

October - December 2022

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto Him, Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me. If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him. Philip saith unto Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto Him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works’ sake.” (John 14:1-11)

The opening verses of this chapter speak of the consternation and the forebodings in the minds of the disciples in the light of all that had been disclosed in the upper room. The Saviour knew this, and so sought to allay their fears with the words, “*Let not your heart be troubled*” (John 14:1). ‘True it is, I shall shortly be leaving you. My physical presence will be withdrawn, but that is no different to the God in whom you have always believed. If, therefore, you have believed in Him who is invisible, so must you have confidence in Me, though I be no longer with you in the flesh.’ This is the very principle of faith by which all Christ’s followers are to walk. Then did Christ direct their thoughts to the Father’s House (Heaven), their eternal home. This was to be their ultimate destination, their hope upon which they must focus, and not upon the ‘light affliction which is but for a moment’. They must not

look upon the things which are seen, for they are temporal; rather they must dwell upon those things which are not seen, for they are eternal (cf 2 Corinthians 4:17-18). “*I go to prepare a place for you*” (John 14:2). Christ the forerunner has gone on ahead to make all preparations for the believer’s arrival; and when we, as God’s children, leave this scene, it is but to go **home** with all the warmth, love, and security which that term conveys.

The words of verse three are strong consolation: “*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also*”. The Lord tells His disciples that when He goes away, they must not think it is forever. For at the appointed time, He will come again and take them all home, gathering them around Himself in one united family, to part no more. Never forget that God’s elect are a special people taken from earth and translated into the Kingdom of God. They are destined for a special place, and that eternally. When Christ speaks of coming again, He is speaking of His personal second advent at the end of this age. Exactly when that will be, no one knows. But what is known, is the certainty of it. It will usher in eternal glorification for the child of God; but for the unbelieving sinner it will be judgement and eternal damnation.

“*I will come again*” – the Lord will not send a summons from a distance, or in some mystical or supernatural way translate His people from earth, which would indeed be frightening. No, the Saviour in that Great Day will come for His own, and conduct them in person to the Father’s House. “*For the Lord **Himself** shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Notice too, the language is not ‘take’, or ‘fetch’, but rather is it “**receive you**”. During the period of time of the Saviour’s absence, the saints are

the special charge of the Holy Spirit; but when the last elect soul is saved and the body of Christ is completed, then will His work here be completed, and the Holy Spirit will hand them over, as it were, to the One who died for their salvation. Christ, our Lord and Saviour will personally receive us unto Himself. This is the great longing and desire of the Heavenly Bridegroom – to receive His bride. Her destiny is to be *“forever with the Lord”*; ‘where I am there ye shall be also’. This promise has been given before: *“If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be”* (John 12:26). The same is expressed by the Lord later in His intercessory prayer: *“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am”* (John 17:24). This is the destination, beloved; the Father’s House; to be forever with the Lord. How lovely to sing those words penned by James Montgomery:

“My Father’s house on high,	Ah! Then my spirit faints
Home of my soul, how near	To reach the land I love,
At times to faith’s foreseeing eye	The bright inheritance of saints,
Thy golden gates appear!	Jerusalem above”

“And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know” (John 14:4). This remarkable statement was evidently made to stir up the disciples. They were troubled and perplexed, as is revealed in verse 1. The Lord was going away, which greatly distressed them; and although the Saviour had now told them that He would be coming back again one day to receive them all to glory, yet they were still cast down. ‘Why is this?’ saith the Lord, ‘Stir up your memories; why should it come as such as shock to you? If you will only reflect, I have spoken on other occasions concerning this. You ought to know of these things by now!’

“Thomas saith unto Him, Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (John 14:5). This verse but shows how foolishly a disciple may talk when he becomes despondent. Here is a man who had actually been in the company of the Lord for three years, and heard His every word; yet now he says that he knew not where his Master was going, neither did He know the way. Thomas always seemed to be one

who was slow on the uptake, quite often was he full of doubts. Why was it? Simply because he had not yet registered and fully believed what the Lord had spoken. Are there not many Christians like this today? They spend a lot of time in Doubting Castle and become very low and spiritually distressed; and when one talks to such, and speaks of the wondrous promises of God, and of the hope of eternal glory, it seems to make little, if any, impact upon them. They have heard it all before like Thomas, but they fail to so believe as to rest upon it. By this the Adversary gains an advantage over them; for they have no ‘thus saith the Lord’ wherewith to ward Him off; and so they live in spiritual misery, lacking the assurance and joy of God’s salvation. Dear old John Trapp quaintly said: ‘Believers in this frame of mind are like worried people who are anxiously looking for their keys, when they have them in their pockets all the time’.

“*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.*” (John 14:6). J. C. Ryle points out that “this is a brilliant example of a foolish remark drawing forth a great truth from the Lord’s lips”. To the fretful complaint of Thomas, we owe one of the grandest texts of Scripture. This verse is such an utterance that no commentator or expositor can fully unfold or exhaust it. When the Lord says “*I am the Way*”, remember the context. It is the Father’s presence, His eternal home. He says “*I am the Way*” to it. Heaven can only be reached by the mediatorial work of Christ; faith in Him and His atonement is the key to realms of day. He that believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ is on the road; he is on the narrow way which leadeth unto life – life for ever more. Without Christ, men are as Cain (wanderers). “*They are all gone out of the way*” (Romans 3:12). Sadly, many may think that they will ultimately, somehow, reach heaven at the last, but in this they are deluded. Proverbs says: “*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*” (Proverbs 14:12). Christ Himself is the only way. He is not a guide to show men the path in which they ought to walk. No, no! I repeat, He is **Himself** the way.

But more, He says: “*I am . . . the **truth***”. Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God. Man’s first parents in Eden believed the Devil’s lie, and ever since humanity has been groping in ignorance and error. “*The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.*” (Proverbs 4:19); “*There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God*” (Romans 3:11); “*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). Men today have their own ideas and thoughts, but truth is not to be found in a system of philosophy. The theories which pour out of the great halls of learning are legion. The religions of the world are many. I am sure that Pontius Pilate voiced the perplexity of multitudes when he asked: “*What is truth?*” (John 18:38). There is but one answer to Pilate’s question, and that is **Christ**. Truth came by Jesus Christ (cf John 1:17). It is in Him and in Him alone are hid “*all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Colossians 2:3). What folly to ignore Him!

Young people reading this, you are busily engaged in your studies at school and you should be diligent in this; “*but seek ye first the kingdom of God*” (Matthew 6:33). Spiritual matters are infinitely more important than secular studies. You may master the sciences, become well-acquainted with the great events of history, be most proficient at geography, shine brilliantly at languages, be well up in world politics and international affairs; but of what value will it all be to you, if you know nothing of the truth as it is in Christ? Oh, there are countless numbers in torment, in the caverns of the lost, who wish they had studied the Scriptures as they have studied human textbooks. “*For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*” (Mark 8:36). “*That I may know Him*” (Philippians 3:10) was the consuming passion of the Apostle Paul. If you do not know Christ as your Lord and Saviour, dear reader, then you are under the power of the Devil, the father of lies. “*Ye know not the truth*” (1 John 2:21), being deceived by the Great Deceiver.

Nor is this all. Christ is the Way, and the Truth; He is also the **Life**. Christ is the emancipator from death. I love the word emancipate: It means to liberate, to release from bondage, to set free. Without Christ men are dead in trespasses and sins. Only Christ can set at liberty those who are in the bondage of death. Man is alive to the things of the world (very much so, perhaps); but while he walks according to the course of this world, he is dead to spiritual things. He certainly exists, but he has no spiritual life. The Lord Jesus said: *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10). The person who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ has passed from death unto life (cf John 5:24), for Christ is the Life.

The utmost importance of this is then emphasised by the closing phrase *“no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me”* (John 14:6). Christ is not merely ‘a way’ to the Father and His House in heaven. There is no other way. *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 3:11). *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12). *“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Timothy 2:5). The last clause of John 14:6 is a clear and distinct limitation. No person outside of Christ will ever enter Heaven. If Christ be rejected, all is lost. Then treat this matter with all gravity, I urge upon you.

“If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him.” (John 14:7). These next verses contain such deep, yea, mysterious truth. Necessarily so, for it is another of those sections that pertains to the Trinity. Whenever confronted with the union of Three Persons within the Godhead, mortals are faced with a truth which they are unable to fathom. Here, it is just the Father and the Son who are mentioned, two distinct Persons, yet inseparably united. Christ was more than a manifestation of God – He **was God** manifest in the flesh. The underlying truth here is this: the more one knows of Christ, the more one knows of the Father.

John 14:8: *“Philip saith unto Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us”*. I often wonder what Philip’s motive was in asking such a question. Perhaps he was like Moses who wanted a full display of eternal majesty when he said to Jehovah God: *“I beseech thee, shew me Thy glory”* (Exodus 33:18). Or perhaps this statement of Philip’s was included in Scripture to show how little was the knowledge that these twelve men had as yet of their Lord and Master. I personally believe this to be the reason.

“Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?” (John 14:9). This is undoubtedly a gentle rebuke from the Saviour. ‘You have been so long time with Me, Philip’. The Lord addresses him personally. Philip was one of the very first to be called. We read of his call in John 1:43. ‘For three years you have been with Me, Philip, yet you have never apprehended who I am. I may be in a servant’s form, but do you not realise that I am Emmanuel, God with men? How sayest thou, shew us the Father?’ The rebuke continues in verse 10: *“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works.”* ‘Do you not realise, Philip, that I am in the Father and the Father in Me? The words which I have spoken, the teachings which I have given, are His.’

It is very striking to note in this verse that Christ refers to His words as the Father’s works. The words spoken by Jesus of Nazareth produced the very works of God. *“Never man spake like this man.”* said the Jewish officers (John 7:46). He spake as one having authority. Indeed! For He had authority – divine authority. *“He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast”* (Psalm 33:9). The man Christ Jesus stood at the grave of Lazarus and said, *“Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth”* (John 11:43-44). In this midst of a raging sea, Christ stood up in the boat and said: *“Peace, be still . . . and there was a great calm”* (Mark 4:39). His words wrought the works of God.

“Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sake.” (John 14:11). This is rather solemn, or perhaps better described as sad. ‘If you cannot believe Me by what I have said, then surely you can believe by what you have seen?’ This is the level to which Christ had to descend when talking to His enemies: *“But if I do, though ye believe not Me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in Me, and I in Him”* (John 10:38). One can only conclude that up to this point the disciples were still living much by sight, rather than by faith. The indwelling Holy Spirit is the privileged lot of New Testament believers today, and how thankful they should be for a faith that can take the words of Scripture, and say from the heart: *“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life”* (1 John 5:20).

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

I conclude with affectionately warning those who think they are in the way to heaven, while they are not in Christ – ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ – that the path they are pursuing will, at the close of life, lead downward, not upwards. Let these be assured, that the incarnate, Only Begotten of God would not have lavished such expense of labouring and suffering and blood, to open and consecrate a path to the celestial blessedness, if means less costly could have accomplished the end. And that since it is the only way in which it is worthy of Jehovah to grant, so it is the only way in which it is possible for man to receive, access to a holy God and admission into a holy heaven. While our Lord proclaimed ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’, we would proclaim to all wayfarers for eternity that come within the reach of our voice, ‘This, this is the way: walk ye in it’ (cf Isaiah 30:21).

John Brown (1784 – 1858)

THE TRUE AND LIVING WAY

Christ is the true and living way, and this verse (John 14:6) points out the order of walking in, and making use of that way – that first we must ‘close with Him’ by faith as the Truth, and doing so, will find Him to be Life in our walking – which is to be perfected as our prize at the end of the journey. Whence learn:

1. Christ is very tender of the acknowledged ignorance of His own, and will take pains help it; for here He instructeth Thomas, who confessed his ignorance.
2. Whilst saints may look upon their infirmities, ignorance and doubts as very burdensome and useless, yet Christ can bring good out of them, to clear and confirm themselves and others the more; for Christ makes use of Thomas’s doubts to clear up this argument of consolation more fully, for the good of believers in all ages.
3. Those who rightly know heaven, and the way and means to wrestle through unto it, may easily [overcome] difficulties in the way. It is for this reason that Christ [mentions no more] the rough path of trouble which leads towards heaven – because the knowledge of heaven, and of the Father there, and of Christ as the way thither, is enough to swallow up all difficulties.
4. Man by nature is subject to many necessities and spiritual miseries, being inclined to go astray from the womb, and wanting a path wherein to walk towards happiness; being subject to error and seduction, and wanting light to discern the way of his happiness and to guide him in it. But being dead in sin legally and spiritually, is unable to walk in the way, though it be pointed out; and needs nothing less than eternal life to prevent his eternal misery. All these necessities can be inferred from this fact, that Christ must supply ‘the way, the truth, and the life’.

5. Christ is an all-sufficient remedy for all our wants. He is the way for wanderers, and the path wherein exiles may return towards lost happiness; He is the truth to lead them surely, and to point out their path unto them; and He is the quickener of His people, for ‘I am the way, the truth and the life’ saith He.
6. Christ is the way to heaven and to the Father, not only because it is through Him that we must obtain the knowledge of the Father, or as He points out the way to happiness as a Prophet; but as having by His merit and satisfaction as Priest, made a patent door whereby sinners may enter and approach to God; and being their effectual leader in that way as King. In all these respects, He is called ‘the way’ (cf Hebrews 10:19-20), so that through Him, sinners may come forward.
7. Christ also is the truth – not only essentially in Himself, and He from whom all truth is – but more especially, He is the true way to His people: partly in opposition to types and legal ceremonies, which were but shadows of this true way (cf John 1:17, Colossians 2:17); partly in opposition to all delusions and vanities of the world, whereby men think to attain happiness (all which, as they depart from Christ the true way, so they will prove a lie and not the truth); partly in respect of the promises whereby we are encouraged in our way (all which in Him are ‘yea and Amen’ cf 2 Corinthians 1:20); and partly in respect of His directing us in the way. He is not only a way wherein to walk, but a way that will direct the passengers in walking: by the infallible directions of His word, by the inward direction and illumination of his Spirit accompanying the same, and by His gracious providence hedging them in from many difficulties. In all these considerations it is Christ’s prerogative to be “the way and the truth”, so that saints may trust His guiding, and lean on their beloved.
8. It is Christ’s prerogative above all, that not only is He the truth, but the life also. For other ways cannot [sustain travellers], but they may

faint and die in them; nor can they lead to a blessed rest. But He is a way who quickeneth the dead when they are brought to it, and who furnisheth the passengers that walk in Him, so that they will walk and not be weary; and who is author of eternal life, who, living in Himself, and having merited life by his death, doth confer eternal life upon walkers at the end of their journey. Therefore is it subjoined “I am the life”.

9. The right method of making use of Christ as a way is first to close with Him as the truth, and in His Word of truth, and then to walk onwards, believing. Upon which, life will follow, both for the present and everlastingly; for this way is first “the truth”, then “the life”.
10. It is man’s chief misery to be separated from God, and his happiness to have access to Him and enjoy Him; for that is the advantage to be had in this way, even to come to the Father.
11. Christ is the way to God to the extent that there is no other besides unto which a man can lean, but it will deceive him; no saving knowledge of God can be had but by Him; our reconciliation, vocation, access to God in prayer, and final glorification, must be through Him and by Him, for, “no man cometh unto the Father but by Me”.

George Hutcheson (1618 – 1674)

“It will be most certainly known at last, that no-one of Adam’s fallen race ever found acceptance with God, or admission into the mansions of felicity, who refused to seek them by faith in the righteousness, atonement and mediation of our crucified Emmanuel; by reliance on His Word, who is essential Truth; and by seeking life to his soul from Him who is the Life itself.”

Thomas Scott (1741 – 1821)

BY ME KINGS REIGN

“Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: And He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings: He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.” (Daniel 2:20-21)

The Holy Scriptures contain many references to monarchs. In the 21st Century there are a dwindling number of places where such verses could be directly applied to persons literally holding that name and office. Britain, and certain Commonwealth countries, are among them. Whilst in the system of Constitutional Monarchy the Head of State has a purely ceremonial role, without any legislative or executive powers, their titles lend an added pertinence to those parts of God’s Word that speak of ‘kings’ or ‘princes’.

It is a system of government that incites much debate and invective between those who argue for its retention, or its revocation – with the question of ‘democracy’ often raised. But those who contest these points rarely perceive the truth of the matter: regardless of the mode of government, or the method of appointment, *“there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”* (Romans 13:1). It is neither a democratic vote nor family inheritance that places an individual in a position of authority, but **Divine Sovereignty**. The least knowledge of history will show the frequency with which anticipated lines of succession are dramatically altered, and the extent to which supposedly ‘democratic’ leadership is truly a popular choice, open to all. *“There are many devices in a man’s heart; [be they ‘absolute primogeniture’, or ‘proportional representation’] nevertheless **the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand**”* (Proverbs 19:21). The continual subversion of human expectation is a sure token of the working of God’s hand.

The United Kingdom has recently witnessed profound changes in its positions of power, with the departure of one prime minister, the

appointment of an unelected replacement, the death of its longest-reigning monarch, and accession of another, all occurring in the space of three days. To write off the timing of these events as mere coincidence would be folly of the worst kind (cf Psalm 14:1). Those that know it is God who “*removeth kings, and setteth up kings*” (and their modern-day equivalents) should be the most heedful of His solemn interventions in national affairs.

Biblical and secular history demonstrate how God often accomplishes His purposes through the leaders whom He appoints – whether those purposes be of blessing, or judgment: “*The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will*” (Proverbs 21:1). Thus the commencement, and end, of their terms of office could be a portent of either good or ill – as the successive reigns of Saul and David illustrate. In the case of the former, the Lord says: “*I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath*” (Hosea 13:11); while of the latter it is said: “*He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also He gave their testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, which shall fulfil all My will . . . For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers*” (Acts 13:22, 36). The difference could not be more pronounced, and illustrates the fundamental principle: “*The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts [i.e. a corrupt leader] overthroweth it*” (Proverbs 29:4).

The Apostle Paul experienced, and suffered under, the rule of various kings, procurators and Caesars, but still gave this inspired instruction: “*that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty*” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). In regard to the late queen, it may be said that such prayers were abundantly answered. The unparalleled 70 years of her reign have been ‘quiet’ and ‘peaceable’ ones for the Lord’s people in the main, and not obstructive of ‘godliness and honesty’. Her influence, albeit limited,

was benign: there is much to commend a monarch whose principal concerns were ‘duty’ and ‘propriety’, and who continued to quote the language of Christianity in a secular and godless age. It is not the purpose of this article to speculate or presume upon the true spiritual condition of the late queen. Despite the bold assertions of some, there is insufficient evidence in the public sphere upon which to form so serious a conclusion. Ultimately, neither popular opinion, or the platitudes of churchmen, have any bearing upon the question. As the successive biographies of Israel’s kings make clear, it is only how an individual appears “*in the sight of the Lord*” that counts for anything (cf Romans 14:4).

The same verse which speaks of God’s setting down and raising up of kings also declares: “*He changeth the times and the seasons*” (Daniel 2:21). The two events are not unconnected. The names of some monarchs have been used to describe distinctive periods of national history – and it seems likely that a second ‘Elizabethan Era’ has now come to a close. For the United Kingdom, the past seven decades have been characterised by huge advances in science and technology, and relative freedom from want and war, greatly increasing the health and wealth of the populace. Viewed from a humanistic perspective, it would appear as an unqualified success story. But with the rise in material prosperity has come moral and spiritual degeneracy on an appalling scale. The transformation almost defies description: basic Christian principles, still commonplace in the 1950s are now vilified and actively legislated against; criminal vices once punished by law are now promulgated and paraded in the streets; good is called evil, and evil called good (cf Isaiah 5:20). The royal family itself simply epitomises the iniquitous state of society at large (for example, in repeatedly abrogating those very standards of marriage relationships which brought their predecessor to the throne in an earlier generation).

Divine forbearance has its limits, as the Scriptures prove. Mercy long extended may be withdrawn. And as meteorological phenomena worsen, pandemics afflict the globe, war erupts in Eastern Europe,

plenty is turned to poverty by economic upheaval, and a long and peaceful reign is terminated – it is clear that a watershed moment has been reached. The times are not merely changing, they are being changed – and it is God in judgment who changes them.

The Word of God contains examples to illustrate and inform every aspect of the Christian life, and these present circumstances are no exception. Uzziah had the second-longest tenure of any of the kings of Judah, amounting to 52 years. He acceded to the throne at the tender age of 16, after a time of international conflict – 2 Chronicles 26 documents his life thereafter: publicly seeking the Lord, reversing the misfortunes of war, restoring town and country, and advancing the kingdom territorially and financially. His rule and influence extended to every aspect of national life – except one: the priesthood. Whether this prohibition rankled with him, whether he thought to unite state and church together, whether he would have liked to be regarded as the Supreme Governor of the temple, the Scriptures do not relate – but he tried to enter the Holy Place and offer incense there, against the priests’ protestations. And the Lord smote him with leprosy. On account of this illness, he had to observe quarantine. He was a symbolic Head of State divested of any power – which instead resided with a regent – while he advanced in years, and frailty.

The year that king Uzziah died (about 759 BC) would have been a momentous one for the population of Judah, and a date that long remained in their minds. Many would never have known another monarch. There was a state funeral at the kings’ burying-field, and the coronation of Jotham, his heir apparent (cf 2 Chronicles 26:23). It was a memorable year too for Isaiah the prophet – but for a far greater reason. He records: “*In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple*” (Isaiah 6:1). The inspired association of the two events in the record of the prophet was not simply a matter of chronological exactitude – a very pertinent contrast is being made between Divine

kingship and all lesser human equivalents. In every part of the description, the supremacy of God is displayed.

The king was dead; but “*the Lord liveth*”, and that eternally. The latter part of Uzziah’s reign had been veiled in obscurity and anonymity, hidden from sight; but Isaiah ‘**saw** the Lord’. A sombre aspect of the regency period would have been a vacant throne in the palace of Jerusalem; but here was a more glorious seat of power, wonderfully occupied (cf Revelation 4). Judah’s late monarch had been laid in a coffin and buried in the depths of the ground; but the Lord was ‘high and lifted up’. The extent of Uzziah’s authority was limited to the borders of his own land, and notably excluded the chief site of religious worship; but Isaiah beheld One whose rule actually centred upon the temple, and could not be contained there, whose glory spread outward and filled the whole earth (cf 1 Kings 8:27). Uzziah’s retinue of servants, forfeited on account of his illness, could wait upon him no more; but seraphim attended perpetually upon the Lord. Whatever expressions of honour or praise had been bestowed upon the former king, no earthly ruler was ever worthy of the title heralded by the angels there: “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts*”.

Such was the nature of the scene that unfolded to Isaiah’s wondering view, and the effect upon him was profound: “*Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips*” (Isaiah 6:5). Leaders among men have provoked a variety of emotions – from veneration and adoration, through inspiration and emulation, to detestation and rebellion. None but an incomparably Holy God could elicit conviction of sin, and this degree of self-abasement, even in His own saints (cf Daniel 10:7-11, Revelation 1:17, etc). This is not all, however, because with Him is also the remedy for sin, as at His direction comes a heavenly minister to apply the cure, and pronounce: “*Lo . . . thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged*” (v. 7). Here is a miracle of Divine authority and grace, for “*who can forgive*

sins but God only?” (Mark 2:7); He commandeth wind and waves, and sin and Satan are alike subject to Him – what manner of monarch is this?! Notice too His ability to direct and motivate the service of His people. “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*” (Isaiah 6:8) comes the summons, and – despite the impossibility of the task (v.9-12), the smallness of success (v.13) and the unfitness of the servant (v.5) – the acceptance and obedience is immediate, “*Here am I, send me*” – for “*Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power*” (Psalm 110:3). Who would hesitate to serve the cause of such a king, in whose hand is not only the work, but its outcome; who knoweth the end from the beginning, and whose counsel ever stands (cf Isaiah 46:9-10)?

Ceremonies lately observed in Britain have been described as a great show of pomp and pageantry, demonstrating the enduring influence and longevity of the monarchy. But viewed more objectively and spiritually, the very opposite is seen to be the case. What an indictment of man’s brevity, that ‘three score years and ten’ should be the longest reign on record – for what is that when compared to the millennia of human history; much less to the eternity of God? A casket draped in a royal standard is still a casket, however richly embroidered; a coffin is no less a coffin for having a bejewelled and gilded crown placed upon it. There is no mortal ruler who has any ‘power in the day of death’, or who can defend himself against the ‘king of terrors’ (cf Ecclesiastes 8:8, Job 18:14).

How inexpressibly more glorious do those familiar verses then become, which declare: “*Thy throne, O God, is **for ever and ever**: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre*”; “*Thy kingdom is an **everlasting** kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations*” (cf Psalm 45:6, 145:13). And so it must, and will be, for He “*...is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; **Who only hath immortality**, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen*” (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

R. J. Steward

UPON THE DEATH OF WILLIAM IV

Brethren, I invite you to learn from the present occasion, a salutary lesson, upon the comparative insignificance of all human greatness. Is it so, that monarchs go down to the tomb like other men; so certainly and so rapidly that it has become proverbial to say, “*Ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes*” (Psalm 82:7)? Is it true that ‘the sad accompaniments of a sick chamber are as conspicuous in the palace as they are in the cottage; and that all the prerogatives of the greatest monarchs on earth cannot purchase even a momentary exemption from the grasp of death’? Then learn from this fact, how little there is of real worth in all the pomp and splendour and pageantry of the world; how little reliance is to be placed upon the arm of man, even in the most exalted station upon earth; and how requisite it is to look beyond the sphere of human greatness for something that possesses a permanent and intrinsic value. While in rapid succession we behold the kings of this world going down to the dust from whence they were taken; while we see their crowns departing from them, their sceptres passing into other hands, let us lift up our eyes to that king eternal, immortal, invisible, who only hath immortality, and who dwells in the light of heaven – let us look with the eye of faith to our glorified Redeemer – to Him who has all power in heaven and earth committed to His hands – whose crown and throne are immutable – whose glory is infinite and eternal; and whose love, and grace, and power are, like all His other attributes, ‘the same yesterday, today, and forever’. He justly claims our entire allegiance. He is worthy of our best affections. In Him, without fear of disappointment, we may confidently trust. And happy will it be for you, my brethren, who are loyal to your earthly sovereign, if you are equally careful to render true allegiance to the King of Kings. There was weight and wisdom in the saying of a minister of former days: “Had I but served my God with half the zeal that I have served my king, He would not, in mine age, have given me over to mine enemies”.

John Gray, 1797 – 1868

EDITORIAL

Recent events have brought to the attention of the public at large, Christians amongst them, the language and nomenclature associated with the monarchy in Britain. One of the official titles in use, and embossed in an abbreviated form on practically every coin in circulation, is 'Fidei Defensor', or 'Defender of the Faith'. The present king, Charles III, is on record as having reservations about the terminology, preferring a more inclusive form of words, like 'defender of faith', or 'protector of faiths' – to the consternation of some Christians. Relief has recently been expressed that the original seems to have been retained. But here is a worrying example of the 'commandments of men' assuming the status of biblical doctrines, and man-made traditions rendering God's Word ineffectual (cf Mark 7:7, 13).

Consider the origins and significance of this term, 'Defender of the Faith'. One will look in vain to find it in the Scriptures, because it does not have its basis there. It stems instead from the church of Rome, who during the Middle Ages bestowed the name of 'Defensor Ecclesiae' (Defender of the Church) upon European 'Holy Roman Emperors', reflecting the belief that force of arms was necessary for the extension and preservation of Christian religion. Famously, the term 'Fidei Defensor' was first used in England of king Henry VIII, being granted by Pope Leo X in recognition of a treatise written by the king, denouncing Protestantism, published in 1521. He was defending 'The Faith' of Romanism, against the perceived threat of the Reformation.

Twenty-two years, six wives and a dramatic religious U-turn later, and Parliament passed a bill for the title to be used again by Henry VIII, and his successors; only 'The Faith' was now that of Anglicanism, to be defended against Popery, and any other systems of belief that failed to conform to the new state-sponsored religion. Henry's heirs all used the same 'style' in their turn: godly king Edward VI, murderous Mary Tudor (for whom its meaning reverted again to Romanism), and the

ecclesiastically ambivalent Elizabeth I. And so the pattern continued throughout history, with each successive monarch boasting in the title of ‘Defender of the Faith’, be they Protestant, Papist, profligate or profane. Over the following five centuries, only one national ruler refused to adopt it – perhaps the one who was most concerned with conformity to the Scriptures, religious freedom, and the defence of Truth – namely, Oliver Cromwell. This in itself, speaks volumes.

There are four important lessons for the Lord’s people to learn in connection with this title ‘Defender of the Faith’. **Firstly**, that whatever its long history and other associations may be, it is fundamentally a vestige of Romanism, and therefore to be eschewed. It embodies one of the most grievous errors of that false system – that the promotion of ‘Christianity’ necessitates and justifies the use of force and physical violence. This policy has directly caused the deaths of countless martyrs through the ages, and is totally at variance with the Word of God (cf John 18:36, 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, Ephesians 6:12). The long shadow of Rome continues to darken the doctrine and practice of the church.

Secondly, whatever ‘The Faith’ has been made to mean by the various holders of this title, it has never meant: “*the faith ... once delivered unto the saints*” (Jude 3), or “*the faith of God’s elect*” (Titus 1:1). Present-day, evangelical Christians, of an independent and baptistic persuasion, might imagine that they could take some comfort in this royal title, as though it afforded to them a degree of privilege, or protection. This is a false assumption. So-called ‘Defenders of the Faith’, have through the ages burned Bibles, martyred the saints, displaced pilgrims, ejected dissenters, imprisoned non-conformists, and outlawed the Truth. And ‘The Faith’ being defended today is that ritualistic, ecumenical Anglicanism, brought out on special occasions, that stands for nothing, and embraces everything, and is so beloved of the world’s media for its political correctness, and guaranteed absence of any real Christianity. Believing child of God – this is not your Faith! This is not your religion! The defence of such errors is an offence to you.

Thirdly, the Saviour's example and teachings in the New Testament are clearly opposed to honorific titles and the aggrandisement of individuals in relation to the church (cf Luke 18:19, 22:24-27). The use of 'rabbi', 'master', or 'father' as terms for religious offices is expressly forbidden (cf Matthew 23:8-10) on the basis of an essential principle: in the context of God's people, these are roles which belong **to Him alone**. It is a dreadful sin for mortal men to assume for themselves the names and titles of Deity – but multitudes of professed Christians are guilty of it – whether it be 'Holiness' (cf Luke 1:49), 'Lord' (cf Ephesians 4:5), 'Father' (cf Matthew 23:9), 'Reverend' (cf Psalm 111:9), 'Excellence' (Psalm 8:1, 9), 'Worship' (cf Matthew 4:10), and all the associated superlatives. What then must God's Divine opinion be, when a mortal, sinful man dares to be called the 'Head', or 'Supreme Governor' of the church (cf Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18), or presumes to be 'The Defender of the Faith'? The commandment is clear: "*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain*" (Exodus 20:7).

Fourthly, let true Christians rejoice in the glorious fact that there **is** a Defender of the Faith, and of the Faithful: "*Yea, **the Almighty shall be thy defence***" (Job 22:25). The great office-bearer and title-holder is God Himself; in light of which: "*let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because Thou defendest them: let them also that love Thy name be joyful in Thee*" (Psalm 5:11). 'What need have we of creature-aid? The power to save is Thine!' The Psalmist delights in this truth, and repeats it time and again (cf Psalm 7:10; 59:1, 9, 16, 17; 89:18, etc); the prophets take up the wonderful theme – for this work of God's is not merely temporal and passive, but eternal and assured, for, "*defending also He will deliver*" (Isaiah 31:5). Then let us gratefully sing:

“Beneath the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
And **our defence is sure.**”