

Scripture Truth

The Gospel in Job
Christian Ambition
Lessons from James
The Anointing of David
Wonderful Words of Life
A Look at Nehemiah for Today

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SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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Wonderful Words of Life

“Go...and speak to the people all the words of this life.”

Acts 5:20

“Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

Colossians 3:16

Sing them over again to me,
wonderful words of life!
Let me more of their beauty see –
wonderful words of life,
God’s sweet in-compelling
sinners to His dwelling,
beautiful words! believable words!
wonderful words of life!

Words first spoken by the Lord,
wonderful words of life!
Words confirmed by them that heard,
wonderful words of life;
Spirit’s attestation
seals so great salvation,
not-to-spurn words, not-to-*burn* words!
Christ-bearing words of life.

Words that mirror the Saviour’s face,
celestial words of life!
All God’s majesty, all His grace,
glorious words of life.
Christ’s compassions inner
greet me, sheer a sinner -
self-shaming words! wonderful words,
wonderful words of life!

Words that our whole heart lay bare,
wonderful words of life!
All our sins as *sins* declare,
wonderful words of life!

Words that wound – to heal us,
to ourselves reveal us!
Serious words, wonderful words,
wonderful words of life!

Words that tell of a reckoning day –
ridiculed words of life;
warn to flee from its wrath away,
words of the Book of Life!
Words which can’t be broken,
words our Lord has *spoken*.
Terrible words – wonderful words,
wise-making words of life.

Words reporting from Calvary –
once-for-all words of life –
where my Substitute died for me,
utterest words of life:
God His love declaring,
Christ my sins’ wrath bearing,
sorrow-full words, soberest words,
heaven-opened words of life!

Threefold witness of Christ arisen
– arresting words of life!
Scripture, apostles, and Spirit’s mission
– reproving words of life!
Man’s pretension ended,
Christ supreme, ascended,
many-crowned Lord! dominant Lord!
obesant words of life!

Resonant words with the Saviour's fame,
faith-to-faith words of life,
clouds of incense of Christ's pure Name,
every-place words of life!
In and out of season;
for our hope the reason;
every-race words, every-case words,
all-men-grace words of life!

Wonderful words of sins forgiven!
God's very word of life!
Makes me citizen *now* of heaven –
world-judging word of life!
Grace beyond condition
working soul-contrition,
cross-secured word, Spirit-pledged word,
guaranteed word of life!

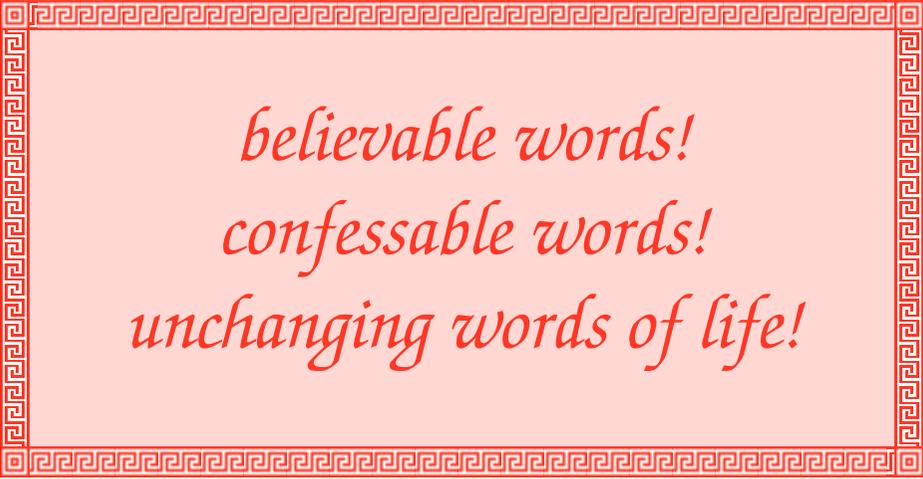
Words that lift to the highest height,
heavenliest words of life!
Graced in Christ who is God's delight,
Christ-gaining words of life!
Spirit, not the letter,
bringing something *better*;
ear-never-heard, Spirit-declared,
thirst-quenching words of life!

Words to *stop*, as Almighty's will
Israel calls to life,
footstool makes Christ's refusers still –
Ruler from midst of strife!
Living saints up-raptured,
by His loved voice captured!
heavenly words, Face-seeing words!
Father's-house words of life!

Words that measure the Father's love –
measureless cost of life!
Son beloved before worlds, to give
- infinite WORD OF LIFE!
God the Father – willing,
God the Son – fulfilling,
God the Spirit – outpouring
fills us with adoring –
worshipful words! wonderful words!
wonderful words of life!

*believable words! confessable words!
unchanging words of life!*

after P.P. Bliss



*believable words!
confessable words!
unchanging words of life!*

Christian Ambition

George Stevens

The self-seeking and self-serving character of the world around us contrasts markedly with Christian priorities. Each year that passes serves only to highlight this growing divergence. This article challenges us all as to what those priorities should be.

Introduction

Is there room for ambition in the Christian life? Scripture reminds us of three important areas in which each believer needs to be ambitious. It will be helpful to look at each of these in turn.

The same Greek word, ‘*philotimeomai*’, occurs three times in the New Testament and is translated variously in the Authorised Version as ‘labour’, ‘strive’ and ‘study’. W.E.Vine in his *Dictionary of New Testament Words* writes, “‘*philotimeomai*’, literally, to be fond of honour (‘*phileo*’, to love; ‘*time*’, to honour), and so, actuated by this motive, to strive to bring something to pass, to be ambitious, to make it one’s aim.”

The ambition to pioneer the Gospel

Paul could write, “For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. Yea, so *have I strived* to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation” (Romans 15:18-20).

Paul had ‘fully preached’ or ‘made complete’ the Gospel of Christ from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum. Paul accredits the obedience of the Gentiles, in word and deed, as the work of Christ through himself. He acknowledges that there can be no fruit in the Gospel unless Christ is working. At the same time, human instruments are used by Christ to achieve that end.

The way that Paul phrases the beginning of v.18: “I will not dare to speak of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me...” tells us that he would not accept credit for the labours of others. V.20 certainly indicates that others had been preaching. It was Paul’s ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ had not already been named. He had no intention of preaching where another servant was actively involved in the proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles. He would not interfere in another servant’s area of work. So he writes, “To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man’s line of things made ready to our hand” (2 Corinthians 10:16).

A float fisherman knows the annoyance of others muscling in on his area of fishing. Having arrived about dawn, he throws in groundbait to form a carpet of fish food in

his selected area of fishing. He sets up his rod and tackle and begins fishing. With every cast, he throws in more loose feed, making the area attractive to the fish. After a few hours of patient labour, the fish are usually being caught and reeled in. Should another fisherman come along and attempt to fish the same area, you can imagine the frustration and even anger the first one there would feel.

There was once a gathering of the Lord's people that, because of subsidence of the building in which they met and the desire for extra space for the Lord's work, sought to move elsewhere. A hall was found that would be suitable. The question was asked, "Are there other churches in the area because we do not want to seem to be building on another man's foundation?" The answer came back, "No, there aren't". The hall was purchased. When the move had taken place, it was found that there were, in fact, several Christian churches already active in the area. Consequently, the witness there has not proved as fruitful as might have been.

The verses also show how important it is publicly to preach the Gospel, whether in the open air, over the airwaves, or from platforms in Gospel halls, churches or chapels. The word 'preach' is a translation of the Greek word, 'euangelizo', meaning, 'to announce good news'. Our word, 'evangelize' is derived from it. It is used in Acts 5:42: "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ". Note, firstly, how teaching and preaching are placed alongside one another here. Secondly, they are done both publicly (in the temple) and privately (in the houses). Do we have both teaching and preaching in our local assemblies?

In Acts 14:15-17, we find the apostle and his companions preaching the Gospel and publicly healing a cripple. The people thought they were gods. Paul had to restrain them saying, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you,

and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Publicly preaching the Gospel can, as Paul and his companions found, bring with it many problems. These include: people begging for money, verbal and violent opposition from unbelievers and even so-called Christians, despising or criticising the work. Yet the experience of preaching in the open air is invaluable in helping one's growth as a witness

for our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, it leads to personal evangelism as well, because people who are interested will speak with, or ask questions of, individual servants of the Lord who are part of the witnessing team. Are you exercised that the Lord sends out evangelists? Don't limit yourself to prayer but "Go ye also into the vineyard..." (Matthew 20:4).



*Go ye also
into the
vineyard*

It is worth noting from Scripture some key characteristics of the preacher and the preaching.

“And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them” (Acts 16:10). Here we see that Paul was *led by the Spirit as to the place and the time* for preaching the Gospel.

“So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also” (Romans 1:15). Paul was a preacher who was *prepared to preach*.

“And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” The preacher *must be sent by the Lord and is to be honoured*.

“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” (1 Corinthians 1:17). The preacher *must be dependent upon God* when preaching the Gospel.

“What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:18). Paul would accept no wage for preaching the Gospel. The Gospel *is to be preached free of charge*.

“To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen...” (Galatians 1:16). *The preacher of the Gospel reveals Christ*.

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). *The preacher should be marked by humility*.

Today, great emphasis is being placed on personal evangelism. That is good as long as it is balanced with the public proclamation of the Gospel. The latter should not be despised by Christians. The declaration of the Good News of Christ in public will bring its reproach as well as its blessing. Dare we venture to say that it costs the servant more to proclaim Christ publicly than it does to speak of Him privately? It is certainly fair to say that both are needed.

The ambition to be well pleasing to the Lord

Next, we come to the unswerving aim of Christians to be well pleasing to the Lord: “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. *Wherefore we labour*, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:8-10).

The Greek word translated ‘accepted’ in the A.V. is ‘euairestos’ meaning ‘fully agreeable’ i.e. ‘acceptable (-ted)’ or ‘well pleasing’.

In the context of this chapter, Paul is speaking about our bodies as tabernacles or tents. They may be weak or worn, but God has a new tent ready for us in the day of resurrection! In the meanwhile, it may be necessary to leave this tent behind and go to be with Christ (absent from the body and present with the Lord). The apostle expresses the willingness of believers that this be so.

He then goes on to say that he, and his fellow Christians, labour (or, are ambitious) in order to be accepted (well pleasing) to the Lord. He also reveals that we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (or better, God). There we will give an account of our lives to Him who knows all things – words, actions, motives. It will be helpful to look in detail at those qualities of life which Scripture teaches are acceptable to God.

In Romans 12:1-2, we see an on-going commitment of life to God: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, *acceptable unto God*, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”.

Our God-given nature is fully expressed through the body. By it, we would shun sin; be marked by faith and love; live disciplined lives; and overcome the world. All these are involved in ‘a living sacrifice’. It expresses a life fully lived in the will of God with the assurance that all things work together for good to them that love Him – to those who are the called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). His will, no matter how many difficulties it seems to throw up, is always the best option for us. Just look at the life of Christ, with all its shame, sorrow and suffering. In the will of God, all that has worked out to His honour and glory.

How do we know God’s will? He has provided two main ways of revealing this. Firstly, we have His word. Secondly, we are able to commune with Him. One without the other will lead to uncertainty. The combination of both will guide us in a sure way. In addition, circumstances may indicate the path He wants us to take (but should not dictate our actions without Him). Going forward cautiously and prayerfully may lead to the opening or closing of doors of opportunity or blessing presented to us. May the Lord develop our spiritual senses and understanding so that we may each more readily discern His will!

Romans 14:15-19 tells us that we please God by being marked by righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost as we serve God: “But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ *is acceptable to God*, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another”.

Ephesians 5:8-12 reminds us that God is pleased when we walk as children of light: “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) proving *what is acceptable unto the Lord*. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret”. We must, therefore, have nothing to do with that which is wrong, but rather speak out against it.

Philippians 4:18-19 informs us that sacrificial giving to needy saints rises as a sweet smell to God: “But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice *acceptable, wellpleasing to God*. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus”. How much do we give to the Lord’s people and His work?

*His will is
always the
best option
for us*

Colossians 3:20 reminds us that children can please God by obeying their parents: “Children, obey your parents in all things: for *this is well pleasing* unto the Lord”. As a young lad, I delighted in playing out; but there was one thing that spoiled my fun – time. In the lateness of the evening, I would hear my mother calling me in. I ignored her. If she chased me, I ran for the nearest hill, knowing that her asthma would cause her to give up the chase. I thought that staying out was worth the spanking I would get when I returned home! I knew some of the sorrow that my disobedience caused my parents, but I did not then realise the grief that I was causing the God who delights to bless. The Lord Jesus bore my sins in

His own body on the tree – every one of them! In retrospect, would obedience to my parents have somehow lightened His suffering for me?

Hebrews 12:28-29 encourages us to have grace in order to please God in our service: “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby *we may serve God acceptably* with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire”.

The ambition to walk honestly before unbelievers

In 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12, Paul writes, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; *and that ye study* to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing”.

The Thessalonian believers were marked by brotherly love in which Paul encourages them to superabound. However, the verse shows that brotherly affection is directly

linked also to love in a social or moral sense. This love is unconditional. Both are to be found in believers who are acceptable to God. But the ambition in these verses goes further. The Thessalonians were to aim earnestly to “be quiet”. The Greek word is ‘hesuchazo’, meaning ‘to refrain from labour, speech or meddling in people’s affairs’. In the context of this verse, it means the opposite of being disorderly. Reference to this is made in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12: “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any should not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread”.

*The devil
finds work
for idle
hands*

The Thessalonians were being ‘loungers about the market place’ or, in our usage, ‘lazy, good-for nothings’. It is certainly true that the devil finds work for idle hands. These people were causing unrest among the Thessalonian saints. By asking that they aim to be quiet, the apostle is encouraging them to follow those things that lead to peace. These lazy brethren were also busybodies. They were continually meddling in the affairs of other believers. Paul would rather that they focussed instead on getting their own affairs right.

They were also to work with their own hands. The word used for ‘work’ means ‘toil’. They had to work hard! They were not to use the coming of the Lord as an excuse for idleness. Paul had set them the example in that he was a tentmaker and supported himself in the service of the Lord. The Lord Jesus gives us a particular example of work in that He was a carpenter for much of His life. In this way, He gives a special dignity to manual labour. It is customary for Jewish children to learn a trade, regardless of the wealth of their parents, because manual labour is highly respected in that culture. Do the Scriptures encourage apprenticeships for us even if we are marked by academic success?

Conclusion

The Christian who has these ambitions will be respected not only by fellow believers, but also by people of the world. The world still approves of people who lead honest and decent lives, whether Christian or not. The Christian who lives in this way is adorned with the doctrine of God – the word for ‘honestly’ means ‘decorously’. Are we dressed in the comeliness of Christ on a daily basis? Are we ambitious to be fully agreeable to the Lord? Do we have an unswerving aim to preach the Gospel?

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.

K.B. Wilkinson

Lessons from James

Part 4 – Chapter 4:11-5:20

David Anderson

The ever practical James continues his series of exhortations right to the end. In this final part of this series, he challenges us today on so many relevant issues: what we say, our dependence upon God, our attitude to wealth, our need of patience, being true to our word, and the power of prayer. This article is based on a talk first given on London's Premier Christian Radio.

A recent delay in a planned business trip meant that I had to reorganise some domestic arrangements. It was a timely reminder of James' admonition: "...you do not know what will happen" (4:14). We will find that each lesson from this final part of the Epistle of James is so practical for us today!

Speak no evil

First of all, James concludes his exhortations on ways to achieve peace within the church community with the instruction: "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren" (4:11). (Generally in this epistle, the address "brethren", "my brethren" or "my beloved brethren" indicates the introduction of a new topic or some emphasis.) Although Christians tend not to slander each other to the world outside, it is so easy for them to indulge in this behaviour inside the Christian fellowship. In vv.11,12, James explains why this is wrong. To speak evil of one another is to speak evil of the law which, by not being observed, is, in effect, criticised. Furthermore, God is the only Lawgiver and, as such, is the only Person capable of judging properly. James has already pointed out that, even in judgment, God

is merciful (2:13). God can then either save or destroy. We have a tendency to condemn, even on the basis of incomplete evidence. But the omniscient God is the Saviour God, as the Lord Jesus said, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17).

If the Lord wills

James has already used strong words for his blunt exhortations in vv.7-10: submit to God! resist the devil! draw near to God! cleanse your hands, you sinners! purify your hearts! lament! mourn! weep! humble yourselves! Now he strengthens this approach in the next two sections by the use of the words, "Come now" (4:13; 5:1).

First of all, businessmen who scheme their activities independently of God are denounced. They have plans, including diary entries (today or tomorrow, a year here or there); with personnel, places and activities all identified (we, such a city, to buy and sell); and the outcome predicted (we'll make a profit!). This boasting is evil because:

1. There is no guarantee of even another day – “You... say, “...tomorrow we will go...” whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow” (vv.13,14).
2. Life is very fragile, transient and unpredictable, so ready to disappear from earth into eternity: “For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (v.14).

*You do not know
what will happen
tomorrow*

3. They were proud, ambitious and arrogant (v.16). Remember the successful farmer of the parable in Luke 12! He was so self-confident that he thought to build greater barns, to get goods for many years, so that he could take it easy!
4. God was not included in their plans – “Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that” (v.15). (In Luke 12, God said to the farmer, who similarly had no thought of Him, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you”.)

As Christians, we should always qualify any plans we make by admitting that they are subject to the will of God.

Otherwise we, too, shall be guilty, as v.17 states: “Therefore to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin”. Sin is not only doing what’s wrong; it is also *not* doing what is right!

A God-dependent attitude completely changes our view of life, especially that of working for a living and enjoying those things which God has given us. In all our circumstances, we need to seek the will of the Lord: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD” (Proverbs 16:33). When we allow for His will in each and every plan we make, we prove “what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).

Ill gotten riches

Next, James turns upon those who had achieved their ambitions and had become very rich. He delivers his second severe admonition in 5:1-6. Some Bible commentators think he wasn’t addressing Christian believers in these verses, because he does not call them ‘brethren’. However, we must not use this as an excuse for ignoring his message! The traders of 4:13-17 may have been occupied with lawful pursuits in accord with Christian ethics, but they had ignored the uncertainty of life.

In the first six verses of ch.5, the rich are told to repent because their ungodly ways would not go unpunished:

1. Terrible things were coming upon them soon (v.1).
2. Their provisions for future security were rapidly disappearing, leaving them exposed (vv.2,3,5). Riches were rusting through disuse, garments were moth-eaten by infrequent use,

their silver and gold were losing their value through hoarding. They had heaped up treasure for the difficulties of the last days, but they should have listened to the Lord's advice (Matthew 6:19-21).

3. These wealthy people were facing judgment because they had become fraudulently rich (v.4). The distressing cries of their employees, whom they had cheated, had been heard in heaven, heard by the avenging Almighty God (v.4 – the Lord of Sabaoth is an Old Testament name for God as the LORD of Hosts). They had lived in pleasure and wanton luxury (v.5). They had selfishly indulged themselves and neglected their responsibilities as stewards of the good things that God had given them. Finally, they had used their power and influence in corrupt ways so that innocent people were being brought to court, wrongly punished, and even murdered (v.6)!

*The love of
money is a root of
all kinds of evil*

These verses must pose a searching challenge to us in this materialistic, pleasure seeking 21st century, for these social injustices still abound. We need to take careful note of the warnings of Scripture:

“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows...Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:9,10,17-19). We need to follow the example of Moses who “by faith...[chose] rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward” (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Patience is a virtue

James starts his concluding remarks at 5:7. These conclusions summarise all he has written about to his fellow-countrymen, who had been forced to flee their homeland, Judea. James wanted them to focus on the Lord, rather than on the many trials and temptations they were encountering in the Roman world. “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.” The Jewish farmer was an appropriate example for them to follow. He relied upon God to provide the early rain (to germinate the seeds he had sown in the autumn) and the latter rain in spring (to mature and ripen the

crop), before seeing any fruit for his labours. They, too, were to be patient in waiting upon God's time. Their hearts needed to be established in the certainty of the Lord's imminent return (v.8). They would then receive the Lord's approval and the crown of life – the fruit of their spiritual harvest.

It is so easy to get discouraged, especially when experiencing hardships and injustices for simply wanting to be true to the Lord. The message of v.8 is especially comforting: "You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand". If the Lord's coming was near then, it must be much closer now! It is so easy to be distracted by the busyness of life, the here and now, and to forget that the Lord is coming. Then a self-indulgent lifestyle, with all its accompanying sinfulness, is just a step away!

It is so easy, too, when experiencing difficulties in the world, for Christians to start grumbling, criticising and blaming others in the fellowship. Hence James advises: "Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" (v.9). We need constantly to remind ourselves that our lives will be assessed at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:7-11; Romans 14:7-13). It would be a good thing if each one of us thought, as we meet for Christian fellowship, "The Judge is standing at the door!" Then love and peace would preside!

As a second example of patience, James mentions the Old Testament saints who had walked the pathway of faith: "My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of

suffering and patience" (v.10). Sufferings are brought about by the hostile attitude of unbelievers and, sadly, sometimes by fellow believers. Patience is enduring those adverse circumstances. Daniel, Ezekiel and Jeremiah can be readily cited as good examples. Their lives were hard and difficult. They had to endure much opposition to the messages they faithfully declared from God. Jeremiah was put in a pit as a traitor and Daniel was slandered. But they remained faithful, as Hebrews 11 shows. They were blessed by God: "As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered" (v.11, NIV). The Lord Jesus promises similar blessings to us (Matthew 5:11,12).

However, there are also present rewards, as James shows from his third example of patience, the outstanding Old Testament saint, Job. Job exhibited the most remarkable features of perseverance in extreme adversity. He lost his wealth and his beloved children. Then he lost his health. His wife turned against him, saying, "Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). Even his friends turned against him, accusing him of being a hypocrite and, therefore, deserving of the things which had happened to him, which they took as being God's punishment. Even though Job did not understand what was happening to him, he remained faithful to God: "Though [God] slay me, yet will I trust in Him...He also shall be my salvation" (Job 13:15,16).

Not only are we to learn from Job's example, but we are to appreciate how his life displays the full-heartedness of God. In v.11, James calls this "the end of the Lord – that the Lord is very compassionate and

merciful”, a very strong way of describing God’s love for His servant. God had His own gracious purpose in allowing Satan access to Job. Job learned from this extreme trial: “But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold...He is unique, and who can make Him change? And whatever His soul desires, that He does” (Job 23:10,13). Job was humbled and God was glorified, which is what we should desire about any trials that we are called to endure.

Do not swear

As a first priority, James requires that believers live honest lives, lives beyond reproach. “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes”, and your “No”, “No”, lest you fall into judgment” (v.12). Am I known as a Christian with integrity? True Christian character requires few words; a simple affirmation or denial should be sufficient for anyone to believe me.

The power of prayer

James finishes his letter by expanding his teaching of the grace of God with seven references to prayer. The suffering saint who finds himself in trouble or in difficult circumstances can pray (v.13). In keeping with 1:5, it is to be a prayer for wisdom to understand the situation, to discern God’s will in it, and to seek His glory through it. However, the believer is encouraged to sing psalms when things are going well. (Such psalms might be personal compositions reflecting joy in God.) It is good also to know that God gives “songs in the night” (Job 35:10).

When the missionaries were suffering in the Philippian jail, Luke poignantly records, “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God” (Acts 16:25).

Next James informs us of a prayer method which may be used by a believer who has some serious illness. He can call the elders of the church. They can pray over him whilst anointing him (using oil, the medical agent in use in those times) and invoking the name of the Lord, “and the prayer of faith will save the sick” (v.15). The sick person must have faith that he will be made well, and the elders must have the faith both that the person is genuine, and that it is the Lord’s will. The promise, “will save...and...will raise him up” is all-important. It emphasises restoration rather than healing. This is further highlighted at the end of v.15, where the possibility of the illness being due to sin is stated: “And if he has committed sins (or, has been constantly sinning), he will be forgiven”. This is not a cure for all ills. It is for the exercise of faith, mainly by the person who is ill, relative to the mind of God for his specific situation.

James continues to encourage his readers not to hide sin, but to make a habit of confessing. This is to be done in church, amongst believers in the fellowship. It provides a powerful opportunity for the dynamite, prayer, to be used – “that you may be healed” (v.16). Effective prayer is prayer by righteous people – a great challenge as we think of what James means by “righteousness” in this letter about practical religion. Elijah is identified as an example in this respect. He prayed for

drought and then, three and a half years later, for rain. To encourage us, James describes him thus: “Elijah was a man just like us” (v.17, NIV).

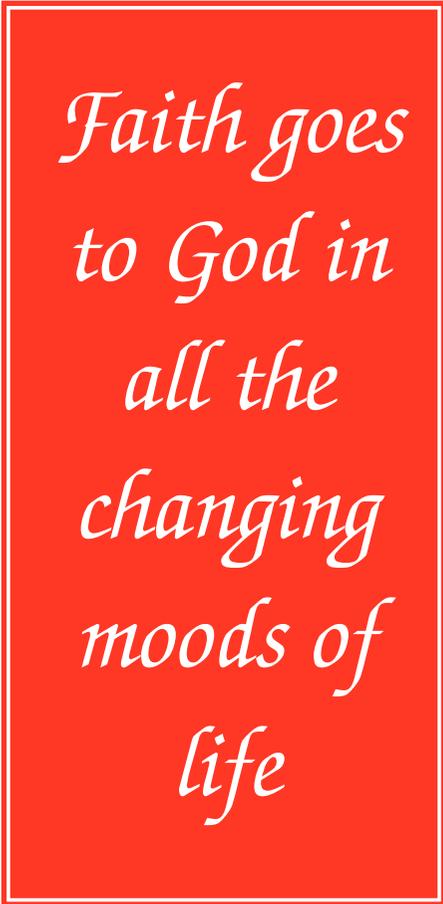
The letter closes with an exhortation for the practice of shepherd care amongst the people of God – to go after the wandering and erring believer. A wonderful promise is given: “...he who turns a sinner from his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (v.20). This is practical religion, which obeys the royal law, as Peter also exhorts: “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins” ” (1 Peter 4:8; see also Proverbs 10:12).

Summary

The following quotation usefully concludes this series on James: “And so we come to the end of this practical epistle, in which faith is on trial. We have seen faith tested by the problems of life, by unholy temptations, by obedience to the Word of God. The man who says he has faith has been challenged to exhibit it by avoiding partiality or snobbishness and to prove it by a life of good works. The reality of faith is seen in a person’s speech; the believer learns to yield his tongue to the Lordship of Christ. True faith is accompanied by true wisdom; the life of envy and strife is exchanged for that of practical godliness. Faith avoids feuds, struggles and jealousies that spring from covetousness and worldly ambition. It avoids a harsh, critical spirit. It avoids self-confidence which leaves God out of life’s plans. Faith stands trial by the way it earns and spends money. In spite of oppression, it manifests fortitude and

endurance in view of the Lord’s return. Its speech is uniformly honest, needing no oaths to attest it. Faith goes to God in all the changing moods of life. In sickness, it first looks for spiritual causes. By confession to God and to those who have been wronged, it removes these possible causes. Finally, faith goes out in love and compassion to those who have backslidden” (from the *Emmaus Bible School study book on James*).

Your faith and mine are on trial each day. What is the Judge’s verdict?



*Faith goes
to God in
all the
changing
moods of
life*

A Look at Nehemiah for Today

Part 7 – A personal attack (6:1-19)

Ted Murray

The devil will use any and every opportunity to frustrate the work of God in the church today, just as he did in Nehemiah's day. We need to heed the lessons of Nehemiah so that we will recognise these efforts of the devil and not be found doing his work. We need to be about our Lord's business only!

The subtle attack of friendship

In this chapter, we come back to Nehemiah's personal history. The previous chapter was almost a parenthesis, where Nehemiah dealt with wrong doings amongst his own people. But now, in ch.6, the old enemies of Israel re-appear. It may be that we do not read of these adversaries in ch.5 because the people of God were doing their work for them! But now the method of attack has changed. It is no longer ridicule or outright opposition. Something far more subtle, friendship, is used to try to deflect Nehemiah from his God given task.

It is good to see that Nehemiah is fully aware of the situation. The breaches in the wall have been repaired, but the doors in the gates had not yet been hung. Sadly, there are many in the church today who are unaware that there is still work to do. They turn up to one service a week, usually on a Sunday morning, but rarely at other times. Consequently, they are unaware of the needs of those in the church and of those tasks that need to be done.

Nehemiah was fully aware of the need to finish the walls. The testimony of God was of great importance; the need for separation from outside influences was of

equal importance. Nehemiah had his priorities right. Consequently, he was not taken in when this message of so-called friendship came (v.2). Nehemiah realised that this offer of friendship was false; its intention was to do him harm. This is surely a lesson for today that any overture of friendship from non-Christians needs to be examined with care. It may detract the believer from the task the Lord has given him to do. Nehemiah's reply to the invitation was masterful: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" (v.3). Are we as fully aware of the task in hand, of its importance and urgency in relation to the testimony of the Lord today? The hymn, "There's a work for Jesus none but you can do" challenges us as to the importance of the work before us, and the shortage of time in which to complete it. "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23).

Nehemiah was marked by faithfulness. He had been given a commission and nothing was going to detract him from completing this task. Sanballat and his friends, the Samaritans, were marked by pretence: "They feared the LORD, yet

served their own gods” (2 Kings 17:33). Like some in Christendom today, they were professors only, pretending to owe allegiance to the Lord but not serving Him.

The enemy is not deterred by this first refusal. Four times they sent this same invitation and four times they received the same answer! The same tactic is still used today – invite them often enough and they may be shamed into accepting! This method was used very successfully by Delilah on Samson (see Judges 16), and caused his downfall and death. Let us remember Nehemiah’s successful method of dealing with this kind of attack. The answer is, “Sorry. I have work to do.”

Lies and criticism

Having failed with their conciliatory approach, the enemy changes tactic. Still pretending to be friendly, they attack Nehemiah in an open letter detailing three things that had supposedly come to their ears. To verify these reports, Sanballat names his source. The reports suggested rebellion against the authorities, usurpation by Nehemiah, and the appointment of prophets to proclaim a new king in Jerusalem. This letter insinuated that all Nehemiah’s work was unauthorised, that Nehemiah himself was position seeking, and that he was embracing religion to further his aims. The enemy, not really knowing Nehemiah, uses lies in his attempt to stop the work. So the Lord rightly describes the devil, “...there is no truth in him...he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). A similar attack was made by Tertullus against Paul, accusing Paul of being “a creator of dissension among

all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5).

We do not have to look very far in our day to see similar tactics still being used. Sanballat’s remedy was, in effect, “Come on. Let’s talk it over. Let’s be reasonable about this rebuilding business”. Compromise is a political tool and one used by Satan on a regular basis. It has no place in the witness and testimony of the church, particularly where the truth of God is concerned. Nehemiah’s answer was blunt and to the point (v.8). In that same spirit, we might say today, “Your imagination is running away with you. All you want to do is to stop or dilute the testimony”.

Sadly, we see around us, in this once Christian Britain, the effects of compromise. In the name of pluralism, the church is expected to be politically correct! For the sake of the testimony, we have to be on our guard and, like Nehemiah, realise what is being attempted. Nehemiah knew the resources that were available to him. This man of prayer soon made his request known to God (v.9). It was direct and to the point. There was no flowery language, just the words, “O God, strengthen my hands”.

The enemy within

In v.10, Nehemiah comes face to face with yet another problem. This time it is from one of the Jews, resident in Jerusalem, one who would benefit from the protection that the wall afforded. Shemaiah does not, however, appear to have been involved in its building – “he was shut up” (v.10, A.V.), probably

unwell. (But note NKJV translation, “a secret informer”.) Here was a man purporting to be a prophet, seemingly hospitable towards Nehemiah. His name (meaning ‘heard of Jehovah’) and his pedigree gave the impression of his being a faithful follower of the Lord. In reality, he was a traitor!

Sadly, there are those in the church today who have knowledge and ability but, for some reason or other, shut themselves up. Then they are open to all sorts of attacks from the devil, rather than assisting in the testimony of the church

Shemaiah’s advice to Nehemiah was that they should go and hide because Nehemiah’s life was in danger. He did not suggest that they leave Jerusalem but that they should hide in the Temple. But in the Temple, Nehemiah would be hidden from the view of the people who depended on him for leadership. By right, the Temple was a place for the Levites. Had Nehemiah followed this advice, he would have dishonoured the Sanctuary and would have been guilty of desertion from his God given task. Those engaged in the building would have been disheartened and the building would have ceased. Sanballat would have achieved his end! The testimony, as seen in an unfinished wall, would have been derisory.

However, Nehemiah realised that the prophecy was not from God. Likewise, we today have the God given ability to know what is of God and what is not. “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things” (1 John 2:20). John continues to expand on this gift from 1 John 3:24 through to 1 John 4:6. He reminds us that “He who

is in you is greater than he who is in the world”!

Nehemiah’s bold declaration, “Should such a man as I flee?” is the hallmark of the overcomer. Nehemiah knew that he had the authority to carry out the task of rebuilding the walls and he had experienced the good hand of God upon him. We, too, should live in the reality of our faith. “And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith” (1 John 5:4). Nehemiah came to realise that the company of the prophets, the same group who had helped in the rebuilding of the Temple in the days of Ezra, were also on the payroll of Sanballat and Tobiah. Moreover, there was amongst them a prophetess, Noadiah, whose name means ‘Jehovah assembles’. How sad it is when there are those who gather with the Lord’s people today but who, through their contact with the world, seek to bring its influences on assembly life, to the detriment of the testimony!

*The victory that
has overcome the
world – our faith*

Nehemiah, having seen through the plan, takes the matter to the Lord (v.14) and leaves it there. The hymn encourages us to “take our burden to the Lord and leave it there”, while Peter reminds us, “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Our problem

is that we are too independent. We try to solve our own problems, with all the attendant unnecessary burdens, sorrows and cares that this brings when we fail to take them to the Lord in prayer.

The work is finished!

V.15 is a tremendous understatement! While Nehemiah had been under attack from his enemies, the work had not stopped. It was finished in just fifty two days! Their enemies could not but hear of it, and the nations around saw the completed walls (v.16). When God works amongst His people, the work is seen and is the subject of general conversation in the neighbourhood. The work of the Lord can not be hidden! So the Lord promised that whatever the opposition against His Church, “the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). His Church will be victorious!

We should take heart as we remind ourselves of what took place in Nehemiah’s day. Today, there are attacks upon the church from many sources – secularists, agnostics, atheists and those who advocate political correctness. Sadly, their influence is being felt in the church. The enemy today is no different from that in Nehemiah’s day. Those who are leaders in the church need to make a stand against

those who oppose the truth and others who want to water down the truths of Scripture. In Nehemiah’s day, the prime source of opposition came from Tobiah. Because of family relationships, his good deeds were brought to Nehemiah’s attention. We need to guard against unhelpful family influences in the church today.

The walls of Jerusalem would speak to us of a number of aspects of the Christian life. They remind us of security, separation and testimony. Security for the believer is to be found primarily in Christ, but also in the fellowship of other believers. Scripture reminds us of this important aspect of fellowship (Hebrews 10:24,25). It is in this fellowship that we can care for one another and so show to the world our love for one another as we carry out the Lord’s commandment (John 13:34,35). Those walls now physically separated Jerusalem and its inhabitants from those without but, sadly, the inhabitants were still very much under the influence of those outside. There is a parallel in the church today where there are those who appear to walk a path of separation from the world, but whose private and home lives are no different from the world around them. As a result, the testimony is marred; the reputation of the church is harmed and its influence no longer felt. The enemy has been successful! We very much need today, like the first Christians, to continue, “steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

God willing, in the next chapter, we will see what Nehemiah did to remedy the deficiencies amongst the people of God.



The Anointing of David

Donald Davison

Anointing with oil is still an integral part of the coronation service in this country. It looks back to the ancient anointing of the kings of Israel. But there are far more important lessons to be learned from the anointing of these first two kings of Israel. Take time to enjoy this meditation.

Saul, the people's choice

Please read 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

The anointing of David as king over Israel is a wonderful type, or picture, of our Lord's anointing by God when He was here on earth. It provides us with some important lessons for today.

The people had previously come to Samuel, the judge in Israel, saying, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:4). We are sometimes dissatisfied with our lot in life and want to be like others around us. We must, however, be careful that what we do is in accordance with the Lord's mind and will as revealed in His word. This request of the people displeased Samuel. He prayed to the Lord about it and received the reply, "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (v.7).

After due warning from God through Samuel as to the kind of king they would get, the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel, saying, "No, but we will have a king over us" (v.19). How like ourselves and our own hearts that will sometimes have our own way in spite of clear directions and guidance from the Lord in His word!

Samuel was told by the Lord that He would send a man of Benjamin to him the next day. Samuel was to anoint him 'captain' or 'ruler' over the people (9:16). Through the providence of God, Saul duly arrived at Samuel's house. Samuel took a vial of oil, poured it upon Saul's head and kissed him, telling him that the LORD had anointed him to be captain over the LORD's inheritance (10:1).

Saul soon proved what kind of man he was by disobeying the Lord. Firstly, he offered sacrifices which he was not entitled to do (they should be offered only by the priest) and then he spared the best of the Amalekites, despite being told utterly to exterminate them. For these acts of disobedience, Samuel told Saul, "Thy kingdom will not continue: the LORD has sought him a man after his own heart" (13:14). Later, Samuel had to say to Saul, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams...Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD he hath also rejected thee from being king" (15:22,23).

Saul, the people's choice and typical of the first man, is rejected and put to one side in favour of the second man, God's choice, "a man after His own heart". We can see in this a picture of this world's choice when they cried, "Not this man, but Barabbas"

(John 18:40). Barrabas was a thief and a murderer, typical of the first man. The Lord Jesus, God's choice, is "the second man...the Lord from heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:47). The world is suffering the effects of their choice and will do so until the Lord Jesus comes again. The first man fails but the second man is established by God, "great David's greater Son".

David, the man after God's own heart

Samuel was told to fill his horn with oil and go to Bethlehem to the house of Jesse, where God had provided Himself a king from among Jesse's sons. How we thank God for Bethlehem – its many mentions in Scripture, and the beginning of the story of grace!

In 1 Samuel 10, Saul was anointed with a vial of oil. A vial is an easily broken thing. Saul's kingdom and reign did not continue because of his disobedience and that dynasty was ended. By contrast, David was anointed with a horn of oil. Horn, being strong and not easily broken, is a picture that God was going to establish David's kingdom forever. It was through David's line, of course, that our Lord was born. Of Him we read, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever" (Isaiah 9:7).

The elders of Bethlehem trembled at the coming of Samuel, asking, "Do you come peaceably?" Samuel answered, "Peaceably" (vv.4,5). This reminds us of the Lord's birth in this world, coming not as Judge but as "the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6), bringing from heaven all the love of God for mankind.

At this stage, even Samuel is not totally in the current of the mind and will of God. He comes to the house of Jesse, who brings his sons forward. As Samuel looked at Eliab, the firstborn, he said, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before him" (v.6). Eliab was of good stature, reminding Samuel of Saul, who was head and shoulders above other men. But God had to say to Samuel, "The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (v.7). There is great instruction for us today in these words. It is our inward motives and feelings, not just our outward appearances and actions, that are important to God.

*The Lord looketh
on the heart*

Jesse makes seven of his sons pass before Samuel. Now in the current of the mind of the Lord, Samuel says, “The LORD hath not chosen these...Are here all thy children?” (vv.10,11). Jesse replies, “There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep” (v.11). This is our first introduction to David and, as yet, we have not been told his name. But right from the start, he is a picture of the Lord Jesus – keeping the sheep. It reminds us forcibly of the Lord’s own words, “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost” (John 17:12). How precious to know that you and I were the love-gift of the Father to the Son before the world was. We are in the safe keeping of both the Father and the Son!

David now comes forward as the eighth son of Jesse. The number eight in Scripture speaks of a new beginning (the eighth day marks the beginning of a new week), a new order of things according to God. What a ‘new beginning’ it was when our Lord came into the world!

Dispensationally, the eternal state answers to the eighth day. At present, we are living between the sixth and seventh dispensations. Christianity is not strictly a dispensation in the time ways of God. It is, rather, an interregnum. The time ways of God are connected with the earth. The church is not earthly but heavenly in origin, character and destiny. The millennium, soon to come, is the seventh dispensation. The eternal state, which will never be superseded, answers to the eighth day, the day of God (2 Peter 3:12).

We read that Jesse “sent, and brought [David] in” (v.12). It is recorded of God concerning the Lord Jesus, “When he *bringeth in* the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him” (Hebrews 1:6).

David is described as “ruddy...of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to” (v.12). This reminds us of the Lord Jesus, of whom it is written, “Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God has blessed thee for ever” (Psalm 45:2). God is able to say to Samuel, “Arise, anoint him: for this is he”.

David means ‘beloved’. Our Lord Jesus is ‘the Beloved’. At the outset of His public ministry, the heavens were opened upon Him, and the Father’s voice was heard saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”. The Holy Spirit was seen descending as a dove and abiding upon Him (Matthew 3:16,17). This is the first time that the revelation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is given in Scripture. The truth of the Godhead was veiled in Old Testament times, but now the full and final revelation of God is declared – the distinctive truth of Christianity.

Our Lord Jesus is described as God’s beloved Son. We, through matchless grace, by faith in Him are now said to be “taken into favour in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). We are now in the same position of nearness and dearness to the heart of the Father as is His well-beloved Son!

Anointed by God

Samuel takes the horn of oil and anoints David in the midst of his brethren. The horn suggests, as has been seen earlier, that this kingdom will be established. Oil universally in Scripture is a type of the Holy Spirit. True to type, we read, “The Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward” (v.13). Psalm 45:7, quoted in Hebrews 1:9, records, “God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows”. Hebrews 2:12, quoting Psalm 22:22, tells us of the Lord in resurrection saying, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.” It is in association with the Lord Jesus as the Son that we, as His brethren, are able to praise Him and, through Him as the Leader of our praises, to praise His Father as our Father and His God as our God (see John 20:17).

Further confirmation of the Lord Jesus being anointed, and for what purpose, is given by Himself when, in Luke 4, He stands up in the synagogue to read. Quoting Isaiah 61:1,2, He declares, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because *he hath anointed me* to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord”. Luke continues, “And he closed the book...And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears”. In the house of Cornelius, Peter could say, “*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth* with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38).

Features of Christ

David continues at home for a while. When an evil spirit from the Lord troubles Saul, his servants suggest that someone be found “who is a cunning player on an harp” (v.16), to help soothe Saul. One of Saul’s servants knows of David. Perhaps this servant had spent some time in David’s company. Certainly, he knows a good deal about David. This is an encouragement for us to spend time in the company of our Lord Jesus so that we may get to know Him intimately in the history of our souls.

*To heal
the brokenhearted*

This servant lists seven features of David in commending him to Saul. These features (v.18) present us with a remarkable picture of the Lord Jesus and it will be helpful to look at each of these in turn.

“I have seen a son of Jesse”

This is the first mark of who our Lord Jesus is in His own Person, essence and relationship within the Godhead. In Psalm 2:7, God says of Him, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (see also Hebrews 1:5). In Psalm 45:6,7, quoted in Hebrews 1:8, that declaration of Sonship is repeated, “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever”. These are most important scriptures, for in them we have the Lord Jesus addressed by God, as God, in eternity. They substantiate His co-equality within the Godhead with the Father and the Holy Spirit. John clearly marks Him out as “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18). Five times John writes of the Lord as “the only begotten” (4 in his Gospel and 1 in his first epistle). The Lord Jesus is the sole, unique, eternal Son.

“A cunning (skilful) player on an harp”

As remarked previously, the Lord Jesus is the Leader of the praises of His people. He is, indeed, the chief Musician. “For thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the assembly will I praise thee” (Psalm 22:21,22; Hebrews 2:12).

“A mighty valiant man”

This speaks to us of a man of wealth, valour, power, strength, substance, virtue and moral courage. The words remind us of Boaz, “a mighty man of wealth” (Ruth 2:1), who became Ruth’s kinsman-redeemer, who was both willing and able to redeem the inheritance. We well know what a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus he is in exhibiting the features listed above.

“A man of war”

We are instantly reminded of David’s forthcoming battle with Goliath and of David’s triumph over him, acknowledging “the battle is the LORD’s” (17:47). In a soon coming day, our Lord will come to take vengeance upon His enemies and the cry will go out in Jerusalem, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle” (Psalm 24:7-10). The Lord will enter the city in triumph as the One “mighty in battle” and also as “the LORD of hosts” with His saints with Him.

His be the Victor’s name,
Who fought the fight alone;
Triumphant saints no honour claim,
His conquest was their own.

“Prudent in matters”

He is wise in matters and counsel: “His name shall be called Wonderful, *Counsellor*, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). We have been predestinated for future blessing “according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the *counsel* of his own will” (Ephesians 1:11). All of us need wise counsel at times. How fitting it is, then, that at such a late stage in the church’s history and in the sorry state of that of the church at Laodicea, the Lord can still say to us, “I *counsel* thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich” (Revelation 3:18). The Lord’s desire is always for the enrichment of His people, both now and throughout eternity.

“A comely person”

David was beautiful in appearance. One of the translations of the word ‘good’ in John 10 is ‘beautiful’. To us, our Lord Jesus is indeed the beautiful Shepherd! When He was here, the world saw “no beauty that [they] should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2). But, through grace, we can take up the words of the bride and say of Him, “He is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend” (Song of Solomon 5:16). So we can sing,

His beauty shineth far above
Our feeble power of praise,
And we shall live and learn His love
Through everlasting days.

“The LORD is with him”

This is one of the most important elements of the seven features we are considering. In eternity, before ever the Lord came into this world, we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the word was *with* God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). His eternal existence, His distinct personality within the Godhead, and His essential deity are all set out in this important statement. John, in describing the Lord’s coming into manhood, declares, “We...show unto that eternal life, which was *with* the Father, and was manifested unto us” (1 John 1:2). In Abraham’s offering up of his son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah, we have the twice repeated statement, “they went both of them together” (Genesis 22:6,8). These words remind us of the closest intimacy that existed between the Father and the Son, of which this event is a picture. Our Lord’s words at the end of His earthly pathway are so full of meaning, “Ye...shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is *with* me” (John 16:32). Peter testified to this same truth in the house of Cornelius: “God was with him” (Acts 10:38).

At the close of this meditation, we can but echo Paul’s words: “It pleased the Father that *in him* should all fullness dwell...*In him* dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 1:19; 2:9).

The Gospel in Job

Part 10 – Conclusion: Job’s restoration (ch.42)

Yannick Ford

“We know that all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28). These familiar words were penned by the apostle Paul many centuries after Job had already proved the truth of them. Be encouraged by the triumphant end to this important Bible book.

Job’s confession (vv.1-6)

We have now come to the last of our studies in Job. After having looked at many lengthy speeches and answers, we see that Job’s final confession is strikingly brief – just six verses. However, there is a great deal of importance in these six verses. In many ways, they are more valuable than the very large number of verses which Job had used in justifying himself.

Job starts by confessing God’s sovereignty and power: “And Job answered Jehovah and said, I know that thou canst do everything, and that thou canst be hindered in no thought of thine” (vv.1,2, JND trans.). If God is minded to do something, there is nothing that can prevent it. So Proverbs 21:30 clearly states, “There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD”. That God cannot be hindered in any of His thoughts makes especially wonderful the fact that His thoughts towards us are thoughts of love!

Those who refuse to submit to God’s declaration that they are sinners and need a Saviour cannot benefit from God’s thoughts of love: “...the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). But God does not desire it to be that way. He is “*not willing* that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9) and He “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

If we are saved, then we can count on God’s thoughts of love toward us and say, with the psalmist, “How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee” (Psalm 139:17,18).

*How precious also are
thy thoughts unto me, O God!*

Having acknowledged God's supreme power and sovereignty, Job realises that he had not been speaking rightly of God beforehand. God had answered Job, as we saw in chs.38-41, and Job had understood that God had both the *right* to do as He pleased, and that what God chose to do *was* right. Job therefore now uses God's own words against himself: "Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not" (v.3, cf. 38:2). Job now saw things in God's light. Isaiah, when in the presence of God, had confessed, "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: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). So Job, similarly says, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (v.6).

To be able truly to say, "Wherefore I abhor myself", is not easy. It meant that Job really did find himself abhorrent. We may be able to admit this in a theoretical way because we know that the Bible says that "*all* have sinned" (Romans 3:23), that "there is *none* that doeth good, *no, not one*" (Romans 3:12), and that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). These statements relate to what the Bible calls the flesh, i.e. what we really are as natural men before we are born again. We know that the flesh is abhorrent to God, because "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8).

Furthermore, we understand from Romans 8:3 that the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross so that God could condemn sin in the flesh: "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh". The Lord Jesus took our sins *and* our sinful nature on Himself when He went to the cross. There He took the punishment for our sins, but the root cause of them, *sin in the flesh*, was condemned there also.

We may know all these things, but it is often difficult for us to apply them to ourselves. It is easy to admit, on the one hand, that the flesh, our sinful nature, is irremediably bad while, at the same time, hoping that we ourselves are not *that* bad, really! The apostle Paul had truly learnt this lesson. So he could write, "For I know that in me, (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18). Knowing that at the cross God has condemned sin in the flesh, Paul could say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

It is worth pointing out that we need to be careful to distinguish what is meant by 'flesh' in the Bible. Sometimes it can mean what we are in ourselves i.e. our sinful nature, but it can also refer to our human bodies generally, such as in the phrase "flesh and blood" (e.g. Matthew 16:17). The context will usually make plain what is meant. In Galatians 2:20, 'the flesh' refers to Paul's human life, not the evil flesh described earlier.

Each one of us needs to pause and ask, “Have I really learned this lesson, to realise that in myself, without the power of God, there is no good thing, and that nothing in me can be pleasing to God?”

Note that Paul did not just say, “I am crucified with Christ”. The matter does not end with the judgment of our flesh. There is a positive side too – “nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Yes, Paul agreed that his flesh was only evil before God, and that God had condemned it in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ at the cross. He could not hope, therefore, to be pleasing to God if he just carried on in the flesh.

But Paul also realised that, his flesh having been judged and done away with in God’s sight, he now had a new life, a life which could be pleasing to God. This new life was on the principle of faith in a Person, who was none other than the Son of God who loved Paul so much that He had been willing to die for him!

Another area in which we need to be careful is the fact that a believer in Christ has two natures. He has a new nature, which Paul expressed as “Christ liveth in me”, which happens when he is born again. But the flesh, the old sinful nature, *is still there*. If we agree with God’s estimation that it is incurably evil and we accept that, in His sight, it has been condemned at the cross, we will not seek to do anything in the power of the flesh. This would mean *not expecting anything good to come of ourselves*, in that we know what the flesh is like, but rather relying on God’s help to be able to live in the power of His life.

The end of the Lord (vv.7-17)

This is indeed the great point. God wants us to agree with His estimation of our flesh, and agree with Him that it is worthless and only fit for judgment. He can then grant us a new life, in His power, and in the strength of His love. We see this symbolically with Job. The very moment that Job had uttered those words, “Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (v.6), God states that Job has spoken rightly (v.7), that He will accept Job (v.8). So God “gave Job twice as much as he had before” (v.10) and “blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning” (v.12).

What about Job’s friends? We see from v.7 that God was not pleased with what they had been saying. They had not presented God in a true light. They had tried to accuse Job of having committed some dreadful crime. They saw God only as a punisher of evil and a rewarder of good – but their idea of ‘good’ seems to be ‘good’ done in the flesh. As we have seen, God dealt with Job, not so that Job could be confronted with some terrible crime of his past, but rather so that Job might be confronted with himself – to realise, as Paul realised, that “in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing”.

Nevertheless, God is gracious, and He desired that these friends of Job would themselves be instructed in this way. Job prayed for his friends, as God had instructed, and

all ended well. Still, it must have been very humbling for Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, who had been trying so hard to convince Job that he had greatly sinned, now to have to seek Job's intercession for themselves before God!

In conclusion, we should note two important verses: "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also *the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before*" (v.10) and "So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" (v.12). Job had gone through terrible circumstances, but they had been for his ultimate profit and blessing. That same thought is reiterated

in the New Testament: "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11).

The challenge for us today is to learn the same lessons as Job, so that we may be able to say with Job, "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). We will only be able to say this, not because of anything in ourselves, but because we have learned that all we need, and the only one we can boast in, is the Lord Jesus Himself!

Job: extracted from Biblio-file by Gordon Spratt & Bos Menzies

This story is deeply significant in the questions which it poses. Job was a man of exemplary character and great prosperity, but God allowed Satan to attack him with such malevolence that he lost his wealth, his family and finally his health. All this Job endured with patience and piety: indeed he has given us one of the most moving expressions of acceptance of the will of God in the words, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (1:21). The story continues with the efforts of Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar to comfort him, though their ineffectual efforts have perpetuated their memory in the expression, "Job's comforters". Although they use many words and all kinds of pious platitudes, they cannot go beyond the view that Job's sufferings are the consequence of his own sin. He must have brought it all upon himself. Yet the reader knows, from the narrative in chapters 1 and 2 and especially from what God says in 2:3, that this is not the case.

Job replies as best he can, maintaining his trust in God, and even asserting his conviction of immortality and a new life, but the only result is despair and self-justification.

At this point a fourth friend, a younger man named Elihu who has hitherto been silent, intervenes. He has a more elevated view of God than the other friends, and indeed claims to speak on

God's behalf. Where the other three can only see suffering as God's punishment for sin, Elihu introduces the idea of God using it as a discipline in order to achieve some practical result in the one who suffers. This is echoed in the New Testament doctrine of chastening, which is developed in Hebrews 12:5-11.

Whilst Elihu's words have a positive ring about them, they can only be a prelude to what follows, for God now speaks personally to Job. He confronts him with His own creatorial greatness and power, and shows the complexity of the purpose that is under His hand.

Job's self-occupation and self-righteousness crumble before this display of God's omnipotence and the impossibility of fully understanding the mystery of His ways. He recognises God's right and ability to accomplish the purposes of His own will, and in the presence of the greatness of God owns his own smallness.

The climax of this developing relationship with God comes with the words: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:5-6).

The epilogue to the story is that Job's wealth was restored, indeed doubled, and a new family of sons and daughters replaced those whom he had lost.

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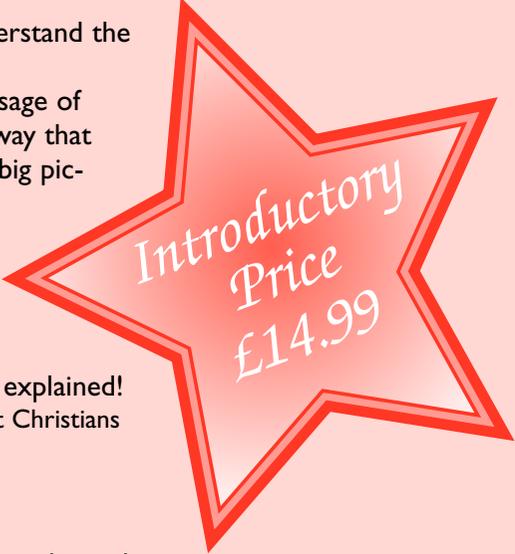
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But make sure that you believe me,
For the Lord may come today.

G. Stevens

The above was written as a Christian response to the Christless futility of the John Lennon song, Imagine, still beloved by the world. The words fit the original melody but with an extra chorus.