...of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently; ... searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow*".

Later, the apostles also wanted to know what lay ahead - "*wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*". (Acts 1:6) Such a desire was natural and in accord with God's will; the Revelation being given

later to "*show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass*"(Revelation 1:1)

In 1 Corinthians 12:28 the Apostle Paul establishes a clear hierarchy of the servants of God in the church, with prophets being second only in rank to the apostles: "*God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles...*". Consequently the office of a prophet in the early church carried with it considerable esteem and so it is easy to imagine why many in the early church would have desired the gift of prophecy.

The reason why the Apostle Paul gave prophets such a high rank is evident from their role. Dr Strong defines the term (#4396) as "*a foreteller, by analogy an inspired speaker*", and Young's Concordance defines the term as "*a prophet, public expounder*". The two aspects of prophecy - an inspired speaker and expounder on the one hand, and a foreteller on the other - are closely related. Prior to Jesus' first advent the Jews were a people in darkness (Isaiah 9:2, Matthew 4:14 - 16) and the Gentiles had "*no hope, and without God in the world*". (Ephesians 2:12) It was the gospel that "*brought life and immortality to light*". (2 Timothy 1:10) The work to be accomplished during the Gospel Age is the preaching of the "*gospel of the kingdom in all the world for a witness unto all nations*". (Matthew 24:14) This "gospel of the kingdom" relates to a time that was future from the Apostle's day (and is indeed yet future) and required inspired speakers to correctly expound it.

Prophecy - a basis for our faith

The gift of prophecy was one of the powers that God gave to selected ones to promote the development of the early church. (Romans 12:6) This gift was no less spectacular and awe inspiring in those days than it was in Old Testament times. In view of the importance of the prophets and prophecy in Old Testament times, and their relevance to the establishment of the Christian church, it is not surprising that the gift of prophecy might have been keenly coveted by those in the early church. Consequently the Apostle's declaration that "*though I have (the gift of) prophecy ... and have not charity (love), I am NOTHING*" (1 Corinthians 13:2) is a statement of great moment and ranks the development of love as the all important Christian characteristic.

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“THIS DO IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME”

The Memorial service of our Lord is first and foremost a service of remembrance as He instructed His disciples nearly 2000 years ago. It is a remembrance of all that our dear Saviour underwent on our behalf “pouring out His soul unto death” and all that it will ultimately mean for all mankind. It is a simple service, though rich in meaning, and in its simplicity it takes us in spirit back to its inauguration by our Lord Himself in an upper room in Jerusalem.

In Luke 22:14-16 we read – “And when the hour was come, He sat down. And the disciples with Him, and He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” This was not to be just another Passover, important as its observance was to every faithful Jew, but the introduction of a memorial to a far greater and more far-reaching deliverance, than that in Egypt. That event remembered in each Passover foreshadowed the far greater deliverance shortly to be accomplished by our Lord. The type was to give way to the antitype, the shadow to the reality.

It is that antitype that we memorialize each year as we participate in the commemoration of our Lord’s death as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, as John the Baptist announced Him early in His ministry. We remember again all that His perfect offering has meant to His people, including all of us, and will ultimately bring to all mankind. This occasion brings us back each year to the very foundation of our faith, and we can echo the apostle’s words – “I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” (1 Cor 2:2) This is the sole and solid basis of faith, the tie that binds all who truly love the Lord, who love to praise Him and do His will.

The three gospel accounts and the later one of Paul tell us in simple terms that, after the Passover supper had been finished, our Lord took two of the elements already on hand from that supper and gave thanks or asked a blessing on each before passing them to His

disciples. Nearly 2000 years later, we read again His words before we partake of the same two elements and our thoughts travel back for a moment to the upper room where our Lord Himself so lovingly served those ones so dear to Him. His promise is that “where two or three (or more) are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt 18:29)

The Passover, instituted many centuries before our Lord’s first advent, celebrated the deliverance of the nation of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, and was to be a perpetual reminder of God’s provision through His servant Moses. “This day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it as a feast throughout your generations....and it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses.” (Exod 12:14,26,27)

In the choosing of the lamb for the Passover, the striking of the blood on the doorposts and the saving of the firstborns, what foreshadowing of our Lord’s sacrifice and its efficacy is so clearly presented. The apostle Paul makes the beautiful link over to our Lord in 1 Cor 5:7,8 where he says “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened, for even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the

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unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” Again in Rev 13:8 we read that Jesus was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

God in His wisdom and foreknowledge saw the need and provided the perfect, unblemished and all-sufficient Lamb. This is our confidence – “Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us.” The apostle Peter also beautifully lists the qualities of Christ our Passover in 1 Pet 1:18-20 – Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world but was manifest in these last days for you.”

Apart from His blessing of the bread and the cup and passing these to His disciples, only a few words of our Master in the actual service are recorded. In the case of the bread, all accounts add our Lord’s words “this is my body”. Luke in his gospel and Paul in 1 Cor 11 also add that it (His body) was given or “broken for you”, that is, for the disciples and by extension all His people. The unleavened bread pictured His perfect life given for all mankind. On Him, as the “bread of life” the Church throughout the gospel age has been sustained. “I am the living bread, if anyone eat of this bread, he shall live for ever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”. (John 6:51)

All four accounts refer to the cup as representing His blood, the blood of the new covenant, which will ultimately bless all mankind. Matthew adds the Lord’s words “drink ye all of it”. It is the privilege of all those who recognize in our Lord’s shed blood their own salvation and whose will is to follow in His steps in appreciation and appropriation of His merit in their

own lives, to participate in this remembrance service. The only qualification which Paul adds is that each take part in a fitting, worthy manner recognising the reality of that which the elements portray. This is not to deter any seeking to follow Christ from taking part, but to encourage self-examination first and then if the heart is right to take part.

The same apostle also points out that our partaking of the bread and the cup binds us with the Lord Himself and all His true people. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the of Christ? For we being many, are one bread, and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (1 Cor 10:16,17) Again, “for unto you it is given on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me” (Phil 1:29,30) This is the privilege of every child of God – “if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be glorified together.” (Rom 8:16,17) Communion, participation now in His and His people’s sufferings, communion in His glory later, what a prospect!

How blessed, then. Is the privilege of remembering our dear Saviour and Lord in the simple but wonderful way which He established nearly twenty centuries ago! Let us remember how He has blessed and kept us through another year. Let us renew our vows of consecration as we set out on another year of our pilgrimage. Once more, our Saviour invites us to His table, to take eat of the bread and drink of the cup in thankfulness and renewed dedication to the service of Him “whom having not seen, ye love, in whom, though ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”: (1 Pet 1:8)

CITIES OF REFUGE

**“God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present help in time of trouble.”
(Psalm 46:1)**

What a wonderful thought the Psalmist brings out in this verse, that God is our “refuge and strength” . David was well aware of the Cities of Refuge, their legal status and how this provided a place of refuge for those who had broken God’s laws. However he would have realized that they were only temporary places of refuge compared with what God had to offer to those who were faithful to Him.

The apostle Paul when writing to the Hebrews also

realized the advantage that we now have when he states, “we who have fled for refuge” (Heb 6:18). Those he wrote to were very familiar with the “cities of refuge” and their purpose to protect a Jew or even a stranger who had accidentally killed a person making them liable to death under the “eye for an eye” provision of the Law of Moses. Under the provision of the “cities of refuge” God had made allowances for protecting them until they could plead their cause. Our Heavenly Father knew that as imperfect human beings mistakes can be made that were not deliberate or malicious. What lessons can we as believers in Christ learn from this feature of the Jewish Law and what it tells us about our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Cities of Refuge in the O.T.

The setting for the provision of the cities of refuge was the time when the Jewish nation had just come through the forty years in the wilderness and had conquered and entered the Promised Land. These were tough times for this fledgling nation, vengeance was a way of life to people, backed by the law of God. The family of a slain person were more often interested in repaying eye for eye than in the careful examination of the circumstances to see whether the offending party deserved the severity of the punishment that grief and anger dictated. God knew that not all the sins of the people were deliberate and willful, and although Divine Justice did not differentiate between sins, Divine Mercy could and so the Cities of Refuge were established.

“Then the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying, Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, Designate the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses; that the manslayer who kills any person unintentionally, without premeditation, may flee there, and they shall become your refuge from the avenger of blood. And he shall flee to one of these cities, and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and state his case in the hearing of the elders of that city, and they shall take him into the city to them and give him a place, so that he may dwell among them. Now if the avenger of blood pursues him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbour without premeditation and did not hate him beforehand. And he shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the manslayer shall return to his own city and to his own house, to the city from which he fled.” (Joshua 20.1-6)

Six cities were set aside by the Lord’s command as cities of refuge. They were centrally situated so that people could reach them from any point in Israel in a minimal period of time, as we read in Joshua 20:7-9 – “So they set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-Arba (that is Hebron) in the hill country of Judah. And beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they designated Bezer in the wilderness on the plain from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh. These were the appointed cities for all the sons of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them, that whoever kills any person unintentionally may flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stands before the congregation. (NAS)

Of these six cities of refuge, three were east of Jordan as selected by God and given to Moses before the Isra-

elites crossed the river into the Promised Land, and three west of the Jordan as later given to Joshua. We read in Numbers 35:6,7 – “the cities which you shall give to the Levites shall be the six cities of refuge, which you shall give for the manslayer to flee to, and in addition you shall give forty two cities. All the cities which you shall give to the Levites, shall be forty eight cities, together with the pasturelands.” (NAS) The cities chosen were then all of them cities of the Levites, which would ensure that they were free from all tribal bias or prejudice. The tribe stood separate and distinct from all other tribes, as the religious representatives of the nation. It was fitting, therefore, that these refuges from justice should be of the Levite wards – under their protection.

The purpose of cities of refuge was to temper justice with mercy; they were established, not to protect willful murderers, but for those who unintentionally through error or accident, took the life of another, which is what we know as manslaughter. Anyone taking a life was worthy of death under the decree of Gen 9:6 – “whoever sheds man’s blood by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man. (NAS) Even self-defence or the result of an accident was no excuse. Anyone believing himself to be free of malice, willful, intentional murder could flee to one of these cities of refuge and there be protected from the full demands of the law against his life. He could obtain a measure of mercy without the condoning of his offence. It is of interest that the routes leading to these cities of refuge were to be built and kept in good order, free from stumbling stones, with bridges over water courses, etc., so as to afford the refugees full opportunity for a rapid flight to secure safety.

Moreover at frequent intervals signboards were erected pointing in the direction of the city of refuge and bearing the word “Refuge”. It was also a custom among Jews that two scribes should accompany the refugee. Their purpose was to persuade the avenger, should he overtake the culprit, to permit him to reach the city of refuge and to have a proper trial. This was to recognize the justice of vengeance, while instilling into the minds of the people the principle of mercy. Most of the people felt sympathy for the person fleeing from an avenger to a city of refuge, as they realized that at some time they too may commit a similar offence and thus likewise need to seek refuge and mercy. On arrival the person was not free, but had to stand trial before the elders of the city representing the congregation of Israel. Then he was received into the city and protected until such time as the trial could take place.

Justice and Mercy

His cause was to be carefully investigated. The court had to be satisfied that the death was not caused by

any of the following actions of the refugee –

- if he struck him down with an iron object,
- if he struck him down with a stone in his hand,
- if he struck him with a wooden object in the hand
- if he pushed him out of hatred, or threw something at him while lying in wait
- if he struck him with his hand in enmity. (Num 35:16-21)

The next verses list reasons for the person to be able to stay on in the city of refuge –

- if he pushed him suddenly without enmity
- if he threw something at him without lying in wait
- if he struck him with any deadly object of stone, without seeing him, while not his enemy nor seeking his harm. (Num 35:22,23)

The intention of these cities of refuge was not to defeat the ends of justice, but that while serving justice, mercy might be extended to those who were eligible for it. If a person was found guilty of murder then the city of refuge could not save him from the death penalty. If he were acquitted of any malice, he was not freed but was obliged to remain in the city of refuge or within its suburbs of 1 000 cubits beyond the walls, as we read in Num 35:24-28 – “the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the blood avenger, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he fled, and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil. But if the manslayer shall at any time go beyond the border of his city of refuge to which he may flee, and the blood avenger find him outside the border of his city of refuge, and the blood avenger kill the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood, because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer shall return to the land of his possession.” (NAS)

The high priest was one of the most prominent individuals in the nation and his death, therefore, would be such a notable event as to be known throughout all the tribes. This would allow the convicted to leave the cities of refuge and to return to their homes free from danger from the avenger, whose opportunity expired with the death of the high priest. Were he to avenge after that, he would be a murderer. This placed a heavy penalty upon carelessness or passionate actions. The penalty included separation from family, and restriction of liberty. This showed that the careless person inflicting serious injury on another, as a result of his actions should suffer the inconvenience of having to stay in the city of refuge and the loss of his freedom

for whatever period elapsed before the death of the high priest.

Our Refuge and Strength

Our theme text “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble” draws to our attention the antitypical significance of these cities of refuge. As we look at our own lives, it becomes apparent that we, like those fleeing to the cities of refuge, are under a death sentence. If our Heavenly Father were to pursue us with the full weight of divine justice, it would result in our death without hope. Paul tells us – “through one man (Adam) sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12 NAS) As a result we all “fall short of the glory of God”, (Rom 3:23) and learn that “the wages of sin is death.” (Rom 6:23) From the moment that we recognize that we are sinners in the eyes of our Heavenly Father and that on our own we cannot stand in His divine presence, we come to see the picture of the Cities of Refuge. On our own we would have the avenger, Divine Justice, on our trail, and it is only a question of time before we would be overtaken and destroyed under the Adamic death sentence.

We can see from the account of the cities of refuge the similarities to our own refuge in Christ Jesus! He is our shield and refuge against the penalty of all our sins – except those that we commit willfully against the knowledge that we have received through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christ does not shelter the obstinate, nor the unrepentant sinner, but He does shelter everyone who accepts Him and realizes “that they were :born in sin and shapen in iniquity” (Psa 51:5) Paul in Romans 5:12 tells us that “through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (NAS) We have all inherited sin through our birth.

To seek refuge in Christ we must first flee from our old life and practices, finding the only refuge God has offered – forgiveness and life in Christ Jesus, Fleeing to the city of refuge pictures our own repentance and conversion from sin as we flee from the world. We must be honest and earnest in our desire to stop sinning with our body, our mind and our affections. Like the ancient Hebrews who sought the city of refuge, having faith that they would there be safe, we too must seek Christ by faith. We are assured that we will find protection but we have to accept and act on that promise of protection. We know that without Christ we are subject to divine wrath against sin.

When we make the decision to flee unto Christ for refuge we are assisted on the way, as with those fleeing to the cities of refuge, by the signposts we find in God’s Word that give us encouragement on the way.

Not only is there the Word of God to assist us, but also as in the Cities of Refuge where the roads leading there had to be kept in good order to assist the refugee, so we have the Holy Spirit to help smooth our way. Like those fleeing who had the sympathy of those along the way, we are fortunate to have fellow travelers to assist and encourage us on our journey, as we are told in 1 Thess 5:11 – “encourage one another, and build up one another.”

Our behaviour in the City of Refuge is set out for us in the rules and regulations that Christ Jesus Himself laid down for us. He has also shown us the way ahead as He learned obedience by the sufferings He endured, and we too will have to please God in the same way, being prepared to sacrifice friendships, wealth and earthly pleasure as well as possibly family as we enter our life of sacrifice. What a privilege we have in abiding within the hallowed precincts of the salvation, deliverance and refuge in Christ which God Himself has provided for us. In Romans 8:33,34 we are reminded, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

When looking back to the Cities of Refuge we see that protection was only available to those who accidentally and not willfully took a person’s life. Under Christ’s refuge, similar conditions apply – His covering robe of righteousness is a refuge to cover our weaknesses and ignorance, the result of the fall. It does not provide a place of refuge from willful and intentional violation of the divine law. As in the Cities of Refuge, our motives and intentions will also need to be thoroughly investigated to make sure that we have the right heart condition to seek Christ’s protection.

This refuge in Christ is intended only for those who are “new creatures in Christ Jesus”, whose sinful course prior to having a knowledge of the Lord is counted, not as intentional or willful, but as of ignorance. Our responsibilities for willful sin may therefore be said to begin with and keep pace with our knowledge of the divine law. Although acquitted of the sins we have committed it is necessary that we continue to “abide in Him” – we cannot take off His robe of righteousness. If once we accepted the offer of refuge in Christ and should then leave the place of refuge, abandoning our trust in the precious blood of Christ which cleansed us from sin, then we would have abandoned the mercy and forgiveness which the Father had extended toward us through His beloved Son.

On the other hand, we are reminded of the reason and the result of continued standing in Christ – “(He) is

able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in His glory blameless with great joy. To the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Jude 24,25)

How long will we have to abide in our antitypical city of refuge? The answer is that we must be “faithful unto death” if we wish to receive “a crown of life”, (Rev 2:10 KJV) How long are the antitypical cities of refuge needed? Until the death of the antitypical High Priest. This has already been largely accomplished; our Lord and Master has finished the work that the Father gave Him to do, it now remains for the members of His body called out down the gospel age to finish their course in death. In Col 1:24 Paul states – “Even now I rejoice in the midst of my sufferings on your behalf, and in my own person I am making up whatever is still lacking (and) remains to be completed on our part of Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church.” (Ampl Vers) The promised result of these sufferings we read of in Rom 8:17 – “if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”

Soon the whole body will be complete and the Gospel Age with its purpose of calling out the Bride of Christ will come to an end. Then the new dispensation will be ushered in and no longer will our imperfections need the covering robe of Christ’s righteousness so that we can stand before divine justice. We read in Rev 20:6 – “Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection, over these the second death hath no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” (NAS) We will be made like our Lord and Master, presented before the Father blameless, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, without any vengeance against on the part of divine justice.

The entire arrangement is of our Heavenly Father, His justice is the avenger of sin, and His Son Christ Jesus is the refuge and deliverance. We acknowledge our Lord Jesus and appreciate highly His work for us, the redemption accomplished through His sacrifice. We must also appreciate all the blessings which come from the Father through Him; thus honouring the Son we honour the Father also. It is nevertheless fitting that we should remember that all these blessings are of the Father and are through the Son.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble.” (RC:06/05)

“In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge” Psalms 57:1

MARTHA AND MARY

We are first introduced to Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42: ³⁸Now it came to pass as they went that he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. ³⁹And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word. ⁴⁰But Martha was cumbered with much serving, and came to him and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. ⁴¹And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: ⁴²But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.' We know from other scriptures that this village was Bethany and this was not the first time that Jesus had visited Bethany, and it was not the first time that He had visited the home of Martha. In most cases we are just told that Jesus went to or stopped in Bethany and no details of the visit are given. However, from remarks and actions of both Martha and Mary it is obvious that Jesus spent the time in Bethany teaching.

Martha and Mary are typical of the characters of many of the called-out ones of the Gospel Age, and as such we can recognize some of our own characteristics in these two sisters. Martha has been represented accurately as a type of activity - bustling, energetic, impulsive, well qualified to be head of the household and to grapple with the stern realities and routine of actual life. Strong and vigorous in intellect, anxious to give a reason for all she did and requiring a reason for the conduct of others, one who combined diligence in business with fervency of spirit. Mary, on the other hand, was a type of reflection. She was calm, meek, devotional, contemplative, sensitive in feeling, ill suited to battle with the cares and sorrows, the strifes and grief of the encumbering world. Her position was at the Lord's feet, drinking in those living waters, asking no questions, declining all arguments, gentle and submissive, the picture of a childlike faith 'which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.' (1 Col.13:7)

It was natural that the presence of the Lord caused some stir in this little household and Martha, the busy eager-hearted hostess, hurried to and fro with excited energy to prepare for His proper entertainment. Mary, likewise intent on welcoming the Lord and knowing that her sister was only too happy to attend to His material comforts, sat at His feet and listened to His words. This was the ancient posture of disciples and learners - they sat at the feet of their teachers, that is, beneath them in a humble place. Hence Paul is represented as having been brought up 'at the feet of

Gamaliel' in Acts 22:3. When it is said that Mary sat at Jesus' feet it means that she was a disciple of His, that she listened attentively to His instructions and was anxious to learn His doctrine. We might note in our scripture too that it says Mary also sat at Jesus' feet, so we have to presume that Martha at some point of time was at His feet as well but then became encumbered with these duties.

Martha enjoyed the task which she had chosen and was quite able without any assistance to do everything required. She was not to blame for her active service but a little bit of jealousy disrupted her peace of mind when she saw Mary still sitting at Jesus' feet. It seemed to her that there was a certain amount of injustice in this situation, although we can be sure that if Martha had asked Mary to help she would have done so immediately. Troubled in spirit Martha somewhat impatiently and not quite reverently asked Jesus if He really thought it was all right for Mary to sit before Him while she herself was taking care of all the work and would He please just speak to Mary and get her to help her with the evening meal. I think we can picture children doing this sometimes, getting jealous and appealing to their parents for help. How true it is that this is a picture of the Lord's people down through the Gospel Age right up to the present time. Little petty jealousies plague us of the faith and bring discouragement to so many, yet as we have more nearly attained the stature of a perfect man in Christ there grows a calmer, gentler view of these weaknesses and more patience and understanding in improving them.

The answer of Jesus beginning with 'Martha, Martha' makes us imagine the half sad, half playful, but wholly kind and mild feelings which lightened His faith as we read: 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things, but only one thing is necessary; for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.' In saying this Jesus did not mean to exalt the reflective character of Mary over the active character of Martha; either may be necessary at one time or another and both must be combined. Jesus was reproving the spirit of fretfulness and fuss, the lack of peace and calm in Martha, and He wanted her to understand that at the time of His visits to their home she should only provide for His simplest needs so that the remaining time could be devoted to higher things. In this sense Mary had chosen the better part. It was the decision she made in putting first things first that brought the Lord's approval. Martha, on the other hand, while properly filled with the true spirit of hospitality was nevertheless overdoing the part and

thus her mind was troubled and she was unable to enjoy the evening's fellowship. Has not this same thing been true in our own experiences?

Our next scene is to be found in John 11. In verse 1 we are told of the sickness of Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and Martha. It is instructive to note in verse 5 that although Jesus had previously approved of Mary sitting at His feet, John here records that Jesus loved Martha, her sister and Lazarus. By this John beautifully shows the impartiality of Jesus, His appreciation of the sincerity of those who serve Him and seek to please Him. At first the sickness of Lazarus came as a surprise to the two sisters. As they discussed the matter they could not understand it, but of one thing they were sure - if the Lord had been present, it would not have happened. And so, as they watched Lazarus slowly sinking, they decided to send a message to Jesus. Notice the message that they sent. It is evidently reported in their own words. 'Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick.' There is no complaint, no urging of immediate action, just a simple statement of facts. No doubt the message veiled an unexpressed care that they could trust Him to read the inner longing in their hearts.

Even in their great sorrow they could not press Him to come for they were aware of the dangers that awaited Him in Judea. They merely informed Him of the situation and leaving it to Him to decide how He should act. The sisters knew the love that Jesus bore for them and that if anything could be done for Lazarus Jesus would do it. So we too, knowing full well that Jesus loves us, should realize that when we cry to Him in our hour of need it is enough to remind Him of our knowledge of His love and assure Him of our abiding confidence in Him.

Jesus received the sisters' message but made no immediate attempt to return to Bethany. Instead He said, 'The sickness is not to end in death but for the glory of God, so that the Son of man may be glorified by it.' (John 11:4) Our Lord's words here would seem to be as much to benefit the disciples with Him as for the absent sisters. He then remained two days longer in the wilderness of Perea where He had fled from the Jews. Our Lord next proceeded to discuss the case of Lazarus further: 'Our friend, Lazarus, has fallen asleep; but I go so that I may awaken him out of sleep.' These words only made the disciples think that this was one more reason why they should not go to Bethany for they reasoned that if Lazarus had been sick and was now resting, obviously it was wiser to wait for him to waken and go at a time when he had recovered from his illness. Then Jesus said plainly, 'Lazarus is dead.' Jesus next informs the disciples that for their sakes He was glad not to have been in Bethany at the time of the sickness and death of

Lazarus. Because of His absence Lazarus had been without the benefit of the Lord's presence and healing touch and had been permitted to die. In the overruling providence of our Heavenly Father this would prove advantageous not only to Lazarus and his sisters but also to Jesus' disciples. In the exercise of the Father's power, our Lord awakened Lazarus from the sleep of death.

In verse 19 we are told that many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother. They needed all the sympathy they received, for all the past bright memories of Bethany seemed now desolation and sorrow. We may picture the scene - the stronger, more resolute Martha striving to stem the tide of sorrow; the more sensitive heart of Mary bowed under the grief too deep for words, able only to indicate by her silent tears her deep sadness. Thus they were when Martha, as soon as she heard Jesus was coming, went and met Him. It requires no small amount of strength in a time of bereavement to face an altered world, but again we have illustrated the strong character of Martha, her quick apprehension and vigorous action. When Martha reached Jesus just outside the village, she stood before Him and said, 'Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.' These words were not intended as a reproach by Martha. Moreover, would she have allowed herself to complain of the Lord's course of action just at a time when she was about to make a very great request? On the contrary. She merely expressed her regret that Jesus had not been there at the time of her brother's illness, and this regret only helped to prepare for the petition she was about to make. 'Even now I know (although it was so late) whatever you ask of God, God will give it to you.'

How wonderfully restrained is Martha in this time of great sorrow. Of course, she hoped that included in her 'whatever' would be the awakening of her brother but she is too reticent to say it. The Master, her Lord, would know best what to do. Jesus responds to her faith with the word of promise, 'Your brother will rise again.' This assurance was capable of being interpreted either in the general sense as referring to the general resurrection or in the particular sense as having reference to the approaching awakening of Lazarus. It is more than likely that Martha sensed the reference to the approaching awakening of Lazarus, but not being sure she applied her Lord's words to the general last-day resurrection which she did regard as certain. This gave Jesus the opportunity to explain His words further and to declare expressly what she had hardly dared to hope. Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even if he dies; and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' (John 11:25,26) To the Master's searching

enquiry Martha replied. She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.' (v.27) Following this noble confession, we read: 'When she had said this, she went away.' The record doesn't indicate, but it is probable that Jesus Himself had directed her to go, for she says to Mary, 'The teacher is here and is calling you.' (v.28) This message she delivered secretly. The secrecy, too, might have been part of our Lord's instructions, but likely as not it resulted from Martha's own wise and loving thoughtfulness - first to avoid unnecessarily alerting our Lord's enemies to the fact of His return, and second to provide her sister with the opportunity for a private talk with Jesus.

It is instructive to observe the characteristic differences in temperament between Martha and Mary as portrayed by John. These differences we previously noted in Luke, where Martha appears as a practical, bustling housewife and Mary as a devout contemplative disciple who chooses the one thing needful. The contrast as outlined is direct and with evident intent on the part of the writer that we should regard Mary as the one possessing those traits of character most worthy of emulating. Here in the eleventh chapter of John the contrast is also noted, but instead of being direct it is developed gradually. As John unfolds the story, the distinct characters of the sisters are seen not so much as a contrast but as blending into each other. He does not forget to mention that both are loved by our Lord in verse 5, that they each show deep sorrow for the loss of their brother, that they both sent to the Lord for help, and both alike express their faith in Him. Yet, notwithstanding this, the difference of characteristics is perceptible throughout the narrative. It is Martha who, with restless activity, goes out to meet Jesus while Mary remains in the house weeping. It is Martha who holds the conversation with Jesus, questions Him, reasons with Him, and in the very crisis of their grief shows her practical commonsense in the disapproval of the removal of the stone from the tomb. It is Mary who silently goes out to meet Him, silently and tearfully so that the bystanders suppose that she is going to weep at her brother's tomb. It is Mary who, when she sees Jesus, falls at His feet, and in uttering the same words of faith in His powers as did Martha, does not qualify them with any reservation. In all this narrative John does not once direct attention to the contrast between the two sisters. He simply relates the events of which he was an eyewitness without any comment.

But the two were real living persons and therefore the difference of character between them develops itself in action. Under the impulse of her devotion Mary, as soon as she heard the message, arose and quickly left the house. The formal sympathizers who had gathered

there watched her departure, but not knowing the reason, assumed she was going to the grave to weep there and console herself. Such, however, was not Mary's intention. The mention of her Master's name and the word that He was near and wished to see her brought joy to her heart and she sought His presence, there to obtain the strength and comfort which only He could give her. When she reached Jesus she fell at His feet, saying in the identical words used by Martha, 'Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.' As already noted, there was no attempt on her part to discuss her grief. Her action at falling at His feet itself expressed the urgency of her prayer. Moreover, in the few moments that elapsed before the professional mourners arrived she was apparently so overcome by emotion that conversation was impossible. Jesus, who loved both Martha and Mary, was well aware of their differences in temperament and adapted Himself to them. With one He was able to enter into a discussion, to lead Martha's lively but not too enlightened faith in the doctrine of the resurrection to faith in Himself as the One in whom was life and through whom resurrection and life should come. To the sensitive spirit of Mary, on the other hand, He responds with silence, joining His tears with hers. Scholars tell us that the word translated 'wept' in 'Jesus wept' in John 11:35 is not the same word twice translated 'weeping' in John 11:33. In verse 33 there is the meaning of 'sobs' but here tears are to be understood, it is expression for a calm and gentle sorrow. To the tears of Jesus, the reaction of those present was twofold. There were those who said feelingly, 'See how he loved him' while others said cynically, 'Could not this man who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

The grave of Lazarus was a cave in the rock, a flat stone lying in the mouth of it. Jesus said, 'Remove the stone'. Here Martha raises an objection. 'Lord, by this time there will be a stench for he has been dead for four days.' It seems clear from these words that Martha now wasn't anticipating the miracle that the Master purposed. Evidently she supposed that our Lord's reason for opening the tomb was to look one more last time on Lazarus. This, however, would be no consolation to her now. Moreover, the dead man's sister would naturally shy away from seeing the ravages of death upon one who was so dear to her. Nor would it alleviate her sister's grief or that of Jesus. Both for His sake and therefore for Mary's as well as her own and the sake of the others present, Martha recoils from the thought of such a painful experience. However, in response to her objection, Jesus gently recalls His earlier promise: 'Did I not say to you that if you believe you will see the glory of God.' Many commentators understand our Lord to be referring to the conversation he had with Martha recorded in John 11:21-27. Indeed His words 'if you believe' in verse

40 do remind us of the expressions found in this passage, but the expression 'the glory of God' prominent in verse 40 is absent in verses 21-27, whereas it forms a prominent feature of John 11:4. Evidently then, it was the promise of John 11:4 of which Jesus now reminds Martha. He was aware that it had been reported to the sisters by their messenger, hence the expression 'Did I not say to you' stands for 'Did I not send you word?' These words are spoken to the faithful down through the Gospel Age to our own day. Often our Lord lets our needs attain extremity so that His intervention may appear more evident.

The stone being removed from the grave, Jesus then raised His eyes and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but because of the people standing round I say it so that they may believe that you sent me.' (v.41-42) At first glance these words might seem strange, yet when we recall that the previous two days had been spent by our Lord in seclusion in the wilderness of Perea, it is not difficult to realize that He had received assurances from His Father that the great moment was at hand for Him to manifest the power of God in resurrection life. Having this assurance and being full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Jesus now offers thanks to His Father in advance of the miracle. Now the great moment arrived. Every eye was fixed on Jesus, what will He do? Eyes strained, necks craned, everyone was watching and silent. We can almost picture the scene, where you could almost hear a pin drop. Then comes His authoritative voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!' At the word of command, the man who had died came forth bound hand and foot with wrappings on, his face wrapped around with a cloth. And again we hear the calm voice of Jesus: 'Unbind him and let him go!' Thus, in simplicity and yet with wondrous grace, Jesus performed His greatest miracle to the glory of God and as an illustration of the power which He will exercise when He comes in power and glory in His kingdom. 'Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all who are in the tomb will hear his voice and come forth.' (John 5:29) In that day the word of the Lord will not be obscure or corrupted by false teachers or by Satan's counterfeits. Instead, no evil shall be there, no dangerous areas to trip over, no sickness, no sorrow, no pain or death, and as Isaiah puts it: 'The work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness in confidence for ever.' (Isaiah 32:17) Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

On a third occasion, supper is being made ready and the Apostle John in his delightful way adds a few words so full of meaning - 'And Martha was serving.' (John 12:2) We can be sure the lesson learned by Martha on the former occasion remained with her, and now her service was within the bounds of sanctified common sense. During the course of the

evening the gentle spirit of Mary prompts her to give significant proof of the depth of her gratitude. Some fragrant ointment of nard contained as we gather from other gospel writers in a box of alabaster had been procured by her at great cost, either obtained for this anticipated meeting with her Lord or it may have somehow fallen into her possession and been kept carefully among her treasured gifts until some befitting occasion occurred for its use. With her own hands she pours it on his feet, stooping down she wipes them with her long hair in a further token of her devotion until the aroma filled the whole room with a sweet perfume. And what was it that constituted the value of this tribute? It was this: she gave her Lord the best thing that she had. Are we willing to give the Lord the best of what we have, to consecrate our time, talents, strength and life to Him? Not, as many do, to give Him the mere dregs and sweepings of our existence but, like Mary, anxious to take every opportunity of testifying that depth of obligation to Him under which we are laid. Let us not hold back, saying 'My sphere is lowly, my means are limited, my best offerings would be inadequate.' Hundreds of more imposing deeds may have been left unrecorded by the gospel writers, but Matthew records this: 'Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.' (Matt.26:13)

Is this love for Jesus paramount with all of us, 'Do you love me more than these?' is His own searching test requirement (John 21:15). Happy will we be if it is so. There will be a joy in the very consciousness of making the effort for His sake, feeble and unworthy as it may be, in acknowledgment of the great love wherein He loved us. Let this be our privilege and delight to give Him our pound of nard, whatever it may be. Let us offer the fragrance of holy hearts and lives revealed by kindness, gentleness, unselfishness, flowing from the principle of grateful love to Him who, though unseen, has been with us as He was to that family in Bethany, a friend, helper, guide and deliverer. 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.' (Psalm 51:17) (DO/05)

**Loves Sacrifice
And so beside Thy sacrifice,
I would lay down my little all.
'Tis lean and poor, I must confess;
I would that it were not so small.**

**But then I know Thou dost accept
My grateful off'ring unto Thee;
For, Lord, 'tis love that doth it prompt,
And love is incense sweet to Thee.**

BSH 437

CHRIST THE GOOD SHEPHERD

'I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep.' (John 10:14,15).

Abel, the first martyr in the sacred Scriptures was a shepherd. All patriarchs were shepherds. The confession of the sons of Jacob to the king of Egypt when they were asked their occupation was "We are shepherds, sir, just as our ancestors were." Moses, the sublimest historian and lawgiver in the history of the world, was a shepherd. David, the poet-king of Israel and the central figure in the history of the sacred people, was a keeper of his father's flocks. Therefore, the title of shepherd is one of great antiquity and one of great honour.

In the many sayings of our dear Saviour He pictures to us His character, work, office and relationship to His people but in none of these is the profound blessedness of our Lord presented more impressively than in the picture which has deeply affected the Christian heart in all ages, namely, Christ the Good Shepherd. Because of its intense tenderness, mingled with sublimest dignity, it is universally admitted to be the most familiar image in all the Holy Scriptures. And although the Saviour took to Himself this title before His crucifixion and with reference to His death for His sheep, it connects equally with His resurrection and His exaltation to glory. Indeed, as we see Him exercising His shepherding care over His disciples immediately after His resurrection it is evident that He intended that this title and office as the Good Shepherd should be a perpetual one. The Apostle Peter in his letter to his Christian brethren after Christ's resurrection speaks of it as a present office of our blessed Lord: 'You were like sheep going astray, but have now turned back to the Shepherd and Guardian of your lives.' (1 Peter 2:25). The Apostle Paul in Hebrews 13:20 speaks of Christ as even now 'that great Shepherd of the sheep' whom 'the God of peace brought back from the dead.'

There are two aspects of the subject that we are going to consider - first, the characteristics of Christ with regard to His people and, second, the characteristics of His people with regard to Christ. With regard to the first aspect, our Saviour has a living fellowship with His flock. This intimacy is not so clear until we become familiar with pastoral life and duty in the ancient world. In our country the connection between the farmer and his sheep is one of distance and mere monetary interest. It was very different in the regions and times in which this title obtained its high significance. In Palestine particularly, there was between the shepherd and his flock the closest union of

attachment and tenderness. It is a country of intense ruggedness and there were many dangers from torrents, robbers and wild beasts.

The shepherd could never leave his flock. He lived with his sheep by day and slept near them by night. His eye was ever on them and he became as familiar to them as one of themselves. He continually incurred personal risks and inconveniences for them. He learned to love them and to feel that his interests and theirs were the same. The hazards and the hardships of the flock were shared by him. When they suffered or were in want he took it upon himself, and he was never happier than when he saw them satisfied and in peace. So close and sympathetic was the union between the shepherd and his sheep that their feeling was what he most felt, and his will their will. Indeed, he and they were but one body – he the head and they the members, and the interest of the one was the interest of the other.

And this living fellowship the blessed Saviour has with all His people. He left His heavenly home, where it says in Proverbs 8 that 'He was daily the Father's delight, rejoicing always before Him', to live among sinful men. He experienced the burdens of their lives, their necessities and exposure, and gave Himself forever to their good and peace. Another and more glorious David, He stands out against the lion and the bear that His flock may live and He puts His life in the place of theirs. The Apostle Peter speaks of this in 1 Peter 2:24: 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.'

The Good Shepherd cares for His sheep. His heart is drawn out towards them. All His dealings with regard to them are conditioned by an undying affection for them. If any are fearful or weak or in need, His eye notices it and His sympathy is enlisted and the necessary help is given. We have the Saviour's beautiful promise in John 10: ²⁷My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.' A good shepherd is also the faithful defender of his flock. He stands by them in every peril and defends them to the last extremity. And so Christ has loved His people even to die for them – 'Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:13).

Let us now look at the second aspect of this subject, as Christ is a shepherd so His people are sheep. This reminds us of our lost and exposed estate without

Christ. A sheep is an ignorant and defenceless creature by nature. It is quite incapable of self-government and perishes without someone to look after it for it has many enemies much more powerful than itself. It must have a keeper. We cannot be happy as our own masters. The sins and errors of the past, the bewildering difficulties of the present, and the darkness of the future are all sources of distress if left to ourselves. That is why the disposition of people of all classes and ages is to group themselves around great teachers, kings, conquerors, reformers and heroes. And yet as often as men have given themselves to these earthly leaders and human light, they have been disappointed and disillusioned.

It was in this helpless and lost condition that Christ found His people at His first advent: 'When he saw the multitudes he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd' (Matt.9:36). Thus, in due time, the Good Shepherd was sent from on high. He began the assembling of His flock, the elect, destined to be fellow heirs of His glory. They have been gathered out of every sorrowful state known in this erring world and have become a people separated unto God. Having bought them with His blood and graciously proposed Himself to them as their true Shepherd and drawn them by His loving ways and spirit, they have learned to know Him, to confide in His wisdom and goodness. They have separated themselves from the rest of the world to be one with Him as their ever-blessed Lord and Master. They not only have been taught who He is but they have a personal acquaintance with Him. They are satisfied that He is their true Shepherd, that He is everything that they can require, that they are His and that they are safe in Him.

Furthermore, they hear His voice. That was not true of those to whom Christ first addressed Himself: 'He came unto his own and his own received him not' (John 1:11). The haughty Pharisees and learned Scribes, too wise in their own conceit to take in the logic of the heart, demanded by what authority He did these things and called for signs from heaven to prove to them that the truth was true. The poor, uneducated fishermen at the first word felt a chord touched in their hearts and responded with loving confidence and obedience. They confessed by the revealing light in their hearts that He was 'the Christ, the Son of the living God' but the more favoured children of the kingdom would have none of Him. They did not know Him and would not hear His voice. They even made war with Him and persecuted Him unto death. Therefore, He turned His back upon that fold and looked elsewhere to find His sheep, which lay scattered among the nations or wandering in the dark wilderness of heathenism.

Jesus said in John 10:16: 'I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice; and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.' As the sheep know their shepherd, they know his call and obey it. More than once travellers have seen great flocks strung along the hillsides of the sacred land seemingly indifferent to everything that was passing, but the moment the shepherd gave his call to lead them down at evening to where they were to be penned for the night, instantly they lifted up their heads, left off their grazing and started after their leader. They heard his voice, they understood what he meant and they confidently obeyed. Even so Christ's sheep hear His voice and follow Him. In all the Christian centuries believers from many races and tongues have made their calling and election sure to be of the 'little flock' to inherit the Kingdom. Yet of whatever national blood, from whatever region brought or whatever social economy reared, they are all one in Christ Jesus, of the one fold of this age with one Shepherd: 'For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ's then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise' (Gal.3:26-29).

No matter how much the sheep of Christ's flock may be scattered and separated in human eyes, wherever they are, they all know Christ and are known of Him. They hear His voice and so are joined together as one flock, members of the same fold and having only one Shepherd. Inwardly looking to Him as their Shepherd and in heart made acquainted with His saving grace, they are but one body with the same head and united in the one fellowship of life and salvation. 'Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God' (Heb.12:2). And yet with all the beauty, tenderness and bliss which attached to their present union with Jesus, it is but a dim and imperfect picture of what awaits this flock in the heavenly home: 'Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known' (1 Cor.13:12). 'Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweigh them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal' (2 Cor.4:16-18) (BL:05/06)

**“He shall feed the flock, like a shepherd”
Isa 40:11**

LOVE IS ...GREATER THAN KNOWLEDGE

Dictionaries use several different words to define knowledge - *acquaintance, familiarity, conversance, perception, knowing, cognisant, and 'aware'* are some of them. To some extent the definitions are circular in that '*acquaintance*' is defined as "*known, personal knowledge*", and '*familiarity*' is defined as "*a thorough knowledge*". Such circularity indicates that the concept of *knowledge* is not distinctly defined in the English language.

The Scriptures do not define 'knowledge' either. The first Biblical reference to 'knowledge' is in Genesis 2:9 where it is recorded that God planted "*the tree of knowledge of good and evil*" "*in the midst of the garden*". There is no description of the tree; the record simply states "*the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise ...*"

Knowledge essential

The knowledge stored in our brain is essential for our body to function. Every task it performs, whether voluntary or involuntary, draws on the knowledge stored in our brain. Brain damage impairs bodily function and severe damage results in death.

Likewise knowledge was a critical factor in God's dealings with Israel - "*Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge ...*" (Isa. 5:13) In later times Israel had "*a zeal of God, but it was not according to knowledge*" (Rom. 10:2) and consequently they did not obtain that which they sought. (Rom. 11:7)

Knowledge is also an essential part of God's dealings with His church: "*For God ... hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*" (2 Cor. 4:6) "*That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God*" (Col. 1:10)

Obtaining knowledge

There are at least three ways by which knowledge can be obtained. One of the ways is by observation. Solomon declared "*For the living know that they shall die ...*" (Eccl. 9:5) Observation alone could have led him to that conclusion. Not one person had lived forever. Death was a certainty for every human being then living, and so he would have been justified in assuming that "*the living know that they shall die*".

Knowledge is also to be gained through effort. Romans 15:4 says: "*whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through ... the Scriptures might have hope*". In order to learn from the things written aforetime (in the Old Testament) we need to apply ourselves to the study of the Word. The Bereans were "*more noble*" because "*they searched the scriptures daily whether these things were so*". (Acts 17:11) Paul exhorted Timothy to "*study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*". (2 Tim. 2:15) In order to rightly divide the word of truth, Timothy had to study it. "*All scripture... is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*". (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

However it is also important for us to realise that not even diligent mental application ensures spiritual knowledge. There are some who are "*ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*". (2 Tim. 3:7). Spiritual knowledge cannot be gained unless it is God's will and He reveals it to us by His Spirit: "*Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gives the increase*". (1 Cor. 3:6) "*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*". "*But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit*" (1 Cor 2:14,10)

God has given knowledge to His servants down the ages as it was necessary to fulfill His plans. God "*filled him (Bezaleel) with wisdom, understanding and knowledge ... and in all manner of workmanship*" so that he could "*make all that I have commanded thee*". (Exodus 31:1-6) Daniel was miraculously given knowledge to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream. (Dan. 2:19-23) Likewise the Apostle Paul was given his knowledge directly by God - "*the gospel which was preached of me is not after man, for I neither received it of man neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ*". (Gal. 1:11-12)

Knowledge brings admiration

Nebuchadnezzar "*worshipped Daniel and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him*". (Daniel 2:46) Likewise the miraculous gift of "*the word of knowledge*" given by God in the first century (1 Cor. 12:8) would have brought admiration, making it easy for them to be "*puffed up*" (1 Cor. 8:1). Hence we can understand why Paul assured the Corinthians that he "*came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom ...*" so that their "*faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God*". (1 Cor. 2:1-5)

Knowledge inferior to love

1 Corinthians 13:2 reads "*And though I ... understand all mysteries, and all knowledge ...*" The mysteries to which Paul referred are the secret things of God. (Greek: *musterion*); the things that God has revealed to His chosen by His spirit. They are the things that set the spirit begotten apart from those who possess merely that knowledge that can be obtained by observation or effort. However Paul goes on to say that, although one might have such privileged spiritual insight, if this one does not have love, he is "*nothing*". Consequently we can see the importance of the fruit of love. Even though knowledge is essential for our physical existence, has been a part of God's dealings with mankind, gives insight into God's plans, and brings admiration from those around us, unless the one who has the knowledge also has love, they "*are nothing*". (1 Cor. 13:2)

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FAMOUS LAST WORDS

The idea for this address came from some fictional last words from Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known." It made me think of how Jesus "who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb.12:2), and "We know love by this, that He (Christ) laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (1John 3:16). So what of Jesus' last words?

Technically, Jesus had three sets of last words:

- At the end of His human life on the cross
- After His resurrection but before His ascension
- Those at the end of the book of Revelation.

However, you could say that Jesus has not had any 'last words' as He is still alive, and because He is now immortal He will never have any last words. Consequently I have decided to make that a future project and now consider many other last words in the Scriptures that are worthy of note. So, instead, we will look at the last recorded words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy, chapter 4.

Obviously these are not Paul's last spoken words but his last written words to Timothy, whom he dearly loved and frequently refers to as his son. He was in prison in the city of Rome and is supposed to have been 63 years of age at this time. During his first imprisonment in Rome Paul was permitted to live in 'his own hired house.' After he was released from custody, it is supposed that during the period of his release (which was about three years) he revisited some of the churches previously established and also carried the Gospel to *Spain*. It was during this period of freedom that the great persecution arose in Rome under Nero. This persecution commenced shortly after Paul's release from his first imprisonment in Rome, and the bitter persecution was still in full swing when, three years later, he was again arrested. This time, as he explains in verses 16-18, it would appear that he had a public trial, possibly before Nero himself; but the fear of the people was so great and quite probably Paul's language so bold that he was abandoned by all his followers, as was Jesus before

Pilate. He tells us, nevertheless, that he had with him the Lord's presence, which strengthened him to such an extent that he spoke the Word with a boldness which permitted the Gospel to be fully known to the Gentiles thereabouts. He evidently was more anxious to make known the 'good tidings' than to save himself from pain and death. Paul's prison was a very uncomfortable place we may be sure, but notwithstanding all this we are struck with the tone of triumph which permeates Paul's writings from there. Did he murmur or complain? No. There was nothing of a depressing nature in those final words of Paul.

It is said of some great men that the characteristic of waning life is disenchantment, a sense of weariness and inevitable disappointment. Elijah had discouraging moments. John the Baptist asked: "Are You the expected one or do we look for someone else?" (Luke 7:20). Paul might have been excused if he had become disconsolate. What visible success had he achieved? He had founded a few churches, the majority of which were already cold to him. He saw his efforts being slowly undermined and a world utterly hostile to the faith of Christ. The very name 'Christian' had now come to be regarded as synonymous with 'criminal'. The opposing forces of Paul's message were united in hostility to the truths he had preached. What had he gained personally? Power? No. At his worst time of need there had not been one friend to stand by his side. He was a lonely prisoner awaiting a criminal's end. What was the sum total of earthly goods that the long labour of his life had brought him? An old cloak, some books and parchments.

And yet, in what spirit did Paul write to Timothy? Did

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he regret his hard life? Did he discourage his young friend by telling him that almost every earthly hope is doomed to failure and that the struggle against human wickedness is a fruitless fight? No. Instead, this last letter was far more a cry of triumph than one of dejection and despair. For Paul, life was ending, the race was run, and the treasure safely guarded, his day's work in the Master's vineyard almost over. He was assured that when it would be totally finished the unspeakable reward would be laid up for him, held in reserve. He was looking forward to the return of his Master, when he would receive the crown of righteousness that fades not away. What else than the power of the Holy Spirit of God could so sustain Paul under these various trials and hardships which he experienced, including this his last imprisonment and his final execution, which possibly followed shortly after the writing of this epistle to Timothy. He was spared from crucifixion by reason of being a Roman citizen, and according to tradition he was beheaded.

Timothy would have received joy and encouragement, even in the midst of his natural sadness, when he read Paul's letter. It was Timothy, not Paul, who was in danger of yielding to anger and timidity and forgetting that the spirit God gave was not one of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind. That was why Paul guided and directed Timothy: Bear afflictions with me. Be strong in the grace of Jesus Christ. Be brave. Don't be ashamed. We are weak and may fail if we trust in ourselves. Nevertheless, God's foundation stone stands sure. Be strong and faithful, even unto death. After laying down the foundation of Timothy's established faith, and after thus urging him to abide, or continue, in those things which he had learned, the Apostle Paul proceeds to deliver his dying charge. He sets the matter forth in a most solemn form: 'I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the words; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.' (2Tim.4:1-2)

We may regard this exhortation from Paul as applicable to ourselves. We also stand before God; we also are trusting in His favour for eternal life; we also are adopted into His family, and as sons are hoping to have such experiences as will equip and prepare us for the glorious things the Father has promised to them that love Him. Paul explains that as a minister of the grace of God this declaration of the Gospel may include three features – (1) reproof, (2) rebuke, (3) exhortation. But it is safe to caution all of the Lord's people against a too liberal use of the first two features. In order to reprove properly, the heart should be very full of love and sympathy, otherwise the reproofs and rebukes may be sharp and possibly do more harm than good. Even with the heart full of love it requires a head that is exceedingly well balanced to be able to make use of reproofs and rebukes to good advantage to those who really need them. And

in this God's people are to exhibit a character of patience, longsuffering, brotherly kindness. Another point to be noted is that it is the Word of God that is to be preached and not the word of man. However God may use human agencies in explaining His Word, the distinction between the Word of the Lord and the word of the teacher is to be continually discerned.

Paul now prophetically writes of the great falling away and probably the formation of the papacy: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry," (2Tim.4:3-5) But Paul adds that Timothy should not be discouraged at these things but should continue on in the world, fulfilling his ministry. Timothy would have been encouraged by these words and they would have reminded him of all that Paul had suffered for the Truth and what a great example he was to him. After Christ, Paul has probably been the next greatest example of faith that has encouraged Christians all through the ages.

To fix this heartfelt appeal for faithfulness to the Word of the Lord in Timothy's mind, this conviction of the apostle that he was about to die, is urged as a reason why Timothy should be laborious and faithful in the performance of the duties of his office. Paul refers to himself - that he must now give up the fight, that the end of his life was apparently in sight and the time of his departure from life was at hand: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." (2Tim.4:6-8). How humble and yet how confident are the closing words of the great Apostle's testimony "*I have fought a good fight*" etc. He did not boast of perfection in his flesh but, on the contrary, disclaimed it saying that he had to constantly keep his body 'under', in subjection to the new mind. He did not boast of how many churches he had established or how many converts he had made and baptized. He did not boast of his knowledge of the Lord's Word, nor of his ability as a speaker, nor of how many epistles he had written, nor of his imprisonments and sufferings for the sake of the Gospel. On the contrary, his boast was simply that he had fought well, fought faithfully, fought to the best of his ability against the sin abounding everywhere and the weaknesses in himself. His boast was not that he had made a faith or that he had expressed the Gospel in the most clear and positive manner which would progress for generations after him to glorify God and to bless His people, but his boast merely was that he had 'kept the faith' – the faith which

God through His Word had inspired, the faith which he had received and was given to all of the Lord's people. He had kept it, he had been faithful to it, he had not bartered it for earthly advantages.

On the strength of these two points, his having kept the Word of the Lord's testimony obediently and his having fought to defend it to the end of his course to the best of his ability, he builds his hope for the crown of rejoicing in the Kingdom with the Redeemer and His faithful Bride at His appearing. What an encouragement is here for each of God's people; to know that it is not by intellectual or physical strength, not by wonderful works, not by anything that we can do or have done for the Lord, His cause and His people, that we are to hope for eternal glory; but simply, like Paul, we are to seek to faithfully use what talents we do possess and what opportunities the Lord provides for us. We are to keep the faith, not denying it under any circumstance. We, too, are to fight the good fight against selfishness in its every guise, especially in ourselves, and to develop in ourselves more and more under the Lord's instruction His spirit, the spirit of love, the Holy Spirit.

And here we must remember that keeping the faith is not merely keeping it in us, but is in the sense of faithfully declaring it; for whoever does not declare the good tidings to others will soon lose the faith himself. Let us press along the line toward the same mark for the same prize of joint-heirship with the Lord. And if when we come to the end of our life we can say, as did the Apostle, that we have fought well all along our course and kept the faith, the Lord will not say to us that we did not do as much as the Apostle Paul or as much as the Lord Jesus, but having done what we could, having been faithful in the few things and in the small talents entrusted to us, we will hear the welcome words: 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master.'

These joys of the Master Paul refers to as 'a crown of righteousness.' The Apostles James and John speak of the same crown and call it 'the crown of life' (Jas.1:12, Rev.2:10), and the Apostle Peter calls it 'the crown of glory'. (1 Peter 5:4) The thought behind each of these expressions is evidently the same, namely, the custom in times past of running races and the giving of a crown to the successful runner at the end of the race. It was not sufficient to only enter a race or start to run, it was required that the race be run faithfully, persevering to the end. And so it is with this race which we are running as followers of Jesus. It is essential, not only that we shall make consecration to the Lord, but that we persevere to the end, and our reward will be 'the crown of life' in the sense that we will get life on the highest plane – immortality. It will be 'a crown of righteousness' in the sense that only those who are approved of God as righteous will thus be rewarded and glorified. Our hope, therefore, is that we may be accepted in the Beloved, that the righteousness of the

Law may be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit, and that the rewards which God has promised to those who love Him and serve Him will be granted to us. 'The crown of glory' is another name for the same grand reward – the glory of the Kingdom, the glory of immortality, the glory of the Father's favour, and the glory of being joint-heirs with Christ in His Kingdom.

That is practically Paul's last word. The remainder of the letter is occupied with personal information given in the natural, loose, accidental order of a letter mingled with earnest entreaty to him that he would come at once: 'Make every effort to come to me soon.' Demas, Crescens, Titus are all absent from him. Erastus did not come with him father than *Corinth*. Trophimus was taken ill at Miletus. Luke only is left. Mark is useful to him for service, perhaps because he knew Latin, and therefore Timothy is to pick him up somewhere on the way and bring him. Tychicus is already on the way to Ephesus so that he can take Timothy's place when he arrives. Timothy is to be on his guard against the pronounced hostility of Alexander the coppersmith. Then follows the touching allusion to his first trial and deliverance, spoken about earlier. Greetings are sent to Prisca, Aquila and the house of Onesiphorus. Once more, 'Do your best to come before winter'. If he comes after that time he may be too late. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren.

Did Paul ever get that cloak and the parchments and the books? Did Timothy ever reach him? No one can say for sure. With the last verse of the second letter to Timothy we have heard Paul's last words: "The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you." (2Tim.4:22) We have no record of Paul's last trial before the Roman court. We can only suppose, justly so, that Paul preached and defended the Gospel and the faith to the very end. We can only suppose also that he was totally alone at his second trial, even more so than at his first, for tradition does not even supply an answer. There must not have been even one timid secret Christian there who could have passed on a record to fellow Christians. Although Paul wrote the following words of Hebrews, ch.11, about the heroes of faith, I believe that they are equally applicable to him as well, for Paul was truly one of the great heroes of the faith: "*All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.*" (Heb.11:13-16)

(DO O6)

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

Today there are a number of views people have about Jesus. You have one extreme view that He is, in fact, God Almighty. Then there are those who believe He was a very wise and intelligent man, a good man, but at the other end of the scale, the other extreme view, that He was a trickster, that He was an imposter. Many non-Christians believe Jesus was, in fact, someone who set out to deceive the multitude. The notion is that people back there in the first century were very ignorant people and He was a very clever man, consequently He took His cleverness and set out to make a name for Himself. But sadly, they say, everything backfired and He failed. That is the other extreme view.

So when you point to the miracles that Jesus performed, well, they have answers to that. He was a magician, they say. He was a trickster, he knew how to make things appear when in fact they were not. Somehow He took the opportunity and acted upon it, others He staged, and consequently succeeded in getting a crowd to follow Him at that time. Many go further and say that His followers tried to continue on with that kind of deception, to continue to try to push the deception that Jesus was somebody more than they think He was. Let us look at some examples.

There are a number of miracles recorded in the Bible. One I would like to discuss, and to bring to your attention the claims they make of these miracles, how they “disprove” these miracles, how they show there is something wrong there. In John 9:1-7 we read of the case of a man who was blind: ¹Now as Jesus passed by he saw a man who was blind from birth,² and his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? ³Jesus answered, Neither this man nor his parents sinned: but that the works of God should be revealed in him.⁴ I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work,⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. ⁶When he had said these things, he spat on the ground and made clay with his saliva and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. ⁷And said to him, Go, wash yourself in the pool of Siloam (which is translated Sent.) So he went and washed and came back seeing.’

That’s fair enough! But now, where’s the trick. Well, if you read verse 13, ‘They brought him who was formerly blind to the Pharisees.’ So they took this man to the Pharisees and, of course, the Pharisees were disputing that now he was healed perhaps he was not really blind, that the whole thing was a trick,. They even brought his parents and the parents testified that this man was blind, but that was not good enough, so at the end of the day, they threw him out of the synagogue, as verse 34 tells us. They said to him, ³⁴You were completely born in sin and are you teaching us? And they

cast him out.’ They threw him out. But let’s read on: ³⁵Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and when he had found him, he said to him, Do you believe in the Son of God? ³⁶He answered and said, Who is he Lord that I may believe in him? ³⁷And Jesus said, You have both seen him and it is he who is talking with you.’ You see, this is where the whole account falls apart because they claim that the blind man has certain abilities that people who see do not have. A blind man can hear sounds that we don’t necessarily hear, so when we speak to a blind man he can recognise in the voice pitch, in the way we sound, what is known as a voiceprint. This voiceprint is a bit like a fingerprint, unique. Everyone of us has a voiceprint, and a blind man can apparently pick even if we can’t. It takes us a long time to recognise a voice but scientists have discovered that this is something that a blind man can pick up straight away. So they say, if this man was really blind, why in verse 36 does he say, Who is he Lord that I may believe in him?

The argument is that if he was really blind he would not have asked this question because he would have recognised his voice when Jesus said to him, Do you believe in the Son of God? This is where people who read the Bible without any spiritual discernment can make anything they want out of it. In reality, with spiritual insight, we realize that what the blind man was asking now that he was healed was reassurance as to whether it was in fact the Son of God, the Son of man, the Messiah, that had healed him and not someone else. Not that he didn’t recognise His voiceprint, he obviously did, but he wanted to know, Are you the One? That’s what he was asking for and that’s what Jesus answered to him. Of course, people without spiritual discernment can look at this argument today and make it a proof that Jesus’ miracle here was not really a miracle, because they claim the man was not really blind, much like the Pharisees who were questioning whether he was really blind or the whole thing was staged.

Let’s look at another example. Matthew 14 reads: ²²Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into a boat and go before him to the other side while he sent the multitude away. ²³And when he had sent the multitude away, he went up on a mountain by himself to pray; and when the evening came he was there alone. ²⁴But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. ²⁵In the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.²⁶ And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a ghost; and they cried out for fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, Be of good cheer; it is I, do not be afraid.’ Twenty-first century modern, intelligent, enlightened critics claim that the storm had actually caused the boat to be tossed about into the middle of the sea, and then

back onto the seashore. In fact, the disciples were so disoriented that when they saw Jesus walking, he wasn't really walking on the water, he was walking on the seashore in shallow water coming towards them. They say, You see, he didn't walk on water, that's what happened. You can read the account that way and say, Yes, I guess the boat was tossed about and make a story out of it, and disprove the miracle this way if you want to. Now how do they explain the Apostle Peter's experience, well I shudder to think but I'm sure there are some explanations about what happened there.

We can look at the feeding of the multitude in John, chapter 6. ¹After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. ²Then a great multitude followed him because they saw his signs which he performed on those who were diseased. ³And Jesus went up on a mountain and there he sat with his disciples. ⁴Now the passover, a feast of the Jews, was here. ⁵And Jesus lifted up his eyes and seeing a great multitude coming towards them he said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread that they may eat.' And the account goes on to show that Jesus was then able to perform a miracle with just a handful of loaves of bread and fish and able to feed over five thousand people. The claim, of course, is that Jesus had secretly bought this food beforehand, dug it into a hole in the ground, and that he was in fact taking the food out of the hole and passing it on. You may think this is a joke, but this is what people really say about Jesus' miracles in this day in the 21st century, because others could do that kind of thing if they chose to. But we know otherwise.

It is the same thing with Lazarus' resurrection. The claim is that Lazarus never died and that he was in fact hiding in a cave waiting for a very good actor to come and supposedly resurrect him. That's what they say. With lepers they say there are different types of skin diseases and that the ones Jesus chose to heal were those that were not as fatal and consequently healable. The same thing with fever. You can heal fever today. Paralytics, psychosomatics – they say these miracles are performed today. People can be healed of supposed problems when they are not really problems. They are psychosomatics, people with psychological problems, and with a bit of persuasion you can get these people out of it.

Just one more. In John, chapter 2. ¹On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: ²Now both Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding. ³When they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to him, They have no wine. ⁴Jesus said to her, Woman, what does your concern have to do with me? My hour has not yet come. ⁵His mother said to the servants, Whatever he says to you, do it. ⁶Now there were there six water pots of stone according to the purification of the Jews containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. ⁷Jesus said to them, Fill

the water pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸And he said to them, Draw some out now and take it to the Master of the feast. And they took it. ⁹When the Master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine and did not know where it came from (but the servant who had drawn the water knew) the Master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said, Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior: but you have kept the good wine until now.' Well, they claim that Jesus drew water out of the pots and that as the disciples were taking the water over to the master of the feast that somewhere along the line they switched glasses and gave him wine which had been stored there beforehand. That's what they claim.

I wonder if this is how the Pharisees looked at Jesus' miracles. There's one scripture in Matthew 12:38-41 which I would like to spend a bit of time and consider. 'Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.' Just think. Jesus had been going around performing signs, doing all these miracles, and on many occasions Pharisees, scribes and Sadducees, religious leaders, were there present and could see Jesus performing His miracles, His signs. Why are they asking Him for a sign? Could it be that perhaps in their minds they thought Jesus was an enemy of Moses? Look what happened to the enemies of Moses back in the days of Pharaoh. When Moses was performing these miracles, Pharaoh could bring his magicians and they could imitate some of his miracles. No doubt those Pharisees may have looked at Jesus as an enemy, a magician, an enemy of Moses, who was there to deceive. So they said to Him, Come on Jesus, give us a **real** sign! We know who you are. Now look at what Jesus said to them. 'But he answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'

Let's just think about this for a moment. If you are an imposter, a trickster, out to mislead the ignorant people, who would you stay away from? You would obviously stay away from the intelligent so-called brilliant leaders of a particular group, right? Now look at what happened to Jesus. An imposter would never surrender himself to his enemies. An imposter would never let himself be accused of wrongdoing and be condemned to death and be hung on a cross, hung until he died. This is something that Jesus could not have staged. But what did Jesus say? That He would be in the heart of the earth for three days. What does that mean? We are told that on the third day Jesus was resurrected. How could He have staged that? This is not possible. We see that the sign of Jonah is just so conclusive. Yes, they can claim what they want about the miracles that Jesus performed while

He was alive, but what claims can they make about His own resurrection. Some will try and say that He didn't really die, He just fainted. But doesn't the account tell us that He was hung for six hours, from nine o'clock in the morning till about three o'clock in the afternoon, and doesn't it say that when they came to break the bones they didn't get to Jesus because He was already dead. Doesn't it say that they took a spear and stabbed Him and blood poured out? Do you think these Pharisees who were out there and wanted to destroy Jesus were just going to overlook that? Just leave Him on the cross and walk away without making sure that He died? They had to make sure, so it was conclusive that Jesus had died.

But you see the sign of Jonah? Three days, and then what? What happened to Jonah on the third day? He came out, didn't he? Jesus came out from the earth, He came back to life. That is the sign of Jonah and that is the sign that is so hard that anyone could perform unless they had God's power upon them. And that's the sign that proved that, in fact, all the other signs that Jesus performed were done by the power of the Holy Spirit. Many saw Jesus. In fact, in 1 Cor. 15:6 it says more than five hundred brethren have actually seen Jesus alive after He had died, so there is no doubt in the minds of these people that Jesus was in fact genuine. If they had any doubt that what the Pharisees were saying, what our modern thinkers, smart people, might think of Jesus, the fact that they had seen Him alive after having seen Him dead is conclusive for them that Jesus was, in fact, the One. Maybe there were some scribes or Pharisees included in the five hundred, maybe even Saul of Tarsus who was probably a Pharisee if he was taught by Gamaliel. But the greater fulfillment of that prophecy is yet to happen. In Revelation 1:7, notice what it says: 'Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him, even they who pierced him.'

So those scribes and Pharisees asking Jesus for a sign may not have seen the sign yet, but they will in the future. Then they will have no doubt that Jesus was not only resurrected by God but that He was the One that resurrected **them** in the new order of things for them to be able to recognise and accept Him and believe Him. Today we see the Jewish people becoming a nation and very soon it will recognise that Christ will be fighting for them. They will accept Him and they will believe in due course. That is the power or the sign of Jonah. It had a minor fulfillment back there for the believers and will have a complete fulfillment in the course of a thousand years.

Another thing I would like to look at is that the miracles of Jesus can be classified into two categories, you might say. There are those that required faith on the part of Jesus, and then there are those that required faith also on the part of others. Or you may classify them as those who had no effect on Jesus personally and those that

affected Him personally. Examples of miracles that did not affect Jesus but required faith on His part are feeding the multitude, walking on water, turning water into wine, raising the dead, etc. Jesus had to have faith Himself for those things to happen. Examples of those that affected Jesus personally and required also faith on the part of others was healing of the blind, the sick and demon possessed. The woman who touched Jesus' garment, why was she healed? Was it because Jesus had faith? No, it was **her** faith and the power of the Holy Spirit together that brought about the healing. In order to get the benefit of Jesus' healing, they had to believe. How many times do we hear Jesus say, Do you believe? And then when they say Yes, it happens to them. They also have to have faith just as much as Jesus had to have faith that He could heal.

That second category of miracles, the ones that affected Jesus personally had a tremendous impact on Him. In Isaiah 53:4 we read: 'Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrow, yet we esteem him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.' While Jesus was a perfect man, He was not a superman. He had feelings like us, He had emotions. He took our sicknesses upon Himself, the Bible tells us. He was stricken, He took the sin of the world on Him. This is why when you read through the account of His life to the end of His ministry, the last few days, you get the impression that Jesus was starting to feel the weight of all the sin He was taking upon Himself. He was starting to feel tired and exhausted. To be tired and exhausted is not a sign of imperfection, on the contrary. A perfect man can get tired. There's nothing wrong with that. Jesus was perfect and remained perfect to the end but He had to be tested to the end. It says in Isaiah He had to take our place, He had to take on our diseases, as it were, and He was affected by that. And Satan, of course, tested Him right up until the end so that in His last few hours Jesus was essentially all by Himself. God had taken His Spirit away from Him. He was exhausted and tired. He had to be tested right to the limit, and sure enough He was. Hebrews 5:7 & 8 says: 'Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death and was heard because of His godly fear, though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered.' He was a perfect man yet He had to learn obedience. Jesus had undertaken all this upon Himself for our benefit, for our sake, and by doing so, right at the end in His last hour when His Father's Spirit was taken away from Him and tested to the full, He gained the victory over Satan.

So, what a friend we have in Jesus and all the things He has done for us. And aren't we happy that He was willing to subject Himself to all the troubles, the heartache and hardship he endured so that He could give Himself as a ransom price. So may we be willing to walk in His footsteps until the end. (FD:05/06)

OUR WALK WITH GOD

In our reflection we look back on the experiences, not only in our own lives but those that have occurred in the world, and how they have affected us. Most of all, we reflect on our walk along the narrow way with our Heavenly Father. We remember fellowship and growth in the truth, and we each evaluate how we have progressed. In anticipation, we look forward to the coming Kingdom wherein all mankind will be blessed. It may not be in the coming year but we always pray 'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' We pray for and we wait for this blessing which will come in God's due time. We continue our walk with God as we study on our own. We also have the privilege to study in fellowship with our brethren. Each one of us will strive to make our own calling and election sure, but we also work together to complete the church. The New Year is a time to renew our consecration to do the will of God. Let us strive to be faithful unto death and receive that crown of life which God has promised to the more than overcomers. Let us be strengthened in the truth by our walk with God.

Not so long ago people spent most of their time providing for the necessities of life. They had little time for anything else. But due to modern inventions and the shortening of the work week, people have a lot more time for recreation. With this extra time and the absence of physical labour it has become aware to many of us that we need to exercise our bodies. I would guess that most of us have walked for exercise, or just for pleasure a hike. We have done this some time in our life, I'm sure. But it's been our option, hasn't it, whether we walk or not? What we want to talk about today is about a walk that is not an option. It's not just for pleasure; it's not just for exercise; it is our life as new creatures. It is a picture God has given us to show progression in what He called a narrow and difficult way, but I would like to say it is a narrow but wonderful way! It is a walk where we will never be alone; we will be led by the very Hand of God. Now, it's a long, long walk and we will never finish that walk until the moment we complete our life on earth. And although some of it will be difficult, even perilous, it will bring us more pleasure than any other way we can live our lives.

We know that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and other Ancient Worthies walked with God. They continued to walk with Him through the good times and they continued to walk with Him through the bad times. At times the Jewish nation walked with God, but often they stopped walking with Him and turned to walk in the way of false gods. They never seemed to be satisfied with their blessings; they always seemed to want more. There were many times God told them to walk

in His way. An example is in Deut.13:4 – "Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him and cleave unto him." Now just before this God had warned them about false prophets, that they should not hearken unto them. We know that many times in the Old Testament Scriptures He told them to walk in His instructions, to walk in His commandments, to walk in His statutes, to walk in His ordinances, to walk in His laws. If they had continued to walk with God they would have been richly blessed. Over and over He gave them this opportunity, but over and over they disobeyed. And what did God do? He finally turned to the Gentiles.

Even though Abraham, Isaac and other Ancient Worthies walked with God, they could not inherit the promise of that heavenly calling because Jesus had not given His life as a corresponding price for Father Adam. The Apostles were the first ones to receive the Holy Spirit and to have that supplied to walk in the narrow way. It speaks of this supply in Romans 6: "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Those who have received the Holy Spirit and given up their earthly lives, who are dead to the world but alive in Christ, have consecrated their lives to serve their Heavenly Father, to be obedient to His commandments, to be obedient to His statutes, to be obedient to His ordinances and to be obedient to His laws of love. The walk now is through the narrow gate, up the difficult way which leadeth to life - and there will be very few who pass this way.

How are those who have made a commitment able to walk this narrow path? In other words, we have made this commitment, how are we to walk? We are in these earthen vessels, walking literally in the world. We're in the world but, as we know, we're not of the world. Our thoughts, our actions, our walk must be with God and His Son. We must look to His word, a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. That is from Psalm 119:105. Before we look at how we should walk, let's look at what it means. We should define it as to move along in ordered steps, to follow a certain course, to walk with or to accompany. The Hebrew and Greek words seem to have the same thought. To tread all around, especially as proof of our ability, to follow as a companion, to keep in step, to conform to virtue or righteousness (I like that!). These seem to describe our Christian walk. We are continually moving on in a narrow way, step by step, and we are passing through this

period of time till we pass beyond the veil. As we are walking we have our companion, we have one another, and we are all led by God and His only begotten Son. We are called upon to prove our ability to conform to that virtue and righteousness. That's a tall order, isn't it? We place our hand in that of our elder Brother and He will lead us, and we will never be alone. If time permits we will look at a few of the ways we are to walk with God. They are:

- Walk by faith
- Walk in the Spirit
- Walk in love
- Walk as Christ walked
- Walk in the truth of God's word
- Walk in the light
- Walk worthy of your calling
- Walk circumspectly

Walk by faith:

What is faith? In the Scriptures it is defined as 'the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence (or conviction) of things not seen.' (Heb.11:1) Other sources describe it as truth, trust or confidence, especially trust in God; an assurance that what is said is true. You must have complete trust in God and assurance that whatever He writes is true. In the Jewish Age they walked primarily by sight - God led the leaders and the people followed them. We all know Abraham was one who walked by faith, but Abraham's faith rested on God alone. He had that full assurance that God would fulfil His word. Romans 4: ²⁰He staggered not at the promise through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; ²¹And being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform."

Now Hebrews 11 tells us how other Ancient Worthies walked and how they followed God. They completely trusted in Him. Moses chose to walk with God, and he refused to be called the Pharaoh's daughter's son. By faith they conquered kingdoms, they wrought righteousness, they obtained promises, they stopped the mouth of lions. By faith or trust in God the walls of Jericho fell down. By faith or trust in God the people crossed the Red Sea. They had that faith; they had that assurance that God would be with them in their walk, that His word was true. In the next Age, the Millennial Age, the world will walk by sight and that light of knowledge will flood the world. In the next Age the world will have the actuality whereas now they have the promise of God. The eyes and ears of understanding will be opened to all mankind as they see the glory of God. All shall know Him from the least to the greatest. What a difference from the way the world is now! Mankind not only does not have faith in God but they have no faith even in their fellow man because it seems that whenever they put their faith in man they are very disappointed.

The Lord has made faith the condition for all His blessings of the present Age. In the present Age all His followers are required to walk by faith, to have a heart condition of faith in God as that great Teacher, who knows our limitations and has promised to guide us unto all truth. God has promised us divine guidance in understanding the Scriptures. In 2 Cor.5:7 it says: "For we walk by faith, not by sight." On our walk in the narrow way we meet many obstacles, and if we don't care where we're going, if any path will do, then where will it get us? There will be other paths that seem inviting, paths that seem smoother; there will be paths that seem shorter to us, and it is easy to follow our emotions or fleshly desires down those wrong paths. They will never get us where we want to go, will they? We must learn to trust Him where we cannot trace Him, to follow where He leads us, keep our eyes on the path ahead, do not look back on mistakes or wrong paths we have started on, because this walk along the narrow way takes all of our time and it takes all of our energy. There are not going to be any planes or trains to take us there; we must walk hand in hand with our Lord, having that faith that He will lead us in the right direction. His promise in Hebrews 13:5 is "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Paul gives us some good advice in 2nd Thessalonians regarding brethren walking together as they walk with God. As we travel the narrow way together we offer each other encouragement to endure the obstacles put before us because each day God gives us the opportunity and the privilege to serve the brethren. 2 Thess.1, reading from the RSV: ³"We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for another is increasing. Walk by faith."

Walk in the Spirit:

This seems to imply walking in the spirit or mind of Christ. As it says in Philippians 2:5:"To have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus." To walk in the spirit of God's law, to walk in the spirit of truth, to have the spirit of God dwelling within us - all of these relate to walking as new creatures - putting away those fleshly appetites, putting away those fleshly preferences, putting away those fleshly desires, because they war against the spirit and the new mind. In proportion as we yield to the desires of the flesh, the new nature will decline. The best way to keep down human ambition and desires is what? It is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let us keep filled with the Holy Spirit! If the spirit, if the mind is of the disposition God wills in us, we cannot be in accord with the fallen, fleshly nature because that Spirit of God is powerful. As we become more and more in tune with it and are more and more controlled by the Holy Spirit of God, the new creature will then have control of that old creature. This will enable us to raise ourselves to be more active in our spiritual life in the service of our Lord. Let's look at Galatians 5: ¹⁶"This I say then, Walk in the spirit and

you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. ¹⁸But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law” The chapter then goes on listing the works of the flesh from the 19th to the 21st verses. The fruits of the Spirit are then listed – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. All of these lead to the crucifying of the flesh. Gal.5:25 reads: “*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*”

Walk in love:

This is the Spirit of our Father, our Lord, and the spirit of all who are truly His members, who are truly members of that body of Christ. Now God gave His only begotten Son because of His love for all. As the spirit of love was manifested in our Lord’s case, so it should be demonstrated by His followers. Of course, it was also the love for the world that prompted Him to give His life as a ransom for all. Eph.5: “¹Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children: ²And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” And we know that all the fruits of the Spirit are sometimes condensed into the one word ‘love’, which is God’s law of love. We can have all sorts of power and knowledge, even giving our bodies as a sacrifice, but if we have not love we have nothing, because love never ends and is greater than faith and hope. Love never ends!

In the 6th Volume our growth in love is compared to a race course. The race against our flesh, which Br. Russell divided into four quarters. In a way this is true, but in another way each quarter is a part of the whole. You don’t just complete one quarter and forget to go on to the next quarter. You have to complete all four quarters. We need to work on each aspect as we progress in the race for the prize of the high calling. This is a quote, but I’m going to paraphrase what he says: ‘At first we recognise love as the divine requirement, though able to apprehend it only from the standpoint of duty. We feel it a duty to love God as our Creator, and our Lord Jesus also, because He loved us. It’s kind of a duty-love toward our fellows because we know that this is the will of God. As we progress in the next quarter we move nearer to the mark. The love we felt we should have had becomes a love of appreciation as we see more clearly God’s love for us. We begin to love God because we see the grand elements of His character. Our eyes of understanding have been opened. They have been opened wide enough for us to see something of those lengths, breadths, the heights and depths of His wisdom, His justice, His love and His power. We grow as our love for our brethren widens and deepens. More and more we are able to overlook their unwilling imperfections and blemishes. We see in them our desire to walk in the footsteps of Jesus; we realize our

Father’s overlooking of our own shortcomings, we see our own blemishes and appreciate our Lord’s grace towards them. This enables us to overlook the imperfections in our brethren so long as we see that they, too, are seeking to run this race course for the same prize. Finally, perfect love towards God, towards our brethren and towards all men.’

This is what we are all to seek earnestly to attain, and do this as quickly as possible. This love, of course, includes even our enemies. Perfect love towards God, towards brethren, toward all men. The race which started with our consecration has to be completed before we can enter the Kingdom. We are expected to reach it in just a moment when we expire in death, but as early as possible in our Christian experience. And as we reach that mark of perfect love, we will require testings. These testings are exercises that will strengthen our character. Our Lord did not have to run to attain the mark but He did need to hold fast to it when He was tested. And so must each of us hold fast to it, with the Lord’s assistance, after we thus attain that. These are going to come to us, temptations will come to us; they suggest that we become impatient with those whom we have learned to love and appreciate, and appreciate their weaknesses. Suggestions will come to us that our generosity towards enemies should have limitations. But blessed are we if we hold firmly to the position to which we have attained, return that perfect love for all to walk in love.

Walk as Christ walked:

It tells us in 1 John 2: “⁶He that saith he abide in Him ought also himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” To ‘abide’ means to stay in a relationship, and we can only follow in the footsteps by walking as new creatures, by walking with that new mind, by walking with that new heart, by *not* walking according to the desires of the flesh. We need to follow that same path, in the same direction, towards the mark, towards that same standard, towards that same goal. Our thoughts and our actions are to show a love for everything good and to avoid everything that is evil. Jesus at all times walked in harmony with the divine word and in complete harmony with the will of God. Whoever walks as Jesus walked does so in harmony with Him, which implies being in harmony with the divine word and in harmony with the will of God, having given up our own will for God’s will. We need not only to know the will of God but to obey it willingly, not being forced but delighting to do the will of God.

Another scripture tells of this walk in a different way but we feel it has the same thought, and that’s Colossians 2: “⁶As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: ⁷Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” This thought seems to refer to being a part of the body of Christ. He

is the Head of the body, as we know, and we are members of that body. This gives a picture of each member of the body being in complete harmony with the Head. Each member has a function, all striving to make that body complete; all working together, walking up that narrow path that leads to glory, honour and immortality. In Romans 12:1 Paul admonishes us to “*present our bodies as a living sacrifice*, holy and acceptable to God.” To do this requires a full, complete consecration. The great test of our Lord Jesus’ loyalty to the Father’s will, those various tests allowed to come upon the church of God, will be tests of obedience. They will be tests of heart loyalty because trials and testings are necessary in our walk in the narrow way. They are evidence that God is working in us. Count it as joy when meeting these trials and testings. Trials and testings are necessary in our walk. To walk as Jesus walked, it is important to receive His message fully in our minds, to appreciate His love in all that He has done for us, so we need to walk as Christ walked.

Walk in the truth of God’s Word:

God’s word is presented to us in the Scriptures. Psalm 86:11 (RSV) reads: “Teach me thy way, O Lord, that I may walk in thy truth.” Now the Scriptures clearly outline God’s plan for all mankind but only a few of God’s called-out ones understand that plan that He has; those whose eyes and ears of understanding have been opened. And how have they been opened? They have been opened through the power of the Holy Spirit given to us through Jesus. I like the thought in the RSV of Ephesians 1:18 (and this is just a part of it): “*The eyes of our hearts have been* enlightened to the hope to which he is calling.” It has such a deep meaning to me that ‘the eyes of our hearts have been enlightened’. We have been taught by God through His word, which is Truth. The word of God is the source of all true knowledge, and the truth is the spirit of the word, the spirit of its meaning, its intention and its heart. We are to be diligent to study, to be grounded, to be built up in our most holy faith. Let us all be students of the Bible, rightly dividing the word of truth as it mentions in 2 Timothy 2:15 “*Rightly dividing the word of truth.*” In the Psalm scripture quoted earlier, it says for the Lord to teach us in His ways so that we may walk in truth. In the third epistle of John who testified to the brethren the truth, he wrote: “⁴I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”

Walk in the light:

We remember in 1 John 1:6, Walk in light, not in darkness. This is also related to truth, to walking in Christ, to walking in the Spirit. We should consider the thought that we cannot walk in darkness and stay on the right path. We have to walk in the light of God’s promises and His instructions. 1 John 1:”⁵This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at

all. ⁶If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Now, the whole world was in darkness due to the fall of Adam until that true light of Jesus came into the world, because Jesus brought the light of God. This light is only seen by His faithful followers. We may walk in the light for we are in the presence of the true light. In the next Age we will help shed forth this light for the blessing of all mankind, to scatter present darkness and to cause that knowledge of the glory of God to fill the whole world. We are in that presence of light. Without light it would be hard to walk the narrow path. We couldn’t see who we were travelling with, whether with false teachers or brethren. We couldn’t see the obstacles, we couldn’t see which is the right way to our goal of bringing honour and glory to our Heavenly Father. We couldn’t see if the path is uphill, the path of righteousness, or downhill, the path that leads to destruction. John 11: “⁹If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not because he seeth the light of this world. ¹⁰But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.” So let us walk in the light!

Walk worthy of the calling:

We are told to walk worthy of the vocation to which we are called (Eph.4:1). That profession is to be our main purpose, the one thing that we do. We are called to that divine service to God, to His Son and to the brethren. Why? All for the glory of God. No earthly vocation should be permitted to hinder this service which we have undertaken. Let’s turn to Colossians 1 (RSV): “⁹We have not ceased to pray for you that you be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰To lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bringing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” To us, this means to walk in a manner that represents God’s goodness and being an example to others. We are the representatives or vessels of our Lord here on earth, and that’s an awesome responsibility. If faithful, we will be called to glory and immortality. We must prove ourselves worthy to share the throne and glory with our Redeemer. We must be worthy to have the opportunity to share in the joy of bringing the blessings of the Kingdom to the whole world. To me, that’s an awesome thought, and we pray that we may have a part in bringing those blessings to the whole world of mankind, because Paul exhorts us in 1 Thessalonians 2:12 “*To walk worthy of God who hath called you into his kingdom and his glory.*” Walk worthy of God.

Walk circumspectly:

According to Webster, this means ‘watchfully, very cautious, prudent’. The Greek word in Strong’s means ‘most exactly, diligently, perfectly.’ In our lesson we

have reviewed various ways we can walk with God. To walk circumspectly would seem to mean giving all our attention and care as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus. We need not only to understand God's word, we need not only to understand His will, but to strive with all our might to do His will. A common term we use is that we should 'walk like we talk' because God will never leave us where His grace cannot sustain us. Ephesians 5: ¹⁵"See that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." In the NIV it says "*Be careful how you live, making the most of every opportunity.*" The Living Bible says "*Be careful how you act, making the most of every opportunity you have for doing good.*" It requires that our hearts and our minds be consistently centred upon our Heavenly Father and His Son. All of our thoughts, all of our actions, all of our words reflect what is in our heart and mind.

To recap the ways we walk with God, we walk by faith, complete trust and confidence in God even though we cannot see Him. We walk in the spirit, having that Spirit of God dwelling within us. We walk in love, having the same love for all that was evident in God and in His Son, Jesus. We walk as Christ walked, walking in harmony with the divine word, in harmony with the will of God as Christ did. We walk in the truth. The truth is the spirit of the word, its meaning, its intention, its heart. We walk in light, for we are in the presence of that true Light. We walk worthy of our calling, making our calling and election sure by making the vocation to which we have been called our main purpose. We walk circumspectly, giving all the attention and care we can to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. If we walk with God and follow all the ways He has given us, we will be walking in this life – dead to the world but alive to Christ. No one said it would be easy but the word of God shows that it will be well worth it. We have consecrated our all to the Lord, we have put off the old man and put on the new. Let's turn to Romans 6: ³"Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? ⁴Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

I would like to read the 23rd Psalm:

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He maketh me lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴Yea, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

It is a privilege for us to walk in the narrow but wonderful way. Dear brethren, put your hand in mine, and our hands in God's, and let us walk together up the narrow way so that we may bring honour and glory to our Heavenly Father. (AA:05/06)

OUR MESSAGE

(1 Peter 3:15)

What message ought we to carry to the world? We are commissioned to carry a message, see: Matt 28:19, 20 but how we use our opportunities is a very personal thing and we need to adapt from person to person. We should be ready to give an answer to every person who may enquire of us; to do so a knowledge of God's plan is required. The right spirit to deliver the message is also very essential; love for all should be the motivating influence. Only "new creatures in Christ" will be found with these qualifications; for the love of Christ constraineth these.

We have a powerful message for those who have listening ears and who will give us sufficient time to tell it – including the predictions of the Old Testament and the hope that God's Word builds for the future. We need to make our message comprehensible – it is often required that we condense our message and in doing so it is good if we can build upon what our listener already knows, and thus let a little further light shine through to him. We should endeavour to fill in the background of God's plan so that the interested one will see its overall beauty.

Essentials of doctrine are also important to stress but seed must be sown in season, the time and circumstances must be convenient to the other person, whether or not to us. The chief point of our message should always be to impress that God is good; but we should not press our message beyond what is necessary at the time. In cases of bereavement, quite often a brief assurance of the resurrection may be all that is required. When an explanation is sought for suffering by the Christian in this life, we need to impress the vision of the ages to come, and that present afflictions are fleeting in comparison with our future hope of a glory that will be lasting.

Above all, let us remember at all times that actions speak louder than words.

LOVE ...SURPASSES FAITH

With more than 300 occurrences in the New Testament of the Greek words *pistis* and *pistos* (from which the English word "faith" is translated), it might be assumed that faith is the most important aspect of Christian character development. Added to that is 1 John 5:4 which states that "*faith is the victory that overcomes the world*", and it is those who "overcome" who receive the rewards offered to the church. (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26 etc.)

Additionally, "faith" is comprehensive. It embraces the overall Christian belief and way of life. In Acts 14:27 we read that "*when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles*". The "*door of faith*" included the doctrine (or belief) and the associated "*works*". (James 2:17 - 26)

Faith necessary for justification

The Law Covenant was given to Israel "*because of transgressions till the seed should come ... wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*". (Gal. 3:19) "*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified ... But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested ... even the righteousness of God which is by faith ...*". (Rom. 3:20 - 22) Faith is an essential element in our justification and it is our justification that gives us "*peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*". (Rom. 5:1)

The Christian's Armour

Ephesians 6:16 lists faith as the most important item of the Christian's armour - "*Above* (Greek: *epi*) *all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked*". In ancient warfare the shield was not a weapon of assault but a means of protection. It didn't matter how robust or masculine the warrior, without a shield he was vulnerable to the weapons of the enemy.

Likewise in the Christian's spiritual warfare. 1 Peter 2:11 tells us that it is the "*fleshly lusts that war against the soul*" - "*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life*". (1 John 2:15) It could be contended that it was the "lust of the eyes" that caused Eve to contravene God's command - she saw "*that it was pleasant to the eyes*". (Genesis 3:6) Likewise pride may quickly lead to a Christian's downfall, especially those young in the faith - "*not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil*". (1 Tim. 3:6) The "shield of faith" is necessary to thwart these weapons of the enemy.

The shield was manoeuvrable. The Christian's shield of faith also needs to be manoeuvrable. It has to defend the body on every side - on doctrine ("*there shall come in the last days scoffers*" - 2 Pet. 3:3); on standards of conduct (when we fail we are challenged whether we are "good enough" to be God's children), and from our associates ("*a man's foes shall be they of his own household*" - Matt. 10:36). The arrows of the scoffers will be repelled by our faith that "*the Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness*" (2 Pet. 3:9). Our confidence that we are God's children is protected by our faith that "*the*

spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God", and "*he which has begun a good work*" in us will "*perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*". (Rom. 8:16, Phil. 1:6)

The Power of Faith

Matthew 17:14 - 21 records the incident of Jesus casting out a devil. His disciples had not been able to cast out the demon and Jesus attributed their failure to a lack of faith - "*... because of your unbelief; for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place and it shall remove*". Similarly Matthew 21:18 - 22 records the incident when Jesus cursed the fig tree and it withered immediately. Jesus again told His disciples "*if you have faith and do not doubt, ... you can do what was done to the fig tree ...*".

Stephen was "*a man full of faith*" and the power it gave him enabled him to do "*great wonders and miracles among the people*". His faith enabled him to preach the word of truth fearlessly, such that "*certain of the synagogue... stirred up the people*". His subsequent testimony before the high priest was courageous and led to his martyrdom. (Acts 6:5, 8, 9, 12; 7:1 - 60) Stephen was "*a man full of faith*".

Faith is necessary for our sanctification. It is the means by which God purifies our hearts. (Acts 15:9) It is "*the substance* (conviction) *of things hoped for*" (Heb. 11:1) It is our hope that "*when he shall appear we shall be like him*", and it is our conviction of this hope that enables us to "*purify ourselves even as He is pure*". (1 John 3:3)

Faith sustains the new creature - "*the just shall live by faith*". (Rom. 1:17) It is essential for our salvation - "*by grace are ye saved through faith ...*". (Eph. 2:8)

Love Surpasses Faith

In spite of the crucial roles that it plays in our spiritual development and survival, the acquisition of faith alone is not the pinnacle of Christian development. Regardless of whether one's faith is a consequence of diligent study of God's word, and the consequent assurance of the reliability of His promises, or whether it is a miraculous gift of God, faith is only the basis for the development of love - "*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue ... and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*". (2 Pet. 1:5 - 8)

Consequently how momentous is Paul's statement that "*though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity* (love) *I am nothing*". (1 Cor. 13:2)

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