



Volume 105, Number 1

AUSTRALIA

January / March 2022

“Seasons of Refreshing”

“Therefore, repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19 NASB).

The opening verses of the third chapter of Acts records the healing of a man lame from birth by the Apostles Peter and John. This miracle made such an outstanding impression upon the people when they saw this man walking, leaping and praising God, for they knew he had been lame previously all his life. In the words of verse 10, “they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened to him.”

Peter goes on explaining how this miracle came about, and the logical procedure for those to follow who had brought about the death of Jesus, whose resurrection to the Father’s right hand had been the means of manifesting God’s power in such a remarkable manner as to cure this lame man instantly.

“Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. “But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:12-18 NASB).

Verse 19 reads from the Diaglott, “Reform, therefore, and turn, that your sins may be blotted out; so that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” The meaning of the Greek

translated “blotted out” is — “to smear out, that is, obliterate.” And the words “from the presence of the Lord,” carry the thought of — “out from the face of, as a mark of favour” — that is from Jehovah, whose favour is indicated by the figure of His face turned towards us because our sins are covered by the robe of Christ’s righteousness.

The question may be asked, when did the Apostles Peter and John expect those to whom they spoke to truly repent and become converted based on faith in the sacrifice of Christ and then be worthy to receive seasons of refreshing from the presence of Jehovah? Would it not be there and then? Would not those who truly repented have the opportunity and privilege to become Christians right away?

And by walking faithfully in the steps of Christ, have the hope of the heavenly reward? Is not that why the Apostle exhorted them to repent, and has not that been the object of the Gospel being preached all the Gospel Age, to take out a people for God’s name from the world of mankind?

It seems obvious that the preaching of the Apostles was to convert those to whom they spoke there and then repent and be converted, turn again, and

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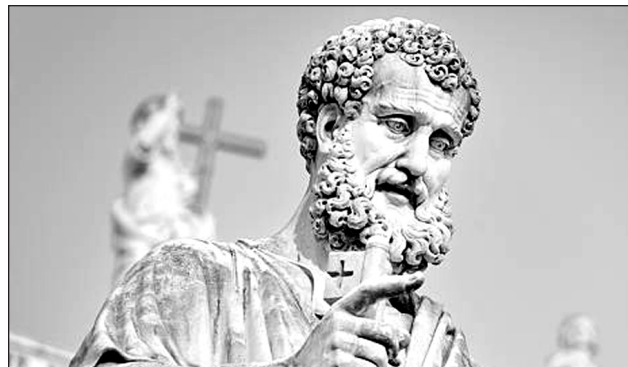
have seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. That seems to be the point in the teaching of Peter and John, and the reason for the miracle, to impress upon the people that here were God's true witnesses. For many it has been usual to link verse 19 of our chapter with verses 20 and 21, making the three verses apply to our Lord's second advent and "times of restitution of all things" throughout the Millennial Age. Understood that way, the "seasons of refreshing" and "times of restitution" would be the same period, and both would apply to the Kingdom Age. Wouldn't it be strange if Peter was implying that after true repentance and conversion based on faith in Christ's sacrifice, those to whom he spoke must wait about 2,000 years to receive seasons of refreshing in the day of the general resurrection, when the times of restitution for the earthly kingdom were operating? It surely would be strange if that were true.

On the other hand, it may be asked why Peter followed verse 19 with the promise that God would send Jesus Christ at His second advent, and then there would then be times of restitution of all things. Peter no doubt was following through with the wonderful plan of God. In addition to bestowing seasons of refreshing there and then to those worthy of His blessing, God had a Plan which would ultimately embrace all mankind.

It is a well-known fact, too, that when people are feeling after and learning the Truth as we know it, to read of God's plan of times of restitution for all mankind very often is the means of convincing such people that God really loves all the human family. They say, if God has such a gracious plan for the restitution or restoration of mankind from death through the sacrifice of Jesus, we wish to serve God now. We wish to use our lives in the service of such a God. Very often the understanding of restitution clinches in the minds of people that they really wish to serve God now — they are willing to sacrifice for God who so loved the world as to redeem all humanity and give them an opportunity of everlasting life in due time.

Very likely some who heard Peter speak thought the same way about God and yielded their lives in sacrifice after repentance and conversion, and had their sins covered by the robe of Christ's righteousness and received seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord for the remainder of their lives on earth and had good hopes of attaining the heavenly reward by proving faithful unto death.

There is a similar meaning to the passage in Acts 2: 36-39. Here Peter, speaking previously to our text in the third chapter, says "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your



The Apostle Peter

sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself" (Acts 2:36-39 NASB). Doesn't it seem that the same exhortation of chapter 2 is applicable in chapter 3? Repent and be converted, acknowledge the Lord as the true Saviour, consecrate your life to His service, and seasons of refreshing shall come out from the presence, from the face of Jehovah.

We have received refreshing from the presence of the Lord. We have not had to wait for the times of restitution, and why should those to whom Peter spoke be required to wait 2,000 years for the kingdom age? Those who really repented, even though they crucified the Lord of glory, would be forgiven. And the Apostle declared that it was mainly in ignorance that they put the Lord to death; that would count in their favour and help them to repent and be converted, and they could have God's favour there and then.

How wonderful that God's plan works that way. We have received much refreshing since we repented and had forgiveness for sins through faith in the Redeemer and yielded our lives in His service. Most of us have had similar a experience to that described in Ephesians 2:1,2,4-6.

"And you did he make alive, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein ye once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; but God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus" What a lovely privilege and favour is indicated here for those who really yield their lives to the Lord; and He is merciful to accept them on the basis of faith in Christ and raise them up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

The same Greek word (*prosopon*) for "presence" in Acts 3:19 is found also in Hebrews 9:24. This is a verse telling us about our Lord's resurrection and ascension to heaven. "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the

presence of God for us.” God had given His Son to be the Saviour; He had been faithful unto death and had ascended into heaven to appear in the presence of God for the Lord’s true people. This is the same word “presence” which indicated “out from the presence of the Lord” seasons of refreshing would come to those whom Peter exhorted to repent and be converted.

Aren’t we glad that Christ appeared in the presence of God for us, for the Church class of the Gospel Age! He has not yet appeared for the world of mankind in general. He will appear the second time for all mankind, but now, during the Gospel Age, he has appeared for us, the children of God. This is the great

Plan of God, that He is taking out a people for His name, those who delight to represent Christ name above every name, and by proving faithful unto death they may, by the Lord’s grace, inherit the heavenly kingdom with Him.

Surely, we thank God because He has invited us into His family, and our Lord has appeared in the presence of God on our behalf. May we, by the Lord’s grace, continue “looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Walking Through the Shadow of Death

*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
for Thou art with me” (Psalms 23:4).*

The expression “valley of the shadow of death” suggests danger and that there is the possibility of death. To walk through such a valley safely is possible only by keeping close to the Good Shepherd and listening attentively to his every directing word. We must also learn to depend upon his protecting care when danger is near as in reality the Christian is always in danger.

The world of mankind has been in the valley of the shadow of death ever since our first parents transgressed the divine law, and the sentence fell upon them, “Dying thou shalt die” (Genesis 2:17, margin). The valley has been so continuously dark that the entire period during which mankind has walked in it is described in the Bible as a nighttime.

It has been a night of weeping for the poor groaning creation. David speaks of it, saying that “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” (Psalms 30:5). Mankind has utterly failed to dispel the darkness and gloom with which they have been surrounded with. Despite their best efforts they have continued to suffer and to die. David wrote that in God’s favor is life, and since man lost God’s favor, it is impossible to escape death except through a provision of grace whereby divine favor is restored.

It can be accomplished only through the provision made by the Creator. That is why it is well to seek the Lord, for he alone is able to lead one through the “valley” of death and darkness into light and life. “Seek him that ... turneth the shadow of death into morning.” (Amos 5:8) Joy will come to the sin-sick and dying world when the “valley of death” with all its darkness and gloom will be turned into “morning” through the rising of the “Sun of righteousness,” and there will dawn the glad new day of Christ’s kingdom!

By faith the followers of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, even now escape the great enemy death that continually stalks up and down in the “valley of the shadow

of death.” Through faith in the Redeemer they pass from death unto life, as death has no more dominion over them. Nevertheless they are still in the valley and surrounded by death. They are in the world, but not of it. As the world views these they are not different from others, for they “die like men” (Psalms 82:7). What the world does not know is that the Lord’s sheep die, not because they are under condemnation, but because they lay down their lives in sacrifice, walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

Death Still Threatens

The Lord’s people, the “sheep” of this Gospel age, having passed from death unto life, are still in danger of death—not Adamic death, but the second death. Even Jesus, the perfect One, who walked through the “valley” before us, sensed this danger. Near the close of his life of sacrifice, when the possibility of failure bore down upon Jesus, he “offered up ... strong cryings and tears,” and the apostle tells us that he was heard in that which he feared (Hebrews 5:7). He did not fear the Jews or the Roman soldiers or the cross. But he did fear that he may not have been wholly faithful to his vows of consecration, otherwise he would lose life altogether and go into oblivion. When Jesus was assured of victory, he was calm and satisfied.

As new creatures in Christ Jesus we stand in a similar position, but we have the advantage of enjoying the good offices of having Jesus as our “Advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1). We therefore do not have the same need of fear. As the Psalmist says, we “fear no evil,” for the Lord, the Good Shepherd, is with us, hence we are not endeavoring to find our way alone through the valley of darkness and death. As the great Shepherd of our souls, we can depend upon him to supply all our needs, even our need of forgiveness when we come short of the glory of God.

Our faith in the Good Shepherd’s care is based on

the assurance of his love for us as his sheep. Knowing of his great love that caused him to lay down his life for us, we can say with the apostle: “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38,39).

“I Will Fear No Evil”

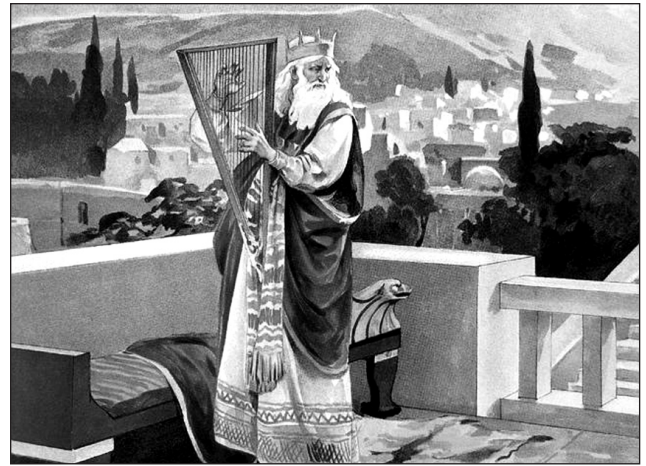
The apostle asks, “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” (1 Peter 3:13). This great fact of divine care has been true of the Lord’s people in every age, but it is manifested differently in the Gospel age when compared to the Jewish age. The natural house of Israel, dealt with by God under the terms of the Law Covenant, were cared for and blessed along material lines in proportion to the degree of their faithfulness. But material blessings are not promised to spiritual Israelites, the Lord’s “sheep” of this Gospel age.

When we take to ourselves the promise that no evil shall befall us, we must understand it to apply along spiritual lines. We need only to look unto Jesus, who is our Good Shepherd and our template as well. We are following in his footsteps, and we should not expect to fare better in “this present evil world” than he did (Galatians 1:4). The Heavenly Father permitted the cruel hand of persecution to come down upon Jesus, and it crushed him even unto death.

So it is now with those of us who are following the leadings of Jesus our Good Shepherd. No evil can befall us and no one can harm us. This does not mean that we will be spared from material loss or physical suffering. It does not mean that all men will think well of us and that we can go through life having everybody’s smile of approval upon us. Following the leadings of the Good Shepherd does not bring immunity from any of these things which the world and those of the world may construe to be “evil.”

As we walk through the “valley of the shadow of death” we will have similar experiences along material lines as those which are common to mankind in general. We will not be protected from pain, or persecution, or loss, simply because we are following the leadings of the Good Shepherd. Our outward man will indeed perish. We will “die like men.” None of the experiences, can do us harm but rather good. The reason for this is that while the outward man is perishing, we have the assurance that the “inward man” is being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). And after all, this is the important consideration for us. Let the hardships come, if they will. Let the world, the flesh, and the devil combine to inflict hardships upon us, yet we will fear no evil, for no evil can befall us—that is, no evil that can touch the new creature.

We will die in the “valley of the shadow of death,” but by grace and power divine we will triumph over death. Being planted together in the likeness of



The Psalmist David

Jesus’ death, we will also be in the likeness of his resurrection.

We do not fear because we know that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17,18).

“Thou art with me”, oh what comfort there is found in this thought! The very thought of his presence dispels all fear, all anxiety. Knowing that he is near, we can focus entirely to the doing of his will and to the enjoyment of his sweet fellowship. We do not know what experiences await us each day. But if we follow closely where the Good Shepherd leads, he will be with us in our every time of need. And after all, this is all we need to know.

How comforting indeed is the assurance of the Lord’s presence with us while we are walking through this valley. The allurements of the world seem nothing when compared with the blessedness of his presence and fellowship. While traveling through the “valley of the shadow of death” many troubles are bound to assail us. Dangers will loom up at almost every step of the way. Our unbelieving friends will forsake us, and our foes may unite to harm us. But we will fear none of these things, knowing that our Good Shepherd who leads the way is ever near, a very present help in every time of need.

“Thy Rod and Thy Staff They Comfort Me” (Psalms 23:4)

In the 4th and 5th verses of the 23rd Psalm, David expresses a more intimate relationship with the divine Shepherd of Israel. Thus the psalm changes from a testimony to a prayer.

In David’s prayer to the Chief Shepherd he indicates that both the “rod” and the “staff” are sources of comfort. In Oriental lands a shepherd carries these two pieces of equipment. He uses the rod, or crook, to guide the sheep while leading them through narrow and dangerous passes. The staff is used to assist him

in driving off wild animals which attack the flock. It was also apparently used by the shepherd as a sort of walking stick, a support, as it were.

The Hebrew word translated “rod” is the same as the one used in the prophecy of Christ’s kingdom, where we read that the Lord will break the nations with a “rod of iron” (Psalms 2:9). The rod was used to keep the sheep in the right way, and to protect them from danger of not holding to the path along which the shepherd leads. That way the sheep are thereby forcibly guided back into the right way, sometimes by hooking the crook of the rod around their necks and gently lifting them back to the path, and sometimes around the hind legs to steer them aright, so the nations will be held in line by an inflexible law, a “rod of iron” (Revelation 2:27).

Transferring the lesson of this symbol to the Christian life we see in it a beautiful illustration of the disciplines of the Lord; the apostle assures us, that they are a special evidence of the Lord’s love — “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (or disciplines) (Hebrews 12:6). These are not punishments which the Good Shepherd administers when he is unhappy with us, but rather they are disciplinary in nature, designed to train or direct us to walk in the right way. It is because the Lord loves us that he uses such measures to keep us close to him. Indeed, in the symbol it was essential for the sheep to be very close to the shepherd in order for him to use the rod to keep them in the path of safety.

It was unpleasant for a sheep to feel the crook of the shepherd’s rod hooked around its neck. The sheep would have no choice as to the direction in which it walked. When David put himself in the position of the sheep, he realized that what seemed an unyielding attitude on the part of his God was in reality an evidence of His love. God loved David and would not permit him to continue along a straying path. David knew this, and explained, “Before I was afflicted I went astray” (Psalms 119:67).

Sometimes the chastenings of the Lord come upon us in the form of afflictions. In such experiences we might feel discouraged thinking that the Good Shepherd is angry with us and is administering punishment. But in reality, behind that frowning providence he hides the smiling face of his love. The affliction comes because of the Good Shepherd’s loving care, and it is designed by him to train us to walk more circumspectly, more within the bounds of the right way in which he is leading us day by day. Thereby learning our lessons day by day.

When a shepherd in the East leads his flock through dangerous mountain passes he frequently looks back to check his following flock. If he notices one of the sheep going too near the edge of the precipice, he gently draws it toward the other sheep and away from danger by applying the crook to its hind legs. David had this in mind when he wrote, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his

way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand” (Psalms 37:23,24).

The Staff

The shepherd’s staff was used to help him in protecting the sheep from an attacking enemy, and also as a support, like a walking stick. The “staff” of the Good Shepherd “comforts” us in both these respects. The enemies of the Christian do not attack in a physical sense, but the attacks are against our faith. This is the reason we can resist these enemies only by being “steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:9). Nor can we successfully resist our adversaries alone, apart from the help and wisdom given us by the Good Shepherd. It is his “staff,” not ours, that wards off the attackers.

However, if we are to be protected by the Good Shepherd’s staff it is essential that we remain very close to him. If we do, we will be comforted by that staff. The attacks of our enemies along spiritual lines, are to be warded off, not by carnal weapons but by the Word of God. In reality, the Word of God is the staff which is provided to sustain and protect us. As the Word of God is the “green pastures” and “still waters” of the Psalm, so also is the “staff.” We can rest assured that we will be victorious over all our enemies as long as we use the means which he provides for our protection.

The “staff” is the Word of God. But it is necessary to depart from the strict interpretation of the symbol in order to fully appreciate the value of the lesson. Actually a sheep never takes the staff from the shepherd’s hand and wields it for its own protection, but the Christian thus uses the Word of God. The Good Shepherd provides the “staff” for us, but it is essential that we use it to combat our enemies, and to lean upon in our weakness.

We usually think of our enemies as the world, the flesh, and the devil and we are to use the Word of God in combating all of these. But there are other enemies of the Christian. We are also attacked by temptation, discouragement, pride, and by weariness. Against all of these the Word of God is the only sure form of protection.



Jesus guides his flock.

When Jesus was attacked by temptations instigated by the Adversary, the Word of God was his defense. “It is written,” was the Master’s reply to every subtle suggestion made to him. So it should be with us. Whether we are tempted to depart from the narrow way, or to believe a false doctrine, the enemy can always be beaten off by a “thus saith the Lord.” This is a “staff” that never fails.

Is discouragement threatening us? Let us again use the Word: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” it assures us (Hebrews 13:5). Upon this blessed promise we can lean, and be assured of strength to sustain us until we reach the end of the way. Again we turn to the Word and find it saying to us as Moses said of Asher, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be” (Deuteronomy 33:25). With these and similar promises to reassure us, we can ward off discouragement and take our places among those who are following the Good Shepherd victoriously and in safety.

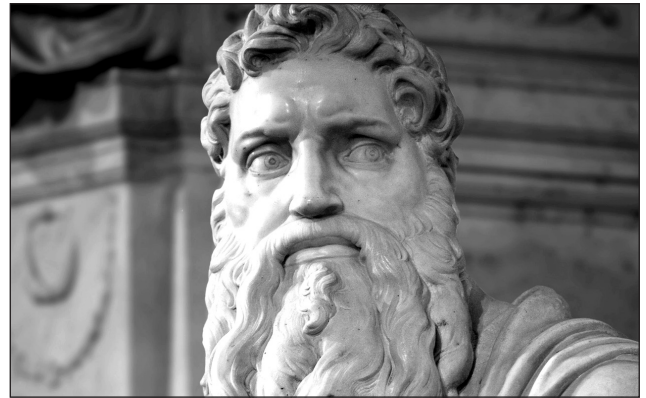
“They Comfort Me”

How wonderfully true it is that the “rod” and “staff” are sources of comfort to us. “Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me” (Psalms 119:49,50). Yes, it is the “Word” of the Lord that comforts all of the Lord’s people in their times of need. The Good Shepherd permits us to have disciplinary experiences in the event the corrective instructions of the Word are not fully heeded. However these are allowed only because we may not at all times zealously follow the instructions of the Word.

The Word of God is sufficient for all our needs if we apply ourselves to its study and practice. Paul wrote, “All scripture given by inspiration of God 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 Timothy 3:16,17). What a wonderful “rod” and “staff” the Lord has provided! How comforting to realize that all we need to guide, warn, and strengthen us as new creatures, is abundantly supplied in his Word!

The Old and New Testaments, serve to keep the sheep of the Gospel age in the pathway of righteousness and are such a source of comfort. Paul wrote, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). The particular “things” alluded to by the apostle as having been written for our comfort are the prophecies concerning the reproaches of Christ. It is a comfort to us to realize that we have the privilege of sharing in these reproaches as the bride of Christ, and that if we endure them faithfully we will receive a crown of life which fadeth not away.

As we look about us in the “valley of the shadow of death” we would be dismayed and discouraged if we



Moses, leader of Israel

did not have an understanding of why this “valley” is permitted. Having the assurance that in God’s due time its mists of darkness will be dispelled by the healing rays of the rising “Sun of righteousness.” We see so much about us that is wrong, and would be tempted to try, in our feeble way, to right these errors, but we know from the Scriptures that this is not our duty in the plan of God for us. Instead of wasting our time in moral and social reform efforts, the Good Shepherd urges us to remain in the narrow way of sacrifice. So that we may be prepared to share with him, the glorious work of actually restoring the world to perfection of health and life, and to give all the willing and obedient the joys of everlasting life. What a comfort it is to realize that this is the Lord’s way, hence it is the right way!

When the cares of life, with its sorrows and hardships tend to discourage us, how comforting it is to be reassured of the Good Shepherd’s love, as those reminders are so beautifully set forth in the “rod” and “staff” of his Word. We hear the divine Shepherd speaking tenderly to us, “I will never leave thee nor forsake,” and, feeling the strength of that promise, our courage is renewed and our hearts are comforted. We know that he who gave his life for the sheep will surely fulfill all his precious promises, trusting in him, we redouble our efforts to follow him as he leads us in “paths of righteousness.”

At times the way may seem unduly long. There are many hills to climb, many obstacles to surmount, and we may be longing for a rest. But we are reminded by the Word that the Good Shepherd’s plan is that we be faithful even unto death; that only by following him even all the way into death, we hope to be with him on Mount Zion. This is as a glorious hope set before us, a hope which when we contemplate it, fills our hearts with joy. It is this joy that enables us to continue on in the way of sacrifice.

The fruition of the Christian’s hope is realized at the second coming of Christ. The early church looked forward to this great event in the plan of God with eager anticipation. The hope of his coming was the mainspring of their Christian lives. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, saying that the Lord would descend from heaven “with a shout, with the voice of the

archangel, and with the trump of God.” He then adds, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). “These words” are indeed comforting to the Christian, especially now when the “shout” can be heard, and when the “voice” is causing the earth to melt, and when the “trump” is resounding its joyful notes of encouragement throughout the earth. But the world neither sees, nor heeds these indications of the new day of his presence.

Knowing that he is here we have this added incentive to follow the Good Shepherd faithfully even to the end. How we are indeed comforted by the knowledge of the Good Shepherd’s presence, in his parousia! This inspires our zeal in doing the Lord’s will, the knowledge of present truth serves to guide us in the way the Lord would have us walk. This also comforts us, for there is nothing more disconcerting and discouraging than uncertainty as to what is the Lord’s. The Lord’s people perish when they do not have sufficient knowledge to direct them in the right way. What could be more comforting than to realize that through present truth the Lord is guiding us in this wonderful time in which we are living. Surely we

should appreciate the “rod” and “staff” of the Lord’s Word now more than ever before.

It is indeed a wonderful time in which we are living, but it is also an “evil” day, a day when the enemies of God and of the truth are attacking the Lord’s sheep from every direction. Hence we surely need the protection of the “staff.” Only those who are protected by the truth of the Lord’s Word will be able to stand against the “wiles of the devil.” If through complacency, pride, self-will, or confidence in the arm of flesh, we do not look to the Good Shepherd for help, we will surely be overcome by our adversaries.

But, comforted by the “rod” and “staff” we are refreshed, our strength is renewed and we continue on, rejoicing in the assurance that the Good Shepherd will keep us from falling. He may permit affliction, but if we are properly exercised thereby we are drawn closer to him and can discern the pattern of his footsteps more clearly. As we hear his voice, our hearts leap for joy as we realize the great privilege that is offered to us of following the Good Shepherd, who as the Lamb of God laid down his life for us and for the whole world.

What Sense Does the World Make?

“All the rivers go to the sea, and the sea is not full. To the place that the rivers go, there they return to go” (Ecclesiastes 1:7. Theme and heading scriptures from Robert Alter translation. Other scriptures from Revised Version, Improved and Corrected, unless indicated otherwise).

The book of Ecclesiastes is both peculiar and fascinating. Had it not been discovered in the caves of Qumran amongst other Jewish Testament books, its authenticity may have been questioned. Its original name, *Qohelet*, and position as part of the Wisdom books, provide an insight into the writer and clues as to its purpose. *QoHeLet*, a name chosen by the Septuagint translators, means “the one who assembles.” It is likely that this assembler was King Solomon, who is identified in the opening verse as the “son of David.” Although the Authorized Version uses the moniker, “The Preacher,” *Qohelet* is more meaningful to an understanding of the book.

Its purpose is clear from the opening words, even in the King James Authorized Version: “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (verse 2). Vanity, from the Hebrew *hevel*, is a 17th century word which means “lacking value.” Robert Alter, in his translation, notes the following: “The form of the Hebrew *havel havalim* is a way of indicating a superlative or an extreme case. *Hevel*, ‘breath’ or ‘vapor,’ is something utterly insubstantial and transient.”

Have you stepped out on a cold day and noted, “I can see my breath!?” That seems to be the idea — one can “see” it but trying to touch it proves futile. There is also a futility of life when perceived from

purely an earthly perspective. Alter renders verse two, “Merest breath, said *Qohelet*, merest breath. All is mere breath.” This assessment of earthly life came after Solomon’s endless quest after earthy riches and earthly pleasure. All of it was meaningless.

Leo Tolstoy, the honored Russian writer, said it plainly: “The only absolute knowledge attainable by man is that life is meaningless.” Ernest Hemingway, the lauded American writer, often said that life was without meaning, and that the only edge one had over death is the choice of when, where and how it will end. Hemingway rose from his bed the early hours of July 2, 1962 and committed suicide. A popular 1970’s song echoed Solomon’s perspective in the titled lyrics: “dust in the wind, all we are is dust in the wind.”

Insightful authors such as Tolstoy and Hemingway saw life in its many facets from an earthbound perspective, especially in our world today. Most seek pleasure and have a constant need to be entertained. They are left at the end of their life with less than real joy. Many have tried to define life’s meaning in their work. A popular quip says, “No one on their deathbed ever said ‘I wish I had spent more time at the office’.” *Qohelet* contrasts this type of life, “life under the sun,” with “life under heaven.” As we shall see, only a heavenly perspective on life can bring one true riches and ultimate joy.



King Solomon

Four Questions

Qohelet asks four questions regarding life, that most popular commentaries call “questions without answers.” These questions are found somewhat buried in chapter six.

(1) “What has already been called by name and is known, as he is man and cannot deal with one more powerful than he” (Ecclesiastes 6:10). Translation: If God has determined what is to be, isn’t it foolish to wrestle with decisions in our life?

As evidenced by the fate of Tolstoy and Hemingway, many struggle to find real meaning in life. They try to find it through constant change in all areas of their lives. If we belong to God, we recognize that He knows the beginning from the end (Isaiah 46:9-11). We can rest in full assurance of faith that Jehovah has, in some cases, determined beforehand what he has planned for us. Consider a few examples from the Old Testament.

“And the angel of Jehovah said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son; and thou shalt call his name Ishmael, because Jehovah hath heard thy affliction” (Genesis 16:11). Hagar was visited by an angel after Sarah’s jealousy resulted in expulsion from the family camp. She was reassured that Jehovah had not abandoned her, and that Ishmael would be the progenitor of a great people.

“And God said, No, but Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him” (Genesis 17:19). Abraham mourned the expulsion of Hagar because he thought that Ishmael would be his heir. Jehovah reassured him that Sarah would have a child who would carry the Abrahamic promise to the next generation.

And he cried against the altar by the word of Jehovah, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith Jehovah: Behold, a son shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he sacrifice the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men’s bones shall they burn upon thee (1 Kings 13:2). Josiah was chosen — 320 years before he was even born — to lead a great reformation in Israel!

Zechariah and Elizabeth received news aforetime that their son, yet to be born, would announce the coming of Messiah. John became the forerunner of the Messiah, preparing the Jewish nation to watch for the Messiah (Luke 1:13). Mary received the news that she would bear the Messiah when she was not yet wed to Joseph.

If we are concerned about our lot in life, we must think about how God has overruled things in the past, and maybe has put us in a certain place, at a certain time, for a certain work. It is our task to find and engage in that work. Any boundaries that the Lord puts on us are a favor. If we had absolute freedom to choose our own path once we have given our lives to God, we would be an absolute failure. None of us has the wisdom to out-think our God. We see the stop sign at the corner; God sees the highway ahead. Let us remember the words of Romans 8:28, “And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose.”

(2) “For there are many words that increase mere breath; what is the advantage for man?” (Ecclesiastes 6:11), Translation: The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does it profit anyone?

In the musical play, *My Fair Lady*, Eliza Doolittle, after having been trained in proper English speech, proclaims, “Words, words, words, I’m so sick of words!” Today, her proclamation stands vindicated. We are witness to twenty-four-hour-a-day convoluted political, economic, and social rhetoric. Every speech, every action is analyzed; the analysis is analyzed; then opinions are written about the analysis. It is much talk with little comfort, and even less concern for truth in what is said.

However, we find God’s truth in scripture is pithy, meaningful and never-changing. Consider the simple words found in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.” One sentence here conveys the entire Divine Plan. Solomon wrote elsewhere, “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise” (Proverbs 10:19). This is a word of caution in our own study of the Word, and of other material available to us at this end of the age. In our class studies, we can spend endless hours in discussions over individual word meanings in both scripture and harvest writings. We can create and debate meaningless “what-if” scenarios. We do well to speak few words full of meaning.

For of these are they ... ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:6, 7). An additional problem of our day is information overload. We can research an issue or a question endlessly. The more information we find, the more difficult it becomes to process it and reach a conclusion. When our mind reaches the threshold

of our brain's ability to process new information, the value of that information declines and we may even become paralyzed in coming to a conclusion. It is human nature to be attracted to the widest selection of options. Consider that the modern grocery store stocks over 39,000 items, while the average shopper just buys 260 items regularly.

As Christians, we are to build our knowledge of truth by searching, studying, and considering. There is a point at which we must accept that we have researched enough. We must decisively put it in our minds and move forward to the next level of development. Consider the following quote from Reprint 3156, "Living by Every Word Out of the Mouth of God."

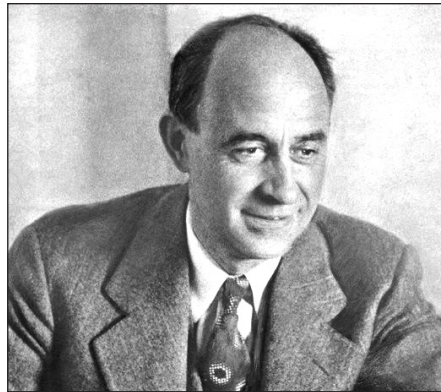
"The truth thus acquired, step-by-step, becomes a sanctifying power bringing forth in our lives its blessed fruits of righteousness, peace, joy in the holy Spirit, love, meekness, faith, patience and every virtue and every grace, which time and cultivation will ripen to a glorious maturity...and this is scripturally called 'growing in grace and knowledge.' Unless each item of knowledge be received into a good and honest heart, and bring forth its measure of obedience and righteousness (grace) we will not be prepared for the next step of knowledge, and would be thus stopped, possibly turned back."

(3) "For who knows what is good for man in life, in his days of mere breath, for he spends them like a shadow" (Ecclesiastes 6:12a)? Can we determine the wisest course in anything?

In September, 2020, the International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research in Western Australia announced that, after searching 10-million-star systems with the world's most sophisticated telescope, it had found no signs of alien technology! Astronomers had used the Murchison Widefield Array (MWA) telescope, costing \$51 million (U.S.) to explore hundreds of times more broadly than any previous search for extraterrestrial life. (This author visited the site of the telescope while on a trip through the outback with other Bible Students. It is also used for other purposes). The study, detailed in Publications of the Astronomical Society of Australia, observed the sky around the Vela constellation for 17 hours.

Over 70 years ago, Physicist Enrico Fermi summed up the fruitless search for other life in the universe this way: "If most stars have planets, and alien civilizations could be billions of years older than humans,' and if the galaxy could be explored and colonized within only about a million Earth years (even at sub-light speed) ... where is everybody?"

The increase in knowledge around DNA research has led to efforts in Silicon Valley, California to "hack



Enrico Fermi

the code of life" through biotech research. Billions of dollars are being poured into the development of a human genome database. Especially important to the database are the genomes of supercentenarians. Dr. Joon Yun, a Silicon Valley, California hedge fund manager has offered a one-million-dollar (U.S.) prize for anyone successfully increasing the life span of mice by fifty percent.

A noble, yet fruitless search for world peace has been in process for over 100 years. The League of Nations began in 1920 following World War I's Paris Peace Conference. It was the first international organization with the principal mission to maintain world peace, prevent wars through collective security and disarmament, and settle international disputes through negotiation and arbitration. It lasted 26 years, toppled by the effects of World War II, giving way to the United Nations.

"To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" are among the first words of the United Nations Charter. Peace-keeping efforts, while laudable, have not eradicated armed conflicts. Globally, the absolute number of war deaths has been declining since the U.N. founding. And yet, conflict and violence are currently on the rise, with many conflicts today waged between non-state actors such as political militias, criminal, and international terrorist groups.

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25). No matter how hard man tries, and how many efforts prove fruitless, he cannot reverse the process of death nor stop people from killing themselves. Only an understanding of the permission of evil provides sense for a world gone mad. Those who recognize this doctrine understand that Jehovah is overseeing the affairs of the Church and preparing man for the long-term benefits of the kingdom on earth. Efforts to extend life by even one day are futile without a knowledge of the future plans God has for man. Everlasting life will come not from progress in science, or the resolution of conflicts, but from obedience to the Millennial law in Christ's kingdom.

(4) "Who can tell man what will be after him under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 6:12b)? Can anyone predict what is coming next?

Let us consider some of the modern predictions regarding the fate of the earth:

- "Dr. S. Dillon Ripley (Zoologist), believes that in 25 years, somewhere between 75 and 80 percent of all the species of living animals will be extinct." — Smithsonian Institute, 1970

- "Population will inevitably and completely outstrip whatever small increases in the food supplies we make. The death rate will increase until at least 100-200 million people per year will be starving to

death during the next ten years.” — Paul Ehrlich, *Mademoiselle*, April 1970

- “Demographers agree almost unanimously on the following grim timetable: by 1975 widespread famines will begin in India; these will spread by 1990 to include all of India, Pakistan, China and the Near East, Africa. By the year 2000, South and Central America will exist under famine conditions...the entire world, with the exception of Western Europe, North America, and Australia, will be in famine.” — Peter Gunter, 1970

- “Scientists have solid experimental and theoretical evidence to support ... in a decade, urban dwellers will have to wear gas masks to survive air pollution ... by 1985 air pollution will have reduced the amount of sunlight reaching earth by one half.” — Life Magazine, January 1970

- In 1970, Harrison Brown, NASA scientist published a chart in Scientific American showing that the earth would run out of copper shortly after the year 2000. Lead, zinc, tin, gold and silver would be gone before 1990.

Jehovah does not provide all the details about the future. The information available at any point in time is sufficient to redirect some preservation efforts, but predicting the future precisely is impossible. Even during the past 100-plus years of the Bible Student movement, at least four dates have been confidently predicted for the completion of the Church and the final resolution of the earth in Armageddon. Even Pastor Russell recognized that he had seen things incorrectly regarding the precise time of the glorification of the New Creation (*The Time is At Hand*, page xi).

This should be a lesson for us especially as we see scriptures regarding the end of the Gospel Age being fulfilled — Israel’s restoration, the decline of morality, fewer responses to the call of consecration. Predicting the time things will occur in the future is risky, even when we base it on what is perceived to

be indisputable evidence. There is only one certainty regarding the end of this age: the fashion of our present evil world will dissolve at some point in the future, and by the Hand of the only authority whose word can be absolutely trusted!

Admonitions for the Consecrated

As consecrated children of God, let us have faith that Jehovah is in complete control. He knows the answers, but protects us from knowing the end from the beginning for our own benefit. As the apostle Paul says, “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:9-12).

We do not need to wrestle over answers to Solomon’s questions. Life is Jehovah’s gift. Our wisest decision is to submit to His care and allow Him to prepare us for an eternal relationship with Him and His son. Let us not imitate the world’s search for endless information and fruitless pursuits. Let us use life’s experiences as stepping stones to mold our character. Let us keep focused on Jehovah’s grand purpose: A kingdom of righteousness will bring blessings and eternal life to all who respond and obey.

Jehovah is fashioning each of us into an image of His son. We must submit our will and allow Him to free the New Creature that dwells within. There is a reason for our lives. There is a reason for our pain and suffering. There is a reason for our joy. “Everything has a season, and a time for every matter under the heavens” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Solomon wrote these words in contrast to life on earth for those without purpose. Let us look up, and live our life with a view from “under the heavens.” To God be the glory for ever and ever!

Antitrinitarians

Bernardino Ochino

(1487-1564)

For many students Martin Luther stands out as one that went against the Roman Catholic church when he nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church which started the reformation in Germany.

There were many other less known individuals who declared dissent/unhappiness against the authority of this powerful corrupt church and her many false doctrines. They formed themselves into separate

groups for religious worship.

One of the earliest groups were the Waldenses who started around the 12th Century, who condemned the Catholic clergy as being unworthy of holding religious office, and that people should have the right to read the Bible. As men started to think for themselves, testing the false teachings of the Great Harlot by reading the scriptures. One of these teachings was the doctrine of the trinity which they found as false

and had no backing in the Bible.

Bernardino Ochino

Bernardino (1487-1564) was born in Siena, Tuscany, Italy. In his youth he asked himself the question “What must I do to be saved?” He thought that the answer to his question was to enter a convent, a religious order to be close to God. He chose the Convent of Osservanza on the outskirts of Siena. He thought that by works of austerity and self-denial that he would be able to gain a heavenly goal.

After a period of years, in approximately 1534, he concluded that this order of Friars did not satisfy his spiritual needs. He left and joined a new established order The Capuchins where he rose to the position of Vicar General. During the time that he spent in the False Roman Church he came to realise that she was not the true offspring of Christ and the Apostles but was in fact part of the Anti-Christ and that the Popes were also anti-Christ teaching false doctrines and claiming to be “the earthly representative of Christ.”

Questioning the False Doctrines

It was during this time of questioning many of the false doctrines of Babylon the Great that he met Peter Martyr, a Calvinist that did not believe in the doctrine of Transubstantiation and John Valdez, a Catholic Theologian who had doubts about the Trinity. This meeting changed his views entirely, so much so as to come to the attention of the NUNCIO the Papal Ambassador who summoned him to appear before the religious court of six cardinals. On the advice of Peter Martyr, he departed Italy in 1545 which saved his life.

The Continued Journey

Bernardino travelled to Venice and then on to Basel in Switzerland, then moving to Germany and then to the relative safety of Protestant England where he intended to spend the rest of his life preaching to the Italian Protestants living in London. The untimely death of King Edward VI, a protestant, in 1553, brought Queen Mary to the throne, a staunch Catholic who so persecuted the protestants that she earned the name “Blood Mary.” Once again, Bernardino, along with the Italian Protestants, had to flee.

He arrived in Geneva on the 28th of October 1553, the day after Servetus, an antitrinitarian, was martyred, being burnt at the stake. Calvin had exposed Servetus’ beliefs and called for his death. As a result, he did not tarry in Geneva but traveled to Poland in 1559 to meet with others who had similar opinions on most things.



Bernardino Ochino

The Meeting in Poland

The meeting included Peter Statorius, John Thenaud, Francis Lismaninus and George Blandrata. They all had doubts about the Trinity and during the meeting Bernardino also took up this belief that the doctrine of the Trinity was in error and formed no part of the Christian faith. There was one God, the Father, one son from the Father and the Holy Spirit. At the time it appears that they stated, “that we still have many things yet to learn.”

Bernardino returned to Switzerland where he is again in trouble because of his beliefs. This time from the Protestants the majority

who taught the Doctrine of the Trinity. Because he had written several Dialogues against the Trinity, thus putting him at odds with both the Catholic Church as well as the nominal Protestants Churches as they both viewed this as blasphemy and a crime. (We see that many of the reformers still retained some of the false teachings of the Apostate Catholic Church). Once again, he was forced to flee from persecution but still, he was pursued by his religious enemies.

He Sought Refuge

Bernardino sought refuge in Poland, preaching to a congregation of Italians in Krakow, however due to the Pope’s influence he was asked to leave Poland. He started to travel towards Moravia in Czechoslovakia. He was now elderly nearing 77, a good age at that time. The Plague was present in Europe, and he was sick, tired and nearly worn out when he passed through the Polish town of Pinczow. Here he was able to find an old Unitarian friend Jerome Phikovius. He helped him find shelter, rest and everything that this poor sick old man needed. After short stay Bernardino went on his way to Moravia, unfortunately he passed away in the town of Slavkov in Czechoslovakia.

His Legacy

During his lifetime he inspired many other to search the scriptures to find the truth about the false teachings of the Catholic Church especially in regard to the Trinity. He was highly esteemed as a pious man, full of zeal for the truth. When he preached from the pulpit everyone was amazed at his knowledge and his zeal for the truth.

Date of the Memorial

Thursday, 14 April, 2022

(14 Nisan) after 6:00 pm

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herald-magazine.com

Bible Fellowship Union

Publisher of the "Bible Study Monthly"
www.biblefellowshipunion.co.uk

Peoples Paper and Herald of Christ's Kingdom

(ABN 23 734 654 922, Reg. No. A0022186J)

Published by the Berean Bible Institute, Inc.
PO Box 402, Rosanna, Victoria, Australia 3084
Email: australianbiblestudents@gmail.com
Website: australianbiblestudents.org

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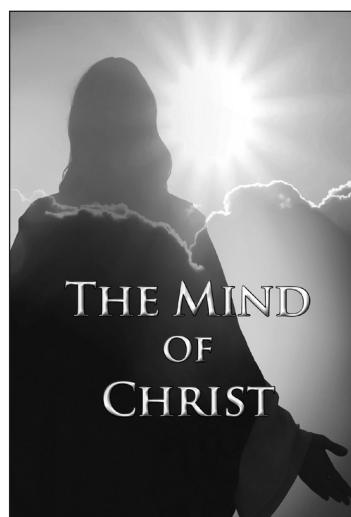
Online Convention, January 22-23, 2022

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It's The Chords that Count

"Dr. F. B. Meyer related a beautiful story of a little girl staying at a summer hotel. She was of that trying age when small fingers are beginning to find their way about the piano, striking as many wrong notes as right ones, and not particularly sensitive to the anguish such attempts are capable of inflicting on others. A brilliant musician was stopping at the hotel. He took in the situation and sat down beside the small musician who thumped out her tunes. He began to accompany her with the most exquisite improvisation. Each note of hers only gave him a new motif for chords of surpassing beauty, whilst the drawing room, crowded with people, breathlessly listened. The performance over, the great musician took the child by the hand and introduced her as the one to whom they were indebted for the music. Her efforts had led to his magnificent accompaniment, but his part in the performance had led to a deep impression. It is the Lord's presence with the Christian that makes the difference. "Apart from Him we can do nothing" acceptable. If we achieve, it is because He works with us and through us. To Him be the glory! (John 15:5 Philippians 2:13). *Quiet Hour Stories*, Keith L. Brooks



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Abundance of Grace

We will also consider the passage, “For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Christ Jesus, hath abounded unto many” (Romans 5:15).

In this text the Apostle evidently does not mean to be understood as saying that the full abundance of grace had then reached the many, because that would be an untruth. It is now over 1800 years since the Apostle’s Day, and the abundance of grace has not yet reached the majority of men. So, we must understand Him to mean that this abundance of grace that is in Christ according to the Father’s plan and arrangement and purpose, is yet to reach the many. The world is yet in its sins, and Israel is yet in its sins and will not be recovered until after the Church shall have been glorified, as the Apostle says (Romans 11:27), “For this is my Covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.”

Grace Not Actual but Abounded Through Promise

Since this grace has not yet gone to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles in general, the only way in which it has abounded is through the promise of God that the death of Christ will yet be efficacious for all. Therefore, speaking from this true prophetic standpoint, it is plain to be seen how Jesus is the Saviour of the world, although He has not yet finished the work of saving the Church and will not be the Saviour of the world in the full sense until the end of the Millennial Age. Some He will never save, because they will refuse the grace of God; and yet He is, according to the Scriptures, the Saviour of all men — the Saviour of the world.

A Saviour in Prospect

He was the Saviour of the world, according to the Scriptures, when He was born. The message of the angels was, “Unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” He was a Saviour in the prospective sense — not because of what He was then, as a babe, and not merely because of what He has yet accomplished, but because, according to God’s promise, of what He will effect up to the time when He shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father. “He is a Saviour and a great one” “able to save unto the uttermost all that will come unto the Father through Him” (Isaiah 19:20, Hebrews 7:25). He is now saving us in a partial sense, by hope, because we have come unto the Father through Him, according to the arrangement of this Gospel Age. He will yet save us in the fullest sense in the “First Resurrection.” The saving of the world will then begin, when He shall awaken them from death; but they will not be fully

saved, will not attain full restitution nor gain eternal life, except as they shall exercise faith and obedience. He opens the door. He makes the way. He provides all the arrangements by which they may know and obey.

The whole earth is a part of the purchased possession and will be filled with the glory of God. And if any knee will then refuse to bow and any tongue refuse to confess and any fail to accept of the favour of God, there will be nothing further for him. He will be doing “despite to the spirit of grace” and will die the “Second Death” (Hebrews 10:29, Jude 12, Z1910-199).

JESUS DID NOT FORFEIT HUMAN LIFE

A forfeited life is not a sacrificed life. If our Lord had forfeited His life — it would not have been a sacrifice. A life that is forfeited is a life that is taken away for some just cause or reason; but His was taken without a Cause, He suffered. As to how He suffered and why He suffered the Scriptures are quite distinct in telling us — “He presented Himself without blemish unto God.” That is to say, He purposed to do God’s will; He bowed to God’s will; He consecrated His whole life to the doing of God’s will. To test His loyalty and obedience to the full, God required that He should be obedient, submissive, “unto death, even the death of the cross.” His life was not taken from Him, either by God or by men; as He Himself declared, He could have called for Divine aid, according to Divine arrangement, and more than twelve legions of angels would have protected His life: “No man taketh away my life; I lay it down of myself.” So, then, in this matter of Jesus’ sacrifice, it was neither that man took away His life, nor that God demanded it, but God gave Him the opportunity of demonstrating His loyalty. This involved a sacrifice in that it put Him into the place where, to do what God desired to have done, meant a giving up of all His earthly rights and privileges.

Application of Merit Not Made in Advance

When He came to the time of His death He did not make application of ‘His merit in advance’, saying, “I do this for such a purpose and such a thing, and I apply whatever merit there is in my obedience to such a purpose.” He did nothing of the kind. There was no such application made. When we speak of Christ’s death as the Ransom-Price for the sins of the whole world; when we say that “He gave Himself a Ransom for all,” we are taking into consideration other features of the Divine arrangement by which it will be possible for the Lord Jesus to apply the merit of that sacrifice on behalf of the world of mankind as their Ransom-Price. This will be accomplished in its due time (1 Timothy

2:5,6). It was not accomplished when He died but was to be accomplished subsequently.

The Father Pleased to More Than Fulfil His Promise

After our Lord had manifested His obedience even unto death, the Father was well pleased to fulfil to Him all and more than He had ever intimated or promised. Hence, He raised Him from the dead — not in the same condition in which He was previously — a man — but in the glorious condition of the divine nature, far above angels, principalities and power and every name that is named.” It would have been possible for the Father to restore our Lord Jesus to the earthly nature; but that would not have been, as we understand it, in keeping with His promise that there would be a special reward for this special obedience — “the joy that was set before Him.”

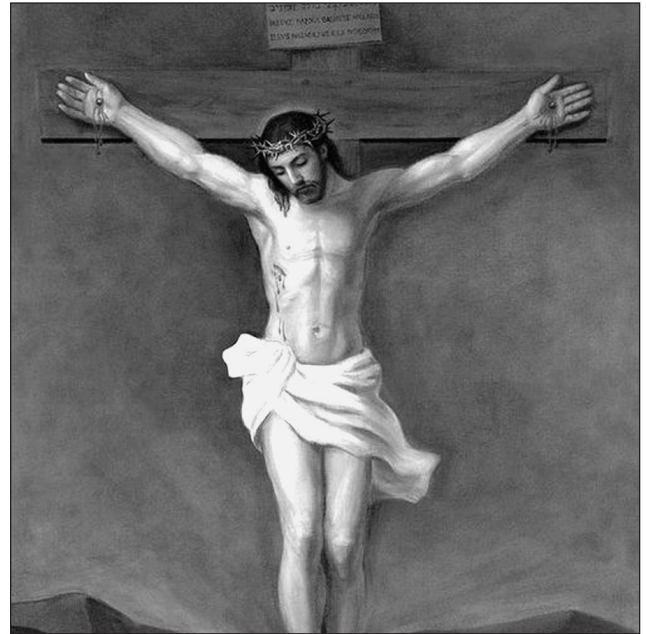
Jesus Had the Right to the Earthly Nature

When our Lord Jesus, therefore, was raised from the dead by the Father on the third day, to this glorious nature which He now possesses — so much better than the earthly condition — He had a right also to the earthly nature. He would not, of course, have thought of exchanging the higher condition for the earthly condition; and especially since such a change would frustrate the entire plan of God. To explain: Suppose

our Lord Jesus, having been raised from the dead to the glory of the Father, to the divine nature, had said, “Father, I greatly appreciate your kindness and favour towards me in thus highly exalting me; but now I prefer the human nature.” If we could imagine His saying such a thing, we cannot see but that He would have had the right to it, as He had never forfeited His human life. He merely laid it down. He submitted Himself in obedience to God, and if in His resurrection He had preferred the earthly nature, it would have been entirely proper that He have it back again. But to have taken it back would have been to undo all the work He had started out to do. He would thus have given away the heavenly nature, which was far more desirable, and respecting which He Himself said, “Father, glorify me with the glory that I had with Thee before the world was.” He would in this way have ignored not only His own expressed preference in the matter, but also the Divine Plan, order, and arrangement, as it was God’s will that He should have this high nature and that He should also have the right to earthly life, the earthly nature, that He might bestow the earthly nature, with all its rights and privileges as the “Ransom,” or Corresponding Price, for Adam’s forfeited life and all of its earthly privileges.

Imputing His Merit Now to Those Who Covenant to Sacrifice It

Actually, our Lord has not yet ransomed all, but He gave Himself, in the sense of performing the sacrifice, more than 1800 years ago. But He has not yet applied the merit as the Ransom-Price for all the world. What is He doing with the Ransom-Price all this time? The Ransom-Price was placed into the hands of the Father.



Jesus yielded himself in death

When Jesus died, He said, “Into Thy hands I commit my spirit.” The Lord Jesus, therefore, as the Great Messiah, has the right to all those things which He intends to bestow upon the whole world of mankind — Adam and all his race. He will give them all the opportunity of becoming people of God. What is He doing with the merit in the meantime? He is imputing it to any individual from amongst Adam’s race who desires to come into full relationship with the Father, on conditions that such an individual follow in His footsteps and lay down his earthly life as He laid His down. To each one of this kind who comes to Him, the Lord imputes His merit at the moment he makes his consecration to sacrifice, and this imputation of the Lord’s merit makes him acceptable with the Father who begets him as a new creature. Thenceforth such are new creatures, and their earthly life is given up as Jesus’ life was given up in sacrifice. All of these, therefore, who are now invited to come under this special arrangement through the use of the merit of Christ’s death, come under the imputation of that merit, not the bestowment of it.

Illustration of Imputing and Applying Merit

There is a difference between imputing the merit and bestowing it. For instance, if we hand you \$100, we bestow \$100 upon you, passing it directly to you but if we endorse your note for \$100, we are imputing to you \$100. In the case of the Church, it is an imputation; there is actually no passing of the merit over. What our Lord has to give is the right to human life, the human privileges which were Adam’s originally, and which he lost — all that he had. That right to human life our Lord has to give away, but He is not giving it away now. He is keeping it to give to the world in due time. He is now merely imputing to us the merit, or that which corresponds to the endorsement of our contract with the heavenly Father, if we desire to enter into such a contract.

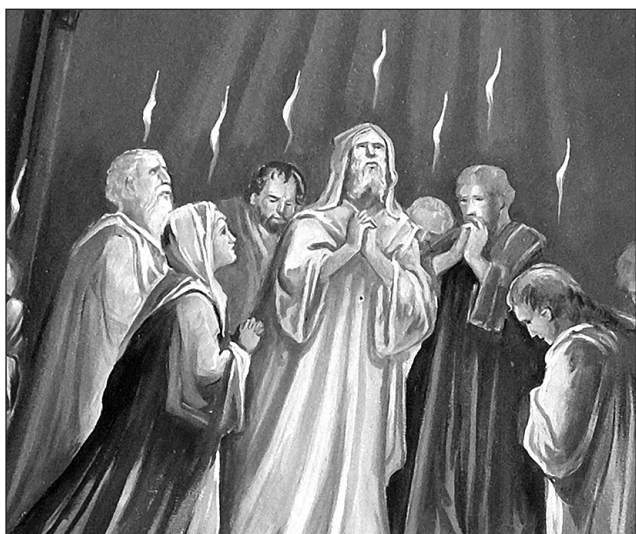
THE WORLD WILL RETAIN THE EARTHLY LIFE-RIGHTS PURCHASED FOR THEM

Coming back to the statement made foregoing, that this merit is to be given on behalf of the world, we should qualify it and say that the merit is not to be given to the whole world, but merely, as the Scriptures outline, “For all the people.” “The people,” however, are not the entire world, but all who come into covenant relationship with God during

the period of the great Mediatorial Kingdom. They are the only people for whom the merit will be applied. Whoever will reject this opportunity and refuse to become one of the people, rejects all the opportunities that are to be granted and does not, therefore, receive restitution to human life. Such are not made perfect. They do not get human rights at all. They will receive an awakening from death, but this will not be Restitution. This will be merely the first step from which they may, if they choose, take the further steps leading to the Restitution blessings. “It will come to pass that the soul that will not obey” that Great Mediator, that Great Prophet, Priest and King, that great “Prophet like unto Moses raised up from amongst your brethren” — and of which Jesus is the Head and the Church of this Gospel Age are His Members — “the soul that will not obey that Prophet shall be destroyed from amongst the people” (Acts 3:19-21).

The Soul That Will Not Hear That Prophet

This is in harmony with the Scripture to the effect that “he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him,” continues on him; he never gets out from under the wrath of God. He had the opportunity; he was brought to a knowledge of the truth; he was brought to the place where it was his privilege to come under the arrangement of the New Covenant blessings which will be extended to all through Israel. But if he fails to make use of that opportunity and to become one of God’s people, then he does not get out from under the wrath at all. He dies under the original wrath without becoming one of the restored ones (Z1910- 206).



Pentecost

WHAT DID JESUS’ DEATH EFFECT?

The question may be raised, “What did Jesus accomplish by the offering of Himself, begun at Jordan and finished at Calvary? Did He purchase the world? How did He redeem the Church?” No. What did He do? He secured the price, the ransom-price, sufficient whenever applied, to effect the cancellation of the sins of the whole world, but He had not yet applied it. Neither the world nor the Church was as yet released from Divine condemnation or brought into full fellowship with God. Although there were five hundred brethren, who had accepted Christ and become His followers, the Father had not yet accepted these. They had offered themselves in consecration to walk in the footsteps of Jesus; they had taken up their cross to follow Him; they had been justified to fellowship with God, even as Abraham, but they had not been justified to sonship and life. Hence, they could not have earthly or restitution life. Neither could they present their bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, because they were still sinners from the Divine standpoint. No appropriation of Jesus’ merit had yet been made in their case.

When Jesus ascended up on high, forty days after His resurrection, He commanded representatives of these, about 120, to tarry at Jerusalem in the upper room until they should be endued with power from on high — until the Father should recognise them — until the Father should accept the sacrifice which they had already made. But first Jesus, as their Advocate, should appear in the presence of God for them, and make such imputation of His merit to them as to cover their blemishes, and permit Divine justice to accept them as “living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God.”

Pentecost Marked Acceptance of Jesus’ Sacrifice

We remember that it was on the fiftieth day that the holy Spirit came upon the waiting ones. That was the first intimation to them that the Redeemer had been acceptable to the Father, and that He had imputed to them His merit, and that the sacrifice which they had already made was acceptable to the Father in the Beloved One, and that they were no longer merely justified to friendship, but had come into the position of sons, into covenant relationship with the Father. Thus, it is written of the Jews, “He came unto his own, but his own received him not; but to as many as received him, to them gave the power (privilege) to become sons of God, even to them that believed on his name,” which were begotten not of man nor of the will of the flesh, but of God — begotten of the holy Spirit. Thus, they became sons of God, members of the anointed Body of the great Messiah, Prophet, Priest, Mediator, King, Judge, appointed for men, on their behalf to effect reconciliation between God and men during His’ Millennial reign.

Both Jews and Gentiles Called

Meantime the same work has been progressing throughout all these eighteen centuries. Others have been called, both from the Jews and from the Gentiles,

to be the followers of Jesus, His under-priests — the Church of the firstborns whose names are — written in heaven. As soon as this work shall have been accomplished, the great Mediator, the antitype of Moses (Acts 3:22,23), raised up from amongst his brethren, will be completed. Then the Mediatorial Kingdom will begin the blessing, uplifting and reconciling of the world. Meantime we thank God for the fact that “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Jesus as the perfect man, the fleshly seed of Abraham, might have accomplished considerably in the way of helping mankind. As one who committed no sin, whose life would have been secure to him, even though it required twelve legions of angels to protect him, he might have been a glorious earthly prince.

The Man Jesus Not Able to Accomplish Restitution

But even as a great ruler amongst men, he would not have been able to accomplish the Divine Purpose of blessing mankind with full uplifting out of sin and death conditions to life eternal. As the man Jesus he could not have accomplished restitution for the race because he would have needed his own human life and rights for himself. The man Jesus, therefore, could not have been “the Seed of Abraham” mentioned in the Abrahamic Covenant, that in the Seed of Abraham all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

To become this Seed, He must first attain to spirit being, just as the record shows He did. By virtue of His sacrifice of His earthly nature, and by virtue of God’s having raised Him from the dead to the heavenly plane as a reward for His obedience, He has His earthly rights to give to Justice as the ransom-price for what Adam lost. The Redeemer is the “Seed of Abraham” on the spirit plane, and during this Gospel Age He is finding His Bride and bringing her to the same spirit plane with Himself as His associates and joint-heir in all the great work of the Millennium — the blessing of all the families of the earth. Thus, it is written, “If ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed (spiritual) and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).

Life Laid Down, Not Paid Over

Do we see clearly what Jesus sacrificed, what He laid down? He gave Himself, He submitted Himself to whatever might be the Father’s will, but He did not forfeit His earthly life by committing sin so that it should be taken from Him. Neither did He barter or exchange it for the heavenly nature. He merely submitted or laid down His earthly rights, in harmony with His own words, “I have power to lay down my life and to receive it again; authority to say this I have obtained from my Father.” No man took it from Him, in the sense that no man had that power, since God had promised that “he that keepeth the law shall live by it.” Therefore, our Lord’s life would have been protected had He not voluntarily submitted and laid it down.

Laid Down Life That He Might Receive It

He laid it down that He might receive it again. He laid

it down in the Father’s hands, saying: “Into Thy hands I commit my spirit.” Then Jesus’ rights to earthly life, earthly protection, earthly honour and glory, earthly dominion and power all belonged to Him as a New Creature when He arose from the dead. He had lost and forfeited none of His earthly rights. Those earthly rights are the basis of all the blessings of God through Him to Adam and all of his race. Jesus had nothing else to give away. He needs nothing else; because, in the merit of this sacrifice there is a corresponding price for the first Adam, and a sufficiency for all.

Jesus Does Not Give Church His Earthly Rights

However, Jesus does not give the Church His earthly nature, and earthly rights, but keeps these to give to the world during the Millennium. Indeed, our calling is a heavenly one, and we should feel somewhat disappointed if instead of the heavenly we should receive the earthly or restitution blessing. But since Jesus does not give us these restitution blessings, and since He has no other merit to give to us or to anybody, what does He do for the Church? What is our hope in Christ? What is the philosophy of it?

Merit in Hands of Justice Unappropriated

The answer is that this merit which shortly is to be appropriated as the ransom-price for the sins of the whole world, was already in the hands of Divine Justice, unappropriated, when our Lord ascended up on high, there to appear in the presence of God for us, the household of faith — to present our cause to the Father. As our Advocate He declares to the Father that we are anxious to become members of the elect Church, His Bride, His Body. In harmony with the Divine arrangement, He appropriates a share of His merit to us, so that our sacrifices might be acceptable to God.

Responsibility of New Creature

Thus, instead of giving us the restitution blessings, which are for the world, our Redeemer, our Advocate, imputes to us of His righteousness, and on the strength of it the Father reckons us holy and acceptable, and immediately accepts our sacrifice. Thenceforth we are dead as human beings and our only standing in God’s sight is as “new creatures.” But we have this treasure in imperfect earthen vessels, in which the new creature cannot do all that it would. It is the new creature, however, that God is testing and proving — the new creature is on trial, not the flesh.

The new creature has no Original Sin, nor is it responsible for the Original Sin of the old creature, which was justified and accepted of God in sacrifice and therefore gone. The responsibility of the new creature is that it shall keep its heart in the love of God, in loyalty to Him. Correspondingly, of course, it will strive to keep the body, the flesh, in harmony with the Divine regulations. Its zeal and energy in controlling the flesh and bringing every thought, word and act into accord, as nearly as possible with the Divine will, shows the degree of its love and zeal.