

**MARCH–APRIL 2020**

**£1.50**

# **The Gospel Magazine**

Cities of refuge • Who will bring us peace? • Christ the Wisdom of God

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## 1766–2020

*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*

*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.*

*Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

These texts, which have been associated for so many years with *The Gospel Magazine*, give some indication of what this bi-monthly stands for. We seek to present the Lord Jesus as the only Saviour for a lost world: to edify the people of God; and to promote unity among believers, ‘the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’.

*The Gospel Magazine* is believed to be the oldest religious periodical still being published. One distinguished former editor was the Rev. Augustus Toplady, whose famous hymn, ‘Rock of Ages cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee’, was first published in these pages.

The Trust Deed of *The Gospel Magazine* is defined in terms of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England, but the magazine itself is non-denominational. We aim to provide variety in unity, publishing articles from a wide diversity of past and present writers committed to ‘the faith once delivered to the saints’.

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# THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

*Incorporating the Protestant Beacon and the British Protestant*

*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*

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## EDITORIAL

THE 119th Psalm contains a number of expressions of love for the law of the Lord, vv. 113, 119, 127, 159, 163 and 167. In two cases (vv. 113 and 163) this expression of love is contrasted with things that are hated or abhorred (vain thoughts and lying). In every case, it is the manifestations of the divine nature that call forth expressions of love. It is the law, testimony, commandment or precept of the Lord that reveals his character to be loved, and it is that same law, testimony, commandment or precept that is loved for revealing the character. In short, love for the Lord and love for his law are one and the same thing.

Such a doctrine is revealing, both positively and negatively.

It is revealing positively because it shows that we cannot know God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—except through his word. Experience teaches us to know the truth taught in the word in a personal and immediate manner. No experience, however, can teach anything other than what is found in the word. Our heavenly Father never acts

towards us in ways that differ from what we are taught to expect, nor does he expect us to behave towards him in ways other than we are taught in the Scriptures.

It is revealing also in a negative way, in that we see what is really going on in the hearts of those who disobey God's word. Many disobey the teaching of Scripture because they refuse to accept that the Bible is the inspired and authoritative word of the Lord. To them, it is merely the opinion of men who wrote long ago, from within the limitations of a more primitive age. They do not believe the Bible is to be trusted, but merely to be referred to as a guide to what people once thought.

A feature of the biblical record is the complaining of Israel during their wilderness wanderings. Whenever the going became difficult, or food and water seemed scarce, or whenever any opposition confronted them, they murmured against the Lord and against Moses. Their usual method was to argue that life had been better in Egypt, and sometimes they referred to the

better diet they had enjoyed there. There is, however, another, unspoken, element to this complaint. The reason why they felt their lot to be unbearable in the wilderness was that they were there by the Lord's instruction. They were following Moses, and he was being commanded by God. Everything they endured came their way because of this obedience. Egypt represented something more than just a better diet: in Egypt there had been no law, no commandments from heaven, no tables of stone, not even a revelation of God in any form. The house of bondage was, to the rebellious Israelites, freedom from the law. Liberty in the wilderness was bondage to the law. The unbelievers knew which they preferred, and unbelievers have been making the same distinction ever since.

David learned from experience the goodness and saving power of the Lord. He had faith, and in that faith faced lion and bear. He faced Goliath in the same faith, and was in every case victorious. The Lord raised him up above his brothers, making him king over Israel. The Lord gave him victory over his enemies, and caused his reign to end in peace. More, the Lord provided an heir for David. Read the history of that king, and see how his sons died, one after the other, as a consequence of sin or jealousy. At least one simply drops from the record, implying perhaps that he died of an illness. But the Lord promised that Solomon would reign, and made a covenant with David to that effect. Read in 1 Kings 8 the prayer of Solomon, and see how he saw the temple and himself as the proofs of God's covenant-keeping grace.

No wonder David loved the Lord. His love for God was not in hope of reward, but was rewarded with hope. First came the love, and then came the blessings.

But what brought David to love the Lord in the first place? We can only speculate,

since we know nothing of his early life. It is clear, however, that his father was a godly man, who no doubt brought up all his sons to believe in God, and to trust his word. David, in common with all Israelite children, would have been taught the history of the nation—the record of God's dealings with his people—both at home and by the Levites who lived in Bethlehem. David's own family history, including the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, would have been common knowledge at home. It is even possible that the kindly and loving character of Boaz was something of a family trait, and was present in Jesse. Would such a man do anything other than the best for his family? What better thing can a father do for his children, than to instruct them in the truth of the Lord, both by word and example?

Those who are brought up with the Scriptures may not all make an immediate profession of faith, nor live as they have been taught. Some, like Israel, insist on a lengthy period of wilderness wandering before they are humbled under the mighty hand of God. Some give a good outward expression of faithfulness, but in time fall away, revealing the lack of root within them. Even these may, by the grace of God, be brought to love Christ, and to repent of their sins, returning to those instructions and examples they had at home.

Some who have been brought up without the truth become faithful and obedient lovers of Christ and his truth. Naomi was one, and reminds us that the power of the Lord is not restricted, but draws to him all whom he calls.

However we came to know the truth, one feature will be common to us all. We will love the word of the Lord because we love the Lord—and we will love the Lord because of what we read in his word. ¶



# LIFTING UP THE SON OF MAN

by THE EDITOR

*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:14–15)*

IN these words we have a comparison of two things, the actions of Moses in lifting up the serpent in the wilderness, and the lifting up of the Son of man. The former is past, the latter yet to come—at the time of speaking. The whole is explained by the words of v. 15, concerning the salvation afforded to all who believe in Jesus Christ. The premiss on which this statement is made is that past events were so ordered by the providence of the sovereign God that they instruct us in how to understand later events. In simple terms, if we correctly understand what took place in the wilderness, we will better understand what took place at Calvary. It is not that the one is an exact copy of the other, since the atonement made by Jesus Christ in shedding his blood is truly unique. Rather, it is that the former prepares us in important details for the latter, if we are teachable.

We will begin with a consideration of Numbers 21, and then turn to see how the lessons we learn there are taught more gloriously in the death of our blessed Saviour.

## **‘Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness’**

The account in Numbers 21:7–9 is brief, but if we read a little more widely, we see that this was far from an isolated incident. In Chapter 20 we read of the death of Aaron, described in detail and at length. This was not a usual death but a judicial calling to account of a man who had served the Lord imperfectly. Given his central role in the nation’s life,

his death would have had a big impact on the people. Regardless of his imperfections, his death before reaching the promised land was a clear indicator of God’s wrath. Immediately afterwards, 21:1, we read of Akad, who won a victory over the Israelites and carried some away as prisoners. Again, the nation is reminded how fragile their state is; enemies appear able to act with impunity. In response, they pray and seek blessing on a counter attack, which prayer is answered and the Israelites are victorious. Though it is not stated, it seems reasonable to assume that the prisoners were freed. Victory, however, is no precursor to further victory. Rather than charge through their foes, Israel is required to take a circuitous route around Edom. This is the homeland of Esau’s descendants, and therefore of a people who are related to Israel. The lengthy distance, no doubt coupled with the feeling that it is all unnecessary, leads the people to complain. They complain that life was better in Egypt, and that the manna is loathsome: neither God’s salvation nor his nourishment are acceptable to Israel. Such complaining leads to a divine response.

The response takes the form of a very large number of encounters with deadly snakes. The tone of the account indicates that this did not happen all at once, but over a period of perhaps a few days. No doubt a naturalistic explanation is available—the end of the hibernation season, or the beginning of the mating season, or the time when the young were hatching—but whatever the

physical cause of the proximity of the large number of poisonous snakes, the whole is a divine judgment. Eventually, some of the Israelites perceive that this is so, and come to Moses, confessing their sin, and pleading with him to intercede on their behalf. He does, and the Lord's response is not what the nation asked for, or expected: they wanted the removal of the snakes, the cause of their woes, but were instead provided with the antidote.

That antidote was not lying about, ready and waiting. It had to be prepared. The Lord's command to Moses had to be obeyed. A brass serpent had to be fashioned, which would probably have required making a model of the serpent, the production of a mould from the model, and then the casting of the finished article from the mould. The final piece, once cleaned and readied, would have been mounted on a pole and set up for all to see. Even then, there could have been no looking to it unless Moses first taught the people that they must. Only after all this, the work of at least some hours, was deliverance available to any who would believe, obey and look. We are not told how long the brass serpent remained on its pole in the midst of the camp. It is unlikely the plague subsided so quickly that it was taken down that same day. However, no matter how long the snakes remained a danger to the people, the brass serpent stood in the camp for all to turn to.

### **'So must the Son of man be lifted up'**

Turning from the Old Testament to the New, what do we see? There are many similarities between the situation there and here, once we look more deeply.

Consider the nation's situation. Judah, at the time of Christ's coming, was a small province under Roman rule. The occupying

forces may not have been all Roman soldiers, but they were certainly not Jewish. Their king was an Edomite, and not a descendant of David. This situation had been ongoing for some time. Under the Maccabees they had revolted against Greek rule, but their short-lived reprieve ended with the coming of Rome. Signs of divine favour, as they understood them, were mingled with signs of divine displeasure. The future was most uncertain. And then came the rabbi from Nazareth, whose miracles testified to his divine authority. 'No man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.' Nicodemus was gearing himself up to make the same sort of pitch that the disciples would make in Acts 1:6—'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' In common with many of the Jews of his day, Nicodemus trusted that the evidences of Christ's power were being interpreted correctly. Here is the one whom Bartimaeus rightly understood to be the Son of David. Whether the blind beggar was hoping for national deliverance or restoration of his sight (comp. Isaiah 35:5) is not hard to determine. What Nicodemus wanted is perhaps less obvious, until we weigh our Lord's response. 'Jesus answered and said unto him, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' What prompted this response? How is it connected to Nicodemus's statement? The answer often given is that Nicodemus followed up his statement with an unrecorded question. The more obvious answer is that our Lord, knowing the direction in which his visitor was heading, cut him off with his response. Entry into the kingdom will not be through the kind of military action you are expecting, Nicodemus, but only by the new birth. This is because your expectation of the kingdom is earthly and false.

Nicodemus showed his lack of understanding with his reply, v.4, to which our Lord responded, v.5f. The Spirit of God, v.8, is like the wind—known by his effects and not by his visibility. It is for this reason that the new birth is essential, for without it none can perceive the kingdom, nor become a member of it. All of this ought to have been known by Nicodemus, a master of Israel, v.10. None but Christ, who has come down from heaven, is able to speak of heavenly things with authority.

It is at this point that our blessed Saviour utters the words of our text. Moses lifted up a serpent in the wilderness, that the nation who had rebelled against the Lord and been punished might instead be granted mercy and grace. Healing was to be had by looking at the serpent. So likewise must the Son of man be lifted up. This is a rebellious people, and they are under the wrath of God. The believing, penitent sinners who look to Christ will be saved.

Where will they find Christ? At the place where he is displayed. In the immediate context this means the cross, the very fulfilment of the words, 'lifted up'. Elsewhere Christ said, 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me' (John 12:32).

Consider that the nation was crying out for deliverance. Many felt themselves to be under the judgment of God. Note Luke 2:38, and the reference to those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Note the huge numbers who went out to hear the Baptist, and to receive the sign of repentance and the washing away of sins, called a multitude, Luke 3:7, and Jerusalem and all Judea, and the region round about Jordan, in Matthew 3:5. Note the multitude that flocked to Christ, almost as soon as he began his ministry, Matthew 4:25. There was a sense of burden on the people, and a true desire among many to find peace

with God. We ought not to be surprised that our heavenly Father prepared the hearts of his people for the coming of the Messiah. We ought not to be surprised that the Holy Spirit was at work, turning the thoughts and desires of many to matters of the soul.

Consider that the remedy fitted the illness. In the wilderness the people were plagued by poisonous snakes. Their remedy consisted of looking to a representation of a serpent. Why? In order to teach their children to look to the Lord Jesus Christ. How so? Because of what the brass snake represented. It was the very form of the thing that was killing them, and none could be healed who would not accept the reality of the cause. Moses was not commanded to make just anything out of brass, but a serpent only. It was not his choice to make the serpent, but it was commanded to him. The affliction was represented in the antidote. So with Jesus Christ. For what cause did the people of Christ's day suffer divine wrath? For the same cause that all mankind is under the wrath of God—sin. Jesus Christ was made to be sin for us, 2 Corinthians 5:21, and the look of faith is the one that sees him as the sin-bearer. In this Christ is no different to the sacrifice offered for sin in the temple; the worshipper, placing his hands on the head of the victim, acknowledged his own guilt, and the role of the victim as the sin-offering. All who look to Christ in faith look to him as the one who has borne our sins. Any who look at him in a lesser light are guilty of what the Apostle Paul describes in Hebrews 10:26–29, the denial of the efficacy of Christ's blood to wash away our sins. To view the death of Christ as being less than the atonement for our sins is to trample his blood underfoot, counting it among the common things—no different from the blood spilt in the butcher's shop. If anyone looked upon the brass

serpent as a mere ornament they would not have obtained the healing promised. If any looked up at it as a meaningless symbol, they too would have remained poisoned. Death would soon have followed.

Consider that Moses must have taught the people how to look at the brass serpent. It was the answer to their prayer, the mercy of God to them in the midst of their sins. Their repentance was not in vain, since the Lord had given them what they needed. The look of faith would draw forth the promised healing. The belief that this was God's gracious answer to their plight, demonstrated by their actual looking in hope to the pole and what it held up, was the only other requirement for salvation after being bitten. There was no benefit in looking if a person was not yet poisoned. There is nothing to indicate that looking beforehand could prevent the person being bitten. This was no talisman or charm. Rather, this was a visible lesson to Israel to learn that salvation comes from the Lord, and that belief, repentance and obedience are essential on our part.

### **This leads us to some points for further consideration.**

If the cross of Christ is to be the constant theme of preaching, it follows that it must also be the constant theme of our meditations. The more we consider the cross, in terms of sin, wrath, mercy, grace and pardon, the more the wonder of God's goodness will become apparent to us. The more we weigh the atonement, and the price paid to deliver us from our sins, the more our praises will pour forth. It is only when we know how much we have been forgiven that we will learn to love much. Soldiers may cheer their generals before the battle, but those who cheer after victory is won do so with an added joy. A person may declare their

love for another, but when the object of their love has seen them as they truly are, and still loves them, that love will draw forth greater love. Let us give ourselves to a serious and thankful contemplation of Christ crucified.

If the cross of Christ is the constant theme of preaching, it follows that the cause of the cross must never be forgotten. Its causes are twofold: ours, and God's. Our cause is sin, for it is our rebellion that made the cross necessary, as it was Israel's rebellion that made the brass serpent necessary. God's cause is his electing love, whereby he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. He did not choose us because we were to be better than anyone else, or more worthy than anyone else, let alone more obedient and righteous than anyone else. No, our heavenly Father chose us in spite of our being what we are. He knew beforehand what wicked sinners we would be, and still he chose us. Indeed, he chose us precisely because we are wicked sinners, for his choosing of us is life, mercy, grace and peace.

Nicodemus was told about the necessity of the new birth. Each Israelite, poisoned by the bite of the snake, was under sentence of death. To look upon the brass serpent was to be saved from death, a form of the new birth. Hope was restored as the poison was rendered ineffective. Despair turned to joy in the light of divine mercy. Repentance was shown to be acceptable before the throne of grace. Faith was seen to count with God.

The same is true for each one of us. Whoever we are, whatever hope we think we have, let us know that the only true hope is Jesus Christ and him crucified. 'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else' (Isaiah 45:22). Jesus Christ, both God and man, died to save sinners. Look unto him you sinners, and love the Saviour. ¶



# CITIES OF REFUGE

by CARINE MACKENZIE

When the children of Israel settled in the Promised Land, each tribe was allocated a different area to live in. Each territory was carefully delineated, and the cities listed. God told Joshua to appoint six special cities as places of refuge for the person who had killed someone accidentally. The relative of the person killed would probably be seeking revenge and might want to kill the manslayer. But if he reached the city of refuge, he would find safety there until justice could be properly carried out.

These cities were spread out across the land—three on one side of the Jordan and three on the other. We understand that the names of these cities have interesting meanings, that point us to Jesus the Saviour. We find the names in Joshua 20:7 & 8.

**Kadesh** means ‘holy’. The Lord Jesus our high priest is ‘holy, harmless and undefined, separate from sinners’ (Hebrews 7:26). He was the only man who was completely holy. Yet he died bearing the sin of his people, so that they might be forgiven and covered with his righteousness.

**Shechem** means ‘shoulder’. This reminds us of strength and power. Isaiah tells us of Jesus, that ‘the government shall be upon his shoulder’ (Isaiah 9:6). He is strong and powerful. We can safely cast every burden on the Lord and he will sustain us. ‘God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble’ (Psalm 46:1).

**Hebron** means ‘fellowship’ or ‘togetherness’. Jesus is indeed the best possible friend. When he lived on earth he was described as the friend of publicans and sinners—people that others despised. John tells us in his letter that ‘truly our fellowship was with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.’ Jesus is always with his people. He has promised never to forsake them. David could say ‘though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me’ (Psalm 23:4).

**Bezel** means ‘a fort’—suggesting strong walls of protection. In Psalm 18 David describes the Lord as a fortress and a strong tower (v.2). When we feel weak and troubled, we can run to Jesus, our strong fort. ‘My strength is made perfect in weakness,’ the Lord told Paul. ‘Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength’ (Isaiah 26:4).

**Ramoth** means ‘high and exalted’. The Lord Jesus on this earth was poor and despised and rejected—a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He humbled himself and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:8). But now God has ‘highly exalted him and given him a name, that at the name of Jesus every name should bow...and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’ (Philippians 2:9–11). How highly exalted he is now at the right hand of the Father.

**Golan** means ‘joy’. We will find true joy and lasting happiness only in the Lord Jesus. One of the puritans, Stephen Charnock said, ‘Nothing less than Christ can satisfy, and once you find him nothing more can be desired’. The Psalmist described the Lord as his ‘exceeding joy’. (Psalm 43:4). Peter tells us that believing in Jesus brings us joy which is unspeakable—too wonderful for words to adequately describe.

These six cities of refuge remind us about the Lord Jesus. We need refuge from our sin which so easily besets us, and from the evil one who seeks to destroy us. The only place of safety for us is Jesus. We must flee to him ‘for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us’ (Hebrews 6:18).

The only place of safety was *in* the city of refuge. It was not enough to be nearly there, or to be intending to go there one day.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are *in* Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). He is our place of refuge. Good intentions will not save us. Being almost persuaded to be a Christian, like Agrippa is no place of safety. Only being *in* Christ is our refuge.

The cities were to be easily accessible from anywhere in the land—three on one side of the river Jordan and three on the other. Jesus Christ is near to us in the gospel. We are told to seek him and we will find him. ‘The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth’ (Psalm 145:18).

In the cities of refuge there was abundant provision—food, drink and a place to stay. We have abundant provision in Christ. ‘My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 4:19). They that seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing (Psalm 34:10).

The cities of refuge were God’s appointment. Jesus Christ is God’s appointed way of salvation. ‘There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12). Jesus told us that he is the way. No one comes to the Father except through him.

The cities were for every one—the children of Israel and the visitor or stranger. All are welcome to Jesus. ‘God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life’ (John 3:16).

## Bible Search

Search the Bible to find the missing words. The initial letters of the correct answers will spell out the subject of the story.

1. We might have a strong \_\_\_\_\_ who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. (Hebrews 6:18)
2. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make \_\_\_\_\_ for them. (Hebrews 7:25)
3. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I \_\_\_\_\_. (Psalm 91:2)
4. For thou art my hope, O Lord God: thou art my trust from my \_\_\_\_\_. (Psalm 71:5)

5. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became \_\_\_\_\_ unto death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:8)
6. O Lord my strength and my \_\_\_\_\_, and my refuge in the day of affliction. (Jeremiah 16:19)
7. But the Lord is my defence, and my God is the \_\_\_\_\_ of my refuge. (Psalm 94:22)
8. I love them that love me; and those that seek me \_\_\_\_\_ shall find me. (Proverbs 8:17)
9. In the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge. (Proverbs 14:26)
10. The eternal God is thy refuge and \_\_\_\_\_ are the everlasting arms. (Deuteronomy 33:27)
11. God is my salvation and my \_\_\_\_\_: the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God. (Psalm 62:7)
12. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as \_\_\_\_\_; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31)

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## A SERMON ON ISAIAH 1:2–3

REV. C. TUINMAN (1659–1728)

Supplied by A.W. DE LANGE (Scherpenzeel, The Netherlands)

### Part 8

#### Against me

Such a transgression was done against the LORD, ‘against me’, saith the Lord. It is punishable if man sins against man (Ezekiel 17:15). Transgressing against the LORD is infinitely more grievous (1 Samuel 2:25; Psalm 51:6; comp. Genesis 49:9). Rightly did

Jeremiah say: ‘Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might. Who would not fear thee, O king of nations? For to thee doth it appertain’ (Jeremiah 10:6–7). Thus they should have cleaved faithfully unto him, to him ‘for a people, and for a name, and for a

praise, and for a glory' (Jeremiah 13:11). But they fell from this King, although he had nourish them and brought them up.

To this was added a more than beastly ignorance: 'An ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not

know, my people doth not consider' (Isaiah 1:3). You see that here a comparison is made between the mindless animals and this people regarding their knowledge wherein the beasts put men to shame.

*TO BE CONTINUED*

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# WHO WILL BRING US PEACE?

by WILLIAM T. FOLEY

I WANT to deal with the topic of peace in this paper. More importantly, I want to address the issue of 'Who will bring us peace?' We all talk about peace from time to time. Is there an answer to world problems? What are the prospects of peace for the world?

The world is definitely looking for a person who can bring global peace, and stop the frequent wars. Peace has eluded the greatest minds and institutions over the centuries. Many promises of peace have been broken. Peace treaties have been cast aside for the most trivial of reasons. Despite education, and international agreements, many global conflicts still occur. Strangely, humans are a threat to their own existence. Greed, selfishness, lust for fame and power drive some people to their own destruction.

Two major world wars, atomic bombs, nuclear power and continued wars, threats and intimidation by narcissistic leaders, demonstrate the evil and tyranny of the human mind. There is no prospect of permanent world peace, while sin reigns in the earth. Where is the manifesto for peace? Who has got it or developed it? The United Nations struggle to find solutions. Paul said peace will be a major topic in the last days,

'For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape' (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Safety is certainly becoming more of a focus for law and order in communities. Muggings are increasingly a fear for many in communities.

However, many argue that human progress is being made, and so-called experts cry we don't want to learn of war anymore. Let's learn about peace. We will fight to make peace, so the argument goes. Admittedly, there are many things which are helping humanity to improve the quality of life. Yet people are not satisfied or transformed, or able to find meaning in their lives. Tremendous advances have been made in just about every field of knowledge that is known to humanity. Standards of living have dramatically improved since the 18th century. But people are not happy! They have no inward peace.

Yet, political leaders, technologists and scientists and academics are looking for alternatives and answers to so many different areas to prevent war. Space exploration will continue and there may yet be star wars. Meteoroids are on the march in the galaxy.



People are concerned that they may plunge the earth into devastation. People's hearts are failing them for fear.

There is the prospect of economic and financial crisis on a scale that the world has never seen. We will witness, in a few years, the birth pangs of sorrows which perhaps will be the greatest challenge to humanity. Restlessness is a major feature of modern life and culture. The Middle East is a powder keg waiting to explode. Hatred and hostility seems to present itself in different guises. People are looking for peace. Who has the answer? There seems to be no avenues available for lasting peace.

Sex and pleasure have become an obsession for many people. Immorality in all its forms has gripped Western culture. What was forbidden by legislators and deemed inappropriate by society in general has become commonplace. Suicide hasn't abated even across the spectrum of the social classes. False religions abound and offer no real hope for eternity. Jesus Christ is rejected as the only way. Neither will the sociologist admit that sin and the Fall provide a better explanation than any other philosophy or religion to humanity's plight and behaviour. The Christian faith is counted as an equal to all world religion, but not superior in truth, and Christ is regarded as one of many contributors to religion. He is not recognised as the only way of salvation for sinners, but the Bible affirms Christ Jesus is the only Saviour of sinners (see Acts 4:12 with John 14:6). There will be no peace with God and no heaven without the Lord Jesus Christ for subscribers to foreign religions. Universalism has support and growing popularity among different religions, even evangelicals are being carried along and deceived with this error. Certainly Pope Francis is duped in this matter, as he clearly is in other significant matters of doctrine.

The Bible is marginalised by theologians and preachers to suit their own agendas. The Bible is being used deceitfully, with only emphasis on the love of God to the neglect of the justice of God. The wrath of God is played down. Emotional emphasis has replaced doctrine and reverence in worship. Preachers and people have developed 'selective hearing' to justify their lifestyle and beliefs. They have rebranded Christianity using modern marketing techniques to appeal to the flesh and the carnal man.

Jesus said, quoting from Isaiah (6:9,10), 'And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them' (Matthew 13:14-15).

The Bible brings the message of peace to the troubled and disquieted soul. It is the greatest book ever written with the greatest story ever told. But are many people really reading the Bible which outlines the condition of humanity and the remedy in Christ? The Bible sets forth the plight of humanity and the power of God for salvation.

Psychologists seek to avoid the issues of sin in terms of analysis and try to explain human cognitive behaviour and difficulties in terms of disorders. Evolution is the greatest lie foisted on the human race and it has created much delusional factors in people's minds. Human beings are seen as a mere extension of animals in the evolutionary chain. Ungodliness and unrighteousness prevail (see Romans 1). The human soul is denied. God is denied in his very existence. Can there be legitimate peace for those who deny their Maker?

What passes off as modern entertainment is really the glorification of filth and dirt. Wickedness is prevalent in motion pictures, and the lyrics of songs in some instances promote violence and immorality. There seems to be no shame. The fashion and dress of both men and women is often debasing, and leaves nothing to the imagination. Beauty is being more contrived so that men are indistinguishable from women and vice-versa. The effeminate has new meaning. Multiple easy divorces and remarriages, and the redefinition of traditional marriage are now widely accepted as being normal. Euthanasia as an alternative to suffering is finding increasingly a number of advocates even in government. God's commandments are ignored, because they define transgressions. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ is now frequently used in blasphemy. Are these factors truly a reflection of human beings that have no peace within?

Abominations and idolatry are so much more common among many people. Sports and leisure and recreation are now the modern gods. Lewdness is now part of comedy. What was the sin of Sodom? Ezekiel says it was a number of sins which were all related. Yes, there was gross immorality, but also there was pride, fullness of bread (economic prosperity), abundance of idleness (people deliberately not working and lazy), forgetting the poor and needy (see Ezekiel 16:49).

Famine, floods and disease are still major problems in many disadvantaged countries. Immunity to prescribed drugs is a real concern for the medical authorities. Medical discoveries have made phenomenal advances. Yet, the pharmaceutical industry, doctors and consultants have not discovered all the answers for the human condition in terms of disorders and diseases.

There is the real prospect that the world is on the path to war; war and disease will bring about a global famine. War and peace live side by side. Whatever one's interpretation of the Apocalypse (Revelation) there is set before us the terrible suffering and consequences of sin, but marvellously also the majesty, glory and triumph of God in all circumstances.

Countless political factions are scheming to disrupt peace in countries and societies. Of course, this is all linked to the destruction of the environment, many people continue to argue. But the problem is much deeper than that, but people don't want to hear the diagnosis or even the prognosis.

War, famine and death will result in terrible human suffering. Death has of course been the ultimate human terror and the source of fear, since humans have transgressed in God's beautiful garden of Eden. Many people do ask, however, what lies beyond the grave. Does God exist? That is because God has set eternity in the human heart, but they don't have peace.

But the human heart, the seat of the emotions, and the will of mankind are in trouble due to sin. There is a lack of understanding in today's world of the issues of the heart. Jesus said to his contemporaries, 'Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man' (Matthew 15:16-20). Sin is definitely defiling. Some people are more interested in the hygiene of the body rather

than the hygiene of their soul. They'll spend more time in the bath or shower rather than reading their Bible or praying. They'll spend more time on bodily exercise and a workout in the gym rather than going to church and sitting under the exposition and ministry of God's word. Truth is vital to the peace of the soul. Jesus said, 'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth' (John 17:17).

Cynicism about God and truth, and atheistic philosophy, and agnosticism will not eradicate God from the human consciousness. We will always have people who are motivated purely by self-interest and scepticism, who do not want to face up to the reality of responsibility and accountability to God. They don't want to face up to their sin, the sin of unbelief. Not surprisingly, 'unbelief and atheism' is an up-to-date system of thought. Satan has blinded the eyes of those who will not believe the gospel (2 Corinthians 2:4).

*Outgrowing God: a beginners guide to atheism* (2019) by Richard Dawkins, is a major new book, which seeks to show that the human race doesn't need God. In fact, this book is a denial of God. By writing this book, Dawkins shows by human reasoning the blindness of his own intellectual framework and reveals his prejudice against God and his works. The Psalmist says: 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one' (Psalm 14:1-3). Paul shows the world is guilty before God and writes in his epistle to the Romans 'the way of peace have they not known' (Romans 3:17). We are witnessing

a new generation of delusional scholars in our university system. No writer can explain God out of existence, despite trying very hard to do so. God is: therefore I am! God is the great I am, the self-existent one. The beautiful character of God unfolds throughout holy scripture.

Every single person will give an account to Christ in eternity. There will be no exception. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10,11). Those who have been 'justified by faith alone' based on the 'doing and dying of Christ' are declared now judicially righteous, and therefore will be received into Heaven and the wicked will be banished to eternal torment in Hell. 'Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth' (Romans 8:33). God's elect are only and exclusively justified—followers of other world religions will be lost. The verdict for God's elect is 'not guilty because of Christ's blood'. Now no condemnation (see Romans 8:1) for believers. No separation from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39). What a glorious privilege and blessing to be acquitted before God. Hallelujah, what a Saviour! O what peace and joy for the children of God! O to be found in Christ not having one's own righteousness (Philippians 3:9). Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every believer (Romans 10:4). Thank God for the riches of his grace. Praise God for the unsearchable riches of Christ. Glory to God for his unspeakable gift of peace in Christ.

But what about peace for this world? Terrorism which is motivated by religious extremism seems to be on the increase. Earthquakes and environmental disasters seem to be happening more often. But the God of creation, who created all things by

Jesus Christ, is in complete control and is fulfilling his purpose in calling out a people for his name. Never for a moment has God lost control or not been involved in his creation. Supremely, God is calling out his remnant people according to the election of grace from the four corners of the earth.

Persecution will increase due to intolerance of other people's beliefs. Christian believers are suffering even at this time. Free speech is under threat. Peace is under threat, too. Imprisonment for preaching the gospel of Christ is a real prospect. Some politicians are evidently dishonest, and some act in a dishonourable manner, through falsehoods and lies, in many areas that are so important to society; when, in fact, they should be improving conditions for the poor and needy.

Hospitals are becoming slaughter-houses for the innocent in the womb. Full-term abortions are tragically being tolerated.

Infanticide is happening. Young people are turning to alcohol and non-prescription drugs to cope with depression and to fill the void in their lives. Murder and rape; abuse and violence have flourished among gangs thus threatening neighbourhoods in villages, towns and cities. Knife attacks are increasingly causing concern for communities.

Cataclysmic and catastrophic things are facing humanity. Great calamities and disasters have motivated great humanitarian efforts. The rich and powerful will not escape God's searching eyes. Though humans know and can foresee great evil, yet people joke and mock biblical truth and will not turn from iniquity and seek to understand the God of truth.

The anger and fury of the Lord Jesus Christ will come at the final judgment. Great tribulations await those who reject God's love and kindness, tender mercies and goodness, in Christ. God is sovereign

and righteous in all his ways and actions. Mercy and forgiveness will be extended to all those who believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hell awaits the disobedient and unbelieving and those who are given to wickedness. Great torments, in the lake of fire, await those who are lost—these are the children of disobedience, the vessels of wrath. In contrast, those who are the vessels of mercy will enjoy the God of all glory and grace, forever! Gratitude should well up in the heart of the saints for the prospect of the fulness of God, and for being heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

Jesus Christ is the only one who can give lasting peace and joy. He is the Prince of Peace to all his people. Remember that the authorities crucified the Prince of Peace. But Peter preached, 'Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins' (Acts 5:31). Christians, with the Old Testament saints, will have the blessed privilege of beholding the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ for eternity, in the new heaven and in the new earth, wherein dwells righteousness and true holiness.

God's love dwells in Christian believers as the Father's love dwells in Jesus and he dwells in believers, who he has justified by faith alone and they have peace with God. Peace comes through the Cross of Christ. His blood brings full atonement for all sins. Not unlike any other generation the Cross of Christ is an offence to our generation. The most important thing to the true believing Christian is the glory of God. Paul said, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world' (Galatians 6:14). Peace comes through the shed blood of Christ. Christ is our mercy seat or propitiation for our sins.

Fundamental to the Christian believer is the incarnation, Christ's sinless life, death and burial; his resurrection and ascension; his session in the glory now, and Christ's Second Coming in glory. The Lord of glory will deal in justice with the wicked at the great judgment.

For evildoers, 'the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?' (Revelation 6:17). There will be no peace for the wicked, for...there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked' (Isaiah 57:21).

Never forget our peace as Christians is through Christ's shed blood on the cross, 'And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven' (Colossians 1:20). Plead the blood of Christ, at the throne of grace, for there is power in the blood for our total peace with God.

From one of the greatest chapters in the Bible we discover truth about peace in Christ. 'But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed' (Isaiah 53:5).

As Christian believers, we can say because of God's grace, 'Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him' (Revelation 19:6-7). Let God's peace reign in our hearts.

Never forget that 'The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name' (Exodus 15:3).

Never forget too Christ alone is the saints' peace. 'For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us (Jew and Gentile)' (Ephesians 2:14).

Christians must preach the Gospel to this generation, as our forefathers did so effectively in their day. Paul, rightly concludes,

'How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!' (Romans 10:15).

Jesus said, 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid' (John 14:27).

For Christian believers God is the 'God of peace' (Romans 15:33, 16:20; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Truly only saints can enjoy the 'peace of God' (Philippians 4:7, Colossians 3:15).

As the saints of God, 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord' (Hebrews 12:14). 'And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4:7).

The saints of the ages are going to be in Heaven with Christ. John writes, 'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away' (Revelation 21:4). Truly Heaven will be the place of peace and joy, but only for those who have been chosen in Christ. There will be peace like a river for God's people who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world. Certainly we know that 'all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him (false christ) whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world' (Revelation 13:8).

Truly Christians should follow the path of peace, for Jesus said: 'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God' (Matthew 5:9). Truly the human soul will never enjoy peace until it embraces the Lord Jesus Christ, the appointed mediator between God and man. He has no equal in bringing peace to the sinner. He alone can



bring peace to the searching and burdened soul. 'For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin' (Hebrews 4:15). He had temptations, trials and infirmities. He understands human suffering and pain, having endured terrible rejection and the agony of the Cross for sin—all of this to bring forgiveness, redemption and reconciliation with a holy God. There is no one who understands like Jesus, the Prince of Peace. 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus

Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God' (Romans 5:1–2).

### **The blessing of peace!**

'Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen' (Hebrews 13:20,21). ¶

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## FORMER DAYS

BEING A SUMMARY OF PAST ISSUES FROM *THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE*

### **250 years ago: March & April 1770**

THE continuation of Deering's Lectures reaches Hebrews 2:12–13 in the **March** issue. The Biography is of the Rev. Arthur Hildersham, 1563–1631. Related to Cardinal Reginald Pole (given here as Poole), Hildersham had come under Protestant influence at his grammar school, and refused all attempts to get him to travel to Rome. Instead, thanks to thoughtful friends, he was enabled to complete his education in England. The account is to be concluded in a later issue. Gospel Mysteries reaches Song of Solomon 3:5 and 6. Casuistical Divinity continues Reflections on Christian Love, from an earlier issue. The Dialogue between a clergyman and one called a Methodist is continued, and the error of assuming that we are justified for our works made perfect in Christ is examined. The Experience of a True Christian continues from an

earlier issue, followed by the next part of The Christian Censor, from the same earlier issue. A letter argues that zeal for God does not make a man a child of God, and is followed by the next part of Divine Allegories. The issue ends with poetry.

In **April**, the Deering Lecture concludes the section begun the previous month. The Biography of Arthur Hildersham is concluded. One aspect of Hildersham's character worth repeating is his readiness to unite with those with whom he may have disagreed on certain points. A non-conformist by conviction, he readily welcomed all true believers. Gospel Mysteries discusses the parable of the pearl of great price. Casuistical Divinity speaks to those who profess to be believers, yet who frequent theatres. The readiness of believers to be worldly is not new. The matter of zeal for God not proving a man to be a child of God is continued, and is followed

by the next part of *The Experience of a True Christian*. A letter to a new convert is followed by the first of what is intended to be a number of extracts from the writings of Dr Bates, recommended by the late James Hervey. The first is a meditation on Psalm 119:97. This is followed by the continuation of *The Christian Censor*, and then there is a review of a work by a Rev. John Andrews, which aims at promoting the doctrine of 'rich, free, sovereign grace'. It is recommended to readers. As usual, poetry ends the issue.

### 200 years ago: March & April 1820

The **March** issue begins with a consideration of various divine promises made to Abraham. The next piece speaks to believers as the Lord's property. The article on Perfection continues from the previous issue. Tomlinson's work on rescuing Scripture from ridicule also continues. There is short correspondence, including an extract from the writings of Bishop Beveridge (most famous for his exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles). Marks of a Christian examines the necessity of the new birth. A writer asks whether it is honest to fill sermons with the doctrines of Calvinism 'like sugar dissolved in tea. It should always there but never be seen', rather than have them as sign-posts to direct all hearers to Christ. Two letters, from a woman who had not come to the Lord's Table for some time, provide encouragement to preachers who remind believers of their duties and privileges. The issue concludes with the first part of an exposition of Isaiah 25:6, and a poem.

In **April** we have a submission from a reader on the question of whether election is to be preached, and if so, how. The writer is concerned that some use the doctrine to frighten, while others so overlook it as to seem to usher in universal Christianity. The

said writer has supplied a piece on the new birth, which is reproduced. This is followed by an item on *The Plurality of the Godhead*: does Jesus Christ possess the Godhead of the Word, or the Godhead of the Father? The debate between Seek Truth and Love Truth is carried forward with a submission on Heart Purity from a reader. Colossians 1:19 is the expounded by another writer, and the exposition of Isaiah 25:6 is concluded. The writings and death of Thomas Paine are displayed, to show that his death gave evidence of his being under the wrath of God. The Editors reply to this, showing that, in most cases, people die as they lived. Calmness in the face of death is no more a proof of faith, than bitter afflictions are proof of divine wrath. The Editors are asked to comment on a quotation from a Puritan, to the effect that the death of Christ is sufficient for all men, and efficient only for such as believe in him. They are not minded to agree. However, it would have helped had the correspondent given the source, to ensure that the quotation was fair and accurate. Some quotations from a writer of an earlier century, on the chief principles of the Christian faith conclude the issue.

### 100 years ago: March & April 1920

A sermon on Justification, from Romans 3:4, opens the **March** issue. 1 Timothy 3:15 and the House of God provide a contrast between the need for housing following the First World War, and the eternal Church. This is followed by wise advice from an old lady, which we reproduce here.

#### 'IT'S ONE OF THEM THINGS'

IN writing to a friend we informed him that five of our grown-up young people had been down with chicken-pox. In replying to our letter our friend wrote as follows:

'Some time ago I was preaching at L—, and missed one of our old members from the service. On inquiry I found she was sick, and so went to see her. 'Well, granny, what is the matter?' was my greeting. Her reply was, 'It's one of them things,' pointing to the foot of her bed, where there hung on the wall that blessed text (Romans 8:28), 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.' 'It's one of them things,' she repeated. And it is 'one of them things' that your dear children are suffering from. The Lord grant healing in his own time.'

We pass on the incident for the comfort of our readers. 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous,' but our afflicted readers, if numbered amongst the people of God, may always truly say in reference to one and another of their trials that, 'It's one of them things.' To them that love God and who are the called according to his purpose, 'All things work together "for" good.'

Proverbs 19:21 provides the text for Wellsprings, and note of a sermon on John 1:27 follow. Some quotations from the preaching of W.H. Griffith Thomas on the benefit of distributing Bibles provide encouragement to all who have such opportunities. A well-written piece shows the changing attitudes to the Bible, and in particular to the decline in the conviction that the God of the Old Testament is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some Fundamental Truths considers the Person of Christ as God and man. This is followed by a meditation

on Hegai, from Esther 2:15. The words, 'Lo, I am with you alway' provide comfort in the face of bereavement. Another piece exhorts believers to attend the Lord's House, and is followed by Thoughts on Ephesians 1:12–23. The Magazine Fund subscriptions are listed, and is followed by notices of deaths. Correspondence, a piece contrasting the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Roman Mass, and reviews, conclude the issue.

The sermon text in **April** is Luke 22:37, and is followed by the desire of our hearts, from John 12:21. Wellsprings takes Revelation 7:17, and Sermon Notes takes Hebrews 13:8. Some Fundamental Truths considers the deity of God the Holy Spirit. Christ's calling of people by name provides further material for a writer, and Bethlehem and Calvary are considered together by another author. Thoughts on the miracles as witnesses to Christ is followed by an account of gospel work among Chinese children in California. The expectation is that God is about to do a great work in that land. In fact, only a decade later, the Japanese would invade Manchuria, and the Second World War would lead to the formation of the Communist Republic. In the late 1930s Christian ministers went to Poland and preached the gospel in Warsaw and other major cities. Many Jewish people were converted. Few survived the horrors shortly to be visited on them. Our expectations are not always met, but the Lord always saves his people, in his time.

A piece from *The Gospel Magazine* from 1885 is reprinted, and an account of a conversion is recounted. Correspondence, including a warning against creeping Ritualism in non-conformist places of worship, and reviews, conclude the issue.

**TO BE CONTINUED**

# THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

by J.E. NORTH (Totton, Hants)

*‘The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’ (Mark 1:1)*

IN our previous study on this verse, we considered that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is a gospel that has been prepared. We looked at the various ways in which that preparation was made (GM Nov/Dec 2019). We now turn to a fourth facet of the gospel, namely, that the gospel is to be proclaimed.

## **4. It is a gospel that is to be proclaimed**

As we move further into this first chapter of Mark’s Gospel we see that the Lord Jesus Christ after He was baptised of John in the river Jordan, ‘immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him’ (vv.12, 13). And then, as if it were of little importance to Mark, he passes over the imprisonment of John the Baptist because he wants to get straight to the importance and centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ and his ministry of preaching and proclamation, ‘Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God’ (v.14).

John tells us in his gospel that John the Baptist had been preaching and baptizing at Bethabara on the eastern side of the river Jordan, ‘These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing’ (John 1:28). It is generally taken that Bethabara was just north of the Dead Sea, and that the Lord Jesus was in the desert in the area of the Dead Sea, and it is there that He was tempted of the devil.

So when Mark and the other Gospel writers tells us that the Lord Jesus ‘came into Galilee’ they are telling us that the Lord Jesus made that long journey into to fulfil, as Matthew tells us, the Old Testament prophecy, ‘That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, ‘The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephtholim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up’ (Matthew 4:14-16), quoting Isaiah 9:1, 2.

The Lord Jesus came to minister to a people who were and are grievously afflicted, and a people who walk in darkness. Does not this beautifully tell us of the purpose of the coming of the Lord Jesus, that he would come to those who are afflicted with sin and a fallen nature; that he came to a people who still walk in the darkness of sin and corruption for ‘men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil’ (John 3:19). And Isaiah goes on to speak of the joy that comes to the church of the living God through the child who was born and the son who was given (Isaiah 9:3-6).

## **The qualifications of the Lord Jesus Christ to preach the gospel**

So the Lord Jesus takes that long journey from Bethabara to Galilee to preach and proclaim the gospel of redeeming grace. ‘Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is

fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel' (Mark 1:14, 15). The Lord Jesus is eminently qualified to preach. Isaiah tells us this on two separate occasions. This has already been alluded to above, where Matthew quotes from Isaiah chapter 9 which goes on to say of the Lord Jesus that he is the Child born and the Son given. The second qualification is quoted by the Lord Jesus as recorded in the 4th chapter of Luke where he quotes from Isaiah chapter 61, and where the Lord Jesus tells the congregation in the synagogue at Nazareth that he is the anointed of God. We have already considered the passage from Isaiah 61 in a previous study, so we will not go over the same ground again, but just consider the qualifications outlined in the passage in Isaiah 9:6.

**Jesus is the Child Born and the Son given**  
 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9:6).

We stated above that the Lord Jesus Christ was eminently qualified to preach the gospel of redeeming grace because of his essential nature as the God-man—truly human and truly divine. Here Isaiah sets forth the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the child born. As Paul expresses it, 'Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross' (Philippians 2:6-8). Again Isaiah witnesses to the true humanity of Christ, 'Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign;

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel' (7:14). The angel spoke to Mary, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God' (Luke 1:35). The Lord Jesus Christ was truly human and therefore able to come alongside the sinner. 'For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin' (Hebrews 4:15). Well did Isaac Watts write:

Touched with a sympathy within,  
 He knows our feeble frame;  
 He knows what sore temptations mean,  
 For he has felt the same.

He, in the days of feeble flesh,  
 Poured out his cries and tears;  
 And, in his measure, feels afresh  
 What every member bears.

He is qualified to preach and proclaim the gospel of grace because of his true humanity. But he is also qualified to preach and proclaim the gospel of grace because of his being the Eternal Son of God. What a mercy! The Lord Jesus did not become the Son of God in his incarnation. He did not become the Son of God in the resurrection from the dead. He always was and is the Eternal Son of God, begotten of the Father from eternity past. We have covered this earlier in this series of articles and therefore it is not necessary to repeat what we said earlier.

Then Isaiah goes on to give further qualifications of the Lord Jesus Christ's ability to preach and proclaim the gospel.

**'The government shall be upon his shoulder'**  
 What a mercy that not only the governance



of the world is in the hands of Almighty God, but the government of the church and of our lives and eternal destiny is on the shoulders of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has the strength to carry his people, he has the strength to hold his people so that not one of them shall ever perish (*cf.* Jude 24).

### **The Titles and Names given to the Lord Jesus Christ**

Then follow the names and titles given to the Lord Jesus Christ which qualify him to preach that everlasting gospel: 'his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.'

He is wonderful in his person; wonderful in his speech, 'Never man spake like this man' (John 7:46); wonderful in his death; wonderful in his resurrection; wonderful in his heavenly intercession for 'he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them' (Hebrews 7:25); wonderful in his mediatorial work.

He is the Counsellor. In that wonderful eighth chapter of the Book of Proverbs we have a further description of the Lord Jesus: 'I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions. The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength. By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths

of judgment: that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures' (Proverbs 8:12–21). 'Counsel is mine', that is, in the hands of and at the disposal of the Lord Jesus Christ so much so that James says, 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him' (1:5).

He is the mighty God. He is the second person in the Holy Trinity. Thomas witnesses to the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ; 'My Lord and My God' (John 20:28). John also witnesses the same: 'For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one' (1 John 5:7), as does the Apostle Paul: "Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Romans 9:5).

He is the everlasting Father. Dr Gill comments, 'Christ is a Father with respect to chosen men, who were given him, and who are regenerated by his Spirit and grace: and to these he is an 'everlasting Father'; he was so from everlasting.' The Lord Jesus refers to his children as he stands before Almighty God: 'For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me (Hebrews 2:10–13).

And he is the Prince of Peace. Christ Jesus is, says Peter, the one whom God 'hath...exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel,

and forgiveness of sins' (Acts 5:31). Oh, what a mercy that the sin sick and troubled soul finds mercy and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ. The child of God has peace through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:20). We, having been justified, by faith we have peace with God (Romans 5:1).

So we are told that the Lord Jesus Christ 'came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.' In this article we have sought to set out some of the ways in which the Lord Jesus Christ was qualified to preach that gospel. But now the ministry of preaching the gospel has been committed to his disciples until the time that he returns in glory for his own dear people. Therefore, having considered the qualifications of the Lord Jesus Christ to preach the gospel, it follows that we should consider the qualifications of those who preach the gospel today. But first of all, we must consider the exhortation that is given by both the Lord Jesus and the Apostles.

### The Great Commission

'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen' (Matthew 28:19, 20). 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15, 16). 'Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things' (Luke 24:46–48). 'But ye shall receive

power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth' (Acts 1:8).

In the above verses from the Gospels and the Book of Acts we have the words of the Lord Jesus giving the Great Commission to his disciples and those who would succeed them, even to the end of the age. It is not an optional extra. They are the words of the Lord Jesus to be obeyed and followed.

The apposite words are 'Teach', 'Preach' and 'Witness'. We are to follow the example of the Lord Jesus who taught in the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:15) and who taught the people in the synagogue in Nazareth expounding the meaning of Isa 61, and they 'bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth' (Luke 4:22). We are to preach! The word used here by the Lord Jesus is literally 'to cry or proclaim as a herald.' It is the proclamation of good news. Nothing else is to take its place. Drama, mime or other things cannot take the place of a clear declaration of the gospel of the grace of God.

And the third word used by the Lord Jesus Christ is 'Witness', to bear record. The Apostles bore record of 'All that Jesus began both to do and teach' (Acts 1:1). Paul, as an apostle born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15:8), is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ and says that because he is a debtor to the Greeks and Barbarians he is ready to preach, to declare, to witness to the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ at Rome and the work he undertook as the Substitute for sinners (Romans 1:14–16). I cannot imagine that those who bore witness (Gk. *martus*, from which we get the word 'martyr') with their lives to the gospel in the theatres of Rome and its pagan empire engaged in either

drama or mime or any such thing as is so popular in today's so-called evangelism and easy-believism!

### **God's call to preach**

When Isaiah went into the temple in the year of Uzziah's death he had a great vision of the absolute holiness of Almighty God and the wretchedness of man. He was cleansed when a live coal from the altar touched his lips and then followed his call to preach. 'I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' to which Isaiah replied, 'Here am I; send me.' Then follows the Lord's call to Isaiah to preach, 'God, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed' (Isaiah 6:8-10). He was to preach the sovereignty of God, and to leave the results to the work of the Lord. He would be glorified in the preaching and his word would not return to him void (Isaiah 55:11).

In a similar manner Paul reminds Timothy that he had been called of God to preach the word of God in the gospel, 'Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands... Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner' (2 Tim 1:6-8).

### **What then are the qualifications for being a minister today?**

From Isaiah we notice in the sixth chapter of his prophecy that he was cleansed from sin. After having the vision of a holy God and seeing his own unrighteousness he was cleansed by a live coal from off the altar. He confessed his sinfulness. 'Then said I, Woe

is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts' (Isaiah 6:5), seeing him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27).

Preaching is not a thing to be undertaken lightly by anyone, but only to be undertaken by those who have a felt sense of the Lord's call, and also by the approval of the local church/congregation (Acts 13:2).

The gospel is not to be hidden. Just as the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, his burial and resurrection were not things done in a corner (Acts 26:26), so the preaching of the gospel is to be undertaken openly, and widely in accordance with the commission of the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Go ye into all the world...' We are to 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven' (Matthew 5:16). Our light is not to be hidden. 'Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven' (Matthew 5:14-16).

Paul exhorts Timothy, 'Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry' (2 Timothy 4:2-5). Here Paul instructs Timothy his son in the gospel when he is to preach, the content of his preaching and why

he should continue in that task.

It behoves us all, especially those of us who are called of God to the work of the ministry not to grow weary in well doing, but to persevere in that sacred work of setting Christ forth in the gospel of his grace before all men and applying it to those who

are brought by the Holy Ghost to see and feel their need of Christ.

Well did Charles Wesley write:

Happy if with my latest breath,

I might gasp his name.

Preach him to all, and cry in death,

Behold, behold the Lamb.

### TO BE CONCLUDED

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# CHRIST THE WISDOM OF GOD

by THOMAS CHALMERS (1780–1847)

*‘Christ the wisdom of God’ 1 Corinthians 1:24*

THUS much for what may be called the judicial righteousness, with which every believer is invested by having the merits of Christ imputed to him through faith. But this faith is something more than a name. It takes up a positive residence in the mind as a principle. It has locality and operation there, and has either no existence at all, or by its purifying and reforming influence on the holder of it, does it invest him also with a personal righteousness.

Now to apply the conception of our text to this personal righteousness, the first thing we would say of it is, that it admits of no measurement whatever with the social worth, or the moral virtue, or any other of the personal accomplishments of character, which may belong to those who have not the faith of the gospel. Faith accepts of the offered reconciliation, and moves away from the alienated heart those suspicions, and aversions, and fears, which kept man asunder from his God. We would not say, then, of the personal righteousness of a believer, that it consisted in a higher degree of that virtue

which may exist in a lower degree with him who is not a believer. It consists in the dawn and the progress and the perfecting of a virtue which, before he was a believer, had no existence whatever. It consists in the possession of a character of which, previous to his acceptance of Christ, he had not the smallest feature of reality,—though to the external eye, there may have been some features of resemblance. The principle of Christian sanctification, which, if we were to express it by another name, we would call devotedness to God, is no more to be found in the unbelieving world, than the principle of an allegiance to their rightful sovereign is to be found among the outcasts of banishment. It is not by any stretching out of the measure of your virtues, then, that you can attain this principle. There needs to be originated within you a new virtue altogether. It is not by the fostering of that which is old,—it is by the creation something new, that a man comes to have the personal righteousness of a disciple of the New Testament. It is by giving existence to that which formerly had no

existence. And let us no longer wonder, then, at the magnitude of the terms which are employed in the Bible, to denote the change, the personal change, which in point of character and affection and principle takes place on all who become meet for the inheritance of the saints. It is there called life from the dead, and a new birth, and a total renovation,—all old things are said to be done away, and all things to become new. With many it is a wonder how a change of such totality and of such magnitude, should be accounted as indispensable to the good and creditable man of society, as to the sunken profligate. But if the one and the other are both dead to a sense of their Lawgiver in heaven,—then both need to be made alive unto him. With both there must be the power and the reality of a spiritual resurrection. And after this great transition has been made, it will be found that the virtues of the new state, and those of the old state, cannot be brought to any common standard of measurement at all. The one distances the other by a wide and impassable interval. There is all the difference in point of principle between a man of the world and a new creature in Christ, that there is between him who has the Spirit of God, and him who has it not,—and all the difference in point of performance that there is between him who is without Christ, and can therefore do nothing, and him who can do all things through Christ strengthening him. There is a new principle now which formerly had no operation, even that of godliness,—and a new influence now, even that of the Holy Ghost given to the prayers of the believe;— and under these provisions will he attain a splendour and an energy of character, with which, the better and the best of this world can no more be brought into comparison, than earth will compare with heaven, or the passions and the frivolities of time with

the pure ambition and the lofty principles of eternity.

And let it not be said that the transformation of which we are now speaking, instead of being thus entire and universal, consists only with a good man of the world in the addition of one virtue, to his previous stock of many virtues. We admit that he had justice before, and humanity before, and courteousness before, and that the godliness which he had not before is only one virtue. But the station which it asserts among the other virtues is a station of supreme authority. It no sooner takes its place among them than it animates them all, and subordinates them all. It sends forth among them a new and pervading quality, which makes them essentially different from what they were before. I may take daily exercise from a regard to my health, and by so doing I may deserve the character of a man of prudence; or I may take daily exercise apart from this consideration altogether, and because it is the accidental wish of my parents that I should do so,—and thus may I deserve the character of a man of filial piety. The external habit is the same; but under the one principle the moral character of this habit is totally and essentially different from what it is under the other principle. Yet the difference here is most assuredly not greater than is the difference between the justice of a good man of society and the justice of a Christian disciple. In the former case, it is done unto others or done unto himself. In the latter case it is done unto God. The frame-work of his outer doings is animated by another spirit altogether. There is the breath of another life in it. The inscription of Holiness to God stands engraven on the action of the believer; and if this character of holiness be utterly effaced from the corresponding action of the good man of society, then surely in character, in



worth, in spiritual and intelligent estimation, there is the utmost possible diversity between the two actions. So that, should the most upright and amiable man upon earth embrace the Gospel faith and become the subject of the Gospel regeneration, it is true of him too that all old things are done away and that all things have become new.

Thus it is, that while none of the Christian virtues can be made to come into measurement with any of what may be called the constitutional virtues, in respect of their principle—because the principle of the one set differs from that of the other set, in kind as well as in degree—yet there are certain corresponding virtues in each of the classes which might be brought together into measurement, in respect of visible and external performance. And it is a high point of obligation with every disciple of the faith, so to sustain his part in this competition as to show forth the honour of Christianity,—to prove by his own personal history in the world how much the morality of grace outstrips the morality of nature,—to evince the superior lustre and steadiness of the one, when compared with the frail, and fluctuating, and desultory character of the other,—and to make it clear to the eye of experience, that it is only under the peculiar government of the doctrine of Christ, that all which is amiable in human worth becomes most lovely, and all which is justly held in human admiration becomes most great and lofty and venerable. The Bible tells us to provide things honest in the sight of men, as well as of God. It tells us that, upon the person of every Christian, the features of excellence should stand so legibly engraven, that as a living epistle he might be seen and read of all men. It is true, there is much in the character of a genuine believer which the world cannot see and cannot sympathize with. There

is the rapture of faith when in lively exercise. There is the ecstasy of devotion. There is a calm and settled serenity amid all the vicissitudes of life. There is the habit of having no confidence in the flesh, and of rejoicing in the Lord Jesus. There is a holding fast of our hope in the promises of the Gospel. There is a cherishing of the Spirit of adoption. There is the work of a believing fellowship with the Father and with the Son. There is a movement of affection towards the things which are above. There is a building up of ourselves on our most holy faith. There is a praying in the Holy Ghost. There is a watching for his influence with all perseverance. In a word, there is all which the Christian knows to be real, and which the world hates and denounces as visionary, in the secret, but sublime and substantial processes of experimental religion. But on the other hand, there is also much in the doings of an altogether Christian of that palpable virtue, which forces itself upon general observation, and he is most grievously untrue to his Master's cause if he do not on this ground so outrun the world as to force from the men of it an approving testimony. The eye of the world cannot enter within the spiritual recesses of his heart, but let him ever remember that it is fastened, and that too, with keen and scrutinizing jealousy, on the path of his visible history. It will offer no homage to the mere sanctity of his complexion, nor, unless there be shed over it the expression of what is mild in domestic, or honourable in public, virtue, will it ever look upon him in any other light, than as an object of the most unmingled disgust. And therefore it is that he must enter on the field of ostensible accomplishment, and there bear away the palm of superiority, and be the most eminent of his fellows, in all those recognized virtues that can bless or embellish the condition of society,—the

most untainted in honour, and the most disinterested injustice, and the most alert in beneficence, and the most unwearied in all these graces, under every discouragement and every provocation.

We have now only time to say that we shall not regret the length of this discourse, or even the recurrence of some of its arguments, if any hearer amongst you not in the faith be led by it to withdraw his confidence from the mere accomplishments of nature,—and if any believer amongst you be led by it not to despise these accomplishments, but to put them on, and to animate them all with the spirit of religiousness,—if any hearer amongst you, beginning to perceive his own nothingness in the sight of God, be prompted to inquire, Wherewithal shall I appear before him? and not rest from the enquiry, till he flee from his hiding place,

to that everlasting righteousness which the Saviour hath brought in,—and if any believer amongst you, rightly dividing the word of truth, shall act on the principle that though nothing but the doctrine of Christ crucified can avail him for acceptance with God, yet he is bound to adorn this doctrine in all things. And knowing that one may acquiesce in the whole of such a demonstration, without carrying it personally home, we leave off with the single remark that every conviction not prosecuted, every movement of conscience not followed up, every ray of light or of truth not turned to individual application, will aggravate the reckoning of the great day,—and that in proportion to the degree of urgency which has been brought to bear upon you, and been resisted, will be the weight and the justness of your final condemnation. ¶

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## CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Editor,

I enjoyed your editorial on the doctrines of grace in the January–February 2020 issue of *The Gospel Magazine*. In particular, your comment about those who would ‘cry up free will’ reminded me of a sermon by Joseph Irons which I read last year. The sermon is entitled ‘The Eternal Reign of Zion’s King’ and was preached in Grove Chapel, Camberwell, on Lord’s Day morning, 11th May 1851. Here is what Irons said about crying down free will on that occasion:

### No Divided Allegiance

We will have no divided allegiances; we will not allow old free-will to share in the sovereignty of Christ; we will cry him down as a traitor and rebel to the

last breath we can utter, and insist that Jesus must reign till he has put all enemies—and old free-will is the very worst of them—under his feet.

The above extract is taken from *Grove Chapel Pulpit* vol. 3 p.609. Some of your readers may be aware that 2019 marked the bicentenary of the opening of Grove Chapel. Joseph Irons was Minister of this chapel from its opening until his death in 1852 and was a great contender for covenant truth and the reformed faith.

Last year also marked the 190th anniversary of another event which is worthy or remembrance by those who love the doctrines of sovereign grace. I refer to the occasion

when William Tiptaft, then Vicar of Sutton Courtenay parish, Berkshire, preached his most famous sermon in St Helen's Church, Abingdon. The date was 25th December 1829 and his sermon, which was entitled 'His People', was based on Matthew 1:21, 'And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins'. Tiptaft certainly cried down free will on that occasion. In the course of his address he set forth the doctrines of grace most clearly, exposed false religion and declared the truth without fear or favour. Assembled in the congregation of some 5,000 people were the Mayor and

corporation, local clerics and other civic dignitaries, not a few of whom were enraged at the content of his address. It was a most separating sermon indeed and caused an uproar in the town! This sermon is well worth reading as it clearly sets forth the doctrines which Tiptaft had come to know and love. In the course of his message he quoted from the 39 Articles and the Scriptures extensively, showing that the truths he had preached were foundational to the Church of which he was then a Minister, and, most importantly, in accordance with the Word of God.

With Christian regards,  
Edward McNaghten

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### Searched and Known

*Donald MacLean*

*Reformation Press 2018. 68pp £5.40 pbk ISBN 978-1-872556-38-3*

The Rev. Donald MacLean (1915–2010) was a towering figure in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. He held ministerial charges for fifty-two years, first at Portree, Isle of Skye, and then at Glasgow, and served as Clerk of Synod for thirteen years continuously, and was three times its Moderator. Much more could be added.

This present work is a series of three sermons by Donald MacLean, lightly edited, on the subject of self-examination before the Lord's Supper, initially taking the text 'O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me', Psalm 139:1. MacLean's framework was the first part of the answer to Larger Catechism Q 171, 'They that receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves of their being in Christ, of their sins and wants; of the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, repentance'. Accordingly, the sermons are aptly titled in this publication 'Being in Christ' (this sermon including examination of sins and needs), 'Knowledge and Faith', and 'Repentance'. Each sermon is subdivided into sections with helpful sub-headings.

MacLean was the Church's theology tutor for nearly three decades and trained dozens of its ministers. These addresses are not his theological lectures, but are profoundly theological, practical and experiential sermons, without a whiff of pietism, delivered to his church at prayer meetings. In the pastoral ministry, it is of limited utility to possess a great store of theology if one cannot deliver the goods, but these sermons show that MacLean had the relatively rare gift of doctrinal clarity coupled with the desire that his hearers might experience union with Christ as he himself knew it. As in the best of sermons, there is a line of thought, a rich

vein that carries every attentive hearer, learned or unlearned, to the end.

MacLean discerns that for many who are approaching death, ‘much of the concern and trouble they have in connection with their soul arises from their failure to examine themselves as they ought to have done while they were on the way in this world.’ It is in self-examination, he says, that we ‘consider the measure of our growing in the knowledge of Christ—Christ’s person, Christ’s work, Christ’s fulness, Christ’s death and Christ’s love.’

So deeply has Arminianism made inroads within Evangelicalism that many confuse saving faith with assurance, and make assurance of the essence of faith. MacLean’s consistent Calvinism, reflecting the Westminster Standards, properly distinguishes these, and shows how they are related, noting that whereas the Arminian gospel assures sinners that ‘if they believe that Christ died for them, then they’ll be saved’, in truth ‘that is assurance, not faith.’ The present reviewer sees a similar misunderstanding in readers of Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* who believe that Christian is saved in that allegory when the burden falls from his back at the cross, whereas he was actually justified at the Wicket Gate hitherto; rather, it is at the cross, having been illuminated in the House of the Interpreter, that Christian receives assurance of grace and salvation.

Likewise, repentance should not be put ahead of justification, as MacLean says, ‘The gospel calls sinners to come to Christ, and you’re to come to Christ for *repentance*’, so ‘repentance comes in as the result of faith...in the order of logic, faith goes before repentance’. ‘I must press this’, he says, ‘repentance is an exercise of the regenerate soul’. On the other hand, the natural and unregenerate man ‘wants to weave repentance out of the belly of his own soul, and then he’ll come to Christ and say, “Lord, I’ve repented, pardon my sin.”’

As the Larger Catechism teaches, Christians are to be diligent in ‘examining themselves... of the truth and measure of their...repentance’. Repentance is not an evangelical grace that withers according to the measure of the Christian’s increase in sanctification. As MacLean teaches, ‘Repentance is a grace which needs to be exercised as long as we are in this world’; indeed we are to cultivate a habit of repentance, and examine ourselves as to ‘the reality of our repentance and whether we are growing in repentance.’

MacLean was at pains to emphasize that the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was instituted as a means of grace ‘for the nourishment of God’s people.’ It is difficult to imagine how any serious Christian could have heard (and now can read) these sermons without being drawn to seek closer union with Christ by being better prepared for receiving our Lord’s sacrament.

KMcG

## Preparing for Eternity

Alexander Nisbet

Reformation Press 2019. 92pp £6.30 pbk ISBN 978-1-912042-06-7

This material was originally posthumously published in 1694 as part of *An Exposition with Practical Observations Upon the Book of Ecclesiastes* by Alexander Nisbet (1623-69), minister at Irvine. Nisbet died in his mid-forties but had spent the last few years of his life preparing the exposition of Ecclesiastes, which helped him to review his life and times in the light of eternity. As a minister he had experience of others approaching death, including condemned Covenanters, whom he so encouraged that ‘when they came to die on the gibbet at Irvine, they died as honourably and cheerfully as anyone could who stood on the threshold of eternity.’

This book is the part of Nisbet's *Exposition* on Ecclesiastes chapter 12, 'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth', etc. There is a brief introduction by Matthew Vogan about Nisbet and this work, followed by Nisbet's overview of Chapter 12, and then a short chapter on each of the fourteen verses. This is not a commentary for the academic as it does not delve deeply into the original Hebrew, or rehearse the differing views of other commentators; it is instead an exposition for everyone, to be taken to heart by all, as all must face death. The style is closer to a series of sermons than a technical aid.

Nisbet takes us through preparation for death, declining comforts and strength, increasing fears, physical weakening, final dissolution and the state after death (vv. 1–7). Although these topics may appear morbid, this is an exposition of God's holy word for our admonition, and, barring sudden death, a succession of 'evil days' (v.1) towards the end of our lives is to be expected. Nisbet's aim, faithful to the message of the Preacher, is to remind us that 'while men have health and strength and immunity from trouble, they should be forecasting evil days and unpleasant years, so that in the summer and harvest of youth and strength they may be making provision for the stormy winter of affliction and old age ...by ensuring the pardon of their sins through the blood of Christ'. Nisbet's exposition is a masterful, faithful exposition, full of relevant application, and a serious challenge to every reader, young or old.

As is well known, the Preacher speaks in figures about decay in old age. Whilst some outward anatomical features are easily identified in the passage (teeth, hair etc), Nisbet's identification of the elements in v.6 (the 'silver cord', 'golden bowl', 'pitcher', 'fountain', 'wheel' and 'cistern') as specific internal organs that have the alleged appearance of such things likely reflects interpretations going back to the Rabbis and an understanding of anatomy that relied upon the ancient Greeks. From that standpoint Nisbet's application is apposite, including that the visible and debilitating decay of the outward parts presages failure of the unseen inward organs, which is invariably fatal. Yet the present reviewer considers that the intended hearers of v.6 could know next to nothing about detailed internal anatomy, so that figures of speech based thereon must fail. Rather, the figures of the cracked golden bowl, the shattered pitcher at the watering hole, and the smashed wheel at the well are surely breakages that men in their common experience would recognize as rendering a good functional design suddenly useless to its intended purpose, which here figures the effect of death.

Nisbet proceeds to the second part of the chapter (vv. 8–14) covering the Preacher's verdict and his diligence, his acceptable and wise words, profitable study, the fear of God, and the Last Judgment. This portion of the book is also crammed full of useful contemplations, exhortations, and application. There are few other commentaries on this chapter as helpful and penetrating as this.

This edition states that spelling, layout, punctuation and grammar have been modernized, which is doubtless a helpful concession to the reader, and that 'the English meanings of Scots words have been included in brackets'. Judiciously applied, this latter can be helpful, but we fear that it has been overdone and is sometimes irksome, as in the explanation that Nisbet's reference to 'every man' meant 'every person'.

Such technical reservations in no way overshadow the value of this short publication. This publication is profitable for every reader, and is highly recommended.

KMcG



**What it means to be mortal, and why the Body of Jesus was Immortal****Henry Cole, DD. Matthew Hyde (ed)***The Huntingtonian Press, 72A Upper Northam Road, Hedge End, Southampton.***116pp hb £8.95 (plus p&p £1.70)**

The name of Henry Cole is most probably unknown to most readers of *The Gospel Magazine*, however between the years 1824 and 1857 he regularly contributed articles in the magazine using the pseudonym of 'Theophilus'. He was the author of a number of small volumes doctrinal, homiletic and polemic, and also the translator of a number of Martin Luther's Works as well as writings of John Calvin.

The volume before us is a doctrinal work in which Cole defends the view that the body of the Lord Jesus Christ was immortal, and not subject to death. The Lord Jesus only died because he laid down his life, it was not taken from him by the cruel execution on Calvary. He considers his subject under three headings: 'I. The true and real meaning of the English adjective Mortal. II. The awful and inevitable consequences of its application to the body of Jesus Christ. III. The insubvertible truth that the blessed body of Christ was ever Immortal' (p.47). This is not just an abstract metaphysical discussion entered into by Cole. The subject matter is of great importance to the child of God. It is the difference between One who is a sinless Saviour and one who purports to be a sinless saviour but is subject to the limits of sinful, fallen, human corruption, who is no saviour at all.

Dr Hyde in his introduction sketches some of the controversies concerning the immortality of the Lord Jesus Christ, and has added footnotes from Cole's Letter to the Rev. Edward Irving who blasphemously stated that Christ's flesh was sinful.

In these days of woolly theology, it is imperative that we be accurate in our views of the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not only do I recommend this book to the readers of *The Gospel Magazine*, but I am happy to be associated with its republication and wish it a wide circulation.

JEN

## POETRY

### I WILL SING OF THE MERCY OF THE LORD FOR EVER (PSALM 89:1)

THY mercy, my God, is the theme of my song,  
The joy of my heart, and the boast of my tongue:  
Thy free grace alone, from the first to the last,  
Has won my affections, and bound my soul fast.

Without thy sweet mercy I could not live here:  
Sin soon would reduce me to utter despair,  
But thro' thy sweet goodness my spirits revive,  
And he that first made me, still keeps me, alive.

Whene're I mistake, thy kind mercy begins  
 To melt me, and then I can mourn for my sins;  
 And, led by the Spirit to Jesus's blood  
 My sorrows are dry'd and my strength is renewed.

Thy mercy is more than a match for my heart,  
 Which wonders to feel its own hardness depart:  
 Dissolved by thy sunshine, I fall to the ground;  
 And weep to the praise of the mercy I found.

Thy mercy is endless, most tender and free;  
 No sinner need doubt, since 'tis given to me;  
 No merit will buy it, nor sin stop its course;  
 Good works are the fruits of its freeness and source.

The doors of thy mercy are open all day,  
 To the poor and the needy who knock by the way:  
 But those that bring cash in the mouth of their sack,  
 The rich and the proud shall be empty sent back.

Dear Father, thy merciful word is my all;  
 Thy promise supports me when ready to fall:  
 When enemies crowd to cause doubt and despair,  
 I conquer them all by thy spirit of prayer.

Thy mercy, in Jesus, exempts me from hell;  
 Of thy mercy I'll sing, and thy mercy I'll tell;  
 'Twas Jesus my friend, when he hung on the tree,  
 That opened the channel of mercy for me.

Great Father of mercies, thy goodness I own,  
 And the covenant-love of thy crucified Son:  
 All praise to the Spirit, whose whisper divine  
 Seals mercy, and pardon, and righteousness, mine.

J.S. (from *The Gospel Magazine*, March 1776)

*Verses 1, 8 and 9 appear, in a modified form, in the Praise! hymn book*

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BEFORE we can know Christ aright, we must know and feel ourselves to be guilty, Hell-deserving sinners. Christ is a SAVIOUR; and it is folly to talk of loving HIM without feeling our NEED of him.

(From *The Gospel Magazine*, 1885)

## MINISTRY

**BIDEFORD, DEVON:** *North Road Chapel*. Consecutive Expository Ministry. AV, *Christian Hymns*. LORD'S DAY 10.45 am and 6.30 pm. *Minister:* Mr R.J. Steward. [northroadchapel.org](http://northroadchapel.org). [nrcbideford@gmail.com](mailto:nrcbideford@gmail.com).

**CHELTENHAM.** *Providence Baptist Chapel*. Lord's Day services, 10.30 am and 6.30 pm. Bible Study and Prayer Meeting, Wednesdays 7.30 pm. Use AV and *Christian Worship*. *Pastor:* Mr Pooyan Mehrshahi. Tel. 01242 245116.

**FRISTON, SUFFOLK:** *Baptist Church*, Mill Road IP17 1PH (4 miles from Aldeburgh, 3 miles from Snape Maltings). Lord's Day services: 10.45 am and 2 pm. Bible Study Tuesdays 7.30 pm. AV and *Gospel Hymns*. Reformed Evangelical worship. *Pastor:* Michael Harley. [fristonbaptistsuffolk.org.uk](http://fristonbaptistsuffolk.org.uk). Tel 01728 602657.

**SUFFOLK:** *Wattisham Chapel*. Evangelical and Reformed services each LORD'S DAY 10.45 am, 2.30 and 6.30 pm. Metrical Psalms and hymns. AV only used. Telephone 01449 612524.

**WOLVERHAMPTON:** *St Silas Church of England (Continuing)*, 49 Long Street, WV1 1HU. Sunday Morning Prayer 11am. Holy Communion as notified. AV and BCP used. For directions, parking and other details please phone 01785 254687.

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