

April - June 2020

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

‘Declaring all the counsel of God’

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Restrictions imposed in the UK from 23rd March 2020 have necessitated the temporary suspension of regular public meetings in the chapel building. In order that the worship, fellowship and ministry of the church might be maintained, preaching services are being broadcast live on our website:

www.northroadchapel.org/livestream

Lord’s Day Morning Service 11.00 a.m.

Lord’s Day Evening Service 6.30 p.m.

Thursday Evening Service 8.00 p.m.

(times shown are British Summer Time, UTC+1:00)

We invite all those who are currently confined to their homes, or without regular ministry, to join with us on these occasions. Recordings of the services (MP3 or Audio CD) continue to be available for those without internet access. To receive these, please contact us at the addresses below.

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THE LORD'S DAY

Part 15

“Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt Him ... Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? ... Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation.” (Exodus 15:1-2, 11, 13)

In this article, we will consider three vital subjects that the Lord's Day is designed to commemorate:

1.) CREATION

The work of Creation is the very origin and reason for the appointment of the Sabbath; and when it was incorporated in the Moral Law, God said: *“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy ... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth ...”* (Exodus 20:8, 11). In the observance of this day the power and manifested glory of God are celebrated, as expressed in Genesis chapters one and two, when He brought the universe into being. In the observance of this day true believers separate themselves from unbelievers, from sceptics, from profane and godless men – and profess themselves to be worshippers of the one, true, living God, the Maker of heaven and earth. The saints take up the same song as was sung by the hosts of spirit beings, who, seeing the planets being spun into space on the fourth day of creation, *“shouted for joy”* (Job 38:7). In New Testament language, there is the worship of: *“the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God”* (1 Timothy 1:17). Creation is commemorated on the Sabbath.

2.) REDEMPTION

This is a yet higher note of praise on this holy day. The first redemption song was sung at the safe crossing of the Red Sea: “*Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God... Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation*” (Exodus 15:1-2, 13). In Deuteronomy 5 there is contained the last recorded public proclamation of the Decalogue; and here, it is significant to note that the theme of redemption out of Egypt is attached to the Fourth Commandment: “*Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work... And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that **the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day***” (Deuteronomy 5:12-13, 15). God’s people of the Old Testament were to have their deliverance out of Egypt always before them on the Sabbath: redemption by blood, the Pascal Lamb, and by power – the outstretched arm of Almighty God.

Entering the New Testament, a greater deliverance is seen; redemption again by blood. Here, it is the Lamb of God. Here, it is delivering from the power of Satan unto God. Here, the day is changed to the day when this mighty spiritual redemption was accomplished and finalised – the first day of the week; the New Covenant Sabbath. No Sabbath must pass without a remembrance and celebration of these glorious truths. The song of redemption must be sung – it is the song of Moses and of the Lamb. This is why we observe the Lord’s Supper every Sabbath Day. Redemption’s mighty work and the Sabbath must never be divorced. In the holy exercises of the Lord’s Day (the New Testament Sabbath) the saints are wearing the badge, as it were, or making public confession of the New Covenant. In the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, the Scripture

says we: “*shew the Lord’s death*” (1 Corinthians 11:26), and the great theme of redemption by blood.

3.) HEAVEN

The Eternal Sabbath is joyfully anticipated. The rest of this hallowed day on earth signifies that rest which remaineth for the people of God (cf Hebrews 4:9). The practice of laying aside earthly things on this day is a setting-forth of that coming day of bliss, of which it is stated: “*the former things are passed away*” (Revelation 21:4). A Sabbath rightly observed is a foretaste of the eternal state. Here, we anticipate the glorious prospect. On this sanctified day, the world is left behind for a while, and the Lord’s people rise into the heavenlies. This is the great significance of the day. It is another reason for its institution: “*And on the seventh day God ended his work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it **He had rested from all His work which God created and made***” (Genesis 2:2-3). A relinquishing of the material for the spiritual is exemplified by the Father.

To return again to the Lord’s Supper which we observe each week: we show the Lord’s death by observing it, and it sets forth the work of redemption; but the Bible also says it is: “*till He come*” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Thus Heaven comes into view on this day. There is an expectation, and a reaching out to the future. Each earthly sabbath affords a “sweet foretaste of the festal joy, the Lamb’s great bridal feast of bliss and love”. Recall to mind the descriptions given in the Word of God concerning the coming glory: that innumerable company; the praises; the unceasing employ of that exalted sphere. Is it just a carnal repose? Is it a state of self-indulgence, where saints do entirely the thing that pleases them? Is it a mere cessation from the toil and labour? No! Heaven is the eternal presence of God; the eternal enjoyment of God; the eternal praises of God and the Redeemer. Scripture swings back the

everlasting doors and allows a glimpse within. We see the worshippers as a blood-washed throng. We hear their hymns; it is the song of Moses and of the Lamb. With one heart and one voice they extol the Lamb that was slain. They ascribe blessing, wisdom, majesty, power, glory unto the risen and glorified Saviour. They are surrounded with all the beauties of holiness. The air is supernal, the light is without shade. It is the day of days, for it will never end. There is no night there; evening shades never fall to usher in darkness which would bring in another week. No! This is the eternal Sabbath, it is the land of fadeless day, wherein the redeemed, in untiring employ, will pour out their ceaseless adoration and their perpetual activity in the worship and service of God.

Can we not see the connection of the Sabbath duties upon earth with the wondrous consummation in Heaven? This day is a foretaste of the glory which is to follow. It is preparing and fitting the people of God for the Sabbath that will never end, when life's short week is over. The earthly Sabbath is the day of God, of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. In essence, it is the same as the heavenly Sabbath. It has the same objects, the same joys, the same praises. If the heavenly Sabbath is to be attained, the earthly Sabbath must be rightly honoured.

Let the saints ever rise to the sacred heights for which this hallowed day was created, and worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. This holy Sabbath was made for them, and therefore will not cease, until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God, where all those redeemed by sovereign grace are finally glorified. As Isaac Watts describes it:

“Then shall I see, and hear, and know
All I desired or wished below;
And every power find sweet employ
In that eternal world of joy.”

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

THE DOMESTIC SABBATH

“The seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings.”

(Leviticus 23:3)

Many Christians around the world have recently entered unfamiliar and troubling territory – namely, the suspension of public services and cessation of gatherings for worship. This, not through political oppression or the ravages of war, but on account of virulent disease, the only preventative for which (at the present time) is the avoidance of human contact. The comforting routines of the Lord’s Day are of necessity in abeyance, and multitudes are obliged to observe it in the confines of their own homes.

The principle of corporate worship and the assembling of the saints is fundamental to Scripture, from the typology of the Old Testament, to the example and exhortations of the New. God is greatly to be praised when He providentially enables His people to practise these things, and meet together in places appointed for that purpose. Now in His sovereignty these blessings are withdrawn. The way in which His people react and respond will be very telling, and indicative of their spiritual condition. Times of trial are always times of ‘proving’.

Thank the Lord, therefore, if this recent change of circumstances has been a source of spiritual distress to you. For sad indeed is the condition of that professed ‘Christian’ who can be deprived of fellowship, and prevented from congregational worship, but feel nothing at the loss. Sadder still if that insensibility is the result of long forsaking the assembly of saints in a time of opportunity. The true child of God is identified by that spirit which says with the Psalmist: *“My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord ”* (Psalm 84:2); who weep to find themselves displaced from their earthly ‘Zions’ (cf Psalm 137:1).

Sanctify the Lord and His day, by the careful maintenance of your regular observances. The discipline of church attendance is a great asset and aid to the proper keeping of the Sabbath; but if the duty of assembling, or the weight of others' expectations, is all that prevents a Christian from profaning the Lord's Day, he is on dangerous ground indeed. The true measure of a person's faith can only be seen in private. To this end, let believers in confinement exert themselves to keep 'the sabbath of the Lord in all their dwellings'. Regardless of extenuating circumstances, adhere to the 'normal' routines of the Lord's Day: prepare for worship; dress for worship; appoint set times for worship and let nothing interrupt them; choose a room or a seat conducive to serious thought and free of distractions; assemble family members; sing aloud; pray audibly; make use of the many available means for receiving the preached Word; in short – worship as fully and freely as though in a congregation of thousands. Let not the situation be made an excuse, nor the venue be any impediment from 'worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth' (cf John 4:21, 23).

Christians in the 21st Century western world would do well to realise that their experience of prosperity and peace, in matters practical and religious, unbroken for over 70 years, is not 'the norm', or 'the rule' – but an exception. The Lord's people from Adam to Sinai knew precious little of organised worship; the faithful remnant among Jewry saw only brief periods of revival in a long history of departure, idolatry and exile; the New Testament church was scarcely established before the veil of Romish error fell, and eclipsed the truth for a millennium or more; the post-Reformation era was blighted by much hardship, privation and war; and still to the present day, thousands of Christians in countries around the world endure a 'great fight of afflictions' – for all whom, the enjoyment of settled, corporate worship is deferred until Glory. And will we despair, if caused to share for a brief season in the experience that countless others have suffered for a lifetime? *"If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small"* (Proverbs 24:10).

R. J. Steward

DUE PREPARATIONS FOR THE PLAGUE AS WELL FOR SOUL AS BODY

Now, while we receive daily such afflicting and melancholy accounts from abroad of the spreading of the plague and of its approaches this way, and find not only private persons but even the Government itself, and neighbouring Governments also, justly alarmed, who can be wholly unconcerned about it? Certain it is, that if it proceeds much farther, nothing but the distinguishing goodness of God can be said to keep it from reaching hither...

If, then, we are in expectation and under just apprehension of it, what appearance is there of our preparations for it? Never less, I think, was to be seen in any nation under heaven, whether we speak of preparations to avoid and escape it, or of preparations to wait and expect it; whether we speak of preparations for the soul or for the body. And this alone has been the occasion of writing this book.

We have, indeed, some physicians who have given their opinions in the matter of our managing ourselves with respect to medicine, in case of the plague breaking out among us, and unto this purpose they treat a little (though very superficially) of the nature of the disease, the best preventive remedies, etc. But even in this part, however (as I said, superficial at best), yet they differ with, contradict, and oppose one another, and leave their readers as uncertain and dissatisfied, as far to seek, and at a loss for their conduct, as they were before.

As to the other part, and what we should think of doing when we set such an awful providence in a clear light before us, with respect to our religious preparations, and for our meeting and submitting ourselves to all the dispensations of Providence of what kind soever, which, doubtless, is the duty of every Christian – of this, indeed, I have seen, I

may say, nothing at all offered in public; on the contrary, the whole world is intent and busy on their ordinary occasions. Men pursue the usual course of the world; they push their interest, their gain, or their pleasures and gaiety with the same gust, or rather more than ever. Nay, the cry of the nation's follies grows louder and louder every day, and so far we are from considering that, when God's judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants should learn righteousness, that we are rather learning to be more superficially wicked than ever; witness the increase of plays and playhouses, one being now building, though so many already in use; witness the public trading and stock-jobbing on the Sabbath day; witness the raging avarice of the times, by which the civil interest of the nation is ruined and destroyed; witness also our feuds, divisions, and heats, as well in religious differences as those that are political, which are all carried up to dreadful extremes.

Upon these many accounts this work has been set on foot, which, though in the design of it 'tis calculated for the present particular occasion of the terrors we are under about the plague, which I may very well call impending, yet may be useful many ways, both to us and to posterity, though we should be spared from that portion of this bitter cup which I verily believe is reserved for us...

PREPARATION OF SOUL

This is the hardest part of the work by far; but of the two, infinitely of greater consequence, as the eternal state into which we are all to pass from this, is of more consequence than the present state.

Life and time are indeed of an inestimable value, but they are only so, or principally so, as on the happy conclusion of them depends the eternal welfare of the person to whom they are so valuable; and especially, the preparations for an eternal state are only to be made in time, which, once slipped away, lost and unapplied, is irrecoverably lost for ever.

The approaches of death are oftentimes imperceptible, and the attacks sudden; the distempers by which we are carried away are violent; and it is a double terror to the dying person to have the work of dying and the work of repentance both upon his hands together. Oh, sinner! remember that the terrors of thy conscience will be a weight too heavy to be borne at the same time with the terrors of death. Nay, the terrors of conscience are those alone which give terrors of death, which make the passage out of life dreadful; and these many times make a disease mortal which would not otherwise be so. Were the diseases and casualties of which people frequently die in this populous city rightly given into the bills of mortality, many would be set down of other distempers than as we find them. Instead of ... pain in the head, it would be pain in the mind; instead of convulsions, it would be said, horror of conscience, and the like ... Christians may prepare in time for the dreadful moments which are approaching; that when the call is heard, no other noise may drown their comforts; and that the business of life may now without any delay be to prepare for death – I say, that they may be moved to do thus, this tract is written.

The apprehensions we are under at this time of the approaching calamity which afflicts our neighbours, are a kind of summons to this preparation, and that more forcible than can be given from the mouth of man; and many thousands will have reason to be thankful for so long a warning, so timely a summons; even all those who listen to the voice of it. Let me add a mite to this treasury. The goodness of God is very conspicuous in this ... that notice given of its approach ought to be taken for the time of interval, for both looking up and looking in, and be improved to that purpose.

Daniel Defoe (1660 – 1730)

The famous author (whose religious upbringing was amongst Dissenting Presbyterians) lived in London through the Great Plague of 1665. He published the work from which this extract is taken in 1722, when plague was again ravaging Continental Europe, and threatened to return to Britain.

A PLAISTER FOR THE PLAGUE

“And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.”
(Numbers 16:48)

Of the godlies’ exemption from the ungodlies’ destruction

God is not willing that the righteous perish with the unrighteous. Peter gives three of the most famous instances that have been hereof since the beginning of the world (cf 2 Peter 2:4-9). One is of the Angels (when they that fell were cast into hell, the other were reserved in heaven). Another is of the old world (when it was drowned, Noah and his family were preserved in the ark). A third is of Sodom and Gomorrah (when they were destroyed with fire and brimstone, Lot and his two daughters were kept alive). Thence the Apostle infers this conclusion, very pertinent to our purpose, *“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished”* (2 Peter 2:9). The mark which God caused to be ‘set on the forehead of such as cried for all the abominations that were done’, and this charge given thereupon, ‘come not near any man upon whom is the mark’ (cf Ezekiel 9:4, 6), shows His mind towards such as keep themselves free from sins which cause vengeance. So also such exhortations as this, *“come out of her My people, that ye receive not of her plagues”* (Revelation 18:4).

Hereby God giveth evidence that, *“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good”* (Proverbs 15:3); that He can distinguish betwixt such as differ: that He can deal with men, as they deal with Him; that, ‘with the pure He will show Himself pure, and with the froward He will shew Himself froward’ (cf Psalm 18:26); and that it is not in vain to fear Him, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

Of the cases wherein saints have their share in public judgments

Observation: ‘True’, may some say, ‘if this were universally and infallibly true, that no righteous man did at any time perish with the unrighteous’. But experience affords evidence to the contrary. For in all public judgments we see the righteous involved with the wicked. They may suffer temporal evils two ways: by the wicked, and with the wicked.

Answer: If the extent of God’s deliverance be rightly conceived, it will be found to be universally and infallibly true, that God delivereth the righteous from the judgment of the wicked. It doth indeed oft fall out that righteous men have a share in some external judgments which the wicked pull upon themselves, and that:

1. When they make themselves accessory to those common sins that cause judgment. As Moses and Aaron became incredulous in the wilderness, as well as the other Jews whose carcasses fell therein (cf Numbers 20:12).
2. When the wise Lord knoweth that greater evils would befall them, if they should then escape. Thus when the time was come that God had determined to heap judgment upon judgment till at length the land of Judah should be made desolate, in the beginning of those days was Josiah, that good King Josiah, slain with the sword of the enemy (cf 2 Kings 23:29). Yet because he lived not to see the miseries of succeeding times, he is said to be gathered into his grave in peace (cf 2 Kings 22:20).
3. When the just God will shew the fierceness of His wrath, how far the wicked have provoked him, to aggravate the judgment, He taketh away the righteous therewith, who are as chariots and horsemen while they remain...
4. When the Lord to whom vengeance belongeth, will give the wicked an occasion to expect sure and sore vengeance; then He maketh His saints a sign and an example unto them. Thus He caused a lion to

slay the man of God, that was seduced by a lying Prophet to transgress the word of God (cf 1 Kings 13:24). In this case saith the Apostle, *“judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?”* (1 Peter 4:17)

Of sundry ways of exempting saints from judgments

Yet hath God His ways and means to deliver the righteous in the fore-mentioned cases, and all other cases whatsoever. As:

1. By visible preservations of them from external judgments: as Ebed-melech was preserved (cf Jeremiah 39:17).
2. By taking them from the evil to come (cf Isaiah 57:1). This was before exemplified in good Josiah.
3. By ordering the judgment so as it proves a means to them to honour God the more; and to do more good to such as are better prepared to accept the good which they do. Thus was Ezekiel carried away to Babel in the first captivity, that he might prophesy in Babylon to the Jews there (cf Ezekiel 1:1), who were counted good figs in comparison of the Jews that were at Jerusalem, who were as evil figs (cf Jeremiah 24:5).
4. By making the judgment a means of their peace, honour, and external prosperity in this world. Thus the captivity of Daniel, and his three companions (cf Daniel 2:48-49); and of Esther and Mordecai (cf Esther 2:17-6:10) was a means of higher honour and greater advancement, than they could in all probable conjectures have attained unto in their own land. They were also thereby special instruments of doing much good to the Church: and their names by that means are more honourable to this day in the Church of God.
5. By taking them by an external judgment from earth to heaven, where they live being dead: yea by making the judgment a means to free them from eternal damnation. Of such as by some extraordinary judgment died (for it is said of them, ‘many sleep’) the Apostle

saith, “*when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world*” (1 Corinthians 11:32). Blessed be that sword, though it be the sword of a mortal enemy, that openeth a passage in the body for the soul to enter into heaven. And blessed be that sickness, though it be the plague, that thrusteth the soul out of the body’s prison, to celestial glory and eternal life. So as in their sufferings they have their comforts and hope of eternal life.

Thus we see how judgments in the fore-mentioned kinds prove blessings; and how the saints that seem to perish in them may justly and truly say, ‘we had perished, if we had not perished’: even more justly than he that so said to his children, by reason of great honour and wealth that he attained unto in a strange country, being banished out of his own (cf Plutarch’s *Life of Themistocles*).

Of God’s care of saints mixed with the wicked

Be not affrighted, O ye righteous ones, be not affrighted over-much at the judgments, though they be terrible judgments, which fall out in the world. Though by reason of the multitudes of wicked ones among whom ye live in this world ye be every one forced to complain and cry, “*Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!*” (Psalm 120:5); and to wish and say, “*O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men, that I might leave my people*” (Jeremiah 9:2); yet can the Lord single you out, and when He comes to sweep them with the besom of destruction, set you aside; and as a few precious jewels in the midst of a great heap of rubbish sift them out, and preserve them safe to Himself, when the rubbish is cast away. It is said of Christ that, “*He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner: but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*” (Matthew 3:12). Men when they fan their corn cannot do it so thoroughly clean, but that some chaff or tares will remain with the wheat, and some wheat be cast out with the chaff... But God’s fanning is a thorough fanning; not a grain, not a saint shall be overslipt. This is indeed most properly meant of the last fanning of the

world at the day of judgment; yet in the meantime doth the Lord take notice of every one of His, to provide for them, and in the most common and general judgments to do that which in His wisdom He seeth to be fittest for them. When Elijah thought he had been left alone in Israel, God knew many more, yea He could tell the just number of them (cf 1 Kings 19:18). Thou mayest therefore, O faithful one, say of the Lord, *“He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence”* (Psalm 91:2-3).

Of believers dying of the plague

Question: How is it then that the righteous as well as the unrighteous die of the plague?

Answer: 1. Some say that no true believers are taken away with a common plague. But this is too bold an assertion; unwarrantable, uncharitable. To adjudge all to Hell that were taken away by that devouring pestilence which in David’s time destroyed 70,000 in three days, is an unmerciful doom (cf 2 Samuel 24). Experience giveth evidence that many who have manifested true outward fruits of a sound faith, upright conscience, honest heart, and entire repentance, have died of the plague. Besides the Word of God beareth witness that: *“All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and the wicked”*; *“And how dieth the wiseman? As the fool”* (Ecclesiastes 9:2, 2:16).

2. Others say, that they that are true saints and have a true justifying faith may die of the plague. But yet they add, that there is a particular faith that saints may have, which will in a common pestilence keep them safe from that disease. But I demand of such, what warrant and ground they have for such a faith? To pretend a faith without ground, is plain presumption. They produce for their ground the 91st Psalm. But if they rightly mark the scope of that Psalm, they shall find that freedom from the plague is there no otherwise promised, than

freedom from death in war; than from hurt of wild beasts if we be among them; than from other dangers and troubles, yea than honour, and long life. The promise then of preserving believers from the pestilence is to be taken as other promises of temporal blessings: so far forth as God in His wisdom seeth it good for them to be delivered. And what believer would be delivered if God seeth it not good for him? Yea, what believer would not die of the plague, if his wise Father seeth it to be the best for him to die of that disease? David could have been content to have died of this disease if it had so seemed good to the divine wisdom (cf 2 Samuel 24:17). For what [matters] it whether sword or sickness, pleurisy or plague loose the soul from the body? God especially observes in what disposition, not by what means, His servants depart out of this world to Him.

3. Without question therefore true believers may die of the plague, and many have in common infections been taken away thereby; yet in mercy, as was before shewed. And as there was a great difference betwixt taking Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker out of prison – the head of them both was lifted up, but of one to his high office, of the other to the gallows – so can God make a greater difference betwixt the godly and ungodly, even when He takes them both out of the prison of this body by one and the same disease; suppose the plague. He can hereby advance one to heaven, and thrust down the other to hell; as He dealt with the two thieves that hung on the cross with Christ.

Of avoiding communion with the wicked, for avoiding their judgment

They that would avoid the judgment that falls on the wicked must avoid communion with them. For this end did God cause an ark to be made for Noah and his family to go into from the old world, that so they might be preserved from the general deluge (cf Genesis 6:14); and sent His angels to bring Lot, and such as belonged to him out of Sodom (cf Genesis 19:12, 14). To this purpose the people of God were advised to

remove out of the midst of Babylon, and to deliver every man his soul (cf Jeremiah 50:8, 51:6); which advice is also given, in regard of spiritual Babylon, to come out of her; and that on this ground, that they receive not her plagues (cf Revelation 18:4).

Saints by separating themselves from the wicked in time of judgment, show their care to use what means they can for preventing mischief; which is a point of wisdom commended by the Holy Ghost, who giveth this note of a wise man, "*A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished*" (Proverbs 22:3). This care of using means for safety, and in the use of means to depend on God for His blessing, is well pleasing to God. God had promised that none in the ship with Paul should be lost, yet when some of the shipmen were about to leave the ship, Paul said, "*except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved*" (cf Acts 27:22, 24, 31). All lawful and warrantable means are the visible hand of God's invisible providence. To reject or neglect means is to refuse to take God by the hand when He reacheth it out unto us, and to follow His visible direction.

It is therefore foolish presumption, rather than a prudent resolution, either to accompany those that are as it were in the fire of God's judgment, or not to go from them, when a fair and warrantable opportunity is offered. This is taxed as a point of folly in Lot's sons-in-law (cf Genesis 19:14). Jehoshaphat too much failed herein. He heard the Prophet say that Ahab should fall at Ramoth-Gilead, and yet he would accompany him thither. It had almost cost him his life (cf 1 Kings 22:20, 32) ...

Be so far therefore from taking boldness from multitudes of men conspiring in sin, as on that ground to be the more fearful lest some sudden judgment should fall upon them. Then especially is the time for such as are upright to mourn, with fasting and prayer to humble their souls before God, and to keep themselves unspotted, when they see all of all sorts with greediness and impudence running into sin ... The way

wherein multitudes run is 'the broad way that leadeth to destruction. But strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth to life: and few there be that find it' (cf Matthew 7:13,14) ...

Of observing God's Judgments

God's judgments are duly to be observed. Of them saith the Lord, "*Behold... regard, and wonder marvellously*" (Habakkuk 1:5). It is usual in holy writ to prefix this note of observation before God's judgments. Christ intended a serious observation of God's judgments, when He said, "*Remember Lot's wife*" (Luke 17:32). The many memorials which among the Israelites were made of God's judgments, did imply a due consideration of them.

"The Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth" (Psalm 9:16). His power, His justice, His hatred of evil, His jealousy, His truth, His providence, and other of His Divine attributes are evidently manifested in and by His judgments. By a due observation therefore of them, we have the more knowledge of God, and are brought the more to trust in Him, and to fear Him, to be more careful of pleasing Him, more heedful in avoiding all things that may offend Him. On this ground saith the Prophet, "*When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness*" (Isaiah 26:9).

Behold here one especial reason of the small profit that is made of judgments which the Lord from time to time executeth in the world: they are not regarded, but are passed over without any right observation of them. The Prophets much complain hereof (cf Psalm 28:5, Isaiah 5:12, 57:1). It may be that men may take notice of judgments that fall upon their own pates, at least while they lie under them, and feel the weight or smart of them. But who almost considers, and lays to heart God's judgments inflicted on others? Or judgments laid on himself after they are removed or taken away?

Man's egregious folly and servile disposition is hereby manifested. **His folly:** in omitting the opportunity of receiving warning by other men's harms (as we speak in the proverb). It is an evidence of God's great indulgency to us, to punish others before our eyes; whereas He might justly punish us for example to others. It is an especial point of wisdom, to make such use thereof, as to be bettered thereby. But not to regard such a providence, is notorious folly. **His servile disposition:** in regarding strokes no longer than they are laid upon him, and he feels the smart of them. Thus he provoketh God to deal with him as with a slave; and to add stroke to stroke, judgment to judgment.

Learn we to be more wise, more ingenuous. Let us apply the fore-mentioned point of considering God's judgments to all manner of judgments: whether inflicted on others, or on ourselves; whether public or private; whether immediately from God's own hands, or mediately from the hands of others, who are God's instruments; whether sudden or lingering judgments; whether temporal or spiritual; of what kind or sort soever. Thus will light arise out of darkness, meat out of the eater, comfort out of judgment, profit out of punishment. Thus are God's judgments sanctified; thus are saints brought to say, and that by true experience, "*It is good for me that I have been afflicted*" (Psalm 119:71) ...

Of God's power over plagues

God hath an absolute power over plagues. Suddenly, as soon as He will He can restrain them, and keep them from devouring any more. As He can say to the sea, "*Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed*" (Job 38:11), so can He say to the pestilence, 'so long shalt thou continue, and no longer; so many shalt thou destroy, and no more'. Did not the Lord beforehand threaten to send a plague upon Israel in David's time three days; and answerably it continued till the time appointed? But when the wrath of the Lord was pacified, the plague was stayed (cf 2 Samuel 24:13, 15, 25). Did He not remove the plagues from Egypt, so soon as Moses prayed unto Him (cf Exodus 8:12,

13, 30, 31)? This power of the Lord over plagues and diseases, was visibly manifested in the Son of God, while He lived on earth. For He spake the word, and they went away; which the Centurion well observing, said to Christ, “*Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed*” (Matthew 8:8).

The Lord, as He is the Creator, so the Governor of all things: nothing can be without Him; nothing can abide longer than He will. He calls, He sends, He bids come, He bids go away; answerably they come, they go. ‘They rebel not against his word’ (cf Psalm 105:28).

As ye desire to have this plague that burneth so fiercely among us, and destroyeth so many, to be stayed, use the only remedy that is of power to that purpose: call upon God to stay it. The plague itself is like a fierce, mad, mastiff-dog, that will not cease to bite if he be loose. The Lord of plagues must chain him up. Yea, it is like ravenous lions, that are ready to tear in pieces and devour all they can catch. The Lord only can stop the mouth of this lion, as He stopped the mouths of the lions among whom Daniel was cast (cf Daniel 6:22). All antidotes, all preservatives, all manner of outward means are nothing without the Lord. He can preserve whom He will while the plague rageth most. He can stay it as speedily, as suddenly, as thoroughly as He please. Call therefore upon Him, turn unto Him, trust on Him; and doubt not but that our God that hath such power over plagues, will in His good time, when His work is accomplished upon this city, and upon this land, stay this plague.

This is a point of much comfort to such as have assurance of God’s fatherly love to them, that their Father hath an absolute power over plagues.

William Gouge (1578 – 1653)

Excerpt from God’s Three Arrows: Plague, Famine, Sword. The author ministered in Blackfriars, London, for 45 years, experiencing serious outbreaks of plague in 1625 (35,000 fatalities) and 1636 (10,000 fatalities).

EDITORIAL

At times when God's extraordinary judgments are abroad, it is the habit of the world to theorise and postulate, apportion blame and censure, and compare and contrast themselves with others. One need only give the slightest attention to the current news media to observe this in practice. But sad to say that these behaviours are also to be found among professing Christians, who often speak as though they had a full knowledge of the secret will of God, and were authorised to make pronouncements concerning His providential purposes. They forget that cautionary word: "*judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts*" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Even the disciples were prone to this attitude. Encountering a man afflicted with congenital blindness, their first question was: "*who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*" They wanted to draw a simple, straight-line connection between some grievous misdemeanour and its punishment. The Lord's answer no doubt surprised them: "*Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him*" (John 9:3). There were greater factors and forces involved than the disciples could ever imagine: the sovereign works of God were being displayed, and His divine prerogative, both in the imposition of disability or disease (cf Exodus 4:11), and its ultimate revocation.

A similar exchange is heard in the wake of other tragedies that befell the land, during the Lord Jesus' earthly life – summary executions in Galilee and the collapse of a tower in Jerusalem. Christ addressed the unasked questions: "*think ye that they were sinners above all men? . . . I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*" (Luke 13:4-5). Not even He unto Whom all judgment is committed would satisfy his hearers' idle curiosity in explaining why certain individuals are conveyed from time into eternity by dramatic or unforeseen means. He would only turn the situation into a salutary exhortation to repentance.

As death and disease ravage the nations of the world, what answer would the Lord give, were He bodily present amongst us, to our enquiring ‘why?’ No doubt this: *“that the works of God should be made manifest”*. And could we ask Him what message is conveyed by these dark providences, the answer would be comprehended in one word: *“Repent”*.

It was the Lord’s disciples who principally benefitted from His answers. The multitudes never heard, or considered. Similarly today, the masses of humanity are deaf and blind to God’s dealings: *“Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness ... and will not behold the majesty of the Lord. Lord, when Thy hand is lifted up, they will not see”* (Isaiah 26:10-11). It is the duty of the **church** to regard and apply the Divine message, and to examine themselves first and foremost: *“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God”* (1 Peter 4:17).

And it is the duty of the church to pray. A National Day of Prayer has been appointed; indeed, an international one; a God-ordained one: it is the **Lord’s Day**, and it comes around every week. The unbelieving and atheistic masses cannot, and will not, be instructed to pray by their unbelieving and atheistic rulers. Nor would their pretended supplications amount to anything more than those of Baal’s prophets on Carmel. The true Christian by contrast, could have no greater summons to prayer, from no higher authority, than that issued by Christ Himself: *“Watch ye therefore, and **pray always**, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man”* (Luke 21:36). Elijah’s example teaches: *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (James 5:16); and the case of David shows: *“the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed”* (2 Samuel 24:25). May God in mercy grant it once again.

Special Announcement

We regret to advise our readers that, in light of the current national situation, we are unable at this time to proceed with the arrangements for our **Annual Bible Convention** (previously advertised for Saturday 6th June 2020 DV). Should circumstances permit its rescheduling, we will circulate a separate notice (cf James 4:14-15).

RECORDED MINISTRY

The expository ministry at North Road Chapel is recorded, and the following series are available: ('#' denotes the total number of sermons. * = Current series)

SUBJECT	#	A	C	M	W
THE BOOK OF GENESIS	202	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF EXODUS	105	◇			
ISRAEL'S WANDERINGS	24	◇			
THE BOOK OF JOSHUA	79	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF JUDGES	81	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF RUTH	27	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE LIFE OF SAMUEL	66	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE LIFE OF DAVID	182	◇			
THE LIFE OF SOLOMON	86		◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF JOB	98	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE SONGS OF DEGREES	51		◇	◇	◇
THE PSALMS OF ASAPH	80		◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF PROVERBS	86		◇	◇	◇
ECCLESIASTES	27		◇	◇	◇
THE LIFE OF ELIJAH	76		◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF HOSEA	50	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF JOEL	11	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF AMOS	29	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF OBADIAH	7	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF JONAH	9	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF MICAH	21	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF NAHUM	8	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK	11	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH	18	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF HAGGAI	12	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH	42	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE BOOK OF MALACHI	19	◇	◇	◇	◇
SERMON ON THE MOUNT	142	◇			
THE LIFE OF JOHN BAPTIST	48	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE GOSPEL OF JOHN	224	◇			
PONTIUS PILATE	37		◇	◇	◇

SUBJECT	#	A	C	M	W
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES	147	◇	◇	◇	◇
GALATIANS	59		◇	◇	◇
1 THESSALONIANS	59	◇	◇	◇	◇
2 THESSALONIANS	25		◇	◇	◇
THE PRAYERS OF PAUL	64	◇			
THE HEBREW EPISTLE	142	◇			
THE ORDER OF MELCHISEDEC	26		◇	◇	◇
THE EPISTLE OF JAMES	48	◇	◇	◇	◇
1 PETER	100		◇	◇	◇
THE EPISTLE OF JUDE	36		◇	◇	◇
LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES	50	◇	◇	◇	◇
AFFIRMATION OF FAITH	31		◇	◇	◇
DECLARATION OF PRACTICE	24		◇	◇	◇
THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD	19	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE ATONEMENT	72	◇			
BIBLE TREES	38	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE CHURCH	51	◇			
THE COVENANTS	65	◇			
DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE	5	◇	◇	◇	◇
DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY	18		◇	◇	◇
EXCELLENCIES OF CHRIST	45		◇	◇	◇
FESTAL DAYS	9	◇	◇	◇	◇
THE HOLY SPIRIT	36	◇			
THE LORD'S TABLE	31		◇	◇	◇
NAMES & TITLES OF GOD	30		◇	◇	◇
SATAN THE GREAT ADVERSARY	8	◇	◇	◇	◇
SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT	32	◇			
SPIRITUAL UNION	30	◇			
SPIRITUAL WARFARE	33	◇	◇	◇	◇
CHRIST IN THE LIFE OF JOSEPH	*		◇	◇	◇
ISAIAH	*		◇	◇	◇

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