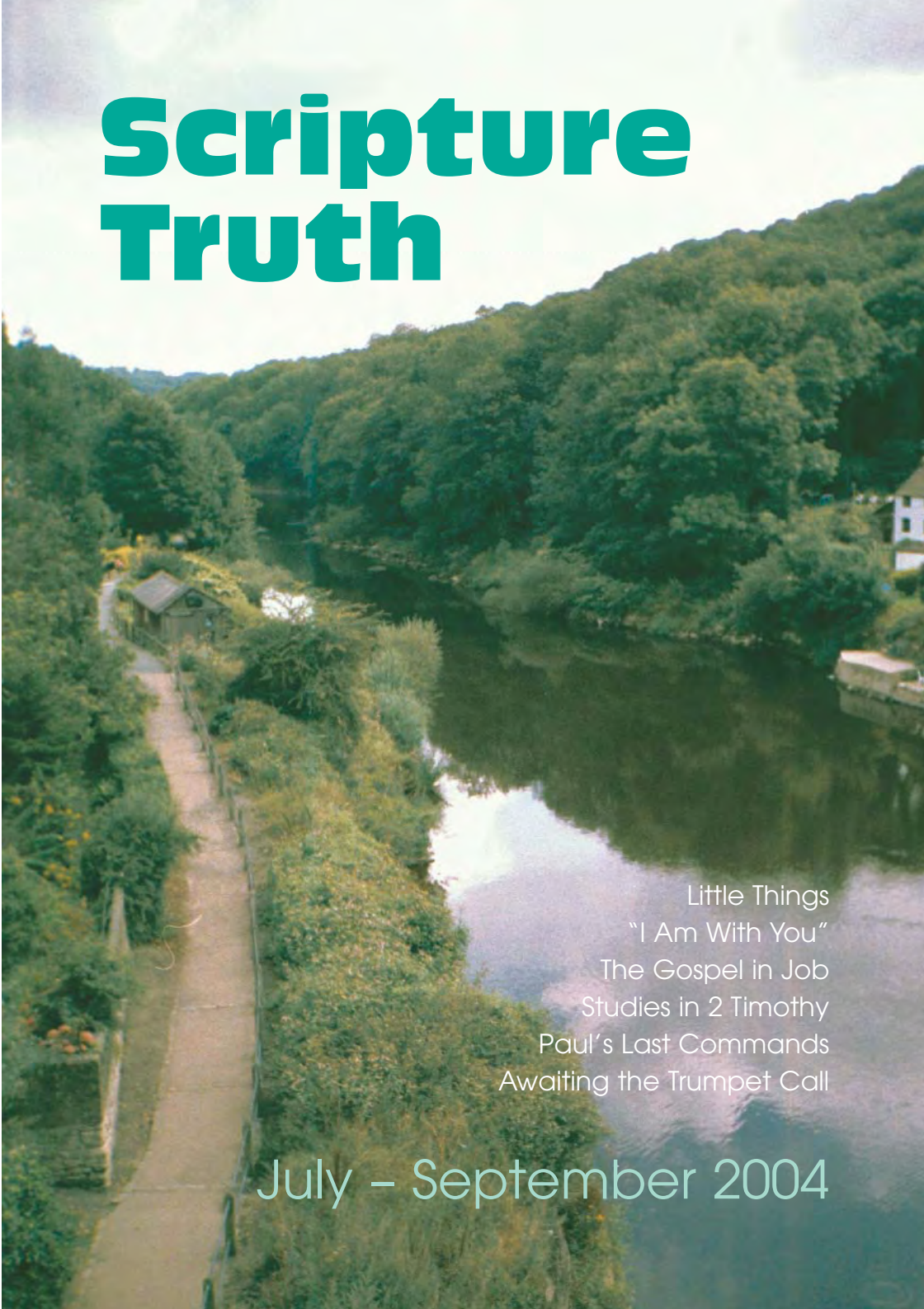


Scripture Truth



Little Things
"I Am With You"
The Gospel in Job
Studies in 2 Timothy
Paul's Last Commands
Awaiting the Trumpet Call

July – September 2004

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Gordon Hughes

SCRIPTURE TRUTH is published every three months to expound the teaching of the Scriptures so that we “may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”.

Annual Subscription 2004

£9.00 Post Free UK – £11.00 Post Free Overseas

Contents

Awaiting the Trumpet Call	1
Studies in 2 Timothy (Chapter 1)	7
The Gospel in Job (Part 3)	12
“I Am With You”	17
Little Things (Part 2)	20
Paul’s Last Commands	25
Learn from Christ	Back Cover

Front cover photograph of the River Severn at Ironbridge, Shropshire

Olive Trees (p3), Mount of Olives (p4), Dead Sea (p6) and River Jordan (p22) from FreeStockPhotos.com

All other illustrations ©Microsoft Corporation or its suppliers

SCRIPTURE TRUTH is the imprint of the Central Bible Hammond Trust

Registered Charity No. 223327

All correspondence should be addressed to:

SCRIPTURE TRUTH Publications

Coopies Way, Coopies Lane, MORPETH, Northumberland NE61 6JN

Tel: 01670 511615

Fax: 01670 516620

Awaiting the Trumpet Call

John Weston

This very personal meditation takes the reader on a kind of spiritual pilgrimage through the Land of Israel. Be blessed by it! The author writes out of a lifetime study of Scripture and of long experience of life in Israel.

I remember so well that many times at school we used to sing Isaac Watts' famous hymn, 'There is a land of pure delight'. (Incidentally, this hymn was written by the author looking up Southampton Water towards the green fields of the Isle of Wight.) One particular verse has always stuck in my memory:

Could we but climb where Moses stood
And view the landscape o'er,
Not Jordan's stream nor death's dark flood
Should fright us from the shore.

I had an inner desire that I, too, might have an opportunity of standing where Moses stood. It was, therefore, a great joy that, a few years ago, I was able to stand on Mount Nebo "and view the landscape o'er".

Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 34:1-4)

"And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land..." (v.1).

Moses, as he stood there, was able miraculously to scan the whole Land. He was able to see those important locations that would, in the course of time, transform world history. There was the land of promise, there a delineation of the pathway trodden by our Lord, there the very place where the great work of redemption would take place, there the mountain top from whence the King of kings would rule the whole world! Moses then died, but death is not, nor ever will be, the end.

Mount Tabor (Matthew 17:1-5)

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before..." (vv.1,2).

So 2,000 years later, we meet Moses again. This time, he is in the Land he had viewed all those years ago! Mount Tabor is, indeed, spectacular. "Tabor rises up to heaven like an altar that the Creator has built for Himself" (Guerin). "It is the greatest altar in the greatest sanctuary of the world" (Hoade). While some maintain that this episode took place on Mount Hermon, many miles to the north, I am convinced that Mount Tabor was the scene of this memorable encounter. Here our Lord Jesus climbs the mountain together with three of His disciples, Peter, James and John. On the mountain top, He is transfigured and we catch a glimpse of His majesty. John writes, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father" (John 1:14). Peter exclaims, "We...were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (1 Peter 1:16).

Together with the Lord Jesus stand two great personages of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah. They represent the Law and the Prophets. Moreover, Elijah will be the witness who will precede the coming of the Messiah on His return to earth (Malachi 4:5). It is the song of Moses that, together with the song of the Lamb, will form the two songs of eternity (Revelation 15:3). Could Moses be one of the two witnesses that will be seen in Jerusalem as recorded in Revelation 11:3?

We are also told of the conversation our Lord was having with Moses and Elijah. It concerned His death that He would accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). John Donne (1572-1631) preached his last sermon on February 25th 1630. It was given before the king and his text was Psalm 68:20: “Our God is the God of salvation; and with Jehovah, the Lord, are the goings forth [even] from death” (JND trans.). Dr. Donne pointed out that the ‘goings forth’ or ‘issues’ (A.V.) is the same expression used in Luke 9:31 for decease, i.e. exodus. Said Donne, “It was Moses who in his exodus had pre-figured this ‘issue’ of our Lord, and in passing Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea had foretold in that actual prophecy Christ’s passing of mankind through the sea of His blood.” Elijah’s exodus and issue out of this world (see 2 Kings 2) is also a figure of Christ’s ascension.

Moses and Elijah might have talked with Christ about His death only in a holy and joyful sense of the benefit which they, and all the world, were to receive by that. This was the central theme. It would be central in the worship of forthcoming generations as it will be the central theme of the worship of the saints in glory.

Moses, looking back from this mountain top, would no doubt have reflected on his previous mountain top experience on Mount Nebo. Here, after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, he had been instrumental in leading the Jewish people to the very threshold of the Promised Land. Now he was actually standing in the Promised Land, peopled by their descendants. However, within a matter of years, these very people would be scattered across the nations of the world. The Land itself would be occupied for the next 19 centuries, successively by Romans, Moors, Moslems, Crusaders, Marmalukes, Turks and the British.

Nevertheless, it was absolutely clear even then from the many prophecies recorded in the Old Testament that a day would come when God would re-gather His ancient people. The nation of Israel would once again become a reality. This, as we know, took place in 1948. How beautifully the yearning for this is expressed in Hatikvah, the national anthem of Israel:

So long as still within our breasts
The Jewish heart beats true;
So long as still towards the East
To Zion looks the Jew;
So long our hopes are not yet lost –
Two thousand years we cherished them –
To live in freedom in the Land
Of Zion and Jerusalem.

These are Bible days and our God is definitely at work in this our day. There are probably more biblical prophecies relating to global events being fulfilled in our generation than at any other time in history.

This era is surely Messianic. God is preparing the world for the coming of His Messiah, and for the rebuilding of the third Temple. The first Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586BC, the second by Titus in 70AD. Ezekiel describes this third Temple and tells us how the glory of the Lord comes into the House by way of the gate whose prospect is towards the East. He then declares that that glory will fill the House (Ezekiel 40-43).

Since the re-birth of the nation of Israel, the Land has blossomed, as the prophets had said it would. A good example of this is the desert city of Beersheba. It is now a flourishing university city with beautifully tree-lined streets. With a population of 130,000, it is the capital city of the Negev. Almost 90 million trees have been planted across Israel. New forests have been constructed in a country where there has always been a timber shortage. Isaiah prophesied that Israel would “blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (Isaiah 27:6). Today this has become a reality.



The years are now passing, and God’s prophetic clock is ticking away. The Church age is drawing to a close and the ‘Israel train’ which, as it were, has been on the sidings for 2,000 years, is getting up steam. Soon, and very soon, it will join the main line of history. Under the guise of ‘replacement theology’, it is claimed that God has transferred to the Church all the Old Testament’s glorious promises which were given to Israel. This is a lie of Satan. No! a thousand times no! God has not forgotten His people, whom He has declared to be the apple of His eye (Zechariah 2:8). “God hath not cast away His people”, declares Paul (Romans 11:2).

Coming events, which are already casting deep shadows, will soon take place. The herald to these events will be the Rapture of the Church. This event will not be seen by the world. Its effect, however, will not only be startling to an unbelieving world, but it will also be the trigger for cataclysmic events. Three and a half years of uncertainty will be followed by a similar period of deep distress and agony for the Jewish people. My heart goes out for those cities of the Holy Land, and for Jerusalem in particular.

We used to live in the Street of the Prophets in Jerusalem. The Mission for which I worked owned a very large detached house in the same street. One day I was asked to arrange for it to be sold. I sent a message to London headquarters that it would be a good idea that,

rather than selling it, it should be fitted out as a field hospital. It would then be ready for the death and destruction prophesied by Zechariah. What a testimony this would be to the Jewish people! It would show them that, although we knew that we would be safely away in heaven, we had given thought to their coming plight. This suggestion came to nought. My committee in London thought that I had rather strange ideas!

The invasion of the Land by Gog and Magog, spearheaded by Russia, Iran, Germany, Turkey and one or two other nations, together with the rise of the Beast and the False Prophet are well known to Bible students. It is not possible to go into the details here. The final three and a half years, the Great Tribulation, bringing intense suffering and agony, will culminate in the gathering of the nations of the world in Esdraelon, by Megiddo, to make a final onslaught on Jerusalem.

This area has been a chosen place for encampment in every contest in Israel from the days of Nebuchadnezzar to Napoleon. Jews, Gentiles, Saracens, Crusaders, Egyptians, Persians, Druses, Turks and Arabs – warriors of every nation have pitched their battle tents on the plains of Esdraelon. It is the classic battleground of Scripture and is now awaiting the arrival of the armies of all nations.

Esdraelon is usually regarded as one plain stretching from the Mediterranean to Jordan. In reality, it is several plains more or less divided by the remains of ridges. We are perhaps more familiar with two of its divisions – the valley of Jezreel and the plain of Megiddo. George Adam Smith in his book, ‘The Historical Geography of the Holy Land’ comments, “Was ever an arena so simple, so regulated for the spectacle of war? Esdraelon is a vast theatre, with its clearly defined stage, its proper exits and entrances.” It now awaits the final conflict – Armageddon. This is the great battle for Jerusalem, a battle that Israel cannot win, but one that she will not lose! As catastrophe threatens, the nation of Israel will call out to their Messiah. This cry for help will be heard and God will step in. The enemies will be utterly defeated.

Mount Olivet (Zechariah 14:4,8,9; Revelation 1:7)

“And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem...” (Zechariah 14:8).

Our attention is now drawn to the Mount of Olives. From here, some 2,000 years before Zechariah’s prophecy will be fulfilled, that small group of Jesus’ disciples saw their Lord and Master taken up in the clouds to heaven and heard the promise given by the angels, “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

I am so glad that the Olivet summit is so much higher than Mount Moriah, the place where Jesus



Every eye will see Him

was crucified. As our Lord prepared to return to heaven, He could look down on the place of His humiliation and rejection. He had conquered and triumphed – it was beneath His feet! On this same mountain top, the glorious climax of the ages will unfold. The very feet of the Lord Jesus will stand on this mountain top! What a scene this will be! Scripture declares that every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7). Today we can see how feasible this will be via satellites beaming television pictures to every corner of the globe. In this way, all countries will indeed be witnesses of our Lord's return in majesty!

I love Frances Havergal's hymn, 'Thou art coming, O my Saviour' and, in particular, the last verse:

Oh, the joy to see Thee reigning, Thee, my own beloved Lord!
 Every tongue Thy Name confessing, Worship, honour, glory, blessing,
 Brought to Thee with one accord; Thee, my Master and my Friend
 Vindicated and enthroned, Unto earth's remotest end
 Glorified, adored and owned!

This time will signify the end of the Great Tribulation, the end of the battle of Armageddon. The Beast and the False Prophet will be cast into the lake of fire. Satan will be bound. Thus the Lord will destroy every hostile force that would challenge His right to rule as Messiah over the earth. Then comes the judgment of Israel, the judgment of the nations and the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ!

When the great plants of our cities
 Have turned out their last finished work,
 When our merchants have sold their last yard of silk,
 And dismissed their last tired clerk;
 When our banks have raked in their last dollar,
 And paid their last dividend;
 When the Judge of the earth says, "Close for the night"
 And asks for a balance....What then?
 When the choir has sung its last anthem,
 And the preacher has made his last prayer;
 When the people have heard their last sermon
 And the sound has died on the air;
 When the Bible lies closed on the altar,
 And the pews are all empty of men,
 And each one stands facing his record,
 And the great Book is opened....What then?

When the actors have played their last drama
And the mimic has made his last fun,
When the film has flashed its last picture
And the billboard displayed its last run,
When the crowds seeking pleasure have vanished,
And gone out in the darkness again,
When the trumpet of ages is sounded,
And we stand before Him....What then?
When a world that rejected its Saviour
Is asked for a reason....What then?

The Great White Throne judgment may be a long way off; it must be more than a millennium away. But the judgment of the living, of “the quick”, may be very near, and before that awesome Throne of glory, the Christ rejectors and still living must surely stand.

The judgments will take place in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2,12). There is no clear indication of the precise location of this valley. Some have suggested that it will be the



Valley of Berakhah which was connected with the victory in the reign of Jehoshaphat. However, this location is too far from Jerusalem. The Valley of Kidron is also called the Valley of Jehoshaphat, but not in the days of Joel. It was not so called until the 4th century AD.

It seems clear from Scripture that a completely new valley will be formed at the second Advent when the mount of Olives is split (Zechariah 14:4). It is then that a river of fresh water will flow from the Olivet down to the Dead Sea, which then becomes the Living Sea, full of fish!

Oh! The shifting sands of time! Four thousand years have passed by since Moses stood on Mount Nebo, surveying the Land of Promise. It was then a land still to be possessed.

During these 4,000 years, the Land has been conquered, possessed, then dispossessed and the Jewish people scattered across the nations of the world.

Now, as was foretold long years ago, God has re-gathered His people, and soon the King will return to His own land, inaugurating His millennial reign. “And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: and in that day there shall be one LORD, and His Name one” (Zechariah 14:9). Thus will come to pass the fulfilment of God’s promises to Israel. Jerusalem will become the centre of blessing and the Jew an instrument of blessing to the entire world. There will be universal unity, universal worship, universal peace, and universal knowledge of the Lord!

This is all in the future, albeit a near future. Before it comes to pass, the Lord will have called to Himself all those who have been redeemed by His precious blood. This event will take place in the twinkling of an eye and without any warning. Are you awaiting the trumpet call?

Studies in 2 Timothy

Chapter 1 – Last greetings and words of encouragement

David Anderson

This final letter of Paul to Timothy is especially relevant to our present day circumstances. We need to heed its important message. This article is based on a talk given on London's Premier Radio.

Introduction

Several years ago, a man took ill whilst I was preaching. I stopped mid-sentence so that an ambulance could be called. The next day, I visited him in hospital with a friend, who said to him, "Well, Norman, I've had some walk out from my preaching but none has ever been carried out". However, it's not the drama of that Sunday evening, or even my friend's humour, that remains with me. It's the godly concern that old believer had for us younger men as he lay there on his hospital bed. He had been a very influential Bible teacher in his day, but just then he realised that his days of service were coming to an end. He encouraged us, his sons in the faith, to carry forward the things of the Lord in the way he had previously instructed us.

2 Timothy is Paul's last letter recorded in Scripture. It shows a spiritual father's tender care for his "true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2). Paul wrote from a dungeon in Rome where he ended his days as an old man. Naturally speaking, he was nearing the end of his life on earth, but the persecution of Nero led him to expect martyrdom for his faith in Christ. So he writes, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand" (4:6). So what was Timothy to do? Give up? No! As his spiritual father, Paul, had done, he was to stand and continue his work for Christ: "But you...fulfil your ministry" (4:6). After years of training and preparation, Paul hands on the work of God to Timothy with the words, "Continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them" (3:14).

This was no last gasp effort by a failing man, but a carefully executed succession plan so that the Gospel and the truth of God would live on! Timothy was to take it on with the charge from 2:2, "Pass it on", ringing in his ears: "...the things that you have heard from



me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also". This rallying call is for every generation to hear and to follow so that the truth of God can be passed on like a baton.

In addition to the external opposition from the world, Paul was aware that Timothy knew about the very distressing evidence of unfaithfulness in the church in Asia, Timothy's area of ministry:

“This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me” (1:15). Paul advises Timothy, “But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue...” (3:13,14). So it is today: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come” (3:1). The call comes to us today, as it did to Timothy, to go on despite the increasing darkness of our times.

There are other dimensions to this moving letter. As a pastor, Paul was very sensitive about the delicate nature, physical frailty, and timidity of his spiritual son. He also greatly longed to see him again and to enjoy fellowship with him. In the meanwhile, he reminded himself of Timothy’s tears, an indication of Timothy’s concern for the Christian testimony. Paul prayed constantly for Timothy and wrote to encourage him. This letter is for our encouragement, too, today.



Absolute certainties (v.1)

The best way to encourage anyone is to start with some positives. So Paul begins his letter to Timothy with some absolute truths. Paul’s own credentials were by “the will of God”, which always succeeds (see Ephesians 1:11). At Paul’s conversion, he was sent (or ‘apostled’) with the most marvellous of messages, the Gospel, here called “the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus”. Indestructible life now, as well as in the time to come (1 Timothy 4:8), is absolutely certain for believers because it is secure in Christ Jesus.

Known as Jesus Christ when He lived on earth, He now has the name “Christ Jesus” because He is the Man who has been raised from the dead, and has ascended to the throne of God where He is seated in glory! (The phrase ‘in Christ Jesus’ occurs seven times in this epistle, each time describing features of faith which cannot be altered, and which do not fail, because they are centred in Him.) The prospect of death clarifies for Paul the reality of Christianity, which is eternal life found only in God’s Son.



Appropriate greetings (v.2)

Paul appropriately addresses his letter “To Timothy, my beloved son”. He does not regard Timothy as a disciple slavishly trying to follow his teacher, but as a devoted son in the Christian family. A special bond of affection exists between them because of their mutual desire to serve Christ: “Timothy... I have no one like-minded...you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel” (Philippians 2:19-22). To the greeting, Paul adds the benediction of the divine grace, mercy and peace, which his younger colleague will need for difficult days ahead: grace for the many trials; mercy for the failures and shortcomings; and peace to counteract any doubts.



Necessary qualities (vv.3-5)

Paul now refers to some essential features which are the foundation of true Christian living and service, and which had been seen in the natural and spiritual relationships that Timothy enjoyed. His spiritual father’s prayers for him were motivated by a pure conscience derived from his Jewish ancestors. Timothy’s tears indicated a love for God and His honour, a tenderness that Paul wished to experience again. Genuine faith is identified as arising from his grandmother Lois, through his mother Eunice, and now

also very much alive in Timothy himself. The necessity for these qualities, "...love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith", had already been emphasised by Paul (1 Timothy 1:5) as crucial elements of godliness for Christians to possess in order to remain on course and not to stray.

It is good to see and to encourage the godly order we find in vv.3-5 in our times and generations also, as we seek to possess, maintain and pass on the truth of God. There is the importance of Christian family life for children. Older believers should seek to form spiritual relationships with younger people and should clearly communicate the truth to them in understandable terms. All young believers must not pretend, but personally possess, sincere faith. By these means, God furnishes men and women for the maintenance of His work.



Timely exhortation (v.6)

Paul exhorts Timothy to build upon godliness: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you..." God had specially selected Timothy through a prophetic word to assist, and then to take over from, Paul. Both Paul and the elders of the church completely identified themselves with Timothy in this respect by laying their hands on him (see 1 Timothy 4:14). Here Paul encourages Timothy to exercise this 'charisma' – the special authority and power from God for the task at hand. He was, and we are, to "fan its flame" despite all the obstacles and difficulties involved. Contrary circumstances were not to affect Timothy so as to dim the flame; rather they were to be the very opportunities for renewed effort.



Divine provisions (v.7)

Furthermore, Paul realises that Timothy is a sensitive person. He was physically frail and naturally timid. Others may have concluded that Timothy was the wrong choice for such a demanding job, but Paul appreciated that God operates in unexpected ways. In addition, v.7 outlines the divine provisions for the good fight of faith: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear (or 'cowardice'), but of power and of love and of a sound mind". By His Spirit, God gives His workers the ability to overcome. Here, then, is the resource for believers in the difficult last days of Christianity: power, not cowardice, in the energy of love, and with clear understanding or self-discipline.



Divine power (v.8)

On the basis of these divine provisions, Paul appeals to Timothy not to desert him, as others had done, but to stand for the testimony of the Lord, and to share with Paul in suffering for the Gospel. This would only be achieved by the mighty power of God. Notice that Paul regards himself as a prisoner of the Lord, not a prisoner of the Roman authority. He was so true to the Gospel that he can claim it as his own in 2:8,9, where he shows that it was the only charge against him: "Jesus Christ...was raised from the dead according to my gospel. For which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not bound".





Complete blessings (vv.9,10)

Although the link between these partners in the Gospel was soon to be broken, it was impossible for Timothy to lose the realities of its blessings. Paul details some of these spiritual blessings and encourages Timothy with some absolute truths that are found “in Christ Jesus”. These truths do not depend at all on what we have done, nor on us, but on God’s election and His thoughts of grace for us from all eternity. From our standpoint, He has saved us; but from His side, He has called us to holiness. Our Saviour revealed all this when He appeared on earth and, in dying, rendered death powerless. A complete salvation – of life for our souls, and incorruptibility for our bodies – has been brought to light through the Gospel.



Paul’s commission (v.11)

To the glorious message of the Gospel Paul was given a three-fold service. Acts records him coming as a royal herald, Paul the preacher; in his epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians there are outlines of his service as Paul the apostle, sent with the final secrets of the heart of God; and his other letters, especially that to the Romans where he explains the Gospel to believers, show him as Paul the teacher.



Sure investments (v.12)

However, Paul’s heaven-sent missions were not received by this world and this led to his imprisonment. His knowledge of his Saviour and Lord, whom he had encountered on the Damascus road, made him unashamed of these wonderful revelations. Such absolute knowledge convinced him that he was right in entrusting everything to this One who would see him through to “that Day” when Christ will be glorified in His saints: “for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day”. We, too, need to have this same confidence as we face a world still hostile to Christianity.



An outline of sound words (v.13)

“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” Although Paul faces certain death because of his beliefs, he leaves behind this beautiful treasury of Gospel truth, as something like an heirloom, for Timothy to own personally and in reality. Timothy was to possess a complete outline of the great truths of the faith in a systematic way, rather like a completed sketch.



A priceless treasure (v.14)

This deposit of Christian truth is also described as wholesome food that provides spiritual health for Christians. Found livingly “in Christ Jesus”, it must be appropriated “in faith” towards God as its source, and used “in love” towards man. Then it must be kept (or ‘guarded’) from the attacks of those who seek to change it, and preserved unaltered and undiluted for subsequent generations of believers. We need the indwelling Holy Spirit to fulfil such a daunting task. But unless, at the same time, we draw on “that good thing”, it will not be of any practical value to us in fighting the good fight, running the race, or keeping the faith.



Widespread defections (v.15)

Paul reminds Timothy of the conditions then prevalent in the church. Things had changed since his first letter when there had been great advancement of the word of God at Ephesus through Paul's preaching (see Acts 19). At that time, Timothy was commanded to remain in Ephesus and so maintain order in the church: "...charge *some* that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3). In the space of only a few years, there had been a full-scale departure from Paul and his doctrine – not *some*, but *all*; and not only in Ephesus, but in all Asia. Two individuals, Phygellus and Hermogenes, are identified as leaders in this defection; other unsound people are mentioned in later parts of the epistle. It was in that difficult situation, and against such active opposition, that Timothy was called to protect the purity and clarity of the faith. Those conditions were the beginnings of the last days that Timothy is warned about in 3:1, which describes the prevailing conditions of Christendom today. There is now widespread doctrinal and moral confusion and Paul's doctrine is no more popular now than it was then. God wants us in our generation to be faithful to those original truths of Christianity that have been passed on to us by faithful believers of previous times.



Faithful Onesiphorus (vv.16-18)

Paul puts on record the faithful deeds of Onesiphorus, a man from Ephesus who had not followed the defecting majority, to show Timothy that there are others with him in the fight. A mispronunciation of his name can be made to show the contrast here: if all are against us, at least One-is-for-us. God always retains some, even if only a minority, who prove by their beliefs and actions to be "those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2:22).

The name, Onesiphorus, means a 'bringer of profit'. He brought help and refreshment to Paul. Not ashamed of Paul's chains, he often sought Paul out in the dungeons of Rome, paying him many visits and ministering to his needs. Paul desired the Lord's mercy to rest upon the whole household of Onesiphorus. He's also sure that the mercy of the Lord will be towards this servant in "that Day", the day of assessment for all believers, when Christ appears (4:1).

A challenge

At that glorious appearing of the Lord, what will be revealed about my faithfulness to the Lord and His people? Will it show me to have been a helper and encourager of the people of God? Will I remain faithful to Christ and to the Gospel if there are times of persecution? Will I desert the Truth if the majority turn away from it? Do I treasure these truths of Christianity, possess, and guard them? Am I active in teaching others about their value and use? How am I passing them on to the next generation of believers?



The Gospel in Job

Part 3

Yannick Ford

Job's desperate search for God, and the failure of his companions to help, should highlight for us the immeasurable blessings we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Bildad's first speech (ch.8)

It is now the turn of Bildad to speak. He is more forceful than Eliphaz and, almost immediately, counsels Job to confess his sins to God so that his trial will be over (vv.5-7). He also suggests that Job's children must have sinned since they have died (v.4). What a terrible accusation, the more hurtful at this time of Job's deep sorrow! We know from ch.1 that it was Satan who had brought about the death of Job's children.

How careful we also need to be before jumping to conclusions and seeing the judgment of God in the circumstances of others! This is illustrated in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, where Paul has to rebuke the Corinthians because of their abuse of the Lord's Supper. Because of the gravity of what they were doing, God had been obliged to act in judgment. Some of their company were ill; some had even died: "For this reason, many are sick and weak among you, and many sleep" (v.30). (N.B. In Scripture, the death of a Christian is often referred to as sleeping (see John 11:11-14)). Note that Paul says *'for this reason, many are sick...'* i.e. the judgment was because of the corporate sin, although it was apparently concentrated upon individuals. Those who were sick were not necessarily more culpable than the others.

We saw earlier that Eliphaz used his own experience in trying to reason with Job. Here Bildad uses the wisdom of the fathers (vv.8-10). "Let us look at what those who gone before have found", he says. "We know very little, since we have been alive for such a short time, but our ancestors will teach us." Although 'the wisdom of the fathers' is not a bad starting place for any research, it is not an infallible basis! Firstly, 'the fathers' do not always agree. Furthermore, if "our days on earth are a shadow", so were theirs. They would not then necessarily be better placed to understand than we.

This is not to suggest that we should be in the habit of despising the wisdom of godly men and women who have preceded us. Scripture contains many exhortations to respect elders (e.g. 1 Peter 5:5; Hebrews 13:7). But we need to be discerning as to whom we listen, and not simply appeal to tradition.

Bildad then continues with illustrations from the natural world. The main thrust of his argument is that the paths of those who forsake God lead to nothing. He then ends with a recommendation that Job should get right with God. Bildad, however, is no more able to convince Job than was Eliphaz.

How can a man be righteous before God?

Job's reply (chs.9,10)

Job's response begins with a very important question: "Truly I know it is so, *but how can a man be righteous before God?*" (9:1). It is probable that the thrust of Job's question was to refute Bildad's accusation – "You say that I must have sinned and that I should get right with God. But tell me, How could one ever be really right with Him?" This question of how we can be just before God needs very careful consideration.

To begin with, we can see how *not* to do this:

- The words of the Lord Jesus to the Pharisees are important: "And He said to them, *"You are those who justify yourselves before men,* but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). There is

no point in justifying ourselves before, or comparing ourselves with, other men and women. It might make us feel good, but it will not do for God!

- In Luke 18:9-14, the Lord Jesus told a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector who went to the temple to pray – the first to vaunt his supposedly good deeds and character, the second to confess his sins. The Lord says, "I tell you, this man (i.e. the tax collector) went down to his house justified *rather* than the other (i.e. the Pharisee); for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (v.14). Presenting God with a long list of all our good deeds will not justify us!
- Paul tells the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia that "by Him (i.e. the Lord Jesus) everyone who believes is justified from all things *from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses*" (Acts 13:39). Trying to keep God's laws, the ten commandments for example, will not justify us. "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20).


Happily, God makes very clear in Scripture how we can be justified before Him:

- "*Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,* whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where

is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law*" (Romans 3:24-28). There is a great deal to consider in this wonderful passage, but the main points can be summarised as follows:

1. We are justified freely by God's grace – we do not have to do anything of ourselves (nor could we), but God has had pity on us, and in His love He gives us freely what we need.
2. It is through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus – because the Lord Jesus has suffered the righteous penalty for our sins, we can be justified, in such a way that God can still be just while, at the same time, being the Justifier of those sinners who now believe in Jesus.
3. Finally, we are justified by faith – we need to have faith in what Christ has done and in what God has said. We need to take God at His word if we are to benefit from His justification.

We can now return to Job and his arguments. We see that he presents God as the all-powerful Sovereign, and he despairs of being able to be justified in His sight. 'God can do anything' is the thrust of his arguments. "God is wise in heart and mighty in strength. Who has hardened *himself* against Him and prospered?" (9:4). Job's words actually state a very important principle. Ultimately, God can do anything, and all things will serve Him.



God
does not
want
forced
service

But God does not want forced service. He wants us to be willing servants and worshippers. Given all that God has done for us, in sending His Son to die for our sins, and the glorious future which He has prepared for those who have been forgiven, it should not be difficult for us to want to worship Him. It is never easy to submit ourselves to someone else, but if that someone else has shown and does show great love and great personal sacrifice on our behalf, then it is a different situation – it is now a question of our hearts being won for Him. "My son, give me your heart" (Proverbs 23:36) is God's great desire for us. Sadly, there are still those who continually resist God and reject His love. In a coming day, they will be forced to acknowledge Him (Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10), but they will not enjoy

God's favour. Instead, they will suffer His anger (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

Vv.5-11 further show the great power of God. It is interesting to compare this section with Matthew 14:22-34. In Matthew, we see one instance where the Lord's deity shines through the veil of His humanity. God, who "commands the sun and it does not rise; He seals off the stars; He alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea; He made the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades, and the chambers of the south; He does great things past finding out, yes, wonders without number", is seen on earth as Jesus of Nazareth, who also trod upon the waves of the sea, to the astonishment of His disciples!

"If He goes by me, I do not see Him; if He moves past, I do not perceive Him" was Job's complaint (v.11). Job could see evidence of God's power in His creation, as he had just described, but he wanted to speak with God directly! We, too, can arrive at some understanding of God from studying creation. David could write, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). Paul writes to the Romans, "For since the creation of the world [God's] invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (1:20). It is interesting to note that belief in God and His creation are assumed in Paul's argument in Romans. There is no justification of creation as a valid scientific theory, nor are there arguments to support it. In fact, Paul goes as far as to say that, because of the witness of creation, men and women are without excuse if they do not


believe in God. God assumes that a proper and true examination of the natural world will provide ample evidence for its Creator.

But we cannot get a full understanding of God through creation alone. God has now fully revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. John 1:18 tells us that "no one has seen God at any time", but goes on to add, "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him". All that we need to know about God, His character, and His thoughts about us, have been fully revealed in Jesus Christ. We cannot, therefore, say as Job did, "If He goes by me, I do not see Him; if He moves past, I do not perceive Him."

Job, however, at this stage in his experience, could only see with bitterness the apparent lack of concern on God's part. He sees God's great power but wonders why He does not act to help him: "For He crushes me with a tempest, and multiplies my wounds without cause. He will not allow me to catch my breath, but fills me with bitterness" (vv.17,18). Job concludes that God acts in an arbitrary way: "It is all one thing; therefore I say, 'He destroys the blameless and the wicked'" (v.22). In other words, Job would say, "There does not seem to be any difference; both good and bad can end up in suffering." But this does not give Job any comfort at all: "If I say, 'I will forget my complaint, I will put off my sad face and wear a smile,' I am afraid of all my sufferings; I know that You will not hold me innocent" (vv.27,28).

Once again, Job wishes that he could speak directly with God, but he is afraid to do so: "For He is not a man, as I am, that I may answer Him, and that we should go to court together. Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand upon us

both” (vv.32,33). The term ‘daysman’ or ‘mediator’ is an interesting one. The word used is actually a verb and, in the context, would seem to mean ‘to arbitrate’ or ‘to mediate’. Job wants someone to arbitrate, someone to plead his case before God. Job himself feels that he cannot approach God directly, so he longs for a mediator who would have the right qualities – one who could approach God without fear, but also one who would understand and sympathise with Job’s case. This mediator would thus be able to “lay his hand” on both God and Job, to use Job’s illustration. But who would be able to perform such a function?



*One
Mediator
between
God and men,
the Man
Christ Jesus*

The New Testament supplies us with the answer to Job’s age-old question. God, who wants us to be able to approach Him, yet fully understands our inability to stand

before Him in our own merits, has provided the Mediator we need. “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the Man Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 2:5). We know from other passages in the Bible that Jesus Christ is God; He is God the Son (John 1:1,14; Philippians 2:5,6). Jesus is also a true Man, having been born in this world as a baby at Bethlehem.

Here, then, is One who can fulfil this position of mediator between God and men. He is the Son of God, and so has perfect access to God the Father; He is also a Man, and so fully understands our case. Furthermore, He has fully satisfied all of God’s requirement of holiness, since He has taken upon Himself the penalty for our sins. 1 Timothy 2:6 goes on to add, “Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time”. This, therefore, is the way in which we can approach God – through our Mediator, Jesus Christ. This is why He says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

Job could know nothing of this mediatorship, since Jesus Christ had not yet been revealed. In ch.10, he again expresses his bitterness and, at the same time, seeks to justify himself (vv.3,7). Once again, he asks, “Why did I live? Why was I brought forth?” (vv.18-22). And we see again Job’s shadowy understanding of what lies beyond this life. To Job, it is a “land as dark as darkness itself, as the shadow of death”. How richly blessed we are to have the full revelation of the New Testament! In it is revealed our Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, and certainty of something far better than a land of darkness and the shadow of death!

“I Am With You”

David Hill

“One with God is a majority”, it has been said. Enjoy, and be encouraged by, this short meditation on the promise of the abiding presence of the Lord with us.

These few monosyllables, totalling only ten letters in our English language, have been the source of strength to some of the greatest men and women. The reason is found in the One who speaks them. It will be of interest to look at some of those in Scripture to whom the Lord spoke in this way.

Moses

Moses, great as he was in Egypt, has to learn for forty years in the desert that he is nothing. Then God speaks to him, telling him to go to the greatest monarch of the day and demand the release of the afflicted slaves, God’s people. Then Moses was to lead 600,000 men (beside women and children) through a wilderness to a promised land. This was a land he had not seen, a way he did not know, and a people whom Moses believed would not accept his mission!



Well might Moses ask, “Who am I?” It did not matter who he was! What matters is who God is! And it is God who says to Moses, “Certainly I will be with thee” (Exodus 3:11,12). Moses needed no other. So God’s wonders are made known in Egypt and, for forty years, in the wilderness – made known through a man who protested his inability!

Moses needed nothing save his rod which became the rod *of God*. What a lesson that is for us to learn! We have the word *of God*, the Spirit *of God*, the love *of God* in our hearts, but only that which is “of God” can be effective in His service. If He is with us then, whatever the problem, service will be effective. No human aid or resource is required. If He is not with us, no service will be effective whatever human devices are employed.

Joshua

Moses brings the Israelites out of Egypt; Joshua takes them in to the promised land. Joshua is also encouraged by God with the same words: “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Joshua 1:5). Under Moses, the people had had to learn victory over self (the battle within); now under Joshua they would learn victory over all their enemies (the battle without). How would they do this? God had promised, “I am with you”. If there was a drawn sword, it was not in the hand of Joshua. It was in the hand of the One who worketh all things for good to them that love Him (Joshua 5:13-15; see also Romans 8:28). So He leads them into the possession of all that He had in mind for His people and they divide the inheritance.

What matters is who God is!

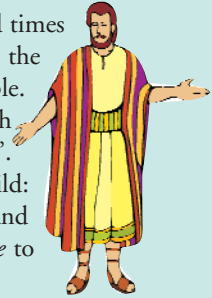
Gideon

Alas! The Israelites forsake the Lord and serve other gods. How easy it is to sink under the pressure of outside circumstances and accept the conditions brought upon us by our failure. Israel needed a deliverer, but whom? Gideon comes on the scene with the question, “If the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us?” But Gideon, the least of a poor family, is commissioned to save Israel, equipped with the words, “Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man” (Judges 6:11-18). So the vast army of the Midianites is turned back, but only by the chosen few, lest Israel should vaunt themselves (see Judges 7). The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong (Ecclesiastes 9:11); the foolish confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). In this way, the glory is to the Lord alone. Smallness is not relevant if He is with us!



Jeremiah

So it is that the history of Israel is punctuated by times of failure and times of revival, when God raises up those to meet the need of the day. In the days of departure, Jeremiah is raised up to rebuke and warn the people. God calls Jeremiah saying, “I ordained thee a prophet...” Jeremiah protests, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child”. But God encourages Jeremiah with the words, “Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for *I am with thee* to deliver thee” (see Jeremiah 1:1-10).



Haggai

In days of recovery, too, God remains true to His covenant. The outward power and glory may be gone; the days may be small. Haggai is sent by God to the governor, Zerubbabel, with the question, “Who is left...?” but also with the message of encouragement, “Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel...and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land...and work: for *I am with you*, saith the LORD of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not”.

We can take encouragement for ourselves today from this message. When Israel was at their zenith, Solomon could build a house “exceeding magnificent” (1 Chronicles 22:5). He builds with the vast provisions that David, his father, laid up and the nations around contributed. Like the rich in the Lord’s day (Luke 21:4), Solomon casts in of his abundance. By contrast, the poor remnant of Haggai’s day are like the widow and her mites. To the natural eye, the temple in their day is but a poor thing: “Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?” (Haggai 2:3). But how precious to God’s eye! The Lord Jesus could say of the widow and her two mites, “[She] hath cast in more than they all”. So Haggai is charged to tell the people, “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace” (Haggai 2:9).

The small things, the despised foundations, are soon going to be used of God to display His glory to a wondering universe!

The disciples

We turn now to the New Testament. At the end of the first Gospel, our Lord says to His disciples, “I am with you”, literally “*I with you AM*” (Matthew 28:20). In this way, the Lord cradles His people in the protection that His name alone can afford: “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Proverbs 18:10). The Lord Jesus had been with His disciples for three and a half years. He had not needed to speak the words during that time – they knew His presence with them. But as He commissions them for service during His absence, He says to them, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”.



Paul

Like Joseph in prison in Egypt (Genesis 39:2), Paul knew the comfort of the words, “The Lord was with him”. The Lord would not leave him nor forsake him (Hebrews 13:5). Paul knew the deep sadness of being abandoned by his fellow men: “All they which are in Asia be turned away from me”; “Demas hath forsaken me”; “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me” (2 Timothy 1:15; 4:10,16). The poor prisoner stood alone – bereft of all human help, but it mattered not. Paul could say, “The Lord is with me”. What strength that knowledge imparted! So he could write, “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me...and will preserve me” (2 Timothy 4:17,18).

Today

So today we also have the assurance of the Lord’s presence with us. He has promised to be with us individually: “He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:5,6). But He has also promised to be with us collectively: “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). May we know the power of His presence with us until we are taken to be for ever with Him!

The protection that His name alone can afford

Little Things

Part 2 – A little maid

Peter Ollerhead

Great rivers start as tiny streams. The story of how one young girl's witness led to both the physical and spiritual healing of a great man still inspires. This is the second in a series on the 'little things' of Scripture. It is based on a talk given on London's Premier Radio.

A mighty man in valour

Many of us, over the years, have had to trim our original ambitions or, at least, to marry them to reality. In 2 Kings 5, we have the story of a little girl who certainly had to alter her ambitions for adult life, for she had been carried away as a slave when she was very young. The house in which she served, however, belonged to a man who had certainly fulfilled his ambitions because he had risen as far as he could go in his chosen career. The man's name, of course, was Naaman and he was leader of the Syrian army. V.1 gives us a few biographical details: "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper."

Naaman must often have ridden at the head of his all-conquering army, taking it back into Syria to receive the cheers and praises of the crowd. He would know then that he had achieved his ambition, for he was the chief and could go no further. He was at the top! V.1 also tells us that Naaman was no brute soldier because he is described as honourable. This would suggest that God recognised the morality of Naaman and commended him for it. There is a further suggestion that, if awards for bravery were given in those days, then Naaman would have received one, for he was "a mighty man in valour".

Sadly, the sting is in the tail in v.1, for it also says of Naaman that he suffered from leprosy, a serious and incurable skin disease. One can imagine how this mighty soldier felt when he realised that he was a leper. His world crumbled for no one could help. Here he was – rich, powerful and famous, with rich and powerful friends at court, yet he had the sentence of death upon him. All his fame and fortune were worth nothing. He might well have thought that it was not fair that such a calamity should befall him. Many of us would feel the same. He had worked his way through the ranks and, just when he could begin to enjoy the fruits of his labour, he found he was afflicted with such a deadly disease.

It certainly wasn't fair, though a moment's thought soon makes us realise that life does not always deal with us fairly. The wonder of the Christian life is that God gives us the grace to bear every problem that we meet. Paul's message to the Corinthians was just that: "And [the Lord] said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Such an attitude is easier to talk about

than to display! Only by the grace of God which, as Paul states, is freely available to all who will trust Him, can we achieve this.

A little maid

If there was anyone in 2 Kings 5 who could say with complete certainty that life was not fair, it is the youngster who is the subject of v.2: “And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman’s wife.” Here was a young girl, alone in an alien land, enslaved for the rest of her life, yet seemingly she showed no bitterness. What an example for us all! She had every right to feel aggrieved but she displayed a very positive attitude. In the midst of this important household was a little, unimportant slave girl, yet she was the means of bringing a message of hope to Naaman!

This little girl is surely an object lesson to every servant of the Lord. Far too many of us in the church want to make a name for ourselves or, at least, to receive the recognition and applause of our peers. We are not content to be nobodies in order for the Saviour to be glorified!

This slave girl was but a link in the chain that connected Naaman to the prophet in Israel, yet such an important and crucial link in that chain! The whole of this healing miracle was set in motion through the open and generous spirit of the little maid from the land of Israel. The message of the slave girl was for Naaman to go to the prophet in Samaria in order to be cured (v.3). How she knew that it was possible for a leper to be cured by Elisha is a mystery. Luke 4:27 tells us that no other lepers in Israel were cured by the prophet, only Naaman. It would seem that she had enough faith in the Lord to believe that this would happen.

A prophet in Israel

V.4 tells us that the message was passed on, up the chain of command, until it reached the king of Syria. Here the first of the errors in this story occurs, for v.5 begins, “Go to, go, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.” Note the destination of the letter: it was sent to the king of Israel, not to the prophet who lived in Samaria. It may have been etiquette or diplomacy that caused the letter to be sent to the king of Israel, but the end of v.5 provides us with an insight into a problem that still afflicts our thinking today. “And [Naaman] departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment.” We are still apt to think that money and influence with the rich and powerful is sufficient for every problem. Money and resources can undoubtedly do much good in this world, but it is also true that money and influence cannot solve every problem of the human condition.

Naaman soon realised this when he witnessed the reaction of the king of Israel to the king of Syria’s letter. The hapless king ripped his clothes in helpless rage. As far as he was concerned, no living person could cure a man of leprosy. Yet this was the task he had been set by the king of Syria! No bribes or payment of any kind could enable the king to cure Naaman of his dread disease. That is still the situation in matters of our spiritual life and wellbeing!

“Money can’t buy us love” is a line from one of the Beatles’ songs. Such a statement is certainly true as regards the love of God because His love is poured out freely to all and can be experienced by any who will pause on the roundabout of life and believe in the Lord Jesus. Happily for Naaman, Elisha heard about the king of Israel’s action and sent a message to him, “Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel” (v.8). This was where the little maid had told Naaman to go – not to the king of Israel but to the prophet.

What follows must have been amongst the most humiliating experiences of Naaman’s adult life. “So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean” (vv.9,10). This great and powerful figure, this warrior of international repute, arrives at the door of the prophet, yet the prophet doesn’t even bother to come and greet him! It was not how Naaman had expected, or hoped, the cure would be effected. He is so angry that he turns away in disgust (v.11). He had expected that Elisha would make a fuss of him and do something spectacular. He wanted to be cured in his own way!

The act of becoming a Christian ought to make us recognise that we are all essentially the same. We might be important, or rich, or influential in society or, conversely, we might have very little wealth or influence. Nevertheless, many of us have a tremendous sense of our own importance. When we become believers in Jesus, we do so, not because of our worth, but because of the grace of God. There is only one way for each one of us to be made righteous before God: “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:22,23).

Faced with such a statement, none of us can expect preferential treatment in our dealings with God just because of our rank in society. V.11 gives a response which many make when faced with the challenge of Christ. “Behold, I thought,” says Naaman. This is an attitude which, if we are not careful, can lead us away from the pathway of faith. It is not that we leave our brains at the door of the church, but that Christianity contains truths which must be accepted by faith alone, though not understood by the intellect. There is



real danger in wanting a faith which contains no miracles or supernatural truths.

Can we really grasp the glorious truth of the mystery of God incarnate? It takes a miracle of grace for us to believe that. Human intellect alone will fail for we need the illumination of the Spirit of God. At the heart of Christianity lies truth which will

We need the illumination of the Spirit of God

never be fully understood. The wondrous story of the love of God, revealed in and through His only begotten Son, Jesus, must be accepted by faith. Let us never reject the truth of Scripture and say, as did Naaman, “But I think...” The fact that “God so loved the world” is beyond the mind of man, but it remains true just the same.

Wash and be clean

Happily for Naaman, he had servants who were aware of his need and managed to persuade him to try the cure that was suggested by the prophet, Elisha. “And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?” (v.13). If only all of us had such faithful and sensible friends! Far too often, people give us the words we want to hear, and not those that best suit our circumstances.

In v.14, we see that Naaman followed the instructions of the prophet to the letter. No longer now wanting to replace Jordan for the rivers of Syria, he made the journey to its banks and bathed in it seven times as commanded. Often in Scripture, seven is used to depict perfection, or completeness. That is certainly true in this account of the healing of Naaman: “...and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (v.14). This complete cleansing happened because Naaman not only believed the words of the prophet, but he also obeyed them.

We can make great claims about the supremacy of Scripture in all matters to do with faith, but they avail us nothing if we are not obedient to it. We cannot claim to be believers in the Lord Jesus if we ignore His commands! We are saved by grace through faith, as Paul told the Christians at Ephesus (Ephesians 2:8), but James reminds us that we must show our faith by our works (James 2:17,18). Naaman demonstrated his confidence in the words of the prophet by going to bathe in the River Jordan.

A new life

Quite often we finish the story there because it has a happy ending. We should notice, however, how Naaman was changed by this event. “And [Naaman] returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.” The miracle of healing had not only cured his body but it had changed his attitude and beliefs. Naaman was now convinced that the LORD was the true God. In his gratitude, he tried to offer Elisha a reward, but the prophet was unable to accept this. What Elisha had done was by the power of God and not by his own peculiar gift. We should notice also from this verse the public way in which Naaman declared his

new found faith in Jehovah. He stood in front of all his countrymen to make this confession. This might well have been reported in the tabloids of his day when he returned to Syria!

As we come towards the end of our study of these events which were set in motion by the little maid who waited on Naaman's wife, we should notice verses 17,18. They demonstrate an important lesson for us. "And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? For thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offerings nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD. In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing." Notice that Naaman wanted to take back to Syria four sacks of soil from the land of Israel. (The traditional way of loading a mule would be one sack on each side of the mule, making four sacks in total.)

Why did Naaman want to take Israelite soil back to his own land? It is possible that he thought that the God of Elisha was confined within the borders of Israel, so that taking Israelite soil to Syria enabled him to provide a congenial dwelling place for a God who was a stranger in Naaman's homeland. More probably, Naaman wanted the soil to remind him of the God who had cleansed him from his dread disease. When he returned to Syria, he would take up duties which required him to accompany the king into the temple of Rimmon. Naaman now knew that the LORD was the only true God. Though the daily round of life caused him to go where this truth was denied, he wanted this pile of soil from the locality where he had been cleansed as a reminder, or memorial, of the time and place where God had dealt with him in blessing.

As Christians, we have a precious memorial of the time and place of our redemption. It is seen in the bread and wine at the meeting for the breaking of bread. The Lord Jesus gave to His church this memorial feast so that a witness could be maintained in the world which crucified Him. "And [Jesus] took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave it unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:19,20).

Christians have to earn a living like other people. This requires entering into commerce and other activities in the midst of an unbelieving world. Amidst this busy round, the Lord gives us the opportunity, on the first day of the week, to set aside time to remember Him. One aspect of this great memorial service is that it reminds us of the One who died and rose again from the dead so that we, His people, might know the power of an endless life. May He help us, in the power of that life, to live for Him day by day!

Go with God

The story of the blessing of Naaman began with a little maid. Even though we may feel that we can only make a little contribution, under God that contribution may result in great blessing for others!

Paul's Last Commands

Donald Hill

Paul's final words to his son in the faith, Timothy, would be tinged by the knowledge that soon he must face a martyr's death. Timothy would catch, and we today need to catch, the urgency of those last words.

Paul's last words in Scripture are found in his second letter to Timothy. It is believed that, soon after he had written this letter, Paul was executed on the authority of Nero, the Roman emperor.

In the final chapter of this letter, Paul writes, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (4:7). Paul did not ask Timothy, or you or me, to become involved in a conflict which he himself had avoided! His experiences in that conflict are recorded in 2 Corinthians 11:24-33. (Please read this graphic description.) As a soldier, he had confronted the enemy; as an athlete, he had run the race and completed the course; as a faithful steward, he had kept "the entrusted deposit" (1 Timothy 6:20, JND trans.). He had not surrendered any of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith.

God buries His servants, but His work goes on! So Joshua followed Moses, and Elisha followed Elijah. Now Timothy was being called on to follow Paul. Today, as other believers go to be with the Lord, we are called on to fill up the ranks, as it were, and so serve our absent Lord. He would still say to each one of us, "Occupy (trade in My interests) till I come" (Luke 19:13).

Special value is placed on the last words of any person. It is an interesting study to consider those recorded for us in Scripture. Christians value in a special way the last words spoken by the Lord Jesus in His upper room discourse (see John 14-17). The fact that He then asked that we should remember Him in His death is of particular appeal. Timothy in his day, and we in our day, should value and take heed to Paul's last words, especially so since the Lord Jesus by His Holy Spirit is speaking through His servant. It is striking that, in the space of this short epistle, Paul addresses at least 10 exhortations to Timothy, and to ourselves. This urgency probably reflects the deep sense that Paul had of the dangers that would face Timothy and us in these closing days.

"Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee" (1:6)

In the days when coal fires were widely used for heating, it was necessary, from time to time, to stir the burning coals with a poker to make them burn more brightly and generate more heat. Like the fire, we need to be stirred into action so that we get on with the work which the Lord Jesus has committed to us. He has something for each one of us to do and

God buries His servants, but His work goes on!

gives the appropriate grace and help for the work (Ephesians 4:7). There is no retirement from the Lord's service! Just as the different members of the human body are all essential and each has something to do, so as members of Christ's Body, the Church, we each have our responsibilities and privileges both for the benefit of the Church and for the unsaved world around us.

To use a sporting expression – are you sitting on the touchline watching others, or are you on the field of play and involved in the action? Paul wanted Timothy to be involved in the action since there was work for Timothy to do. Having seen the light and heard the voice on the Damascus road, Saul of Tarsus asked, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” (Acts 9:6). Paul owned the lordship of Christ and handed over his life to the service of the Lord Jesus.

“Hold fast the outline of sound words” (1:13)

Sound words relating to the Christian faith had been committed by Paul to Timothy. Those same sound words have also come to us in our day. We have an advantage over Timothy insomuch as we have in our hands in the Bible the complete revealed truth of God.

In my student days, I travelled four miles by trolley bus to school. In those days, buses soon filled up and, when the seats were full, a dozen standing passengers were allowed. As a standing passenger, you kept upright by hanging on to a leather strap suspended from the bus roof. Each time the bus started, the conductress would call out, “Hold fast”. Similarly, we need to hold fast to the revealed truth of God as given in the scriptures. Some truths that we especially need to hold fast are as follows:

- The Person of our Lord Jesus has been attacked by the enemy since the dawn of Christianity. Peter had right thoughts of the Lord Jesus in his confession, “Thou art the Christ (the anointed One), the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). This was a revelation from the Father.
- Basic truths concerning the work of Christ. “Christ died for our sins...He was buried...He rose again” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). We have a living Saviour!
- The headship of Christ: “He is the Head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18). As members of His body, we receive direction from our Head in heaven.
- The priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ: “Having an high priest over the house of God” (Hebrews 10:21). Christians form the house, or dwelling place, of God and the Lord Jesus leads our prayers and praises to the Father.
- The first day of the week: “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread” (Acts 20:7). Knowing how easily we forget, the Lord Jesus desires that we should remember Him week by week in the breaking of bread until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).
- Our certain hope: the Lord Jesus promised, “I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).
- No other name: “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).

- Jesus' exclusive claims: He said, "I am *the* bread of life" (John 6:35); "I am *the* light of the world" (John 8:12); "I am *the* door" (John 10:9); "I am *the* good shepherd" (John 10:11); "I am *the* resurrection, and *the* life" (John 11:25); "I am *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life" (John 14:6); "I am *the* true vine" (John 15:1).

The question was raised in a school morning assembly: "If Jesus had said, "I am a way, a door, a light, a shepherd..." what would this have meant? Even an eight year old could answer, "That there are other ways, other doors, other shepherds..." But no! As the chorus puts it,

Only one door, only one way,
 Only one guide to the realms of day,
 Only one keeper when tempted to stray –
 No other friend like Jesus!

"Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2:3)

Roman soldiers were much in evidence during Paul's life. In later life, as a prisoner, Paul was chained to one. Just imagine what life must have been like for a Roman soldier stationed on Hadrian's Wall, especially during a severe winter! Deep snow drifts, freezing temperatures, howling winds – Roman soldiers knew what it was to endure hardness!

So Paul reminds Timothy, and ourselves today, that we cannot expect an easy passage through this world whether in school, college, our place of work, and even in our service for the Lord. The Lord Jesus did not have an easy path. "If the world hate you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" (1 John 3:13).

"Don't get entangled with the affairs of this life" (2:4)

We all have to live out our lives in this world – time in the world of education, time in the world of work, time in the world of home, time in retirement. However, there is a difference between living our lives here and becoming entangled. Entanglement could mean that the interests of Christ are set on one side and we become involved in worldly interests. Let our motto be, "...that in all things He might have the pre-eminence" (Colossians 1:18).

"Be diligent to show that you are an approved workman" (2:15)

An approved workman will present the word of God in such a way that the truth presented, the message given, is the one which God intended. He will apply that word to his own life and be quick to refuse error – that which is not according to God's mind and His revealed truth. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11).

"Turn away from profession and false teachers" (3:5)

In ch.3, we are reminded of those features which will mark the last days and affect both adults and children: children disobedient to parents (v.2), lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God (v.4), religious but having no power to live changed lives (v.5). Paul's

exhortation is clear: “From such turn away” (v.5). God reads our hearts and looks for reality in our lives.

“Continue in the faith” (3:14)

Timothy had had a good start in life. He had a godly mother and grandmother who taught him the Scriptures of truth, the sacred writings (see 1:5; 3:14,15). How important are mothers and grandmothers in the upbringing of children! What an influence for good they can be! Additionally, Timothy came into contact with Paul who also was a guide and an encouragement to him. But whereas Timothy would have had only the Old Testament, we have the great blessing of having the whole Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is “God breathed” (3:16). It tells us (a) what is right; (b) what is not right; (c) how to put things right; (d) how we can be kept right. Let us, like Timothy, keep going on. Let us follow the example of that good runner, Asahel, who “turned not to the right hand nor to the left” (2 Samuel 2:19). Asahel ran a straight course.

“Preach the word” (4:2)

Here is the charge given to Timothy and to ourselves today: “Preach the word – the Bible, the word of God”. This was to be Timothy’s yardstick. Anything which did not match up to God’s revealed truth was to be rejected and publicly refuted. “The time will come when they will not endure sound teaching” (4:3). We certainly live in those times today! We are surrounded by those who teach error and we need to state the truth of Scripture. Let us, like the prophets of old, be ready to declare, “Thus saith the Lord”.

“Do the work of an evangelist” (4:5)

Timothy’s gift may have been more in teaching, but he was not excluded from evangelistic work. He was exhorted to get involved! The Lord Jesus, when He healed the demon possessed man in Gadara, said to him, “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee” (Mark 5:19). There is more to evangelistic work than a pulpit or platform! We can all be involved in spreading the good news of salvation through faith in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ through tracts, magazines, Scripture portions and posters, and in financial support for others.

“Fulfil your ministry” (4:5)

“Timothy, you have a work to do for the Lord Jesus – do it!”, Paul would say. Similarly, the Lord Jesus has a work for each one of us to do. With the Lord’s help, let us each do that work for His glory, whether it be in the blessing and encouragement of fellow believers, or in reaching out to the unsaved. Remember – “Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

You have a work to do for the Lord Jesus – do it

Books by Cor Bruins

Cor Bruins has served the Lord for more than forty years, firstly in Egypt and Lebanon, and latterly in Britain, France, Germany, Holland and Switzerland. He now lives near Leeds with his wife, Audrey.

Divine Design in the Gospels



Hardback 273 pages @ £7.50

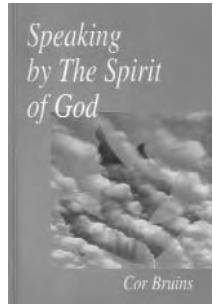
Using the four Gospels, Cor takes us through the life of Christ in chronological order. Along the way he gives explanations for similarities and differences in the way the four writers told the story of our Lord's life here on earth.

Speaking by the Spirit of God

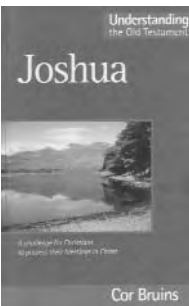
Paperback 95 pages @ £4.99

This book is a verse by verse study of 1 Corinthians ch.14 and takes up the subject of "Speaking in Tongues" dealing with subjects like:

The state of the Corinthian church; How to Edify the Church; How to communicate in the Church; Prayer and Praise; Public Teaching and Preaching; How to communicate in the Local assembly. This book is a must for those who want to know what the Bible has to say about this misunderstood and often misused gift of God.



Joshua



Paperback 232 pages @ £6.00

The result of many years of private study and of public exposition of the book of Joshua, this book gives a vital challenge to Christians to possess their blessings in Christ.

*Special Offer for July - September Only:
All Three Books for £15.00*

Please quote "Scripture Truth Offer" when ordering the Collection.
Do not send money with your order.
An invoice will be sent, as postage and packing need to be added.

Learn from Christ

Move to Beth'lem's manger bare,
See the baby swaddled there.
'Tis the Saviour, Christ the Lord,
Son of God, Eternal Word.
By God's gracious gift, touched be –
Learn from Christ's humility.
To the Temple courts move on,
See the young Boy in the throng.
'Tis the sinless, the wise One;
Has the Father's work been done?
By God's gracious gift, touched be –
Learn from Christ's integrity.
Walk to sweet Gethsemane,
There God's Fellow tearful see.
'Tis the Shepherd, praying still,
Suffering in His Father's will.
By God's gracious gift, touched be –
Learn from Christ's fidelity.
To the Judgment Hall draw near,
See the Captive standing there.
'Tis the Witness, Son of man,
His main aim the truth to fan.
By God's gracious gift, touched be –
Learn from Christ's stability.
Climb to Calvary's cruel crown,
See God's Servant looking down.
'Tis the cursed One, pierced and torn,
Wearing there a crown of thorn.
By God's gracious gift, touched be –
Learn from Christ's serenity.
Hasten to the sculptured tomb,
Know the Lord has left its womb.
See Love's prints in hands and side,
Mark the purchase of His bride.
By God's gracious gift, touched be –
Learn from Christ's vitality.

G.E.Stevens

(may be sung to the tune, 'Rock of ages')