

SCRIPTURE TRUTH



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SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Gordon Hughes

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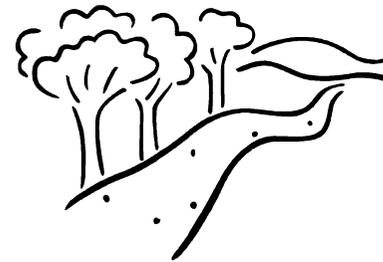
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Holiday Reflections

Donald Hill

Green valleys and gently meandering rivers in the summer sunshine may seem a distant prospect at this time of year. Enjoy this meditation based on the writer’s holiday experiences.

Leaving the hustle and bustle of the town, I made my way down to the riverside and began to walk upstream. This river, like any other, was making its way down to the sea.



Lesson 1

“All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full” (Ecclesiastes 1:7). All that this world has to offer cannot give satisfaction to the human heart. God has planted a much deeper desire in each heart: “Also he hath set eternity in their heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). But there is lasting satisfaction to be found in, and only in, the Lord Jesus. So He could say to the woman at Sychar’s well: “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13,14).

Proceeding upstream, a fertile valley opened out before me with lush meadows where flocks of sheep and herds of cattle

were grazing. Some were already full and lying down in the warm sunshine.

Lesson 2

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures” (Psalm 23:2). There are abundant resources to be found in the Lord Jesus. He is the Bread of God come down from heaven to give life unto the world. So He promises, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst” (John 6:33,35). Am I feeding on Him from the Word of God? Do I find time, or make time, to meditate on the scriptures I have read?

Proceeding further up the valley, I came to crops of standing corn, waiting for the harvester. There were also fields of stubble where the harvest had been gathered in.



Lesson 3

The Lord’s words to His disciples are still relevant and challenging: “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (John 4:35). There are many around us who still have to confess, “The harvest is past, the sum-

mer is ended, and we are not saved” (Jeremiah 8:20). Am I involved with the harvest of precious souls, knowing that the day of judgment for the unbeliever is fast approaching? Do I support in prayer those servants of the Lord who are actively involved in Gospel work?



Moving on to a country lane, I became aware of a ‘clunking’ sound somewhere in the distance. When eventually I drew alongside a field of stubble, the noise came from a tractor pulling a trailer which was full of farmyard manure. Muck spreading was in process before ploughing up the field.

Lesson 4

Am I guilty of spiritual muck spreading? Am I quick to run down fellow believers in face to face conversation? Am I quick to pick up the telephone, or pen and paper, to pass on unsavoury items of news? How much better to be like Anna: “And [Anna] coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). We need to pray with David, “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3).

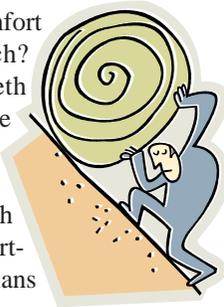
The way ahead was down hill and back to the river. I met quite a number of people

toiling up the hill as they returned to their holiday homes.

Lesson 5

Like the people toiling up the steep hillside, there are fellow believers, and unbelievers too, who find life’s journey rather hard going. Do I pass them by, just as the priest and the Levite passed by the wounded traveller in all his need (Luke 10:31,32)? Or, like that good Samaritan, do I offer them a little help and encouragement along the way? How lovely to be like Onesiphorus, of whom Paul could write, “for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain” (2 Timothy 1:16). How many fellow believers there are who are bewildered and sad at heart because they cannot understand events which tear apart saints of God!

Am I bringing the comfort of God to such? “God...who comforteth us...that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:3,4).



Half way down the hill was a seat, shaded by leafy trees and with a fresh view of the valley I had left behind. Here I was glad to take the opportunity to sit down in peace and enjoy the shade and the view.

Lesson 6

Just like the seat provided a resting place, and the leafy trees provided shade from the heat of the sun, so we have the opportunity of turning aside from the cares of this world to enjoy the company of the Lord Jesus, to sit under His shadow. “I sat

down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love” (Song of Solomon 2:3,4).



So the two on the Emmaus road experienced the blessing of the company of the risen Christ. Afterwards, they could say, “Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way?” (Luke 24:32).

What a peaceful setting was that seat on the hillside. Thank God that Jesus has made peace through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20). Moreover, He continues to bring His peace to His own. So, on the night of His betrayal, He could say to His disciples. “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you...let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:27).

As I sat there, the peace of the afternoon was disturbed, first of all, by a small plane which swooped over the valley and disappeared. Shortly after, two Tornado planes hurtled across the sky, making a terrible booming sound. The peace was certainly shattered.



Lesson 7

We are not to expect an easy pathway through this world. Just as the planes disturbed the peace of the afternoon, so the trials of life descend upon us, testing our faith. The Lord Jesus did not have an easy

pathway. He warned His disciples, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Take comfort, the Lord Jesus is with us all along life’s journey. The chorus reminds us:

“He’ll go with me all the way,
He’s my comfort and my stay.
From His tender loving mercy,
I will never, never stray.
O’er the mountains rough and steep,
through the valleys dark and deep,
Till I reach my home in glory,
He’ll go with me all the way.”

Returning to the river bank, I became aware of a lot of fish swimming in the clear water, occasionally breaking the surface with the resultant ripples.

Lesson 8

Dead fish are carried downstream by the current. Live fish swim upstream against the current. We live in a world of increasing evil. But as believers, we have the power, the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, to be overcomers.

May these simple thoughts encourage us, challenge us and stimulate us to be more actively engaged in the Lord’s interests. May we show His love to unbelievers and to every fellow believer while we wait for His return from heaven. The wilderness journey over, the day of conflict over, we shall enjoy His presence in the whole of the redeemed company for evermore!

Has the Lord been teaching you some valuable lessons from daily life and experience? Please write in and share this blessing with others.

Jesus' Farewell Words

Part 2. The Lord's remedy for heart trouble

(John 14:1-14)

Arthur Goodwin

The opening verses of John 14 are amongst some of the most loved verses of Scripture. We need continually to come back to the comfort of the Lord's own words. This article is the second in a series originally broadcast on London's Premier Radio.

Introduction

Angina, blood clots, heart disease and heart attacks are all physical symptoms of the malfunctioning of the heart. They are one of the primary causes of death in this country. In John 14, we have the remedy for spiritual heart trouble of the greatest physician of all time, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Let not your heart be troubled" were His words to His disciples when He was about to leave them.

In ch.13, He had told His disciples that He was about to leave them. That news had made them very sad. Now in ch.14, He sets forth the consolations which would comfort their hearts in view of His immediate departure and would continue to comfort them after He had gone. He is not going to abandon them; indeed, His going would be for their good. During His life, He had taught them many things e.g. that He was the Good Shepherd, that He had come to give life, that He was going to build His church, that He would make them to be fishers of men. These things were not about to be abrogated by His

death, but rather ratified. He would have told them so if it had not been the case.

His first words are, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me" (v.1). The word translated 'in' might be better translated 'on' and carries with it the thought of confidence. The Lord is really saying, "Believe, yes, but not simply as a fact, but have a real faith in God and Me for keeping, strengthening, providing, indeed for everything that you need to continue as My disciples". 'Believing on' is not simply for salvation but for our onward movement in the Christian life. But this brief statement also contains another vast and majestic truth, namely, that God and Christ are one; Christ

Let not your
heart be
troubled

too is God, denied in His own day and denied by millions today.

His promises

The first word of comfort that He brings them is a promise that He will have them with Himself for ever and, moreover, in His Father's house, a place which He Himself is going to prepare. In it, there will be many mansions, or dwelling places, and there will be room for all. There was no room for Him in the inn, but in the Father's house there is room for all. It is possible that the Lord may have had in mind the temple, particularly Ezekiel's temple, where there were chambers for the use of the priests.

Two suggestions have been made as to the meaning of "I go to prepare a place". Firstly, as the Lord speaks these words, He is upon earth, not in the Father's house and hence that blessed place is incomplete. He is going to dwell therein and then, but only then, will it be fully prepared. "That where I am", He says to them. Secondly, a consideration of Hebrews 9:23; Ephesians 1:4; and Colossians 1:20 would seem to indicate that the work of Calvary must be finished before the Father's house was ready. Consequent upon redemption, it is not preparing them for a place but preparing a place for them.

Then He makes them another promise. "I will come again," He says, so that He might receive them to Himself. What grace, what love, what

condescension on the part of our blessed Lord! Only a very high foreign dignitary would warrant a personal welcome by the queen. The Saviour Himself, the Son of God, not an angel or even an archangel, will come and conduct us personally into our eternal home!

In v.5, the Lord reminds them that He had told them of His approaching death and resurrection; that He had come from God and was going to God. They had acknowledged Him as the Son of God but they had failed to appreciate the nature of His mission and they are still in a state of great perplexity. Thomas voices the feelings of all the disciples by asking the question, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" Jesus answers with three 'I am's': "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life".

The Way

The Lord is returning to the Father and His house. For all who would be there with Him, He is the way thereto. How necessary, and indeed prudent, that when we plan a journey, we know the way we have to take, especially if that journey passes through unknown territory. Scripture speaks of many ways, or paths. The Lord through Jeremiah calls upon Israel to "ask for the old paths, where is the good way", and then exhorts them to "walk therein". Sadly, Israel's response is, "We will not walk therein". Proverbs refers



to “a way which seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (14:12). The much loved Psalm 23 tells us of the paths of righteousness

into which the Lord leads His own. The Lord spoke of the broad way which many travel and the narrow way and “few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13,14). Isaiah prophesies, “And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein” (35:8). Here Isaiah looks forward to that glorious millennial reign of Christ which will be a wonderful time *upon earth*. But in our chapter the Lord is speaking of the path to heaven, and for that He is uniquely the way. We do well to remember that for our spiritual lives now, He is still the way. Hebrews 10:19,20 exhorts us, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil,

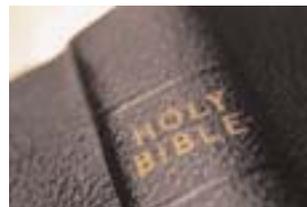
that is to say, his flesh...let us draw near”. Then in Ephesians 2:18, we are told that “through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father”.

The Truth

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the demonstration of truth as to all persons and things. When He appeared before Pilate, Pilate asked Him, “What is truth?” Little did Pilate realise it but truth was epitomised in the very person who was standing before him! Do we wish to know the truth about God, His holiness, His standard of righteousness? Then look at Jesus, listen to Him. Here upon earth He was God’s perfect representative. When Philip asked the Lord to show them the Father, the Lord replied, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (v.9). What about ourselves? How may we learn the truth about ourselves? Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2 pose the question, “What is man?” The answer is Christ Himself: “But we see Jesus”. He is the perfect Man; not Adam, he is the fallen man. The Lord as the Truth highlights the extent of man’s departure from God.

The Life

The Bible constantly reminds us that man is spiritually dead. The reason is given in Romans 5:12: “By one man sin



entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”. So Paul reminds the Ephesians that they “were dead in trespasses and sins” (2:1). But Christ is the life, and if men are to receive it, it can only come through Him: “In him was life” (John 1:4); He has “life in himself” (John 5:26); He is “the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20); “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Not only did He come to bring life, but He Himself is the source of all life. “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:3,4). What confidence such verses give to the believer!

The Father

The Lord goes on to speak to His disciples about the Father. He had done so before, but they had never fully grasped this new revelation. They were, no doubt, acquainted with Malachi 2:10: “Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?” But in that verse God is referred to as Father in creation. What the Lord is saying now is an entirely new concept for them and for the Jewish nation. It reached its climax on the resurrection morning when the Lord commissioned Mary to go to His brethren and

My Father and your Father

tell them that He was ascending to “my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). The Jews, no doubt, had an understanding of God as a composite being: their Pentateuch opens, “In the beginning God”, where God is a plural noun. They would also know that God said, “Let *us* make man”. In Psalm 2, they would have read of the Son. But they could not fully comprehend the Trinity. The Lord’s ministry had brought fresh illumination as to the truth of the Godhead and perhaps particularly on the Fatherhood of God. So John’s writings, in both his Gospel and epistles, focus very much on the children of God, children of the Father. There is an intimacy with John. Paul, on the other hand, speaks more of sons.

So it would appear that the the Lord’s spirit was grieved by Philip’s request: “Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us” (v.8). Philip had been led to Christ; he had led others to Christ. But he had, so to speak, still to reach the Father.

Our fellowship is with the Father

Despite all the Lord's teaching concerning the Father, the disciples were still in ignorance. Many of the dear children of God today have, perhaps, not gone much further than the disciples. John tells us: "our fellowship is with the Father" (1 John 1:3). What a privilege to be able to speak to the Father as His children, to make our requests to Him, knowing that He cares for us and only desires that which is for our blessing.

So the Lord speaks to His disciples plainly: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? The words that I speak to you, I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works" (vv.9,10). He was in the Father; the Father was in Him. On a previous occasion, He had told them, "I and my Father are one". He had so displayed the attributes and glories of the Father as He had been amongst them that all who had seen Him *had* seen the Father.

Prior to His death, He had always spoken of "your Father which is in heaven", or "your heavenly Father".

He was then addressing Jews, an earthly people, and the Father was, so to speak, at a distance. But after His resurrection, whilst we continue to read of 'the Father' and 'our Father', He is no longer afar off. Consequently, we no longer read of a 'heavenly Father'. As Christians, we are a heavenly people. God sees us seated in the heavenlies in Christ; ours is a position of nearness, not distance.

Moreover, the Father is to be worshipped. So the Lord could say to the Samaritan woman at Sychar's well, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23). Just think of that: the infinite, holy, eternal God – the Father – is asking for something. And what is it? Your worship and mine!

So the Lord would return to His Father and leave behind a company of His disciples, His servants, to carry on the works. But note what He goes on to say: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and

The Father is to be worshipped

greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father" (v.12). Greater works! Can it be possible? But so the Lord says! And the book of Acts proves it to be so. There we see: 3,000 converts on the day of Pentecost under Peter's preaching; a great company of priests, the enemies of the Lord during His days on earth, were obedient to the faith; the *shadow* of Peter heals the sick; handkerchiefs and aprons brought from the apostle Paul were instrumental in healing the sick.

But despite all these promised wonders, the disciples are but men. The flesh is still in them, and they will need help, divine help. And their Master provides such – an unfailing power is at hand: the Father and Son are available through the medium of prayer. So the Lord promises, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (vv.13,14).

While not detracting from the wonder of this promise, we need to be careful in interpreting it. It is not a blank cheque to satisfy all our whims and desires! It is not of private interpretation (2 Peter 1:20). It has to be understood along with other similar passages. There we learn that prayer has conditions and these have to be fulfilled so that the ultimate answer will

An unfailing power is at hand

be for the glory of God. Some of these conditions are:

1. The granting of our prayers must be for the glorifying of Father and Son, not for our own satisfaction (James 4:3).
2. To this end, our prayers are to be prompted by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:26).
3. They must be asked in faith (Mark 11:22,23).
4. They must be asked in the Lord's name. This is not a kind of formula which is added to the end of our prayers. In doing so, we need to be able to identify ourselves with Christ in our requests.
5. They should be sincere and persistent. Read the parable of the unjust judge in Luke 18. A one-off request is not necessarily sufficient.

Heart trouble? Let us listen carefully to these words of our Saviour from the upper room. Then, like the two travellers on the road to Emmaus, our hearts will burn within us (Luke 24:32). May it be so, for His name's sake!

The Eternal Son

Part 1

George Stevens

“No one knows the Son except the Father” (Matthew 11:27) are the Lord’s own words which should bring us to the subject of this article with humility and reverence. The article is a wide-ranging review of Scripture and deserves careful reading.

Introduction

This article has been adapted from a number of different sources together with some personal arguments. In considering the eternal Sonship of Christ, ‘eternal’ is used to speak of that which was unoriginated, which always has been, is, and always will be. The adjective indicates that the Sonship of Christ is constant, without beginning and without end. The noun “Sonship” relates to Christ as “only-begotten”, not only having being as the sole representative of His Father and having His character, but emphasising the relationship of love which binds them (W.E.Vine).

This is illustrated, to a lesser degree, in Abraham and Isaac where the term “only-begotten” is used to describe the relationship of Isaac to Abraham (Hebrews 11:17). In Genesis 22:2 we further read, “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest”. Just as Isaac was the *unique* son of Abraham (being of the seed of promise), so the Son of God is the *unique* Son of the Father. Just as Isaac was loved by Abraham, so the Son is loved by the Father. In fact, the Son

was and is ever the delight of the Father: “Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him” (Proverbs 8:30); “Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22).

Sonship also includes all the rights and privileges of that relationship in which both the Father and the Son are seen as equals: “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). On only one occasion did the Lord Jesus indicate that His Father was greater than He: “Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). Here our Lord is speaking as the Word become flesh, namely, as the lowly Man. In position at that time, His Father was greater than He was,

Thou art My
beloved Son

but as to being and nature both He and the Father are one.

By contrast, Christians are *placed* in the condition and position of sons. This is the meaning of the word ‘adoption’ (Galatians 4:5). This never applies to Christ. His Sonship is unoriginated. It is eternal.

To deny the eternal Sonship of Christ and to accept the idea of a temporal Sonship is to rob Him of His Godhood. To insist on holding His deity and yet to deny His eternal Sonship is to subscribe to a form of ‘Tritheism’, i.e. three persons equally God, yet not related to each other as Father, Son and Spirit. To deny that the Son is eternal is to deny that the Father is eternal. If Christ only became Son at His birth then, at the same time, the ‘first’ Person of the Godhead became Father. It is a denial of the eternal relationship of love that lay between them. It is also a degradation of the the value of God’s sacrificial giving: “For God *so* loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son.” He did not give some abstract being. He gave the One He loved most. The very fact that God, in His nature, is love demands that there be love in the Godhead.

It is also important to note that the doctrine leads to an anti-Christian denial because, on the one hand, “he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9) and “whosoever denieth

the Son, the same hath not the Father” (1 John 2:23). Also, “he that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father” (John 5:23).

The main argument used by those who deny the eternal Sonship of Christ is that nowhere in Scripture are the words “Eternal Son”. But the words ‘trinity’, ‘substitution’ and ‘Christendom’ cannot be found either, yet the truths conveyed by the words are embedded in Scripture. “Eternal Spirit” is a scriptural expression (Hebrews 9:14). As in Romans 16:26, the word is used to describe Persons who in their nature are endless. If the Spirit is eternal, then surely so must be the other Persons of the Godhead because God in His being is unchanging.

Passages such as Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8 and 2 Peter 1:1 directly call Christ ‘God’, yet there are many others which are less direct which indicate both His deity and His eternal Sonship.

In Revelation 22:13, we find the fact that the Lord Jesus is eternal: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last”.

- As the *Alpha and Omega*, He is the source and object of all revelation.
- As the *Beginning and the End*, He is the source and object of all creation.

- As the *First and the Last*, He is the source and object of all life and, as such, He is the self-existent One. He is the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

These three couplets express His omniscience, omnipotence, and eternity of being. A consideration of Revelation 1:8, Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; and 48:12 will establish that what is true of the Father is true of Christ, and that what is said of Jehovah is said of our blessed Lord.

We shall now look at some of the passages of Scripture which indicate His Sonship as being eternal.

1. His Sonship in the Old Testament

The great truth of the Old Testament is the unity of the Godhead, in contrast with the polytheistic idolatry into which man had fallen. Within this revelation, we find that the relationships described in the New Testament as those of Father and Son already existed. Psalm 2:1-9 is clearly prophetic, but vv.10-12 give us a present application. This is introduced in the Hebrew text by the words 'and now': "And now be wise, O ye kings...serve Jehovah with fear...Kiss the Son, lest he be angry...blessed are all they that put their trust in him". Who then is this Son? Here the Son is mentioned side by side with Jehovah as His equal.

There is another O.T. passage, perhaps not so well known, but equally clear in its testimony. In Proverbs 30:4, Agur asks, "Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" Agur must have believed that God had a Son even though he lived a long time before these things were fulfilled by Christ in manhood.

Genesis 1:1 opens, "In the beginning God created..." The Hebrew for 'God' is the plural term 'Elohim', indicating three or more (although this plural form may also be used in Hebrew to express majesty). However, the verb 'created' is singular. We find something similar in "The LORD our God is one LORD". This may be translated, "Jehovah our Elohim is one Jehovah". Here we have not only an indication of three or more Persons, but also the insistence that they are One (the Hebrew word for 'one' being 'echad' which always refers to a collective unity).

Proverbs 8 reveals Wisdom to us. Vv.22-25 remind us of John 1: "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting...or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth..."

A Child is born... a Son is given

The truth is further illustrated by the familiar words of Micah 5:2: "Out of thee (Bethlehem Ephratah) shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." The first clause foretells the human birth of Christ, and the second clause may be translated "whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity". Here the Spirit emphasises the fact that the One born in Bethlehem had already existed in the eternal 'past'. To whom did this Person come forth – to the Father. Hence, He is the eternal Son.

The words in Isaiah 9:6, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given", have established the fact of eternal Sonship for most Christians. The 'child born' has to do with the humanity of Christ, but the 'son given' has to do with His deity. We must note that there was to be not only a birth, but also a gift, and that of a Son. The sender of any gift must first purchase or possess it. The Giver in this verse, therefore, must have had the Son with Him. As the words which follow these statements cannot be applied to a mere man, so the 'son given' must refer to the Son of God.

Another indication of the plurality of persons in the Godhead is found in the Old Testament theophanies i.e. the ways in which God appeared to men. As invisibility is one of the attributes of God (Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17), if He is to reveal Himself, it had to be through an intermediary. John 1:18 identifies God's intermediary: "No man (Greek 'no one') hath seen God *at any time*; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him". 'Which is' is literally 'the One being', not 'becoming', as it would have been had it been a relation begun in time. The words denote not mere position, but relationship and oneness of being without any particular regard to time. He knows and declares God as none other could. This was true before the worlds were made.

In his booklet "Divine Revelations before the Incarnation", W. Hoste writes: "As we do not see the sun itself, but its effulgence (or outshining), so no angel ever saw God, except through the Son, who was "the brightness of His glory" (Hebrews 1:3). This was also true in Old Testament times. The appearances of God to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, etc., usually called theophanies, ought rather to be called 'huiophanies', for none but the only begotten Son could have declared Him even then..."

In Isaiah 6, the cry of the seraphim was "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of

hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory". In v.5, Isaiah identifies the Lord as the King, the LORD of hosts. So in Psalm 24:8,10, we read, "Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle...The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah".

So we see the King as Jehovah of hosts. The glory of this King is spoken of in John 12:41. In its context, this scripture refers to Jesus Himself. He is the King who sits upon Zion's holy hill. He is the One of whom it is written, "Thou art my Son". Jehovah of hosts is the Son of God in these particular scriptures!

In the theophanies, the one who appears is often called "the Angel of the LORD", "Angel of the covenant" or simply "Angel". However, the Hebrew 'malach' has, like its Greek equivalent, the double sense of 'angel' and 'messenger'. Jacob remembered this Angel as the One who had the authority to redeem and to bless (Genesis 48:16). The Angel who redeemed him could be none other than the Son of God. Furthermore, would the patriarch call on a mere angel to bless his grandsons? Significantly, Jacob's experi-

The glory of "the only-begotten Son"

ence at Peniel (Genesis 32:30), where he wrestled with 'a man', caused him to say, "I have seen God face to face". Stephen speaks of the "Angel of the Lord" who appeared to Moses out of the midst of a bush (Acts 7:30). But in Exodus 3, that very Angel states: "I am...the God of Abraham". Again, Hoste maintains, "A mere angel could not render the place too holy for Moses to stand on with unshodden feet, or be too much for his eyes to look on. That would be to give the glory of God to another. The "brightness of His glory", which the Son was, was seen in the Shekinah glory, and in the pillar of fire. It is true that angels had their subordinate share in the events of Sinai, but no one can read Exodus and doubt who was the ultimate Lawgiver. Ch.19:3,5,21 settle the matter: "all the earth is mine" (v.5); "God spake all these words" (20:1). And then we read, "They saw the God of Israel" (24:10). It was no similitude that they beheld, but the glory of "the only-begotten Son".

The same Person is referred to in Exodus 23:20: "Behold, I send an Angel before thee". This Angel had God's name in Him and could "pardon transgressions". We also see that the One whom Joshua worshipped, the "captain of the host of the LORD" (5:14), could be none other than Jehovah Himself, again revealed in the Son. He was the Mediator, and there is only one.

Thou art My Son

However, when we look at Acts 13:33, the apostle refers to Christ as raised up in the nation of Israel – the One who became flesh who is the fulfilment of all God's promises to the fathers. This Man will one day sit on Zion's holy hill as King. He will be King of kings and Lord of lords. The first sentence of the quotation, "Thou art my Son", is timeless. It reiterates that Christ *is* the Son of Jehovah.

In Hebrews 1:5, we again read the same quotation. It emphasises that Christ is greater than angels because He is the Son.

In Hebrews 5:5, we find that it was Jehovah who called Christ to priesthood. There the words, "Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee", are simply used to identify the One who gave Christ the authority to be a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek. However, the comparison of the Son of God and Melchisedek is useful in relation to the matter of eternal Sonship and will be dealt with later on.

(to be continued)

The Angel who appeared to Manoah and his wife (Judges 13) could have been no other than the Son for only He had the authority to identify Himself with the burnt offering, by ascending in its smoke and savour to God. This name "Secret" ('pahlah', v.18) identifies Him with the Son who should be called "Wonderful" ('pahlah', Isaiah 9:6).

Further proof is found in Malachi 3:1 where we read, "Behold, I will send my messenger (i.e. John the Baptist), and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant (i.e. the Lord Jesus), whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts". Clearly, the Messenger, or Angel, of the Covenant refers to the Lord Jesus. As such, He is the only-begotten Son who declares God. It cannot be too strongly emphasised: "No man hath seen God *at any time*; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him".

In Psalm 2:7, we read, "I will declare the decree: Jehovah hath said unto me, Thou art my Son. This day have I begotten thee". The subject of the psalm is the Lord's final rejection by Jew and Gentile (cf. Acts 4:27). It would seem that the words form part of Jehovah's reply to His Son's enemies and show that Jehovah is speaking to His Son in resurrection.

Treasures of Love – Part 3

4. The love of the Son for His own

George Bell

“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so” are familiar words which appeal to both the young child and the mature believer in Christ. We need to let those simple words possess our souls in freshness. Enjoy this meditation on this wonderful subject.

In this series, we have considered the Father’s love to the Son, the love of the Son to the Father, and the Father’s love for His children. We need now to look at the love of the Son for His own.

The measure of His love

“As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love” (John 15:9,10).

The love of the Son of God for His own is in the same measure as the Father’s love to Him. This astounding truth we learn from the simple comparisons, ‘as’ and ‘so’, in this easily understood verse. Although the words are simple, the truth is profound! Who would have thought this possible? Whatever the attitude of the world around towards us, whatever the antagonism, we are loved by Christ. So Paul can confidently exclaim, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Romans 8:35,37).

But the Lord Jesus goes on to say, “Continue ye in My love”. The word ‘continue’ might be translated ‘abide’, one of John’s favourite words. How do we abide in His love? We are brought back again to this matter of obedience: “If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love”. Note the positive assurance: “ye shall”. If we want to enjoy the warmth of the sun, we must be where it shines! The love of Christ shines upon the path of obedience. It is there that we know and enjoy His love. How striking it is that the Son of God was under commandment (John 14:31). In His life of obedience, He never moved out of His Father’s love. His pathway was perfect in every way. John’s words still challenge us, “He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked” (1 John 2:6).

Who shall
separate us from
the love of Christ?

His love to all His own

“Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (John 13:1).

John 13 gives us the background to the closing words of the Lord Jesus to His own. The discourse in the upper room has charmed the hearts of Christians down through the centuries. The burden of the message was that He was going to leave them, and the disciples were sad. There was no mention of the cross. He was going to the place of power and resource: to the Father. There seems to be a sense of the work of redemption being already accomplished.

How sweet are the words, “having loved *His own*”. His Father had given them to Him! Later, He would speak of them as “the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world” (John 17:6). This is equally true of us now! The Lord was, of course, going to the cross and the disciples would be His additionally because of redemption.

He was also conscious that the Father had put all things into His hands. Not only was He going to the place of power, but power was in His hands. His power, as well as His love, would be their support during His absence. So we can sing, “His love is as great as His power, and knows neither measure nor end”. The betrayer was in their midst and the Lord was troubled in spirit as

He thought of this. Nevertheless, nothing altered His love for them.

Chapter 13 goes on to show the activity of His love for the disciples. We will focus on the Lord’s wonderful service of love in washing the disciples’ feet. His action then is a picture of what He is doing today, in heaven, for His own on earth. In vv.4,5, we can trace seven distinct downward steps of lowly service:

1. He riseth from supper;
2. laid aside His garments;
3. and took a towel;
4. and girded Himself;
5. He poureth water into a basin;
6. and began to wash the disciples’ feet;
7. and wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.

There is a reminder here of the seven downward steps of the Lord in Philippians 2:5-8.

The object of the Lord’s service is given in v.8: “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me”. During the Lord’s absence from them, they would be able to enjoy fellowship with Him where He is now because of His service of love for them. His service now would be to cleanse, and to remove defilement from, our hearts. This is a service we also can do for one another. This more properly belongs to the subject ‘Our love for one another’ which will be dealt with later. Just for the moment, let us rejoice in His unfailing love towards us now.

His love in the home situation

“Lazarus was sick. Therefore his sisters sent unto Him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick...Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus...Then said the Jews, Behold how He loved him” (John 11:2-3, 5, 36).

There was a place on earth where the Lord Jesus found a welcome – the home at Bethany. In a unique way, this family was the object of His love. V.5 emphasises that each was loved equally. But illness had intruded into this family with its resultant anxiety. Christian families today are not exempt from the problems and ailments which are common to all men. This fact has made this chapter very precious to the Lord’s people.

Lazarus was sick. His sisters took the right course and sent for Jesus. They counted on His love and concern. Their message was, “Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick” (v.3). There are timely lessons for us here. Where do we go for help in times of anxiety? So often we turn to earthly resources only to find them fail us. Let us learn from the example of these two sisters, and go to Him. Let us follow the example of the psalmist, David: “In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee: for Thou wilt answer me” (86:7).

God has His own purposes in passing us through trying circumstances. They are difficult to understand at times. We do well to note the Lord’s words when told the sad news: “When Jesus heard that, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of

Behold how He loved him

God might be glorified thereby” (v.4). Such was the purpose of God. The Lord Jesus was always governed by the will of God. In this particular circumstance of sickness, and ultimately death, God would be glorified.

How perplexing it must have been to the sisters when the Lord did not come immediately. “When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was” (v.6). This delay was not for any lack of affection for them. The Lord Jesus would not make a move apart from His Father’s direction. He was always obedient. When He finally came to Bethany, it was to a scene of sorrow and bereavement. Both the sisters said the same thing when they met Him: “Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (vv. 21,32).

As our theme is the love of Christ, we move on to the close of the narrative. He who was the Creator groaned in the spirit and was troubled as He felt within Himself the result of sin in His own creation. His sympathy with the sorrowing sisters was demonstrated by His weeping: “Jesus wept” (v.35). These striking words have been a comfort to believers in every day and age, especially when loved ones have been taken. The Jews, witnessing this, had to

acknowledge, “Behold how He loved him” (v.36). Had the Lord come straight away and healed Lazarus, Martha and Mary would never have known His sympathy as they saw it here. His love to this family was fully demonstrated as they approached the place where Lazarus lay.

But they were also to see His power over death. To Martha, the circumstances were beyond all hope. Yet He who had said to her earlier, “I am the resurrection and the life” (v.25) was fully able by His divine power to raise her brother from the grave!

As well as His power over death, the dependence of the Lord Jesus upon His Father is clearly seen. “Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me” (v.41). Almost in the same breath, “He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth...Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go” (vv.43,44). At His command, death must yield up its prey!

On a much greater occasion than this, the Lord will once more shout and the sleeping saints will rise and the living be changed. What a triumph His return will be! It may not be long! He has promised, “Surely I come quickly”. May we be able to say, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

His love to the individual believer

“Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23).

Both in his Gospel and in his epistles, John never refers to himself by his own name. He speaks of himself five times in his Gospel as the “disciple whom Jesus loved”. John never made any boast of his love for the Lord. Rather, he rejoiced in the Lord’s love to himself. It will be instructive to consider briefly these five times in which he delights to regard himself as being loved by Jesus.

The first occasion, quoted above, was at the supper table. It was a solemn occasion. The Lord Jesus had given intimation of His betrayal, quoting from Psalm 41:9. Being troubled in His spirit, He said plainly, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me”. The disciples were bewildered by this: “they looked one on another, doubting of whom He spake”. At this point, we are told of the disciple who was leaning on Jesus’ bosom (v.23). John was so near that Peter beckoned to him to ask the Lord, “Who is it?”

V.25 tells us that John was lying on Jesus’ breast. Is there a different thought here? The breast may point to the physical position, whereas the bosom suggests the place of love and affection. John was leaning upon it, as closely as he could! This is where John loved to be. Not surprisingly, it is John who tells us again and again of the vital necessity of abiding in Christ. John practised what he preached! So he could write of “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father” (1:18). We are reminded of the hymn,

“Dwells in His bosom, knoweth all
that in that bosom lies;
And came to earth to make it known,
that we might share His joys.”

May we experience this in our day, even when pressures descend upon us. Abiding in Christ is absolutely essential if we are to bear fruit in our lives for Him (John 15). The main feature of this first mention is *communion*.

The second occasion on which John is referred to as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” is at the cross. Among the group of sad-hearted women gathered there was the Lord’s mother, Mary. John was also there. We read, “When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home” (19:26,27).

Matthew and Mark tell us that the disciples all forsook Him and fled. Somehow, John found his way back to the cross. He joins the group of sorrowing women. His love and faithfulness to his Master brought him there. It is very significant that the disciple who had leaned on Jesus’ bosom should identify himself with Him, even at the cross. Courage to stand by the cross did not come from any self-reliance on John’s part. He drew his strength from the love of Christ.

It must be so with us if we are to take our place in faithfulness to the One who died for us on the cross. There is reproach connected with His cross. We,

too, must draw our strength from abiding in the love of Christ. We can see how near Paul comes to this truth of ‘standing by the cross’. Paul relied upon the present love of the Son of God: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Believers are called today to accept the reproach of the cross. It was the frequent call of the Saviour: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me”.

The Son of God... loved me

We must notice the unique privilege given to John to care for Jesus’ mother and the relationship there now was between these two: “Woman, behold thy son...Behold thy mother”. There may be an intimation here of the new family relationships emerging as the church is bonded together by love. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34).

The main feature of this second mention is *faithfulness*.

The third occasion on which John is referred to as the “disciple whom Jesus loved” is on the resurrection morning

(John 20). The first person mentioned in the narrative is Mary Magdalene. She is well known for her affection for the Lord. Earlier in her life, she had been delivered by Him from demon possession. The crucifixion must have been a tragic experience to her. It seems that she was the first to see the stone rolled away and an empty tomb. Although bewildered, she could not keep it to herself. We read, “Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him” (v.2).

Although Jesus had told His disciples more than once that He was to be crucified, and on the third day to rise again, they never understood. However, the news borne by Mary certainly got them on the move! They ran both together, but John outran Peter. It is usually thought that John was the younger of the two. The character of the two disciples comes out in sharp contrast in this incident. Peter, true to character, when he reached the sepulchre did not hesitate but went straight in. John was different: “Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed” (v.8). It was the disciple whom Jesus loved whose feet were swift and urgent, but who quietly contemplated the scene. We read, “Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping” (vv.10,11). Mary then saw her

risen Lord, but how much Peter and John missed!

The main features of this third mention are *determination (running)* and *contemplation*. These are characteristics of disciples who know that they are loved by Christ.

The final two incidents in which John refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved are both in John 21. The first is about a fishing expedition led by Peter. The Lord Jesus had told the disciples before His death that He would see them in Galilee after His resurrection. They should have waited for Him! It is not surprising that they caught nothing.

They were a very tired and weary company after their night’s toil. Then we read, “But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus” (v.4). The Lord’s question, “Children, have ye any meat?” must have brought home to them the folly of acting on their own. Their brief answer, “No”, showed up their feelings of discouragement. As soon as the Lord gave the command, “Cast the net on the right side of the ship”, things were changed! There were so many fish that they were not able to draw in the net.

How very easy it is to try to do things our own way, instead of waiting for the Lord’s leading. There is never any blessing in taking that route. Jesus had already said, “Without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

It was John who recognised the Lord. The scales dropped from his eyes. The authority by which the Lord had spoken convinced him of who it was on the shore. “Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord” (v.7). Hearing that it was the Lord, Peter, in his usual impulsive way, cast himself into the sea and made for the shore. However, it is the beloved disciple who claims our attention. A keen spiritual vision will only be ours as we abide in the love of Christ. We will then be quick to discern His authority and seek His guidance in every situation.

We see here not only the Lord’s command of the situation but also His loving care for His wayward disciples. On the shore, there was a fire of coals for warmth and food to satisfy their hunger. So He graciously invites them, “Come and dine”. He is just the same today! Our Great High Priest is always available to supply “grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

The main feature of this fourth mention is the *spiritual discernment* which flows from abiding in the love of Christ. At the close of John 21, following the searching interview of Peter by the Lord, Peter is told, “Follow Me”. It is at this point that John again appears. We

The disciple whom Jesus loved

read, “Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following: which also leaned on His breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth Thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, what shall this man do?” (vv.20,21). It has often been remarked that Peter was told to follow, but John was already following, without being told to do so. The question, “Lord, and what shall this man do?” received a very direct answer: “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me”.

It is interesting on this final occasion that not only is John named as the disciple whom Jesus loved, but the discourse in the upper room, when John leaned on the Lord’s breast at supper, is again referred to. Here we have the real secret of John’s devotion to his Master. His following was the result of attraction rather than command.

The words “If I will that he tarry till I come” have given rise to much speculation. The words happily suggest that the character of discipleship, as set forth in John, would continue right on to the coming of the Lord. May it be so with each one of us! The days in which we live are far removed from those of the apostle John. However, it is still possible to follow the Lord. As we look on to that bright day of His return, may we find the real secret in abiding in the love of Christ.

The main feature of this fifth, and final, mention is *following*.

Patmos – an Island Speaks

Part 6 – A collective view of the seven churches

John Weston

“To see ourselves as others see us” might be desirable. But it is far more important that, as Christians, we see ourselves as the Lord sees us. This is the thrust of the Lord’s messages to the seven churches, at times comforting, at times disturbing and challenging.

The individual messages to each of the seven churches have been looked at in some detail. It will be interesting and instructive to look now at some general features of the seven churches together. The following particular aspects will be considered:

1. The presentation of the Lord to each church.
2. The warnings of the Lord to each church.
3. The promises of the Lord to the overcomer in each church.

The presentation of the Lord

In each of the seven letters, the Lord introduces Himself in a different manner. Each style of introduction is pertinent to the message addressed to the individual church. In ch.1, John was given an initial vision of Christ in majesty. Now, in these messages, we have another sevenfold picture of our risen Lord Jesus. In this portrayal, we see Him as He surveys the Church militant.

This aspect of our Lord’s activity is worthy of our attention. It follows His ascension and is prior to His return to this earth. During this period, He is interceding for us as our Great High

Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16). He is also preparing a place for us (John 14:2). He will then return and usher in His Messianic reign. However, in Revelation 2 and 3, we are given a clear sevenfold composite picture of our Lord’s present activity as Head of His Church.

Ephesus

To the church at Ephesus, the Lord appears as the *Director*. “These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands” (2:1). Here is a timely reminder to the church at Ephesus that it, together with the other six churches, derives its life from fellowship in the Lord Jesus. They are subject to Him; they are upheld by Him; they receive their power from Him. But they also come under His searching scrutiny! So today, in our assembly life, we need to remember that we stand in the same light. We are under His direction. The Lord is still walking in the midst of the lampstands.

Under His searching scrutiny

The basic problem at Ephesus was that they were allowing a gulf to open up between themselves and their Lord. In this way, they were no longer responding to His direction. A happily married couple are sensitive to each other because of the love which binds them together. The church at Ephesus was losing that bridal love, so that sensitivity had lost its edge. Christina Rossetti put her finger on the problem when she wrote:

Lord, Thou art life, though I be dead;
Love's fire Thou art, however cold I be.
Nor heaven have I, nor place to lay my head,
Nor home, but Thee.

There must be that living, close relationship between the church and her Head. He directs. We must respond, or love's fire will be extinguished.

Smyrna

To the church at Smyrna, He appears as the *Defeater*. "These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive" (2:8). What an encouragement and comfort these words must have been to this suffering and persecuted church! Here is a glorious reminder of the triumph of that first Easter Day. The Lord had defeated death and Satan. The tomb was empty; the Lord had risen to die no more! He is the Victor; He had conquered!

As a consequence of His victory, all who place their trust in Him share that victory. "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:54,55). As the suffering of the believers at Smyrna intensified, they were reminded that the Lord Himself had been into death and triumphed. He is the

Alpha and the Omega. He knew all that they were having to endure.

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). This blessed assurance still holds good today for Christians under persecution, or in trouble, throughout the world. The abiding presence of the Saviour is there to give strength to all who are passing through such times. There is always a great danger that, in these circumstances, it is so easy for the enemy to undermine our faith, just as he tried with Job.

When hosts of sin encompass me,
When tempted not to trust in Thee,
Open my eyes that I may see
Jesus is nearer and stronger.

May this be our constant prayer during times of stress. Such an arrow prayer will bring spiritual strength and a blessed assurance that we are on the victory side. Christian, claim the victory which our Lord has won! Claim His precious blood which assures us that we shall overcome! Above all, let there ever be a praising in our hearts. The power of prayer will result in praise. C.H.Spurgeon aptly put it this way:

Prayers and praises go in pairs;
They have praises who have prayers.

Pergamum

To the church at Pergamum, He appears as the *Discerner*. "These things saith He that hath the sharp sword with two edges" (2:12). We are all familiar with the figure of justice with sword in hand. Here the Lord presents Himself as the administrator of justice. He is indeed a discernor of what is happening within His Church. Let us never forget this!

In this capacity, He comes to deal with the false teachers, those "birds of the air" who have nestled in the branches of the unnatural growth within this church at Pergamum. The Lord is a jealous God. He will not tolerate false churchism. This comes as a sharp reminder to those Christian fellowships who pay little heed to the real position of those who seek fellowship within the church community.

Fellowship within the assembly is not a free for all. There are strict parameters which must be adhered to. At the close of his Gospel, John declares that he has written "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (20:31). This is the touchstone. Confession of faith in our Lord Jesus is essential, and such evidence must be forthcoming before the hand of fellowship is given. Such evidence was not sought for at Pergamum – hence the two edged sword.

There must never be a watering down of the Gospel message. "Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21) lies at its heart. When a soul confesses Christ in all sincerity, then he is received into the fellowship of believers. There can be no other ground for reception into fellowship. The church at Pergamum had no such yardstick. The Lord had to act against their looseness. The use of His two edged sword clearly shows the discernment which was needed. In these closing days of the Church's history, we also must stand firm and be ever vigilant

for those "grievous wolves" who seek to destroy the flock (Acts 20:29).

Thyatira

To the church at Thyatira, He appears as the *Destroyer*. "These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass" (2:18). To this church, and to this church alone, the Lord presents Himself as the Son of God. This is an assertion of His power and authority. He has to deal with an evil for which there are no remedial measures. Nothing but judgment remains. It is to emphasise this that He uses His title of supreme authority. His burning eyes penetrate into the hidden depths of the heart, and into the very depths of a fellowship where there is gross corruption. He declares that death will come to those who have fallen for the teachings of Jezebel.

As Head of His Church, the Lord still demands purity today. He will act to ensure this. He is the Lord. Throughout these letters, we have a recurring theme. The Lord is looking for singleness of heart, for a company of believers whose eyes are fixed on Him, and who will not tolerate any compromise with the world or with wrong doctrine. In short, the Lord is looking for those who have within them the spirit of Elijah (1 Kings 18:21).

Sardis

To the church at Sardis, He appears as the *Detector*. "He that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars" (3:1). This message is a most solemn reminder to a dead church. It sounds a trumpet blast.

The double use of ‘seven’ emphasises the display of His power in all its fullness.

Despite any smoke screen which the church may use as a cover up, the Lord has probed the situation to its very depths. Dead though the church may be, the Lord has the perfect answer for those within the church whose desire it is to hold fast and repent.

Philadelphia

To the church at Philadelphia, He appears as the *Defender*. “He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth” (3:7). What strength these opening words must have given to the church at Philadelphia! Here was a church eager and ready to spread the new Christian faith, eager to reach out beyond its borders. At the same time, the members were conscious of their own weakness, particularly as they looked on the pagan world all around them.

Now comes this precious word from their Lord, reminding them that He is the holy and the true. These are the attributes of God Himself. The words used are similar to those used to describe Eliakim, a prophetic anticipation of Christ Himself (Isaiah 22:22). To the church in the 21st century, this age-old message is ever new and relevant. So Paul can exclaim triumphantly, “If *God* be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

This is a timeless message to encourage all those who are seeking to take the Gospel message to a lost world, to all those who are seeking to obey the great

commission, “Go” (Matthew 28:19). “How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” (Romans 10:14,15). “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (John 4:35). “The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest” (Luke 10:2). May we recognise the door which the Lord has opened for us, and go forward in His strength!

Laodicea

To the church at Laodicea, He appears as the *Declarer*. He is “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God” (3:14). In these words, the Lord declares His essential glory. There are three great statements of fact. In the first, He is the Amen. This is a title of God given in Isaiah 65:16. (Note that the Hebrew word ‘Amen’ is there translated ‘truth’. So the Lord, in the upper room, could declare Himself to be the truth (John 14:6)).

Secondly, as the faithful and true witness, He comes to contrast Himself with the failure of the Laodiceans. With William Kelly, we can declare:

God and Father, we adore Thee
For the Christ, Thine image bright,
In whom all Thy holy nature
Dawned on our once hopeless night.
Thou didst send Him as a witness
Of a life beyond compare;
By Thy Spirit we received Him;
Now in Christ how blest we are.
For in Christ was life eternal
Once beheld and heard below;
And in Him dwelt all the fullness,
Though in grace He stooped so low.

Thirdly, He was the beginning of the creation of God. These words take us to Colossians 1:15-20. Here we are reminded that He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. In that position of supremacy, He has been given “a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

As we consider the Lord in these seven-fold glories, let us with deep reverence recognise the activity of the Lord Jesus today as He walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, that is, amongst the assemblies of His people. May this deeper understanding of His present activity move us to greater worship and service for Him today!

The warnings given to each church

Solemn warnings were given to five of the seven churches. The churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia received no warnings, but only promises.

To Ephesus, the warning was of *removal*: “I will remove thy lampstand out of his place, except thou repent” (2:5).

To Pergamum, the warning was of *wrath*: “Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth” (2:16).

To Thyatira, the warning was of *recompense*: “I will give unto every one of you according to your works” (2:23).

To Sardis, the warning was of *return*: “If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee” (3:3).

To Laodicea, the warning was of *rejection*: “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth” (3:16).

These are serious and solemn warnings. They were not given to the world of unbelievers, but rather to those who had been observing all that they believed was expected of them as church members. The disappearance of these churches from history is yet another example of what we learn from the fate of Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin. These privileged towns had all been visited by Christ. They had all received blessings from Him. Yet they perished in their unbelief.

Our Lord reminded His disciples that “unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required” (Luke 12:48). These assemblies had assumed a place of spiritual privilege. They would have claimed to be a royal priesthood, ambassadors for Christ in a pagan world. No doubt, they all led busy church lives. Much was expected from them but, with the passage of time, serious flaws were coming to light.

In ancient times, when quarrymen, engaged in extracting blocks of marble, discovered that a block had flaws in it, they would sometimes try to conceal the defect by covering the crack with wax, and then selling it as perfect. Buyers who were aware of this fraudulent prac-

tice would ask for an assurance that the block was ‘without wax’, in Latin ‘sincere’ and hence our word ‘sincere’.

Some years ago, in Israel, watching flowers being packed for export, it was interesting to see samples being passed under special lighting. The normal effect from this treatment was a bright glow being emitted from the stem of the flower. However, from time to time no glow was apparent. Under Israeli export legislation, flowers for export had to have their stems immersed in a chemical solution. This was to ensure that they would retain their freshness, in view of the time that would elapse before they arrived at the retail florist. To the naked eye, treated and untreated stems looked exactly alike. The lamp revealed the truth! The Lord, surveying the churches with eyes as a flame of fire, reveals all. He can see through the sham, through the make believe. He knows what is sincere and what is not.

Let us be sincere before the Lord so that, like the suffering church at Smyrna and the steadfast church at Philadelphia, there may be nothing in us to call forth the Lord’s rebuke. As we ponder over the warnings given to these other 1st century churches, let us make the words of J. Edwin Orr our prayer:

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;
Try me, O Lord, and know my thoughts I pray;
See if there be some wicked way in me,
Cleanse me from every sin and set me free.

I praise Thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin;
Fulfil Thy word, and make me pure within;
Fill me with fire, where once I burned with shame,
Grant my desire to magnify Thy name.

Ephesus and Laodicea both faced the threat of immediate rejection by the

Lord, should the warning go unheeded. In these churches, first love for Jesus had evaporated. Ephesus had left their first love; Laodicea had become lukewarm. Nevertheless, an opportunity was given to both to repent and to return to their once privileged position. This must speak to our own hearts today! We know only too well that, where there is a deep love for Jesus, lukewarmness is out of the question.

Differences between believers will inevitably occur in assembly life. Personality clashes are always ready to surface. Then there is the inherent weakness of the flesh, the pride, the lust. It is only when love for Jesus takes preeminence that these fleshly, dominant forces will be forced into submission. Love conquers all!

The warnings to the other three churches are linked to the second coming of the Lord. These warnings are so relevant to today’s church, for all the signs around us indicate His near return. Those assemblies who recognise themselves in the Patmos mirror need urgently to consider their position before the Lord. Repeatedly in these messages we have been confronted with the second coming of the Lord. In the light of this, the call to repentance must seriously and urgently be faced head on. Soon the day of grace will come to an end. We must not be ashamed before Him at His coming!

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before Him at His
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