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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

“After these things Jesus shewed Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias... This is now the third time that Jesus shewed Himself to His disciples, after that He was risen from the dead.” (John 21:1, 14).

“To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

From all that has been considered so far, it is quite evident that the Lord was not visibly present with the disciples throughout the whole forty-day period prior to His ascension. Rather, on various occasions **“He shewed Himself ”** and gave a purposeful, visible manifestation. The *“things pertaining to the kingdom of God”* were taught not by word only, but also by the process of Christ showing Himself, with the attendant circumstances surrounding those appearances. Thus in a practical, demonstrable way were His commandments given, precedents set, and disciples instructed. In the event now under consideration (recounted in John 21:1-14) truth was being illustrated for the apostles, which continues to have application for the Church today.

It is first necessary to resolve some seeming contradictions which may occur to the reader. This is the seventh appearance of the Lord described in the New Testament, yet John 21:14 clearly states: *“this is now the third time that Jesus shewed Himself to His disciples after that He was risen from the dead”*. If examined carefully, there is no discrepancy here. The Lord’s first appearance was to Mary Magdalene, His second was to certain other women, His third to Simon Peter in isolation, and His fourth to a couple on the Emmaus road. These were visitations to individuals, and personal in nature. The next two appearances (the fifth and sixth) were to the **gathered disciples** in an upper room, and were of a more formal and official

character. Such is also the case in these verses of John 21, when at least seven of the disciples were present. This should clarify the meaning of verse 14, being indeed the third time that Jesus showed Himself “*to His disciples*”.

The meeting was a most remarkable one. After receiving a manifestation of the Saviour on their second Lord’s Day in Jerusalem, the disciples had left the city and journeyed north to Tiberias in Galilee. Doubtless they anticipated the great meeting with the Lord which the angels had promised previously (cf Matthew 28:7). This was a distance of some 70 miles from the capital, so several days must have elapsed in travelling. Where the Lord was during that time the Scriptures do not record, for His resurrection body, though a truly human body, was not visible unless He chose to reveal Himself to mortal sight.

These men, having arrived back in Galilee, needed means to exist. They were poor labouring men who had given up all to follow the Master, and now He was not continually with them as before His death. So it was their natural inclination to revert to their former employment, in order to support themselves until their future course was more fully disclosed. Obtaining a suitable boat, these one-time fishermen put out to sea in the evening, and trawled unsuccessfully through a long and arduous night. With a new day approaching they made for the shore, beset by feelings of disappointment. As the first streaks of daylight appeared over the hills of Gennesaret, drawing still closer to land, they beheld a strange sight in the dimness of dawn – the form of a man on the lonely beach, at this early hour. Stranger still, this lone figure called out across the waves which broke upon the shore, “*Children, have ye any meat?*” (John 21:5). Somewhat disgruntled by the enquiry “*they answered Him, No*”. Then a further message came over the water: “*Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of*

fishes” At this most bewildering occurrence, John turned to Peter and said, “***It is the Lord***” (John 21:5-7).

The scene that greeted them upon the foreshore was both welcome and lovely – a fire with fish and bread cooking. Having landed the catch, the Lord invites His disciples to breakfast. Where had the food come from? Why did the Lord ask them to bring some of the fish they had caught? Had He not enough for them all? What did it mean? As verse 12 suggests, their curiosity was suppressed by a far greater sense of awe. “*None durst ask Him...knowing that it was the Lord*”. So they sat down around the cheerful blaze by the seaside with the Risen Christ, and with gratitude partook of the food so graciously provided.

The question that must now be asked and answered is: What is the meaning of this scene? What lesson is set forth by this appearance? Some would see no more than an act of great kindness by the Lord toward His disciples, and an opportunity for them to be encouraged in a time of disappointment. Yet this is a very shallow interpretation. Why were the fish carefully counted before they sat down? Why is their number particularly recorded? The Holy Spirit does not inspire irrelevant detail – so the very presence of these facts in the text is evidence of hidden truth, which must be unearthed. The Scriptures must be searched, comparing spiritual things with spiritual (cf 1 Corinthians 2:13). Consider then an earlier fishing expedition which the disciples undertook in the same waters, some three years previously – at the very commencement of the Lord’s ministry. It is contained in Luke 5:1-11. This was one of the early miracles of Christ, and held a symbolic lesson. His concluding words to Simon Peter and the others give a strong clue: “*Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men*” (Luke 5:10). It was illustrative of the fact that they were to become preachers of the Gospel. Matthew 13:47-48 sheds still further light: “*Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and*

gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.”

In these scriptures of Matthew and Luke, the casting of the ‘gospel net’ is illustrated. “Fish of every kind are gathered”, says Christ, “*they inclosed a great multitude of fishes and their net brake*” (Luke 5:6). Has not the history of the Church confirmed that of which Christ spoke? The visible, professing Church, Christendom at large, has always included bad and good – and what breakages there have been in the net! What heresies, errors and schisms! How many fish have been trawled, but then have slipped through broken nets, and returned to the murky depths, having never landed on the shore? There are those who receive the Word with joy, and at first are ‘inside the net’; but then trouble comes or difficulties arise “*because of the word*”. They will not face up to the demands, nor live by faith, and take offence at that which God has said. So they seek for a loophole – some erroneous teaching which will bypass ongoing sanctification and progressive holiness – and from the net, return to the dark and briny waters which for a short time they seemed to have left.

In this way did our Lord instruct His disciples during His earthly ministry, and throughout those three-and-a-half years they had abundant evidence of it. At some periods, great multitudes followed Christ; at one point even the Pharisees said, “*Behold the world is gone after Him*” (John 12:19). But it was not really so. They were not ‘good fish’, and soon it was said they “*went back, and walked no more with Him*” (John 6:66). The disciples should have been well aware how things would be, for being ‘fishers of men’ was often a most disheartening task, involving nights and days of toil with no catch. On other occasions, a multitude of fish might appear to be in the net, but upon reaching the shore most had vanished – gone back into the ocean of the world. Has it not been

the case ever since? There are faithful men still who strive earnestly for the salvation of sinners, preaching week by week and year upon year, and yet are compelled at length to ask Isaiah's mournful question, "*who hath believed our report?*" (Isaiah 53:1).

Having considered the fishing miracle at the commencement of the Lord's ministry, together with supporting parables and teaching, much symbolism appears, and analogies too clear to be ignored. Against this background, the passage now in question must be interpreted, as it has both similarities to and differences from the earlier event. One was at the start of Christ's ministry, the other at its close; the first illustrates the Church throughout the continuance of world history, describing the Church visible, the second shows its end representing the Church invisible, as it will eventually be gathered on the Eternal Shore. In the former miracle, Christ was in the ship, the nets began to break, the catch was hoisted into the vessel, whereupon it stood in risk of capsizing. In the latter incident, Christ was on the beach, the nets did not yield for all their contents, the catch was landed safely on the shore, and never was the boat endangered – all was secure and serene. These highly significant and instructive details illustrate the difference between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant.

The Church on earth is like a fisher's vessel which has put out to sea. All around is restless and turbulent – the world in which the Church has to sail. The nets are cast out, and a multitude of fish drawn in, good and bad among them, and many which slip out again through breaks in the mesh. As the ship fills, on times she has looked certain of sinking, and the Church throughout history has developed many a list, inviting the scorn of her enemies who predict she will soon founder. Yet she has ever survived. Despite the bad fish that have weighed her down, there have always been some good, and of those Christ has said 'they will never perish'. So, in spite of error, apostasy and persecution the Church continues –

why? – because Christ the Great Head is still on board, and will be, until the last good fish is caught. Thus is illustrated the Church Militant, as visible upon earth throughout history.

Now to the Church Triumphant, as depicted in the second miracle, during the last forty days of Christ’s ministry. In this instance, the Lord is portrayed standing upon the shore, the lone night of toil is ended, time has run its course, and the fishers are welcomed to a fairer strand. The morning has broken, and she arrives safely on land. Not a cord of her net is broken in this scene, no bad fish are found in the catch. All who arrive on this shore are God’s Elect, the ransomed and redeemed, of whom none shall ever be lost. This net was cast, not ‘into the deep’, but on the **right** side of the ship – the right-hand in Scripture signifying honour and power, and the position of God’s chosen people. Consider too the numbering: in the first incident it was an indefinite, uncounted cargo, in the second it was specific, “*one hundred and fifty and three*”. The point being made here is: ‘every one accounted for’.

It is further stated in John 21:11 that these were “*great fishes*”; no poor specimens, but every one great. What wonderful truth concerning the Kingdom of God does Christ display! The Church Triumphant, as she will appear at the last in glory, is a specific number – all whose names are written in the Book of Life, and graven upon the heart of the Great High Priest, who feature in His Everlasting Covenant. These are the ones who land safely on the heavenly shore: no more and no less. And every one will be great among them, for all will possess the same life, and have the same standing in Christ, and receive the same perfect and total justification, and wear the same spotless robe of His imputed righteousness. That unaccounted mass of the first draught fitly represents the mixed multitude that compose the Church visible, whilst the carefully counted and recorded number of the second sets

forth the chosen seed, the remnant according to the election of grace who will stand before the Lamb in the heavenly Zion.

What then of the fire and the food? These do not appear in the first miracle, for the Church Militant upon earth has not reached its goal. This is not for the mixed multitude to enjoy. There, at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb will sit down and dine Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, together with that number no man can number – but all known and named. What a tremendous lesson was taught to the disciples who had toiled through the night, and at last had reached the shore. To the labouring, struggling, faithful remnant of God’s people today it brings great instruction and encouragement. For whilst now the ocean is rough, and the night cold and dark, and the work often fruitless or thankless – yet the Heavenly Harbour is not far distant. The first light of the eternal morning is beginning to shine; soon will the day dawn, and the shadows flee away, and the tossing sea of time be exchanged for the endless calm of Eternity, there to partake with all the redeemed of all ages the rich bounty which God hath prepared for them that love Him. Truly does the Scripture say, “*Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God*” (Luke 14:15).

W. H. Molland (*transcribed by R. J. Steward*)

“Struggling o’er life’s fitful waters,
Heavy surges sometimes roll,
And we sigh for yonder haven,
For the Home-land of the soul.

Oft we catch a faint reflection
Of its bright and vernal hills;
And though distant, how we hail it!
How each heart with rapture thrills!

‘Tis the weary sailor’s Home-land
Where each throbbing care shall cease;
And our longings, and our yearnings,
Like the waves, be hushed in peace.”

Fanny J. Crosby

The Enemies of the Church

First comes **Science** with her lofty air and many tongues. In a very dogmatic manner she attacks the doctrines of the Sacred Book, forgetting that science itself consists almost wholly of dogmas. Proud of her acquisitions in useful knowledge, she asserts more peremptorily than ever, that the laws of nature as now discovered, tell a different tale from that which we have in the historical statements of the Scriptures. And in their extreme haste, a host of intellectuals already proclaim that Christianity has been reasoned off the stage. But the old rock keeps its place amid the lashings of the waves. Next comes **Philosophy**, boasting that it is in the track of some great discoveries, by which the doctrines of Christianity may be dissipated, and the supernatural element taken out of them, so that they will soon come under the proper control of human reason, and therefore become suited to human liking. Next rises up **Criticism**, which tells us there are ever so many discrepancies between what is now known outside the Scriptures to be true, philological, archaeological, antiquarian and otherwise, and the affirmations of the Old Volume itself.

Closer at hand we have all the schools of our modern Areopagus clamouring in our ears more insolently, and we might add, more discordantly still, than the groups of learned men on that hill of wisdom in Athens – the schools of **Atheism**, of **Agnosticism**, of **Positivism**, of **Deism**, **Theism**, **Pantheism**, of **Rationalism**, **Naturalism**, and **Spiritualism**, of **Broad-Churchism** and **Formalism** – all of which ardently claim at getting quit, not of the beauties of the Bible, nor its good morality, nor its just, pure and lofty sentiments so much, as first its element of the **supernatural**; for **that** is felt to be terribly humbling to man's pride of understanding, and puts him down to the footstool, when he would fain climb to the throne. They wish to get quit too of its **inspiration and oracular authority**; for that binds a man to believe what he is

taught by testimony, and makes his reason a subject, not a sovereign. It also suggests the idea of a Lord of the conscience. They wish to get quit too of the doctrine of **human responsibility**; for that makes conscience a troubled sea in the soul, at the thought that man will be judged for all his thoughts, words and actions. Especially they wish to get quit of such a doctrine as **human depravity**; for that is reproachful to man's character as a moral being, and sinks him to shame and contempt in the estimation of the morally pure and holy. They wish above all to blot out from the page of history, and if they could, from the page of human thought, the doctrine of the death of the Son of God being **the suffering of a substitute endured to atone for the sins of men**; for that is to intensify inconceivably the evil of sin, reveals the alarming condition of man's prospect for the future, and proves his utter powerlessness to help himself in the terrible emergency.

All these enemies of the Christian Church want to get quit of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, as being most distasteful to man's unspiritual nature, and most humbling to his imperial and stubborn will. They would refit the Bible, or reconstruct it so as to make it speak in quite another tone. Instead of being governed by it, they would govern it, and transform it into a book that would suit the convenience, and establish the glory of man.

The language used against the Book which contains the doctrines of Christianity was never more bold, we might say, audacious, than it has been during the present century. Formerly, it may have been more coarse, and ribald... Yet in this age, far more liberty of opinion is claimed than in any past epoch. Never was public opinion stronger, and never did liberty run so far in the direction of laxity. It has indeed become a rage – a passion... The result is, that never has there been such boldness in casting aside old forms of belief, and even the beliefs themselves. After so many failures, the attacks on the old Rock are still kept up, and with renewed

confidence, it is defiantly asserted, that not only must Christianity moult, and change its garb, but, in these advancing times, must change its very substance. Old ships, it is said, do not weather tempestuous seas so well as those of fresher build. So many have taken to imagining that the old vessel of Christianity will not hold out much longer amid the tremendous seas that are now lashing over her, but that she must soon go to pieces and become a total wreck. Others, who do not take this extreme view, yet think the time has come when the ship must be laid up in the dock, and undergo much refitting and reconstruction to prepare her for future service.

These attacks have been most numerous, most formidable and most envenomed. They have come in on every side, and been made with united force. Not withstanding all the falsification of past predictions respecting the defeat of Christianity, the opposition to it is as persistent today as ever it was in any previous age. But one thing is always strangely forgotten, that He who constructed this vessel is the same as the builder of heaven and earth, who holds the waters of human strife in the hollow of His hand, and without whose permission not a single ripple can rise or fall. The raging sea of human opinions may run mountains high, yet the little skiff which carries the Church of God cannot be swallowed up by the threatening element, while the Lord of the Church walks on the crest of the waves, able in a moment to still them at their wildest fury.

J. P. Millar *circa* 1890

“Do not attend a Church which prefers science to Scripture, reason to revelation, theories to Truth, culture to conversion, benevolence to Blood, goodness to grace, sociability to spirituality, play to praise, programmes to power, reformation to regeneration, speculation to salvation, jubilation to justification, feelings to faith, policies to precepts”.

Anon.

Unprofitable Exercise

Paul's first letter to Timothy abounds with much practical instruction to its young recipient, who had but lately entered into Christian ministry. The Apostle especially sought to warn him of those obstacles and hazards which could imperil his faith and work. In chapter four, caution is given concerning false teachers and their heresies (v.1–3); rustic traditionalism (v. 7); the scorn of men (v. 12) and personal inconstancy (v. 14, 16); but one warning is given special emphasis. Paul defines it as "*a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance*" (v. 9), and a theme which must continue to be 'commanded and taught' (v. 11) – it is the warning against **physical recreation**. "*Exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little*" (v.7.8).

Timothy was an active, able-bodied young man living in the region of Asia Minor. These were lands dominated by Hellenistic culture, with its particular emphasis on human feats of skill and endurance, athleticism, and 'the Games'. This had been perpetuated by the Roman Empire. Every notable city had its stadium or circus where such activities could take place. The heroes of popular opinion were the victorious, celebrated sportsmen. The widespread leisure industry with its vast array of events and competitions provided entertainment and amusement for the masses. It also offered a way for even the lowest in society to reach the giddy heights of fame, through exertion and endeavour. For the early believers in the first-century Church, it was an ever-present threat and temptation, well deserving Paul's solemn indictment. Never must Timothy, or his hearers, be waylaid from their faith by these worldly pursuits.

Despite the passage of two millennia, striking parallels exist today, and the words of the New Testament have lost none of their relevance or force. The Greek Games find their equivalents in those

activities collectively called '**sport**'. Still it accounts for vast sums of money and public attention; still every major city boasts its stadium or arena; still the noisy masses gather to be entertained by feats of physical prowess. The only difference now seems to be in the attitude of the Church toward these things. For whilst it is unthinkable that Timothy, or Paul, or any of the early saints would have joined the baying crowds at the colosseum, many 'modern' Christians have no such objections. They see nothing incongruous about occupying the stand of a sports-ground on Saturday, and the pew of a Chapel on the Lord's Day.

The errors and evils associated with sport are readily enumerated: **It is the 'fashion of the world'**. The tremendous popularity and acclaim which sport receives is a sure indication of its origins and true nature. Man is never disposed toward that which is good or godly, but always lusts after those things which appeal to his carnal mind and earthly appetites. That godless persons flock in their droves to these venues and events, and derive such pleasure from them, is proof of the godlessness of sport. It thus falls into the broad category of things which the Christian is to eschew, as 1 John 2:15-16 states: "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. For all that is in the world... is not of the Father, but is of the world.*"

It is the breeding ground of much sin. Organised sport carries a great financial incentive. Salaries, prizes and fees are reckoned in eight-figure sums, and above. With this comes all the attendant greed, corruption, extortion and excess. Every sporting event brings further business to the bookmakers, with bets being placed on all conceivable outcomes, sustaining a multi-million pound gambling industry. As the stakes increase, so does the desire to succeed, with dubious and unlawful means being employed: illegal drugs, match-fixing and other forms of foul play becoming a major issue. The competitive spirit is quickly inflamed into disorderly and aggressive

behaviour among participants and spectators. Offensive and insulting language is a common feature. These things are well known and cannot be denied, but instead are often glibly excused as an inevitable ‘part of the game’. This is the morass of iniquity with which many Christians carelessly associate themselves, thereby giving it credence and support.

It is the company of the ungodly. The Psalmist said: “*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful*” (Psalm 1:1). Engagement in the world’s sport events involves precisely these things, and close proximity to unregenerate men and women. Here it is that evil company has its corrupting influence (cf 1 Corinthians 15:33). The ‘team spirit’ and camaraderie engendered by competitive games is often cited in their defence – but such fellowship and friendship with the unbelieving is incompatible with the Christian profession, which is one of separation from the world, and union with God and His people. The place for the believer to feel kinship, and unity of purpose with others is in the gatherings of the saints – not on the terraces or the sports-field.

It magnifies sinful man. The adulation and praise heaped upon successful sports personalities is widely apparent. They are fêted by the media, idolised by impressionable fans and elevated to a celebrity status. Even in amateur events, there are always figures who are emulated and idealised by others. Yet their honour all rests on one narrow skill or isolated achievement, and is blind to serious flaws in their character; immorality or open sin. This runs completely contrary to all Christian values and spiritual virtue. Man in his fallen state has no meritorious features whatsoever. Of God it is said “*He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man*” (Psalm 147:10), whilst His instruction to believers is: “*Cease ye from man; whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?*” (Isaiah 2:22).

It profanes the Sabbath. There is scarcely a physical recreation in existence that does not now infringe upon the Lord's Day. As soon as the Christian begins to involve themselves in a sport or leisure activity, they find their Sabbath observance challenged and conflicting interests competing for the first day of the week. Sunday is the day set apart by the world for the worship of their god, and they will not accommodate the Christian who seeks to do otherwise. Even those who merely follow sport at a distance will find the peace of the Sabbath regularly broken by the desire to hear a result or learn the outcome of a game. Thus the Devil, with the instrument of Sport, begins to chip away at the believer's resolve to "*Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy*" (Exodus 20:8). God's commandment is: "*turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and ... honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure*" (Isaiah 58:13).

It is 'another Master'. Physical recreation is, by its very nature, demanding. It exacts a great amount of energy, time and money from its devotees. The individual who pursues a particular sport must sacrifice many hours in the week to keep up with the news, or maintain their position. As the hobby becomes more of an addiction, so it becomes increasingly expensive: magazines and periodicals are bought, more advanced equipment obtained, the right clothing worn; diets, habits and lifestyles are completely reorganised according to the timetable of the chosen activity. Those who seek to compete at a higher level are taught to change even the way they think, cultivating a 'winning psychology' and the right 'mental attitude' for the game. These things cannot be reconciled with the Christian Faith. For "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other*" (Matthew 6:24). It is impossible to serve both God and Sport. The Almighty has a prior claim to the

faculties and abilities of His people – this includes their spiritual, mental and physical powers: “*For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s*” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Upon salvation the body is as much redeemed as the soul, and must also be given over to the service of God: “*even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness*” (Romans 6:19).

It is a ‘false religion’. Sport is the world’s religion, and for many unbelieving men and women, provides a palatable alternative to the Truth. It has its regular weekly meetings, and established venues where those of like mind gather together. It has many denominations and specialist groups, all with their teachers and enthusiasts seeking to popularise the cause, and recruit new members. It raises up idols and icons to be venerated and followed. It brings its own brand of joys and trials, hopes and fears, traditions and philosophies. It encourages its adherents to exercise ‘faith in their team’, or ‘belief in themselves’. More subtly, it offers a form of ‘salvation by works’ – the notion that persons may, with sufficient application and dedication, obtain great rewards, public honour and lasting glory. Physical recreation is universally proclaimed to be the way to health, happiness and long life. Here are various religious elements fused together in a deceptive parody of The Faith. Many are in bondage to this system, and professing Christians can be counted among their number.

In his exhortation to Timothy, the Apostle uses two other strong arguments to dissuade him from following competitive physical activities and bodily achievements. Firstly he emphasises a **higher, alternative exercise**. “*exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little*”. There is a loftier, more noble engagement to which the Christian is called – more important than any game, more demanding than any sport, more serious than any human competition, more glorious than any physical

accomplishment – it is the **pursuit of righteousness**; the practical expression of Faith. This infinitely greater exercise is set in opposition to its earthly counterparts: only one race can be run at a time, only one goal pursued – it is a stark choice between **bodily exercise** or **godly exercise**.

The Christian life resembles an inconceivably difficult physical activity, but one in which the flesh avails little. The saints are challenged “*So run that ye may obtain*” (1 Corinthians 9:24), “*let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us*” (Hebrews 12:1), “*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before...press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:13-14).

This is a trial of spiritual strength and stamina, which goes on from conversion, until the end of natural life. There is no prior training, or prospect of relief, no ‘handing over of the baton’. It is not a team event, but must be completed individually. It is like a sprint, though over a great distance; it is like a marathon, yet full of obstacles; it is like a cross-country route, but beset by aggressive enemies along the way. In this great spiritual event there are all manner of hindrances and deterrents which would stop the Christian in their tracks or draw them from the field – sideshows and amusements, and the allurements of the world. Not least among these is the temptation presented by bodily exercise, and ‘sport’. Indeed, the original meaning of the word ‘sport’ is: ‘a trifling distraction or diversion’. So it continues to prove to Christians in this age, as the Devil tempts many to **disport** themselves with the lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life, and to quit their high calling altogether. Faced with this dilemma between the sports of earth and the race toward heaven, the command to every believer is “*Exercise thyself rather unto godliness*”.

The second argument against physical recreation in these verses is its **relative value**: “*For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*” Superficially, honing the body’s capabilities may seem to have much in its favour. It offers a way whereby the individual can gain advantage over their peers. Taken to a competitive or professional level, there are great prizes and huge rewards to be had. Yet even the largest of these is here described as ‘little’, puny or insignificant – for all the bodily exercises known to man cannot prevent the inexorable march of age and decay, nor revoke the curse of sin, or cheat death of its prey. Any good that physical training might obtain is strictly limited to a few short years of man’s mortal life; they are transient and fleeting, swiftly terminated by accident, injury or unfitness.

By contrast, **godliness**, and the development of spiritual virtue, are of a completely different sort. For these things are of eternal consequence, and transcend mortality, having tremendous worth in the “*life that is to come*”. The grand total of all the awards which the world can bestow upon its sportsmen are “*not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (Romans 8:18), for “*they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible*” (1 Corinthians 9:25). ‘Profit’ is measured as the surplus of income over expenditure. The people who devote themselves to bodily exercise make a major investment of time and energy to their chosen sport – but they are doomed to ultimately lose it all. Meanwhile the Christian who runs in the spiritual race, though it prove extremely costly, has an “*exceeding great reward*” in view which will more than compensate all earthly losses. Worldly participants may aspire to win a gilded cup or Olympic medal – but these are things which rust corrupts, and gold which perishes. The Lord’s charge to His faithful people is “*lay up for*

yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:20-21).

In a decadent society wholly given over to leisure and the following of sport, the Christian faces much temptation, and a threat to their heavenward progress. It is high time to recognise the reality of the spiritual race into which every believer is entered, defy the world’s vain hindrances, and cry with the hymnwriter:

“Awake, my soul! Stretch every nerve,
And press with vigour on;
A **heavenly race** demands thy zeal,
And an immortal crown.”

R. J. Steward

In the providence and goodness of God, the Church’s Annual Bible Convention was held on 2nd and 3rd June this year. The Lord’s presence and attendance upon the Word was experienced over the weekend. The vital doctrine of The Church was the theme for the ministry, under the title: “**Questions Concerning the Church**”. These questions were derived from Scripture, and provided the subject for each successive sermon: firstly, “*hath [there] been any such thing as this great thing is?*” (Deuteronomy 4:32); secondly, “*Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?*” (Psalm 115:2); thirdly, “*What manner of persons ought ye to be?*” (2 Peter 3:11); and lastly “*What are these which are arrayed in white robes?*” (Revelation 7:13). The nature of these queries, and the answers to them were profitably considered, with many relevant applications being made. Recordings of the services are available on audio cassette and CD. Please refer to details on the rear cover of this magazine.

Editorial

Every Christian owes an important duty of care to their physical body. Whilst much preaching is devoted to spiritual aspects of the Faith, the doctrine of the body is often overlooked. Yet the human frame is an essential part of man's existence, and has added significance for believers – both in this life, and the next. The world's erroneous attitudes toward the body vary between flaunting and abuse; but the saints should be better instructed and have a Biblical perspective on this vital subject.

In the beginning, it pleased Almighty God to give man (the zenith of His creation) a corporeal form – having a particular shape, substance and size according to His flawless design. In certain respects, man is made “*in the image of God*” (Genesis 1:27), but in this point he differs: God is a Spirit (cf John 4:24); man has a body. This is the Creator's divine plan for mankind, and is in no way disadvantageous or detrimental. “*God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good*” (Genesis 1:31) – including man, in perfectly crafted bodily form. God does further honour to the human body by allowing Himself to be described in anatomical terms (cf Isaiah 59:1, 60:13, Zechariah 2:8, etc) and by appearing in such a guise to Abraham (cf Genesis 18:1-2) and Moses (Exodus 33:17-23). Greater still, He, in the person of Jesus Christ, at length came “*in the likeness of sinful flesh*” (Romans 8:3), “*being found in fashion as a man*” (Philippians 2:8).

Although the Fall and the Curse have intervened to deprive mankind of much of his former Edenic glory, still his basic form remains unchanged, and is still of great importance to God. “*For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust*” (Psalm 103:14) and He is integrally involved in every miracle of natural birth, as Psalm 139:13-17 wonderfully reveals. Given that the

human body bears the hallmarks of its Maker, and receives such Divine attention, it is incumbent upon every man and woman alive to treat their bodies with the respect they deserve: maintaining good health to the best of their ability, and refraining from physically injurious behaviour or excess.

For believers, the body takes on a further dimension. They recognise that it is the interface with the world through which the Devil can most easily introduce temptation and sin. Being an inheritance from Adam the First, it is inclined to iniquity, and must be carefully guarded. So the Apostle said: “*I keep under my body and bring it into subjection*” (1 Corinthians 9:27). Carnal appetites and affections cannot be indulged. Because at regeneration, that same human frame became a dwelling place of the Lord: “*What? Know ye not that your body is the **temple of the Holy Ghost** which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God **in your body**, and in your spirit **which are God’s***” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The Lord has redeemed and purchased His people’s bodies, that they should henceforth be His habitation (cf Ephesians 2:22). These facts alone are a powerful incentive to the eschewing of physical sins, and correct management of the body.

God’s people have the great treasure of Christ’s presence contained in the “*earthen vessels*” of their human flesh (cf 2 Corinthians 4:7); and “*every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour*” (1 Thessalonians 4:4). The Christian dare not pollute his person through immoral conduct, or with alcohol and harmful substances, or allow it to deteriorate through gluttony, idleness, neglect or mistreatment. Neither should it be developed machine-like for the performance of competitive sport, or immodestly paraded as an object of desire, or pierced and painted after the fashion of the world. All such things run contrary to the truth of Divine Tenancy, and the prime objective of bodily

glorifying God. Believers are not at liberty to devote their physical faculties to worldly ends, or treat their bodies as they wish, but are told: “*even so now yield your **members** servants to righteousness unto holiness*” (Romans 6:19). The life of Faith involves the body as much as the spirit.

This situation obtains throughout mortal life, until such time as the terrible process of death severs the body from the spiritual elements of a man’s person. Yet this is only a temporary partition, until that marvellous day of reunification, “*in the which all that are in the graves... shall come forth...unto the resurrection*” (John 5:28-29), and the spirits of just men made perfect will be recombined with their physically resurrected bodies. “*I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And...**in my flesh** shall I see God*” (Job 19:25-26). In confidence of that coming event, the Christian’s mortal remains are committed seed-like to the ground, pending the transformation. In death as in life, the body must be treated in a Biblical way.

Thus the saints will ultimately and eternally exist in glorified human bodies – increased in perfection, but unchanged in essence. Yet even when reckoned alongside the angelic Host they will rank among the highest in the exalted company of Heaven. For Christ Himself, the Son of God, shares the same form. So it was He entered thither at His Ascension, and man’s likeness He forever retains in Glory (cf Revelation 1:12-16). He has raised humanity to the heights of His throne. There the human form will no longer speak of mortality, sin or restriction, but rather of identification and union with the Lord Jesus Christ, “*For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are **all of one**: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren*” (Hebrews 2:11); “*we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is*” (1 John 3:2). Lord, haste that day!