

MARCH-APRIL 2022

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The Gospel Magazine

Sarah • The coming of Christ • They have belied the Lord

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1766–2022

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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OUR PEACE

'Peace, peace, when there is no peace' (Jeremiah 8:11).

THESE words appear here and in Jeremiah 6:14. On two occasions the prophet Isaiah declares that there is no peace to the wicked, 48:22, 57:21. Ezekiel 13:16 also declares that merely saying there is peace is no safe ground for believing it.

The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, declares, 'For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us' (Eph 2:14), and the prophet Isaiah declares that 'the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.'

We are living in a time of war. To be sure, the bullets are not being fired at us, nor are the bombs and missiles raining down on us. The people of Ukraine are suffering terribly, but the effects will be felt here. Already the stock market has fallen sharply, and the price of petrol is climbing further. We are warned that our power bills will exceed £3,000 a year as a consequence of this conflict, since so much of the gas burned in this

country is imported from Russia, the aggressor. Such increases in cost are on the back of a sharp rise in inflation, which itself pushes up prices, and few can expect that wages or pension payments will keep up. This war affects us all, one way or another.

We were treated until very recently to the pronouncements of politicians that the war could be averted by diplomacy. Such claims have been found wanting. Of course, whether the politicians really believed those claims is perhaps another matter, since their main aim is to stem the rising sense of gloom, and even of panic. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there is little, if anything, in the power of man to direct the course of world events. We believe in a sovereign God, and the hearts of kings, and of presidents, are in his hands. It is therefore to him alone we look for peace, should he be pleased to grant it.

That there is hope of peace is surely demonstrated by the fact that God sent forth the Prince of Peace. Our Lord Jesus came to

make peace, reconciling sinners with God. It was the Lord who drive man from the garden, not man who left the presence of God. It is therefore God alone who can reconcile himself to us, and he has done this in the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised seed of the woman. As Abel came before the Lord with his sacrifice, so we come through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, without whom we would be unable to come into the presence of God. The reality of our peace is demonstrated in our ceasing to strive against conscience, against Scripture and against Christ. Instead, we delight in holiness, righteousness, truth and grace, because we objects of divine grace. Such blessings cannot be accounted for in any other way, since they are beyond the scope and competence of the natural man, and of reason alone.

The peace brought by Christ is illustrated in the most wonderful way in Scripture. Isaiah declares it when he writes about the wolf dwelling with the lamb, and the leopard lying down with the kid, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and all led by a little child. This is not the natural order, and only a fool would think to farm like this. No zookeeper would consider it prudent to put predators and prey into the same enclosure. No parent worthy of the name would allow their child to play on the adder's nest. Yet in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, when his rule extends over all, such things will be normal. What a day that will be!

It is therefore foolish to think that there can be peace in this world apart from the true peace we know in our Lord Jesus Christ. Neville Chamberlain came close to blasphemy when he held up his piece of paper and declared, 'This is peace in our time.' The Prayer Book service of Morning and Evening Prayer includes the petition. 'Give peace in our time,' to which the answer is, 'For there

is none that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.' The peace for which we pray, and to which he alluded, is not had in negotiations and treaties, but in the sovereign protection of glorious God. It is sealed to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of peace.

War is a sad reality in our sinful world. Aggressors come and go, but the causes of war remain. Pride, jealousy, greed and fear are among those causes, and sometimes racial or religious bigotry play their part. These things are all manifestations of sin, and until sin is done away, the threat of war remains. One hundred years ago there was a naive but foolish hope that the horrors of the First World War had put an end to man's desire for bloodshed. How wrong that proved to be! For decades the existence of the European Union (as it became) was held up as the reason why there was peace in Europe. But the present threat to peace come from beyond Europe, and alliances and commitments are shown to have no power or effect. War does not stop at borders. It goes, like the wind, where it will.

What are we to do? There is but one thing we can do, and we must. We must give ourselves to prayer, that our heavenly Father would be pleased, if it is his will, to end this conflict quickly. Whatever is his will, let us pray that through these terrible events the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ would be seen. There are believers both in Russia and in Ukraine. The Lord alone knows what opportunity there is for them to witness to their neighbours.

Let us be sure that only when the kingdom of Christ is finally revealed in its fullness will there be true peace. Until then, let us enjoy the peace we have in Christ, and use it for the promotion of the gospel in this land and abroad, that Christ may be praised and sinners be saved. ¶

'HIS GLORY'

A SERMON by The Editor

'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.' John 1:14

ONE of the most sublime statements in Scripture is found in John 1:14. The blessed apostle, sometimes known as John the Theologian in past generations, was moved by the Holy Spirit to write about his experience of our Lord Jesus Christ. He wrote, 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.' To behold the glory of Christ is to behold him as he is, and it is the privilege of the believer, at least from time to time, to behold something of that glory.

When Moses pleaded with the Lord God to go up with Israel, Ex 33, the Lord graciously promised to do so. Moses replied, 'I beseech thee, shew me thy glory' (v. 18). The Lord God then caused his glory to pass by—that is, he himself passed by, having first placed Moses in a cleft of the rock, and put his hand (so to speak) over Moses' face, until he had passed by. Moses was then permitted to see the back parts of God, 33:23. In what in particular did the glory of the Lord appear? In the name of the Lord, pronounced in 34:6f; 'The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.' This is the true glory of the Lord our God, that he is the God who saves his

people from their sins *and* who punishes the guilty. He does not deal with us as we deserve, in that he does not punish at the first moment of sin, but he sends his prophets to preach repentance and he warns by events that wrath lies at the door. But when the hour has come, then judgment falls like an axe, and the guilty are swept away in their sins. The Lord does not overlook sin, but the natural man considers that his slowness to anger is a demonstration of his weakness, Nahum 1:3, whereas the Lord declares that he is jealous and will take vengeance against the wicked, v. 2.

We learn that the glory of Christ, if it is to be recognised as being the same glory as the glory of God, must be seen in both salvation and judgment. Let us see what Scripture teaches on this most important matter.

1. The glory of Christ is truly glorious

Speaking of the resurrection the Apostle Paul declares, 'There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another' (1 Cor 15:40). He then reminds us that the glory of the sun differs from the glory of the moon, and the glory of the stars differs from both, and one star differs from another in glory. Comparative states of glory are known to us, but when we come to the glory of Christ, what can compare with that?

John and two of his fellow disciples were taken up into a mountain with Christ, and

saw the revelation of his glory. In Matt 17:2 we read, '[Jesus] was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.' Mark wrote, 'He was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them' (Mk 9:2-3). Luke wrote, 'And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening.' Why did John, who had witnessed this event, not record the fact in his Gospel? John saw a greater sight even than this, when he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and saw 'one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.' Why speak of the comparatively lesser when he could speak of the greater?

In the transfiguration the disciples were given to see something of what, or who, Moses saw. We read in Numbers 12:6f that the Lord would speak to his prophets in visions and dreams, adding, 'My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold...' Ex 34:33ff records the necessity for Moses to wear a vail over his face after he had been with the Lord, so brightly did his face shine forth the reflected glory of the one with whom he had been speaking. Here on the mount of transfiguration John and his fellow apostles saw the same glory in

the face of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was no borrowed glory, as the moon merely reflects the glory of the sun, but this was his own glory. 'O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was' (John 17:5). There is a glory that is proper to our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is his by nature. It is a glory that exceeds all earthly glory, being truly glorious in itself. It is a glory that manifested on earth in various ways and at various times, as foretold in Scripture.

i. *The glory of Christ is manifested in the gospel.* This much was declared beforehand by Isaiah, when he said, 'the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together' (Isa 40:5). This is in the context of the Lord's coming to redeem his people, and it is therefore properly applied to the gospel. In Isa 60:1 the people are told to arise and shine, 'for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.' This is the great light that will break forth upon the people that sat in darkness, 9:2, through the giving of that Child whose name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, v. 6. The glory of the gospel is that this is the way of salvation, promised from the beginning, taught in types and shadows, and at the last manifested in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The glory of this gospel is that it is the appointed salvation, so that all who obtain mercy in Christ are actually saved and made inheritors of heaven. This is salvation, full and free, graciously given to all to whom it comes.

ii. *More particularly, the glory of Christ is manifested in his life of sinless obedience.* We read in Hebrew 7:26-28, 'For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth

not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.' The matter is stated plainly in 4:15, 'For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.' The sinless obedience of Christ is a manifestation of his glory. Should a mere man be sinlessly perfect we would have to acknowledge that the glory of this fact belongs to God alone, since it could only be explained as an operation of divine grace. That Jesus Christ, who is the Word made flesh, is without sin is a manifestation of his own glory, for it reveals what he is by nature, and not what grace can do in a person. Of course, in reality no man is sinlessly perfect, nor can be, for we have a fallen nature; but Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, has not that fallen nature.

iii. *Furthermore, the glory of Christ is manifested in his death.* The suffering and death of Christ are matters that occupy our thoughts and hearts very frequently. We know that, but for the atonement, we would be without hope in this world and the next. We know that, but for the covenant of grace, there would be no atonement and therefore no hope. We know that, but for the incarnation, there would be no acceptable sacrifice to take away sin, and we would yet be in our sins, and under condemnation. We see the glory of Christ when we contemplate his suffering and death, because we know what we are and have through him and it. In particular, the glory of Christ is manifested in his death by the manner of it. Various things took place: Pilate's wife had

troubling dreams on account of that just man, Matt 27:19; the sun was darkened in the middle of the day, v. 45; at the moment of his death the veil of the temple tore in two and the ground was rent by an earthquake, v. 51. Those who came to the sight went away in a very different spirit from the one in which they had come. Many came to mock, deriding Christ as he suffered. When they saw the manner of his death, they 'smote on their breasts, and returned' (Lk 23:49. Even the centurion, whose soldiers had inflicted great suffering without any qualms when Pilate had sentenced Christ to be beaten, and who had stood by as the people shouted out their mockery, was moved to declare, v. 47, 'Certainly this was a righteous man.' Other Gospel writers record his words as, 'Truly, this man was the Son of God' (Mk 15:39 etc). That such responses should be brought forth from such people is surely a manifestation of Christ's glory.

iv. *The glory of Christ is manifested in his resurrection.* The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is glorious indeed. Scripture records a number of other resurrections, in both Old and New Testaments. Perhaps none is more wonderful than the resurrection of Lazarus, who had been dead four days. Yet all of those who were raised to life, whether by prophet, apostle, or our Lord Jesus himself, had to face death a second time. Not so for our Lord. He arose from the dead having loosed the pains of death. Death could not hold him, for he conquered the grave. It could not hold the Prince of life, and had to release him completely. The nature of his death was sealed by his resurrection, so that his apostles knew he had been the acceptable sacrifice. He who was delivered for our offences was raised for our justification. To believe in a crucified Saviour is a hard thing, but to believe in a crucified and risen Saviour

is not. We know the truth of the gospel in that our Redeemer rose again, and the glory of the gospel is tied to the glory of the resurrection: each confirms the other.

v. *The glory of Christ is manifested in his ascension.* That Jesus Christ should return to the Father and to the glory that is his by nature, is not hard to accept. That he should return by rising bodily into the air until a cloud received him out of the sight of the watching apostles is both gracious and glorious. It is gracious because it provided them both with evidence of his divinity and it marked an actual conclusion to his earthly ministry. When Elijah was taken up into heaven in the chariot of fire, the prophets sought his body on the mountains around. They found nothing. The apostles did not go looking for the body of Jesus, as if he had been taken up and cast down: they knew where he had gone.

The ascension of Christ is also glorious because it marks his lordship over creation. Who but the Lord of glory could overrule the natural laws and ascend by his own power? Who but the mighty God could go in the clouds as he has promised to come in the clouds, Dan 7:13? Who but the Lord should be attended by angels, who spoke to the watching apostles about what they had seen and what they were to do?

We could add much about the glory of our Lord Jesus seen in his teaching, his miracles and his interaction with both the humble and the proud. The whole of the earthly ministry of Christ breathes his glory, and manifests it in various ways, if we have but eyes to see it and ears to hear it.

The glory of Christ is an eternal glory

It is most evident from some of what has been said already that the glory of Christ, manifested in the incarnation, was not specific to

that period alone. As the eternal Son of God he possessed glory in himself, and possesses that glory still. For us, the glory of his saving work is the most prominent aspect of that glory, since it is the part that concerns and affects us the most. It is not, however, the only facet of his glory. The eternal glory of Christ is manifested also in the work of creation. That he is the creator cannot be doubted, for Scripture declares the matter. That his glory did not begin in the creation also cannot be doubted for again the Scripture declares the matter.

i. *Scripture declares Christ to be the creator.* It may not be necessary to say much on this point, since all believers ought to know this. John 1:3, speaking of the Word made flesh, declares, 'All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.' The Apostle Paul wrote about 'the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist' (Col 1:15–17). God 'created all things by Jesus Christ' (Eph 3:9). 'But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him' (1 Cor 8:6). 'God ... hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds' (Heb 1:1–2).

ii. *As creator, Christ is glorious.* The cry of wisdom, recorded in Proverbs 8, is rightly taken to be a description of our Lord Jesus Christ. As our Lord Jesus declared himself to be the light of the world, and that light to be life, so Wisdom declares, 'Whoso findeth me

findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord' (8:35). This is the same Wisdom that was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was, v. 23. Wisdom was by the Lord God, as one brought up with him, v. 30. True wisdom, bringing as it does such blessings as are described here, is glorious. There is no truer or higher wisdom than the fear of the Lord, which is to hate evil, v. 13; and Wisdom declares her hatred of pride, arrogance, evil ways and the froward mouth—the perverse or scheming mouth. This is holiness, and holiness is glorious for holiness is divine. That the Lord should pronounce such a verdict on the creation, that it was very good, is a manifestation of the creator's glory, who has done all things well.

iii. This glory is an eternal glory. To what purpose is the gospel? Why was Jesus Christ manifested in the flesh? Why did he humble himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross? It was to save sinners. But why save sinners? Had not the Lord shown his hatred of sinners when he destroyed all living in the great Flood? Indeed, but why then did he spare righteous Noah and his household? It was that he might keep covenant, and cause the woman's seed to flourish once more in the earth, so that, at the fulness of the time, the promised Redeemer would appear. The entrance of sin and its devastating effect on the whole creation was not to last. The day is coming when the curse will be lifted off, and when the creation will cease to groan and travail, as it does until now, Rom 8:23, as we await the redemption of our body. The creation will be restored, as Rev 21 and 22 make plain, albeit in such a state and condition as will exceed the first state and condition. There will be no tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but all sin will be excluded. There will be no more sorrow, all tears being wiped away.

And there will be no sun in that heavenly city, Christ being the light thereof. His glory will shine from the very foundations to the very heights of that place, and his praises will ring out from the great multitude of the redeemed, whose songs shall be endless. Oh that we may be together in that glory, through the wonderful grace and everlasting mercies of our covenant God!

When we contemplate the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we ponder his nature and power, his incarnation, his life and ministry, his death, resurrection and ascension, and all that is yet to come, we must know where that glory should be seen. It should be seen in the church, and in us. The two are one, for what is the church but the gathering of God's people? If God's people manifest Christ's glory, then the church manifests it: if the church manifests it, then it is because the people do. How shall we manifest that glory? There are two main ways.

In the first place, the glory of Christ is manifested in the church when we preach, teach and believe true doctrine. Since Christ is the wisdom of God, it follows that there is no truth but from him. Whatever is true is Christ, and whatever is not Christ cannot be true. A recent survey revealed a sorry situation. Someone has come up with what they are pleased to call a 'balderdash generator.' This is a computer programme that is able to assemble words and phrases, found in scientific journals, into grammatical but meaningless sentences. These sentences were then ascribed either to 'leading scientists' or to 'leading theologians'—all fictitious. A little over 10,000 US citizens were then asked which statements they trusted the most, The majority, even among professing believers, preferred the meaningless statements of the 'scientists' over those of the 'theologians.'

Rather than consider what they were reading, these people looked at who was supposed to have said it. When we come to scriptural truth, we are reading the word of God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is a word providentially preserved down the ages, so that we are to have absolute confidence that the words before us are the authentic words of the writers, guided by the Spirit. When we believe this to be true, and when we then preach, teach and act upon this word, we manifest the glory of Christ who is the Word made flesh. He came to teach us the way of God, not in a theoretical way, but by being the way, the truth and the life. To reject his teaching is to reject him, and to reject him is to reject life and grace. Where the church departs from the word of God, from the body of sound doctrine, it ceases to be a true manifestation of Christ's eternal glory. But where the truth is believed, loved and taught, then is the glory of Christ present. Happy are they who are in such a state.

In the second place, the glory of Christ is manifested in the church when we see sinners saved. This is, after all, the reason why Christ came. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to save sinners. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He came to die such a death

as to be so lifted up as to draw all men unto him. There is only one Saviour, and he is to be preached, Christ crucified the only hope of sinners. And when a sinner comes to faith in Christ, repenting and casting himself on divine mercy and grace, we see the glory of Christ at work. Such conversions ought not to surprise us, for why else do we preach the gospel? Such conversions demonstrate the power of the gospel, for what but the gospel of grace can bring forth such an effect? Such conversions encourage us, because they show that we are preaching that authentic gospel we have received from the apostles and prophets, showing that we are part of the catholic church. When we see such conversions we should be moved to praise the Saviour and to glorify his name. He is adding to the church such as should be saved, and the power and the glory are his alone. But if we are not preaching the authentic gospel, what confidence can we have in supposed conversions?

The day is coming when Christ shall appear to gather together his people. That will be a glorious day. Shall we found in Christ in that day, part of the new creation, and saved by grace? Let us seek the glory of Christ now, and let us praise him for his glory and now and ever. Amen. ¶

THEREFORE I HAVE HOPE

by CARINE MACKENZIE

What do you do when you have a problem? How do you cope with your worries - perhaps about exams, your lack of friends, or a guilty conscience. As time moves on, the problems seem to get bigger—health concerns, fears about the future, bereavement.

If we watch the news bulletins, we see that the world is full of problems—hunger, war, unrest, the pandemic.

Does thinking about all our problems lead us to despair, or can we have hope for the future. Jeremiah had loads of problems. He tells about some of them in the book of Lamentations. The children were hungry begging for food from their mothers (2:12). Young men and women were cut down by the sword. (2:21). The city was deserted (1:1). The Lord was as an enemy, destroying the strongholds (2:5). The enemies were getting the upper hand (2:16).

Jeremiah was desperate. He felt that God was against him (3:3). He seemed to be in darkness. (3:6.) Was God even hearing his prayers? (3:8).

In this time of sadness, despair and grief, was there any possibility of deliverance and hope for the future?

Yes. Jeremiah remembered something and this gave him hope. 'This I call to mind, therefore I have hope' he said (3:21).

What did he call to mind? We can learn from Jeremiah and remember what he did. This will help us through our problems and griefs. Let's think about what he said.

The Lord is merciful and compassionate (3:22). Our sin deserves God's wrath and punishment. We must recognise and confess our sinfulness. Jeremiah was silent (3:28) and put his mouth in the dust when he thought about sin. We too must recognise the awfulness of sin. God knows each of our sins, even our secret faults that no one else knows. Realising our sinfulness and confessing to God, is a first step towards hope (3:29).

The merciful and compassionate God dealt with sin at Calvary. The awful burden of sin was placed on the Lord Jesus Christ and borne by him. He takes the sin of all his people and gives them his righteousness.

'It is of the Lord's mercy is that we are not consumed,' Jeremiah tells us, because his compassions fail not' (3:22).

The Lord is always faithful and true to his word. His promises never fail. His compassion is 'new every morning' (3:23). The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies over all his works (Psalm 145:9).

Another reason for Jeremiah to have hope was the fact that the Lord was his portion. He felt safe in the knowledge that he belonged to the Lord and the Lord belonged to him. The relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and the believer is described as that between a bridegroom and his bride—a close loving relationship.

When David was in trouble he too took comfort in the fact that the Lord was his portion 'I cried unto thee, O Lord,' he said. 'Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living' (Psalm 142:5).

We too can take comfort in the Lord as our portion. God has a delight in his people. He provides for them. He is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24). What a prospect!

Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth gave the wonderful assurance 'Ye are Christ's and Christ is God's' (1 Cor 3:23). The Lord is truly our portion therefore we have hope for eternity.

Jeremiah tells us that it is good for us to 'both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord (3:26). We have to learn to wait patiently for God's answers to prayer and for his dealings with us, remembering that he does all things well. We have to flee 'for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.' This hope is 'an anchor for the soul, both sure and steadfast' (Heb 6:18).

Jeremiah had a difficult life but the Lord used him to speak his Word. When Jeremiah was

called to the work, he felt he was so young and unfit for the task but God told him not to be afraid for he would be with him and give him the words to say. Jeremiah was able to say ‘It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth’ (3:27).

It is good for us to obey the word of God and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ when we are young. How good to be able to say like the Psalmist, ‘Thou art my hope. O Lord God: thou art my trust from my youth’ (Psalm 71:5).

Bible Search

Find the missing words from the texts. The initials of the correct answers will spell out a word connected to the story.

1. Be of good _____, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord (Psalm 31:24).
2. If in this life _____ we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable (1 Cor 15:19).
3. Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his _____ among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47).
4. Is not this thy _____, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways (Job 4:6).
5. The Lord will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of _____ (Joel 3:16).
6. And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a _____ of hope (Hosea 2:15).
7. We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience _____ and _____ hope (Rom. 5:4).
8. But my God shall supply all your _____ according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).
9. That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his _____ (Psalm 78:7).
10. The _____ of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:18).

SARAH

by the REV. P. LOS (1815–1888)

A miracle of God's grace

Chapter 3 – Dawn

It was Monday morning. The minister sat again in his chamber. The frowns on his head were gone and his face was full of peace and joy.

Why such a change? Who can grasp it, knows that the states of the Lord's children are very changeable. Then the thermometer shows zero and often, very unexpectedly, the temperature rises and it is very hot.

On Saturday he was in the same sad state. The minister had received again, as the day before, the same invitation from Sarah, but had not answered to this request.

When the Lord's day had broken, he was just as hesitant, and when he went to the place of prayer and entered the pulpit, there was no change. But the man had said before that there was medicine in the pulpit and he would experience it again.

During the prayer there already was some openness. The heaven was clear and while preaching he was so lively that the hearers had to testify that the Lord was in their midst.

On Monday he still experienced the sweetness of the previous day. Thus in prepared himself to go and soon left his house, hasting himself to Sarah.

When he just was gone, Madame H. came bearing the message that Sarah had said that he was right if he did not come, because in her healthy days she always had shun him went he came to visit her Mother.

He found Sarah in the same dangerous state, although she was at that moment not

as breathless, so that she could speak softly. She told, and it seemed to the minister, sincerely how now and then, as a consequence of the conversations with her Mother, had heaviness of the soul, but this were deafened soon by her jolliness and gaiety. But when she, for one time when with her Mother came to listen to him, such a sense came into her inner part, which she tried to restore according to her old habit, but it did not work and there more jolly she was, the distressed she became.

Then the minister asked whether she could tell about the nature and cause of this heaviness.

'Yes,' Sarah answered, 'I will tell you that. The words of your verse are as a flaming script before me. He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.' (John 3:36).

'And what did make you afraid?'

'I saw that my whole life I was disobedient to the Son, and I believed that what I heard from your mouth was the truth.'

Hear her voice broken by crying, while she said in a flood of tears: 'And now I know, that the wrath of a holy and righteous God abides on me and that I will be lost for eternity. I am suffering much in my body, but it is but a small spark of what I shall suffer in my soul for what I shall righteously eternally in hell.'

'Well, my child, if your conviction is saving, then redemption certainly will follow. But when death is in sight, man is afraid very soon, knowing that the soul shall appear

before a righteous Judge.’

‘I do not fear death, but it is that wrath of God that oppresses me.’

‘But Sarah, you are still in the presence of grace. The Lord still could look in mercy upon you.’

‘I believe that the Lord could do that, but I do not believe that he will do it, because I heard from your mouth that the Lord cannot forgive any sin unpunished.’

‘That is so, that Lord cannot do that, his righteousness must be satisfied. But do you not know that he hath said: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow?’

‘Yes, but that is not for me. My sins reach to the heaven, and I always have served the devil.’

‘But do you not know that there is still a way, to be redeemed from God’s wrath and to come again to grace?’

‘Is they then also away for me?’

And now the minister began to tell about God the Father, who sent his only begotten Sons in the world, so that those, who were weary and heavy laden because of their sin; those who were oppressed under the burden of God’s wrath and took refuge to him, would find grace in his holy eyes.

‘Even if your sins were as high as the heaven and as deep as the sea, the blood of the Lord Jesus, which he shed on Calvary, is sufficient to put away all those sins, so that they shall be sought, but not be found.’

‘But Oh, the wrath of God, the wrath of God.’

‘Sarah, the Lord Jesus hath laid the whole burden of the wrath of God upon him and bore it for all of them who come to him

sincerely.’

‘Have the Lord Jesus really done that? But surely for those who are better than I?’

‘No, no, not for those who are better, but there is hope for the worst of the worst; because, Sarah, the Lord Jesus is so friendly and he receiveth sinners, who come to him, pressed and dismayed, desiring nothing else than grace, with open arms.’

Sarah was quiet; she folded her arms, and a friendly smile came to her young mouth. Her Mother stood from far, so that she could hear everything and it was as if a beam of hope shun on her soft face.

‘Shall we go together to the Lord?’ Thus the minister asked. This seemed pleasant to Sarah and the man did as he was asked. And when he said ‘amen’, this ‘amen’ was repeated loudly by Sarah.

‘Are you coming soon again?’ Thus Sarah asked and after the minister agreed he left. And when he went, the Mother asked: ‘What do you think of my child?’ He answered to this: ‘We should, Madam, be always careful and not be too hasty, because conversions at a sickbed are often untrue. Yet I must say: I am seeing the dawn of the morning, although I might deceive myself. I must counsel you one thing: admit only discovered Christians to her, and it is better to leave her alone with the Lord. He shall, if it pleaseth him, finish his work.’

The minister went with gladness in his heart, that the Lord had blessed his word, so that he was encourage to continue gladly the work, that the Lord had laid upon his hand, hoping that he would win more for the kingdom of his King.

TO BE CONTINUED

COVENANT COMMUNION WITH GOD

by JOHN HOOPER (Saltash)

8. FRIENDSHIP

IN making his covenant with his people, then, God is doing so much more than entering into some kind of formal, mutually agreed compact or bargain with them. Such a covenant would be little more than a means to an end, a kind of technical mechanism or business arrangement by which God achieves a greater goal. That, I suggest, is to greatly diminish the covenant. God's covenant is so much more than that. It encompasses both the way and the goal.

By an act that displays both Divine sovereignty and almighty power together with condescending mercy and love, God establishes his people in a personal relationship, a friendship no less, with himself. In the person of our Lord Jesus Christ God becomes the Friend of sinners — *our* Friend: 'This is my beloved, and this is my friend' (Song of Solomon 5:16). He makes Himself to be the friend 'that sticketh closer than a brother' (Proverbs 18:24). This is the truth expressed in some of our well-known and well-loved hymns, such as Newton's

One there is, above all others
Well deserves the name of Friend.¹

But true as the sentiment of this hymn most surely is, along with others like it, Scripture lays a greater emphasis on the

¹ John Newton, *Olney Hymns*, (Olney: The Cowper and Newton Museum, repr. 1984), Book I, No. 53, p.67.

reciprocal truth that we are the friends of God. It was as 'the Friend of God' that Abraham became known (James 2:23; Isaiah 41:8). Jesus says to His disciples, 'Ye are my friends ... I have called you friends' (John 15:14–15; cf. Luke 12:4), and when he receives news of the sickness of Lazarus he speaks of him with heartfelt affection and tenderness as, 'Our friend Lazarus...' (John 11:11).

There is something unbelievably humbling about this. We might think that we could never become a friend of the Queen or some other famous and powerful dignitary, and we would be quite right. It would be out of the question for such a person to come into our home and befriend us. But here we have a truth that is nothing short of incredible, that God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, in the person of his Son, comes into the homes of sinners, *our* homes, where he makes his abode with us (John 14:23) and takes us to be his friends. God has called us into the 'fellowship' of Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9).

Now we would be quite right in saying that this is an act of the greatest humility and condescension on the part of the Lord of glory, but we can go further still. Consider what a man might do for his friends. He might go to great lengths and sacrifice much in terms of his time, effort and resources for them, but 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:13). Such love does the Lord Jesus Christ

have for us that even while we were yet sinners he laid down his own spotless life for our salvation.

Which of all our friends to save us,
 Could or would have shed their blood?
 But our Jesus died to have us
 Reconciled, in Him to God:
 This was boundless love indeed!
 Jesus is a friend in need.²

We might well ask ourselves that since our Lord Jesus Christ has done so much for us, what kind of friends are we to him? Are we loyal and thankful? Are we loving and sacrificial? Are we obedient? He says to us, 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you' (John. 15:14). Surely this in itself is enough to give us pause for thought. If we were truly honest with ourselves, we
² *Ibid.*, p.67–8.

would have to confess that if we let down our earthly friends half as often as we let down our Lord and Saviour, we should not be surprised if they wanted no more to do with us. We would not deserve their friendship, and neither do we deserve the friendship of Jesus Christ. We provoke him every day and we test His forbearance to its limit, but such is his love and faithfulness to us that he will never let us down. He will never leave us nor forsake us.

This, then, is what it means to be made a partaker of God's covenant. It is a bond of friendship with him through his Son, our Saviour. It is the most precious friendship imaginable and it is known, experienced and lived out in our day to day lives. It is a sacred bond, a close and hallowed union with God that brings everlasting joy and peace to every believer's heart.

9. MARRIAGE

SUCH is the intimacy of this covenant friendship that the institution of marriage no less, the bond of husband and wife in mutual love and devotion is likened to it. Notice how I have expressed it. I have not said that the covenant is like a marriage, although that is true up to a point, but that marriage is like the covenant. The institution of marriage, wonderful and beautiful as it is, is still only a picture. Yes, the degree of intimacy is great, so close that husband and wife are described as 'one flesh' (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31), but if that is true of the picture, how much more of the reality, which is the unity and intimacy that is God's covenant with his people in Christ?

In many passages of the Old Testament

we find the covenant bond typified as a marriage in God's relationship with Israel and Judah. In Isaiah 54:5, for example, the prophet announces to the people, 'thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name.' We could also look at Psalm 45, or the whole of the Song of Solomon, Jeremiah 3, Ezekiel 16 and Hosea 1 and 2. All of these passages foreshadow what the New Testament calls the 'great mystery' that is the blessed union of Christ with his church (Ephesians 5:22–32). And finally, as the Bible draws to its close, the vision the apostle John is given of the holy city, New Jerusalem, is of her coming down from God out of heaven 'prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (Revelation 21:2–3).

The history of Israel and Judah tells us much about the longsuffering and faithfulness of God toward his people. Although they were an unfaithful, backsliding people likened to two harlot sisters, God was ever

gracious in calling them back to himself, for he said, 'I am married to you' (Jeremiah 3:14). Yes, God is ever faithful to his people and will never leave us nor forsake us.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE COMING OF CHRIST

by J. E. NORTH (Landford Wood)

'Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.'

'And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.'

'He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.'
(Revelation 22:7, 12, 20).

We are to consider in our study the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was a subject that was uppermost in the minds of the Christians of the first century. The first Epistles, indeed the first books of the New Testament were the Epistles to the Thessalonians, written by the Apostle Paul about AD 52, written before the first of the Gospels, that is Mark's Gospel which was written between AD 66 & AD 74. The prevailing message of the Thessalonian Epistles is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in accordance with his promise given to the disciples in the Upper Room: 'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also' (Jno. 14:3).

Here in the Book of the Revelation the central message is the history of the Church from the days of John who was in exile from his church at Ephesus on the Isle of Patmos 'for the Word of God and the Testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ' down to the end of the

age. The Book of the Revelation dates from about AD 96. He describes himself as being our companion in tribulation. We are told he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and had the glorious vision of the Lord Jesus Christ who instructed him to write to the seven churches of Asia Minor (present day Turkey), and also write of the things which were to come to pass, concluding with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in victory and total vindication.

The three verses at the head of this article speak of that return. The Lord Jesus says that he will 'come quickly.' The Greek word that is used by John to describe the manner of Christ's return literally means 'speedily' and 'shortly.'

I want, in this article, to look at the various ways in which the Lord Jesus Christ comes to and for his people. There are those who deny the final, literal coming of Christ to this earth, but if we look carefully at the Scriptures as a whole, we can see a

multiplicity of occasions when the Lord Jesus came and still comes to his people, culminating in the final triumphant and literal return to the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth to take all his saints home to be with him in heaven.

1. Firstly, then, we can think of the coming to earth of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Eternal Son of God, who came to this earth at numerous times.

Way back in the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve had taken of the forbidden fruit and had realised some of the consequences of their action, they sought to hide from Almighty God: 'And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden' (Gen. 3:8). What a vain thing it is to try and hide from God! (As if the Lord did not know where Adam and Eve were hiding!) The Psalmist speaks of the impossibility of being able to hide from the presence of God in Psalm 139:7-12: 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.' It is impossible to hide from the Lord. But who was it that came into the garden that day so long ago? It could be none other than the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ.

On numerous other occasions the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth,

and was manifested to certain of the Lord's people. He revealed himself to Abraham before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gen. 19), and at other times.

I would like to refer you to a further time in which it was revealed that the Son of God was here upon earth in his pre-incarnate state, which is to be found in the Book of Daniel: 'Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God' (Dan. 3:24,25). Here is a clear declaration that the Son of God, even the Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth in his pre-incarnate state. He was identified as 'the Son of God' not a son of the gods, nor as just the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who was to become the Son of God at his incarnation. No! The Lord Jesus Christ was and is the Eternal Son of God.

2. We can think of the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ when his glory was veiled and he took upon himself human flesh and human nature.

He was born in Bethlehem. The historical record is quite clear. He took upon himself frail human nature. He was in all points like us, yet without sin. Paul describes the humanity of Christ Jesus in the following manner: 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even

the death of the cross' (Phil. 2:5–8). He also wrote of the impeccability of the Lord Jesus Christ: 'For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin' (Heb. 4:15).

We see the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ in his incarnation: 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich' (2 Cor. 8:9). The Eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity was found here upon earth as a man. Truly man yet truly God. He did not lay aside His divine nature. No! His divine nature was veiled in flesh. And that veil was taken aside for just a few moments when the Lord Jesus Christ was transfigured before Peter, James and John; when he was declared to be the Son of God: 'This is my beloved Son, hear him.' Peter describes the scene: 'For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount' (2 Pet. 1:16–18). The hymn writer captures the incarnation of Christ Jesus in the following words:

He laid His glory by,
He wrapped Him in our clay;
Unmarked by human eye,
The latent Godhead lay;
Infant of days He here became,
And bore the loved Immanuel's name.

It is beyond our comprehension. We cannot understand with our finite minds

how such a thing could happen; how could Almighty God become man? It is beyond our comprehension! We accept this as a reality. We do not deny the Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor do we deny that He was truly man with a truly human soul. The Westminster Confession of Faith states, concerning the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ:

[The] two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. The Lord Jesus, in His human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure, having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell; to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a Mediator and Surety.

Where reason fails with all her powers
There love adores and faith prevails.

3. We can think of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ as the coming of Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ died, he laid down his life for his people. 'Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it' (Eph. 5:25). As the Good Shepherd, he gave his life for his sheep, all of the flock—not one of the sheep will be lost on the final day. His sacred humanity, his body lay within the confines of the tomb which had been sealed and guarded by soldiers to prevent his disciples (or any others) coming and stealing his body. But those precautions were all in vain. He

rose from the dead and came to his people. Peter, as he preaches says: 'Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead' (Acts 4:10). The Apostle Paul writes to the Roman Christians, 'And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead' (Rom. 1:4). We could continue quoting Scripture after Scripture which speak of the coming again from the grave of the Lord Jesus Christ in resurrection power. In that great chapter in which Paul considers the resurrection of Christ and its implications to the people of God (1 Cor. 15), he says, 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (v. 3f).

He came quickly, speedily from the tomb and revealed Himself to his disciples on numerous occasions until he was taken up into heaven as recorded in the first chapter of the Book of Acts.

4. We can also consider the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in His coming to the sinner and calling them by his grace out of nature's night into the glorious light and liberty of the gospel.

Look at some of the examples given to us in the New Testament.

Consider the Apostle Paul. He who was consenting to the death of Stephen; he who harried the early church; he who sped to Damascus to persecute the early church at Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem. He literally hated the very name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet he was 'is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel' (Acts 9:15). Paul describes

his experience on the road to Damascus where he saw a light brighter than the sun, was blinded by the glory of the Lord Jesus, 'it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen' (Gal. 1:15, 16). The Lord Jesus Christ came to him on that day many years ago. And his reaction? As he addressed King Agrippa, 'I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision' (Acts 26:19).

We could speak of others who were called by his grace: Lydia, the seller of purple to whom the Lord came gently; the Philippian Jailor to whom the Lord came in an earthquake. Each in their several ways; the Lord comes to those given to Christ in covenant bond.

5. We can think, also, of the Lord Jesus Christ coming to his people in their trials and tribulations.

On at least three occasions the Apostle Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus coming to him and standing by and with him in his trials and tribulations.

(a) 'And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome' (Acts 23:11). Persecuted for the name of the Lord Jesus and his preaching of the resurrection of Christ Jesus, he had stood before the Sanhedrin for his preaching of the gospel. But the Lord came speedily in his trials and assured him that he would bear witness to Christ in Rome, which we go on to read of later in the Book of the Acts.

(b) 'For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve. Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs,

be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me' (Acts 27:23–25). The occasion Paul spoke these words was after he had been in the bowels of the ship taking him to Rome to stand at Caesar's judgment. The ship had been caught up in the violent storm, and both the crew and passengers were afraid that the boat would be lost and all on board would be drowned. After a long absence Paul appeared on deck and assured the captain that all on board would be saved if they remained in the ship. He said to the captain and ship's company, 'there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.' Now we must identify who it was that stood by the side of Paul on that night so long ago. Paul says that the One who stood by him was 'the angel of God'—but this One must have been more than just any angel for Paul for he says, 'whose I am, and whom I serve.' It could be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. In a time of peril, he appeared to him and assure him that he would be safe and would stand before Caesar. In another place Paul makes mention of his hope to be able to preach in Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28). He was assured of the presence of Christ.

(c) 'At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion' 2 Tim. 4:16, 17). He was deserted by his supposed friends. They were ashamed of his testimony, ashamed of his preaching, and ashamed of his imprisonment. But in the midst of all these trials by both the enemies of God and supposed friends he knew the Lord's immediate presence. The Lord stood by him!

What a mercy it is that the Lord is not only with his people in accordance with his promise: 'lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen' (Matt. 28:20), but there are special times when the Lord appears for 'is people. When they are in Achor's gloomy vale, and a door of hope is given by the Lord's immediate presence (Hos. 2:15). This was the case with those two disciples who walked a gloomy path towards Emmaus. Oh, they were broken hearted after all the time they had spent with Jesus. But they had seen him taken from them, brought before the Sanhedrin and then before both Herod and Pilate after which he had been taken and crucified. They were bitterly disappointed! They had trusted that it had been him who would redeem Israel. Ah, but there is that word of comfort and promise: 'Jesus himself drew near, and went with them' (Lk. 24:15). And Jesus opened the Scriptures to them to show that all those things that had happened had to happen for the redemption of the spiritual Israel. Jesus came to them in their sad turmoil. And what a mercy it is that the Lord comes to his people when they are in special need. There are times when faith is tried, and when the chastening hand of God is upon his people. He comes in times of need

6. We can think of the Lord's coming to the child of God when he is about to pass from time into eternity.

Paul writes of those who are subject all their lifetime to the fear of death (Heb. 2:15), but yet there is comfort. Do we not all know almost by heart the words of the 23rd Psalm. It is, however, one thing to know this psalm in the head, but it is another thing to know the experience of it in the heart. The ungodly often turn to this psalm when there is a death in the family, but they have no cognizance of

the opening words of this psalm: 'The LORD is my Shepherd...' Knowing nothing of the Covenant God of Israel, they know nothing of what David goes on to say, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me' (v. 4). The Lord comes alone to his people with the balm of the covenant which makes their death bed as comfortable as a pillow of down, as Robert Hawker was wont to say. Bunyan tells us that when Pilgrim was crossing the river at the end of his pilgrimage, he felt that his feet had almost slipped, but he was miraculously upheld in the situation and was welcomed into the heavenly Jerusalem. And this is the experience of all the children of God. Read some of the testimonies of the saints of old. Polycarp, the disciple and successor of John, looked forward to his being cast to the lions. Isaiah tells us of the presence of the Lord. 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour' (Isa. 43:2,3).

And here many would leave the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ with the death of the believer and his/her entrance into heaven (that is, if they believe in a literal heaven). But there is more. The verses at the head of this article refer to the literal and physical return and not just a spiritual coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth,

7. So we turn now to the literal return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth to take all his chosen vessels of mercy to heaven to be with him for all eternity.

Scripture contains a number of promises

of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. And where can we begin apart from the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ. The opening verses of the final discourse of the Lord Jesus Christ as found in John's Gospel chapters 14 to 16 refer to the going away of the Lord Jesus and of his return. 'I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also' (Jno. 14:2,3). The disciples who had gathered to celebrate the Passover had no understanding of what the Lord Jesus was speaking about. They did not understand what the Lord Jesus said about his going away. They did not understand that he was talking about his death on Calvary, neither did they understand what He meant about his coming again. That understanding was to follow at a later stage. We, with the hindsight of the years of the church's understanding and the direct teaching of the Spirit of God who leads into all truth, can have an understanding of what the Lord Jesus meant when he spoke to his disciples all those years ago. We have the written Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The disciples had only the Old Testament. In that sense, present day Christian believers have a blessed understanding given to them by the teaching of the Spirit of God in applying the Scriptures of truth to our hearts.

We understand, then, when Jesus spoke of his coming again, he did not just mean that he would be resurrected by the power of God, but after his ministry of intercession for his church in heaven (Heb. 7:25), he would return to this earth to claim all his own church and receive them to heaven. Now the Lord Jesus spoke in this final discourse of the teaching of the Spirit of God (Jno. 14:16,17; 26; 15:26). The disciples would have received that teaching of the Spirit on the day of

Pentecost and continually throughout their ministry, understanding what the Lord Jesus had spoken to them in the Upper Room on the night he was betrayed.

If we turn over to the Book of the Acts, we have in the first chapter the account of the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is here we find another promise concerning the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. 'And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven' (Acts 1:11f). Here is the promise made by the angels concerning the return of Jesus to this earth. We notice some of the wording used. Christ is referred to as 'this same Jesus'—this Jesus, this God-man, this One who is the propitiation of our sins, this One who was the sacrifice made from the foundation of the world; this same Jesus will return to this earth. This destroys all the notions of those who consider the final return of Christ to be a spiritual return. The angels said that is the same Lord Jesus who will return in like manner as he was ascended and received into heaven.

But although the angels said his return would be in like manner, there is one notable difference in his return. When he first came, he was a little babe born and placed in a manger in the stable for the was no room

in the inn. He came as the suffering Servant, who bore all the burden of the broken law and the sins of the church of God which were imputed unto him; he being the sacrifice for sins paid the penalty in full.

But the second time he returns it will be without sin. He will return as a glorious Saviour taking the victory to the praise of His own name. 'So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation' (Heb. 9:28). He is pictured in the book of the Revelation as the King going forth to conquer the nations of the earth. He has a sharp sword proceeding out of his mouth by which he will conquer all that oppose him. It will be the time when the kings of the earth and all the peoples of the earth will call for the mountains and the rocks to fall upon them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16). Oh, what a dreadful day it will be for those who know not the Lord Jesus Christ as saviour and Lord. There will be no escape on that day. But for the people of God, it will be a day of great comfort (1 Thess. 4:18). All their trials will be over. They will see the Lord Jesus Christ. They love him even though they have not seen him, but then they will see him and be in his glorious presence for evermore.

The Lamb with His fair army
Doth on Mount Zion Stand
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land. ¶

Thus is a man made righteous, even of God by Christ, or through his righteousness. Now if a man is thus made righteous, then in this sense he is good before God, before he has done any thing of that which the law calls good before men; for God maketh not men righteous with this righteousness, because they have been, or have done good, but before they are capable of doing good at all. Hence we are said to be justified while ungodly, even as an infant is clothed with the skirt of another, while naked, as touching itself.

John Bunyan

FORMER DAYS

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

250 years ago: March & April 1772

The *Magazine* for **March** opens with the continuation of Mrs. Ann Dutton's letter to a Christian friends. She shows the strangeness of the gospel way of salvation to the carnal mind from the illustration of the brasen serpent in the wilderness as a cure for snake bite. We must receive what is divinely revealed, or remain without hope.

A correspondent asks a series of questions about the nature of true faith, including wanting to know if, and in what sense, faith might be considered a duty. It will be interesting to read any responses.

John Ryland exposes the sinfulness of Deism. The Harmony of Scripture prophecies shows how those relating to Noah's son Canaan were fulfilled, including in the Phoenicians.

One who admits to being comfortably off writes to encourage a brother who is in poverty. A correspondent asks for opinions about the creation of the angels: before the world, or on the sixth day? An interesting account concerning the finding of money leads the author to consider modern miracles. John Ryland writes on the Full Assurance of Faith. He addresses the nature, foundation and effects of such faith in this portion, with a second part to come. Two short meditations and poetry conclude the issue.

In **April** we begin with a letter on the differences between the converted and the unconverted. Thoughts on Election take up a large number of pages. A writer gives his thoughts on trees: he clearly knew something about fruit trees, and speaks from them to the human condition in a very

natural manner. A Letter to one Distressed on Account of Sin, points the recipient to Christ. A thoughtful writer responds to a request to consider the relative benefits of two types of preacher. One, declaring all the fullness of Christ, leaves the application of this preaching to the Holy Spirit. The other, while maintaining the whole of the gospel of grace, exhorts and pleads with sinners to repent and believe the gospel. The first sort scrupulously avoid any suggestion that the hearer has any power in the matter. The second sort may occasionally speak loosely on that matter. Which, if either, is to be commended? While pointing out that the second sort usually have the more fruitful ministries, the writer sets his answer on what Scripture teaches. For him, the example of Christ and his apostles vindicates the second sort.

Jacob as a type of Christ is continued from January. Poetry ends the issue.

200 years ago: March & April 1822

The **March** issue opens with an enquiry into the moment when the Christian dispensation began. The author takes the resurrection of Jesus Christ to be that moment. It is impossible to read such things without having the errors of Dispensationalism in mind. Whatever the good intention of the original writer, such divisions have proved to be unwise. Far better the opinion of Henry Bullinger, who showed that the Christian faith is the old faith, from Abel on. The Old Testament saints looked to the atonement, and we look back to it. The one hope of sinners has sustained believers from the beginning.

The controversial nature of recent contributions is addressed by a writer who confesses to having been one of the controversialists. For him, the greatest danger arises from those errors that approach most closely to the truth. Specifically, the error exposed concerns the nature of saving faith, and whether there is any such thing as the spiritual new birth. The author contends mightily for the truth.

Sermon skeleton xxix outlines Gal 5:4, 'Ye are fallen from grace.' Skeleton xxx takes Luke 1:68, 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people.' Skeleton xxi is of Luke 2:14, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will towards men.' Skeleton xxxii takes John 10:35, 'And a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the, voice of strangers.' 2 Kings 6:5, 'Alas, master! for it was borrowed' is Skeleton xxxiii. These are followed by an oration on Solomon's assertion, that God made man upright, but that he has sought out many inventions.

A letter on Coming to Jesus is followed by another on the Body being Sanctified, and another on Christ Bearing Sin. A correspondent asks for answers to four questions:

Q. 1. Is the sinner's sin, or his rejection of Christ, the cause of his condemnation; including any who may have never heard of the Saviour?

Q. 2. What is the distinction between regeneration and faith?

Q. 3. Can God have an angry feeling towards anyone of his children, if ever so rebellious; and does he correct them *for* their sins—or for his own pleasure and their profit, that he may be glorified in them?

Q. 4. Does the flesh or carnal mind in the believer love, delight in, and serve sin as much or more after regeneration as before? On this subject compare and reconcile the

following passages, 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon', 'With my mind I serve the law of God, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.'

Another writer takes 2 Peter 1:10 to show that those who hold to conditional election are on very unsure ground. The longest of the remaining pieces concerns the punishment of sin. Two hymns conclude the issue.

The first entry for **April** sets out Satan's devices. A question from November 1821, on the meaning of Hebrews 2:16, is answered. A writer quotes Dr Gill on the election of angels, and then turns to the election of men. It is a detailed and learned answer, and bears careful consideration. The Infinite Importance of Christ's Humanity is defended by a writer against objections. Another offers thoughts on the Triumph of Faith from Job 19:25. Experimental Godliness is the subject of a letter. A writer answers a question from the previous year, What Sin is that which a Believer cannot Commit? Does Psalm 23:4 speak to our temporal death, or to our trials between conversion and the grave, asks a correspondent.

The next piece, part of the Attempt to Rescue the Holy Scriptures from Ridicule, sets out Bible references, Hebrew words and their translation in a table. Unfortunately the scanned pages are cut short on the long edges, making it impossible to gain a complete view of the author's intention.

Question 1 from March is answered. Sinners are condemned for their sins, both original sin imputed and actual sin committed. A writer speaks to the eternal safety of church, being the foundation of God. Of the poetry that forms the final part, one is worth mentioning. Lord Byron wrote a dramatic poem called 'Cain a mystery.' He asserted that nowhere in the Old Testament is there any hope of a future state. A writer

begs to differ, offering various Scripture passages against this claim. He supplies a poem against Byron's blind reading of Scripture.

100 years ago: March and April 1922

The opening sermon for the **March** issue is from Proverbs 3:6. We are exhorted to acknowledge the Lord Jesus as our Divine Saviour, our Divine Ruler, our Divine Keeper and our Divine Counsellor. We are to acknowledge him in all our ways.

A frank review of the recent Islington Conference, on the Atonement, shows how far Evangelicalism in the Church of England had slipped from what it once was. The reviewer, careful to acknowledge all that was spoken truly, quotes various statements that show a sad decline in gospel understanding. One speaker, of mixed quality, quoted the then-Bishop of Manchester (later Archbishop of Canterbury) William Temple, as saying, 'Christians believe that the antagonism in God against us is removed by the sufferings of Christ. How so? Well, if we read the New Testament carefully we shall not be in any doubt; it is not because this penalty due to us has been visited on him; that would make the Atonement flatly immoral. It is because the life of Christ, and above all, the death of Christ, possesses transforming power.' Both the speaker at the Conference and the reviewer dissent strongly from this baseless assertion. One speaker asserted the old Moral Influence theory of the atonement, and another denies the reality of hell, the resurrection and heaven.

Job 37:21-22 provides the text for the bright light that is Christ. A sermon on the resurrection of the saints, from John 11:33 provides comfort for all Christ's people. An expression taken from Samuel, Rutherford, 'So many plies', speaks of the riches of Christ. The plies are the folds of the cloth, and there

are so many that we cannot exhaust them, yet we are bound to explore them.

The account of a man who narrowly escaped entering one bad marriage only to make another is given to show why we always need heavenly wisdom in all we do. To have been guided once should encourage us to seek guidance again, not convince us that we have no further need of help. Thoughts on time and eternity remind us that now is the time to seek the Lord.

A section of one of Bishop Ryle's Charges is quoted, setting out some false modern views about the state of man after death. See the review at the end of this *Magazine* for more information about that book. Christ our light, from John 1:5, encourages to see Christ as the light after darkness, from three Old Testament passages. The article on Dancing is concluded from an earlier issue. Protestantism in Ireland is the subject for a writer, and given the current optimism being expressed by some, is as relevant now as it was a century ago. One or two short pieces, including a review of David Baron's exposition of Isaiah 53, conclude the issue.

In **April**, the sermon asks, 'Who is this?' from Matthew 21:10. We are shown the Father's answer, the Son's answer, the angels' answer, the devils' answer, and the answer of Christ's own people. The recent marriage of Princess Mary is referred to in a sermon on the Royal Wedding of Matthew 22:2. It is a royal wedding, a sumptuous wedding, a wedding to which all sorts of people are invited, and it is a wedding from which the improperly dressed will be excluded. Wellsprings speaks to the work of the Comforter, from John 14:26. A sermon by the late James Ormiston, on the Peace of God, from John 20:20 is begun, and the sermon on the resurrection of the saints is concluded from the March issue. Readers are provided with

some interesting information on the history, culture and importance of Tarsus. Under the heading Jesus Everywhere, we are given some thoughts arising from a contemplation of the two disciples who were met by the Lord on the Emmaeus road. Jesus came to them by the way, showed himself to them in all the Scriptures, was present in their home, was present in the midst of the disciples in the upper room, and is even now in heaven. The connections between the Epistle to the Hebrews and the book of Leviticus are considered under the heading, Christ the Eternal Word. The same man whose marriage troubles were reported previously is given as an example of how Christians ought to pray. He reported that when he ceased to

pray for Christ's people, his soul ceased to prosper.

A layman is quoted with great approval, calling as he does for true spiritual revival. This will entail a return to first principles. These must be proclaimed, beginning with the sovereignty of God; these must be apprehended, and these must be adhered to. Romans 8:35 provides the ninth Question propounded in Holy Writ, and a few short pieces follow. The final major piece takes up a point from the creed of Pius IV, who asserts the retaining, worshipping and honouring of images of Christ, Mary and the saints. The errors are clearly exposed in the light of Holy Scripture.

THEY HAVE BELIED THE LORD

A sermon on Jeremiah 5:10–19

by PHILIP LIEVESLEY (Frinton-on-Sea)

Whilst on holiday between Christmas and new year I enjoyed a quick rare day trip out to London to see some of the sights. It was good to be reacquainted with some of the historical sights such as Tower Bridge, the Tower of London, the Houses of Parliament, and last but not least Elizabeth Tower a.k.a. 'Big Ben'. Another of the historical sights seen was the Monument to the Great Fire of London of 1666. This is perhaps one of the lesser-known London sights and probably not on the top ten list of tourist attractions. The Monument was built to serve as a permanent reminder of the Great Fire. Dr. Robert Hooke and Sir Christopher Wren designed the Monument, which was completed

in 1677. The Monument stands 202 feet tall because it is situated 202 feet west of the spot where the fire started on Pudding Lane. Despite its height it is almost hidden today by the surrounding tall modern commercial buildings. Hopefully it still provides a bird's eye view of London for those who don't wish to go on the London Eye!

Seeing the Monument reminded me of the classic work I studied a few years ago called *The Doctrine of Repentance*. This book was written in 1668 by the English puritan Thomas Watson. It was Watson's response to the Great Plague of London of 1665 to 1666 and the Great Fire of London in 1666. These events had a devastating effect on London.

The Great Plague was the worst outbreak of plague in England since the black death of 1348. London lost roughly 15% of its population and devastated the lives of the survivors. Almost simultaneously the Great Fire made 85% of Londoners homeless. Those who could fled from the city and didn't return for many years until it was considered to be safe again. It took almost half a century to rebuild the city.

In his book Watson calls the reader to consider God's afflictive providences. From Watson's perspective God had made good upon London and England those two threatenings: 'Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth' (Hos 5:12) and 'I will be unto Ephraim as a lion' (Hos 5:14). God had been like a moth to England in the decay of trading, and as a lion in the devouring plague. According to Watson: "God has set our houses on fire that we may run to him in repentance. 'The LORD's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it (Micah 6:9). This is the language of the rod, that we should humble ourselves under God's mighty hand and 'break off our sins by righteousness' (Dan 4:27)'. Watson continues: 'God's judgments are so proper a means to work repentance that the Lord wonders at it, and makes it his complaint that his severity did not break men off from their sins. "I have withholden the rain from you" (Amos 4:7), "I have smitten you with blasting and mildew" (Amos 4:9), "I have sent among you the pestilence" (Amos 4:10). But still this is the burden of the complaint, "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD".'

We live in times in this nation and throughout the western world where the words 'repent' and 'sin' have become mainly forgotten, and even taboo words in many evangelical churches let alone in the

established and increasingly secular and amoral world outside the church. This means that sadly many in evangelical churches and in society have never heard of the foundational gospel truths taught by Watson in his work. Moreover, even where the words 'repentance' and 'sin' are mentioned they are watered down. Their seriousness has been replaced by a shallow and flippant regard for them. Watson's book therefore clearly addresses a foundational part of the gospel and the Christian walk of sanctification that is sadly either not preached at all from pulpits today in the western world, scarcely preached, or preached in a diluted form. This is quite staggering as the first word preached by both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ himself as recorded in the New Testament is 'repent' (Matt 3:2; 4:17). Additionally, there is no call to national repentance from the national church or the state today. Divine judgment has clearly fallen upon this nation in recent years, such as the Credit crunch of 2007, the international banking crisis of 2008 with the resulting years of economic austerity, and the current prolonged coronavirus pandemic that has adversely affected everyone to some degree. Yet in all this time there has been no acknowledgment of the nations' sin and call for repentance from the national church or politicians. Whereas Watson's work written in 1668 has reference to the plague of 1665 and the Great Fire of London of 1666 being God's just judgment on our nation with a clear call for national repentance. Sadly throughout 2021 we have not yet as a nation repented toward God. This is because as yet during the pandemic so far there continues to be no apparent fear of God. As C.H. Spurgeon said whilst preaching on Jeremiah 5: 'You have not that reverence and fear of God which he deserves from you, else you

would turn at his reproof, and he would pour out his spirit upon you.' With these thoughts in mind let us study our text.

I. Many in our nation today deny God's existence.

'For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the LORD. They have belied the LORD, and said, It is not he' (vv. 11–12).

God charges the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah in our text with perfidy, because they had revolted from Him. He charges them with general treachery and defection. This is strong language. God detests a covenant breaker (Romans 1:31; 2 Timothy 3:3). From the divine perspective the remaining northern kingdom and those of the southern kingdom had become apostates from worshipping the one true God revealed to them as Jehovah—the covenant keeping God. This is despite good king Josiah's unsuccessful attempts to bring about a reformation and restore their part in the covenant in the southern kingdom at the time of Jeremiah's prophecy. The prophecy goes on to declare that they denied God, saying within themselves that there was no God. This was not to lie to God, but to reject him as one who did not exist. The Israelites of the two kingdoms completely disregarded God and attempted to erase the remembrance of the one true and only God who had revealed Himself to them. 'Satan teaches men first to doubt and then deny; he makes them sceptics first, and so by degrees makes them atheists' (Matthew Henry). It seems that most people in this country today do not believe in the existence of God. Most people today in our nation live ungodly lives. In other words, there is no acknowledgment of God whatsoever. People in this country live secular atheistic lives.

Church attendance on the Lord's Day continues to decline. One result of the pandemic so far is that monthly churchgoing now suits worshippers. Just like the situation in this chapter, one of the most disappointing aspects of this pandemic so far in this nation has been the refusal to acknowledge God from the highest to the lowest in society. Help from experts in science and medicine has been sought but God's help to deliver our nation from this pandemic has not. The people of this nation are generally atheistic and therefore Godless. And therefore, of course, most people die committed atheists or at best agnostics. There is irony in our nation welcoming the new year fixing its gaze upon the TV broadcast of the chimes from 'Big Ben'. As our nation takes great pains to forget about God Britain is reminded that the new year is the year of our Lord 2022. Surely a reminder that the Lord Jesus Christ who is Almighty God does indeed exist and reigns supreme as King of kings and Lord of lords in heaven and on earth. And eventually everyone, not just in our nation but for all time will bow the knee and acknowledge this.

II. Many in our nation today deny God's righteous justice

'They have belied the LORD, and said, It is not he' (v. 2).

The prophet Jeremiah alleges also in his prophecy that the two kingdoms denied God's righteous justice. They did not fear what God is. Most it seems were ungodly atheists and attempted to deny the very existence of the one true God altogether. But those who were religious, it seems, hardened themselves against God's threatening's. They totally disregarded his righteous justice and judgment. Therefore, in effect they also 'belied the LORD, and said, It is not he' because to acknowledge God properly

is to acknowledge His power to judge. This is one of his fundamental divine attributes. Admittedly, it is true that judgment is called God's strange work (Isa 28:21; Ezek 33:11). In other words, God would much rather show his mercy and does not afflict willingly, especially his own people. The ruins of Jerusalem, the holy city, when God did finally judge are said to be an astonishment (Jeremiah 25:18). But God is nevertheless the righteous impartial judge of the earth. Likewise, today the people of this nation deny God himself by denying his righteous justice. The people of this nation deny God by refusing to believe in divine judgment including the final awesome day of judgment, that God can and will punish sin in this mortal life and for all eternity. Many souls are sadly ruined by imagining that God will not be so strict to punish iniquity as the word of God gives fair warning. But this was how Satan, the enemy of our souls, first laid his snare for mankind: 'And the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die' (Gen 3:4). This is how Satan continues to lull people into a false sense of security today.

III. Many in our nation today deny God's afflictive providences

'They have belied the LORD, and said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword or famine' (v. 12).

The people of the two kingdoms did not believe that God is the righteous judge of the earth. Therefore, they did not believe in God's afflictive providences. They confidently boasted that the divine punishments threatened in Jeremiah's preaching would not happen, and that they would be safe from any harm. Again, this was to deny God. It is his divine prerogative to correct and punish by his providential governance

of the world. Today the people of this nation, including most in the church it seems, do not consider this pandemic to be God's afflictive providence. It is not discerned as God's call to national repentance. From the nation's perspective this pandemic, which has so far claimed the lives of about 150,000 British people and adversely affected many is part of the normal course of nature in a world where there are viruses and diseases. Pandemics have always happened from time to time, it is claimed, the last one being Spanish flu around a hundred years ago.

IV. Many in our nation today deny God's ministry of the gospel

'And the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them: thus shall it be done unto them' (v. 13).

This text commends to us the ministry of the gospel and the public preaching of the word of God. The people of the two kingdoms did not believe that God was speaking through his commissioned servant Jeremiah because he was faithful to the word of God. He preached authoritatively the word of God. But they refused to acknowledge the authority of the word of God. They refused to acknowledge that Jeremiah and all the other faithful prophets had been sent by God as a prophet. Jeremiah and the other faithful prophets didn't preach peace, peace like the false prophets did when there was no peace. They did not take any notice of Jeremiah's and the rest of the faithful prophets preaching because he and they threatened divine judgment to come unless they repented of their sins. They therefore refused to acknowledge the office of the true prophet called and sent by God. Again, they denied God in this way too. To deny the authority of the word of God is to deny God. To deny his ministers and their message is to deny the God

who sends them. Today in our nation faithful gospel ministers are generally ignored whether in the pulpit or in open air public preaching. Ridiculous as it seems, they are considered unchristian and unloving. From most people's point of view faithful gospel preaching is hard and nasty and comes from the mouth of a preacher who doesn't understand the Scriptures he preaches from, whose idea of God is false. Today open-air preachers are being treated shamefully by some members of the public and some authorities. Admittedly it is nowhere near as bad as Christians, pastors and churches fare who are persecuted for the Christian faith in dangerous parts of the world today such as China, North Korea, Afghanistan, Iran, and Nigeria. But our nation is supposed to be a Christian nation that has enjoyed hard fought civil and religious liberties for many centuries.

Summary:

According to the national archives King Charles II ordered that 10th October 1666 be a day of fasting on account of the Great Fire of London. He told the Lord Mayor of London to support collections for victims of the fire. This was a very Christian thing to do as a fundamental aspect of fasting from a scriptural basis is to provide donations for the poor and the needy. Thomas Watson also wanted heartfelt repentance throughout the nation, both personal and national. In the 'tolerant' western world including our nation something that is not embraced is the mention of sin and repentance. Thomas Watson's work *The Doctrine of Repentance* is therefore a very important book for today. We are being advised by the government via the NHS to have our booster jabs to fight off the Omicron variant of Covid. But what medicine has the Church and State prescribed

for our souls and the nation's soul? The government and perhaps the nation is proud of the national vaccine roll out including the booster covid jabs. But what about a roll-out for repentance? We have had no posters up anywhere calling for repentance. This is because what is impressed upon the minds of everyone in our nation and throughout the western world today is the necessity of having a good self-image and self-esteem. The Church, the State and the Media indulge people by making them feel good about themselves all the time. According to the late R.C. Sproul, 'We live in one of the most narcissistic cultures of all time. In Greek mythology Narcissus saw a reflection of himself in the clear water of a pond and fell in love with his own image. What he did was mythical. What we do is real.' Additionally, almost everyone today would admit to being far from perfect. But even if people do acknowledge to being sinful it lacks an appropriate seriousness. Today people agree with the famous quote by Alexander Pope from his poem an essay on criticism: 'to err is human, to forgive, divine.' Forgiving others who have wronged you is considered a 'divine' act on the part of the one who forgives and helps to increase self-esteem. There is also the assumption that since God is divine, He is obligated to forgive everyone without the need to repent and believe the gospel. Sinfulness is not understood by the biblical definitionably taught by Watson, but rather as the common tendency everyone must make mistakes that are readily forgiven by God, that is, if he exists at all which he supposedly probably doesn't. This is a serious defect of the Alpha Course used by evangelical Anglicans. In the Alpha Course sin is regarded as how we have messed up our lives and being sorrowful as a result with no acknowledgment of being sorry for sin and how we have offended a

holy God. Watson's view of sin and its consequences in his book is far more substantial and penetrative. Indeed, Watson shatters any notions that contemporary British people have, whether evangelical Anglican who do the Alpha Course, or secular atheist, about sin and their desperate need of repentance, particularly in chapters three and four.

Sproul also has made the profound observation that people today in the western world who do still believe in God, heaven and the afterlife no longer believe in the doctrine of justification by faith alone, or by works. What they believe in today is the doctrine of justification by death alone. In other words, all a person must do to be received into the everlasting arms of a loving heavenly Father and to go to heaven is to die. There is widespread ignorance, superficiality, and flippancy regarding the holiness of God and the sinfulness of sin inside and outside the churches in our nation and throughout the western world today. Again, according to Sproul 'we fail to understand who God is, and we fail to understand who we are. Our view of God is too low, and our view of mankind is too high.' There is no felt need of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of calvary today. But even the Lord Jesus Christ himself believed that his once-for-all sufficient atoning work on the cross of

Calvary was necessary for anyone to receive divine pardon and get to heaven. Without 'repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ' there is no salvation (Acts 20:21). Repentance is just as much a part of our legal standing before God as faith is. The Lord Jesus Christ said to the apostles after his triumphant resurrection from the dead; 'Thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations' (Luke 24:46, 47).

God needs us and our nation to be sincerely humble so that he can save. Although gospel ministry is mainly about the eternal salvation of souls it does also include the denouncing of national sin and call to national repentance. Watson's book provides many examples of how national repentance forms an integral part of the biblical doctrine of repentance. Without repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ in this mortal life there will be divine judgment to come for individuals on the last day. And, as Watson discerned in his time, that without national repentance toward God our nation will continue committing abominable sins and continue to lose much of its pristine fame and renown throughout the world, and without God's mercy risk further calamities. Amen. ¶

BOOK REVIEW

Charges and Addresses

J. C. Ryle

Banner of Truth, 2021, xvi + 448 pp, £15.00 hb ISBN 978-1-80040-011-5

As one who has long been an admirer of the writings of Bishop J C Ryle, I could almost be said to have jumped at the opportunity of reviewing a new book by him. Not that his is, of

course, a wholly new publication but a new edition of one first published in 1903 and first issued by Banner of Truth in 1978—about the time I first read *Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century*. Most readers probably know Ryle best from his biographical writings such as *Christian Leaders* and *Five English Reformers* or classics of spirituality and doctrine such as *Holiness* and *Knots Untied*. This collection is in neither category, even if it includes much history and doctrine. Rather it contains the working papers of a pioneer bishop, the first of the great city of Liverpool, then claimed to be the second city in the empire, as we are often reminded.

Ryle was probably the most decidedly Protestant bishop of the Church of England since the early days of Cranmer and the other Marian martyrs and their immediate successors; it is also doubtful if there have been any to approach him since. The circumstances in which he became a bishop are themselves a little bizarre and illustrate how in the providence of God good can come out of the machinations of men, even politicians. Disraeli was on the point of being defeated by Gladstone in the General Election of 1880 and was keen to get one over on his great rival before laying down his office. Gladstone, as a Liverpudlian himself, would no doubt have taken great care over the appointment and as a High Churchman recommended an appointment from that constituency. The appointment of Ryle, who had only just started work as the new Dean of Salisbury, was rushed through largely to spite Gladstone by a Queen only too pleased to reward her favourite Prime Minister.

We live in days when bishops are expected to retire at 70 and many opt to go earlier on reaching pensionable age. John Charles Ryle was 64 when he arrived in Liverpool and it was not expected that his time in office would be long. His various triennial charges are peppered with references to his age and the possibility that this would be the last time he would address his clergy. In the event he lived to be 84 and only resigned his bishopric a few months before his death in 1880.

Charges and Addresses contains 17 of these occasional writings by Ryle: six triennial charges to the clergy of the diocese, eight addresses to the annual diocesan conferences, attended by laity as well as clergy, a brief 'Farewell to the Diocese' and two other sermons and addresses given on various occasions. Nearly all the diocesan addresses comprise two elements, matters of exclusive interest to the Liverpool area and issues affecting the church as a whole. Some of these issues, both local and national, recur repeatedly throughout the series, resulting in a degree of repetition. Readers, however, who admire Ryle's plain and direct style of writing will not mind that too much. Some of the topics are still relevant today, while even with those that might appear to be of only historic interest much can be learnt from Ryle's approach.

Ryle took charge of a new diocese that had fewer church buildings and clergy per head of population than any of the established dioceses. This, along with the sizeable population of Roman Catholics and dissenters, resulted in lower percentage attendance at Anglican places of worship than elsewhere. Ryle recognised the role of the parish and its pastoral ministry in remedying this and much of his energy as bishop was thus devoted to encouraging the endowment and building of new churches. He also encouraged the building of mission rooms and the like to attract the unchurched. In this he sometimes came under criticism for doing little towards providing the new diocese with a magnificent cathedral worthy of a great city. Ryle certainly wanted Liverpool to have a Cathedral, provided funds were forthcoming to pay for it but saw it as secondary to the work on the ground in the parishes.

We hear much in these latter days of the popularity of cathedral services, especially choral evensong, as one of the growth points of the church but it may well be asked whether the

otherwise unchurched participants are truly worshipping God or enjoying a sacred concert. Yes, there is much gospel teaching in the psalms and canticles but can it be readily received when sung in elaborate choral settings? We can perhaps take more encouragement from the recently launched 'Save the Parish' movement which I suspect would have been more to Bishop Ryle's liking.

As a bishop, Ryle accepted that there were three valid strands of thought in the Church of England, represented by the Low Church including the Evangelical Party, the old High Protestant Church and the Broad Church Liberals. However, he also believed that there were limits to such comprehension and that many within the Tractarian and newer Broad Church movements went beyond them. He regretted very much the effects of the Public Worship Regulation Act, passed during Disraeli's second government, in sending certain clergymen to prison as ritualist martyrs. This tended to discredit the legislation and led on to the compromising Lincoln judgement of 1890. Nowadays we are in a situation where almost 'anything goes' in the Church of England but who would argue that that church is the stronger for it? We can read Ryle's wise words in *Charges and Addresses* and regret that they were not heeded.

On the liberal front Ryle has much to say about the effects of higher criticism of the Bible. He clearly saw that the efforts by the Liberals to question the truth of parts of *Genesis* and Moses' authorship of the *Pentateuch* could only serve to undermine the authority of the Bible as a whole. It is interesting to note that, while making no reference to the similar battle that C.H. Spurgeon was fighting within the Baptist Union, he makes use of Spurgeon's term 'Downgrade.'

Ryle was also much exercised over threats to the establishment of the Church of England. Disestablishment had already taken effect in Ireland and the (political) Liberals were preparing similar legislation for Wales that was not realised until 20 years after Ryle's death. Ryle believed that such measures could only weaken the influence of the Church and that, moreover, they would not advance the cause of those free churches that clamoured for them. The threat of disestablishment within England itself may have passed away but it can scarcely be denied that the relations of Church and State are now far weaker than they once were: the Church for the most part runs its own show through the General Synod and the State is content to ignore its existence. The Church of England now enjoys a lower level of allegiance within its territory than did its former Welsh dioceses pre-1920; the state can thus regard it as irrelevant, as has been only too evident during the COVID crisis.

The bishops of the Church today appear above all to be managers and committee men. They could learn much from this book and from a bishop whose pastoral love for his flock is never in doubt. Would too that the clergy would take to heart these words of advice from Ryle's farewell message to his diocese, with which it seems apt to conclude:

Let me, then, charge all the clergy whom I am about to leave behind never to neglect their preaching. Your districts and population may be comparatively small or large. But the minds of your people are thoroughly awake. They will not be content with dull, tame sermons. They want life, and light, and fire, and love in the pulpit as well as in the parish. Let them have plenty of it. Never forget that a Christ-exalting minister will always have a church-going people.

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.

LANDFORD WOOD, WILTSHIRE: *Landford Wood Mission Hall*, Stock Lane, Landford Wood, SP5 2ES (off A36). Weekly Service on each Lord's Day at 3 pm, (God

willing) from February to December). Conservative Evangelical Worship using the AV at all services. Elder: J.E. North, phone 07500265419

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 St, WV1 1HU. Lord's Day, MP 11 am EP 6.30 pm Holy Communion as notified. AV and BCP, *Christian* and *Anglican Hymns* used. Contact Paul Hooper (m) 07477 704921.

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