

April – June 2008

**T
H
E

L
I
N
K**

**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

“And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me.”
(John 21:19)

The Lord had restored Peter to his apostolic office by a gracious question-and-answer dialogue. Now the scene changes, as the Saviour arises and begins to walk away from the company, saying to Peter, *“Follow Me”*. This command held a double meaning, both spiritual and practical. The apostle was to henceforth emulate his Master and follow His example, being ever conformed to His image. At the same time, Peter was physically accompanying the Lord, as the next verse shows: *“Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on His breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth Thee?”* (v.20) Having already covered a little distance, Peter, looking back, observes John coming along behind.

This silent act of John’s speaks volumes concerning his character. The Lord had not been talking to him, or to any of the other disciples, Peter having been the subject of His conversation. Nevertheless, when the Saviour arose and moved away, John – that disciple who had previously leaned on Jesus’ breast – could not refrain from rising up also. It was as though John said in his heart, ‘The path may be hard and unknown, but where the Master leads, there I must follow’. This is another striking indication of John’s loving and deep obedience. A marked contrast to Simon Peter, whose impulsiveness is manifested once again: instead of quietly following the Lord as bidden, and taking care of his own footsteps (which after recent events should have been Peter’s great concern), he turns his attention upon John. *“Peter, seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord and what shall this man do?”*

The words ‘*shall*’ and ‘*do*’ are not found in the original Greek, so the exact nature of the question here is: ‘Lord – and this man – what?’ Remember the immediate context: Peter had just been told that his life must be one of obedience; his pathway would not be easy, and at its end lay a violent death. Peter, now seeing John following in this same track asks, ‘Lord, and what of this man?’ ‘How is it going to be with him?’ ‘How is his life going to end?’ What prompted this enquiry, or what Peter’s motives were, Scripture does not record. They were evidently improper, because Christ’s reply comes in the form of a rebuke. It appears that inwardly, Peter felt anxiety and a secret fear at those things which had been foretold. An arduous course was set before him, which ended in blood. Little wonder then if, at such a disclosure, he knew a measure of apprehension. For whilst an apostle, he was still human, and human nature recoils from the prospect of death. So turning and watching John tracing the same physical route, he is inclined to ask, ‘am I alone appointed to suffering – or will he share a similar end?’

In the events here enacted, truth pertaining to the Kingdom of God is being set forth. Wherein lies the application? Peter was to know great hardship and suffering, and this caused him to turn to others, and ask about them. A similar experience is often the lot of the Christian. A tragedy befalls the family circle; a dear friend is taken; disaster strikes in personal life. Whereupon a question may arise in the secrecy of the heart: ‘Why am I singled out for this experience?’ ‘Are others going to be exempt from such sorrows as I undergo?’ ‘Am I set as a lone target for all the sharp arrows of affliction?’ Such a reaction in trouble is very wrong. Consider further this incident from Scripture. If it was Christ’s will that Peter should suffer, and not John, then a Divine reason existed which ought not to have been questioned.

The fact remains that whilst John did not suffer in the same manner as Peter, he did know severe trial later in life. Peter's violent death meant for him a swifter passage to Heaven. John, meanwhile, lingered on for many years, reaching the infirmities of old age, and was also banished to the Isle of Patmos, there to eke out his later life in loneliness and isolation. Let none be like Simon Peter, and imagine their personal affliction to exceed that of others. No believer can know what their fellow-saints presently experience; much less predict what will befall them in the future.

There may have been other reasons for Peter's enquiry, perhaps mere curiosity, or a genuine concern for John's welfare. After all, these two disciples do seem to have been very attached to one another in life. They had been together in the fishing business prior to the apostolic call, and appear much in company again – at the Lord's graveside for example. Human affection may have prompted Peter's question. Indeed, this is a common and natural emotion. Those who have been blessed with parenthood know what it is to look upon the infant in their arms, and wonder about its future life and health. Will it grow to maturity and adulthood? Will they be spared to see their child's development? Personal anxieties also arise in the mind, pertaining to course that life might take – an enquiring curiosity that desires to see momentarily beyond the veil that hides the future. Yet it is God's mercy and kindness which deny that vision; for a knowledge of the future would most certainly deprive the present of all its peace and joy.

What is more, the uncertainty that obscures the years ahead is all part of the discipline of life. This state of ignorance should cause the people of God to cast themselves all the more upon their Heavenly Father, and His omniscient foreknowledge. It also ensures that the Christian must walk by faith, and not by sight. These are further truths pertaining to the Kingdom of God, set forth with such clarity in this post-resurrection appearance of the Lord.

Consider the answer provided to Peter's query: "*Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he [that is, John] tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me*" (John 21:22). These words were wholly indefinite, and the knowledge that Peter craved was withheld; his curiosity must go unsatisfied. Some are inclined to interpret this as a harsh retort, as though the Lord said 'this is none of your business, Simon'. Rather is it a gracious intimation that John's future was equally in the Lord's hands, and there it must be left.

Commentators make great play on the words "*till I come*"; their conclusions varying according to their personal position regarding prophecy. Some suggest that it refers to the Last Great Day; others to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70; still others understand the Lord coming to the saints at their deaths to take them to be with Himself (cf John 14:3). All such interpretation is spurious, because the context of this passage is **not** Second Advent truth. To read prophecy into this incident is to divert entirely from the vital instruction which Christ is giving, namely: the sovereign Will of God, and His people's submission to it. The Saviour is here explaining that **all** events and happenings in life are ordered according to **His will**. "*If I will that he tarry*", in other words 'the life of John will be precisely as I determine it'. Neither is this truth peculiar to John only, but applies universally to all humanity.

In this doctrine, the Christian has great cause for thankfulness. If life was subject to chance, or was the product of feeble, personal endeavours, then would there be real cause for apprehension! Take as an example the sorrows and trials of life. If they came about by mere accident, and not by the predetermining hand of God, existence would be fearful, and man would be the victim of 'fate'. But to know that all things come about by the fore-ordaining will of an Almighty Heavenly Father, and is part of His Eternal Plan, puts the vicissitudes of life into an entirely new light. Though dark clouds may loom on the horizon, the believer can press on with unflinching step, knowing that all things are embraced by the Divine

blueprint, and “*all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28).

Examine the next words in the Lord’s reply: “*if I will that he tarry*”. The Christian’s life is one of tarrying – he is not at home in the world, but waiting for the summons to better things. Just as the soldier on the battleground, or the labourer in the field, or the mariner on the high seas anticipates his arrival home, so it is with the saint. Waiting or tarrying implies there is something irksome about the present state, coupled with a longing to get home. Nevertheless, what Christ here teaches is that tarrying according to His will is not aimless or without purpose – rather is it a Divine arrangement, based upon wise and Holy reasons.

It can happen, when an elderly person has outlived all their active usefulness, and watched as one after another of their generation has passed away, that they begin to question – ‘why am I left?’ Feeling that they are a burden to those around them, they inwardly ask: ‘how much longer have I to tarry?’ Such inner thoughts may be natural, but they are not spiritual, and should be dismissed from the believer’s mind. The aged Christian can uniquely demonstrate how the Lord sustains and satisfies the weary pilgrim, when all else is taken away. Much instruction has been silently given from the sick-bed, where the ailing saint has endured pain and infirmity with uncomplaining submission – lessons of greater worth than many an eloquent sermon. Such grace amidst the rigors of old age testifies to the preserving power of Christ, and has a great influence on those who observe. Let none complain or repine if they are appointed to tarry long – for thus they fulfil the will of God. One writer has stated: “Home at last will be but sweeter for a season of having to tarry on the journey”.

So to the concluding part of Christ’s reply: “*What is that to thee? Follow thou Me*”. It has been pertinently said that “the cure for

anxiety concerning the future is to discharge the duties of the present”. The Christian who lives in the present, and is fully occupied with those things the Lord requires of him, will find that anxious cares for the unknown are excluded from his mind. What said Christ in His wonderful Sermon on the Mount? *“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof ”* (Matthew 6:34). If tomorrow dawns, it will bring with it tomorrow’s God – and He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Worrying today about possible trials tomorrow will not dissipate tomorrow’s trials, but only today’s joy. Rather than fretfully anticipating the unknown, the believer should perform his present duties; cheerfully shouldering his responsibilities and leaving the rest to God. Whatever evil or affliction may come, the abundant grace of God is sufficient to meet the need of that day.

The summary of all this teaching is contained in two words – in every stage of life, in every condition, to – **follow Christ**; and the closer we walk with Him, so will greater light illuminate the road, and deeper peace fill the heart. And when at last the path winds down to its last dark valley, then will His presence be the more keenly felt, as He leads through death’s chilly waters to the Eternal Home. There, says Revelation 7:17, *“the Lamb shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”*

“Down in the valley with my Saviour I would go,
Where the flowers are blooming and the sweet waters flow;
Everywhere He leads me I would follow, follow on,
Walking in His footsteps ‘til the crown be won.

Down in the valley, or upon the mountain steep,
Close beside my Saviour would my soul ever keep;
He will lead me safely in the path that He has trod,
Up to where they gather on the hills of God.”

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

Comfort for Christians

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”
(2 Corinthians 4:17)

These words supply us with a reason why we should not faint under trials nor be overwhelmed by misfortunes. They teach us to look at the trials of time in the light of eternity. They affirm that the present buffetings of the Christian exercise a beneficent effect on the inner man. If these truths were firmly grasped by faith they would mitigate much of the bitterness of our sorrows.

“Our light affliction, which is but for a moment” Affliction is the common lot of human existence; *“Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward”* (Job 5:7). This is part of the entail of sin. It is not meet that a fallen creature should be perfectly happy in his sins. Nor are the children of God exempted; *“Through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22). By a hard and rugged road does God lead us to glory and immortality.

Our affliction is *“light”*. Afflictions are not light in themselves for oftentimes they are heavy and grievous; but they are light comparatively! They are light when compared with what we really deserve. They are light when compared to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. But perhaps their real lightness is best seen by comparing them with the weight of glory which is awaiting us. As said the same apostle in another place, *“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18).

“Which is but for a moment” Should our afflictions continue a whole lifetime, and that life be equal in duration to Methuselah’s,

yet it is momentary if compared with the eternity which is before us. At most our affliction is but for this present life, which is a vapour that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. O that God would enable us to examine our trials in their true perspective.

Note now the connection between the two. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, “*worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*”. The present is influencing the future. It is not for us to reason and philosophise about this, but to take God at His word, and believe it. Experience, feelings, observation of others, may seem to deny this fact. Ofttimes afflictions appear only to sour us and make us more rebellious and discontented. But let it be remembered that afflictions are not sent by God for the purifying of the flesh: they are designed for the benefit of the ‘new man’. Moreover, afflictions help to prepare us for the glory hereafter. Affliction draws away our heart from the love of the world; it makes us long more and more for the time when we shall be translated from this scene of sin and sorrow; it will enable us to appreciate (by way of contrast) the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

Here then is what faith is invited to do: to place in one scale the present affliction, and in the other, the eternal glory. Are they worthy to be compared? No indeed. One second of glory will more than counterbalance a whole lifetime of suffering. What are years of toil, of sickness, of battling against poverty, of persecution, yea, of a martyr’s death, when weighed against the pleasures at God’s right hand, which are for evermore? One breath of Paradise will extinguish all the adverse winds of earth. One day in the Father’s house will more than counterbalance the years we have spent in this dreary wilderness. May God grant unto us that faith which will enable us to anticipatively lay hold of the future and live in the present enjoyment of it.

A. W. Pink

What is Man?

“When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet.” (Psalm 8:3-6)

The eighth Psalm poses a searching and profound question, consisting of just three words: **“What is man?”** It is a significant question that affects each one of us personally, because we all belong to that race called ‘mankind’ or ‘humanity’ – so this is a question which deals fundamentally with **who** and **what** we are.

The world thinks it knows what man is – and concludes that he is the product of immeasurable eons of evolution. They speak of the ‘human species’, and give him a systematic zoological name: ‘homo sapiens’. They describe his behaviour in terms of jungle-dwelling ancestors and suggest that language and civilisation just about divide him from the monkeys. They talk of ‘animal instincts’, of ‘hunting and gathering’, of 95% of DNA in common with the chimpanzee. The animal rights movement further blur the distinction by asserting that all creatures are equal to man, and should be treated as such. Some false religions have their chosen sacred species, while others honour all animals alike, and include man among that number. The worldly man’s opinion of himself, instilled by modern philosophy, and *“science falsely so called”*, is that he is ‘evolved a little higher than the beasts’. By stark contrast, Psalm 8:5 definitively tells us that man is **“made... a little lower than the angels”** – and between these two descriptions there lies a vast difference, which this portion of Scripture serves to illuminate.

Following the logic of the Psalmist, we might conclude that he too held a low opinion of mankind. He begins with God – so great and so Divine that His Name fills the earth, and His glory exceeds the heavens: “*O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth! who hast set Thy glory above the heavens.*” (v.1) He then goes on to describe God’s sovereignty, which extends its control to all humanity – young and old, good and evil: “*Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger*” (v. 2).

Then David reflects upon the celestial creation – sun, moon and stars – which fill the limitless universe further than the eye or the imagination can reach. From which great contemplation he descends in thought from the vast galaxy to one solar system; and among all the numberless orbs to one sun; and among its encircling satellites, one planet; and living on one-third of that planet – mankind – a race which even in its sum total could be “*counted as the small dust of the balance*” (Isaiah 40:15). Since this is the magnitude of God, and since these are the immense proportions of His creation, then humanity, were they all gathered together from every place and every age, would be accounted as nothing. Which of necessity prompts the question: “*What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?*”

Having reached this crisis point in the Psalm, the inspired writer begins to supply the answers. The fifth verse continues: “***For Thou hast made him***”. On the surface, this may not seem much of an answer. Yes, we believe that God made man, just as He did the rest of creation: “*all things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made*” (John 1:3). But that in itself is a marvellous concept: to think that the same God, whose power and dominion has just been described, whose infinite might stretched out the universe and set the stars in their place, is **our** Creator too.

We also find, from the very beginning, a special distinction placed upon man – in the very manner of his creation. For five days, the Divine mode of operation was the same: “*God said*”, “*And it was so*” (cf Genesis 1:3-23). The Lord spake the word, and spontaneous creation occurred ‘*ex nihilo*’ or ‘*from nothing*’. What this must have looked like as it happened we can only imagine, for God alone observed it, but: “*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear*” (Hebrews 11:3). This miraculous process continued on the sixth day: “*And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so*” (Genesis 1:24) – God spoke into being all the land animals. But **man** is **not** among them! Man is not merely a ‘*living creature*’, or a ‘*beast of the earth*’. He is separate and distinguished.

The creation of man necessitated a heavenly conference between the persons of triune God, if we may so describe it: “*And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion...*” (Genesis 1:26). From the very outset man was to be different from, and pre-eminent over, all the rest of creation. God said so – and it is further evidenced by these vital distinctions:

1.) Neither man or woman were created ‘*at a word*’, as everything else had been. God did not say, ‘*Let there be man – and there was man*’. No, man was first made, and then inspired. Having given this Heavenly prologue to the genesis of man, God then took of the dust of the earth, and with awesome power formed a man, perfect in every respect. In this act, many commentators see something humbling – that man, for all his pride and self-conceits is at best made only from the dust of the ground, ‘*earthy*’ (cf 1 Corinthians 15:47), and consequent to the Fall, must ultimately return to that primordial state. However, there is also something wonderful and

beautiful in this scene. God did not (as He easily could have done) ‘speak’ man out of the air, but instead took materials, and time, and the application of skill and craftsmanship to **form** man. He – who is elsewhere described as the great Potter (cf Isaiah 64:8) – took of earth’s clay and from it fashioned man, a glorious vessel unto honour. Similarly with woman, the materials were different but the process was the same: making, building, constructing. There is no logical reason why omnipotent God should so act – other than to **set mankind apart** as distinct and superior.

Then we are told that God “*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul*” (Genesis 2:7). That flawless body, recently crafted from the earth’s soil, still lay lifeless upon it – until God in an intimate and direct way ‘breathed in life’. The effect of this inspiration was not only to bring natural life; it also imparted to man that which no other living being possessed – a **soul**. Thought, will, intellect, emotion and communication were conveyed; those intangible attributes which do not reside in any anatomical place; those immortal elements which are irrefutably and uniquely present in every human being. These are not an over-developed ‘instinct’ as some teach, nor a biological fluke resulting in consciousness – but a God-given soul. No animal underwent this process. Nothing apart from humankind possesses a soul. This is why man is **not** merely ‘created a living creature’, but “*so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul*” (1 Corinthians 15:45).

2.) The uniqueness of man is further described thus: “*So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them*” (Genesis 1:27). Here is another description used of humanity which is not applied to any other being, earthly or angelic. God made man and woman in **His own image**. How are we to understand this expression? Ideally, we would need to compare God and man together to see in what respects they are similar. But “*no man hath seen God at any time*”

(John 1:18), for God is spirit, and does not have a body like man. In that latter statement lies the answer: “*God is a Spirit*” (John 4:24), and it is that part of His image which He has conferred upon us: a spirit. Man is a spiritual being, capable of communion with God, destined for a spiritual realm, and like a spirit, having an immortal aspect to his person – a part which, though it had a beginning, will never have an end, but exists forever.

So we see that man consists of three parts: body, soul and spirit (cf 1 Thessalonians 5:23). There is the material, physical **body**. There is an intangible yet essential **soul**, comprising sense, thought and conscience. Then there is the **spirit** – which in the unregenerate man is dead in trespasses and sins, and will die eternally unless quickened and converted. The spirit, which in a saved person experiences the closeness and communion of the Holy Spirit (cf Romans 8:16); a spirit with which we engage in worship (cf John 4:24); a spirit which we desire to see grow and develop day by day (cf 2 Corinthians 4:16). Man is constituted of three parts and yet is one entity. In this too, he faintly resembles the Trinitarian God in whose image he is made.

3.) A third distinction apparent in the creation account concerns **names**. When God finished His creative works, the natural realm was nameless. Every creature had existence, but no word by which it was called. **Adam** was different: he was created with his name, and no naming ceremony was required – as soon as he existed, so did his name. We read: “*the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof*” (Genesis 2:19). The brute creation was untitled, but Adam had an epithet by which he was known, and known unto God. Had Adam existed in isolation, he would have had no need of a name – but God was there, who knew

him, and would be known of him – so names were essential. Man was to have communication and relationship with God.

There are distinctions between species of animal, but they do not have individual, personal names – such a notion is ludicrous – but every man or woman who has ever lived has a name that is known unto God. It is a marvellous thought. Long before we had mortal bodies, or parents, or existence, before we were ever thought of upon earth, we had a name. Our names were known in heaven – either as those who by sovereign election were entered in the roll of grace; or as those who by reason of sin and reprobation were excluded. To those who through salvation belong to the former category, the Lord says: “*Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven*” (Luke 10:20) – and so they have been, from before the foundation of the world. Yes, God is mindful of all creation; He upholds all things by the word of His power; He knows when the least sparrow falls; but uniquely to a remnant from among **men** He says: “*I have called thee by name, thou art Mine*” (Isaiah 43:1).

These features of the Creation record serve to show what man **is**, and why Almighty God should be mindful of him, above every other creature. Yet to the question ‘What is man that Thou art mindful of him?’ Psalm 8 furnishes still more answers: “*For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels*”. Man is not a higher order of animal who by some means has elevated himself to a better state than the rest. Man is primarily a spiritual being, intended for communion and service with God, who has descended lower. What caused that fall from such purpose and blessedness? It is **sin**. We dare to assume that this inferiority of rank would never have occurred, but for the Fall. Man would otherwise have been first among equals with the angelic hosts, serving his God on earth as they do in heaven.

God rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and His delight was with the sons of men (cf Proverbs 8:31). He walked with Adam in the Garden in the cool of the day, having direct and unveiled communion. But then that monster of sin came upon the scene – the power and principality of darkness; spiritual wickedness – and it felled man! How far did we fall? “*Lower than the angels*”, for the curse of mortality took effect: the spirit died instantly (cf Genesis 2:17), the physical body began to die (cf Genesis 5:5), and the soul was likewise sentenced to eternal death (cf Ezekiel 18:20). Sin became man’s natural, continual and habitual course. Man entered a state of rebellion and enmity against God (cf Romans 8:7). What then is man that God should be mindful of him now? What are the sons and daughters of Adam the First, that God should visit them now?

There is still one redeeming feature in the race of mankind that provokes Divine interest and incites Divine attention: it is a **redeemed people**. For it is among the multitudes of fallen humanity that God has a remnant according to the election of grace. For their sakes He is ever mindful of man; for their sakes He has **visited** man. Here is one of the marvels which the Psalmist sets forth: that man, for all his seeming smallness and undeserving wretchedness, should be visited by God. And so we have been: in all the boundless universe, God has visited but one small planet. Of all the living beings whose likeness God might have adopted, He came in fashion as a man, to save men (cf Hebrews 2:14-16). There are angels cast out of Heaven on account of sin (cf Jude 6); in fact the whole creation groans and suffers in consequence of the Fall (cf Romans 8:22); but mankind alone has been the recipient of Divine condescension, visitation – and salvation.

The words of Psalm 8 have reference to humanity in general, but they also speak prophetically of one man in particular, as the Hebrew epistle reveals. The apostle Paul quotes this Old Testament

scripture in full, and continues: “*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man*” (Hebrews 2:9). This is the way whereby God came to earth and accomplished the work of salvation: the Son of God became the Son of Man; He who was the creator of the angelic hosts became temporarily lower than they. For He was manifested in the flesh; and just as mankind is subject to mortality and death “*He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*” (Hebrews 2:14-15). That work He has completed, entirely, successfully and triumphantly, obtaining a perfect salvation for all His people. What is the consequence and result of that work? He will bring many sons to glory! He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified will be made one, and will be exalted and glorified together (cf Hebrews 2:10-11).

In describing the significance and pre-eminence of the Elect among mankind, the Psalmist goes on to say: “*Thou...hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under His feet*” (Psalm 8:5-6). This speaks of men in a state of great glory and dominion – but when will this be? It does not have reference to the present time, nor to this present evil world. It has not yet come to pass, as Paul confirms: “*But now we see **not yet** all things put under him*” (Hebrews 2:8). Well then, can it really be true? Can we genuinely believe that such a wondrous destiny as this genuinely awaits any of the children of men? There is no visible proof of it in the here-and-now, we do not see it happened to ourselves – **but we do** by faith see Jesus...crowned with glory and honour. We know Him to be ascended to the right hand of God in heavenly places, “*Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is*

to come” (Ephesians 1:21). He is gone thither as the forerunner, and firstfruits, and captain, and firstborn son. He will bring many sons to that same state of glory; He will prepare a place for us and receive us unto it; the glory which the Father has bestowed upon the Son now, we will share hereafter (cf John 17:22).

Were such promises not found in the Bible, we would not dare to claim such things – but here they are in the inspired Word. We, sons of men, originally made in the image of God, dragged down by sin to a position far below the angels, will be ultimately restored to a position more exalted than theirs: “*For unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak*” (Hebrews 2:5). Well did the hymnwriter say of Christ: “In Him the tribes of Adam boast, More blessings than their father lost”.

This is verily true. Adam’s tenure in Eden was limited; his dominion small; his righteousness self-wrought; his communion brief; his pleasures short. But the believers’ destiny will be the Paradise of God; their dominion with Christ over the world to come; their righteousness imputed and perfect; their communion eternally unbroken and ineffably sweet; their enjoyments ‘full, unmixed and evermore’. Yet throughout eternity, the same joyful, awestruck question will resound in every wondering heart: “What is man, that Thou wast mindful of him – that Thou shouldst crown him with everlasting glory and honour?”

R. J. Steward

A new series of ministry is now available in a variety of recorded formats
for loan or sale

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Preached by W. H. Molland and R. J. Steward

*An extensive study examining the vital and relevant
lessons taught by this neglected part of Holy Scripture*

See rear cover for details

Lord, what is man?

Lord, what is man that Thou
So mindful art of him? Or what's the son
Of man, that Thou the highest heaven didst bow,
And to his aid didst run?

Man's but a piece of clay
That's animated by Thy heavenly breath,
And when that breath Thou takest quite away
He's clay again by death.
He is not worthy of the least
Of all Thy mercies at the best.

Baser than clay is he,
For sin has made him like the beasts that perish,
Though next the angels he was in degree;
Yet this beast Thou dost cherish.
And Thou Thy greatest mercy hast
On this accursed creature cast.

Thou didst Thyself abase,
And put off all Thy robes of majesty,
Take on his nature to give him Thy grace,
To save his life didst die.
He is not worthy of the least
Of all Thy mercies: one's a feast.

Lo! man is made now even
With the blest angels, yea, superior far,
Since Christ sat down at God's right hand in heaven,
And God and man one are.
Thus all Thy mercies man inherits,
Though not the least of them he merits.

Thomas Washbourne – 1654

Editorial

It is often the Christian's experience to be called upon to declare the Truth on certain matters – whether from the pulpit, or in personal life. On such occasions of responsibility numerous counter-arguments inevitably arise in the mind, all to the same effect, namely: that 'silence' is preferable to 'speaking out'. These mental excuses and justifications may seem sound and persuasive, but their origin is invariably with the Great Adversary – for whom the Christian's muteness is a triumph. A worthwhile study may be made of these deterrents to truth-speaking.

Chief among them is **the fear of man**. The saint may well feel intimidated by those to whom he is required to speak, and worry lest an aggressive reaction be provoked. Yet such opposition is an inescapable feature of the Christian life, and ought to assure, rather than affright, the saint: "*if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf*" (1 Peter 4:16), for Christ has said, to His people's inestimable comfort: "*if the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you*" (John 15:18).

However, the 'fear of man' usually takes on a more subtle guise. The believer may fear the censure or criticism of his worldly peers; and be afraid of losing face or reputation amongst those whom he seeks to impress. This can include family, friends and colleagues. When Christians allow such factors as these to dictate and constrain their witness for Truth, they prove that verse which says: "*the fear of man bringeth a snare*" (Proverbs 29:25). The greatest antidote to the 'fear of man' is a genuine fear of the Lord; and a desire to secure His Divine approbation, rather than curry the favour of mere mortals.

Another common obstacle is **personal unworthiness**. In many instances, such emotions are right and good, consistent with the meekness and humility to which Scripture exhorts. But the Devil can magnify the believer's sense of 'unfitness' to sinful and immobilising proportions – to the point that they do not speak; being overwhelmed by thoughts of inadequacy and unsuitability. The Apostle Paul addresses this very point. Informing the Early Church that they must broadcast the knowledge of Christ both to the saved and the lost, he asks *“And who is sufficient for these things?”* (2 Corinthians 2:14-16). Of course, no-one is! No Christian has ever lived who could declare the Truth in complete absence of personal sin or guilt. Must all the saints then hold their tongues in shame, and cease to proclaim the Biblical standard? No! *“For we are not as many who corrupt the Word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God **speak we in Christ**”* (v.17) *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament”* (2 Corinthians 3:5). Every believer, however personally unworthy, is qualified to speak **by the grace of God**.

A further impediment to the free course of Truth is **embarrassment**. The Word of God has relevance to every aspect of life, nor is there any part of human existence upon which it does not have bearing. The Bible is personal, practical and applicable – and where it goes, the Biblical Christian must be prepared to go also – with the same directness, frankness and honesty. In the Church today large tracts of Scripture go un-preached, because the doctrine they contain is considered too difficult or divisive. Certain sections are consistently avoided because ministers are afraid to address the issues found there. Modern Evangelicalism has its taboos and proscriptions – subjects upon which no self-respecting preacher would dare to speak – being ashamed to confront a congregation with pertinent applications. Whilst this kind of attitude might flatter

itself with such titles as ‘propriety’ or ‘tact’, if it is subtracting from the Word of God, it is sinful and inexcusable.

The Apostle’s testimony was: “*I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and taught you... For I have not shunned to declare unto you **all** the counsel of God*” (Acts 20:20, 27). So it must ever be with the true servant of the Lord. “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable*” (2 Timothy 3:16); would any dare to qualify or restrict the Divine Author’s own testimony? There is nothing that can be omitted, or left out, for any cause.

To be made a trustee of God’s Truth is a tremendous privilege. To come to a measure of understanding and appreciation of it is a still greater responsibility – and this is the status of every true Christian. Unto them are ‘committed the oracles of God’. The magnitude of this commission, coupled with a knowledge of what the Bible is, its authority and power, should more than outweigh all the opposition of the world, all the disinclinations of the flesh, and all the insinuations of Satan. Oh that the Lord might impress His people with the greatness of His Word, ‘that therein we may speak boldly, **as we ought to speak**’ (cf Ephesians 6:20).

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

7th & 8th June 2008 D.V.

Saturday 3.30 p.m. & 6.00 p.m. Tea served 5.00 p.m.

Lord’s Day 10.45 a.m. & 6.30 p.m.

Preacher: Mr. Michael Harley
(Friston, Suffolk)

a cordial invitation is extended to all