

October - December 2010

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of them that seek Him; that seek thy face, O Jacob. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory” (Psalm 24:3-10).

There was a glory to be assumed by Christ the Mediator, after that He had completed His work on earth, which demanded His public entry into Heaven. Christ had made reference to this in His wonderful prayer in the Upper Room: *“I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was”* (John 17:4-5). In these words, the Saviour distinctly intimates that there is a glory into which He is to enter, as **the result** of His work of Atonement. This is constantly alluded to in the New Testament. For example: *“Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2:5-11).

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” (Hebrews 1:1-4).

“Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things” (Ephesians 4:8-10).

‘A name above every name’, exalted far above angels, far above the heavens, indeed, filling all things; there is so much recorded in Holy Scripture that mortal minds cannot rightly comprehend. The glorious re-entry of Christ into heaven is one of them. Yet glimpses of it are given in the most graphic language. Consider again the words of the twenty-fourth Psalm. These verses give a faint vision of a wonderful coronation day in Heaven. It depicts the triumphal entry of the mighty, victorious King of Glory; the one who had come to earth and spoiled principalities and powers, openly triumphing over them; who had, by Himself, purged our sins; returning to Heaven, there to sit at the right hand of God. There He assumes the sceptre of His mediatorial Kingdom. He is, as the Scriptures state, the *“King of Saints”* (cf Revelation 15:3). To Him is given all power in heaven and in earth, and He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet (cf 1 Corinthians 15:25). The Ascension of Christ the Mediator was not simply necessary; it was a vital part of His work in the Redemption of His people.

Nor should be forgotten the involvement of **the Trinity** of God's person in the salvation of sinners. Every saved soul is elected by God the Father, redeemed by God the Son, and effectually called by God the Holy Spirit. The Bible explains that the Ascension of the Son was an essential prerequisite to the advent of the Holy Ghost. *"But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified"* (John 7:39); *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you"* (John 16:7).

The reason for this particular ordering in the Divine Plan is not disclosed, and so it is futile to question. This was the design and purpose of Him who 'worketh all things after the counsel of His own will'. Let it suffice that the Scriptures make clear: Christ's Ascension had to take place before the Holy Spirit could descend in His New Testament power.

Another vital reason for the Ascension, set forth in Holy Writ, is that of **Christ's Intercession**. *"For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God for us"* (Hebrews 9:24); *"Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens"* (Hebrews 7:25-26); *"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us"* (Romans 8:34); *"we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"* (1 John 2:1). What is the precise nature of the office which Christ now holds, by virtue of His Ascension? This is a particularly precious theme to contemplate.

Often, in their Christian experience, the people of God know failure and sin. With sad hearts and smitten consciences they feel like the publican of Luke's Gospel who "*would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven*" (Luke 18:13); or like Ezra, who in praying confessed, "*O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God*" (Ezra 9:6). Such times as these are familiar to all God's children, for none are perfect. If even great men like Ezra blushed as they came to God in supplication, it must surely be common to every believer. But what a comfort to know that there is one at the very right hand of God interceding for us! As our Advocate, He appears in the presence of God for us; He handles our case and never, never will He fail; for He is able to save to the uttermost – that is, whatever our failure. He is able, because He ever liveth to make intercession on our behalf.

A further, wonderful aspect of Christ's Ascension is that He entered Heaven as our **Forerunner**; that is to say, one who has gone on ahead: "*within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus*" (Hebrews 6:19-20). The truth is that the Redeemer – Jesus Himself – is gone on ahead **for us**. In all aspects of His Mediatorial work, He has His people in view. Their names are upon His heart; indeed, they are 'graven upon the palms of His hands' (cf Isaiah 49:16).

In contemplating the character of the Lord, emphasis is often given to His deity and Godhood – that the one born of Mary, who bore the earthly name Jesus, was none other than God manifest in the flesh. This is right, and grievous error abounds where this doctrine is not preached. Nevertheless, it is equally wrong to neglect the fact that He was also **truly man**. Sinless man, yes indeed, but still touched with the feeling of our infirmities; Christ was verily human, and knew the sensations of weariness, hunger, thirst, loneliness, sorrow, indignation. All that which is common to humanity, He experienced. As the 'man of sorrows' and acquainted with grief (cf Isaiah 53:3), the hope and prospect of completing His mission and returning to Heaven was ever

before Him: *“I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!”* (Luke 12:50). His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem (cf Luke 9:31) would be the culmination of His work on earth, and for this the Saviour longed: the finalising of that which was entrusted to Him, and a return to Heaven. It was *“for the joy that was set before Him”* that He *“endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 12:2).

For the man Christ Jesus, the hope of Heaven and His entry into it was far, far more eagerly anticipated than for any mortal of earth, however great their faith, or burdensome their pilgrimage. Consider again John’s Gospel chapter seventeen – the whole prayer there recorded breathes the longing of one who is homesick for His Father’s house: *“O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was”* (John 17:5). These words express the deep longing of a heart that is conscious of having faithfully performed that which was entrusted to Him, and now He looks for release, and for the spoils of the victory which He had accomplished. This prayer is answered: He **was** ‘received up into heaven’, as the Scriptures testify (cf Mark 16:19, 1 Timothy 3:16).

Yet this is not the whole story. The point in question is Christ’s return into heaven as the Forerunner. He came down to this earth in a **representative capacity**, as the legal Surety of all His people. Just as Adam represented and acted for the whole human race at the first, so did Christ represent and act for all the elect. The first man – the first representative – was of the earth; he failed and dragged the race down. The second man – the second federal Head was the Lord from Heaven (cf 1 Corinthians 15:47). He did not fail. He triumphed gloriously, and raised all the Election of Grace to life everlasting!

These two Heads are spoken of in 1 Corinthians 15:45 as the First Adam, and the Last Adam, the Last Adam being Christ. In Adam, all

die (that is, all the human race); but in Christ shall all be made alive (that is, all God's elect people). The life of which the Scripture here speaks is **endless life**; life beyond the grave; immortality. All God's redeemed people are to bear the image of the heavenly – just as by nature they bore the image of their first Head, Adam, so by new birth are they to bear the image of their second Head, Jesus Christ. They will ultimately be fashioned like unto His glorious body (cf Philippians 3:21); the glory which has been given to Christ as Mediator upon completion of His work, He will in turn confer upon all His believing people (cf John 17:22).

In order to prove the veracity of this truth, and give an assurance of it, Christ had **of necessity** to enter Heaven first. As His people's representative He must needs go in, and prove that His work on their behalf is effectual and accepted. The presence of the Redeemer in Heaven is the great harbinger and pledge for His saints: Because **He** is there, **they** are bound to follow, in God's own time. This great transaction cannot fail, for it is all guaranteed in the infallible Covenant of Grace, and secured by Christ's finished work. He, the Forerunner is **for us** entered.

There are some who teach that 'Heaven' is merely a state or condition. This notion is to be repudiated and totally rejected on the grounds of the authoritative Word of Almighty God. When Christ left the earth, He did not enter some mystical realm or 'higher state of consciousness'. Indeed not – it was "*into heaven itself*", a location; and it is there that He prepares **a place** for all His people (cf John 14:2-3).

Another important doctrine set forth by the Lord's Ascension is that **the body**, as well as the soul and spirit, is destined for that place. There is to be a glorious day of resurrection, when the bodies of all the redeemed of all ages will, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, come forth from their graves; they will be reunited with their spirits,

which long before had gone to be with Christ; those mortal, corruptible bodies will instantly be changed, putting on incorruption and immortality. Then will the whole personality be complete, body, soul and spirit, just as the Creator intended; but then glorified, like unto Him – our spiritual Head and Mediator.

The Ascension of Christ is both a promise and a picture of the Christians' future glory. In these appearances of Christ there are set forth certain "*infallible proofs*" and fundamental teachings "*pertaining to the Kingdom of God*", and not least amongst them is this that occurred at the very end, as Christ entered bodily into Heaven. It was the body with which He came, born of Mary; the body in which He grew; the body in which He worked at Nazareth; the body that travelled the provinces of Judea, Samaria and Galilee, teaching and preaching; the body which was scourged, spat upon, and nailed to a tree; the body which was bound in grave-clothes and laid in a tomb. That same body rose from the dead in immortality, and that same body gloriously entered Heaven. Here is the Forerunner – here is the prototype! As He entered – so shall all His people. Their eternal destiny is not to be disembodied spirits, but to be made like unto their Lord – raised from death, clothed with immortality, glorified, fashioned like unto His body of glory. "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is*" (1 John 3:2).

In contemplating this wonderful subject, the eye of faith beholds the blessed Lord received into the clouds, and strives to catch a glimpse of heaven through that opening portal. John Bunyan sought to depict the scene, as he described in allegorical language the pilgrims who had come to the end of their journey, and reached the Celestial City: "Now just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them, and behold the city shone like the sun; the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many... with crowns on their heads, palms in

their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal... And after that they shut up the gates; which when I had seen, I wished myself among them." May such holy aspirations as these be deepened in the heart of every reader.

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

Oh, what tongue of the highest archangel of heaven can express the welcome of Thee, the King of glory, into these blessed regions of immortality? Surely the [highest] heaven never resounded with so much joy: God ascended with jubilation, and the Lord with the sound of the trumpet. It is not for us, weak and finite creatures, to wish to conceive those incomprehensible, spiritual, divine [congratulations] that the glorious Trinity gave to the victorious and now glorified human nature. Certainly, if, when He brought His only begotten Son into the world, He said, 'Let all the angels worship Him', much more now that He 'ascends on high, and hath led captivity captive, hath He given him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow'. And if the holy angels did so [sing] at His birth, in the very entrance into that state of humiliation and infirmity, with what triumph did they receive Him now returning from the perfect achievement of man's redemption? How did they sing, "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in*".

And why dost not thou, O my soul, help to bear thy part with that happy choir of heaven? Why art not thou rapt out of my bosom, with an ecstasy of joy, to see this human nature of ours exalted above all the powers of heaven, adored of angels, archangels, cherubim, seraphim, and all those mighty and glorious spirits, and sitting there crowned with infinite glory and majesty?

Joseph Hall (1574 – 1656)

PSALM 24

These verses reveal to us the great representative man, who answered to the full character laid down, and therefore by His own right ascended the holy hill of Zion. Our Lord Jesus Christ could ascend into the hill of the Lord because His hands were clean and His heart was pure, and if we by faith in Him are conformed to His image we shall enter too. We have here a picture of our Lord's glorious ascent. We see him rising from amidst the little group upon Olivet, and as the cloud receives him, angels reverently escort him to the gates of heaven.

The ancient gates of the eternal temple are personified and addressed in song by the attending cohort of rejoicing spirits. They are called upon to 'lift up their heads', as though with all their glory they were not great enough for the All-glorious King. Let all things do their utmost to honour so great a Prince; let the highest heaven put on unusual loftiness in honour of "*the King of Glory*". He who, fresh from the cross and the tomb, now rides through the gates of the New Jerusalem is higher than the heavens; great and everlasting as they are, those gates of pearl are all unworthy of Him before whom the heavens are not pure, and who chargeth His angels with folly.

The watchers at the gate hearing the song look over the battlements and ask, "*Who is this King of glory?*" A question full of meaning and worthy of the meditations of eternity. Who is He in person, nature, character, office and work? What is His pedigree? What His rank and what His race? The answer given in a mighty wave of music is, "*The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle*". We know the might of Jesus by the battles which He has fought, the victories which He has won over sin, and death, and hell, and we clap our hands as we see Him leading captivity captive in the majesty of His strength. Oh for a heart to sing His praises! Mighty hero, be Thou crowned for ever King of kings and Lord of lords.

“Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in”. The words are repeated with a pleasing variation. There are times of deep earnest feeling when repetitions are not vain but full of force. Doors were often taken from their hinges when Easterners would show welcome to a guest, and some doors were drawn up and down like a portcullis, and may possibly have protruded from the top; thus literally lifting up their heads. The picture is highly poetical, and shows how wide heaven’s gate is set by the ascension of our Lord. Blessed be God, the gates have never been shut since. The opened gates of heaven invite the weakest believer to enter.

Dear reader, it is possible that you are saying, ‘I shall never enter into the heaven of God, for I have neither clean hands nor a pure heart’? Look then to Christ, who has already climbed the holy hill. He has entered as the forerunner of those who trust him. Follow in His footsteps, and repose upon His merit. He rides triumphantly into heaven, and you shall ride there too if you trust Him. ‘But how can I get the character described?’ say you. The Spirit of God will give you that. He will create in you a new heart and a right spirit. Faith in Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit, and has all virtues wrapped up in it. Faith stands by the fountain filled with blood, and as she washes therein, clean hands and a pure heart, a holy soul and a truthful tongue are given to her.

The closing note is inexpressibly grand. Jehovah of Hosts, Lord of men and angels, Lord of the universe, Lord of the worlds, is the King of glory. All true glory is concentrated upon the true God, for all other glory is but a passing pageant, the painted pomp of an hour. The ascended Saviour is here declared to be the Head and Crown of the universe, the King of Glory. Our Immanuel is hymned in sublimest strains. Jesus of Nazareth is Jehovah Sabaoth.

C. H. Spurgeon

“BUT GOD...”

“...we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:3-5)

The portion of Scripture with which this article is concerned consists of just two words, or six letters, in its English translation. It is an expression to be found in numerous places within the Bible, and might justifiably be called an apt summary of time, history and the plan of Redemption; or a description of the works of the Almighty; or indeed, the Christian’s testimony.

There are, within any language, certain words whose brevity belies their significance; words which, in a single syllable, or a few characters, totally alter the meaning of a sentence, or entirely change the sense of a reading. Such words are to be found in the Holy Scriptures – that greatest written work of all time, authored by God, transmitted by the Holy Spirit and recorded by faithful men of old. Here, in this of all books, the choice of language is doubly important, and the nature of words used; *“Hold fast the form of sound words”* (2 Timothy 1:13) Paul exhorted Timothy; and with good reason.

The small word, abounding with meaning, to which our attention is now drawn, is the little conjunction ‘**but**’; in particular, the occasions when it is used together with the most important name which human lips can frame: **God**. These two in combination convey tremendous force. The word ‘but’ is commonly placed between two contrasting or contradictory clauses to emphasise the distinction; and thus it is seen in Scripture that the words ‘but God’ often stand betwixt irreconcilable

opposites; making the impossible, possible; achieving the incredible; acting as the crux or turning-point of life and experience.

Consider how these two short words may be used to describe the extremities of time. In the beginning, there was neither matter nor existence, indeed, nothing but God. God was; God spake. The earth was without form and void; but God by His Spirit moved on the face of the waters (cf Genesis 1:2). All was enveloped in darkness; but God had other designs, “*And God said, Let there be light: and there was light*” (Genesis 1:3). Or think upon the other extreme, and the end of this earth’s history. Fallen men scoff, and impudently ask “*where is the promise of His coming?*” (2 Peter 3:4), and accuse the Almighty of slackness, or worse, of lying, or of not existing at all. “*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise... **But** the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night*” (v. 9-10); with a great noise, and with the trump of the angels! Sceptics, scientists and humanists may presume to eliminate the Lord from their thinking and confidently assert, “*all things continue as they were from the beginning*”; but God will ultimately demonstrate the magnitude of their folly.

Consider then some specific occurrences of this text in Scripture, and its application, **firstly** to the unbeliever.

For the atheist, the apostate, the lover of evil, the words ‘but God’ hold no hope or comfort, rather the threatening and ominous ring of judgment. Natural man is incredibly bold in his sin. He will relish it, and boast of it; march and parade in honour of it; proudly display and publicise it. He thinks he may sin with impunity, having no fear of retribution or accountability; and so long as all consequences or repercussions are avoided, the bolder he becomes. “*They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them? They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep.*”

***But God** shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded. So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves: all that see them shall flee away” (Psalm 64:5-8).*

The patience and long-suffering of God is not unlimited. Judgment will finally come upon the evildoers. A further, practical example of this is given in Luke’s gospel. There, the Lord describes a godless man of the world who prospered greatly in the things of this life, growing so arrogant in iniquity that he concluded: *“I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. **But God** said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”* (Luke 12:19-20). With awful suddenness, the very God whom the rich man had denied and ignored breaks in upon him in dreadful tones of condemnation, and at the very peak of his ill-gotten gains, the sinner’s doom falls. *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”* (Galatians 6:7).

This is a needful word for the present day “when darkness of sin is abounding... when the godless do triumph, all virtue confounding”. The sinner has no grounds for confidence, nor have the saints any reason to despair. There is no miscarriage of Divine justice; the law and righteousness of God have not been revoked. The Psalmist was once caused to admit: *“But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked... When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment!”* (Psalm 73:2-3, 16-19). Let none be deceived or discouraged by present, temporary appearances. The ungodly may flourish for a season, *“but **God** overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness”* (Proverbs 21:12).

There is an application of these words, **secondly**, to the believer.

The fact is that, by nature and birth, all were alike and indistinguishable in sin. The Ephesian epistle describes the believer's original condition thus: *"And you... were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others"* (Ephesians 2:1-3). Here is a graphic and unsparing portrait, in which every Christian recognises themselves, as they once were. What has made the difference? How has so great a change been effected? **"But God**, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (v. 4-6). Here is the transforming conjunction! Here is the Divine Name! **But God!** This is what happened. God, in the richness of His mercy, and greatness of His love, has made His people to live in Christ, and saved them by His grace.

The words "but God" are at the centre of every true Christian's biography. They once were blind, and lost, and dead, even as others, until the Divine intervention of the Almighty 'caused them to differ'. Looking upon the unbelieving masses, they can say in humble wonderment, 'there, but for God and His grace, go I'.

Once they stood, equally, under the sentence of death, on account of transgression and the broken Law. What could be done? What steps might be taken to save the sinner from the irrevocable claims of Divine justice, and the wrath of a sin-hating, offended God? The only possible means of escape was via a Substitute – to have one stand in their stead, and bear the penalty in their place. Could any candidate be found, or

be constrained to act on their behalf? *“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet per adventure for a good man some would even dare to die”* (Romans 5:7). The situation looked bleak, for the condemned sinner is neither ‘righteous’, nor ‘good’, but entirely ungodly, and has no strength, or merit to plead. Surely then, any hope of salvation is vain! **“But God** *commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us... For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly”* (Romans 5:8, 6). Let every believer rejoice in those wonderful words ‘but God’! For He in wisdom and love has wrought the impossible, and contrary to all expectation, provided a way – indeed, supplied The Way, The Truth and The Life in the person of His Son, whom He delivered up for us all (cf Romans 8:32). Such is the mystery of godliness, and the miracle of salvation.

The words of the text may be applied, **thirdly**, to the Christian Life.

The experience of God’s people as they progress through this present life is described in Scripture as a pilgrimage, and it is well typified by the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt, and their passage from slavery to the promised land. Both journeys seem equally improbable and unlikely, beset with dangers, toils and snares; the difficulties of deriving sustenance in an inhospitable desert; the continual risk of opposition and conflict; the ever-present tendency to turn back, regress or return. How soon would the Israelites have failed if left to their own devices? The saints are equally susceptible, if they go forth in their own strength, by their own means: **“But God** *led the people about”* (Exodus 13:18). A wilderness journey would indeed be impossible, but for the presence and guidance of an omnipotent God. Well might Moses, and the true child of God in their turn, say: *“If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I...have found grace in Thy sight? is it not in that Thou goest with us?”* (Exodus 33:15-16). The most difficult and arduous pilgrimage can be accomplished in safety when God Himself leads the way.

Another character in Bible history who knew much of the wilderness was David. He, though called and anointed of God, though exercising faith and obedience in Him, was caused to suffer great opposition and hardship, and was hunted daily like a fugitive by powerful enemies. Capture and destruction seemed inevitable, for the combined forces of a national army and an evil king were arrayed against him: **“But God delivered him not into his hand”** (1 Samuel 23:14). When it appeared that escape was impossible, God so intervened that it was impossible for His servant to come to harm! *“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31).

Many will try to oppose the Christian and his testimony. A man’s foes may even be those of his own household (cf Matthew 10:26). Such was the case with the godly patriarch Joseph. His brethren despised him, not simply on account of a father’s favouritism, but hated his piety and spiritual discernment. They sought to silence the witness which he bore, and having plotted and schemed against him, executed their plan with apparent success. Yet a higher power was at work in their midst, turning their worst devices to a greater end: *“...as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive”* (Genesis 50:20). Oh, the wonders of Divine Sovereignty and the remarkable workings of providence that surround the people of God; such that, even in their darkest moments *“we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”* (Romans 8:28).

Above all human foes, the saints have cause to fear their great Adversary the Devil. He is the prime mover in all their conflicts; the accuser and tempter of the brethren. In this respect, it is uncomfortable to consider the power of temptation, his choice weapon, with which the first Adam was overcome even amidst the perfections of Eden. *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”*, indeed, faced with such an antagonist, it seems

unlikely that any could withstand! The Scripture goes on: “*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: **but God** is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*” (1 Corinthians 10:12-13). Our enemy is powerful; temptation is subtle, insidious and all-too common; but God is faithful, and able, and on the side of His saints! “*Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world*” (1 John 4:4).

The words of our text can apply **fourthly** to the Christian’s final destiny.

The believer’s life proceeds, and thus preserved by an immutable God, waxes on. At length, however, an inescapable object must be confronted; the consequence of sin and the curse. Described as the last great enemy, and seemingly indomitable and unconquerable, death must be faced. All have to pass this way, and walk that dark overshadowed valley. The Psalmist was caused to, and made a remarkable statement: “*My flesh and my heart faileth: **but God** is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever*” (Psalm 73:26). On either side of the words ‘but God’, two contrasting clauses are seen. On one hand, the inevitable facts of age and decay, the evident tokens of mortality and the brevity of life; and on the other, the promise of strength and plenty and eternity! How can these things be? How can one whose outward man is perishing and dying lay claim to an **eternal** portion? It is because of the Divine purposes of an almighty God, whose power is greater even than death.

A full demonstration of His authority and greatness has been given in the person of Jesus Christ. He clothed Himself in mortality and was found in fashion as a man, and humbled Himself even unto death. At length His enemies, “*though they found no cause of death in Him, yet*

*desired they... that He should be slain And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre” (Acts 13:28-29). At this point in the narrative, all seems to be lost! The immortal dies! The appointed Saviour and Messiah lies in a tomb and it seems that the forces of evil have triumphed. How could so dire a situation possibly be reversed? “**But God** raised Him from the dead” (v. 30). These two amazing words continue the Biblical record, and dispel the darkness of death with the glorious light of resurrection.*

In this revelation of the power of God, there is great consolation for all His believing people, for by the resurrection of Christ Jesus, the saints are assured of their own conquest over death: *“we declare unto you the glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us... in that He hath raised up Jesus again... And as concerning that He raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David” (Acts 13:32-34). God will mercifully revoke the sentence of death against us, and fulfil the wonderful promise of life everlasting. So whilst every Christian must still face the prospect of the end appointed for their ‘earthly tabernacle’, they do so with calm assurance, and with the words: “**But God** will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for He shall receive me” (Psalm 49: 15).*

What a tremendous testimony are these simple words ‘but God’, and what depth of meaning is therein contained. They are the sound of Divine Intervention, a description of God’s grace, a record of His transforming power, a summary of salvation, a ground for hope, a cause for confidence, a watchword at the gate of death, an exhaustless theme of praise for the endless ages of Glory. May the consideration of them be blessed to all who read.

R. J. Steward

EDITORIAL

When the children of Israel first entered the promised land of Canaan, they secured it through hard conflict and war. Jericho and Ai were conquered in succession, and numerous heathen kings fought and overcome. At length the land was sufficiently subdued that it could be divided amongst the tribes, and each could carry the battle to their respective portions. For a while the fight was maintained, and more enemies were defeated. Before long, however, another trend became apparent. The early chapters of the book of Judges show how, weary of warfare and daunted by their foes, the Israelites instead resorted to compromise and concession, and did not drive out the inhabitants of the land.

This attitude was entirely contrary to the word and will of God, who had said: *“When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it.”* (Numbers 33:51-53). *“Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left; That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: But cleave unto the Lord your God, as ye have done unto this day”* (Joshua 23:6-8).

The perils of failing in this commandment, or of forming such allegiances were clear: *“Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee”* (Exodus 34:12). *“...but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish*

from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you” (Joshua 23:13). Even so it proved to be. From these tenacious, unconquered heathen peoples, idolatry, false worship and all manner of error spread into the whole nation of Israel, and plagued them throughout their subsequent history, ultimately precipitating their downfall.

In this sad spectacle of failure and disobedience, there are several parallels and lessons for the Church in the present day. It is a fact that on numerous occasions throughout ecclesiastical history, falsehood has been identified, and bravely fought against. Pernicious doctrine, being seen for what it is, has been engaged and overcome. Spiritual darkness has been dispelled with the light of truth. On these occasions, God’s people have come forth stronger and better for the conflict, and inherited the Lord’s blessing.

However, in practically every instance when the Church has combated heresy and undergone a Biblical reformation, old, incumbent aberrations have remained, unaddressed and unconquered. Thus Protestantism perpetuated many of the perversions of Rome, Nonconformity continued in the follies of Anglicanism, and so on through the generations. Whilst more obvious and overt fallacies were confronted and eradicated, it seems that resolve quickly weakens, the fighting spirit fades, and a full victory is not pursued, or gained. As was the case in Israelitish history, so it has proved in the Church: these resident, indwelling errors prove the most insidious and injurious. At first they are ignored or connived at, and before long are embraced and accepted; instead of being recognised for the danger which they are, they become immovably entrenched, and established amongst God’s people.

The solemn warnings pronounced by the Lord to Israel remain equally true today. These lingering errors, incorporated into the Church’s doctrine will ever prove to be: *“snares and traps unto you, and scourges in*

your sides, and thorns in your eyes"; pitfalls in which the unwary are caught and entangled; that which will immobilise the Christian, and prevent any forward progress; a continual source of irritation and pain; that which will cause blindness and loss of vision, leaving the sufferer unable to see the right way. Compromise may seem like a preferable alternative to conflict, but it will ever prove disastrous to the cause of Truth.

It is the solemn responsibility of the people of God to “*earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3) without cessation or remission; to “*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*” (Ephesians 5:11); to ever and always “*fight the good fight of faith*” (1 Timothy 6:12), until a full and complete victory is won. Therein lies their safety, and only thus will the Lord’s promised blessing be fully realised.

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