

April - June 2016

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE TABERNACLE OF GOD

Part 19

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee; The tabernacle of the congregation, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the tabernacle, And the table and his furniture, and the pure candlestick with all his furniture, and the altar of incense, And the altar of burnt offering with all his furniture, and the laver and his foot, And the cloths of service, and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, to minister in the priest’s office, And the anointing oil, and sweet incense for the holy place: according to all that I have commanded thee shall they do.” (Exodus 31:1-11)

The first eleven verses of Exodus chapter 31 deal with the artificers, or skilled craftsmen, who were selected by God for the actual construction of the Tabernacle. Full instructions concerning all the details of the design had been given. Nothing was left to chance, and no place allowed for human modification. Everything was to be after the Divine pattern. God’s strict instruction to Moses was: *“And look that thou make them after the pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount”* (Exodus 25:40). Moses was bound to follow and enact the Divine directive. He was not commissioned merely to go around lecturing on the ‘regulative principle’, or arrange a seminar – he was himself to put those holy instructions into operation. The same rule obtains in every generation.

Having given the plan and specifications of the Tabernacle, God also appointed and made known the principal workmen. This choice was not left to Moses, and the equipping of these men for the work was also Divine, and not human, in origin. In this passage of Scripture there is found both typological and practical teaching – in common with the rest of the book of Exodus. The typological aspect will be addressed first.

A description is given of Bezaleel, concerning whom three facts appear in the verses: The workman appointed by name (v. 2); the workman equipped (v. 3); the workman's task (v. 4 – 5). As with so much of the detail concerning the Tabernacle, Christ can be seen, set forth in this Old Testament character.

The **name** Bezaleel means 'in the shadow of God'. The book of Psalms frequently refers to 'the shadow of His wings', as a metaphor of closeness and intimacy. Christ was ever in this position, described as being 'in the bosom of the Father' (cf John 1:18) – the heavenly Bezaleel, in the very shadow of God.

Bezaleel was the son of Uri, whose name means 'light'. "*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all*" (1 John 1:5); Christ is called, "*the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person*" (Hebrews 1:3). When upon earth, the Lord could truthfully say that He was 'the Light of the World'.

Bezaleel was of the tribe of Judah – the royal line, to which dynasty the genealogy of Christ could be traced: "*For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah*" (Hebrews 7:14). The name Judah signifies 'praise' and indicates the spirit in which Christ undertook the work assigned Him by God: "*I delight to do Thy will, O My God*" (Psalm 40:8); "*In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and*

prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight” (Luke 10:21). He is the one appointed of God for the building of the spiritual Tabernacle, the Church of the Redeemed.

Next, his **equipping**, or the qualification of the artificer: “*And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship*” (v. 3). This verse immediately connects with the great antitype spoken of in the prophecy of Isaiah: “*And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; And shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord*” (Isaiah 11:1-3). The Spirit was not given in measure to the man Christ Jesus, but in all its fulness (cf John 3:34). He was Divinely fitted for His mediatorial work.

Now to his **task**: “*to work in gold*” (v. 4). As has often been seen in this study of the Tabernacle, gold sets forth the Divine glory. Who could manifest this upon the earth save He who was filled with the spirit of God in wisdom, and understanding, and knowledge? At the close of His earthly ministry, Christ could approach His Father in very truth, and say: “*I have glorified Thee on the earth*” (John 17:4). Yes, He was the one-and-only great worker in gold.

“*...and in silver*”. This is the symbol of Redemption. Who, save the Son of Light from the Father’s bosom, could effect this work? “*None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: For the redemption of their soul is precious*” (Psalm 49:7-8). So precious, that all the corruptible wealth of the world could not achieve it. Nothing less than the blood of the Lamb of God would suffice. The blessed outcome of His ‘work in silver’ is seen in the Book of the Revelation, where a great multitude which no man can number, from

every nation under heaven are in chorus: “*And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*” (Revelation 5:9).

“...and in **brass**”. Brass is always symbolic of judgment in Scripture. What need there was for a Divinely qualified and fitted person for this task! For no mortal was capable of enduring the weight of God’s judgment upon His guilty people. Therefore is it written that God, “*laid help upon one that is mighty*” (Psalm 89:19). This aspect of the Lord ‘working in brass’ is very solemn. It tells of the blessed Redeemer being made sin for us (cf 2 Corinthians 5:21); of being made a curse; of suffering, the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God (cf 1 Peter 3:18). When the great ‘work in brass’ was completed, He is heard to cry: “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). None but Christ, the great Heavenly Artificer, could have accomplished this work.

“*And in cutting of stones, to set them*” (v. 5). This has particular reference to the High Priest’s garments which were also to be fabricated along with the Tabernacle and its furniture, among which were the Ephod and the Breastplate. These both incorporated gemstones, in golden settings, engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel (cf Exodus 28:9-12, 17-21). The fulfilment of these types are the true people of God, whose names are graven upon the Saviour’s hands (cf Isaiah 49:16); who are described as ‘living stones’ cut and shaped by the Divine Builder of the spiritual house (cf 1 Peter 2:5). They are hewn from nature’s rugged quarry and fitted for their setting in the Church of God. Christ’s skill has done this.

“...and in carving of **timber**, to work in all manner of workmanship”. The Lord’s people are again in view in this analogy, for timber speaks of that which is earthly in origin, and human in nature. This the Lord takes, and fashions for His service: “*For we are His workmanship, created*

in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Coming now to Exodus 31:6, another Israelite is introduced: Aholiab the son of Ahisamach. Many human characters are brought in to foreshadow the manifold perfections of the Mediator. For example, Abel, Noah, Moses, Aaron, Joshua and David were all types of Christ, but each one could only prefigure a limited aspect of His person or work. No single individual, nor all of them put together, could adequately portray the Lord, but each had some particular attribute or experience which helps to illustrate perhaps just one detail. Thus Aholiab is brought into the account here, to complement the picture given by Bezaleel.

Aholiab’s name means ‘tent of the Father’, very apposite for the work in which he was engaged, and a name that connects immediately with a New Testament reference: *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). The underlying Greek word, here translated as ‘dwelt’ is synonymous with ‘tent’ or ‘tabernacle’. Just as God took up His abode in the Tabernacle in the wilderness, so too, *“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself”* (2 Corinthians 5:19). Christ was ‘God manifest in flesh’ (cf 1 Timothy 3:16). *“...in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”* (Colossians 2:9). So complete and entire was this, that the Lord could say: *“he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father”* (John 14:9).

Aholiab was of the tribe of Dan. When Israel was on the march, Judah took the lead, whereas Dan formed the rearguard. Thus the people of God were encompassed between these two tribes. The Psalmist says, *“Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it”* (Psalm 139:5-6); whilst a similar verse in the New Testament describes,

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). He is before and after the whole work of salvation. As He Himself declares: *“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty”* (Revelation 1:8).

Now to the phrase, *“that they may make all that I have commanded thee”*, and, *“according to all that I have commanded thee shall they do”* (Exodus 31:6, 11). Every detail of the Tabernacle which these two men would bring to fruition was Divinely appointed and laid down beforehand. How perfectly this ties in with the antitype who said: *“For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me”* (John 6:38), *“Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father”* (John 10:17-18). All was pre-arranged, and pre-determined. So in these two skilled craftsmen selected for the construction of the Tabernacle do we see prefigured Christ the great master-builder of the Church of the Redeemed.

As well as its wonderful typology, this section of Holy Writ also contains much practical teaching and instruction for Christian service, with particular reference to the ministry.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, See, I have called by name...” (Exodus 31:1-2). The word ‘see’ is an emphatic interjection and a call to give close attention to that which follows. And the first thing to observe was that God selected His own workmen. They were summoned personally, and by name. Bezaleel and Aholiab were not self-appointed; neither were they chosen by Moses; there was no committee of Levites appointed to make the selection; it was not accomplished by a democratic vote of all the people. No, these men

were called of God. ‘See this’, says the Almighty, ‘register the fact’, for it is a Divine principle which runs through all ages. Paul frequently emphasised the same truth, declaring that he was only, “*an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*” (1 Corinthians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 2 Timothy 1:1); “*Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead*” (Galatians 1:1). This lies at the foundation of all true service.

Alas, there are those who run who have never been sent (cf Jeremiah 23:21); those who undertake work in the ministry, even doing it in the name of the Lord (cf Matthew 7:22), but they were never truly called of God. Sadly, there are many such persons throughout the professing church today. These are not artificers of Christ at all – they are spiritual charlatans, and a disaster for the Lord’s people. How many there are, attracted to the pulpit because of the prestige they believe is attached to it. Others pursue a ministry because there is house and a salary that goes with it, and they look upon that most sacred office as their ‘living’. It is most fearful presumption and sin for any man to profess to speak in the name of Christ, if he be not truly called of God, and evidently gifted for the work.

Moses was instructed to ‘see’, or observe, Bezaleel and Aholiab, to witness that they were demonstrably equipped by God for the work to which they were called: “*And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship*” (v. 3). God never calls any man to His service, without also fitting him for the task – even in practical and physical matters. Has the man a good clear voice, or does he mumble in the pulpit? Of the Lord it is recorded: “*And He opened His mouth, and taught them*” (Matthew 5:2) – He made Himself heard; He did not speak in monotones. A preacher’s deportment is of great importance to the

delivery of the word; facing the congregation and addressing them; raising and lowering his voice in order to give the right expression.

An Old Testament account is very instructive upon this point: “*And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people)... And Ezra... and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law... So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading*” (Nehemiah 8:4-8). Ezra ascended into a pulpit and stood to address the people, as one who meant business. The reading of the law of God was performed distinctly. A preacher’s speech must be articulate, and each word definitely pronounced; not garbled and run one into another. An equally objectionable trait is the affecting of a ‘parsoning voice’ in preaching. Of Ezra it is specifically said that his speech was distinct and understandable.

He ‘gave the sense’, and ‘caused the people to understand the reading’. No man will ever give the sense of Scripture, or any other book, if he ignores punctuation – commas, full stops, exclamation marks, question marks, parentheses – all are vital in conveying the meaning of the subject matter at hand. The human voice is to undulate according to these symbols. An expressionless speaker who does not give heed to these basic principles of delivery will never impart the full truth of Scripture to his hearers. Indeed, it is to be doubted whether such a person is called; for the Great Head does not give the gift of monotony, He gives the gift of clarity.

There is still another dimension to this, for many men of the world and secular orators have these skills and abilities, perhaps in great measure; but this alone does not qualify them for the work of the ministry. A truly called servant of Christ will be filled with the Spirit of God in wisdom, understanding, knowledge and workmanship (cf Exodus

31:3). Wisdom can be defined as the ability to make right use, and application, of that which is known. Understanding is the faculty of apprehension, comprehension and discernment. Knowledge is the result of study, and learning through experience. Workmanship speaks of effective labour, effort and toil, and skill manifested in the finished article. These are the gifts and virtues imparted by the Holy Ghost.

The instruction of Scripture is: “**Study** to shew thyself approved unto God, a **workman** that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). The proper preaching of God’s Word demands workmanship. Alas that so many ‘sermons’ are devoid of this! They may be doctrinally sound, free from error, and theologically accurate; but they have not been put together into a gripping and meaningful discourse. There has been no preparation of the material, no prior thought for form or structure, no careful choice of vocabulary, or the order in which the material will be presented. Instead, it is a dry collection of statements, quotes and anecdotes; or an extemporised stream of pious-sounding verbiage. There is no craftsmanship, no study, no ‘labouring in the word and doctrine’ (cf 1 Timothy 5:17).

There is another common, but misguided, belief amongst many that a college, university, theological seminary or Bible institute is that which fits a man for spiritual ministry. Let him pass through these halls of learning, and come out with the title ‘doctor’ or ‘reverend’ before his name, and as many letters after it as he is tenacious enough to secure, and he will be ‘qualified’. The New Testament knows nothing of these establishments, and it certainly knows nothing of abominable religious titles, or clerical garments. All this is very far removed from the mandate of Scripture. The qualifications of which the text speaks (cf Exodus 31:2-3) are these: the **calling** of God, the **enabling** of God and the **Spirit** of God, which things will be manifestly **seen**, practically and spiritually, in those to whom they are imparted. Let no man, or human institution vainly imagine that they can endow these

things. God has either given them, or He has not. This may be humbling to the flesh, but it is God's way. He is a jealous God. He equips and fits, and will not share His glory with another.

What is the work or task of the Lord's servants? It is succinctly summarised in these words: "*according to all that I have commanded thee shall they do*" (Exodus 31:11). The sum and substance of true service is **obedience**; adherence to the Word of God, with no deviation from His Divine instructions. Not originality, popularity, celebrity or material success, but obedience. And an obedience not merely talked about, but seen in action; not only preached from the pulpit, but practised from day to day. In this decadent age, may it yet please God to call and equip for His service more men of the calibre of Bezaleel and Aholiab, to the ultimate glory of His Name.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

The Lord confers His unmerited favours on whom He pleases; but the honour, which cometh from Him, is always attended with a work to be done; and to be employed by Him is indeed the highest honour, and the noblest privilege. Men are not now called forth by name as in the days of Moses; yet our God generally marks out the persons whom He hath made choice of, by endowing them with correspondent dispositions and qualifications by His Spirit, and opening the way to their work in His providence. We may certainly know that we are not appointed to any service, for which we continue utterly unqualified. Yet there are cases, in which men are unexpectedly and evidently called to situations, and engaged in services, for which they are humbly conscious of being in themselves wholly insufficient; but may depend upon God to give them 'the Spirit of wisdom, understanding and knowledge' for their work, even after they are engaged in it; if they simply seek His glory, do His will, and are employed by Him.

Thomas Scott (1747 – 1821)

A PLEA FOR PREACHING

The work of the preacher, as he expounds the written word in the face of his congregation, must ever be the supreme method of God's communication with men. Other means may aid this method, but nothing can supplant it. If our lot is cast in an age with little more than amused contempt for preaching, that in no way affects its importance or its pre-eminence in the purpose of God. Christ came preaching. From the Day of Pentecost, the Apostles spent themselves in preaching. Great movements in the Church have normally been initiated and developed by preaching. Revival has invariably come by preaching. By preaching, it may confidently be anticipated, it will come again.

Let us not confuse the difficulties of it, or men's apparent lack of taste for the work even when it is done, with its importance. To fly from the preacher's task because it is hard or unappreciated is, for any man who has received Christ's commission, or to whom He proffers it, something near to apostasy. For every reason that can appeal to the mind and heart of a consecrated man, the call to preach, if it has come to him, must be answered with all he has. If, having answered the call long ago, he finds his zeal abating with the years, let him examine his heart to learn how this loss of faith came about.

The reasons are often quite personal. Some men have half unconsciously lost faith in the message itself and in its ability to meet the need of the world in any wide way. 'What relevance has evangelism', they ask, 'in [this] age?' Having lost faith in the message, how can they have passion in its proclamation?

Other men have grown weary of offering what so few seem to want. They have said that Christ is utterly necessary to... life, but the multitude passes unheeding by and gets on apparently quite happily

without Him. Only those who have had the experience know how depressing it can be to pour out one's soul to a small company of people which never seems to grow, and never seems much affected by what is said. If a man in those circumstances does not guard with jealous care his periods of daily devotion, his work becomes a dull routine. Nothing ever happens, and – worse still – he no longer thinks it will. Because the company which comes to hear the gospel is small, and either has embraced the Truth, or never will embrace it, a minister may begin to make scanty preparation. A few unrelated thoughts are offered in place of a sermon. He repeats himself, and not in the fresh way the gospel must ever be repeated, but boringly. Inevitably, the few get fewer still.

Still other men have convinced themselves that able preaching all depends on the possession of certain special gifts which, with modesty, they confess they do not possess themselves. The absence of those gifts does not move them (as their congregation might suppose) to harder work that the deficiency might be made up, but serves as an excuse for wearying the people without any pangs of conscience. Clearly, the blame is God's because He was grudging with the gifts! It cannot be denied, of course, that there are special aptitudes for the task; though the God who called can be trusted to equip. If the man of modest gifts places his five barley loaves and two small fish on the altar, who dares to deny that, even with them, God may feed a multitude? ...

Called to preach! That is the basic thing at the last. Let a man be sure of that, and keep his certitude by obedience, and he will have the answer to all the doubts which dog the steps of a preacher regarding his vocation. Commissioned of God to teach the word! A herald of the great King! A witness of the Eternal Gospel! Could any work be more high and holy? To this supreme task God sent His only begotten Son. In all the frustration and confusion of the times, is it possible to imagine

a work comparable in importance with that of proclaiming the will of God to wayward men?

Only a divine commission can justify it. Lacking that, it is a gross impertinence. No humble man would take upon himself the task of talking to others in a public place about the most intimate things of the soul... Searching preaching is either divinely inspired or intolerably insolent. What but a warrant from God could justify one mortal provoking, probing, piercing the consciences of others – and in public, too? ... There is a terrible personalness about general preaching at times. Uttered in honesty to all, it has power to break congregations into [individuals], and leave each one aware... [of] themselves and their Creator. No other form of human address is like this. It is, indeed, one way in which the word of God authenticates itself ... Who, with a shred of modesty in his soul, and smartingly aware that he is a sinner himself, would charge, challenge, and affront his fellows in that way? Only a man who knows himself divinely appointed so to do!

The divine origin of the message is not proven only by the vulnerability of conscience to it. It is proven also by the things which preaching does. Nothing is more foolish in connection with this subject than the supposition that preaching does not do anything. Preaching is a constant agent of the divine power by which the greatest miracle God ever works is wrought and wrought again. God uses it to [impart life]. It is hard for any mortal to tell, either of himself or of others, what forces have worked upon him to issue in some dramatic change of life; but many affirm that the occasion, and no small part of the cause, was one sermon. It would be wearisome to set out the names even of the most notable of those who have conspicuously served God and who traced the real beginnings of their life of surrender and service to meeting Him while a man preached. Looked at in one way, a sermon is a most impermanent thing. Hours of deep brooding, honest study and not a little prayer – and it is gone with the wind. Looked at in

another way, it partakes of eternity. Quite literally, the force of some sermons will never end.

The power of preaching is not, however, confined to occasions when a life is dramatically changed. More often it concerns itself with teaching and feeding the faithful; or giving comfort to those wounded in the battle; or courage to those wanting to quit the field; or strength to those hard-pressed by temptation. What an unspeakable privilege to be allowed and equipped by God to do such lovely work! When one thinks of the awful wounds life administers at times, the sudden bereavements and betrayals, the secret anxieties and the gnawing inner griefs – to be able to speak a sure word of God to suffering souls is an honour of which no man is truly worthy.

But does it not call for all a man has of heart and mind and will? Daunting as the task is, being called and knowing God is faithful, is it not plain that a man is summoned to whole-souled consecration? Shoddy work in any calling is unworthy, but in this calling it would be blasphemous too. No related occupation can squeeze this task from its central place. No personal fad, or mood of self-pity, should blind a man to the greatness of his work. If he comes to it aware of his awful privilege and open to the endowments which God gives to those He calls, his church may not fill, but the people will be blessed...

It would be foolish – and worse – to suppose that because this work is divine in its origin, there is no technique to study and no craft to learn. The history of preaching records no sadder story than that of those misguided zealots who have brought no consecration of mind to the preaching of the word and have just ‘opened their mouth’ in public in expectation that ‘the Spirit would do the rest’. The Spirit spurns their superstitious sloth. For every reason which can appeal to faithful and rational men, this task demands that we be master-craftsmen.

W. E. Sangster (1900 – 1960)

GOD THE SOURCE OF ALL WISDOM

“...in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom” (Exodus 31:6)

When the time is come for carrying into effect the purposes of God, difficulties, which appeared insurmountable, vanish, and ‘mountains become a plain’. The obstacles which opposed the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, were only augmented till the precise hour for its accomplishment arrived: but at the appointed hour, even ‘the self-same night’, they not only went out unmolested, but were actually thrust out by their oppressors. At the Red Sea, an interposition equally seasonable was vouchsafed to them; as was also a supply both of bread and water in the wilderness, in the hour of need. Those who looked only to second causes judged the various blessings unattainable: but, on all the occasions, God showed that there was nothing impossible to Him; and that whatever He had ordained, should not fail for want of means and instruments whereby to effect it.

Having brought His people into the wilderness He commanded a tabernacle to be reared, and to be furnished with a great diversity of vessels proper for His service. The most costly materials were to be used, and the most exquisite workmanship employed, in the structure of the whole. But where should all the materials be found? Behold! The Egyptians themselves had loaded the Israelites with them to an immense amount, no-one throughout the whole land of Egypt refusing to an Israelite any thing that he required. Still, though gold and silver and precious stones and other things were found amongst them, and were granted by them with a liberal hand, who was there amongst the whole nation that could fashion them according to the model shown to Moses in the mount? They had been so oppressed, that it would be in vain to look for persons sufficiently skilled in works of gold and jewellery and embroidery, to execute all that was required for the

occasion. But was the work therefore delayed? No: God, by His Spirit, instructed two persons, Bezaleel and Aholiab, with a perfect knowledge of the whole work; and, under their superintendence, others were speedily qualified for executing every one the office assigned to him; so that the whole was finished within the short space of nine months. Every one performed his part aright, because ‘in the heart of all that were wise-hearted God had put wisdom’.

From this remarkable expression I shall take occasion to point out, in reference to ‘wisdom’, **its only source**. The wisdom here spoken of, proceeds from **God**. Whatever difference may be occasioned in men by education, the original faculty of understanding is our Creator’s gift. Some, indeed, are born into the world destitute of any rational powers: if, therefore, we have been favoured with them, we are the more indebted to the goodness of our heavenly Father. It is probable that amongst the poor, or even amongst the [least] civilized part of mankind, many possess by nature as much strength of intellect as the most learned philosopher; whilst, for want of the advantages of education, they have never been able to turn it to any good account. If, therefore, we have enjoyed the means and opportunities of cultivation which have been withheld from others, we must ascribe that also to God, who in this respect, also, has made us to differ.

The Scriptures trace to this same source the wisdom manifested by the husbandman in ploughing his ground and threshing out the corn: “*Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? ... his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him... the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is bruised... This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working*” (Isaiah 28:24-29). We wonder not, therefore, that the skill so suddenly given to Bezaleel, and to all who worked under him, is ascribed to God; for that was indeed truly miraculous. But the declaration which traces it to God, extends

to every kind and every measure of wisdom; and consequently constrains us to give God the glory of every faculty we possess, and of all the improvement that we have made of it. We are not left in any respect to ‘sacrifice to our own net, or to burn incense to our own drag’ (cf Habakkuk 1:16): the whole honour must be given to God, and to God alone.

But to the same source must we yet more eminently trace the attainment of **spiritual wisdom**. Of this, no measure whatever is born with man, or is natural to man. He is born, “*like a wild ass’s colt*” (Job 11:12). As for, “*the things of the Spirit of God... they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Nor is wisdom the product of mere human instruction : for ‘the world by wisdom knew not God’. The Apostles, when instructed in divine knowledge, traced the acquisition to the only true source: “*we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God*” (1 Corinthians 2:12)

Even the Messiah Himself was instructed for the discharge of His office by the very same Spirit who wrought in Bezaleel for the forming of the tabernacle. Of Bezaleel it is said, “*I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship*” (Exodus 31:3): and of Jesus it is said, “*the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; And shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord*” (Isaiah 11:2-3). And the same Spirit will be given to us also, to enlighten our minds with saving knowledge: for Paul says, “*I... cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: The eyes of your understanding being*

enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling” (Ephesians 1:16-18).

To Him, then, must every man look for wisdom: and from Him shall every man receive it, who seeks it in a becoming way. As Bezaleel and Aholiab were instructed at once how to perform all manner of work; and as the disciples of Christ, poor uneducated fishermen, were enabled at once to speak different [languages]; so shall the Spirit impart to us also, according to our respective necessities, that we may both know and do all that God has required of us.

To all, then, I would say:

1. Acknowledge God in all the talents you possess

Not only Bezaleel and Aholiab, but all who were employed in the different departments of the work, were taught of God. So, whatever furniture we have for the constructing of God’s spiritual tabernacle, we have received it from the same heavenly source, and must ascribe the glory of it altogether to our God. Let this be borne in mind, and none will envy those who are endowed with richer talents than themselves, or despise those who are called to occupy a humbler post. The eye in the natural body vaunts not itself above the hand, nor the hand above the foot; but each is satisfied with executing the work for which it is fitted and ordained: so let it be with us; every one doing what God has called him to, and every one seeking the glory of God in all that he performs.

2. Improve your talents for the end for which they have been committed to you

At the formation of the tabernacle, every one engaged, according to his ability, to expedite the work. Men, women, rulers, all accounted it their honour to be employed for God: and “so”, we are told, “*it became one tabernacle*” (Exodus 36:13). And who can say what the effect would

be, if all, men, women, and rulers, engaged heartily in the work of God, and laboured to advance His glory in the [church]? Beloved brethren, let us not sit down in despair, because the work is too great and arduous. God can fit us for it, however ignorant we be; and can bless us in it, however unequal we may be for the task assigned us. Only let it be said of every one amongst us, 'he has done what he could', and we shall yet see glorious days amongst us; and God will rear His tabernacle, and glorify Himself, as in the days of old.

But, for this end, it is necessary that you 'stir up your hearts': for, by nature, they are sadly averse to it. Nor need we fear that any exertions of ours will exceed the demand for them... Go on then, all of you, both in your individual and collective capacity, without intermission and without weariness: so shall the work proceed to the honour of our God, and a rich recompense be treasured up for your own souls.

Charles Simeon (1759 – 1836)

“The idea that the fulness of the Spirit is necessarily intended to make preachers of us all is erroneous. Bezaleel was a [craftsman], but he was filled with the Spirit in order to use his hands in the service of God. He was as much a worker for God as any preacher, with a task of fundamental importance requiring care as well as skill. Some Christians are irked at having to devote their training and abilities to merely secular jobs, chafing under a desire to be freed for what they call 'full-time service'. Bezaleel's example reminds us that one of the secrets of the Spirit's fulness is to do all our daily work thoroughly and to do it for the glory of God (cf Colossians 3:23). We are all called into 'full-time service' and are not permitted to make a distinction between the sacred and the secular.”

H. Foster, *Daily Thoughts from Bible Characters*, 1971

EDITORIAL

The meeting convened by Ezra for the returned exiles, as recorded in Nehemiah 8, is both significant and instructive, and evidently a precursor of the format followed by the church to the present day. The service included the use of a ‘pulpit’, or place of prominence from which the message could be declared; the word ‘Amen’ as a verbal response from the congregation indicative of concurrence; corporate worship in which all collectively participated; and central to the whole proceeding – the reading and exposition of Scripture in a clear and systematic way. The blessings which attended that gathering of the people were manifold – further commending its emulation.

That great occasion, and the word preached upon it, was not a spontaneous act, nor devised on the spur of the moment. Its origins can be traced back to a much earlier time: “*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments*” (Ezra 7:10). This was the attitude and practice of Ezra the scribe, during the four months and 900 miles of travelling back from Babylon, and in the years which followed in Jerusalem. Long before he ever taught Israel, there had been **preparation** of heart, **searching** the Scriptures, and a **performing** of the Scriptures. These are the vital prerequisites to the proper ministry of the word.

‘Preparing’ may equally be translated as the ‘directing’ or ‘setting’ of one’s heart, and speaks of the conscious focussing of thoughts, intents and affections upon an object, to the exclusion of all distractions. Thus Moses exhorted the people: “*Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day*” (Deuteronomy 32:46); and Paul prayed for his readers: “*the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God,*” (2 Thessalonians 3:5); whilst the Psalmist could rejoice and say: “*My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise*” (Psalm 57:7).

This devotional activity must also be accompanied by the practical study of the Word of God, and a diligent comparing together of spiritual things (cf 1 Corinthians 2:13). To this exercise the Lord Himself commands us: “*Search the scriptures*” (John 5:39), for this task, though arduous and time-consuming, evidences true nobility of spirit (cf Acts 17:11). Further, having determined what the Word says, there must be a doing of it (cf James 1:22), for the preacher is himself the primary hearer. If he is unwilling to be conformed to, or reformed by, the Word of God, what hope is there for his congregation?

Preparation is the foundation of preaching, and the sermon that lacks it is built upon sand. Let none exalt the spoken word at the expense of the studied word, or disparage the study whilst magnifying the pulpit, for the Holy Ghost is present and active in both alike, imparting a blessing in the former, that it may be communicated in the latter. “*The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord*” (Proverbs 16:1).

Prepare my heart to love Thee well,
And love Thy truth which doth excel,
And love Thy children dear;
Instruct me how to live by faith,
And feel the virtue of Thy death,
And find Thy presence near.

Prepare my tongue to pray and praise,
To speak of providential ways,
And heavenly truths unfold;
To strengthen well a feeble soul,
Correct the wanton, rouse the dull,
And silence sinners bold.

Berridge

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

Saturday 4th June 2016 D.V.

Services: **3.00 p.m. & 5.15 p.m.** Tea served: **4.30 p.m.**

PLEASE NOTE THE REVISED TIMES FOR THIS YEAR'S MEETINGS

Preacher : Mr G. Chewter
(Trinitarian Bible Society)

a cordial invitation is extended to all