

January - March 2011

# The Link

**NORTH ROAD CHAPEL**

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**BIDEFORD**

## FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

*“And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”* (Acts 1:7-11)

It is a most touching fact that at the Ascension, the Saviour was taken up in the very act of blessing His disciples. Luke states, *“it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven”* (Luke 24:51). The Lord was still blessing them as He vanished out of their sight. This may seem strange: why did He not finish His blessing, and conclude with words of farewell, and leave in a more ordered fashion? There is precious truth contained even in the manner of His departure, namely this – the benediction that began on earth is **not ended**. It still continues around and upon all His believing people.

It was not a brief, once-for-all blessing; but is ongoing. It is continually uttered from heaven, and will persist until such words cease to be valid or necessary upon earth; when the last elect soul is called of the Holy Spirit and all the redeemed of God are brought in. Then, words of blessing will give place to words that proclaim Him as Judge of all the world. Through the grace of God, the age of blessing still goes on; but one day it will end – suddenly, unexpectedly, as a thief in the night.

Let the unbeliever be warned, lest that day should find them unprepared to meet God! “*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

As the disciples saw their beloved Lord and Master vanish through the clouds, it was only natural that they continued to look up into the sky. They were overcome with mixed feelings of sorrow, fear, uncertainty and amazement. The awful sense of being alone set in; much as it did with Elisha, when he saw his master Elijah caught up into heaven in a chariot of fire. Poor, stricken Elisha cried out, “*my father, my father*” (2 Kings 2:12). Like this Old Testament character, the apostles must have felt that their great guide and protector had gone. If nothing more had been said or seen, they would in all probability have returned to the city with doubting, sorrowful hearts. But they were not so left – their ascended Lord had arranged differently – instruction concerning the Kingdom of God was to be given at His disappearance, as well as by His former appearances. As they gazed up into heaven, two angelic messengers appeared, giving them assurance that the departing Saviour would indeed **come again**. Thus is revealed another aspect of truth pertaining to the Kingdom.

**Firstly**, an examination of these two heavenly emissaries is required. The First Advent of Christ was heralded by angels as they burst forth over the Judean hills at the incarnation of the Saviour. It is also a notable fact that this wonderful forty-day period (which has occupied these articles) was both opened and closed by the appearance of certain heavenly beings. The Lord’s coming forth from death was proclaimed by angels; and as He left this sphere to go back to heaven, His Second Advent was similarly announced. These were messages calculated to remove the gloom of the grave, and the pain of parting. The instruction set forth by this, is that the help and comfort of the angelic host was sent at the very time when it was most needed. Thus it is that God still deals with His people, invariably using the same agency today

as He did on the outskirts of Bethany 2000 years ago, albeit without the provision of any corporeal, visible form, and ‘unperceived by mortal sense’.

The ministry of angels is a topic from which many preachers shrink. In past generations, even to the present time, there is much sentimental, fanciful and nonsensical teaching concerning spirit beings, further distorted by man-made myths and traditions. Such falsehood is rightly to be rejected. Yet some deny their existence or operation altogether; while others avoid the subject, and do not search the Scriptures to discover whether these things be so. These factors go some way to explaining the silence in the pulpits on this most important doctrine. But no fact could be more clearly stated, nor work more definitively set out in Holy Writ, than that of angels. The New Testament says with great clarity that they are: “*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*” (Hebrews 1:14); the Psalmist explains that ‘God gives His angels charge over His people, to keep them in all their ways, to bare them up lest they should dash their foot against a stone’ (cf Psalm 91:11-12). These are glorious truths revealed in the Word of God; angelic agency is operative today. Unseen by man, they constantly afford spiritual ministrations and protection to the people of God: “*The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them*” (Psalm 34:7).

To fail to preach and expound this subject would be a serious deficiency, for herein lies great comfort and encouragement. If ever it is the lot of a child of God to sit in loneliness, or walk the pathway of sorrow, let them but remember that God has given His angels charge over them. Perhaps in this dark and evil day, there come feelings of insecurity; does it not then help to know that the angel of the Lord encamps around those that fear Him? When the apostle Paul had the terrible experience of shipwreck, he was able to give this remarkable testimony, “*there stood by me this night the angel of God*” (Acts 27:23).

When Peter lay in prison, awaiting imminent execution, chained between two soldiers, an angel appeared unto him in the watches of the night. His chains fell off, the iron gate opened of its own accord, and out walked the veteran saint into liberty. These are the beings of which we now speak – heavenly emissaries sent forth by God for the good of His people. When a sinner repents of sin, and turns to Christ for salvation, “*there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth*” (Luke 15:10). When their weary pilgrimage is complete, and mortal life ends, the saints are conveyed by angels into the realms of endless day (cf Luke 16:22). What a subject this is! Does it not speak great peace and consolation to every believing heart?

What is the nature of this agency? Is it a supernatural intervention, or miraculous interposition? It was in the case of the apostles on certain exceptional occasions; but these were extraordinary, and not a precedent. Are angelic ministrations designed to give fresh revelation? No indeed, for whilst this may have been their purpose in an earlier age, now the transmission of Divine Truth is complete, in the inspired Holy Scriptures (cf Galatians 1:8). Like the Holy Spirit Himself, (cf John 16:13), angels never operate outside the scope of the Word of God, nor go beyond its teachings.

This was clearly manifested on the Mount of Olives. Those eleven men who saw the Lord go were in want of immediate help and comfort; so without a moment’s delay, two angels were at their side. Not to work a miracle, but to console and shield them in the time of their need; not to declare new doctrine, but to reassure and remind them of truth which the Saviour had already declared (cf Matthew 24:30, Mark 14:62). So even in this, the disappearance of Christ, further instruction pertaining to the Kingdom of God was demonstrated, namely the ongoing ministry of angels to the New Testament saints; and that even in the bodily absence of the Lord, His people are not left without heavenly aid and succour.

**Secondly**, consider the nature of the angels' communication. Had they some new or novel thing to impart? Not at all; for complete truth had been communicated by the Living Word, Jesus Christ, who was now ascended. "*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*" (Hebrews 1:1-2). To this, nothing can be added or taken away (cf Revelation 22:18-19). The message which the angels had for the disciples that day was truth with which they were familiar; truth which constantly appeared in the Old Testament (cf Jude 14, Psalm 96:13); truth which had been greatly emphasised by the Lord in the closing weeks of His earthly ministry, just prior to the cross. Yet a truth which at that precise moment on Olivet was furthest from their thoughts, eclipsed by sorrow and surprise. Hence this visitation and message: "*Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:11). The wonderful fact of the **Second Advent** – what a vital teaching this is!

Their message can be conveniently divided so as to come under three headings: **rebuke**, **comfort** and **warning**. The first of these will be addressed in the remainder of this article.

**1. Rebuke** "*why stand ye gazing up into heaven?*" There is reproof here, albeit a gentle one. Remember that the setting and context of all this is the giving of instruction relating to the Kingdom of God. These disciples were possessed of a feeling with which every mourner is familiar. When the gates of heaven have opened to admit some dear one taken away, probably the first wistful longing of the heart is to follow them thither; the world suddenly seems so dark and empty without them that to remain here is undesirable. This is akin to the emotions of the disciples as they gazed heavenwards; even the stoutest of hearts are inclined to think like this in the hour of deep sorrow. Recall the character Elijah, who in days of great apostasy fled into the

wilderness, thinking that all was lost, and God's cause hopelessly crushed. Lying beneath a juniper tree he longed to die and enter heaven (cf 1 Kings 19:4). The same was true of Moses in an moment of great discouragement (cf Numbers 11:15), and Job in the midst of his afflictions (cf Job 3). Think too of David, and his words in the Psalms, "*Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest*" (Psalm 55:5-6). These experiences are common to all believers; but when such seasons of sorrow and depression come, then should the kind rebuke of the angels be heeded: "*why stand ye gazing?*" Is this the manner in which ye will live, from henceforth?

Consider what these words meant, and how they were intended to affect the disciples. The implication of the angels' words to those men were: "Why do you long to escape from toil, and evade your charge and responsibility? Return to Jerusalem! Were not the last words that your Master spoke to you an assurance that you would in due time receive the promise of the Father, and it would be for you to go and labour to the uttermost parts of the earth? Then gird yourselves to obey that parting command; for did not He also say that He would be with you always, even unto the end? And what of those words in the Upper Room, 'I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself'? Have you forgotten all this? He is going to come again! Gaze not with longing eyes at those golden gates. The time of your entry has not yet come; but it is sure, it is certain; and it is for you in the meantime to work, and wait, and fulfil your God-given duty".

That this rebuke had its proper effect in the case of the disciples is evidenced by their immediate action: "*And they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God*" (Luke 24:52-53). Their Lord had vanished

out of their sight, yet they were not alone; in spirit He would be with them right to the end; and ultimately He would come again and receive them unto Himself. This physical parting was only temporary; the day would come when they would be together again, and reunited forever. *“For yet a little while, and He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry”* (Hebrews 10:37); then all will meet in the general assembly and church of the Firstborn (cf Hebrews 12:23), where the present light affliction, which is but for a moment, will be seen to have worked a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (cf 2 Corinthians 4:17).

This is the lesson taught by the angels who briefly appeared on the slopes of Olivet at the Lord’s Ascension. Its application is as much to every reader now, as ever it was to the eleven apostles then. When times of sorrow or discouragement come, when the way seems impossibly dark and confusing, when yearnings for heaven fill the soul, and these things render the Christian unfit for his earthly labours, a voice of gentle reproof is heard *“why stand ye gazing up?”* Instead of indolently longing for the rest of heaven, continue to work upon earth, so to be the more fitted for that destination! *“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God... Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest”* (Hebrews 4:9-11). Only with this attitude are aspirations for better, future things still honouring to God. Think of Paul, who admitted, *“For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you”* (Philippians 1:23-24).

There may be times when the soul desires that ‘better country’, but never must this be with an impatient discontent, or an idle wish to escape from those duties and responsibilities which God has assigned to His people upon earth.

To be concluded.

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



## THE WORD SPOKEN BY ANGELS

“*Which also said, Ye men of Galilee...*” Which was said by them, not to reproach them with their country, but partly to let them know that they knew them, who they were, and from whence they came; and partly to observe the rich and distinguishing grace of God in choosing such mean and contemptible persons to be the apostles of Christ, and eye-witnesses of His majesty.

“*...why stand ye gazing up into heaven?...*” [Thereby] reproving them for their curiosity in looking after Christ with their bodily eyes, who was no more in common to be seen this way, but with an eye of faith; and for their desire after His corporeal presence which they were not to look for; and as if they expected He would return again immediately, whereas His return will not be till the end of the world. And besides, they were not to remain on that spot, or stand gazing there; they were to go to Jerusalem, and abide there, as Christ had ordered, till they should receive the Holy Spirit in an extraordinary way; and then they were to preach a crucified Christ, and declare that He was risen from the dead, and was gone to heaven, and was ordained to be the Judge of quick and dead.

“*...this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven...*” This same Jesus: and not another; the same in person, in body and soul: which is taken up from you into heaven; who was taken up in a cloud out of their sight, and received into heaven, where He will be till the times of the restitution of all things; and which might be a matter of grief to them, because of the loss of His bodily presence; though it should have been the rather joyful to them, since he was gone to the Father and as their Forerunner, to prepare a place, and make intercession for them.

“...shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven” He shall come in the same flesh, in the same human nature; He shall come in the clouds of heaven, and shall be attended with His mighty angels, as He now was; He shall descend Himself in person, as He now ascended in person; as He went up with a shout, and with the sound of a trumpet, (cf Psalm 47:5) so He shall descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God.

John Gill (1697 – 1771)

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“The question of the two [angels] seems to involve an indirect reproof of [the disciples’] forgetfulness or unbelief of what their Lord Himself had told them. This was betrayed by their excessive and continued wonder at His disappearance, as if they had expected Him to stay on earth for ever, though the promise of the Paraclete, which He had just renewed to them, was formally suspended until His own departure, and return to the bosom of the Father (cf John 16:7). Their astonishment, moreover, seems to show that they despaired of ever seeing Christ Himself again; whereas He had repeatedly declared that He would come again (cf John 14:3), and in the very way that He had now departed, i.e. in a cloud (cf Luke 21:27), or as it is variously expressed by the Evangelists, in clouds, on the clouds, or with the clouds of heaven (cf Mark 13:26, 14:62, Matthew 24:30, 26:64). The question of the two men was intended therefore to recall them to themselves, and to remind them that, instead of stupidly and idly gazing after one who was no longer visible, they should rather show their love to Him by instantly obeying His farewell commands, and trusting His repeated promise to return, which they accordingly repeat, as if to show their own implicit confidence in its fulfilment.”

Joseph Alexander (1809 – 1860)

## BLIND FAITH

The Ascension to heaven of the Lord Jesus accomplished and denoted many things. It demonstrated and proved His merits, His Deity and the fulfilment of His redemptive plan; it glorified His humanity, and that of His people, assuring them of their ultimate reception into Glory; His sacrificial work was thus completed, and His mediatorial work begun. But it also marked the dawn of a new era upon earth, and a dramatic change for His disciples. Until this time, they had enjoyed the very person of Christ in their midst. They had been called to His service audibly and directly; they had followed a real man whom they could see with their eyes, and whose presence they could confirm with their natural senses; they had witnessed unmistakable proofs of His Deity in tangible signs, wonders and miracles. Now that time, that privilege and experience, was ended. A new epoch was beginning; strange and different to them, but more familiar to the modern reader.

With certain notable exceptions such as the Apostle Paul (cf 1 Corinthians 15:8) and John upon Patmos (cf Revelation 1:12-13), man would no longer behold the Lord with the sensory functions of the human body. Though each of the disciples could say, *“Am I not an Apostle?... have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?”* (1 Corinthians 9:1), and testify of the Saviour, *“we have heard... we have seen with our eyes, ...we have looked upon, and our hands have handled... the Word of Life”* (1 John 1:1), the fact was, *“yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more”* (2 Corinthians 5:16). The physical evidences of Christ’s reality upon which they may previously have relied, were now taken away. The situation had changed into that state which still obtains to the present day: the Lord Jesus in heaven, His people upon earth; He in the spiritual realm, they in the material realm; and between the two a ‘veil’ fixed, which, though temporary, cannot be penetrated by mortal senses.

Was this then, a final and ultimate separation? No indeed. For within just a short period for the disciples, the day of Pentecost would fully come, bringing with it the Advent of God the Holy Spirit, whose presence would abide with them, and with all God's people perpetually. "*Even the Spirit of Truth... for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you*" (John 14:17). And besides this, there remains another means whereby Christ may be known and comprehended; one which transcends the body's normal faculties, namely **faith**. Of this, the hymnwriter W. C. Dix said:

“Alleluia! Not as orphans are we left in sorrow now;  
Alleluia! He is near us, **faith** believes, nor questions how;  
Though the cloud from sight received Him  
When the forty days were o'er,  
Shall our hearts forget His promise, ‘I am with you evermore’?”

In the absence of sight and the other natural senses, faith is in the ascendant. It is the way in which spiritual truth, and the Lord Himself, can be perceived.

### **Faith better than sight**

It is perhaps an idle fancy of many Christians to wish that they could have lived in the early days of the first Century, in the region of Galilee or Judea, and had the opportunity to see the man Christ Jesus. It is possible that some even envy the disciples for the opportunities which they had, and imagine that to have been a contemporary of the Incarnate Lord was the highest of privileges, and invaluable in strengthening belief. These are foolish and misguided notions. One real example, and the Saviour's words upon the matter, are sufficient to set the record straight.

Assembling in fear and secrecy after the death of their Lord, the disciples were astonished by His sudden appearance among them, in His resurrection form: “...*Jesus... stood in the midst, and saith unto them,*

*Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.”* (John 20:19-20). Their state of joyful happiness at this manifestation is scarcely to be wondered at: the sight was greatly to their comfort and assurance. However, one of their number, Thomas, was absent, and upon hearing the account of this event refused to accept it without substantial, practical examination. A week later, such an occasion came; the Lord again appeared unto them. Thomas was able to make full proof, as he previously demanded: *“Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and My God”* (v. 27-28).

Surely, the experience of the disciples, and of Thomas in particular is to be coveted, as one of greatest blessedness. No, to the contrary: *“Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: **blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed**”* (v. 29). The Lord Himself declares that it is a **more blessed** state to believe in the absence of physical evidences – faith is to be preferred above sight. Had Thomas turned his original absence to a nobler end, and believed on the basis of faith alone, his blessings would have exceeded those of his fellow disciples, and history would have remembered him by a very different name.

Every child of God in the present day has the opportunity to succeed where Thomas failed, and inherit greater blessings than those which he forfeited through doubt and unbelief. Though this season of physical separation be one of heaviness and manifold temptations, and necessitate the exercise of much faith, that faith will ultimately, *“be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (1 Peter 1:7-8).

## **Faith instead of sight**

The term ‘Blind Faith’ is common among men and women of the world. They tend to use it in a pejorative or derisive way to describe faith which they consider to be of an irrational or extreme kind. Yet the expression is quite accurate, because all true faith is ‘blind’ – that is to say, it is exercised in the absence of sight. If a person or thing can be seen, there is no need for faith in their being or existence. As Scripture succinctly puts it: “*but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?*” (Romans 8:24). Faith and sight can be described as ‘mutually exclusive’ – if one is present, the other is absent, or negated.

The Hebrew epistle adds: “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1). It is as though faith itself were another ‘sense’, in addition, and very much superior, to those of the natural body. Just as the senses of sight, hearing, or touch supply to the brain the necessary evidence of the physical world, so the Christian’s faith substantiates that which is spiritual, and confirms it to the soul. Many fundamental aspects of Truth are ‘invisible to the naked eye’: the being of God (cf John 1:18, 1 Timothy 6:16), His divine attributes, His regenerative working in the hearts of men (cf John 3:8), the eternal realm in which He dwells. In such mysterious and unsearchable matters as these, human vision is futile. Faith must make good the deficiency. “Where reason fails with all her powers, there faith believes...”

By faith, the people of God can ‘see’ those things which are not evident or visible in this terrestrial sphere. Faith is the spiritual alternative or equivalent to ‘sight’. Thus it is recorded of Moses “*By faith he... endured, as seeing Him who is invisible*” (Hebrews 11:27). Indeed, in that wonderful portion of Holy Writ, recounting the exploits of faithful saints of the Old Covenant era, it is striking to note how many of them acted when sight was wanting: they saw by faith. The notion of a

global flood, or even of rain, was entirely alien to Noah; but “*By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark*” (Hebrews 11:7). Similarly, Abraham faithfully obeyed the direction of Almighty God to go to a land which he had never seen; and on a still deeper level, he “*looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (v. 10). That more desirable place and better country is a heavenly one, that mortal eyes could never behold – only the eye of faith.

The same was true of Moses, Abel, Enoch, and all the believing patriarchs of old: they exercised a prospective faith in a coming Messiah, whom they could not hope to look upon themselves, in their lifetimes; but by faith they ‘saw His day, and were glad’ (cf John 8:56). So it is recorded: “*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them*” (Hebrews 11:13); faith viewed the future, heard the persuasive truth, and laid hold upon it with a firm hand.

That virtue for which these saints of old are so highly commended is equally necessary in the present age. Faith is incumbent upon every Christian, and remains the only means of seeing and comprehending that which is invisible and spiritual; God’s person, and all His works from Creation, to the final universal Judgement: Still today, it is “*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God*”; still it is true that, “*Without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*” (v. 3, 6).

### **Faith in opposition to sight**

The Scripture says, concerning the people of God, “*For we walk by faith, not by sight*” (2 Corinthians 5:7). From this verse it is evident that a conflict exists between these two modes of operation; these are two very different ways in which an individual may walk, and not by both

roads at once – it is either by faith, or by sight. These are opposing routes, that lead to two distinct destinations. But for the Christian, the course to be taken is clear: “*the just shall live by faith*” (Hebrews 10:38).

Faith and Sight invariably point in opposite directions, and the outward appearance of a situation often runs contrary to that which faith knows to be true. Take for a practical example the incident of the Galilean storm. The disciples took a boat with the Lord to cross to the farther side, “*But as they sailed He fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Master, Master, we perish*” (Luke 8:23-24). Judging by sight, it seemed that the Saviour was absent and far from helping them. They saw only waves and the imminent danger of capsizing. Yet within a few moments of their impassioned plea, “*He arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm. And He said unto them, **Where is your faith?***” (v. 24-25). Faith in that instance should have rested upon the Lord’s omniscience and omnipotence, and not been so distracted by the look of the storm-clouds and the water. Human sight and reason is like Peter, who “*when he **saw** the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink*” (Matthew 14:30); Faith is more like Paul, when he said, “*I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me... And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land*” (Acts 27:25, 44).

This principle applies more widely, for the Devil (the arch-deceiver and father of lies) strives ever to make the world and the things therein to seem to contradict the truth, and militate against faith. He can stir up oceans of afflictions, hardships and persecutions like a turbulent and troubled sea. He can overspread the sky with dark clouds of atheism, humanism, and science falsely so-called, until the light is almost gone. He can flood the Church with so much of the world’s polluted waters that she seems almost ready to sink beneath it and to founder without trace. To the natural eye he can make it appear as though all the



purposes of God are gone awry, and that the existence of the Almighty is open to question. Yet at the very worst, these things are but a similitude and facade. The eye of faith is not so readily deceived, nor inclined to be misled by ‘things which do appear’. To our human sight, the Adversary shows the perishing outward man; let us by faith see the inward man renewed day by day. To our earthly vision, he displays all the worst afflictions of the moment; let us by faith see a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory in the making. For by faith “*we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal*” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

It is a popular misconception that the people of God may have both ‘faith’ and ‘sight’ simultaneously, and some have vainly tried to bring these two opposites together. The Charismatic, for example, claims to walk by faith, but demands something more besides, and insists on having his modern day signs and wonders, and audio-visual spectacle, sensory experiences and fleshly emotions. Dissatisfied with faith alone, he wants something to see and hear and feel at a physical level. To those of this persuasion come the solemn words of the Lord: “*A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign*” (Matthew 16:4). These aberrant desires are but the symptoms of carnality, and unbelief.

On the other hand, the modern liberal Churchman imagines that the cause of faith will be much helped by reasoned debate and logical argument; if only the individual could be made to ‘see’ how sensible and rational the way of Truth is, then they will surely believe. So Christian apologetics and philosophy are brought in, and Christianised scientific research, designed to appeal, not so much to the body (as in the former case), but to the mind. Evangelism becomes little more than an exhortation to make a sensible lifestyle choice and a pragmatic decision. This approach too is doomed to failure; there can be no dilution or alternative to faith, for “*the natural man receiveth not the*

*things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned ” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Nothing less than God-given faith can perceive and believe the Truth. “As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).*

### **Faith made sight**

Though faith is such a fundamental and indispensable feature of the Christian life, it is also a thing of temporary duration. Faith, like prayer and preaching, is one of those functions which will ultimately pass away. Faith is necessary at this present time, because of the absence of sight; but that situation will finally be reversed. This present period of absence will be gloriously concluded: “*Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him*” (Revelation 1:7); “*we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is*” (1 John 3:2); “*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face*” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

In view of this wonderful fact of reunification, Peter could speak of all believers “*receiving the end of your faith*” (1 Peter 1:9), for in that great day, when Christ is seen in all His glory, face to face, and without a veil between, there will be need of faith no longer. Then all doubts and uncertainty will be forever done away, and give place to assurance and reality; then will every faithful child of God be received into the presence of their Lord, nevermore to be divided from Him eternally.

“And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul.”

R. J. Steward

## MORE BLESSED

*“...blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed”* (John 20:29)

Those who saw and believed not, were far from being blessed. Those who saw Him, and believed, were undoubtedly blessed. Those who have not seen, and yet have believed, are emphatically blessed. There remains the superlative degree of blessedness in seeing Jesus face to face without need of believing in the same sense as now. But for the present this is our blessedness, this is our place in the gospel history – we have not seen, and yet we have believed. What a comfort that so high a degree of blessedness is open to us!

C. H. Spurgeon (1834 – 1892)

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But why specially blessed? Because the Holy Spirit hath wrought this faith in their hearts. They are blessed in having a believing heart; they are blessed in the instrument of their belief, blessed in having an evidence that they are passed from death unto life... It is more blessed to believe than to see, because it puts more honour upon God’s word. It is more blessed, because it presents us with a more invariable object. He that can trust an unseen Saviour may trust him in all circumstances: shut him up in a dungeon, separate from all sight and light, it matters not; for he has always a heart to believe unto righteousness, and his soul rests upon a rock that shall never be moved. The same faith that takes hold of an unseen, risen Saviour, takes hold of every other truth in the gospel.

Richard Cecil (1748 – 1810)

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The cry of the modern sceptic is, “If I could see, I would believe”. The answer of the Christian ought to be, “If you would only believe, and humbly ask for Divine teaching, you would soon see”.

J. C. Ryle (1816 – 1900)

## EDITORIAL

In the year that king Uzziah died, the prophet Isaiah was given a remarkable vision of God. He beheld one seated upon a throne, with a splendour and glory exceeding all the kings of earth, and surrounded by angelic beings who constantly waited upon Him, and sang His praises. The words of their song were heard and recorded; the seraphim cried one unto another and said, “*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory*” (Isaiah 6:3). It is significant that of all the Divine attributes of God, His **holiness** is that which was uniquely adopted and hymned by the angels. Nor would it suffice for them to sing it once; it must be thrice repeated. This is not the only evidence that this feature of the Godhead has special significance – on several occasions in Scripture, the very title and epithet by which God is known is described as “His Holy Name” (cf Psalm 103:1, 105:3), as though this quality above all others best characterises and describes Him. Indeed, God is Himself the very definition of holiness, “*Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy*” (Revelation 15:3-4).

This biblical emphasis is not reflected in modern pulpits. For whilst many preachers will stress the love of God, or His grace; and others His power or heavenly fatherhood, the aspect of holiness receives but scant coverage, as though it were too hard a subject to broach, or a cause of some embarrassment. Yet the fact of God’s holiness is the context and explanation for so much of the doctrine of the Faith.

It is demonstrated in all that God has done, since the beginning of Creation, for, “*The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works*” (Psalm 145:17). The original perfection of the natural realm, in which all things were declared ‘very good’ was simply a

manifestation of His inherent holiness. It is seen too in the Old Testament Law, and the moral code laid down at Sinai: “*the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good*” (Romans 7:12). For those who find the Levitical system inexplicable and intractable, here is the fundamental reason for it: it is a blueprint and description of the holiness of God; it is an attempt to convey in human terms the unmitigated perfection of the Almighty. The minutiae of its precepts, the breadth of its commandments, its impossible, unobtainable standards, are all designed to show something of the incomprehensible purity of an utterly holy God.

The holiness of God is also the reason for the life, work and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son’s own Deity, and the demands of the Law to which He submitted Himself, combined to render Him “*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*” (Hebrews 7:26). His life fulfilled every perceptive requirement of God’s holiness. Then upon the cross, and in His death, ‘He bore our sins in His own body’ and so endured the unrelenting wrath of One who is “*of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity*” (Habakkuk 1:13).

A holy, sin-hating God could do nothing other than punish transgression, and cut off the sin bearer; which He did, eliciting from Christ in His passion that plaintive cry, “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*”, and the almost instant admission, “...*But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel*” (Psalm 22:1, 3). The fact of God’s holiness necessitated the work of the Saviour, and was the very cause of Calvary. There was no other process that could propitiate an offended God, and cause Him to be reconciled to man. There was no other way whereby rebellious sinners could be restored to the place from whence they had fallen, and be reconciled once more with the Almighty. The degree of God’s holiness is the measure of His work of sanctification: to that unimaginable height He has raised the sinner.

This wondrous and all-encompassing Divine attribute has still more implications and effects. It should direct and inform our worship. “*Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool; for He is holy*” (Psalm 99:5); “*Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord, for ever*” (Psalm 93:5). A lesson should be taken from the angels: for if they are sinless beings of the spiritual realm, and even they cover themselves in the presence of Deity, and sing His holiness with filial fear and great solemnity, how much more should ransomed sinners of earth humble themselves before Him?

Let this truth concerning God also be our guide in all matters of conduct and behaviour: “*But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy*” (1 Peter 1:15-16). This is not to set up the holiness of God as a standard to be reached; the impossibility of such a task is well established; it cannot be done. Nevertheless, God’s holiness is to be our inspiration: a motivation to sanctified living, and a disincentive from sin. He is the Creator in whose image we are made, He is the heavenly Father whose children we desire to be, He is the source of that Divine light, in which illumination we walk, He the eternal God, in whose sinless, holy presence we shall enjoy fullness of joy for evermore. For all believers, to practise holiness in this life is to have a foretaste of the next: “Walking in all His ways they find their heaven on earth begun”.

*Preliminary Announcement*

**ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION**

**Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> & Lord’s Day 5<sup>th</sup> June 2011 D.V.**

*Preacher : Mr Alun McNabb*  
*(Great Bridgeford)*