

October - December 2021

# The Link

**NORTH ROAD CHAPEL**

---

**BIDEFORD**

# I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”*  
(John 8:12)

There are three things in Scripture which God is said to be: “*God is Spirit*” (John 4:24), “*God is light*” (1 John 1:5) and “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8). All these expressions relate to the nature of God – what He is in Himself, or in His essence. Hence, when here in the temple Christ says: “*I am the light of the world*”, it is an affirmation of Deity, that which He actually is in Himself – “*the true light*”. John the Baptist had heralded Christ as: “*the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world*” (John 1:9). The Lord confirmed John’s words three times in His own statements:

1. In the text above: “*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*” (John 8:12).

2. “*As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world*” (John 9:5) – this is a general and broad assertion of the Lord’s purpose in coming into the world; He came to be its sun and guide and source of life, and as long as He was in the world, in no way would He be deterred. “*I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day*”, He had just said in John 9:4. No-one could overshadow or black out the rays of eternal light and spiritual illumination which beamed forth from the Sun of Righteousness.

3. “*I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.*” (John 12:46) – here, the Lord recaps upon His previous discourses. He is pressing home upon the people, for the last

time during His earthly ministry, that apart from Him and His work, they will abide in darkness.

What exactly is meant when Christ says: “*I am the light of **the world***”? Remember that the Lord’s immediate audience were prejudiced Jews, and their thinking went no further than their own nation. Any persons outside of Jewry were of no account to them, and certainly not thought to figure in the blessings which Israel enjoyed under the Old Covenant. However, Isaiah had prophesied something very different concerning the Messiah: “*I the Lord have called Thee in righteousness, and will hold Thine hand, and will keep Thee, and give Thee for a covenant of the people, for **a light of the Gentiles***” (Isaiah 42:6); and again: “*And he said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for **a light to the Gentiles**, that Thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth*” (Isaiah 49:6). That these words found their fulfilment in the Saviour is confirmed by Simeon, who pronounced Him to be: “*A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel*” (Luke 2:32). ‘I am that light of which these men spake’, says Christ, ‘not a light to just one nation, but to people throughout the world’. This, then, is the meaning of: “*I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness*”.

The expression ‘darkness’ in the New Testament denotes sin, ignorance and unbelief. A most important truth concerning the natural man is set forth in Ephesians: “*Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart*” (Ephesians 4:18). This is the state of the unsaved. This has befallen mankind because of Adam’s transgression. He, the federal head of the race, by his disobedience and fall, plunged the whole of humanity into a state of spiritual darkness. In that condition all men throughout the whole world are found; there are no exceptions; all are ‘born in sin and shapen in iniquity’ (cf Psalm 51:5). By nature, all are ignorant as to their true state, absolutely in spiritual darkness. True –

they may be endowed with intelligence, prudence, discernment and other human qualities – but as for a knowledge and appreciation of sin, God, holiness and heaven, or any real spiritual matter, they are ‘in the dark’. Their most pressing need is light, yet they do not realise it, for “*men love darkness rather than light*”. The reason being that darkness is their natural environment; neither will they come to the light lest their deeds should be reproved (cf John 3:20).

Apart from Christ and His work, this benighted condition will persist eternally. Only Christ can deliver from the power of darkness (cf Colossians 1:13); it is only by coming to Christ, who is the Light, that men can be translated from darkness into light. All who continue in a state of unbelief, remain in spiritual darkness – and this is the prelude to the blackness of darkness forever (cf Jude 13). By contrast, persons who follow Christ are in that state no longer. They have “*the light of life*”.

The doctrine under consideration is beautifully illustrated by the Old Testament typology of the shekinah cloud that hovered over Israel. It was as a pillar of fire in the darkness, it gave illumination in the blackest night, and the Israelites were to remain under that cloud. When it moved, they were to follow; and so, as they followed, they had its light. The cloud led the Israelites from Egypt, right through the wilderness and into the Promised Land of Canaan. Thus it is with the sinner who is in the Egypt of unbelief (in spiritual darkness). When the Holy Spirit effectually calls from darkness into light, that person follows on with Christ – following as a disciple. What a guide is to a traveller, a general to a soldier, or a shepherd to the sheep, so is Christ to the Christian. ‘Following’ in this sense does not merely mean copying or imitating; it means putting absolute faith and trust in another – that One being the Lord. In summary it means: living by faith, obedient in all things to His revealed will as laid down in Scripture, and submissive to His providences – always content to be under the bright cloud of His presence. In this way God’s people have the Light of life.

Additionally, this spiritual life in Christ is independent of time or place; it is not affected by circumstances or sickness; not even death can black it out: “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.*” (Psalm 23:4). Yes, believer! It is He who is the light of the world, He is with us! The radiance of His presence shines round about us, guiding our footsteps, emanating light to direct our conduct and conversation. It beams into the grave at last, accompanying us through death with the sunlight of His presence, right to the gates of the Celestial City! So is the believer ever beneath that ray, until at last he enters the realm where shadows will never fall; that eternal world where the Lamb is the light thereof, the dwelling-place of God – God, who is light (cf Revelation 21:23). In consequence of that Eternal Light which is inherent to the God of Heaven, there is no night there. These former things are passed away. The Christian has the light of life in this world and in a much fuller degree in the world to come for evermore. Thus Paul writes: “*Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness*” (1 Thessalonians 5:5).

Beloved, how favoured! What a privileged people believers are, what grace has been given unto them! If a man could continually follow the sun, such an one would continually be in broad daylight in every part of the globe; night would never be able to settle upon him! This is how it is with Christ and His people – always following Him, they have perpetual light.

Do these words come before anyone who knows not the wonder and joy of living in the sunlight of the Lord’s presence? One who is still in nature’s darkness, groping around in ignorance of spiritual truth and blinded by the god of this world from the light of the glorious Gospel shining into the heart? One who is living in that state of depravity in Adam, with no other prospect than eternal night at the end, yea even the blackness of darkness forever? Christ is the Light of the world! He says

the man or woman “*that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*” (John 8:12).

“The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin,  
The Light of the world is Jesus!  
Like sunshine at noonday, His glory shone in;  
The Light of the world is Jesus!

*Come to the light, 'tis shining for thee;  
Sweetly the light has dawned upon me;  
Once I was blind, but now I can see:  
The Light of the world is Jesus!*

No darkness have we who in Jesus abide;  
The Light of the world is Jesus!  
We walk in the light when we follow our Guide!  
The Light of the world is Jesus!

Ye dwellers in darkness with sin-blinded eyes,  
The Light of the world is Jesus!  
Go, wash at His bidding, and light will arise;  
The Light of the world is Jesus!

No need of the sunlight in Heaven we're told;  
The Light of the world is Jesus!  
The Lamb is the Light in the city of gold,  
The Light of the world is Jesus!”

P. Bliss

May God in His grace and by the power of His Holy Spirit bring all who read this message from nature's darkness into His marvellous light, for His glory.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

## MEDITATIONS UPON PSALM 27

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”* (Psalm 27:1)

Light, which makes all things visible, was the first made of all visible things (cf Genesis 1:3): and whether God did it for our example or no, I know not. But ever since, in imitation of this manner of God’s proceeding, the first thing we do when we intend to do anything, is to get us light. Indeed, light is not only a director, but a comforter; and nothing naturally strikes so much terror as Darkness. For when we are in the dark, not only are we apt to take into our fancies all frightful objects, but we know not how to take our steps, for fear of walls and thresholds.

It is everyone’s case to have the sun for his light; but it is not everyone’s happiness to have God for his light; and alas, if I should trust to the sun for light, I should be left in darkness every day, at least at night. But God is a sun that never sets (cf Psalm 84:11, Isaiah 60:20). He is light Himself; He is light itself (cf 1 John 1:5). And therefore, it is good trusting to God for light, for so I shall be sure, neither day nor night, to be left in darkness (cf John 12:46). O Thou great Creator of Light; Thou Light of all creatures, vouchsafe to shine upon me, and to lighten my darkness, that neither any objects of terror may make me to tremble; nor any thresholds of error may make me to stumble, but that I may walk securely in the confidence of this: the Lord is my light: of what then, of whom now, should I be afraid?

But is it enough that God be my light? What if I myself be blind? What good then will His light do me? It is true; and therefore David stays not here, but: *“Deus illuminatio mea”* [Psalm 27:1, Vulgate] – God is my enlightening too. He is both my **light** and my **sight**; my light by which to see, and my sight with which to see; my light to make walls and

thresholds visible, and my sight to make me able to avoid them. If it were not for light, I should be always in the dark; if it were not for sight, I should be dark myself (cf Matthew 6:23). No illumination without both; and never both, but only from God.

There is one indeed, who hath gotten him a name to be called Lucifer ['light-bringer', cf Isaiah 14:12], as though it were he that brought us light: when God knows but for him, we should have had no darkness! Yet he pretends to both: both to light, and to enlightening; alas, his 'light' is but imposture; his 'enlightening' but illusion. For as he can transform himself into an angel of light (cf 2 Corinthians 11:14), so he can transform the light itself, and make it seem light, when it is indeed dark: and therefore his light can never make walls and thresholds to be truly visible – and as little can his enlightening make us able to avoid them. For this was tried in our first parents, who upon his 'enlightening', had their eyes opened indeed, but opened to **see** good and evil (cf Genesis 3:5), not to **distinguish** good from evil; and therefore could not enable them – nor us – to avoid the evil. But as they that follow his 'light' do stumble and fall at the threshold of error, so they that are led by his 'enlightening' do run their heads against the walls of impiety. [There can be] no avoiding of walls and thresholds, no shunning the snares of Satan, the illusions of this Lucifer, but only by saying, if truly saying, 'God is my enlightening'; and **then** we may safely infer: of what, of whom, should I be afraid?

Indeed, David might well say 'God is my enlightening', since God had enlightened him not only to see, but to be a Seer, which is a Prophet (cf Acts 2:30). But what is this to us, who are far from any such enlightening, to see as prophets? O my soul, it is enough for us, that Christ is the Great Seer, in whose light we shall see light (cf Psalm 36:9). And though David was of the Jews and we be of the Gentiles, yet as Christ was the glory of His people Israel, so He is a light to lighten the Gentiles (cf Luke 2:32) and therefore: 'God is my enlightening' – as fit for us to say, as it was for David.



But doth God's enlightening serve only for a safeguard against walls and thresholds? Alas, the light of the sun and the enlightening of Nature would serve to do this, and what need we then to seek any other? O my soul, there are spiritual walls and thresholds which no sun can make us see, which Nature herself is not able to see; only God's enlightening hath the influence to do it. There is a wall of sin, the partition wall between God and us, the wall that bars us from having access to God. And this wall the natural man sees not, neither can see; illumination only makes it visible. There is a threshold of pride in the heart of man; a swelling of self-love, that lies in the way we are to pass, and is a cause of stumbling if not avoided. And this threshold the natural man sees not, neither can see; only God's illumination makes him able to see it. And many other walls and thresholds there are, which without illumination can never be seen; and not seen, can never be avoided; and not avoided, are the cause of falling into endless perdition.

And as illumination makes us to see these lights of terror, so it makes us to see also sights of comfort. It makes us see Death lie dead before us, and swallowed up in Victory (cf Isaiah 25:8); it makes us see the powers of Hell astonished, as not able to endure the lustre of this light; it makes us see the doors of Heaven open, into which by virtue of this Light we have means to enter; it makes us see Him that is invisible (cf Hebrews 11:27), God Himself that is our enlightening, in whose presence is the fulness of joy for evermore (Psalm 16:11); and of whom then, of what now, should I be afraid?

These indeed be comfortable sights, but what comfort for me to see them, if I be not sure I shall enjoy them? And how can I be any more sure to enjoy them, then the angels that fell (cf Jude 6)? For they had illumination in a greater measure than I can hope to have it; and yet for all their illumination, they stumbled at the threshold of pride, and ran their heads against the wall of sin, and utterly lost – alas have lost for ever – all benefit of all these comfortable sights. All this is true, and therefore David stays not here either; but: "*The Lord is my light **and my***

*salvation*” (Psalm 27:1) – God is my enlightening, and my salvation too; and this He was not to the angels that fell. He left them at illumination, and never conducted them to salvation; for if He had done this, their illumination had never been turned into darkness. Either they had not stumbled at all, or at least not so stumbled, as to fall. If God were only my illumination, I should by that light, “see and approve the right”, but would presently follow it with, “yet do wrong” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*): but when He is my salvation too, this makes me break off ... as where God was heard to say: “*O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself*” [then adds] “*but in Me is thine help*” (Hosea 13:9). If my illumination reflected upon myself, to make me seem bright in my own eyes, as though I had something which I had not received (cf 1 Corinthians 4:7), then indeed I should be in the case of the angels that fell; for so did they. But now that my illumination reflects upon God, and makes me see all goodness to be originally in Him, none in myself but what He is pleased to impart or impute unto me; now illumination becomes a step to salvation. And as they are free indeed whom the Spirit frees (cf John 8:36); so they are safe indeed, whom God saves – and of what then, of whom now, should I be afraid?

Richard Baker (1568 – 1645)

---

Christ is the Sun of Righteousness. One sun enlightens the whole world, so does one Christ, and there needs no more ... The inference from this doctrine is “*he that followeth Me*”, as a traveller follows the light in a dark night, “*shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*”. If Christ be the light, then it is our duty to follow Him, to submit ourselves to His guidance, and in everything take direction from Him, in the way that leads to happiness ... It is not enough to look at this light, and to gaze upon it, but we must follow it, believe in it, and walk in it, for it is a light to our feet, not our eyes only ... Follow Christ, and we shall follow Him to Heaven.

Matthew Henry (1662 – 1714)

## A WORD LIKE FIRE

*“And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures?”*

(Luke 24:32)

There is to be observed among Christians generally an unbecoming tendency to elevate certain of the Lord’s servants above measure. Church historians and biographers in particular are prone to heap inordinate praise upon pastors and ministers of the past, even to the coining of such titles as “prince of preachers”, and similar terms of veneration, for mere mortal men. This ought to be carefully guarded against, whether in respect of persons living or dead, lest the hallowed ground of Christian service become marred by the idolatry of ‘creature-worship’. As regards the work of the ministry, better instead to focus upon Him who is worthy of all the praises man can give, and an eternity besides; He who – as well as being the sum and substance of preaching – stands as the superlative example of a preacher; indeed, the finest the world will ever know.

The Jewish people were no strangers to oratory. Their forefathers heard judges and prophets, seers and psalmists; those alive in Christ’s day had the benefit of scribes and priests, Pharisees and Sadducees, who could be heard both in synagogues and on street corners. The Old Testament Scriptures were preached in every city, and read publicly every Sabbath day (cf Acts 15:21). But this great heritage notwithstanding, consider what is said of Christ. From earliest days: “*all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers*”; “*And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth*” (Luke 2:47, 4:22). This was something new and unprecedented: “*the people were astonished at His doctrine: For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*” (Matthew 7:28-29). Academics asked: “*How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?*” (John 7:15), yet at the same

time: “*the common people heard Him gladly*” (Mark 12:37); while the involuntary assessment of those officers who failed to arrest the Lord was quite simply: “*Never man spake like this man*” (John 7:46). Nor should we wonder at it, for none other than “*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets*” was here speaking through “*His Son ... the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person*” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

In the goodness of God, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a portion of the Lord’s earthly ministry has been preserved on record in the Gospels. As well as the fundamental teaching conveyed in those passages, they also serve as the best examples of preaching to have occurred upon earth. One such case is found in Luke chapter 24, which provides a wealth of instruction upon this topic. The scene opens with two individuals, one called Cleopas, the other unnamed, journeying from Jerusalem to Emmaus. The distance being 60 ‘stadia’ (approximately 7 miles), and the light failing, some two or three hours might have been required for the journey.

## **THE OCCASION**

There is no doubt about the timing of the incident related here, which date was soon etched into the memories of all those involved. It was “*that same day*” (Luke 24:13), namely ‘the first of First Days’, the primordial ‘Lord’s Day’, a God-wrought occasion in which to rejoice and be glad (cf Psalm 118:24) – Resurrection Day. The two characters with whom the account commences did not yet know this, but the third who joined them most certainly did! The Divine ordering of these events teaches:

**(1.)** The importance placed upon preaching by the Lord Himself. This was the day on which He rose in “*the power of an endless life*” (Hebrews 7:16); He, “*being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him*” (Romans 6:9); “*God ... raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory*” (1 Peter 1:21). On such a day, one might expect the

conquering Son to make bold demonstrations of His risen power, display His glory, or receive the adoration and praise of all His people on earth. Instead of which, He devotes two or three of the waking hours of that momentous day to delivering a sermon, and ministering the word. That the risen Lord should choose to spend His resurrection day thus occupied teaches the great significance of preaching in the mind of God.

(2.) There is here a Christ-appointed precedent for preaching on the Lord's Day. Within a short time, the disciples would begin observing the first day of the week as a commemoration of the resurrection, by assembling themselves together (cf John 20:19, 26; Acts 20:7). There was no doubt in their minds how the day should be spent, for Christ Himself had given the pattern. Morning (cf Luke 24:1-9) **and** evening (cf John 20:19) they would gather to hear truth declared, and the Scriptures verbally expounded, as had been the case on very first New Testament Sabbath Day – when the word had been recalled to their minds by the ministry of angels (cf Luke 24:5-8), and opened unto them by the Saviour Himself (cf Luke 24:44-48). This is the great original for Christians' practice in the present day.

## **THE PREACHER**

To return to the Emmaus Road – the third traveller was none other than Jesus Christ, who would undertake to preach as they journeyed. His glorious credentials and fitness for this task have been described in an earlier paragraph. The fact and reality of His newly-accomplished resurrection only added to this, and lent further force and pertinence to His every word. He was, Himself, the greatest illustration and proof of the truth about to be declared to these two persons. “*But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him*” (Luke 24:16). This was not an accident of circumstance caused by the lateness of the hour or gathering dark; it was not a weakness of sight or recognition by Cleopas or his friend; this was a situation positively effected by the Lord, who ‘held their eyes’ (cf Psalm 77:4). It might be asked why He saw fit to act in such a manner, and impart this temporal blindness to His hearers? Surely

an immediate revelation of Himself would instantly have dispelled His companions' doubtful reasoning, revived their hopes, and explained 'the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow' far more eloquently than words. Hours of discourse might have been spared if the Saviour had simply manifested His person to their senses. Two reasons for the Lord's course of action suggest themselves:

(1.) He gives a priority and honour to the word of God, even over His own person. A remarkable truth concerning the Lord is stated by the Psalmist: "*Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name*" (Psalm 138:2). Such is the divine regard that God has for His own written manifestation of truth; and it is borne out in the Lord Jesus, of whom it was prophesied: "*He will magnify the law, and make it honourable*" (Isaiah 42:21), which words He duly fulfilled (cf Matthew 5:17-20). This is exemplified in His encounter with the Adversary, when tempted to make demonstration of His miraculous powers and deity. On each occasion He refused, replying: "*It is written...*" (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10), allowing the Scriptures to speak for themselves, rather than performing signs or wonders. And likewise upon the Emmaus Road: He opened His companions' ears to the word, whilst veiling their eyes from His person. Here is a precedent for every mortal minister to heed and emulate. If even Christ Himself would not use His identity to advantage in the ministry, how dare any lesser preacher magnify themselves above the word they are to preach? But alas, many do. Numerous conferences and seminaries are marketed upon the names of the participants rather than the message to be delivered; countless 'sermons' comprise more autobiography than theology, and become self-exalting instead of God-glorifying. 'These things ought not so to be'.

(2.) He exemplifies the principle that: "*faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17). Until a dramatic moment later around the supper-table, the experience of Cleopas and his friend was exactly the same as that of every New Testament hearer, from the Ascension to the present day. The word of God is preached; it is heard

with the ear; it is believed on in the heart – as an act of faith, and not of sight or sense. That process had clearly begun in the case of these two travellers. The despondent and hopeless frame in which they left Jerusalem, their disinclination to enter into conversation with a stranger, was significantly changed by the time Emmaus was reached, and they constrained the anonymous preacher to continue longer! Faith and hope had been rekindled by virtue of a sermon. And well that it had. It was the Lord’s divine conclusion, expressed elsewhere in His ministry: “*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead*” (Luke 16:31). A sad trait in many modern preachers is that they doubt the efficacy of preaching to accomplish its purpose, and be the means of imparting faith; they are guilty of reckoning their own God-appointed work to be futile and ‘foolish’ (cf 1 Corinthians 1:21), and supplement or supersede it with man-made ‘evangelistic’ gimmicks; they are of that wicked generation which ‘seeketh after a sign’ (cf Matthew 16:4), imagining that sensational phenomena, tangible miracles, are superior and bound to succeed. But it was never the case – there were many who questioned those (cf John 9:9, 12:29, Matthew 28:17). Seeing is **not** believing. Sight is **not** faith. And it is only faith that saves. Hence the Lord’s words: “*blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*” (John 20:29).

## THE CONGREGATION

The Divinely-inspired penman of this account demands the reader’s attention with the words “*And, behold...*” (cf Luke 24:13). The conjunction serves to connect the passage that follows with the preceding details (namely – it also occurs on resurrection day, a point stressed again later in the verse), while the exclamatory ‘behold!’ suggests something note-worthy, remarkable, or even incongruous, about the scene described. “*And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs*”. These details bring further truth to light concerning the congregation that heard this wonderful sermon.

(1.) Its **size**. It comprised only two persons. There would be another occasion on which the risen Saviour appeared to “*above five hundred brethren at once*” (1 Corinthians 15:6). Later in Luke 24, He would visit a select number of His gathered disciples – perhaps ten or eleven. The city of Jerusalem at Passover season was filled to overflowing with religious pilgrims, unto any and all of whom the Lord could have spoken. But here on the Emmaus Road, on this day of all days, He gives hours of His undivided attention to just **two** people. There is tremendous grace and condescension to be seen in this act – but also great encouragement for those who minister to vanishingly small congregations today. In this matter, Christ has ‘left an example, that we should follow His steps’ (cf 1 Peter 2:21). The oft-quoted verse: “*where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them*” (Matthew 18:20) is devoid of its proper context when taken in isolation; but here in Luke’s Gospel is a more perfect demonstration of this precious truth: the Saviour does not despise the bruised reed, the smoking flax, nor the smallest company of saints. Neither should His earthly ministers. For “*God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are*” (1 Corinthians 1:27-28).

(2.) Its **state**. Familiarity with this account ought not to diminish the strangeness of the circumstances. Here, on the selfsame day that striking news had been brought from the Saviour’s burial-site, are two disciples in possession of those facts, going **away from** Jerusalem. With Biblical hindsight, it seems the very opposite direction from that in which they should have been going! But being permitted to ‘eavesdrop’ upon their conversation, their motivation becomes clearer. This was the manner of their communication: “*...concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him*” (v. 19-20). They speak in the past tense, convinced that



the Lord is no more. They speak of a death sentence, not only sought by the Jews, but handed-down and finally executed. And this was how they further reasoned: “...we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done” (v. 21). They reproach themselves for their former faith and credulity, and the time in which they had lingered, foolishly hoping against hope – but three days was surely conclusive. As for the morning’s reports from the cemetery, these, rather than being received with joy, seem to have been the ‘last straw’: “*Yea, and certain women also of our company made us **astonished**, which were early at the sepulchre; And when they found not His body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but Him they saw not*” (v. 22-24). The word ‘astonished’ denotes ‘insanity’, or being at one’s wits’ end. Their scepticism is plain to hear: a simple case of a mis-located tomb, or grave-robbery, had been given a fantastical interpretation, without any solid evidence or sighting in its support. It was time for them to leave. And leave they did – both sad (cf v. 17), and angry (as their impolite response to the Lord’s inquiry suggests, cf v. 18). Never were there two persons less deserving of a sermon, or less willing to hear it; but to these the Saviour came. He who rained daily manna upon the disobedient Hebrews throughout their 40-year rebellion, is He who brought the bread of life to these two doubting defectors. The Word is to be preached, even to hardest of hearers.

## **THE SERMON**

Theological seminaries and colleges abound in which – it is claimed – students may be taught how to preach. There are many popular (and largely humanistic) ideas about how it should best be done. But few, if any, would recommend preaching of the kind exemplified by the Lord here on the road to Emmaus. While we are not permitted to know exactly what was said during the hours that the journey occupied, sufficient is revealed for our instruction. His sermon was:

**Excoriating** – There was no lengthy preamble. There was no humorous, or anecdotal, or topical introduction. The Saviour did not begin by endearing Himself to His congregation, courting their favour, or conniving at their vices. His opening words were: “*O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken*” (v. 25). He does something rarely heard in modern preaching: rebuking His hearers, nor suffering sin upon them (cf Leviticus 19:17). The word of God is designed, though rarely used, for this very purpose (cf 2 Timothy 3:16).

**Expository** – “*He expounded unto them*” (v.27). The Lord’s chosen manner of preaching was to take the Scriptures and explain or expound their meaning. This is characteristic of all His ministry. By various estimates there are over 70 Old Testament quotations and allusions made by Him, occupying approximately one-tenth of the verses spoken by Christ in the Gospels. His preaching was always rooted and grounded in Holy Writ.

**Exhaustive** – “*beginning at Moses and all the prophets ... in all the Scriptures*” (v. 27). The Old Testament is relegated to a position of secondary importance in modern churches, and receives scant attention; large portions are entirely absent from the pulpit. But when Christ said that the Scriptures testify of Him, are of power to give eternal life, can never pass away, must all be fulfilled – He was speaking of the Old Testament (cf John 5:39, Matthew 5:18). He prized, and preached from, it all – the Pentateuch, every prophet, every book.

**Exalting of Christ** – The Bible was called upon and quoted in support of one grand object: “*the things concerning Himself*” (v. 27), the sermon in summary being: “*Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?*” (v. 26), for this is the central theme in them all (cf 1 Peter 1:11). Preaching that begins and ends with man, and man’s needs, will never rise any higher than its earthly subject matter. But preaching that magnifies Christ and His work will at once glorify God, and raise men up to glory.

**Extensive** – precisely how long that momentous journey took, or at what point the Lord Jesus joined it, cannot be known with certainty, but evidently much ground was covered, both Biblically and physically, over a period of hours. But when it seemed the preacher must end and go His separate way, the hearers prevailed upon Him to continue still longer. Would that this attitude manifested itself in the pew more often! Would that preaching was more often worthy of such a reaction!

**Elucidative of Christ** – much has been speculated concerning the events which occurred around the Emmaus meal-table; but perhaps the best explanation is that it exemplified what had just happened in the process of the foregoing sermon: “*He was known of them in breaking of bread*” (v.35). As the food of the word had been faithfully ministered unto these travellers, so Christ had been revealed to their hearts. And as the preaching came to an end, a blessing was asked, an ‘Amen’ said – it all became perfectly clear: they saw Him, they knew Him, they cried: ‘It is the Lord!’ This should be the objective and effect of all true preaching; that the hearers may: “*know Him, and the power of His resurrection*” (Philippians 3:10).

## THE CONSEQUENCES

“*Is not My word like as a fire? saith the Lord*” (Jeremiah 23:29). It is a God-given analogy, and therefore absolutely fitting. It is well illustrated by this episode on the Emmaus Road. Like fire, the word of God is transmissible and communicative; it spreads from place to place, from person to person, from soul to soul. “*And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures?*” (Luke 24:32).

The word of God is to be as fire to the **preachers** of it – an uncontainable force, greater than themselves, demanding to find an outlet. The prophet Jeremiah suffered much for his preaching in the hostility and animosity of his audience, and determined that he would desist in his own best interest. But he could not, testifying: “***His word***

*was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay*” (Jeremiah 20:9). With good reason was Isaiah commissioned by means of a seraph placing a live coal upon his lips (cf Isaiah 6:6-7), and likewise the disciples blessed with ‘cloven tongues like fire’ appearing upon each of them as they were given utterance to preach on the Day of Pentecost (cf Acts 2:3-4). Though the visual evidences be absent, the principle still applies: the Lord’s ministers have to confess: “...*necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!*” (1 Corinthians 9:16).

The word of God is to be as fire to the **hearers** of it – an urgent, imperative, motivating influence, driving them to action. So it proved in Emmaus (which name, pertinently, translates to ‘hot springs’). Of Cleopas and his companion it is recorded: “*they said one to another...*” (Luke 24:32). Having listened for two or three hours, they now talk for two or three hours more. They had ‘caught the preacher’s fire’! Still more: “*they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them ... And they told what things were done in the way...*” (v. 33, 35). They would not be hearers only, or talkers merely, but doers of the word (cf James 1:22), and that, immediately. Disregarding the lateness and the night, they rose up the same hour; undeterred by the distance, they returned from whence they had fallen; notwithstanding shame or self-abasement, they were repentant; despite their former disinclination, they sought out the gathered disciples once more; contrary to the sad communications they had previously, they came again with rejoicing, bearing these joyful tidings, telling what great things the Lord had done for them. Truly, how great a matter that initial fire had kindled within!

Such is the nature and effect of preaching when fashioned according to the Saviour’s supreme example. May God grant His churches a greater abundance of it, even in these dark days.

R. J. Steward

## EDITORIAL

The principle of the ‘family’ was instituted by God in the pre-Fall innocency of Eden, for the universal benefit and maintenance of human society. Almost as soon as it came into existence, this divinely-ordained pattern came under attack, as Genesis chapters 3 and 4 describe; and it has been imperilled by sin ever since. In the Western world, the past century has been particularly injurious to the family, with humanistic ideas and practices, and rampant immorality, grievously endangering it. Sad to say that the church has largely aided and abetted this decline, abandoning Biblical principles in favour of worldly philosophy – especially the errors of divorce and remarriage, and ‘feminism’ – to the great detriment of the family.

In more recent decades however, buoyed along by the wave of religious populism in America, there has been a revival of interest in family values – which have been placed front and centre of many church’s confessions, and produced a plethora of ecumenical campaigns and para-church organisations. While helpful to a degree, and superficially laudable, this swing to an opposite extreme has brought new errors of its own, which must be confronted. The language of these family-centred movements makes some grand claims, such as: ‘the family is the building block of the church’, or ‘the church is a family of families’. These demand closer scrutiny in the light of Scripture.

There is an obvious appeal in the notion of ‘household salvation’, or ‘family membership’ of the church. The falsehoods of Covenant Theology are founded upon these very errors. What Christian parent would not wish to convey some spiritual advantage to their children, or have some guarantee of their loved ones’ salvation too? Reference is often made to the Old Testament where evidence seems to be plentiful of God working with, and through, entire families or dynasties of people, over several generations. While it is a fact that God chose to act in such a way, in certain instances, in the Old Covenant era, it is folly to

conclude that this is a good, or desirable, mode of operation. Consider what this ‘family theology’ meant for the descendants of Dathan and Abiram (cf Numbers 16:25-33), Achan (cf Joshua 9:24-25) or Eli (cf 1 Samuel 3:12-14)! It is explained in this verse: *“I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me”* (Exodus 20:5).

It is one of the greatest glories of grace, and wonders of this New Testament age, that God **does not** deal with sinners according to their family lineage. For no matter how many generations of Christian forebears a person can reckon in their genealogy, they must ultimately arrive at Adam, the original sinner, of whom it is said: *“by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men”; “in Adam all die”* (Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:22). Adam’s global bequest is sin; the common inheritance of all his descendants is corruption. If God were to act in a ‘family-oriented’ way, and respect our woeful pedigree, the human race would be entirely doomed.

Instead it has pleased God to operate, not according to any law of familial inheritance, but according to the promise of His grace (cf Galatians 3:18). The Psalmist asks: *“If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”* (Psalm 130:3), and answers: *“He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him”* (Psalm 103:10-11). How is this possible? Central to the work of salvation is the miracle of new birth, which is accomplished by the Holy Spirit (cf John 3:5-7), and annuls all former lineages. Christ wields a sword that severs earthly unions (cf Luke 12:51-53), and calls His people to forsake their worldly ties, for His sake and the Gospel’s (cf Luke 14:26) – for God has *“predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will”* (Ephesians 1:5). In the final reckoning of the Last Day, the only family worth belonging to will be that one which transcends earth and heaven, which is named after the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf Ephesians 3:15).