

Scripture Truth



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The rich young ruler

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The parable of the leaven
The love of Christ constrains us
Why do we need a revelation from God?

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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Things above

“If therefore ye have been raised with the Christ, seek the things which are above, where the Christ is sitting at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1, Darby Trans.).

The glory and grandeur of Milford Sound in south-western New Zealand is much easier to appreciate than to describe. Walls of sheer rock, often covered with an intricate carpet of moss, shrubs, and even trees rise abruptly to a height of over five thousand feet. Waterfalls, some of them cascading several hundred feet down the steep cliffs, add to this awesome display of God’s creation.

Travelling through all this natural beauty I was struck by the words of the captain, “Keep looking up or you’ll miss much of the beauty.” My mind immediately raced to the words quoted above, “Seek the things which are above.” For if travellers through Milford Sound miss out on natural grandeur by ignoring the captain’s word, how much more do Christians miss out on spiritual grandeur by ignoring the Word of God!

True, the spacious lounge offers comfortable seats, shelter from the elements, and, yes, a limited view, but the exhilaration belongs to those on the top deck whose faces are whipped by the wind and whose eyes are filled with the glory.

Why do so many of us prefer the lounge?

Gazing on Thee, Lord in glory,
While our hearts in worship bow,
There we read the wondrous story
of the cross – its shame and woe.

Gazing on Thee, we adore Thee,
blessed, precious, holy Lord:
Thou, the Lamb, alone art worthy,
this be earth’s and heaven’s accord.

From Grant Steidl, My Musings (Beamsville, Ontario, 2009), p. 260; poem by Miss C. Thompson.

Why do we need a revelation from God?

Yannick Ford

Why indeed? As this excellent article shows, the Bible itself powerfully indicates why, in the strange little book of Ecclesiastes! It is the first article of a short series on this vital topic.

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:38-40, ESV).

Life and death issues! The Lord Jesus spoke these words the day after the feeding of the five thousand. What a far-reaching promise He made! Those of us who believe His words are staking our eternal destinies on what He said. He promised, “I will raise him up on the last day”, and we are trusting that He will do just that.

On what basis do we trust this and all the other promises recorded for us in the Bible? It is because we believe that the Bible gives us an accurate record of what God wants us to know. On the face of it, it might seem very strange to others that we would firmly believe a book for something as important and far-reaching as our eternal destiny after this life is over. Why believe an ancient book? Why not trust in our experience, in the experiences of others, in recent discoveries, or in new theories or philosophies?

This brings us to the fundamental question of how we can know that the Bible is true, accurate, and sufficient for our spiritual needs. God willing, I would like to look at this important question in three parts:

1. Firstly, we need to understand that we are dependent on a revelation from God.
2. Secondly, how can we know that the Bible is the revelation from God that we need?
3. Thirdly, how should we respond once we know that we possess a revelation from God?

This article will consider the first point, and then I hope to cover the remaining questions in further articles.

When it comes to subjects such as our eternal destiny, we definitely need a word from God Himself. While there are many things that we can know and discover for ourselves, questions such as what happens after death and how we

can be acceptable to God can never be fully and unequivocally answered simply on the basis of what we know. Interestingly, king Solomon, the wise “preacher” of the Bible book of Ecclesiastes, grappled with these issues. Consequently, he can teach us much about this subject. Let us therefore briefly consider what light we can gain from Ecclesiastes.

About twenty years ago, Rachel, my wife-to-be at that time, gave me an interesting commentary on Ecclesiastes, written by F.C. Jennings.¹ Jennings himself was an interesting man – he was born to British parents in India in 1847, and when grown he entered the tea business, eventually setting up his own tea importation business in the USA. The business prospered and he retired in the late 1890s, when he would only have been around 50 years old. He then devoted himself to Bible study, ministering and writing. He died in 1948; thus he lived to see his 100th birthday!²


Ecclesiastes can seem like a strange book at first reading. Consider the opening verses:

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?” (Ecclesiastes 1:1-3)


It does not seem like the start of an encouraging message! Jennings explains that the phrase “under the sun”, which occurs 28 times in Ecclesiastes,

¹ F.C. Jennings *Meditations on Ecclesiastes*. Believers Bookshelf, Sunbury, PA, USA (no date given). This book can be read for free online via <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/29971>. Originally published as *Old Groans and New Songs. Being Meditations on the Book of Ecclesiastes*.

² Biographical information taken from the back cover of F.C. Jennings *Studies in Isaiah*, (Neptune, NJ, Loizeaux Brothers, 1935; reprinted 1982).



*When it
comes to
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from God
Himself*



gives us the key to interpretation. Ecclesiastes shows us *what we can know from the viewpoint of this earth, with our human wisdom*. It is, as Jennings explains, the furthest that unaided human wisdom can go. And this will show us why we need a revelation from God.

1 Kings 4:29-31 shows us how wise a man Solomon was:

“And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations.”

In Ecclesiastes we see Solomon applying his wisdom to problems “under the sun”, and we see his conclusions. For example in chapter 1 he bemoans the fact that life as a whole is vanity. In chapter 2 he tells us that pleasure and grand projects do not bring lasting satisfaction. Solomon notes that wickedness can be found where justice should be administered (3:16), something that causes much grief and outrage. He also knows that there are people who are oppressed and are not delivered (4:1), which is as true today as it was in Solomon’s time. Ultimately, all will die (6:6), and we cannot know what the future will hold: “For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?” (Ecclesiastes 6:12)

All these findings of Solomon add up to a depressing conclusion – if that is how life really is! However, it is not quite the end of the matter, as Jennings shows in his commentary. There is something further that we can glean. Let us consider some verses from the last chapter of Ecclesiastes:

- “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” (12:1).
- “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil” (12:13-14).

We see from these verses that Solomon takes it as granted that there is a Creator God. This is indeed something that we can know with our unaided human wisdom “under the sun”. Paul says the same thing in Romans 1:19-20: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

Solomon also understands that there will be a moral judgement of our deeds, and indeed he assumes the existence of right and wrong as such. We have already seen how he was saddened to see wickedness in the place of justice, and that he was saddened with the issue of oppression. Like the truth of creation, an understanding of morality seems to be built in us, as Paul also shows in Romans 2:15: “They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.” If there is a God, and if there is an existence of good and evil, it seems logical that there will be a judgement. Jennings believes that Solomon would have come to this understanding by thinking through the natural correspondence between sowing a seed and reaping a harvest.

There is a God, we should fear Him, and there will be a reckoning – thus far, it seems, the wisest man can go without any further knowledge. We can thank God that this is not where we have been left! How would we respond if that was all we knew? Doubtless, in the same way as many people do today – either by ignoring such questions, focussing only on the here and now, simply trying to get by, or perhaps by seeking to do some good in the hope of balancing out past mistakes. Without further revelation, this is not unreasonable. Consider the following quotation from Lewis Sperry Chafer’s book *Grace*:³

“The proposition of becoming acceptable to God by being good appeals to the fallen heart as the only reasonable thing to do, and, apart from that which it has pleased God to reveal concerning grace, it is the only reasonable thing to do. It therefore becomes a question of believing the



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further
knowledge*



³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace: the Glorious Theme* (Philadelphia, 1922; reprinted 1982 by Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI), p.191.

Record God has given concerning His Son
(1 John 5:10).”

What I trust our brief consideration of Ecclesiastes has done is to awaken in us the sense that we are completely dependent on a revelation from God. Unaided human wisdom will only take us so far. If we are wise, like Solomon, we may come to understand that there is a God to whom we are responsible, and that He will hold us accountable for our deeds. If left there, we will perhaps seek to become acceptable by doing good deeds, which, as Chafer states, would indeed be reasonable in the absence of revelation, even though experience would tell us, in quiet moments of reflection, that it is hard to do and that we can never be sure of success.

We need, therefore, a revelation from God. We are dependent on more than knowledge “under the sun” for fundamental questions like “What is the point of life?” or “How can we be acceptable to God?” or the question that Solomon asked, “For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?” The great news is that we *have* a revelation from God! As Chafer points out, there is a record that God has given concerning His Son.

In the following articles, I want to consider how we can *know* that we have a revelation from God, and then how we should respond to that revelation. How can we be sure that the Bible really is that revelation from God, which is all that we need? And once we are sure, how should we respond? The purpose of these articles will be to strengthen our faith in the revealed Word of God, so that we might joyfully be sure of the things shown to us by God.



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Healthy churches

Reflections on 3 John: avoiding sectarianism

David Hughes

A previous article¹ reflected on the down-to-earth character of John's prayers for Gaius, and on Gaius's fine character, as one who "lived out" the truth, especially in the matter of hospitality. Now John comes to what may have been the main reason for his letter.

Loving pre-eminence

In verses 9-11 we get a more sombre section of the letter, where we have to learn from the negative example of Diotrephes rather than from the positive example of Gaius. In this section we learn that healthy churches avoid sectarianism.

Diotrephes was causing problems. He always wanted to be in charge and have the best place. He wanted to decide who could do what in the assembly. Anyone who didn't agree with him and follow his commands was soon in trouble. He even put some of them out of the church. He had got to the point where he was speaking evil of the apostle John himself, and wouldn't receive well-known Christian teachers. Anyone who wanted to receive them was kicked out of the church.

It's hard to understand how this situation arose. You can perhaps understand how it might happen today, when one Christian leader might have a clash with another. But this was the apostle John! Can you imagine John the apostle turning up at your assembly on Sunday morning and being told he wasn't welcome? Madness! Was there, maybe, a clash on how much involvement other Christians could have in a local assembly? Maybe Diotrephes thought John had no right to tell him what to do in his locality. Maybe he couldn't cope with people with more spiritual gifts than he had, and was jealous? I don't know.

The sad thing is, it's possible that Diotrephes may well have been someone who cared deeply about the truth. He maybe thought he was faithfully serving God

Can you imagine John the apostle turning up at your assembly and being told he wasn't welcome?

¹ See *Scripture Truth*, April 2016, pp. 304ff.

and guarding against error, but he had clearly got it wrong. That must be a warning to us! It's clearly right that we stand for the truth, but let's be very careful that in our fight for the truth we don't cut ourselves off from believers we should legitimately be joined with. Large personalities clashing with each other in a fight for the truth, and putting out anyone who doesn't agree with them, are not a pretty sight. Worse still when each side speaks ill of the other, and malicious slanders are used, instead of each crediting the other with the best possible motives.

Brothers and sisters, let's guard against sectarianism like that.

This section is also a warning to us not to impose our views too strongly upon the assembly. Again, we must stand for and teach what is right. But we have to be very careful that we don't turn our personal preferences on certain issues into a fight for the truth. We must be careful not to speak ill of people who disagree with us on non-essential issues, and we certainly must not put out believers for differences in views on non-vital matters. I need to be careful that I don't chase after the first place, and always want to have my way.

John warns Gaius not to follow Diotrephes (v.11). Strong personalities can often gain a following quickly. Perhaps Gaius could have gained position for himself by following Diotrephes. But John reminds him that ultimately Diotrephes' deeds are evil and Gaius shouldn't follow them. Healthy churches avoid sectarianism.

Imitating others

Instead of following the evil example of Diotrephes, Gaius is told to imitate what is good. John then presents Demetrius as a good example (v.12). I don't think we know any more about Demetrius than we see in this verse. But what a testimony he had! Everyone spoke well of him, and even the truth, if it could speak, would speak well of him. John expressly adds his own commendation of this man. He was clearly a man who lived out the truth.

The church needs good examples in every generation. Demetrius was a contemporary of Gaius and Gaius would be able to learn from him. When God has provided good examples for us let's make sure we learn from them. I'm grateful for the various men and women who have been a good example to me all through my life. None of them is perfect; all of them have flaws, but all of them have shown me in practice what it means to live a godly life. That's one

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*Whoever we are, someone will be watching us!
What kind of example do I set?*

of the reasons why we need each other, and why God has placed us in the church.

I wonder if it would be true of me that I have a good testimony from all? (v.12) Would it be true of you? Could others look at me in the same way as Gaius was to look at Demetrius? Whoever we are, someone will be watching us! What kind of example do I set? This is not a call to be perfect. None of us could. Instead it's a call to be genuine: to love the truth, to seek to live the truth, and to love Christ.

I've been reading in Ezekiel recently. There's an interesting point in chapter 14 when Ezekiel mentions three godly examples, Noah, Job, and Daniel (vv.14ff). I've been wondering why Ezekiel chose to list these three men in particular. Obviously Noah and Job were from a long time before Ezekiel lived, and probably all the Jewish people would have grown up hearing stories about them. But why Daniel, who was a fellow-exile, and possibly even slightly younger than Ezekiel?

I just wonder if it was because Daniel was a current example.² He was an example of someone living in the same difficult days as Ezekiel's audience. He showed that it was still possible to live a godly and righteous life: for he was in the middle of doing it. No one who knew about Daniel could claim it was impossible to live a godly life because the circumstances were so different from those of Noah's and Job's day. Daniel was alive at that point, and Ezekiel points to him as a godly example for the people to follow.

Maybe John uses Demetrius in a similar way. I wonder if any of us could be used as that kind of example of faithful living in difficult days? Healthy churches need good examples. There are good examples of godly people in our time too. Do we learn from them?

Healthy churches value other churches

As we finish let's just quickly look at the last two verses of John's letter. Of course it's important to do good to our local church, and this will occupy most of our time. That's where God has put us. But just notice in verses 13 and 14 that, from a distance, John says, "I hope to see you shortly." He cared about believers in other localities. He wanted to see them when he got the chance. He

² I owe this point to Mr David Hill.

*This is just a little reminder not to forget
to care about believers in other places*

sends them greetings of peace. Not only that, his friends also send greetings (v.14). This is just a little reminder not to get so focused on our own assemblies that we forget to care about believers in other places. We can pray for them and show them support in any ways we can. How well do I co-operate with other assemblies?

Finally, two more things to notice. John calls the other believers “friends”. I think it would be more common for the writers of the New Testament to refer to other Christians as brothers, saints, etc. But maybe it’s significant that John uses “friends” here. After all, if we are going to deal with difficult people in our churches, it would be better to keep in mind that we really are friends. Healthy churches view each other, not just as brothers but as friends, and have that kind of friendly affection for each other.

Finally John writes, “Greet the friends by name.” This reminded me that it’s important to know each other’s *names*. John shows personal interest in each individual in Gaius’s assembly. They were to be greeted not just as a collective group but individually, by name. Do I take an interest in each individual in my assembly? Do I know their names and their children’s names? Do I know the things that concern them? Do I know how I could helpfully pray for them? If not, perhaps I had better spend a bit more time talking to them and getting to know them.

I’m sure we all want to belong to healthy churches. I hope these pointers have been helpful and given us all things to think about that allow our assemblies to be healthier. Let’s commit to caring about each other, caring about hospitality, avoiding sectarianism, following good examples and caring about the church.

John has exhorted us to walk in truth. May the Lord help us to do so!

*It’s important
to know each other’s names*

The love of Christ constrains us

Jeremiah and the Rechabites

W.H. Westcott

Hijacked in former times by teetotalism, this strange little episode, buried in a seldom-read book of the Bible, has now sunk back into oblivion. What can it teach us? This article is an edited version of one first published in Scripture Truth, vol.7 (1915), pp. 291-4. The writer, his brother, and their wives pioneered the gospel work in central Congo (DRC) whose results are now supported by the North Kasai Mission.

When Jeremiah commanded the Rechabites to drink wine (see 35:5f), they refused. This episode has, of course, been bent to serve the teetotal cause. But this seems to me to miss the whole purpose of Jeremiah 35. It is obvious that you cannot make it a teetotal question. The instruction which “the house of the Rechabites” had received from their father Jonadab is indivisible: “Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever: neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers” (KJV).

It relates as much to house-building, seed-growing, and fruit-growing, as it does to wine. You cannot do what Jehoiakim did in the next chapter – excise with your penknife what you do not wish to hear (36:23). The knife and the fire serve the *self-will* of the man who hates God’s thoughts, but not the *broken spirit* (cp. Psalm 51:17) of the one who longs to be suitable to God.

Thus the test which God permitted Jeremiah to apply to the Rechabites was not, as some might think, an attempt to get them to drink alcohol. Rather, God, who knew their principles and their faithfulness to them, wished to bring out their obedience to their father’s word by way of contrast to the disobedience of Israel to His laws (Jeremiah 35:14).

But who was Jonadab the son of Rechab, and why did he issue such strange commands to his sons? What led him to his conclusions, and induced him to pass so stringent a rule and urge so strange a life on his posterity?

His short story, as given in the inspired record, is found in 2 Kings 10:15-28. His ride with Jehu, and his presence with that king when he destroyed the Baal-worship – that is all we know about him. But when you study things, perhaps you begin to understand. His name means “The LORD [Jah] is liberal.”¹ Evidently his father Rechab had known something of the true God, and had

¹ Otherwise translated as “The LORD is a willing giver”. [Ed.]

desired his son to bear the testimony throughout the whole of his natural life that God is good. Else why give him such a name? It is when we have tasted that the Lord is gracious (cp. Psalm 34:8) that we become anxious to transmit the knowledge and conviction of His liberality and grace to our offspring.

Jonadab lived in testing times! Ahab was king for most of them, with Jezebel – the most wicked woman of all ages – inciting him to evil. Ahab’s death did not end the evil, for Ahaziah, his successor, followed on the same lines (1 Kings 22:51-53). Finally Joram came to the throne. Against him God, through Elisha, sent Jehu (2 Kings 1:17; 9:6-10). The people were sunk in idolatry; they had turned to Jehovah the back and not the face (cp. Jeremiah 32:33); the prophets of Baal swarmed over the country, even the removal of four hundred and fifty of them by Elijah making little impression. The sins of Jeroboam *wherewith he made Israel to sin* were raging among the Israelites (cp. 2 Kings 3:3).

But it was in the days of these successors of Ahab that Elisha said to Gehazi, “Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?” (2 Kings 5:26) Elisha had wished to teach Naaman that “Jah is liberal,” but Gehazi, by his wish to get a settlement on himself, had frustrated Elisha’s intention. “The leprosy therefore of Naaman”, said the prophet, “shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever.” Do we perceive these lessons? Do we discern the times? (cp. 1 Chronicles 12:32) Do we understand the state of things around us?

It is possible, if not probable, that Jonadab knew Elisha; at any rate, he seemed to have formed the same estimate of his environment that Elisha did. Both appear to have stood morally apart from their generation, Elisha in his service, and Jonadab in his testimony. The days were evil, and Jonadab was not at home in them. He was surrounded, it is true, by the favoured nation of God; but they had sunk, as God said they would, to the level of the nations among whom they dwelt. When Jehu appeared like a great revivalist in the midst of the evil, commissioned by God to punish Israel for their sin, Jonadab may have thought, “Here comes the change I have longed for; now the worship of Jehovah will prosper; now the people will learn God’s righteous ways.” Jehu’s invitation to him to ride in his chariot (2 Kings 10:15) indicates that he was

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known as one who would rejoice to see God's glory manifested. He gave Jehu both heart and hand, in order to see his "zeal for Jehovah" (vv.15f).

Surely, he must have thought, the tide has turned, when the huge congregation of Baal-worshippers was exterminated (10:25-28). Alas! how soon must he have been disillusioned. Twice is it immediately stated that Jehu departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin (10:29, 31). He went wrong himself, and led others to wrong as well.

Was it the sense of the hopelessness of things in an outward way that led Jonadab to be a stranger and a pilgrim in the midst of his own people? ² Was it the feeling that if, like Abraham, he was on the Divine ground, he was, equally, with Abraham, apart from all that surrounded him? Did he realize that where Jehovah was rejected and His word despised was no settling place for him?

Of the father of the faithful it is written, "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country; dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:9). For him and his children, the life of the stranger; for him, no building of houses, no planting of vineyards – nothing to tie him to this earth, nothing to even seem like a portion here. He awaited the time when an order of things would be established on earth, wholly of God. Till then he took the pilgrim's garb, and walked the pilgrim's path, and, above all, showed the pilgrim spirit. God was his portion, and he would take nothing in gift from the world, whether from the king of Sodom or from the sons of Heth (Genesis 14:21ff; 23:13). He held to this principle equally in the day of his prosperity and in the day of his adversity. None but those who have trodden this path a little will know what I mean: not to let the appetite for gain be whetted when the air rings with the shouts of success, nor to hanker after the getting of things for nothing when the atmosphere is heavy with the pressure of untoward circumstances.

² Rechab may have been a Kenite (1 Chronicles 2:55), a desert people connected to Moses' father-in-law and dwelling in the wilderness of Judah (Judges 1:16; 1 Samuel 15:6). But if Jonadab had merely been recalling his family to the nomadic life of their forbears, this would not have elicited the blessing of Jeremiah 35:19. [Ed.]

Such was Abraham's life: a life of magnificent nearness to God and of corresponding moral distance from those who surrounded him. His heart was attracted by things Divine, he lived in them and fed on them; he had his estimate of his environment formed in God's presence; there was nothing to attract *his* spirit in what attracted Lot, and certainly nothing to attract in the ways of the Canaanite and the Perizzite who were then in the land. So he went from place to place, and trained his son and grandson to do the same, a dweller in tabernacles.

Is Jonadab's spirit not the same? Was it for him a question of partial abstinence or of teetotalism? No, surely not. His refusal to take part in the pleasures of those around, and indeed to have any portion whatever in the land in the condition which then characterised it, was his protest against that condition. If Jehovah was rejected and like a stranger in His own land and among His own professed people, so would Jonadab be.

Thus far Jonadab and his sons. But what about ourselves and the times in which we live? Theoretically the hope of the Christian is laid up for him in heaven (Colossians 1:5). It is when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, that we shall appear with Him in glory (3:4). The order of things purposed by God will be ushered in at that time, and *our* part will be a heavenly part with Christ in glory. But somehow the truth has fallen in the street, the professing church suffers "that woman Jezebel" to exercise her baneful influence (Revelation 2:20ff), and the majority of professing Christians seek a portion, and influence, pleasure, and position here where Christ was rejected, and where even now few regard His word. The wine of human recreation or enjoyment or indulgence exhilarates even Christians; the thousand and one hobbies and recreations, and entertainments of the world, seduce most from their loyalty to Christ, and hinder their spending and being spent for Him. Nay, I will go further. And I will say that the strongest and most successful testimony for Christ is not found usually with those who "buy houses, and plant vineyards" here; with those who join their building societies and possess their own property on this earth.³

The loosening influence of whole-hearted devotedness to Christ is plainly seen in Acts 4:34, where "as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them." We can easily see that encumbrances are best got rid of. But in our day it is

³ This no doubt reflects the amazing self-renunciation for Christ of a couple who also left two of their children buried in the Kasai. But moderate home ownership and moderate recreation are, like moderate alcohol consumption, matters for individuals before the Lord (e.g. 1 Timothy 4:8; 5:23; 6:10, 17ff). However the matter of recognising that we, like Abraham, are strangers in and pilgrims through this world, and this being evident to the world in our lifestyles, is not a matter for individual preference, neither is the constraint of the love of Christ. [Ed.]

*Oh, what need there is
to be constrained by the love of Christ!*

even more needed, if our testimony is to have a true ring. For we are surrounded by the Ahabs and the Jezebels in the Christian profession; all seek their own also, and not the things which are Jesus Christ's (Philippians 2:21). The earth-dwellers mind earthly things. I do not speak alone of *worldly* things, but of *earthly*. The numbers of those who speak of a heavenly calling are great;⁴ the souls who are true to it – can we say they are many? But the worldliness of the Christian profession as a whole, the unmistakable revolt against the authority of God's Word, the consequent disobedience to the simplest requirements of holiness and truth, the love of pleasures distancing the love of God, the settling down into things and affairs *here* – all these call loudly for a seed of Jonadab.

It is a joy to learn from Jeremiah 35:19 that, "Therefore, thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever." So pleased was Jehovah with their obedience to their father, and their fidelity to their pilgrim principles, that He pledged His own Name to secure a succession of "sons of Jonadab" down to the end of time.

The question for us is, are we among them? Do we seek after the intoxicating pleasures of this world that wine symbolises? Do we build houses, as though we were fixtures here? Are our hopes detained here by things we should gladly bundle to one side, if we thought the Lord were coming to-morrow?

Jonadab, we may surmise, was constrained by his own name, by the liberality of God toward him. Oh, what need there is for intenseness in our spiritual life, to be *constrained* by the love of Christ! (2 Corinthians 5:14) Do you know, I used to think it said "the love of Christ constrains us to live to Him"? That is not it. It simply says, the love of Christ constrains us, *constrains* us, **CONSTRAINS US!** It holds us, sets the forces of Christian life in motion, never relaxes its hold, always exercises its gentle, happy pressure. It is this that leads us to choose the Abraham-path and not the path of Lot. It is this that makes Jonadabs of us, makes association with the sickly and wicked condition of things around us impossible, and induces the simple pilgrim life in which the heart aims to be free from entanglement here, that it may be yet more willing and more fully under the constraint of His love.

⁴ Not sure that even this is the case in 2015! [Ed.]

Alpha People

Kohath

George Stevens

“This shall be the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation, about the most holy things...” (Numbers 4:4, KJV)

Kohath was the second son of Levi (Exodus 6:16), and from him was descended the priestly family through Amram and Aaron (1 Chronicles 6:1-15). But by “Kohathites” the Scriptures usually mean the descendants of Kohath’s other three sons (6: 18ff), to whom was assigned the responsibility of carrying the most holy things of the tabernacle during Israel’s wilderness journeyings (Numbers 4:2, 15; 10:21, etc.). This article concerns them. Theirs was a solemn service, because they were not to touch or look upon any of the holy things themselves or they would die. Instead, Aaron and his sons packed up the items and placed them on staves or bars by which the Levitical Kohathites could carry them upon their shoulders.

But what have these ancient details to do with us? Colossians 2:17 tells us that all these things “are a shadow of things to come”: so they all have a meaning we can learn from.

We can start with the name. “Kohath” means “assembly”, and immediately reminds us of the church, the assembly of “called-out ones” according to the etymology of the Greek *ekklēsia*. Everyone who acknowledges that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God has been “called... out of darkness into his marvellous light” in order to “shew forth his excellencies” (1 Peter 2:9, Darby Trans.). And the various items of tabernacle furnishings that the Kohathites carried through the wilderness set forth the varied glories of Christ.

For example, the veil – the first item of the tabernacle that the priest had to dismantle (Numbers 4:5) – sets forth Christ as the perfect man who was, nevertheless, the Son of God. It was made of “blue and purple and scarlet and fine twined linen” with cherubim embroidered into it, and hung upon gold-overlaid pillars (Exodus 26:31f). The blue reminds us that the second man is from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:47, Darby Trans.); the scarlet that He was the rejected King of Israel (Matthew 27:25, 28), but also the Deliverer (Joshua 2:18; 6:23) and the sin offering (Isaiah 1:18). Purple speaks of His pre-eminence in whatever position or office He takes up (e.g. Judges 8:26). He is the glorious Man who shall one day be acknowledged as King of kings and Lord of lords; and He is our *great* high priest. The fine-twined linen speaks of the service of God (e.g. Revelation 19:8), and shows Him to be the perfect Bondman of God

who humbled Himself and served with urgency and faithfulness. The cherubim speak of judgment, and remind us that all judgment is given to the Son (Genesis 3:24; John 5:22). And the gold-covered pillars on which the veil was mounted tell us that although a man, He was still the holy God.

The service of bearing the tabernacle furnishings fell to those who were between thirty and fifty years of age (Numbers 4:3). This reminds us that those engaged in the holy work of the Lord should be spiritually mature. It also suggests that there is a time to step down from full-time service (though not from all service – 8:26!)

The families of the sons of Kohath pitched their tents on the south side of the tabernacle (3:29). For someone standing at the door of the tabernacle and facing east, i.e., towards the sunrise, the Kohathites' camp would be on their right hand. This reminds us that as Christians we should be watching for the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13) who will rise as the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings in a soon-coming day (Malachi 4:2).

But down the line of Kohath's family there came a black sheep. His name was Korah. He was not content with his God-given service in the tabernacle, and openly rebelled against God by questioning the authority and privilege given to Moses and Aaron in God's purposes. He, along with other rebels, was swallowed up by the earth (Numbers 16:31-33). However Korah's sons were shown grace; they were not consumed (26:11). There is exalted privilege, solemn warning, and wonderful grace in the history of the line of Kohath.

The sons of Korah were saved to serve. With the LORD's choice, ultimately, of Jerusalem as His centre, the privilege of carrying the tabernacle furnishings ceased (1 Chronicles 23:25f). But David appointed the Korahites to be doorkeepers (9:19; 26:1ff) – a menial, but happy role (Psalm 84:10). There's a lesson for us here!

And some of them were also saved to sing (1 Chronicles 6:31-38; 25:1,4). Psalms 42-49 (including probably 43) and 84-88 (except 86) were composed by or for "the sons of Korah".

"One song there is of sweetest tone,
reserved for sinners saved by grace"¹

All of us were saved to sing – now, and in eternity! (Ephesians 5:19; Revelation 5:9f)

¹ Thomas Kelly, 1769-1855.

The parable of the leaven

Iain Martin

A lively refresher course in a much misunderstood parable.

“Another parable He spoke to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened” (Matthew 13:33, NKJV).

Jesus had already given the crowd the parable of the sower and the seed (Matthew 13:3-9; 18-23). Here the same seed (the gospel message) is sown in all parts of the field (the world); but it doesn't prosper universally. Some is eaten by the birds, some withers, some is choked by the weeds, and even that which bears fruit does so with differing levels of success. This message is both a warning and an encouragement – not everywhere nor everyone we take the gospel to will accept it, but the sower still scatters the seed and trusts that where it falls on fertile soil it will prosper and bear good fruit.

Jesus had then spoken the parable of the wheat and the tares (vv.24-30, 36-43) – where good seed (the gospel) was planted in the field (the world) and grew well (faithful Christians), but amongst that good seed an enemy (the devil) came and sowed a different seed, that produced weeds (false doctrine, heresy, evil ways) – weeds that were, to all intent and purpose, indistinguishable from the wheat until the time came for harvest. But at the time of harvest the wheat (those belonging to the Lord) would be gathered into the barn – a wonderful picture of the gathering that we look forward to when the Lord reaps His harvest – while the weeds are collected and burned.

The theme is developing through the discourse: Jesus is talking in terms of things the crowd will relate to, but by these stories is really addressing the question of the course of the gospel. Not all the seed will prosper; the devil will sow false seeds amongst the true. The third parable takes the theme further, still using seed to make His point. This time it is the mustard seed. Some, wishing for a good-news story, present the growth of the mustard seed as a picture of incredible success, and point to the shelter offered the birds. But not only does this fail to grasp the direction of the discourse generally, it also ignores two thousand years of history; and seems oblivious to the fact that the growth of this particular seed represents a distortion of the natural order – it became a tree rather than the large bush it should have been. Providing shelter to birds by no means proves that the tree fulfils the purpose of God, as Ezekiel 31:6, 10ff, speaking of proud Egypt, show.

Rather, as said in the last article,¹ the parable of the mustard seed speaks of the

¹ See “The mustard seed”, *Scripture Truth*, July 2015, pp.291ff.

growth of what the world sees as the Church; not of the church that Christ claims as His bride.

The woman, the leaven, and the meal

But now let us move on to the fourth parable, given at the head of this article. This, again, is today portrayed by many as being indicative of the wonderful growth of the gospel. This is generally the view of those who believe that they are bringing in the Kingdom, winning the world for Christ, and preparing the way for His glorious return. They regard the “meal” as the world, the “leaven” as the gospel, and the “woman” as the church.

In other words they see the parable as teaching the gospel’s quiet permeation of the world by the agency of the church, until the whole world is won for Christ. But I want us to look carefully at the parable through the eyes of Scripture.

The meal

There are three elements in the parable – the meal (i.e., flour), the leaven (i.e., yeast), and the action of the woman. And these three are the key to its understanding.² Let us consider firstly the “three measures of meal.”

In Genesis 18:6 we read, in the passage where the LORD has appeared to Abraham, “So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, ‘Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.’” The word for “measure” here is “seah”. And in Judges 6:19, where the Angel of the LORD appears to Gideon, we read, “So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour.” An “ephah” is a unit of capacity equal to three seahs.³ An ephah of meal also occurs in Hannah’s offering when she brought Samuel to the house of the LORD in Shiloh (1 Samuel 1:24); and in the prescriptions for the offerings in the new temple in Ezekiel 45:24f.

Therefore, from the above Scriptures, most of the Jews listening to Jesus would have connected the three measures of meal with an ephah and with the meal, or grain, offering commanded in Leviticus.

Now did Abraham prepare for the LORD something that symbolised evil, as it must be if it represents the world? Likewise, the grain offering commanded in Leviticus – was it symbolic of unconverted humanity?

And where does the grain that was milled into the meal come from?

² The writer is indebted to Lehmann Strauss, *Prophetic Mysteries Revealed* (Neptune, NJ, Loizeaux, 1980) for several of the following points.

³ See *The New Bible Dictionary* ed. J.D. Douglas (London, IVP, 1962), p.1323.

Let's go back to the first and second parables: in the first the grain is the product of the seed that fell on good, fertile ground; and in the second the grain comes from the wheat seed, not the tares.

The Lord presents Himself as the Bread of Life in John 6, and describes Himself in John 12:24 as the grain that must die in order to bear fruit. It would be turning the discourse, Scripture, and all reason on their heads to then suggest that the meal in the parable represents the world at large by using that which was a wholesome and acceptable offering to the Lord as a symbol for fallen, corrupt humanity.

So, if the meal represents that which is good, what of the leaven and the woman?

The leaven

If the leaven were to represent the gospel permeating all the world, how would we explain the seed that didn't prosper in the parable of the sower, the tares that endure until the final harvest, the corruption of the mustard seed into a tree, and a largely unconverted world some two thousand years on?

The first mention of leaven in the Bible is in Genesis 19:3 where the two angels came to Lot in Sodom. "They turned in to him and entered his house. Then he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate."

Scripture is quite specific here – the bread shared with the angels was unleavened bread, not bread as the world ate.

The second mention of leaven occurs in Exodus 12:8 where the Israelites are commanded to eat unleavened bread along with the Passover lamb. And in verse 15 the feast of unleavened bread is instituted, and the cleansing of the house from leaven. If leaven was such a symbol of good, why would the Lord command the Israelites to eat unleavened bread and cleanse their houses of leaven?

So, the first two instances where leaven is mentioned in Scripture actually concern *unleavened* bread; and these two mentions occur in the contexts of Sodom and Egypt respectively. What do "Sodom" and "Egypt", when mentioned together, bring to mind? *The martyred witnesses*.

"When they [i.e., the two witnesses of v.3] finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (Revelation 11:7f).

It is no accident that these two places are connected, and are associated with Satan and his man of sin.

Exodus 34:25 commands, “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven.” The meal offering was not to be baked or mixed with leaven; and only unleavened cakes were permitted on the altar of the LORD (Leviticus 2:11).

All these sacrifices were symbolic of Christ who is pure and untainted by corruption.

There were, however, two cases in which leaven was stipulated as a component of offerings. (1) As part of the peace offering alongside unleavened cakes (Leviticus 7:12f). The “peace” offering could be termed the “fellowship offering” (see NIV); in this case parts of the offering were consumed by the worshippers, unlike in the case of the burnt and sin offerings. Here, then, the leavened cakes represent saved *sinner*s having fellowship with God on the basis of shed blood (Leviticus 3:2; 7:15-21). And (2) in the wave offering of two loaves brought as firstfruits at the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:17). This feast was fifty days after the Passover and foreshadowed Pentecost. Turning from the “shadow” to the “substance” (Colossians 2: 17): at Pentecost two classes of humanity – believing Jews and gentiles – were baptized into the Body of Christ by one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). So these two loaves were symbolic of the two classes, Jew and Gentile, who, though now born of the Spirit, still have within them the old nature, the sinful nature. The leaven of the flesh still exists within them.

So in cases where bread offered represented saved sinners’ participation in the divine blessing, leaven was prescribed. The meal offering, the bread that typifies Christ, is pure and unleavened; that which typifies saved but nonetheless still-fallen man is leavened.

Within the New Testament, and leaving Matthew 13:33 aside, leaven *clearly* represents evil in all the word’s occurrences. For example, in Matthew 16:11 the Lord says to the disciples, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” Here it is plainly a figure of that which is *evil*. In Luke 12:1 He said, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy.” Would Christ, then, deliberately confuse His disciples by using as the figure of *good* in Matthew 13 what He had used as the figure of *evil* elsewhere?

The Holy Spirit has also used this same figure through the apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 5:6, 7 we read, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the

*Within the New Testament, leaven clearly
represents evil in all the word’s occurrences*

*The meal did not “turn bad” of itself.
Someone else introduced the corrupting agent*

whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump.” Would they be told to “purge out” that which was *good*? See too Galatians 5:9. Leaven is symbolic of things that break up, and corrupt.

What the woman did

Moving on now to the woman – what is her part in the parable? She takes the leaven, which we have just identified as corruption, and hides it in the meal, which we have identified as that which is pure and of the Lord. The meal did not “turn bad” of itself. Someone else introduced the corrupting agent, just as “an enemy” sowed the tares that spoiled the wheat field.

And what she sowed worked surreptitiously, not openly: she *hid* the leaven in the three measures of meal. This represents the way Satan strikes against the truth. The leaven of the Pharisees was hypocritical formality. That of the Sadducees was scepticism. The leaven of Herod (see Mark 8:15) was shameful self-indulgence in worldly desires. Leaven puffs up: the leaven of those who have distorted doctrine down through the ages has been greed, pride, control, and worldly compromise.

The action of the leaven in the parable represents the progress of the professing church in history.

Something I read this week⁴ drew me to this passage of Scripture. It was comments made in connexion with the decision of the organisation that calls itself “The Church in Wales” to ordain women bishops. The decision was welcomed on grounds such as, “Now we are in step with the world”, and, “Now the world can relate to us”, as if the church was called to compromise with the world, rather than to be a called-out group of believers separated to Christ. That is to say, the leaven of the world was used as a deciding factor in what should have been a scriptural and spiritual decision. To me it is indicative of the way that the parable foretells the influence of the world upon the church – it is not a positive progression, but rather a hidden influence that changes its nature.

Let me end with a challenge. I am sure most readers know that yeast does not grow when it is cold or hot, but rather needs a warm environment in which to prosper. Scripture helps us on this point as well:

⁴ This article originated as a talk given in 2013.

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, “These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:14-16).

The Lord knows that in spiritual things too leaven prospers where we are only lukewarm, and He tells us that if we are lukewarm he will vomit us out – we will be corrupted, we will be compromised, and we will cease to be a faithful witness to Him.

The challenges to us today are to remain “hot” in our love for Him, and pure, and to watch for and purge out the leaven; and not to be compromised with the world.

The rich young ruler

Matthew 19:16-30

Theo Balderston

Was the Lord really instructing the young man in salvation by works? What does “treasure in heaven” mean? In what way does “Sell all that you have” apply to us?

Keeping the commandments

“What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16, RV) Why did the “rich young ruler” ask this question, and what did he mean by “eternal life”?

The phrase “eternal life” occurs, I think, only once in the OT, in Daniel 12:2. Presuming that the ruler’s conception of eternal life was Scripturally founded (and, if not, surely the Lord’s reply would have been different), he must have had this verse in mind. From Acts 24:15 we can deduce that first-century rabbis interpreted this verse in terms of the two resurrections. Therefore it seems that the ruler’s concern was how he could qualify for the resurrection of life. He seems to have believed that some single, extra, good deed beyond the Law, was needed for him to qualify.

However the Lord’s answer missed out the word “eternal”. “If thou wouldest enter into life...” (Matthew 19:17). As so often He answered the questioner behind the question.

It might seem like hair-splitting to distinguish “life” from “eternal life”. But, if you omit “eternal”, the word “life” recalls not Daniel 12:2 but Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

“See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; in that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and keep his commandments, and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live... I call heaven and earth as witness against you today, that I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse: therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, thou and thy seed” (Deuteronomy 30: 15, 16, 19).

This passage is Moses’ moving and final exhortation to the great speech that he had begun in Deuteronomy 1:6. He had recounted the ways of God with them since Sinai up to their present position on the edge of the promised land (chapters 1-3), and restated the covenant of Law that had been made with them at Sinai (chapter 4-26). He had placed them under its blessings and curses (chapter 27), and peered into the future to forewarn them of the fearful penalties of disobedience to the covenant (chapter 28:15ff). But in chapter 30:1-10 he had annexed the *promise of grace* to these *warnings against disobedience*, telling them of a time to come when God would even regather disobedient Israel from exile and circumcise its heart to love Him, to keep His commandments, and to “live” (30:6).

With this dread yet wonderful panorama of their destiny spread out before them, Moses comes to the climactic exhortation of his speech, “See, I have set before this day life and good, and death and evil...”

The Lord’s answer therefore draws the ruler back to Scripture. The ruler’s question was framed in terms of “What must I do?” (cp. Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18). On these terms the answer was clear: not perform one extra good deed, but simply keep the law – all of it: the “ways”, the “commandments”, the “statutes”, and the “judgments”. “If there had been a law given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been of the law” (Galatians 3:21).

But the ruler was persistent. His reply to the Lord’s instruction was, “Which?” He was still searching for that single meritorious act that would assure him of qualifying for life. It seems that he genuinely believed he had kept the ways, the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments (Matthew 19:20): but had he somehow overlooked one of them?

The Lord, too, persists on *His* line of reply, keeping to the revealed word of God. He simply lists the obvious: all but one of the commandments of the so-called second table of the Law, the section concerning relations with other people. He rounds His list off with Leviticus 19:18b, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” as the most general, and total, summary of the Law’s teaching on this matter.

The hopelessness of the Law

“Jesus, looking upon him, loved him” (Mark 10:21). The young man was sincere, indeed, in deadly earnest; and left yet hope-less by the Lord’s reply. He could only say, “All these things have I observed: what lack I yet?”

The commandment that the Lord had omitted was the tenth, “Thou shalt not covet” (Exodus 20:17). Probably the young ruler had never consciously coveted anything. Being so wealthy, he had never needed to. And therefore he had never had to face up to the ingrained greediness of his own heart. But *the Lord* faced him up with it with his next words, “Go sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven” (Matthew 19:21). The prospect of losing his possessions confronted him with his own greed – and he could not conquer it. “He went away sorrowful” (v.22)

His departure verified something else the Lord had said: “One there is who is good” (v.17). I expect this was a Jewish truism: only God is good. Yet it implies that man is not good. And this implies that no amount of law-keeping will ever truly *keep* the law: to truly keep it, one would have to be “good”. Why did the young ruler not admit this inescapable conclusion? Yet, and despite the hopeless feeling he had been left with, he could not admit it.

There are many thousands like him today who, perhaps even after having often heard and been challenged by the terms of the gospel, have looked at themselves – and still all they can see is “a good person”. Even if God Himself showed them the error of their self-appraisal (as in this episode) they would not see it. There is no self-delusion so tenacious as self-righteousness. May the Lord deliver any reader from this worst of fatal diseases!

The young ruler had failed the “second table” of the Law. But what about the “first” – which sets out the requirements toward God? This is where the Lord’s further stipulation, “... And come, follow me”, comes in.

It seems likely that the Lord’s words instantly convinced the ruler that following Him was the only way into the kingdom. This inference seems to follow from the facts (i) that “he went away sorrowful,” and (ii) that the Lord immediately switched to “kingdom” vocabulary – “It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (v.23). The ruler realised that in not following the Lord Jesus he was refusing the kingdom of God as well, and all because of covetousness - “which is idolatry”! (Colossians 3:5) He was turning away from God Himself. He knew he *could* not love God more than himself, and so was breaking the first commandment of the Law, “Thou shalt have no other gods

There is no self-delusion so tenacious as self-righteousness

besides me” (Exodus 20:3). How devastating this self-realisation must have been! If only he could have admitted his incapacity as Paul did in Romans 7:7-24! He would surely have received grace to renounce his possessions and follow Jesus – and in a few months would have found himself in the company of others who were doing likewise (Acts 2:45). But he could not face up to his own incorrigible sinfulness, and so “went away sorrowful.”

And thus the Lord showed that keeping the commandments *cannot* be the way to life. The commandment was not too hard for the ruler in itself, nor too far off (Deuteronomy 30:11), yet still he was not up to it. This discovery was the chief purpose for which the Law had been given (Romans 3:20).

The puzzle is, why the Lord did not immediately spell out this lesson for the benefit of the disciples. Perhaps it was because such instruction would have raised questions that could only be answered by the cross and resurrection (e.g. Romans 6:1ff; 7:24 – 8:4; Acts 1:6). As yet, it belonged to the “secret things” of grace (cp. Deuteronomy 29:29). But at the crucifixion the disciples *would* learn the lesson experimentally (see below).

Instead, the Lord here astonishes them by pronouncing it next to impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom. The Law promised material blessing to Israel as a nation if they were faithful to the covenant (Deuteronomy 28:1-13), and in places individualised this promise to the one that feared the LORD (Psalm 112:3-9; Proverbs 3:16; 8:18; 22:4). But the Old Testament also taught the error of trusting in riches (Psalms 49:6ff; 52:7; 73:3ff). According to the Lord, almost all rich people covet their riches rather than regarding them as divine blessing. A word for our affluent times!

The hope of heaven

But the Lord had added a promise to His demand: “...and thou shalt have treasure in heaven” (Matthew 19:21).

“Treasure in heaven” in v. 21 must have the same meaning here as in 6:20, where it is followed by the explanation, “For where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also.” The worldling’s treasure is on earth, and rivets his heart to earth as the place where he hopes to enjoy it. Contrariwise the disciple’s treasure should be in heaven and, if it is, this will rivet his heart to heaven. This

*Where the Lord showed
the bankruptcy of men’s hopes under the Law,
He opened up the hope of heaven*

implies that such treasure will not only be accumulated in heaven, but also *enjoyed* there. If we heard of a rich man whose heart was riveted (metaphorically speaking) to the strong room where his treasures were in safe deposit, we would consider that pathological.

The Lord certainly taught an earthly hope too in this Gospel – e.g. Matthew 5:5; 6:10 and much more. But here and in 5:12 & 6:20f He clearly taught a heavenly hope to those who followed Him. And, here particularly, at the point where the Lord showed the bankruptcy of the best of men’s hopes under the Law, He opened up the hope of heaven.

What shall we have?

Peter’s question (v.27) discloses that he shared some of the young ruler’s doubts. He had given up a presumably prosperous fishing business to follow the Lord; and he had a wife. “Lo, we have left all, and followed thee: what then shall we have?” The Lord’s reply comes in three parts. He promises (v.29) that (i) all who have left the natural blessings of this life for Him will receive an unspecified abundance of recompense, culminating in (ii) eternal life.¹ But in the previous verse Matthew also records something unmentioned in the other Gospels (Mark 10:29f; Luke 18:29f), namely, (iii) a special promise to the disciples, that in the regeneration they shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

This judicial office is not the “treasure in heaven” that was offered to the rich young ruler. His “leaving all” would have come under the rubric of v.29 (“...everyone that hath left houses...”). In any case the disciples had already been told of their heavenly treasure (5:12). But they were in a special position: their reward would be both heavenly and earthly.

The Lord’s answer ran the danger of swelling the disciples’ pride in having merited eternal life by “leaving all”. So He concluded His reassuring reply with verse 30, “But many shall be last that are first; and first that are last.” He went on to illustrate this by the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (20:1-16). But, beyond this, in some sense the disciples would be *themselves* the “first” who became “last”. For though they had indeed left all and followed Him, at His arrest they all left *Him* and fled (26:56). Never again could they make the claim of 19:27.

After the crucifixion the natural man in Peter would surely have harboured murderous thoughts towards those who had just murdered His Lord (cp. John 18:10). Without his own denial of the Lord and loving restoration he could not have been the preacher of unmerited grace at Pentecost. Similarly in the case

¹ It is noteworthy that in Mark 10:30, where the reward is specified in the same earthly “coin” as the renunciation, it is restricted to this present time; and, separately from this, eternal life is promised for the age to come.

of the “sons of Boanerges” who not long before had been demanding their recompense in the kingdom (Mark 3:17; 10:35ff; cp. Luke 9:54). All the disciples must have learned through their desertion that they were the recipients of undeserved grace, and that fallen flesh can never do what is justly required for entering the kingdom of heaven. This was indeed the lesson that the Lord came to teach Israel (cp. John 3:3). The time for the demands of Deuteronomy 30:15ff were past. A long and depressing history had proved that, eminently manageable though these demands were (30:11), Israel had incorrigibly failed to comply. All that was left was the sheer, undeserved forgiveness of God, long promised (e.g. Jeremiah 31:34), but actualised towards a helpless paralytic in that crowded little house in Capernaum (Matthew 9:2, etc.). Israel nationally refused the lesson. The disciples had to learn it deep in their souls, at the crucifixion.

What should we do?

But is this demand to “sell all” binding on all disciples? Shortly afterwards Zacchaeus was voluntarily and cheerfully distributing the half of his wealth to the poor (Luke 19:8), but he was not required to surrender all of it. We must conclude that something peculiar to the ruler gave rise to this demand – i.e., his unadmitted covetousness. It is a fair guess that Zacchaeus would not have been bothered by the thought of his wealth being worthless in heaven, but the ruler’s attitude was different: hence the command.

God did not extirpate in summary judgement the nation that refused His forgiveness in Christ. Instead the gospel of grace went forth with unfettered freeness (Acts 20:24). The kingdom of God did not appear immediately (Luke 19:11). But the Lord is still “at hand” (Philippians 4:5; James 5:8), and we should hold all our possessions with this energising truth in mind. “Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, for neither can we carry anything out... But they that desire to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare.... But thou, O man of God, flee these things...” (1 Timothy 6: 6-11). No Christian should have failed to hear the challenge, “Sell all that you have and come, follow me” in respect of some deeply cherished possession, ambition, or pursuit; something right enough in itself, but which has to go. Or fail to feel the force of the widow’s mites (Mark 12:42-44). The Lord will give the grace to comply.

*Israel had incorrigibly failed. All that was left
was the undeserved forgiveness of God*

Two new books from Scripture Truth Publications

Fruit for Christ's Labour by Yannick Ford

Paperback: 84 pages; STP price: £4.50 + p&p; published 31 July 2015.



"He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied", prophesied Isaiah. His prophecy was fulfilled by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, with wonderful far-reaching results. They are the fruit of the labour of Jesus: closely associated with our current and future blessing. The author explores some of this glorious fruit in this book.

To know God better is a compelling reason to study Bible themes from many different angles. The author looks at some word pictures that illustrate the great consequences of Christ's death and resurrection. His desire is that the reader might see something of Christ's wonderful character and consider what He delights in; and, as a result, have a renewed and strengthened affection for the Lord Jesus as they think about the fruit

of His work. The focus of this book has been restricted to consider some of the ways in which the Lord Jesus relates to us individually, with the aim of encouraging a greater appreciation of His love to us. Whilst it is intended to be an encouragement to Christians, the author trusts that it may also be helpful to those who do not yet know the Lord Jesus in a personal way, but are curious to find out more.

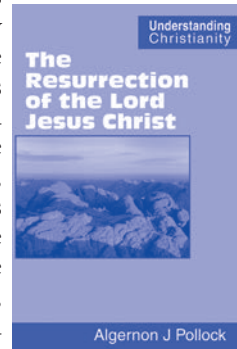
The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ by A J Pollock

Paperback; 88 pages; STP price: £4.50 + p&p; published 31 July 2015.

This edition was produced especially to accompany the theme of YPCC 2015.

It is an historical fact that Jesus Christ actually rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven. In a survey encompassing Old and New Testaments as well as Lyttleton's Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, Pollock affirms his thesis with characteristic eloquence. Out of print for many years, this newly revised edition, edited by John Rice, conveys his message to the 21st Century reader.

Beginning with an overview of the Bible's detailing of the facts and consequences of Christ's resurrection, the author briefly considers Old Testament prophecies of the resurrection, before reviewing Christ's own prophecies of His death. He continues with an examination of the person, life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and their connection with His resurrection. He then considers the circumstances of the Lord's resurrection, before an extensive discussion of all the recorded appearances of the risen Christ. An examination of objections to the inspiration of the Gospel accounts is followed by a look at some theories presented in denial of the resurrection. The author, himself convinced of the fact of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, plainly sets out his reasons in this book.



Father, save!

FATHER, in days gone by
Thy people sought thy face,
longing that souls might be
reached by Thy saving grace.
Thou gav'st the answer, then,
in blessing far and near,
saving the souls of men
from sin and guilt and fear.
Father, save!

Bowing together here,
Thy people of today:
Thou dost, in Jesu's name,
drive unbelief away.
Faith's holy confidence
is resting now on Thee:
O thou that hearest prayer,
we would Thy blessing see!
Father, save!

Down Eden's valleys, Lord,
let living waters flow;
And Adam's fallen race
Thy full salvation know.
And midst the thorny woes
Euphrates knows so well
may those who know its balm
the Saviour's mercy tell.
Father, save!

Let all our hearts arise,
alive with heavenly glow,
Moved by Thy Spirit, Lord,
with love's deep stream to flow;
and, if in foreign lands,
or this, Thou bidst us roam,
oh! for Thy mighty power
to call the wanderers home.
Father, save!

W. H. Westcott (1865 – 1936); excerpted from *Scripture Truth* vol. 1 (1909), p.70.