

Scripture Truth

Momentous Words
Some Problems Christians Face...Commitment
Word Study
Monuments
What Does the Bible Say About...Parents?
Lessons from Isaiah ch.40 for Today
Points to Ponder

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SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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Momentous Words

Donald Hill

Down through the ages, men have made momentous statements which have changed the course of history. The words of the Lord Jesus considered here are of surpassing moment, yet expressed in simple terms. Enjoy this brief meditation.

Introduction

“I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father” (John 16:28).

These momentous words were addressed to His disciples by the Lord Jesus in those closing hours before He went to the cross. They reveal that He was in complete control of the situation. That must be so because of who He is – God manifest in flesh. The words comprise four important facts:

1. The One from whom He came. “The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:14).
2. The place to which He came. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).
3. The place He would leave behind. “And now I am no more in the world” (John 17:11).
4. The One to whom He would return. “I go unto the Father” (John 14:28).

Sometimes you pass a grassy meadow and see a herd of cows all on their feet, munching away at the juicy grass. Another time, you may pass the same meadow and the herd are lying down, chewing the cud. They are making good the grass they have taken in! It is good to read Scripture, but prayerful meditation on the verses read is of paramount importance. This statement of the Lord Jesus certainly demands such meditation.

In its scope, this brief statement of the Lord in John 16 encompasses the whole of the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, together with verses in the opening of the Acts of the Apostles. From the Incarnation at Bethlehem to the Ascension from the Mount of Olives and every other event in between is captured in this statement.

Do the Gospels contain the complete life story of the Son of God in this world? No! “There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25). What is recorded, however, is set down so that “[we] might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing [we] might have life through his name” (John 20:30-31). So let us take careful note of the four important statements in this verse.

The One from whom He came

“I came forth from the Father.”

In stepping into the world by way of the manger at Bethlehem, the Lord Jesus came with the express purpose of making known to us the Father’s Name and the Father’s heart of wondrous love. He could say, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). At the beginning of John’s Gospel, we read, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (1:18). The Son came to make known that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all, and also that God is love (1 John 1:5; 4:8). The whole wondrous plan of salvation for sinful mankind underlay His coming here. So we sing of Him,

“Dwells in His bosom, knoweth all that in that bosom lies,
And came to earth to make it known that we might share His joys.”

The place to which He came

“...and am come into the world.”

Physically, the Lord Jesus stepped into the world at Bethlehem. That coming had been part of the purpose of God from before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20) and had been foretold in Scripture. The prophetic scriptures were fulfilled in relation to both the manner of His birth, His virgin birth, and the place of His birth, Bethlehem. There followed the journey down to Egypt to escape the murderous intentions of King Herod, and then the return to Nazareth when two other scriptures were fulfilled, “Out of Egypt have I called my son” and “He shall be called a Nazarene” (Matthew 2:15,23).

Then followed the silent years but, at the age of 12, the Lord Jesus, in the company of Mary and Joseph, travelled to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. He remained behind after the feast and, when Joseph and Mary eventually found Him in the temple, He said to His sorrowing earthly parents, “Don’t you understand? I must be about My Father’s business” (see Luke 2). Even as a boy of 12, He was here in the world for the accomplishment of the will of God.

More silent years follow and then we have more momentous words, this time spoken by John the Baptist by the River Jordan, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of *the world*” (John 1:29). Here we are left in doubt as to the reason why the Lord Jesus was in the world. He had come to take up and deal with the question of sin.

The Lord’s miraculous power during His three and a half years of public ministry clearly demonstrated His power to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Equally telling were His many remarkable statements. Reflect on the “I am”s of John’s Gospel, the Sermon on the Mount, His discourse with Nicodemus and with the woman at the well of Sychar. But His miracles could not save us; His teaching could not save us – He had to die for us. “And for us did’st come from heaven, as the Lamb of God to die.”

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ was a divine necessity. The Lord Jesus Himself said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be

He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father

lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:14,15). He also said, “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38). Even in the garden of Gethsemane, His words were, “Not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36).

“From heaven the Saviour came, Jesus His precious Name,
The Mighty One of all things Lord, lost sinful man to save,
To triumph o’er the grave, and bring the wanderers home to God.”

We come, then, to the time when the Saviour was crucified at Calvary. He was in complete control – it must be so because of who He is, “God over all, blessed for ever”. He had already declared, “No man taketh [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power (or, authority) to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:18).

As the Lamb of God, the Saviour came to die and so deal with the sin question. From the cross, and that with a loud voice, He said of the work He had come to undertake, “*It is finished*”. Furthermore, in His prayer just before the cross, He could say to His Father, “I have glorified thee on the earth: *I have finished the work* which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4).

“There remaineth no more to be done.
Christ once in the end of the age hath appeared
And completed the work He begun.”

He was buried in a borrowed tomb belonging to the rich man, Joseph of Arimathea. This had already been prophesied by Isaiah, “[He was] with the rich in his death” (53:9). There followed on the third day, as the Lord had promised, His glorious resurrection. Jesus is alive! As the risen Lord, He appeared to Mary Magdalene bringing not only news of His resurrection but also that, in resurrection, new relationships had been forged. “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). Writing in his epistle, the apostle John reminds us, “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons (children) of God” (1 John 3:1).

As the risen Lord, He brought peace to troubled disciples, joy to sad hearts on the road to Emmaus, and recovery to Peter. But His appearances on earth as the living Lord, the conqueror of death and the One who annulled the power of Satan, finally drew to a close to be followed by another wonderful event.

The place He would leave behind

“Again, I leave the world.”

This event is recorded for us in Mark 16:19,20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:4-11. His hands still uplifted in blessing, He was carried up into heaven. Earth had refused Him; in effect, men had said, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). Heaven gladly received Him! “A cloud received him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).

The One to whom He would return

“And go to the Father.”

“He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19). So was fulfilled God’s prophetic declaration in Psalm 110:1: “Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool”. That He is seated there clearly indicates that His work is completed. There was no seat in either the Tabernacle or the Temple. The work of the priest was never done. “Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices which can never take away sins: but this man (Christ Jesus), after he had offered one sacrifice for sins *for ever sat down* on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool” (Hebrews 10:11-13).

Seated at His Father’s right hand, as our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus “ever liveth to make intercession for [us]” (Hebrews 7:25). As having gone through the world Himself, He is able to support, sympathise and help each of us as we, in turn, go through that same world.

Before the cross, the Lord Jesus had prayed to His Father, “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). The place of glory and honour He now occupies is rightly His and is a fitting response to His request.

“Yes, we see Thee crowned with glory, highest honour to Thee given;
But the glory of Thy Person is the light that shines in heaven.
Thou art greater, glorious Saviour, than the glory Thou hast won;
This the greatness of Thy glory – ever blest – Thou art the Son!”

Very soon, the Lord Jesus will take His own throne and reign supreme. But before that, He will have taken every believer home to His Father’s house. Meanwhile, may we ever adore the One who came forth from the Father, and the Father Himself who in love gave His Son!

Heaven gladly received Him

Some Problems Christians Face

3. Commitment – am I prepared to sacrifice?

Jonathan Hughes

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit...and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Prepare to be challenged as you read this article. It is based on the third of a series of talks first broadcast on London’s Premier Radio.

A parable

“Prince Rabadash’s army lay close behind them, Anvard ahead. If they did not reach Anvard before Rabadash and his horde, their journey – their entire lives – would have been wasted. The horses, Bree and Hwin, galloped. Certainly both horses were doing, if not all they could, all they thought they could do, which is not quite the same thing.” But a lion appears out of nowhere and, with the spur of terror, “Bree now discovered that he had not really been going as fast – not quite as fast – as he could.” This quotation is from the *Chronicles of Narnia*, that fount of many simple and usually overlooked truths.

“Perhaps of all the temptations we meet in this life – money, power, sex, drink, fame – the subtlest of all is the comfort zone, that invitation to settle for less, to go for contentment when the stresses and miseries of over-achievement beckon. The way that takes you out of the comfort zone is the path less travelled. Most of us, when we come to that place where the two paths divide, prefer the one that leads to safety, to warmth, to comfort.” So wrote Simon Barnes in *The Times* last year. The picture he draws is a useful one. The distance between what we can do, and what we think we can do, is called sacrifice. As we learn to go beyond ourselves for the good of others, we truly find out what it is to sacrifice, to be committed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The challenge of the Lord Jesus

Jesus had some important words to say about commitment: “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:34-36). How many people today spend a whole lifetime losing their lives, knowing nothing of commitment to Jesus, and sacrifice for Him?!

Three things characterise a man on the cross:

- ◆ He makes no plans for the future
- ◆ He is not there of his own choosing
- ◆ He can only face forward.

If we are to be committed to the Lord Jesus, then we do need to have this single-minded focus to our lives. The lack of commitment, or even the sense that commitment is a good thing, is a common failing in society. Sadly, what is common practice amongst non-Christians is finding its way into the culture of Christianity. Already, it is being argued that if God's word says something that I don't agree with, then it must be His word that is at fault. It's just Paul, or it belonged to another culture, or it isn't meant to be taken literally.

Our readiness to sacrifice stems from our appreciation of just how much the Lord Jesus has sacrificed for us. If His death really means anything to me, then it must find practical expression in my life. Take time carefully to read and ponder the following scriptures which all have a bearing on this matter of our commitment to Christ:

"Reproach has broken My heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none" (Psalm 69:20).

"Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men" (Isaiah 52:14).

"He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him" (Isaiah 53:3).

"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the LORD has inflicted on me in the day of His fierce anger" (Lamentations 1:12).

"I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me" (John 5:30).

"Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done...and being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly" (Luke 22:42-44).

"Calvary, there they crucified Him" (Luke 23:33).

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

"The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

If these words remain just words to us, then we shall never leave behind the comfort zone of our Christianity; we shall never learn to sacrifice, joyfully giving to Him more than we think we are able to. His immeasurable, unconditional love for us must move us to say 'no' to ourselves, 'no' to our ambitions, 'no' to our happiness and ease, and to say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do" (Luke

We can never out-give God

17:10). No matter how much we give to Him, no matter how much we lose out on now, we can never out-give God.

There are three important examples in Scripture as to how we should sacrifice.

Ittai the Gittite

A Gittite was someone from Gath, a Philistine, from the town of Goliath, whom David had destroyed. The Gittites had no cause whatever to love David. And yet, at the time of Absalom's treason, when David had to flee from Jerusalem to save his life, Ittai comes and joins himself to David. So we read, "And the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why are you also going with us? Return and remain with the king. For you are a foreigner and also an exile from your own place. In fact, you came only yesterday. Should I make you wander up and down with us today, since I go I know not where? Return, and take your brethren back. Mercy and truth be with you." And Ittai answered the king and said, "As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely in whatever place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also your servant will be" (2 Samuel 15:19-21).

How David must have been encouraged to hear such a statement of unstinting loyalty and commitment! There was no natural reason for Ittai to be so devoted to David. Indeed, David says as much when he encourages Ittai to turn back, with no hard feelings between them. But how beautiful it is to hear Ittai, having counted the cost, to pledge himself wholly to David. At this time, David was on the run, an outcast from his own people. To associate himself so closely with David was hardly a wise career move on Ittai's part! But the words "whether in death or life" encompass every aspect of our existence. If it meant death to Ittai, well, he would rather die with David than live without him.

So we see that the first lesson in sacrifice is that it is to a person. When I, in whatever measure it may be, sacrifice, it is to and for the Lord. He is the One who inspires me, although others may be the beneficiaries of my sacrifice. The words of the chorus say it well:

"Out there amongst the hills, my Saviour died.
Pierced by those cruel nails, was crucified.
Lord Jesus, You have done all this for me!
Henceforward I would live only for Thee!"

Do we in our individual circumstances, and in our lives as believers together, have such an overwhelming sense of what He has done for us that we are ready to commit ourselves wholly to Him? This is not done by words only but by deeds. Ittai did not make his fine speech only to go back. He followed David into the wilderness and paid the price in terms of his own comfort and prosperity, simply so that he would remain true to his rejected lord. Are we similarly ready to follow great David's greater Son?

But see, too, what else happened. Not only did Ittai follow David, but so did his men with their little ones. Such reality, such commitment does have its positive effect on those round about us. To turn Christianity from a 'formal religion' into a vibrant lifestyle would only take a few individuals who are prepared to get out of their comfort zone and to dedicate themselves wholly to serving the Lord. Sadly, all too often we are not prepared to leave all that matters to us to follow Him.

David

David himself also teaches us an important lesson in what it means to sacrifice. Towards the end of his life, David had taken a census of the people. Perhaps he wanted to see how much the people had grown under his care. Perhaps he wanted to see how strong they were militarily. Whatever the reason, what he did was not part of what God wanted him to do. So Israel is struck with a plague which affects the nation, right to the gates of Jerusalem. But God, in His mercy, spares Jerusalem. It is enough. David repents. God, a divinely sent messenger came to David with the instruction, "Go up, erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite". David went to Araunah and offered to buy the land so that he could build his altar. However, Araunah was only too willing to give the land to David, free of charge. But David told him, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24).

David was going to build an altar and was presented with the opportunity of doing so at no cost to himself. But David knew that he would have to pay for the land or the altar would be worthless. If we are to sacrifice anything to the Lord, then it will cost us.

To remain in our own comfort zones is so easy. It is perfectly possible to be active in my local assembly, or church, but does it really cost me anything? Christianity is not a spectator sport; it requires individual commitment. So often these days, we hear

*Christianity is
not a spectator sport*

about how we can make our Christianity more enjoyable, more acceptable. But this goes against the very heart of what He has already done for us. Our salvation is based upon sacrifice, a sacrifice that cost Jesus His life. Our faith must not be seen as a path to self-fulfilment. To ask, "What is in it for me?" is wholly to misunderstand what it is that God requires of me now. In terms of my time, my emotional strength, my energy and, yes, my money, does Jesus have the first place, to my cost?

The history of the church is full of those who gave of themselves beyond what they could afford, even to the point of their health and their life. Sadly, though, for every one of those, there are many more who have shrunk back from going beyond what they thought possible.

The nameless widow

Finally, we have the example of the nameless widow in Luke 21:1-4: "And He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had"".

How much this wordless woman has to say to us today"! There is no logic to sacrifice. How stupid, some would say, to give away everything she had! How would she eat? How would she live? Faith hushed all these questions as she responded to her God. To this widow, God meant everything; she gave Him all that she had. What does God mean to me? An hour or two on Sunday and a few pounds in the collection, less than the time I spend watching the news each week or getting to work? Those two small coins were the widow's comfort zone and, in appreciation of her God, she gave them both away! The half-heartedness of the others must have been such a discouragement to her, and yet she does not let that put her off. She had a job to do, and she did it, regardless of others. All too often, we let the actions of others impair our own response to sacrifice for Him.

But there is one other thing here to encourage us. So often we speak about the widow's mite. Scripture never does. There were two – the widow's mites. One small coin might not matter much to us. You could hardly buy anything with just one! But Jesus correctly notices everything done for Him. One mite was the difference between something and everything – a distance many of us have never trod. Nothing that we sacrifice to Him escapes His notice. He knows the true cost of everything we do for Him. He has promised that even a cup of cold water given in His Name would not lose its reward (Mark 9:41). When we sacrifice ourselves for Him, frequently others will not know the cost, but Jesus does! Nothing given for Jesus is ever wasted, even though, at the time, it might seem so.

Conclusion

Each of us needs to take up this challenge to re-examine our own lives, quietly before the Lord, to see if there is something more that we could do for Him now. Let us be ready to take the path less frequently followed, to leave behind our personal comfort zone and follow Him wherever He may lead.

But it is necessary to sound a note of caution. Sacrifice is a wonderful thing when it is truly for the Lord. But sacrifice can be terribly destructive. Suicide bombers and terrorists make a sacrifice of sorts, even to the point of their own lives. And yet there is nothing commendable in that. It is self-seeking glorification. Sacrifice without obedience is fanaticism, and God never calls us to that. God never calls us to serve Him in a way that is contrary to His word. It is perfectly possible for the flesh in me, or even the Devil, to prompt me to sacrifice and commitment in religious things, but if that contradicts His word, then it is not profitable, not worthy of the name of sacrifice.

Samuel had some very telling words to say to King Saul, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22). What does God desire first and foremost? Obedience, obedience, obedience! Could it be that perhaps the greatest sacrifice 21st century Christians could make is simply to obey what He has written in the New Testament for His people today? May He give us the strength and the wisdom to be committed to Him today, ready to leave behind all that stops us from putting into practice what we read in His precious word.

*What does
God desire first and foremost?
Obedience,
obedience,
obedience!*

Word Study

Made with hands; made without hands

David Anderson

“We have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1). So Paul confidently affirms our Christian hope. This word study was prepared as background information for a radio talk. Take time to look up all the references and weigh their meaning. In this way, appreciate a little more fully the wonder of what God has done.

“We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is *made with hands* (Greek, ‘cheiropoietos’), and within three days I will build another *made without hands* (Greek, ‘acheiropoietos’)” (Mark 15:48).

Made with hands is a single compound word in Greek, with two components, ‘cheir’, ‘hand’ and ‘poieo’, ‘to make’. (To make Greek words negative, α (a) is added as a prefix.)

In Mark 14:58, both the positive and negative words are used. This highlights the respective meanings:

- ◆ *made with hands* – of human handiwork or origin
- ◆ *made without hands* – of divine work and origin

(see Daniel 2:34: “...a stone was cut out without hands” and its interpretation in vv.44,45: “...shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom...forasmuch thou sawest...the stone”).

Made with hands is used in:

- ◆ Mark 14:58 – for Herod’s temple
- ◆ Acts 7:48; 17:24 – for temples
- ◆ Hebrews 9:11 – in a negative sense for the heavenly/spiritual tabernacle*
- ◆ Hebrews 9:24 – for the physical/earthly tabernacle
- ◆ Ephesians 2:11 – for physical circumcision

- ◆ Septuagint Old Testament for idols – see Leviticus 26:1,30; Isaiah 2:18; 10:11; 16:12; 19:1; 21:9; 31:7; 46:6.

Made without hands is used in:

- ◆ Mark 14:58 – mistakenly for the temple by the Lord’s accusers (see John 2:18-23)
- ◆ 2 Corinthians 5:1 – for the resurrection body of believers, where it is described as a house*
- ◆ Colossians 2:11 – for our spiritual circumcision* in the death and burial of Christ

Notes

1. *Bible teachers usually consider these topics together as a group to show what God has done for Christians.
2. Comparing and contrasting the use of these opposite words, therefore, shows the excellences of God’s work
 - ◆ Mark 14:58 – it is much more glorious than even the best of man’s work and will not fade away
 - ◆ Colossians 2:11 – it is complete, not merely outward or superficial
 - ◆ 2 Corinthians 5:1 – it is permanent, for eternity, not temporal
 - ◆ Hebrews 9:11,24 – it is heavenly and spiritual, not earthly and sensual
3. Reference: Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.

Monuments

John Weston

Jacob's life was one of ups and downs, of spiritual highs and spiritual lows. His experience is one with which many of us can readily identify. This article draws some important lessons from these experiences of Jacob.

Introduction

In this article, we will look at the three monuments erected by Jacob in the Holy Land. These monuments – in the Hebrew ‘matzava(ot)’ – are translated ‘pillars’ in our English Bible. Jacob erected one other pillar, but it was outside the Land. He was not very happy with it, and when his father-in-law, Laban, gave it an Aramaic name, ‘Jegar-Sahadutha’, Jacob responded by giving it its equivalent Hebrew name, ‘Galeed’, meaning ‘a heap of witness’ (see Genesis 31).

These three monuments, looked at in a spiritual sense, reflect three aspects of our pilgrim journey through life:

1. Our heavenly connection
2. Our heavenly calling
3. Our heavenly confirmation.

Our heavenly connection

Please read Genesis 28:10-22.

Jacob's dream revealed that the angels, ascending and descending, had established a bridgehead on earth, forming a direct connection between heaven and earth. What a contrast to man's effort to erect a tower from earth to heaven (see Genesis 11)! Awaking from his dream, Jacob gives the place a name – Beth-El, the house of God. He builds his first monument here (v.18). That monument suggests three important features of our Christian life today: Blessed Assurance; Blessed Anointing; Blessed Abiding.

Blessed Assurance

Elisabeth Clephane writes in her hymn, Beneath the cross of Jesus:

“O safe and happy shelter!
O refuge tried and sweet!
O trysting place where heaven's love
And heaven's justice meet!
As to the holy patriarch
The wondrous dream was given,
So seems my Saviour's cross to me
A ladder up to heaven.”

God has not forgotten the world! In this vision, Jacob came to realise that God in His love is in direct contact with, and is reaching out to, mankind. Elisabeth Clephane is so right to make the connection between Jacob's ladder and the cross of Calvary. The love of God is nowhere so clearly shown as at that awesome scene outside the walls of Jerusalem. There is a way back to God from the dark paths of sin! It starts at the place where Jesus died.

Many years after the vision of the ladder, the Tabernacle in the wilderness was completed in accordance with the divine blueprint. Here, however, as later in the Temple, access into the holiest of all was blocked by the Veil. Christ's victory at Calvary opened up the way into God's presence, as symbolised in the rending apart of that Veil. "So seems my Saviour's cross to me a ladder up to heaven." Blessed assurance, indeed, that now, through grace, we have a new and living way into God's presence, by which we can draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:19-22).

At Beth-El, Jacob received not only confirmation of God's promise to Abraham, but also the promise of God's protection and care over him and of his eventual return to the Land of Promise. As we, as it were, stand by this monument of God's grace, we can affirm with Major Whittle,

"I know not what of good or ill
 May be reserved for me –
 Of weary ways or golden days
 Before His face I see.
 But I know whom I have believed...!"

Our confidence is in a God who declares, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11).

Blessed Anointing

Jacob anointed this monument with oil (v.18). Oil, in Scripture, speaks to us of the Holy Spirit. This thought takes us on to the Feast of Pentecost celebrated in Jerusalem (see Acts 2). Here we see the fulfilment of the Lord's promise given in the Upper Room. The Holy Spirit would be power to the Church throughout its pilgrim journey.

Blessed Abiding

At Beth-El, Jacob realised the reality of the presence of God: "Surely the LORD is in this place" (v.16). This first monument, anointed with oil, was witness to this fact. At

*So seems my Saviour's cross
 to me a ladder up to heaven*

conversion, our bodies become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, a temple as Paul calls it (1 Corinthians 6:19). This is the first step along the Christian pathway. We recognise the reality of God's presence in our lives. We have, through grace, become part of the household of faith and are exhorted to abide in Him (1 John 2:29).

Our heavenly calling

Please read Genesis 35:1-15.

The passing of years

Having erected his first monument and acknowledged the reality of God's presence, Jacob now leaves the Holy Land to go into the far country. The passing of the subsequent years reveal little of his relationship with his God, but rather his determination to make the best of his own little world. How often this is sadly reflected in our Christian lives today! A personal encounter with the Lord and a promise of future obedience slides into second place and, before we know it, the years pass by.

Despite our failure, the Lord Jesus, in His wonderful love, deals in grace with the wanderer. Robert Robinson could say,

“Oh! To grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.”

The parting of ways

“There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune” (Shakespeare). In Shakespeare's day, ‘fortune’ may have meant victory. Here, Jacob, driven by some inner compulsion, severs his ties with the wily Laban and sets his face towards the Land of Promise. But this is a journey which was to be beset with many difficulties, and many testings as to the genuineness of his motives.

“The way of transgressors is hard” (Proverbs 13:15). So it proved to be for Jacob. It has been said that affliction has always been a schoolmaster in the life of saints. This was a pathway of sorrow for Jacob. Crisis after crisis was to face him in succeeding years. He was to experience low points as well as high – no higher than when he embraced Joseph in Egypt, no lower than when he buried his beloved Rachel.

We, too, having met with the God of Beth-El, and embarked on a new direction in life, will experience kaleidoscopic events in life. But through the power of the risen Christ, we can be more than conquerors. We also know that all things work together for good to them that love God (Romans 8:37, 28).

As Jacob's feet once again trod on the soil of the Holy Land, God presented him with a dynamic challenge: “*Arise, go up to Beth-El*” (v.1). Because of his obedience and his acceptance of this challenge, revival comes to Jacob. A line is drawn under the past and Jacob returns to Beth-El after an absence of 20 years. As he does so, he makes three vital decisions:

1. To cast off idols. William Cowper writes,
 “The dearest idol I have known
 Whate’er that idol be,
 Help me to tear it from Thy throne
 And worship only Thee.”

This is the first essential step to revival. Idols must be surrendered. Whatever has come between us and our love for the Lord Jesus has to go. Jacob buried his idols and so must we if we are to live fulfilled lives as believers.

2. Cleansing. The familiar chorus sums it up:
 “Cleanse me from my sin, Lord,
 Put Thy power within, Lord,
 Take me as I am, Lord,
 And make me all Thine own...”

Scripture highlights two aspects of cleansing.

Firstly, the precious blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7) – initially upon conversion, and then daily for the remainder of our earthly pilgrimage, as we come day by day in repentance.

Secondly, we have the pure water of God’s word (Ephesians 5:26), typified by the laver in Tabernacle worship. This is the essential pre-requisite to worship and service. The way into the Holiest for the priests of yesteryear could only be trodden by those who had been cleansed from defilement.

3. Change of clothing. In its spiritual context, this may suggest something of our human weakness of wearing a cloak of deception. How easy it is to fall into this trap! We are all too ready to cover up our true selves in an endeavour to appear as spiritual as others. For Jacob, this was, indeed, an essential third step. Only too well did he remember the way in which he had deceived his aged father. But now Jacob is a man of purpose on his way back to Beth-El, with no cover-up.

The paramount of confession

Renewed and strengthened in his resolve to tread a new pathway, and in obedience to the call of God, Jacob arrives back at Beth-El. He now erects a second monument in this place and, as before, he anoints it with oil and, very significantly, pours a drink offering on it.

However, there is a notable difference this time in his perception of the place. On the previous occasion, it was the place that was of greater significance. To Jacob, it had been Beth-El, the house of God. Now, upon his return, he renames it El-Beth-El. It is no longer the place, but rather the God of Beth-El who becomes of supreme importance. Thus it must ever be.

The downfall of the church at Ephesus was the losing of their bridal love for the Lord Jesus (Revelation 2:4). The tragedy of the church at Laodicea was that Christ was on the

outside (Revelation 3:20). To the Laodiceans, the church and its activities were everything. Christ had no place in its church life.

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face;
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.”

Yes, this confession is paramount in our personal, as well as our church, life – El Beth-El. The God of Beth-El, not the place but the Person, is the banner under which we march. Nothing but Christ, the Christ of God!

Our heavenly confirmation

Please read Genesis 35:16-20.

The third monument erected by Jacob in the Holy Land is to be found on the Jerusalem side of Bethlehem, just before the road forks to Hebron. The story is well known. Jacob and Rachel are hurrying towards Hebron, and possibly on to Beersheba, when suddenly Rachel goes into labour and dies in childbirth. She requests that the baby boy be called Ben Oni, ‘the son of my sorrow’. However, Jacob decides that the name should be Ben Yamin, ‘the son of my right hand’. He erects the monument on the spot.

The location of Rachel’s burial has always been something of a puzzle. Certainly, in warmer climes as in the Middle East, burial is almost immediate. However, in the case of Rachel, it does appear to be rather strange. The family burial place in the cave of Machpelah was only 20 miles away. Here were buried Abraham, Sarah, Leah and, later, Jacob himself. Surely Jacob could have made a quick journey to Hebron but, apparently, he did not.

The promise

Rabbis of old pondered over the problem of Rachel’s burying place and came up with a possible explanation based on Jeremiah 31:15-17: “Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And their hope is in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.”

*Not the place
but the Person*

God knew that a time would come when the Children of Israel would be taken captive and exiled to Babylon. However, He also knew that a day would come when the exiles would return again to their homeland, the Land of Promise. In His love and mercy, God wanted to comfort them and to give them hope by reminding them of His promise to them. This, suggested the rabbis, was achieved by Rachel's tomb being where it was and by the monument erected there. As the captives were being driven into exile, they would have travelled along this road, passing the tomb and its monument, reminding them of God's promise through Jeremiah.

The Parousia (Presence, Coming)

Beloved, let us rejoice in the fact that we, too, have a heavenly confirmation!

The first demand made by those early Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem was not, as in later years, to be shown the site of Calvary. No! Their first request was to be shown the empty tomb. Here, indeed, was heavenly confirmation. That confirmation is set out so emphatically in 1 Corinthians 15: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming" (vv. 20-23).

H. Bonar expresses that confirmation well:

"The mighty stone is rolled away, for He has left the tomb.
We know the Son of God has come; we know He died and rose.
We know He liveth now at God's right hand above.
We know the throne on which He sits; we know His truth and love."

We, too, know that a day will come, and we believe soon, when our Lord will arise from that throne and leave heaven. He will summon the redeemed to leave earth and meet Him in the air. Simultaneously, the trump of God will awaken all those who have died in Christ. They will arise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18).

For the Children of Israel, as they left for exile, the sight of the monument was in itself a proclamation that a day would come when they would return. For believers, the empty tomb in Jerusalem is a proclamation that Christ has risen, that He is a living Saviour who has triumphed over death, and that a day will dawn when all believers will be called to their homeland. May this glorious hope lift up our hearts and voices in anticipatory praise and worship! "What gladness then, what bliss without a cloud shall fill these hearts so oft with sorrow bowed...Lord Jesus, come!" (Helena von Poseck).

What Does the Bible Say About...?

6. Parents

John Keable

The first commandment with promise is “Honour your father and your mother...” (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:2,3). Interestingly, the first use of the word ‘parents’ in Scripture highlights the tensions that can exist between the generations (Matthew 10:21). All of us, parents and children, need the clear teaching of Scripture on this important subject.

Much of the current interest in today’s media, e.g. magazines, TV soaps, etc., centres on family relationships, particularly the relationship between parents and their children. This is clearly an important subject and one which affects us all in one way or another. Having recently led a Bible study on the subject of ‘parents’, it seemed good to share some of the thoughts which came out of it. Today, more than ever, it is important to having our thinking on such important issues clearly rooted in biblical teaching.

What is the purpose of parents?

When God gave His laws to the Israelites in the desert of Sinai, He had a very important role for parents: “These commandments I give you today are to be upon your hearts. *Impress them on your children*” (Deuteronomy 6:6,7).

From the dawn of time, it was God’s intention that parents should teach their children about Himself. Adam and Eve must have taught Cain and Abel that they had a responsibility to honour the Lord. Although Cain got it wrong, both boys felt a duty to worship God (Genesis 4:3,4); their parents must have taught them this. At the end of Genesis 4, we read of Seth’s son, Enosh: “At that time, men began to call on the name of the LORD” (v.26). The inference is clear: they were taught to do so by their parents. In the same way, God instructed His people to teach their children about Him and to teach them His laws.

King Solomon, the wisest king in history, instructed his hearers to “*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it*” (Proverbs 22:6). Not only is it a parent’s duty to teach children about God, it is also necessary that children should be trained in understanding right and wrong. From a very early age, a child is influenced

*Train a child
in the way he should go*

by what goes on around him. The greatest influence on a child is that of his parents. The way parents act and speak will influence the way the child grows up and the values he has. These values will remain with that child all his life. Even though later on he may outwardly reject them, they will still remain in his thinking.

Paul looked upon himself as a spiritual parent to the Christians at Corinth. While writing to them, he uses a very important role of parents to emphasise his care for them: "Children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children" (2 Corinthians 12:14). Parents are not just there to provide spiritual guidance to their children; they have a very necessary role as providers of material necessities such as food, clothing, shelter.

A child is totally dependent upon his parents for everything he needs, both spiritual and material. In God's creatorial wisdom, He has given parents so that they might teach their children about Himself, that they might train them in the way they should live, and that they might provide for them as they grow up.

How should parents treat their children?

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). This verse is probably one of the hardest instructions in the Bible to obey. Children can be very exasperating themselves at times! As parents, we are required to understand the frailties of immaturity. After all, we have been children ourselves, but children do not know what it is like to be a parent.

When children especially teenagers, are abusive and rude to their parents, it is a far more effective witness when the parent remains calm and collected. If we react with the same rudeness and abusiveness, we show ourselves to be just as immature as our children. We should seek to show them the love of the Lord Jesus, and ask Him for His help in dealing with confrontations. In this way, we train them and instruct them in the Lord. Sadly, it is all too easy to fall into the trap of exasperating our children. A modern expression to describe this action would be 'winding them up'. When we do this, we are in great danger of losing any credibility or respect we have from our children. Worse still, if we persist in that approach, we can drive them to conclude that the Christian life is not worth living. The Lord Jesus Himself had some very strong words for those who cause children to stumble: "It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied round his neck than for him *to cause one of these little ones to sin*" (Luke 17:2,3).

Having said all the above, there is an equal danger in shirking our responsibilities in discipline all together. "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die" (Proverbs 23:13). A child needs discipline; in fact, most children crave it. They need to know where the boundaries are. If a child is simply allowed to do as he pleases, he will soon lose all direction and purpose in life. One of the reasons for so much chaos in the world today is due to this lack of discipline. Laws that protect our children from harm are necessary, but when the right of parents to

discipline their children according to scriptural guidelines is under threat, trouble will not be far away.

“[A church leader] must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect” (1 Timothy 3:4). Although this verse relates explicitly to church leaders, it should be true of all parents. It is said that respect must be earned, as so it must. Parents who live according to scriptural guidelines will gain the respect of their children because they will treat them with respect.

Parents, then, should treat their children with loving care, loving discipline and loving respect. These are not easy things to do. We will need the help and strength of the Lord every day in this important ministry we have as Christian parents.

What if parents are not perfect?

It is a sad fact that in this 21st century there are fewer and fewer parents who live by the instructions set down in Scripture. Homes run on Christian lines are not regarded as ‘normal’. We are living in a post-Christian age.

Many children today live in homes where their original parents are no longer living together. In a class of 30 children, at least half will have had to deal with the break-up of their family home. These things can be very distressing for young and impressionable people. Stability is one of the most important factors for a healthy and well-adjusted lifestyle. Many children today do not have that stability. About 30 years ago, I was at a house-party during which a talk was given on the subject of divorce and the Christian. At that time, it was almost unheard of for Christian couples to think about divorce. Things have changed and, sadly, divorce among Christians is becoming more common. “Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me” (Psalm 27:10). God has very special promises, such as this one, for those who do not have the benefit of parents to teach them His ways. He will undertake for them Himself. I can testify that this is so. My father died when I was just five years old. I do not know how my mother managed to bring up three young children alone. She says she could not have done it without God’s help. I also remember Christians from the local parish church being regular visitors to our home. In that way, the Lord watched over us. When I gave my heart to the Lord Jesus at the age of sixteen, I received an overwhelming sense of the Father heart of God.

“He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young” (Isaiah 40:11). As a shepherd cares for his sheep, so the Lord watches over those that are helpless. Jesus Himself had a very special place in His heart for young children: “Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14).

As Christian fellowships and assemblies, we need to emphasise the values and importance God places upon the family. When we receive in our Sunday Schools, Youth

Clubs, Camps, and in our homes, children who do not have stability at home, we have a responsibility to care for them on the Lord's behalf.

This responsibility may involve putting up, at least for a time, with behaviour and language not tolerated in our own homes. These children do not have the benefits we have; they may be scarred, both emotionally and spiritually. When Jesus met such people, He did not immediately rebuke their behaviour. Instead, He displayed love, acceptance and forgiveness. He brought healing, comfort and peace into their troubled lives. Now He calls upon us, His followers, to do the same.

How should children treat their parents?

“Honour your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 5:16). Anyone who learned the ten commandments as a child will know this verse off by heart. It is very important to God that children honour and respect their parents. Lest it be claimed that Old Testament laws do not apply to us, Paul clearly states that this one does: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honour your father and mother’ – which is the first commandment with a promise – ‘that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth’” (Ephesians 6:1-3). God will bless those who respect their parents – the Bible says so!

The Bible also has some graphic warnings for those who refuse to obey this commandment: “The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures” (Proverbs 30:17). This is very strong language as it is meant to be. Its message is clear: there are rich blessings for those who respect and honour their parents, but the wrath of God is upon those who do not.

Final thoughts

Being a parent is a hard job. God understands this. He Himself is our Father; He knows the pain of seeing His children go astray. He also knows that, however hard we try, we will never be the parents, or indeed the children, we would like to be or should be. He has, however, given two valuable resources to help us – His written word and His Holy Spirit. As we read His word, and allow His spirit to have His way in our lives, we will be better parents, better servants of our Lord and Saviour, and better children of our heavenly Father.

*Jesus displayed love,
acceptance and forgiveness*

Lessons from Isaiah ch.40 for Today

Part 3. vv.6-8

Mark Davison

The importance of today's verses is highlighted by the fact that they are quoted by the apostle Peter (see 1 Peter 1:24,25). There Peter contrasts the transient glory of man, born of corruptible seed, with the believer, born of incorruptible seed through the word of God. How thankful we should be that our eternal future is secure in Christ!

Introduction

On 28th January, 1986, the space shuttle 'Challenger' was launched from Florida. It was a freezing morning, the coldest it had ever been for the launch of a shuttle. Seventy three seconds later, at an altitude of 46,600 feet and a speed of Mach 1.92, the shuttle suddenly exploded without warning, and all seven crew were killed instantly. The failure was put down to the bad weather causing a seal in the solid rocket booster to fail to operate correctly.

The space shuttle is probably the most powerful machine ever built, and yet it was shown to be very fragile. When it failed, it disintegrated into millions of pieces. More serious was the fact that the seven people inside were also fragile and, in a matter of seconds, were hurled into eternity. Many die each day in equally unexpected circumstances, often as a result of man's wickedness. Life seems so often to be considered cheap.

The person who trusts in God, however, can take assurance from the words of the psalmist: "The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him" (Psalm 28:7). This, in essence, is the message of verses 6 to 8 of Isaiah 40.

*All their glory is like
the flowers of the field*

Context

These verses look beyond the captivity of the Jews. They speak of a time when the great empire of Babylon has fallen. After the sad message of chapter 39, this chapter brings hope for the future to God's people.

Babylon was probably the most splendid civilisation that the world had seen. Its kings ruled for 1,000 years. The Babylonians were very skilled in the construction techniques they used, and were very intelligent in their layout of towns and cities. They were also skilled in arts and crafts, as is evidenced by modern archaeology. They made huge advances in education, mathematics, literature, agriculture and science. It must have seemed then that the empire was unassailable and would last forever. Yet in one night it was gone! Like grass, it had been swept aside (see Daniel 5:30-31).

Western civilisation today is more impressive than that of the Babylonians. Huge advances have been made in the areas of literature, culture, science and art (there has never been a period of such fast development in these things than the last century). But where has it got us? And how will it end? Just like Babylon, our civilisation is still built on the wrong foundations – materialism, wealth and power. Still there is no room for God and His eternal Word. If human life is fragile, great civilisations are equally so.

Personally weak

V. 6 introduces us to the second of the three 'voices', or heralds, heard in this chapter: "A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field." " These words make abundantly clear the fact that we are mortal. We are no better than grass. If you stop to consider the flowers which bloom in the grass – daisies, buttercups, etc. – how insignificant they seem to be. How vulnerable they are! We walk across a field, treading on them with little thought. Then how soon they wither and die. This is the life of man. Just like those astronauts who lost their lives so suddenly, we are fragile. Today somebody dies; tomorrow it may be my turn. Some might consider this thought depressing, but wise King Solomon reminds us that we should be aware of this fact: "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1).

Death need not be a depressing thought, however. Sure, we may fear the process of dying. It may be that some degree of suffering and pain will precede it. But of the death of the believer, it has been well said, "We do not see the opening of the jaws of death, but rather the opening of the gates of glory".

Weak in our glory

There are many good points which we do well to highlight in each other. It might be a kind and understanding attitude, supportive of others who are going through difficulties. It might be generosity, or the willingness to go the extra mile for the benefit of another. All these characteristics, and many others, *should* be displayed in a believer, for they were all seen in the life of our perfect example, the Lord Jesus. Such

The word of our God stands for ever

characteristics might be considered the 'glory of a person'. On the other hand, this 'glory' might be considered to be their wealth, or the wisdom they display, or their natural abilities. Some people are honoured by the Queen for their good works, such as their 'glory'.

However, v.6 clearly states that "all their glory is like the flowers of the field". Anything we might consider as worthy in a person is transient and dies with the person. That is not to say that such things are worthless or evil, but we must get them in the right perspective, and see them as God sees them. Many believe that these things will earn them credit with God and a place in heaven. Perhaps they take the place of God in our lives and become our all-consuming passion. We must, rather, put the emphasis on those things which 'count' with God – the objectives which motivate us. Only those things which please God will last (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). These are the things which bring glory to *God*, and not to ourselves.

We have already seen that the Babylonian empire, with all its grandeur, its power and its wealth, withered and fell. So will our glory if we do not put things in the right perspective and seek to serve God as our overriding objective – "so that in everything He might have the supremacy" (Colossians 1:18).

Verse 7

"The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass." Here we see the wind blowing on the grass and drying it. This seems to show the immense power of God in comparison to mankind. He merely 'blows' on the grass and it is gone. The breath of God is used as an illustration of the Holy Spirit (see Job 33:4). He roves throughout the earth and is penetrating in His effect (John 3:8; 16:8), revealing man for what he really is – vain, sinful, fragile (see also Psalm 103:15ff.). This is the devastating effect He has upon those who come under His conviction. There is no escaping when He begins to work in a life (Psalm 139:7ff.). For the believer, however, it is the Holy Spirit who gives eternal life to our mortal bodies (Romans 8:11).

Verse 8

"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands for ever." Some of the words of v.7 are repeated here to emphasise the contrast between man's life and the enduring word of God. This is the main point of these verses, directing us away from frail mankind to the eternal nature of God. In its context, the verse refers to the promises

made in verses 2-5, in order to assure the people that what God has said *will* come to pass, thus giving them hope for the future.

God's word is eternal and sure because it is not dependent upon mortal man, but upon the eternal God. This contrast between God and man is emphasised by Balaam: "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfil?" (Numbers 23:19).

With men and women, promises are often made and broken. One example of this is the disregard for the vows of marriage, made before God (regardless of whether in a church, registry office or elsewhere). Another illustration is in political life. Public opinion also changes and is not reliable. New scientific discoveries mean that advice is constantly changing in relation to food, health, etc. Only God's word remains steadfast and can be relied upon – indeed, it is the only steadfast thing the world knows.

This eternal Word brings to us an eternal message. The Lord Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matthew 24:35). In the light of these things, we must ensure that our spiritual food is the will of God, revealed through His Word. It is here that we find life: "...man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

If we are to find guidance and help for life from God's word, it will need to be imprinted upon our minds and hearts. There is no short cut to this. It will only come about by daily careful reading of the Bible with an open and obedient heart to take in whatever God would show us from it. That word is described as "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12). V.12 is also quoted by the apostle Peter, who adds the words, "And this is the word that was preached unto you" (1 Peter 1:23ff.). This emphasises again the relevance of the Bible for us today. We still need to read it and understand it.

Conclusion

These verses make clear to us that there is only one solid foundation for life in an ever-changing world – the eternal Word of God. It is the only basis for this short, fragile life here, and puts all our experiences into context. The challenge remains for you to take up. Do you acknowledge the reliability of the Bible? Are you prepared to trust its every word? Will you be obedient to the message which it contains?

*One solid foundation...
the eternal Word of God*

Points to Ponder

(taken from The Gospel of Mark – an expository outline by Hamilton Smith)

“The lack of riches and human learning is no hindrance to being a companion of the Lord, or to being used in His service. Nevertheless, however humble the calling of those the Lord may engage in His service, they are not unemployed. These simple men were pursuing their occupation of fishermen, when the Lord called them to become *fishers* of men. The Lord’s service is not to be taken up by those who have nothing else to do” (see Mark 1:17).

“The fact that Levi was a publican, or tax-gatherer, sets forth the great characteristic of Christianity in contrast to the law. No occupation was more degraded and scandalous in the eyes of a Jew, than that of a man who made his living by the extortion of tribute for the hated Roman. That the Lord should call such was great grace that lifts a man from the lowest place of degradation as a sinner, into the highest place in the service of the Lord as an apostle” (see Mark 2:14).

“If any man have ears to hear, *let him hear.*” The Lord Himself can say through the prophet, “The Lord, Jehovah, hath given me the tongue of the instructed, that I should know how to succour by a word him that is weary. He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear *to hear as the instructed*” (Isaiah 50:4, JND trans.)” (see Mark 4:23).

“We learn from this solemn incident that if the power of Satan is terrible to man, the presence of God is intolerable, even when present in power and grace to deliver man. One has said man “is more afraid of Jesus and His grace than of the devil and his works”. The men of the city, coming out “to see what it was that was done” are at once faced with the evidence of the grace and power of Jesus. The man who had long been a trial to the country, they find “sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind”. Beautiful picture of a truly converted soul, delivered from the terrible power of Satan, and brought to rest at the feet of Jesus; no longer naked and exposed to judgment, but clothed, cleared from every charge, justified before God,

Christ his righteousness, and in his right mind – reconciled, with all the enmity of God withered up” (see Mark 5:14-17).

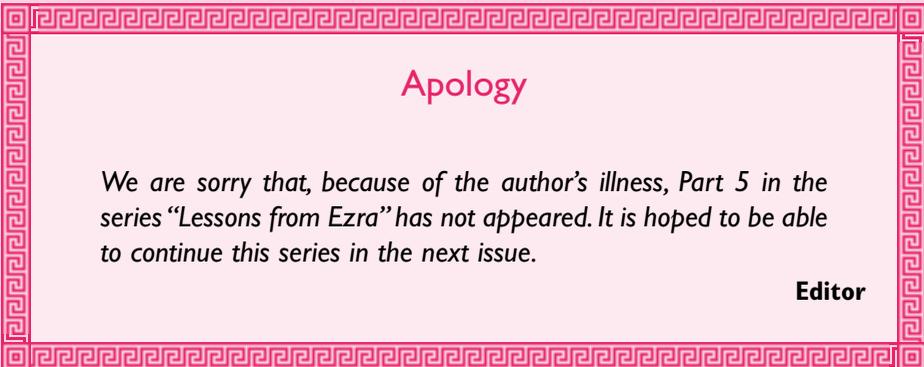
“The apostles, having fulfilled their mission, “gathered themselves unto Jesus”. Having been sent forth by the Lord, they now return to Him. How good for every servant, when any little service has been accomplished, to get back to the Lord and tell Him all things that they have done and taught. Too often we are inclined to tell others, though at times it may be right to encourage the Lord’s people by telling them of His work. There is, however, this great difference, if we gather the assembly of God’s people together, as was the case with Paul and Barnabas at Antioch, it should be to rehearse “all that *God had done, and how He had opened the door*” (Acts 14:27). But when, after service, we gather together unto Jesus, it is to tell Him what *we have done and taught*. How good for our souls to pass in review our acts and words in the presence of One who will never flatter, and before whom we cannot boast, and from whom nothing can be hid; there to learn, it may be, our weaknesses and defects. Alas! We may be full of ourselves and our service; but, in the Lord’s presence we can speak freely of all that possesses the thoughts and burdens the mind, and thus have our spirits calmed so that we may think soberly of ourselves, or forget ourselves and our service to be occupied with Himself. We have no record of any comment on their service, but we learn the Lord’s sympathy and care for His servants. They had spoken of their service, but He is concerned about *them* and the rest they need. Hence, He can say, “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest a while”. The eternal rest remains, but here there is the “rest a while” ” (see Mark 6:30-44).

“We have seen the danger of exalting self; in the incident that follows we see another snare, the danger of exalting a company. John says, “Teacher, we saw one casting out demons in Thy Name, and he followeth not us: and we forbade him, because he followeth not us.” They themselves, though following with Christ, had just failed, through lack of prayer and fasting, to cast out a demon. Now they forbid one to do what they had failed to do because he followed not with them. The Lord, in His answer, shows that what is of value, above all else, in His sight, is the disciple’s relation to Himself. It may be true that the man had not the faith to identify himself with the disciples who were following the Lord in the outside path; but if

he could do a miracle in Christ's Name it was evident that he set value on that Name and would not speak lightly of it" (see Mark 9:38-41).

"The Lord adds a searching word, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last first." This would surely be a warning word against the self-complacency to which we are all so prone, and which apparently marked the words of Peter when he said, "Lo, we have left all." What, indeed, had he left, but a few old nets that wanted mending! Let us beware of boasting what we have given up for Christ. It has been well said, "It is not the beginning of the race that decides the contest; the end of it is necessarily the great point. In that race there are many changes, and withal not a few slips, falls and reverses. The real question is not what we have left in the past, but what are we doing today?" (see Mark 10:28-31).

"[Mary's] act of love is to be used for all time as a beautiful example of the true and proper result of the Gospel. Not only does the Gospel bring to us the knowledge of salvation and the forgiveness of sins, but it wins the heart to Christ, so that He becomes the supreme object of life. We know that the Lord's Supper, which has been celebrated throughout the ages, is a continual memorial of the perfect Saviour and His infinite love to His people; but the one supper that took place at Bethany has become the lasting memorial of a devoted saint and her love to Christ" (see Mark 14:3-9).



Apology

We are sorry that, because of the author's illness, Part 5 in the series "Lessons from Ezra" has not appeared. It is hoped to be able to continue this series in the next issue.

Editor

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“Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28,29).

Thou hidden Source of calm repose!
Thou all-sufficient Love divine!
Our help and refuge from our foes,
Secure we are, for we are Thine;
And, lo! from guilt and grief and shame
We're hidden, Saviour, by Thy name.

Thy mighty name Salvation is,
And keeps our happy souls above;
Comfort it brings, and power and peace
And joy and everlasting love;
To us, with Thy dear name, are given
Pardon and holiness and heaven.

O Lord, our All in all Thou art,
Our rest in toil, our ease in pain;
The medicine of a broken heart;
'Mid storms, our peace; in loss, our gain;
Our smile beneath the tyrant's frown;
In shame, our glory and our crown.

In want, our plentiful supply;
In weakness, our almighty power;
In bonds, our perfect liberty;
Our refuge in temptation's hour;
Our comfort 'midst all grief and thrall,
Our life in death, our All in all.

C. Wesley

“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).