

MAY-JUNE 2020

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The Gospel Magazine

'Occupy till I come' • None Just • The Gospel of Jesus Christ

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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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EDITORIAL

IN the beginning God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone.' In his infinite wisdom, love and mercy God created the woman, and brought him to the man to be his wife. The marriage service in the Book of Common Prayer gives three reasons why marriage was ordained of God. The third reason given is that it is 'for the mutual society, help and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.'

Our government, taking its cue from many other governments, and from the 'experts', has concluded that it is good that man should be alone. We are meant to keep ourselves at home at present, as much as we can. We are meant to keep ourselves apart from the rest of our family in the same house, if we display any of the symptoms of the Coronavirus. We are meant to observe 'social distancing' when we take our state-mandated daily exercise, or when we take ourselves to the shops for our 'necessities'.

One effect of the harsh measures has been a measurable decline in the death

rate, compared with the death rate seen in other years. Fewer people died in the first three months of 2020, across Europe, than have died in the comparable periods since 2016. This includes all age groups. The information is available from EuroMOMO (European monitoring of excess mortality for public health action). This means, at the very least, that it is impossible to accurately measure the mortality rate from the Coronavirus. The implication is that, if we all observed the basic hygiene instructions, and kept ourselves away from others when we are sick, there would be a marked decline in the mortality rate. Of course, one is bound to ask what would be the long-term effect. It stands to reason that some who were spared death by a variant of 'flu or some similar seasonal illness would instead succumb to another illness or disease. Death will not be denied, but will take us all in the end.

All of this is perhaps of academic interest. What is of greater concern is the effect the measures are having on the Christian presence in our nation.

Churches were, on the whole, very quick to signify their intention to close, even before the government made such closures a requirement. The rush to online or virtual services was quite extraordinary to behold. Yes, it is a great blessing that we are able to 'meet' via our computers, smartphones and tablets, but I do not suppose any of us consider this to be a proper alternative to physical gathering. Those who have tried to join in services in this way soon discover the awkwardness of the time lag, and it requires a moderator of some sort to decide who speaks, and when. Of course, not everyone is able to meet like this, and churches and pastors are having to make provision for those members who are cut off from the virtual world.

Eventually, however, by the grace of God, we will return to a semblance of normality. I say a semblance because we cannot know, at this stage, what may or may not change permanently as a consequence of the present unique circumstances.

When things do return to normal, what will the church find? I suggest a few things.

First, that it really is irrelevant to the majority of our nation. When access to church, its services and its place in daily life, was last denied, the nation suffered terribly. This was in 1208, when England was placed under an interdict by the Pope in retaliation for King John's interference in ecclesiastical matters. The interdict was, in effect, a church strike. Infants were no longer baptised. In a society that was taught that the unbaptised would go into limbo at death, this was a terrifying prospect for the deceived parents. Weddings were no longer conducted. This led to an increase in illegitimate births, human nature being what it is. Confession, absolution and penance were closed off. Those whose consciences troubled them could find no rest, not knowing that we are to come to

our heavenly Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. Burials were not carried out, and the horror of storing corpses without refrigeration need only be imagined. Burials conducted without the priest were not counted as Christian burials, and so the hopes of the religious were sorely tested. The overall effect was intended to make the population rise up against the King, and demand that he submit to the Pope. He did, and the nation suffered as a result, until Henry VIII threw off the yoke of papal suppression. By the grace of God this action, coupled with the rediscovery of the true text of Scripture and the doctrine of justification by faith, allowed our nation to come under the sound of the authentic gospel.

But today there is no outcry against the closure of churches. Today, there is more worry about the closure of pubs and parks, not about places of worship. Religion is irrelevant to most people, and so the shutting of church doors has no impact on them.

Secondly, that some of its members think like the world. When we are able once more to meet again, in public worship, in the buildings set apart for that glorious privilege, how many will be missing? How many familiar faces will have decided that they can do without such services? How many will conclude that the inconvenience of getting ready for church on Sunday morning and evening is not worth the effort? Such opinions will be alien to some, who will rejoice, even with tears, to be back in the familiar setting. They will tremble as they lift their voices in praise, and they will hang on the words of the minister, as he reads the Scriptures, leads in prayer, and preaches the word of life. They will greet their fellow believers with a warmth and sincerity not seen for some time, as the realisation of the preciousness of Christian fellowship is brought

home to them. But they will also be acutely aware of the gaps. Sadly, some will be caused by the great and irresistible end of all flesh. Some, more sadly still, will be caused by the falling away of a few, perhaps more, who have decided that they really can do without church. May it not be true of any of us.

Thirdly, that our knowledge of the truth is less than it ought to be. The period of absence from the fellowship, and the silencing of preaching, has exposed our weakness. We understand that we depended on the pulpit more than we had realised. We come to see that we lived hand to mouth as regards our spiritual diet, failing to lay anything in store against a season of famine such as we have endured. Too late we awaken to the warnings and admonitions of those who exhorted us to read books, and to have a little library of suitable material from which to feed our souls. Yes, we have kept up our daily Bible reading, but we have found ourselves running out of strength, because we lacked input from the wisdom of those who are especially called and equipped for the ministry. May we learn from past mistakes, and be made stronger by our experience.

Fourthly, may all our experience teach us the faithful, unchangeable mercy of our

gracious heavenly Father. We have not been left, nor forsaken. Our situation may have changed, and our stays and comforts may have been removed for a season, but we have learned to lean on Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. God does not change, and therefore we are not consumed, though our sins deserve only the fulness of divine wrath. The precious promises of our God, confirmed to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, and set before us in his eternal word, have been our comforts and the source of our strength through this dark and difficult time. Or have we instead relied on following government advice, and on keeping our hands cleaner than our consciences? Have we isolated ourselves from bodily contamination but allowed our souls to be corrupted? Have we tended our spiritual needs as carefully as we have tended our gardens in this time of enforced inactivity for so many? The day is coming when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. How ashamed will any of us be in that day, concerning our living now?

May the Lord grant blessing and mercy on us now, that we may be strong to proclaim the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to our friends and neighbours in the days, weeks and months ahead. ¶

God is sweetened in Christ to our understandings: he lays by his fury to unveil his mercy, and sticks the sting of justice in Christ, to receive us into the bosom of his love. It is a strong consolation, that if God kept to his own design, formed in his own breast from eternity, and discovered to the world in Christ, to advance the riches of his grace, no penitent and believing sinner can despair, but rather hath an argument that God will pardon him, because it is suitable to the design he had from eternity, and the manifestation thereof in time; for why should he prepare all things for man's recovery, before man's fall foreseen by him, and decreed to be permitted? Why should he provide a medicine before the disease, and fix upon a certain way to pardon rebels before they had a being to rebel, if he had no intention to apply it.

Stephen Charnock

A SERMON ON EXODUS 3

by THE EDITOR

The chapter in view deals with the call of Moses. That call took place at the burning bush. By that call, Moses was given assurance that the Lord was with him, and would bring about his purpose for Israel as promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is, therefore, a chapter that is of vital importance in the unfolding narrative of redemption we find in Scripture.

This being so, let us consider the chapter, and see what we may learn from it.

1. Let us ask, in the first place, what brought Moses here

The early life of Moses has been given in the first two chapters, from the remarkable circumstances of his birth, the preservation of his infant life from those who would take it, and the privilege to which he was brought in the providence of God. But all this he renounced, 'choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season' (Hebrews 11:25). In this spirit he intervened when the Egyptian hit the Hebrew (Exodus 2:11f), supposing his people would understand that the Lord had sent him to deliver them (Acts 7:25). They did not, and in order to become their saviour, he had to forsake his splendid home, his privileged life, and all the comforts he enjoyed, and instead remove to a far country and labour there as a shepherd.

It was a life of humility after the power of early years. It was a life of labour after the ease of early years. It was a life of hardship after the privileges of early years. It was a life that required him to live almost as a sheep: he must go where they go, at the

same speed at which they go, and endure the same weather and conditions they endure. Like them, he must sleep under the stars, be on guard against wild beasts, and suffer the same heat and cold. His fare, like theirs, was simple and rough, and his suffering was comparable to theirs.

And yet he was content in this work, and spent fully forty years at it, settling to the new life of a shepherd, husband and father. He may have been away from home for long periods of time, and he may have had to endure a degree of suffering, but nothing suggests he complained against any of it. It was in this pursuit that he was brought to the burning bush, and it would be here he would know the Lord's will for him, and endure the test of faith before setting out on his mission.

In this we should see parallels with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who is fully God, the second person of the blessed Trinity, the one by whom all things were made, and without whom was not anything made that was made, condescended to leave his Father's realm and humble himself in the form of a man. He divested himself of his glory and majesty, and was born into the home of a carpenter from Nazareth. In this he did not complain, but, for the sake of his perishing people, was content to endure all things as his Father willed them. This is condescension far greater than we can imagine, since it is impossible for us to know or even imagine existence in heaven in order to compare it with life on earth. And even if we could, we cannot know the fulness of Godhead, with its purity and power, and then come into a sinful world and feel the

weight of wickedness in everyone and everything. Jesus Christ is unique in this.

2. Let us ask in the second place what drew Moses to the burning bush

Moses was drawn by a sight that required investigation. The Lord did not use some ordinary matter and trust that Moses would have the sense, wisdom or perception to understand its significance. Instead, he used something extraordinary, a bush that burned but was not consumed.

It is sometimes suggested that Moses would have seen burning bushes on other occasions, since they are assumed to be reasonably common in deserts. However, why would a shepherd lead sheep into such a place? The desert here is the wilderness, the wild country where sheep can roam freely—but so can wild animals. The role of the shepherd was to protect the sheep, and to lead them from pasture to pasture, and from water to water.

What drew Moses was not the sight of a burning bush, but the sight of a bush that kept on burning. The fire did not consume the leaves and branches, and so it remained alight for long enough for Moses to take notice. As he observed the bush, he saw that it remained intact: the flame was on it, but not from it, so to speak. And so, natural curiosity being what it is, he approached.

The Lord, however, was not looking for the first naturally curious person to come along. He intended to meet Moses at this place and reveal himself to the man, and the man to the mission. That this is so is made evident by 4:14, and the information that Aaron is already on his way to see his brother. Rather, both events—and much else—were as the Lord willed and directed them.

In a word, this is the work of God the Holy Spirit. It was he who laid on Moses's heart the desire to visit his afflicted people, to renounce

the wealth and privileges of his upbringing, and to intervene between the Egyptian and the Hebrew. It was the Holy Spirit who led Moses to that particular well, 2:15, at that particular time, 2:16, and to behave in that particular way, 2:17. We may not, then, think that the Holy Spirit was not leading Moses now, as he came to the burning bush.

Again, we have a clear parallel with our Lord Jesus Christ. After his baptism he was led, or even driven, by the Spirit into the wilderness, Luke 4:1 etc. It was not as if our Saviour was ignorant of his work, or the purpose of his coming: it was, however, necessary that the flesh be subject to the spirit, and that means his human nature being subject to God's will. And so he was led by the Spirit. All that came to him, and in particular at this stage the temptations, did so because God willed it. The work of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of our Saviour Jesus Christ is stated plainly in the Gospels, and yet the significance is often overlooked. This is usually because of incorrect views about the God-man: views which focus on his Godhead but overlook his humanity, and which assume that he was God merely disguised as a man. He was not: he is both God and man, and as such knew in his Godhead all that God knows, and knew in his manhood all that a man can know, or that God chose to reveal to him. If we better understood the role of the Holy Spirit towards Christ in his incarnate state, we would make fewer errors regarding the role of the same Spirit in our lives.

3. Let us ask, next, Moses found at the burning bush

In a word, he found the Lord. He was called by name, and, on responding, was commanded to keep a respectful distance, and to remove his shoes, v. 5. And then the Lord revealed himself, saying, 'I am the God of

thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' That he called himself 'the God of thy father' shows that Moses was born into a faithful family. This is shown by his parents' decision to hide the infant, and then to entrust him to the Lord when he could no longer be hidden. In that he called himself the God of the patriarchs, he left Moses in no doubt that he was the God who had revealed himself already to Moses's forebears. I will say more on one important aspect of this later.

Why did the Lord God reveal himself to Moses in this way? He did not appear to Abraham, Isaac or Jacob as a flame of fire. Rather, he spoke to them, in visions and dreams, and perhaps in other ways also. He appeared to Abraham to reveal the birth of Isaac. He showed himself in power in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But he never appeared as a flame of fire in a bush.

To answer this, we need to consider two matters: the limited knowledge of God among the people of the day; and the nature of the work to which Moses was being called.

The Lord had shown himself in the work of creation, and Adam and Eve had no doubt whatsoever about God and his character. The gracious command of Genesis 2:16f, and the dreadful consequences of disobedience, 3:15ff, show this. Enough was known for Adam and Eve to teach their children to offer sacrifices, as Genesis 4 shows, and the appearance of the Lord to Noah (in what manner we are not told) indicates the ongoing dealings of the Lord with the people of earth, according to his will, and for the working out of his sovereign purposes.

Up to this point, and for centuries afterwards, there was no written record of this. We are not to suppose that writing did not exist, but that the dealings of God with man were taken so seriously that they were talked

about openly. People did not keep these things to themselves, but discussed them freely. What one knew was communicated to others, so that there was no need for a written record. Given the long life-span of people in those days, that knowledge, coupled with time to think, permitted the righteous to ponder and contemplate the things of God. They had opportunity to understand the Lord and his ways, and to instruct others in these things. A written word was not needed yet.

Moses, however, lived far from the company of righteous people. He had been some forty years a shepherd, and it is unclear what his new family knew of God. His father-in-law is called the priest of Midian, and so was descended from Abraham. How much of the truth he retained we cannot know, although he was a pious man, and we dare not think that Moses would have married into the family of an open idolater. Therefore the Lord must reveal himself to Moses in such a way as to command his attention and draw him unmistakably to hear the word of God.

The Lord must reveal himself to Moses in a clear and unambiguous manner, in order that there be no possibility of doubt later. Given that Moses will be sent back to Egypt, to the place of oppression and suffering, and to one who hated him, it was vital that this man have fulness of assurance regarding his God-given and God-ordained mission. And so the Lord revealed himself as a flame of fire, a symbol of both purity and of power. Fire cleanses, and fire destroys: and God would redeem his people by destroying all Egypt if needed. As the narrative unfolds we will see Moses being given additional confirmations: the leprous hand made whole again, and the rod becoming a serpent and then a rod again. And when Moses will complain that he is not a speaker, the Lord will show that he has already provided for

that need, in bringing Aaron to meet Moses. Thus Moses found the Lord, or rather, was found of the Lord, at the burning bush. The revelation made known to him meant he had no doubt that it was indeed the God of his fathers whom he had met, and the manner of meeting left him in no doubt as to the character of the God of his fathers. In this way he was being prepared for the work to which he was being called.

4. Finally, let us ask what Moses learned at the burning bush

Moses learned something about God. He learned something, more particularly, about God's faithfulness to the covenant made with Abraham, and renewed with Isaac and Jacob. That this is so is shown by the statement that the Lord had seen the affliction of his people, and heard their cry, and had come to deliver them, verses 7–8. Since the Lord had declared himself to Moses to be 'the God of thy father' (v. 6), and since he called Israel 'my people' (v. 7), it follows that this is all based on the covenant. We know the terms of the covenant, since they are repeated on a number of occasions in Genesis (12:2–3; 7: 13:14–17: 15:5, etc). In 15:13–16 the very time at hand was declared—that Israel would be slaves in a foreign land, but that the Lord would bring them out and settle them in the promised land.

In particular, the Lord spoke of a token, v. 12. To what does this refer: to the burning bush, the future event—or both? If to the bush, then Moses is being told that, as the Lord had shown himself to his chosen servant here, so he would show himself to Pharaoh there. If to the future event, then Moses is being told that the proof of God's presence will be manifested when obedience to the commission brings Moses and the people back to the very spot. If to both, then

there is a present help and a future, and the two stand together. We take it that the sign of the burning bush is intended to convey to Moses the assurance that the hard work of confronting Pharaoh will not be in vain.

Then, Moses asked how should he answer if the people wanted to know the name of the God who had met him, v. 13. This implies that the identification of God as 'the God of thy father,' etc, v. 6, was not sufficient for the Israelites. If this is a new revelation, then God must reveal something more about his character. He does: He says, 'I am that I am', v. 14. This is the fullest name God can have, as far as we are capable of understanding it. He says, in effect, 'I am him which is, and which was, and which is to come' (Revelation 1:4). God refers to his underived, eternal and unchangeable existence, the one true God who alone has power to act. He does not say, 'I am *what* I am', but 'I am *that* I am'. In other words, 'I exist that I exist.' God is self-sustaining, depending on nothing and nobody, but instead giving life to all (Acts 17:28). So, if Israel were to ask Moses for the name of God (that is, for a further revelation of his nature, character or being) this answer is the fullest that could ever be given. No more can be said.

That the Lord is truly the self-existent one, whose power is above all, is shown by the fact that he has seen the affliction of his people, v. 16. They are not so far from him, nor so far beneath him, that he is not intimately familiar with every aspect of their suffering. Furthermore, he has said he will bring them out, which is a reference to Genesis 15 and the covenant made with Abraham.

If more evidence were needed, note also that the Lord promises two further things: that Israel will believe and obey, and that Pharaoh will not, vv. 18ff. This will open the way for a plain demonstration of the divine power, when Israel comes out of Egypt

carrying away her wealth, vv. 21ff. This will not be a fleeing of danger by the fearful, but a conquest of former captors by the new victors. The power of God will bring this to pass because he, the self-existent one, has decreed it. This is the power of God.

Application

We know that Moses expressed doubt about his suitability, and that the Lord granted further signs to him, 4:1–17, to confirm his word. We have been given the greatest sign of all, and it has been confirmed in the clearest manner possible.

The greatest sign of God's saving power is the cross of Jesus Christ. I do not mean the piece of wood, the very tree, to which he was nailed, but the whole event. The coming of Christ in the incarnation was to be the propitiation for our sins. 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' By his life of active obedience, keeping perfect righteousness, Jesus Christ showed himself to be the lamb without spot or blemish. By his passive obedience, submitting to the Father's will for him in the matter of his death, he showed himself to be the beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased. We must therefore hear the Son. What do we hear? We hear his great cry from the cross, 'It is finished.' What is finished? His suffering? Yes, but more than that, his work of redemption. The will of the Father has been fulfilled, and there is no more work of special salvation needed. We are unable to add anything: no righteousness of our own, for we have none: no works

of our own, for they are all sinful: to worth of our own, for we are worthless viewed in ourselves. And when we hear the cry, 'It is finished', we see also our blessed Saviour bowing his head and giving up the ghost. He died on the cross, and was buried: and on the third day he rose again. He is the victor over death and the grave. His power to save is beyond doubt. He rose from the dead to grant eternal life to as many as he will. The sign of Christ's finished work is glorious.

The confirmation of the sign is clear. It is not that we have archaeological evidence for the life and death of Christ, and we cannot go to a tomb and know it to have been his. We have the eyewitness testimony of the women, and of the apostles. We have the Scriptural account of the going forth of the gospel, of the salvation of sinners, and of the growth of the church. But we have something else: our own experience of Christ. It is vital that we have an experience of Christ, of the coming of the gospel, of the conviction of sin, of the humility of repentance, and of the blessing of the knowledge of forgiveness. In all this we are comforted by faith in Jesus Christ, to whom we look in love and trust. In his presence we rest, and in his footsteps we follow. His words feed, comfort and guide us, and we rejoice to be sheep of his flock. This experience is not something we can have by any other means than grace, and it is testimony to us of the truth of the gospel.

May this be the experience of each of us. May we all rejoice in the goodness of our gracious Lord and Saviour, who died for us. ¶

The peacemaker is the one who demonstrates the harmony of the Scriptures, where others see only a contradiction: the Old with the New, the law with the prophets, Gospel with Gospel. Accordingly, having imitated the Son of God, he shall be called a child of God, having his work grasped of the 'spirit of adoption'.

Cyril of Alexandria (d. AD 444) on Matthew 5:9

MADE TO MEASURE

by CARINE MACKENZIE

We needed to get a new bedside table. We saw one in the shop that we liked. But would it fit into the space? We had to take the tape measure and work out the space we had available and, yes, the new piece of furniture did fit. It was important to measure up before we took delivery.

Measurements are important. When a tailor is planning to make a suit, he has to take lots of measurements. Taking the wrong measurement could result in an ill-fitting jacket.

When you bake a cake, it is important to measure out the correct amounts of each ingredient. Inaccuracies could lead to a big disappointment. In all sorts of activities measurements are vital—whether it is building a house or putting up a shelf.

The Lord God gave very specific instructions to Moses about the construction of the tabernacle and all that went into it. The ark of the testimony was to be made of shittim wood—two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits broad and one and a half cubits high (a cubit is about 45 centimetres). God gave Moses the precise measurements for the table for the shewbread, the altar for the burnt offering and the altar for incense. The exact measurements for each of the curtains that made up the tabernacle were prescribed by God. God gave special skill to Bezaleel and Aholiab to make all that God had commanded for the tabernacle.

God gave instructions to his people to ensure that the weights and measures they used were just and fair for all. (Deuteronomy 25:15). Dealing unfairly in that way is an abomination to the Lord (Proverbs 11:1) but a just weight is his delight.

David the Psalmist knew something of his own weakness and his need of God. He knew that his life was totally in God's hands. 'Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is,' he prayed, 'that I may know how frail I am.' That would be a good prayer for us too. Only God knows the length of our life, whether long or short. Our days are completely under his control. What a comfort that should be.

God sees and knows everything about our daily life. His grace is sufficient for us and is given to us 'according to the measure of the gift of Christ' (Ephesians 4:7). God gives each one of his children a spiritual gift to use in his service. He portions this out, or measures it out to each one according to his sovereign will and good pleasure.

There are some things that cannot be measured. Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:19, that God's power to us who believe is exceeding great—far greater than anything we could measure. His power in creating the world and in sustaining it every day, shows us his power. But we can understand only a little of it. We cannot fully grasp the power of God's righteous wrath either. 'Who knoweth the power of thine anger?' Moses asked in Psalm 90:11. 'Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.' The only one who fully felt the power of God's wrath was the Lord Jesus Christ, as he experienced being forsaken by his Father—suffering the punishment for the sins of his people. He knew the full measure of God's wrath so that we can escape.

Another immeasurable thing is the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:7). Our finite minds just can't take in the wonder of God's kindness and love to us. 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' Paul asked in Romans

8.35. He goes through a long list of circumstances that we might think would indicate that God did not love us—tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or sword. But no, none of these things separate us from God's love. Paul then gives us another list—death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, any other creature. Not one of these can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. What amazing immeasurable love.

If God is for us, nothing can be against us. He is so much for us that he 'spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all' (Romans 8:32). What an immeasurable, 'unspeakable gift' (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Bible Search

Look up the verse to find the missing words. The initial letters of the correct answers will give you word from the story.

1. Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and _____ out heaven with the span... (Isaiah 40:12)
2. From whom (Christ) the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the _____ working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:16)
3. The wind ceased: and they were sore _____ in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. (Mark 6:51)
4. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the _____ by measure unto him. (John 3:34)
5. And God gave Solomon wisdom and _____ exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. (1 Kings 4:29)
6. Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and _____ over, shall men give into your bosom. (Luke 6:38)
7. And lest I should be _____ above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh. (2 Corinthians 12:7)
8. And [they] were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he _____ both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak. (Mark 7:37)

9. I lifted up mine _____ again and looked and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. (Zechariah 2:1)
10. And Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left _____ it: for it was without number. (Genesis 41:49)
11. Thou feedest them with the bread of _____; and givest them _____ to drink in great measure. (Psalm 80:5)
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A PRAYER FOR PRESERVATION

by PETER MURCOTT (Douglas, Isle of Man)

'Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust.' Psalm 16:1

PSALM 16 is subtitled 'Michtam of David'. Some have said that 'Michtam' means 'golden', though the majority of commentators doubt this. Another suggestion is 'watch over', though this does not make complete sense as it stands.

Maybe the best suggestion is that it means 'secret', in the sense that it takes one into the depths or realms of divine life.¹ As such, it reveals something of the secrets of Jehovah, as to how much he is willing to reveal (*see* Deut. 29:29). This is supported by reference to the word's origin that means 'conceal'. That certainly sounds convincing. Did not Christ Jesus say that it was God, and not flesh and blood, who had revealed to Peter that Jesus is the Christ? So it was that God the Holy Spirit by revelation made known those things which God the Father would have known; and this revelation in the canon of Scripture stands for ever (Psalm 119:89).

¹ *The Englishman's Bible Encyclopaedia*, 1878, p.473 says that the word comes from the Hebrew 'katham' 'to conceal', and that David liked using enigmatic expressions.

Preservation

The Psalmist opens with a prayer that emphasises his complete and utter dependence on God, saying: 'Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust.' Preservation nowadays is often associated with buildings, considered to be of importance, usually because of their design or their associations. In that sense, it involves keeping things as they are and of positively protecting them against any change or decay. The latter point is one of the aspects here. But 'preservation' has a much wider purpose for Christians—not only that they should be prevented from falling under the wiles of the devil, but that they should move mightily forward, growing in grace, and in the knowledge and love of the Lord.

So, in further pursuit of this, we ask:

1. Why does the Psalmist pray for preservation?

No reason is given in the first verse for the Psalmist's prayer beyond that he trusts in God. He doesn't mention any particular problem, such as a troublesome temptation

or a person, who constantly assails him, or a medical condition. To that extent, his words may be contrasted with Psalm 56:1–2: ‘Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High.’

Some hymn-writers have referred to specific dangers in the Christian life, such as Charles Wesley in ‘Forth in Thy name, O Lord, I go’:

Preserve me from my calling’s snare,
And hide my simple soul above,
Above the thorns of choking care,
The gilded baits of worldly love.

A General Prayer

But it would seem that Psalm 16 opens with a general prayer for protection against *all* temptation of whatever nature, knowing how easily one can be led astray. This is confirmed where the Psalmist adds a reference in verse 2 to his inherent weakness: ‘O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee.’ In other words, as he stands (and, maybe, like all of us, he often doesn’t!), he is nothing in comparison to God on whom he is totally reliant. Thus Psalm 16:1 is a very wise, appropriate, ongoing and humble prayer that acknowledges the spiritual battle against sin, the flesh and the devil in which believers are constantly engaged.²

Personal Responsibility

This verse bears a resemblance to the Lord’s Prayer, where it says: ‘Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ Those words acknowledge each Christian’s personal responsibility to resist temptation, and not to

tempt others! Satan cannot compel, unless we consent. It is true that he works hard to overpower our wills by his cunning devices.³ Therefore, surely this prayer for preservation and deliverance includes the recognition of each Christian’s personal responsibility for vigilance.

After all, there are more than adequate warnings in Scripture as to how the tempter operates. For instance, the Book of Proverbs advises on—

- what company to keep, and whom to avoid (27:17 and 22:24 & 25 respectively)
- the dangers of flattery (7:21 & 29:5)
- how to respond to temptation (4:14f etc.)
- how to be kept from temptation (4:13, 26)

Add to this the clear warning in Proverbs 19:27 about the dangers of error and of neglecting the means of grace: ‘Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge’, and the need for God’s protection becomes glaringly obvious. Therefore, consider—

2. What essential promise is implied here?

Return to Psalm 16:1: ‘Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust.’ Well, if one trusts in God, one must also trust in his Word. The two cannot be separated. If one truly trusts in God, and regards his revealed Word as sufficient for every need, one is surely promising to study and obey it.

The reason is that the world is always very near. By ‘the world’, one means its ungodly attitudes and temptations. It is, to say the least, very alarming how a growing number of Christians’ resistance to ungodliness is being severely worn down so that they sit on the fence, as it were. Is that really such a safe place to be?

² Ephesians 6:10–18 comes to mind; but there are other texts: e.g. 1 Peter 5:8, 2 Corinthians 2:9–14.

³ Can we say, in the words of 2 Corinthians 2:11, that ‘we are not ignorant of Satan’s devices’?

There's nothing more drear than being
 driv'n by fear
 To defer to mortal man's ways;
 Yet man in his sins is but dust full of
 wind,
 A heart-beat that measures his days.

The danger's intense for all those on the
 fence
 (That bound'ry 'twixt darkness and
 light);
 Their prospect is dire—who reside on
 barbed wire,
 And imagine that they're sitting tight.

Eternal praise be, gracious Lord, unto
 Thee;
 Great peace surrounds those who
 attend⁴
 To Thy promises giv'n, fully-settled in
 heav'n,⁵
 Secured by Thy love without end.

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Therein lie the alternatives. One is either overcome by the world, or one overcomes the world by faith. So we are assured in 1 John 5:4: 'For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.' That is what Christians urgently need to know if the current capitulation to the ways of the world is ever going to be reversed. Therefore, fall on your knees in fervent prayer, saying, 'O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary' (Judges 6:11f).

⁴ See 1 John 5:4 about faith in God overcoming the world.

⁵ Psalm 63:1 & 2.

That is the prayer for preservation against living in defeat, such as the majority of the Israelites were, until God raised up Gideon at Ophrah, against seemingly impossible odds. Remember how Gideon's father, Joash, had capitulated to the forces of darkness by raising up an altar to Baal, until his own son's courage and obedience brought him abruptly to his senses (Judges 6:30f).

So ask yourself, where are you? What steps are you taking to resist the wiles of the world, and to live the true life of a faithful follower of Jesus? A very powerful preservative against being overcome by despair and inertia is to be found in 2 Peter 1:4–8: 'Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.'

Believers are called upon to build up their faith by—

- adding virtue,
- knowledge,
- temperance,
- patience,
- godliness,
- brotherly kindness,
- and finally, charity.

Peter says that anyone who lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off but if you do these things, 'ye shall never fall' (2 Peter 1:10)

What a glorious prospect, never to fall into despondency because of the world we live in! On the contrary, the more the darkness deepens, the more God's word will enlighten (Psalm 119:130) and reassure you, and will show you how to live, move and have your being (Acts 17:28). But the route to this is faith. So we end where we began: 'Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust.' ¶

‘OCCUPY TILL I COME’

by EDWARD MALCOLM (Reading)

Some thoughts on the state of the Church under the present lockdown

THE churches of our nation are closed. Not a single one is permitted to be open. One or two have chosen to flout the law, and are attempting to carry on ‘business as usual’. One wonders how many people are entering those buildings, and for what purpose. A recent letter in the *Daily Telegraph* from one clergyman implied that the main reason for being open was that parishioners might come and make their confession to the ‘priest’. A church of a very different stamp has been reported to be under investigation from the Charity Commission after it was found to be selling an oil to heal the purchaser of the Coronavirus. It was one among many such healing oils being offered.

On a more serious note, congregations small and large, Reformed, Arminian, liberal, conservative, Evangelical, Ritualistic, and every other sort imaginable, are closed. The voice of praise has been, if not silenced, then certainly muted. How many churches can sing when they ‘meet’ over the internet, with the time lag and buffering problems associated with the medium? How many congregations are actually meeting in this way, and how many are recording a service, and inviting people to come and ‘view’ it later?

Where is preaching? The sermon must be prepared, usually at least as far as notes (I make no issue about how a man preaches: each must do according to his ability, and to the limitations of his situation), and then is declared to the congregation. Where there is no congregation, how can a man preach properly? The response of the congregation

is part of the sermon. When people look up eagerly, the preacher is encouraged to expand his theme. When they shift uncomfortably, he knows he has touched a nerve. When their heads drop or their eyes wander, he knows he must regain their attention. But when he cannot see the congregation in ‘real time’ he is denied this aspect of his ministry.

What of prayer meetings? It is not possible to meet in person, although the problems of ‘virtual’ prayer meetings are less than those of ‘virtual’ services. But of course there are many folk, particularly the older members of our congregations, who have no access to such things.

Pastoral visitation is impossible. We can speak to each other on the telephone, and we can email one another—and the post still operates (at least, at the time of writing!). But this is no substitute for sitting down with someone and seeking to apply the balm of Gilead to troubled souls, after they have poured out their grief. Our dear folk must make the best of their lot, and seek to be physicians to their own souls.

The celebration of the Lord’s Supper is another issue. Some churches consider it to be acceptable to hold a ‘virtual’ communion, where each participant has their own bread and wine to use at the appropriate moment. Some churches see this as not being communion in any recognisable form, and so are refraining from the Supper for the duration of the lockdown. One writer has even suggested that it would be appropriate to view the present constraint as amounting to the

church having been excommunicated by God himself. Since we cannot participate on the one cup and the one bread, a 'virtual' communion is no communion. Perhaps an enforced absence from the Lord's Table will make our attendance seem all the more precious when we can resume.

The greatest difficulty is that the voice of gospel witness has been silenced in our land. If ever there was a time when the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ was needed, it is surely now. If ever there was a time when the reality of divine wrath and judgment needed to be heard, it is surely now. If ever there was a time when the clear call to repentance was needed, it is surely now. If ever there was a time when the promise of the resurrection to eternal life for all who are in Christ needed to be proclaimed, it is surely now.

And yet the government has seen fit to silence the church, to close the public buildings, and to deny us our public voice.

What shall we do? How shall we occupy in the mean time?

Our greatest need must be to bring this matter to the Lord in prayer. He is the Head of the Church, and cries to anyone else, without first appealing to him, would be dishonouring to his name. When we cry to the Lord, we must do so as those who recognise a most important principle: 'the powers that be are ordained of God.' By this I do not mean that we are free to sit back and do nothing until politicians say otherwise. I do mean, however, that we are to recognise that the actions of governments are not outside the will of God. It is not as if our heavenly Father has not ordained this present situation. Why has he ordained it? Consider the state of the church generally. How far does it honour Jesus Christ, or preach his gospel, or exhort men and women to repent of

their sins? And how far does it encourage sin by calling good evil, and evil good? Is the church itself not ripe for judgment? Is this not a judgment of God? Let us take note of this, and humble ourselves accordingly.

Let us note also that, during the seventy years of exile, the land had rest from the wickedness of the people. Their lewdness, their drunkenness, their idolatry, blasphemy and hypocrisy were ended for a season, and the land no longer had to soak up the blood of violence, nor languish under the sound of wicked words. So for our churches today. In how many of them is error proclaimed as truth, and in how many of them is Christ dishonoured? For a season, such things are curtailed. What a relief it must be to buildings that have stood, in some cases for centuries, and which have heard the eternal gospel preached faithfully and boldly, to be delivered from the folly and error of the modernists. How much better for those who attend such buildings to not hear lies for a while. It may be that, in the interval, they will sober up, and begin to seek the truth.

Having said all this, we are in an intolerable situation. Spiritual liberty was hard-won in this nation. It began with the Protestant Reformers, who withstood to gross errors of the whore of Babylon. The antichrist was cast out of the land, and the truth was declared. Then came the period of conflict, when competing systems of church government oppressed those who were not in the ascendancy. Eventually toleration was granted, and then actual religious liberty. Dare we give up our hard-won freedoms? If so, we do not deserve to have them.

For as long as this situation prevails, we all have a solemn responsibility to discharge our office and duty as faithfully as we may. We must occupy, till Christ grant otherwise. Pray that this be soon. ¶

NONE JUST

by WYLIE W. FULTON (U.S.A.)

For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

THE only message we can give is to push the sinner *down* into the dust, and point to God *high* and lifted up on his throne. Men say, 'I don't want to hear that universal depravity doctrine.' For it is in the nature of those fallen the lowest to wish to place themselves upon the highest pedestal, and men of extremely low pedigree proclaim their own 'goodness' and self-worth. The Law of God has never hit home to their hearts, and the word of truth has no fixed place within their ideas and philosophy. So the messenger of truth is despised, cried down, opposed and cast out of their religious circles, while they cry, 'Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things; prophecy deceits' (Isaiah 30:10).

The natural man wants to be comforted and consoled in his sins, and in his own way of life. He will not listen to a doctrine that strips him, that shows his inherent depravity, his desperately wicked heart, and his unsaved condition before God. When the late Dr. A.R. Copeland of Texas was preaching in a certain place, he described the condition of man by nature, dealing with the third chapter of Romans and other key passages. When he dismissed the meeting, he noticed a very upset man making his way up to the preacher. 'That depravity doctrine you are preaching is not right; it is not the truth and I can't swallow it!' Brother Copeland quietly replied, 'You don't have to "swallow" it, my friend; it is *already in you*, and your actions toward the truth of God's Word prove it!'

The Book of Ecclesiastes presents for us

the best goals that men can have in this world of sin and death—yet he who attains to every goal possible still finds 'vanity of vanities' (Ecclesiastes 1:2). And when our Lord was here in person he called the people together in order to announce to them, 'What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' (Mark 8:36).

Men wish to live their lives regardless of Christ and his claims, and yet enter into life and peace in the process of rebellion and impenitence. This can never happen. While sin is what it is, while God remains upon his throne in absolute authority, and while the Word of God is before us—*the message must be clear: God will punish sin*. And apart from his blood redemption and effectual calling no man upon earth is just, and thus every soul is destitute of the right or privilege to stand before the Lord Almighty.

If I gained the world but lost the Saviour,
Were my life worth living for a day?

Could my yearning heart find rest and
comfort

In the things that soon must pass away?

If I gained the world, but had no Saviour,
Would my gain be worth the life-long
strife?

Are all earthly pleasures worth comparing
For a moment with a Christ-filled life?

...

Oh, what emptiness!—without the
Saviour

'Mid the sins and sorrows here below!

And eternity, how dark without Him!—

Only night and tears and endless woe!
 What, though I might live without the
 Saviour,
 When I come to die, how would it be?
 Oh, to face the valley's gloom without
 Him,
 And without Him all eternity!
 (Anna Olander, 1861–1939)

I want you to know that regardless of your earthly position and attainments, God still has this to say of you: 'Not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not.' 'And we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is not that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities' (Isaiah 64:6–7). And while men may have much information that is true—concerning God and his word, his Son and the manner of approach unto him in salvation—it's possible to yet be utterly destitute of the life of God in their souls. It is one thing to name the name of Christ; it is another to know him. It is one thing to outwardly utter a most expressive form of 'prayer,' it is another thing to know a heart-felt aspiration for the Saviour. It is one thing to talk the talk, quite another yet to 'walk the walk'.

Hear the authoritative and searching words of a Puritan:

A man may have the whole frame of divinity and of spiritual truths in his head, and yet they may have no influence on his heart. He may have a form of knowledge and yet feel no power of it (2 Timothy 3:5). 'An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge, and of the truth in

the law' (Romans 2:20). He may have a pattern of wholesome words (2 Timothy 1:13), and yet have no experience of the things signified by them. Nay, he may be much delighted with such knowledge, and not have his heart affected with the things which he knows in divinity. Though he knows what the true nature of love to God is, and of hatred of sin, yet his heart is not excited to love God or to hate sin. Though he knows Christ and grace [in theory, WWF], yet he doth not love, nor desire them, nor delight in them. Now this is a mere knowing knowledge.

(Thomas Goodwin, 1600–1679)

It is an empty 'knowledge' which does not work by love of the things professed, and does not have a single eye to Christ in the performance as well as the profession of these holy things.

'For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.'

I. A just man's qualities

1. *He 'doeth good.'* Now true good is like God; it is the outworking of genuine godliness within. And in order to 'do good' your every thought, word and work must be in complete harmony with the will of God. A truly 'just man' is in tune with God, for his thoughts and inward processes of reasoning are all the time in tune with his Creator and Redeemer. The Law of God he upholds and loves in every thought, every word and all his deeds.

When we think of 'doing good,' it is often in terms of kindness to neighbours, giving a few coins to the Salvation Army or the Red Cross. These things in themselves may be desirable, and yet may not be 'good' at all in the sense of our text—and as God surveys

the situation. To be a 'just' man, now, means that you are fully complying with the command to 'love God with all your heart, and mind and body, and your neighbour as yourself.' Are you doing it? Who would dare to stand up, square his shoulders and say, 'I am a good man; I am a just man; I am a better man than these publicans and sinners.' One took that position, but according to the Saviour he went again to his house dead in his own sins and trespasses—while the heart-stricken publican experienced a full sight of his own sin and condemnation, slapping himself on the breast because of his felt unworthiness to stand before God. This latter man is the one God delighted to 'justify,' to make him just and righteous by the blood-sacrifice in that temple, pointing to a Crucified Christ. Read Luke chapter 18.

2. *Then he 'sinneth not.'* This just man, this holy man, this God-approved man, has never missed the mark of complete obedience in either his thought life, his words or his deeds. He has never even thought in terms of sin! A 'just man' is a man that you locate here on earth who has not sinned, who does not sin, who has no desire to sin. Is that your position? If you would be called 'just' by the Thrice Holy One, it must be. But you consider this too strict, and you turn your eyes away from God's requirements—'this is unreal and impossible,' one says, and goes on in his merry way, continues his religious rounds of duty, but knows not the utter strictness of God's Holy Law. He lowers the standard to let himself in. But God knows nothing of any such compromise of his attributes of holiness and immutability. But as long as men live in apparent security and peace, enjoying themselves and their lesser apprehensions of God's justice and mercy, they truly are under the indictment of Ecclesiastes 8:11, 'Because sentence

against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.'

And so we see that if you choose to be justified and righteous by works or law-keeping, this is how narrow the way becomes. 'O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing' (Jeremiah 10:23–24). The 'hope of unjust men perisheth' (Proverbs 11:7), when they seek to direct and improve themselves up to a standard that God will accept. This is mockery of the absolute justice of the Holy One, and a denial of the total corruption of the sinner himself.

But this Book of Ecclesiastes, as we stated, is showing man 'under the sun' apart from grace, and showing him up as a rebel who is not concerned that the honour and glory of God be maintained, but only seeking to 'save his own skin.' Such a one is never saved. Are you guilty of trying to skirt around the Law and make it just a little thing, minimizing your offences to the point of 'mere human mistakes' that have no eternal consequences? Then, may God awaken you! God is holy, righteous, just and good. You are by nature the very opposite of your enthroned Creator and lying under his strict judgment and certain condemnation! Repentance and turning to Christ for mercy remain your only possible cure.

'For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.'

II. It should be readily apparent from the text that none are righteous, that all stand under total depravity and under definite condemnation. But listen further to the infallible Word of God.

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none that

understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes. (Romans 3:10–18)

Now, friend, this is every man and woman—in Adam’s fallen nature, including you and me, apart from God’s deliverance in Christ. And the Pharisees of the world, along with all forms of work-monger religionists, would teach that this man can grow up in ‘goodness’ of his own to the point of acceptance by Jehovah God! But it can never be! ‘None righteous, no, not one.’ ‘Not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not!’ Notice some words and Bible expressions to shed further light on our subject, ‘None Just.’

1. *Unjust.* This means, according to the dictionary, one who is not walking according to the Law; one who does not frame his ways rightly. An ‘unjust’ man, then, is one who has nothing but utter disregard for God’s truth. As already intimated, that is man, that is all men and women in their natural condition. But, oh, that unjust souls would pay close attention to these blessed words of gospel truth: ‘For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit’ (1 Peter 3:18). Here you have the Holy and Just One, the only One who can make an unjust sinner into a justified believer! Look to him, my unjust sinner friend! And then the next thought is:

2. *Ungodly.* The ungodly is one who is not like God, has no desire to emulate God, has no obedient heart towards God, and is conformed in every way to his father Adam. As Adam hid from God physically in the garden, so the sinner of today hides from God either in a round of worldly pleasure or of religious duty. He is ungodly, not yet knowing nor seeking for a precious promise of grace and mercy in deliverance. And in himself he must hear the solemn indictment: ‘Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous’ (Psalm 1:5). Oh that by grace he could be brought to the point of knowing and resting in the truth of the gospel: ‘For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly’ (Romans 5:6).

3. *Unrighteous.* It means not ruled by God’s principles; an unruly person; close akin to the thought of unjust. Are you such a one now, or have you ever been convinced that it was so with you? We must have this conviction of our unrighteousness before we will turn to the Lord and accept his righteousness. ‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon’ (Isaiah 55:7). There you have it, sinner, but I know you won’t obey this solemn word of Jehovah unless the Spirit has laid hold of your heart. We are all unrighteous and in our own hearts we desire to remain so. There is within the human breast no real comprehension of what the righteousness of God entails and no desire to learn this Divine wisdom. We pursue a course that must end in destruction, and we by nature love to have it so. Poor sinner, in this you ought to see why we hold to the doctrines of natural depravity and spiritual inability. ‘For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness,

and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth' (Romans 10:3–4).

4. *Unregenerate*. This shows that the fallen sinner is not yet renewed, not re-born, not principled according to God's kingdom—not born again, not newly created in Christ Jesus, but still in nature's darkness and death—that is the UNJUST man, the UNGODLY man, the UNRIGHTEOUS—which is the condition of every son of Adam. 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3), and thus will continue in nature's blindness.

5. *Unstable*. Here we see man as not steadfast, changing with every whim, seeking only the pleasure and self-fulfilment of the moment. How unstable are the sons of Adam! If they were convinced of the reality of their condition and grounded in the Word of Truth, they would be stable, sober, righteous and have a single eye to God and his glory. That's what is missing in the natural man, and here we see abundant evidence that 'church membership' (whatever its implications) will not change the fallen sons of Adam. They must be arrested and awakened by God himself. How shall such a man 'turn over a new leaf' or 'change garments' or 'mend his ways,' when he is described in the word of God as 'Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children' (2 Peter 2:14)? 'A double minded man is unstable in all his ways' (James 1:8). True stability and the firm resting place is found only when by God's grace a sinner is separated from himself and brought to Christ and founded upon the Solid Rock Christ Jesus (Matthew 7:25; Romans 9:33; 1 Corinthians 10:4).

6. *Unable and unfit*. This means the sinner has no power, no ability, no proper function in the kingdom of God; he is impotent in the things of God. 'No man can come to me,' says the Lord Jesus Christ—and this is a word of absolute authority, manifestly the truth of Divine revelation and of human experience—'No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him' (John 6:44). 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3). 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil' (Jeremiah 13:23). No man is able to work the works of God until God has given that man the nature and ability to do so, 'working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight' (Hebrews 13:21). So here we see more of the enslaved condition of all men by nature, the UNJUST men of our text.

7. *Unsaved*. By this we mean not salvaged but left to rot and ruin, fit only for destruction. There you have another slant on man's condition. He is in the pit of sin and under the condemnation of God; he has no inherent righteousness that God will accept, and he is unable to do one thing to alleviate his sad situation. Has the realization of such a plight dawned upon your heart? Have you been awakened to your lost, hell-deserving, undeserving condition? Have you come to despair of help within yourself? The reality of your condition must be burned into the depths of your heart and soul, so much so that you cry out in despair of self-deliverance. Unsaved means that God has not, as of this moment, seen fit to call you by his marvellous grace unto the blessings of salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord. Pity your condition; recognize your plight; turn to God's Word for answers. Let not the sun go down over your head with this pitiful cry: 'The

harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved' (Jeremiah 8:20).

'For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.'

O soul! 'Flee from the wrath to come' (Matthew 3:7). If you will not attend to your dire needs and weep for yourselves, the messenger must pause and weep for you. Oh, that this message would be used to awaken many to their condition, and induce them to seek mercy in Christ by heartfelt repentance and genuine faith! But for those who are now concerned the GOOD NEWS IS—

III. Unjust one, God can make you just!

We have seen this as your only hope. We bring you God's remedy for the salvation of unjust mankind. And I must continue to bring the saving Word of God before you—with this we come to a close.

First, may I remind you that we earlier read to you an extended passage in Romans 3, calling attention to your sin, guilt and condemnation. But notice as the faithful apostle continues:

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set

forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay; but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. (Romans 3:19-28)

Again we call attention to Romans:

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin' (Romans 4:4-8)

Poor unjustified sinner, again Paul in Romans assures you: '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).

Listen again:

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own

Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit ... For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, ye rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. (Romans 8:1-4; 29-34).

For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not'

(Ecclesiastes 7:20). But, O soul, look what God has done for you in Christ: 'For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit' (1 Peter 3:18).

Conclusion:

Let us hear the conclusion of it all in the prophetic words of our Lord: 'For the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still' (Revelation 22:10-11). Join me in prayer:

'O Lord, we confess our inability in bringing out the full impact of this subject. But, we pray, hear our cries, and grant us the blessing of finding free justification in Christ Jesus, ere we go hence and be no longer able to hear or read thy sweet promises of mercy and grace! And we know it is thy justification ALONE that can deliver us poor fallen, Hell-deserving sinners from our just condemnation. Hear us, our Father, in Christ's worthy Name! Amen.' ¶

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

by J.E. NORTH (Landford Wood, Wilts)

'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (Mark 1:1)

WE come now to the final study of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we have looked at the beginning of the gospel as it is here recorded in this first chapter of Mark's Gospel, we have noticed the following:

1. It is a gospel that is PROMISED

2. It is a gospel that is centred in a PERSON

3. It is a gospel that is PREPARED

4. It is a gospel that is PROCLAIMED

Now we come to consider the final facet in our studies, namely,

5. The gospel is a gospel to be PROFESSED

As we read this opening chapter of Mark's Gospel, we can see how the Lord Jesus Christ called people unto himself, including those who were called of God to be his disciples and Apostles. In verses 16 to 18 we read how the Lord Jesus called Simon Peter and his brother Andrew to follow him: 'Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.' He walks further and finds James and John, whom he called to follow him: 'And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him' (Mark 1:19, 20).

It is interesting to note how Luke deals with the call of these four disciples (*cf.* Luke 5:1–11). It is somewhat different from that recorded by Mark. It does not contradict Mark, it is rather complementary to Mark's record. Mark omits certain events which are here recorded in the 4th and 5th chapters of Luke's Gospel. Mark leaves out those things that happened which were recorded by Luke in the fourth chapter of his Gospel which, had he written about them, would have taken place between verse 15 and 16, and conversely the actual call of the first four is not mentioned by Luke, but would have taken place between verses 37 and 38 of Luke chapter 4. But that which I particularly want to consider is (for the want of a better phrase), the sealing of Jesus' call to Peter which is recorded in chapter 5.

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.... When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord (Luke 5:4–8).

This occurrence in the call by Jesus of Peter tells us three things which must always take place in the profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. *There must be obedience to the word of the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel.* The first four of the disciples had been called by the Lord Jesus as he had walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. No doubt, also, Peter and the other three (Andrew, James and John) had been with the Lord Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum. They had been there when the man with an unclean spirit had been cleansed from that spirit by the Lord Jesus Christ. They had gone back to Peter's house where his mother-in-law had been healed. They had witnessed the healing of the sick at eventide. It is now some days later, they had gone fishing and caught nothing during the long hours of darkness. Now tired and weary from their labours they had returned home with empty nets. Jesus enters the ship and speaks to the multitude and then commands Peter to launch out into the deep, and to let down his nets again. Peter had been with the Lord Jesus; he had seen the miracles done by him, and perhaps there is more than just a stirring in his heart for the Lord Jesus so he says that he would obey his word.

That is the first requirement. 'Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the nets.' Here is Peter; he is tired, he is weary, he knows the sea like the back of his hand; he has fished and made a living out of the Sea of Galilee, and possibly thinks that he is wasting his time. But here is the One who is the eternal Son of God speaking and commanding him: 'Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.'

When the gospel comes to a sinner, when it penetrates his heart by the power of the Holy Ghost, all the oppositions and excuses that the sinner, the quickened sinner—for there will be absolutely no response from the dead sinner—can make will dissipate, and there will be obedience to that command.

The call of God is always particular: 'He said unto Simon.' The Lord Jesus had turned from the crowd on the shore and he was particularly addressing Peter—just as he addressed Lazarus when he was in the tomb, 'Lazarus, come forth' (John 11:43). And the response is always in accordance with and in obedience to the Word of God. In this case it was to launch out. In the case of Lazarus it was to come out of the grave. In the case of the little maiden, it was, 'Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway the damsel arose' (Mark 5:41, 42). It was a particular call.

But notice, it was addressed to those who were in need. Peter was weary from a night's empty work. Lazarus was dead and bound in grave clothes. The woman with an issue of blood who touched the hem of his garment had spent all on the physicians and was no better, indeed she had become worse (Mark 5:25–34); indeed, she was bankrupt!

What a mercy it is if a sinner is quickened and made alive by the Spirit of God (Ephesians 2:1) and made to see their need; to see their death by sin; to see their bankruptcy. Oh, they will be obedience to the very Word of God.

Naaman was in need, he was a leprous man and would not in the first instance be obedient to the words of the prophet, but then he was made humble and submitted in obedience to the words of the prophet and was healed. God grant that we will be obedient to the very words and instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ, as applied to our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

2. *In the second place, there must be a felt sense of need and conviction of sin:* 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.' The Apostle Peter here recognises that he is a sinful man, that he is not worthy of the least of the mercies of God.

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army is recorded as saying, 'The chief danger of the 20th century will be religion without the Holy Spirit, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, and heaven without hell.' Whilst we may well disagree with some of William Booth's theology, there is much truth in that quotation, especially his comments on 'forgiveness without repentance and salvation without regeneration'. The preaching of sin and the personal knowledge of sin is absent from much of today's evangelical preaching. Contrast this with what the Lord Jesus said, 'They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' (Mark 2:17). When Isaiah had that glorious vision of Almighty God and his absolute holiness, as recorded in the sixth chapter of his prophecy, he said, '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). Well did Joseph Hart write:

To understand these things aright,
 This grand distinction should be known:
 Though all are sinners in God's sight,
 There are but few so in their own.
 To such as these our Lord was sent;
 They're only sinners who repent.

What comfort can a Saviour bring
 To those who never felt their woe?
 A sinner is a sacred thing;
 The Holy Ghost has made him so.
 New life from him we must receive,
 Before for sin we rightly grieve.

And what Joseph Hart was saying here is that there must be, as Scripture teaches, a personal, heart experience of the knowledge of sin; an awakened sinner, awakened by the Holy Ghost is sacred because he is now indwelt by the Holy Ghost and will be brought to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what happened to Simon Peter when he met with the Lord Jesus Christ that day when he saw the net filled with fishes. He saw the sovereignty of the Son of God, he saw the holiness of God and he said to the Lord Jesus Christ, 'I am a sinful man.' He felt his unworthiness to be in the presence of the Christ of God. But it is to such characters that the Lord Jesus came and offers his salvation.

3. And the third thing we notice about the calling of Simon Peter is that *he worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ*. In verse 8 we read that 'he fell down at Jesus' knees. ... O Lord' (Luke 5:8). He acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As Paul says, 'Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost' (1 Corinthians 12:3). And, 'that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Philippians 2:11). Peter was here

calling Jesus Lord (Gk. *kurios*)—he worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ.

Love I much? I've much forgiven;
 I'm a miracle of grace.

But he could not of his own ability or vocation, it was solely by the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart bringing him by faith to see in reality who the Lord Jesus is, and by that secret work in his heart he was brought to profess the name of Christ, as all true believers do.

Spirit of truth, come down,
 Reveal the things of God;
 O make to us salvation known,
 And witness with the blood.

No man can truly say
 That Jesus is the Lord,
 Unless thou take the veil away,
 And breathe the living word.

The, only then, we feel
 Our interest in his blood;
 And cry, with joy unspeakable,
 'Thou art my Lord, my God!'

Oh that we now might know
 The all-atoning Lamb!
 Spirit of faith, descend and show
 The virtue of his name

Charles Wesley

Simon Peter's expression of profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the same in all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. They call upon his name, they 'do justly, ... love mercy, and ... walk humbly with thy God' (Micah 6:8). The Lord Jesus Christ speaks of the call by grace, and the profession of the gospel in the 10th chapter of John's Gospel: 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give

unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand' (John 10:27, 28). Oh! Look at those things Jesus says about those who profess the name of Christ:

1. They hear the voice of Christ as he calls them, and as they walk with him
2. The Lord Jesus knows them, each one. He has always known them, he has loved them with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3). He laid down his life, and gave it for them (John 10:15; 17)
3. They follow him wherever he leads them (Psalm 23:2, 3)
4. The Lord Jesus gives them eternal life which is both safe and secure (Jude 24).

What a mercy! What security for the child of God!

No matter how far a sheep of Christ may fall and wander in this sinful world before he is called by grace; before he is brought to profess the name of Christ, he will be brought by the powerful work of the Spirit of God. Says the Psalmist: 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth' (Psalm 110:3). And, for the child of God who is brought to profess his name, 'The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them' (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Let me just speak of one further character who was brought to profess the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He led a dissolute life! He plundered his way through the land of Israel! He robbed people in Judea with his fellow companion in crime! But they were both caught by the authorities of the day, and by those same authorities they were both brought one day to be nailed to a cross

which was the punishment for their crimes. But in death they were separated by another who was crucified at the same time. That One who separated them was the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, they both mocked and scoffed at the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32). One of the thieves said to him 'If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us' (Luke 23:39). But there was a difference in these two thieves. One was a sheep and the other was a goat. One was loved eternally by God in the Covenant of Grace! And in his extremity, with death in front of him, there was a change in him. He was brought to see his sinfulness: 'Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom' (Luke 23:40-42). And this sheep of Christ addressed himself to the Lord Jesus, even in his dying moments: 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.'—'My sheep hear my voice.' And that afternoon, at the point of death, he heard the Lord Jesus in his innermost heart and soul; he heard the words from the lips of the Saviour of sinners, 'Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:43). Today, you will be with me in heaven!

My sheep will hear my voice,
No matter how the world may call.
I gave my life, made them my choice;
Now I am their All in All.

And thus it has been down the ages of the true church of Christ. All those given to Christ in covenant bond have been called by him from nature's night into the glorious light and liberty of the gospel of God's grace. They profess his name and walk in his ways. 'The path of the just is as the shining light,

that shineth more and more unto the perfect day' (Proverbs 4:18). And thus it will be until the church is complete, then he will return and take every one to be with him in heaven, 'and so shall we ever be with the Lord' (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

There is a period know to God
When all his sheep, redeemed by blood,
Shall leave the hateful ways of sin,
Turn to the fold, and enter in.

Glory to God, they ne'er shall rove
Beyond the limits of his love;
Fenced in by Jehovah's *shalls* and *wills*,
Firm as the everlasting hills.

The appointed time rolls on apace,
Not to *propose*, but call by grace;
To change the heart, renew the will,
And turn the feet to Zion's hill.

John Kent

What a mercy if we are called by God's grace and are brought by the Spirit of God to profess the name of Jesus Christ. The gospel is a gospel that is professed, and we are told that it is professed by 'a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, ... clothed with white robes' (Revelation 7:9).

FORMER DAYS

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

250 years ago: May & June 1770

DEERING'S Lectures reaches Hebrews 2:14–18 in the **May** issue.¹ Here, Deering intends to show 'how [Christ] was man, and wherefore he died for his elect.' His target in this is 'the foul and rotten thoughts of such heretics as have denied the humanity of our Saviour Christ, [and] many other vain fancies of men; who grant, indeed, a natural body to our Saviour Christ, but they give it such qualities as no body in the world hath ever had.' Among the obvious targets is Rome's heresy of transubstantiation.

The Biography is of Thomas Cartwright, whose views on church order brought him into conflict with the University authorities at Cambridge. His godly character and intellectual ability is evident.

¹ In the previous issue, No. 2731, p.48, the reference was given incorrectly as Hebrews 11.

Gospel Mysteries continues the exposition of the parable of the Pearl of Great Price, and Casuistical Divinity concludes the discussion of zeal being no proof that a man is a child of God. The Miscellaneous section continues the Experience of a True Christian, followed by a Soliloquy of a Christian Just Rising From His Bed. A writer contributes a piece on the condition of the believer in this world, under the guise of a letter written from prison by one under sentence of death. A review of a recent publication, and poetry, conclude the May issue.

In **June**, the Deering Lecture continues the exposition of Hebrews 2:14–18, and the Biography is of one Julines Herring, whose family hailed from Coventry. He ministered in the early seventeenth century, first in Derbyshire, then in Shrewsbury. The spelling of his name is of interest, as the Newbury

martyr, Julins Palmer (c. 1532–56), has frequently and wrongly been called Julius.

Gospel Mysteries picks up the exposition of the Song of Solomon at 3:6, and Casuistical Divinity offers thoughts on John 6:66. It is a warning against trusting in one's own will and decisions, and is from the pen of W.M. (William Mason, a former editor). The Miscellaneous section offers thoughts on the stage (Christians should avoid the theatre), and continues the Experience of a True Christian. The importance of meditation on the word of God is treated, being the continuation of an earlier piece. A Dialogue between Evangelist and Christian provides help for those who have doubts about assurance of forgiveness of sins. This is followed by a Christian Paraphrase on the Lord's Prayer (distinguished from the many un-Christian ones), and the Christian Censor turns from the necessity of speaking to the Lord to hearing from the Lord. The issue for the month ends with poetry.

200 years ago: May & June 1820

The **May** issue opens with an exposition of Psalm 72:17. The first paragraph gives a flavour of the whole:

The whole system of providence and grace was fixed in the eternal purpose of God before the foundation of the world. Hence he is represented, as 'declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.' The writings of the Old Testament give us the history of this plan, during that dispensation, in which we may observe almost continual references to the appearance of an illustrious person, at a certain important period, called 'the fulness of time.'

To quote one further sentence, 'We cannot honour Christ as an almighty Saviour, unless we believe and remember that he is the only Saviour.'

Paul's experience of strength in weakness is a paradox thoughtfully explored, and is followed by A Short Hint on Distinguished Preaching. The author seeks to encourage preachers to say 'saint' when they mean the elect, rather than 'sinner'. This latter term should be used only of those who are yet in their sins. Since 'sinner' describes both the regenerate and the unregenerate, confusion can be avoided by a careful use of terms.

A letter of encouragement is sent to an Essex congregation facing opposition for standing for Christ and the gospel. Tomlinson's attempt to rescue Holy Scripture from ridicule shows that history teaches that the best and wisest of men have had faith in a deity, and that atheism has been largely reviled. The examples of King Canute, Henry V and Edward VI are brought forward to show how Christian faith has been evident in our own nation.

The Review section is plain in its criticism of some volumes, and warm in its commendation of others. One that comes between is a sermon preached on the occasion of the death of King George III. The reviewer is clearly not happy with the work, but is careful not to be openly critical, given the occasion. The issue ends, as usual, with poetry.

The **June** issue opens with A Short Account of Christ's Mediatorial Work. 'Christ is the days-man betwixt God and sinners. He was employed to take cognizance of the difference between the two parties, to decide who it was had done the wrong, and on what terms he might be reconciled.' The article on Perfection continues, and the author notes that the March contribution ought to have appeared ahead of the February one.

Juvenis takes issue with *Less than the Least*, concerning his assertion that man is bipartite (body and soul) and not tripartite (body, soul and spirit). This is an issue that continues to divide theologians.

A section entitled *Bunches of Violets* contains several short pieces, the first on the imperfection of human knowledge compared with the divine; the second on the fall and its consequences; the third on God in his Being and Perfections; the fourth, a discourse on sin. Tomlinson continues his attempt to rescue Holy Scripture from ridicule, pointing out in this section the necessity of religion for society. One interesting quotation, worth repeating, relates to the creation–evolution debate.

Aristotle, indeed, was of opinion that the ‘world is eternal, and supposed it to be a necessary emanation from God, as light is from the sun’ but he also acknowledges that the ‘philosophers before him, believed that the world had a beginning;’ which may justly supersede the authority of his own opinion.

Amicus writes to commend the previous issue of the Magazine, but is critical of the first piece, from Psalm 72:17. It bears, he writes, the air of one who is not acquainted with Christ, but who writes from the head, and not the heart. The Editors reply that their contributors are not all veterans, nor are they all raw recruits. Some show promise but need encouragement. How much truer is that of the church today.

Southey’s *Life of Wesley* arouses the ire of its reviewer. ‘What could be the motive in the king’s Poet Laureat, to rake together such a mass of cadaverous offals from the most pestiferous dunghills, we cannot conjecture; for if anyone wished to bring religion into contempt, they could not do it better than by such an exposure.’ And so on, for more than

six pages (the reviewed work ran to 1,200 pages). Next, a review of ‘The best Means of preventing the Spread of Antinomianism’ by the Rev. J. Hooper, being a sermon preached at Hoxton Chapel. The treatise is not well received, but draws forth a lengthy and detailed reply. The final piece here looks at another sermon preached on the death of the late King, and observes that the preacher, in his desire to show that the monarch was a man like any other before God, has opened himself to the charge of Jacobinism. The review also contains a warning against anecdotes, then in circulation, but whose authenticity was in doubt. Two poems conclude the issue.

100 years ago: May & June 1920

Thomas Houghton writes on being filled with the Holy Spirit in the May issue. Genesis 3:13 provides the text for a sermon on the beguiling serpent. The author points out that, since the New Testament accepted the facts of the fall, any who reject them must also reject the apostles’ teaching arising from these facts. The sermon applies the lessons of the serpent to the church of his (and our?) day.

A contemplation of Christ from Luke 4:30–31 is followed by a sermon on 1 Timothy 1:12–14. Next comes a piece entitled, ‘Won’t you try it?’, in which the author argues that experience shows the worth of Christ and his gospel, and leads to confidence in Christ and his gospel. A useful piece on the inspiration of Scripture encourages readers in a day when critical attitudes to the Bible were everywhere. Micah 5:2 leads a writer to express thoughts on the eternal will of God, and of our security by it. A consideration of Exodus 33:21 leads another writer to show that to be in Christ (the Rock) is to be at the side of God. The subject of sanctification—a thorny issue for *The Gospel Magazine* at times—is treated in an address to the Sovereign Grace

Union. It bears reading again. The blessing of small things possessed by the righteous is followed by the conclusion of a piece entitled 'The Week's Whirl.' Here, the author seeks to show how, in the busyness of life, trust in Christ and dependence on him become even more important.

Correspondence and a few notices conclude the issue.

The **June** issue begins with a sermon on godly households, from Psalm 118:15, and is followed by thoughts on the spirituality of God, from John 4:24. Joseph of Arimathea provides an example of one who waited for the kingdom of God, and the second part of the sermon on 1 Timothy 1:12–14 concludes the exposition. This is followed by a consideration of what is meant by 'Unto me' from John 12:31. Song of Solomon 8:5 provides one of the 'Questions propounded by Holy Writ' to which an answer is given, in the form of a sermon outline. Thoughts on the Fall of Man is followed by a Bible study on the words, 'In no wise', which come eight times in the New Testament.

A reader writes from his current experience of serious illness, on being inside the separating and dividing line. It speaks to believers at all times, and especially to those who are conscious of approaching death.

The Editor answers a question put by a reader, 'Does God repent?' The reply states that God, being immutable, cannot change his will, but can change his dealings towards us. He cites several commentators, including Dr John Gill, in support.

Comments on the worldliness of too many churches, and thoughts on David's gospel spirit, are followed by a solemn table showing the total number of men who served from all Empire nations, as well as the number of casualties, in the First World War. This was to mark the ending of conscription. The Rev. F. Peacock of Buxton writes on the failure of holiday churches to preach the gospel to visitors, and the theme of worldliness among Christians is taken up again from the pen of the Rev. E. Poole O'Connor. Brief notices and reviews end the issue.

TO BE CONTINUED

BOOK REVIEWS

Exegetical sermons and lectures on Hebrews

Charles Hodge (ed. William VanDoodewaard)

Banner of Truth, 2019. 264pp cloth £12 ISBN 978-1-84871-884-5

Charles Hodge is one of the most helpful commentators of the nineteenth century, and the addition of his writings on the Epistle to the Hebrews is surely to be welcomed widely. Consisting of three parts, this short volume (being in a small format) represents a good investment.

The first part is an Introduction, by the Editor, and provides a brief overview of the author's life and theological persuasion. The second part is the notes of Hodge's exegetical lectures on Hebrews 1–12. The third part consists of a number of sermons and sermon outlines—some very brief—on selected texts from the Epistle.

Hodge's exegesis departs from Owen and Calvin at certain key points. The word of God in 4:12 is the scriptures, *contra* Owen, and the assembly some forsake, 10:25, is not the church, *contra* Calvin. Anyone looking for a good introduction to the Epistle will do well to begin with Hodge. The brevity of the majority of his notes makes it easier to keep the flow of the argument in mind, rather than becoming bogged down in detail. A part of his comment of 11:40, and the whole of his writing on Chapter 12, will make the careful reader think deeply. Buyers should note that Hodge wrote for theological students who had Greek. Many online and printed helps are available today for those who do not.

The sermons and sermon outlines provide helpful models for preachers, as well as additional insight into Hodge's expositions. Beginning at Hebrews 2:9, and going on to 12:1-2, these fifteen parts will provide material for meditation, study and perhaps other sermons.

A full stop is missing on p.126, before νέφος. The word 'class' on p.5, line 1, makes more sense as 'close'.

EJM

Master Robert Bruce: Minister of the Kirk of Edinburgh

D. C. Macnicol

Banner of Truth 2020. 296pp £12.50 hbk ISBN 978-1-84871-878-4

This work by Duncan Clark Macnicol (1861–1910), a minister in the Free Church of Scotland, was first published in 1907, and remains the standard full length biography of Robert Bruce of Kinnaird (1554–1631), whom Professor William Cunningham described as 'one of the most distinguished men whom Scotland has ever produced'. Robert Wodrow, historian of the Covenanters, writing within a century of Bruce's death, stated that 'There were few, if any Ministers, or Christians, in Mr Bruce's time, or since, that came up his length, far less excelled him, in solid serious piety, eminent wisdom and conduct, real learning and knowledge, remarkable faithfulness and courage, and singular communications with God, and extraordinary communications from him.' Without dwelling on comparisons, Macnicol amply evidences that Bruce exhibited all the qualities that Wodrow described, and furnishes a comprehensive and rounded biography, with added details of his background. Bruce was from an aristocratic family, descended from Scottish kings Robert the Bruce on his father's side and James I on his mother's side, but he gladly forfeited all his goods and inheritance to study divinity at St Andrews under Andrew Melville. Bruce traced his conversion to 1581, and by 1589 he was preaching with great power in St Giles Church, Edinburgh, where John Knox had ministered fifteen years previously. Years later, Alexander Henderson was converted under Bruce's ministry and went on to become the eminent leader of further Scottish Reformation, a champion of Presbyterianism (as was Bruce), and a Scottish Commissioner at the Westminster Assembly.

Bruce's life was inextricably linked with that of King James VI of Scotland. Readers might be more familiar with this monarch following his succession to the English throne as James I, but Macnicol's biography shines a light into James' background in Scotland, which he visited again only once after his arrival in London. In his early twenties James admired Bruce, twelve years his senior, and viewed him as so safe a pair of hands that he appointed him as effective regent when he was abroad, an office that Bruce discharged admirably, and for which James owned that he was 'worthy of a quarter of the kingdom.' But favour was not to last: James

envied that Bruce had the people's ear more than he himself did, and he resented that Bruce had a mind of his own and would not consent to, or even tacitly forbear, all that James endeavoured to do, especially in relation to the Church. Ill treated by James, Bruce was prepared to endure, not accepting deliverance, imprisonments and internal banishments and other depredations at the whim of an increasingly arrogant sovereign. Bruce could have taken an easier path had he trimmed to the prevailing winds, but his conscience would not suffer it.

Of all of his sermons, Bruce is chiefly remembered for those on the Lord's Supper, in which Macnicol speaks of the 'virile intellect engaged in the effort to state the doctrine of the Reformed Church upon the sacraments...All Bruce's powers of logic, his skill in definition, his lucidity, are brought to bear on the theme. Professor Laidlaw's testimony is that the doctrine of the Reformed Church has never been better stated.' In the course of researching his book, Macnicol discovered a further thirty sermons which he convincingly proves to be Bruce's and describes in a dedicated chapter.

Macnicol's work is very well written with an attractive style, even if there appears the occasional Scots word from a bygone age (mainly in quotations). Macnicol was sensitive that a few accounts of the 'strain of the supernatural which characterised' Bruce, as related by his godly contemporaries, 'may strike some minds as incredible', and he devotes but a few pages to them in the interests of penning an 'honest biography', resisting straying into hagiography. Of such details, some might prefer more, others less. Taken as a whole, the research, the breadth, the candour, the analysis and the style are admirable, and honest Christian biography does not come much better than this.

KMcG

God is always better than we can imagine

Iain Wright

Banner of Truth, 2019. 249pp pbk £12 ISBN 978-1-84871-934-7

Iain Wright has put together a series of thirty-one meditations on passages of Scripture. The opening piece, from Ephesians 3:14–21, sets the tone and theme for the whole book. A somewhat provocative and well aimed opening paragraph shows the importance of the book, and requires us to ask ourselves what theology we have. In short, what do we think of God? From here, he goes on to show how the great saints of old learned their theology from God himself, and all discovered that God is indeed always better than they, or we, can imagine.

The thirty chapters that follow show something of the unfolding revelation of God in Scripture, beginning at Genesis 3:15. The chapters are not always in 'Bible order', but they do follow a clear order. Each ends with some brief but (if considered properly) searching questions.

Above all, the author wishes to encourage believers to know God better and more fully. It is vital that our knowledge of God be taken from Scripture, and nowhere else. The warm and pastoral tone of the writing only adds to the sense that this is from the heart of one who has himself learned more and more about the Triune God we serve. We know God in Jesus Christ.

The book would be good for personal, family and small group use. I recommend it.

Quotations at the chapter headings and in the text are usually from ESV, but sometimes from AV. In the latter case the author almost always draws attention to a particular aspect of the AV translation, to show its particular suitability to the point he is making.

EJM

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. 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. 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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