

Words of Peace & Truth



No. 116: May-August 2022

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WORDS OF PEACE & TRUTH

(Esther 9:30; see also Zechariah 8:19 and Jeremiah 33:6)

No. 116: May – August 2022

Editorial

Many times in the Bible we have the exhortation, “Fear not.” On the first occasion it was spoken to Abraham; God said to him, “Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, thy exceeding great reward” (Genesis 15:1). This was when Abram was concerned about being childless. The last recorded instance is when the Lord Jesus appeared before the apostle John in judicial glory, walking among the candlesticks that represented seven churches, or assemblies. In between, the words “fear not” occur in many different circumstances that are worth studying. One challenging instance is when the Lord told Jairus, ruler of a synagogue, whose daughter had died, “Fear not: only believe” (Mark 5:36; Luke 8:50).

Our faith, too, is often tested. We live in the “perilous [or difficult] times” that were foretold (2 Timothy 3:1) and corruption and violence abound; see Genesis 6:11. As God tested Abraham’s faith (Genesis 22:1), so He tests ours; see 1 Peter 1:6,7. To the disciples in the boat on the lake, after the squall of wind, the Lord Jesus said, “Where is your faith?” (Luke 8:22-25).

Whatever we may be passing through at this moment – illness, bereavement, the infirmity of old age, poverty, famine, isolation, conflict, disappointment or the pressure upon us of our responsibilities or of the evil around us – may the Lord help us all to lean upon Himself in the faith that honours Him and will surely be answered. G.S.B.

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THE SHEPHERD AND THE PSALM

A Musing on Psalm 23

By James Wallace

This article appeared in Number 21 of “Words of Peace & Truth” (Summer 1991 issue) but the readership has changed greatly through the intervening years and I think the present readers may be interested to see it. I reproduce it as it appeared in that earlier number, complete with the disclaimer at the end – Editor.

Old Fernando D’ Alfonso was a Basque shepherd, one of the best in his district. And rightly so, because behind him were at least twenty generations of Iberian shepherds. But D’ Alfonso was more than a shepherd; he was a patriarch of his guild, the traditions and secrets of which have been handed down from generation to generation. He was full of the legends, the mysteries, the religious fervour of his native hills.

I sat with him one night under the clear, starry skies, his sheep bedded down beside a sparkling pool of water. As we were preparing to curl up in our blankets, he suddenly began a dissertation in a jargon of Greek and Basque. When he had finished, I asked him what he had said. In reply, he began to quote the twenty-third Psalm. There and then I learned the shepherd's literal interpretation of this beautiful poem.

“David and his ancestors,” said D’ Alfonso, “knew sheep and their ways, and David has translated a sheep’s musing into simple words. The daily repetition of this Psalm fills the shepherd with reverence for his calling. Our guild takes this poem as a lodestone to guide us. It is our bulwark when the days are hot or stormy, when the nights are dark, when the wild animals surround our bands. Many of its lines are statements of the simple requirements and

actual duties of a Holy Land shepherd, whether he lives today or followed the same calling six thousand years ago. *[This would take us back to Abel, and I doubt that anyone knows how he practised his shepherding! – Editor.]* Phrase by phrase, it has a well-understood meaning for us.”

“The Lord is ay shepherd; I shall not want.”

“Sheep instinctively know” said D’Alfonso, “that before they have been folded for the night the shepherd has planned out their grazing for the morrow. It may be that he will take them back over the same hills; it may be that he will go to a new grazing ground. They do not worry. His guidance has been good in the past, and they have faith in the future, because they know he has their well-being in view.”

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.”

“Sheep graze from about 3. 30 in the morning until about ten. They then lie down for three or four hours and rest,” said D’Alfonso. “When they are contentedly chewing the cud, the shepherd knows they are putting on fat. Consequently the good shepherd starts his flocks out in the early hours on the rougher herbage, moving on through the morning to the richer, sweeter grasses and coming to a shady place for the forenoon rest in fine green pastures, the best grazing of the day. Sheep resting in such happy surroundings feel contentment.”

“He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

“Every shepherd knows,” said the Basque, “that sheep will not drink gurgling water. There are many small springs high in the hills of the Holy Land, whose waters run down the valleys only to evaporate in the desert sun. Although the sheep need the water, they will not drink from those fast-flowing streams. The shepherd must find a place where rocks or erosion have made a little pool, or else

he fashions with his hands a pocket sufficient to hold at least a bucketful.”

“He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.”

“In the Holy Land,” went on D’Alfonso, “each sheep takes his place in the grazing line in the morning and keeps the same position throughout the day. Once during the day, however, each sheep leaves its place and goes to the shepherd, whereupon the shepherd stretches out his hand and rubs the animal’s nose and ears, scratches its chin and whispers affectionately into its ears. The sheep, meanwhile, rubs against his leg, or, if the shepherd is sitting down, nibbles at his ear and rubs its cheek against his face. After a few minutes of this communion with the master, the sheep returns to its place in the feeding line.”

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”

“There is an actual valley of the shadow of death in Palestine, and every shepherd from Spain to Dalmatia knows of it. It is south of the Jericho Road leading from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, and it is a narrow defile through a mountain range. Climatic and grazing conditions make it necessary for the sheep to be moved through this valley for seasonal feeding each year.

“The valley is four and a half miles long. Its side walls are over 1,500 feet high in places, and it is only ten or twelve feet wide at the bottom. Travel through the valley is dangerous because its floor has gullies seven or eight feet deep. Actual footing on solid rock is so narrow in many places that a sheep cannot turn round, and it is an unwritten law of shepherds that flocks must go up the valley

in the morning and down towards the eventide, lest the flocks meet in the defile.

“About half-way through the valley the walk crosses from one side to the other at a place where the path is cut in two by an eight-foot gully. One side of the gully is about eighteen inches higher than the other; the sheep must jump across it. The shepherd stands at this break and coaxes or forces the sheep to make the leap. If a sheep slips and lands in the gully, the shepherd’s rod is brought into play. The old-style crook circles a large sheep’s neck or a small sheep’s chest, and the animal is lifted to safety. If a more modern narrow crook is used, the sheep is caught about the hoofs and lifted up to the walk.

“Many wild dogs lurk in the shadows of the valley looking for prey. The shepherd skilled in throwing his staff uses it as a weapon. Thus the sheep have learned to fear no evil even in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, for their master is there to protect them from harm.”

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”

“David’s meaning is a simple one,” said D’Alfonso, “when conditions on the Holy Land sheep pastures are known. Poisonous plants which are fatal to grazing animals abound. Each spring the shepherd must be constantly alert. When he finds the plants, he takes his mattock and goes ahead of the flock, grubbing out every stock and root he can see. As he digs out the stocks, he lays them upon little stone pyres, some of which were built by shepherds in Old Testament days, and by the morrow they are dry enough to burn. When the pasture is free from poisonous plants, the sheep are led into it and, in the presence of their plant enemies, they eat in peace.”

“Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.”

“At every sheepfold there is a big earthen bowl of olive oil and a large jar of water. As the sheep come in for the night, they are led to a gate. The shepherd lays his rod across the top of the gateway just above the backs of his sheep. As each sheep passes, he quickly examines it for briars in the ears, thorns in the cheek or weeping of the eyes from dust or scratches. When such conditions are found, he drops the rod across the sheep's back and it steps out of line.

“Each sheep's wounds are carefully cleaned. Then the shepherd dips his hand into the olive oil and anoints the injury. A large cup is dipped into the jar of water, kept cool by evaporation in the unglazed pottery, and is brought out – never half full but always overflowing. The sheep will sink its nose into the water right up to the eyes, if fevered, and drink until fully refreshed.

“When all the sheep are at rest, the shepherd places his staff within reach in case it is needed during the night. Then he wraps himself in his woollen robe and lies down across the gateway facing the sheep for his night's repose.

“So,” concluded D'Alfonso, “after all the care and protection the shepherd has given it, a sheep may well soliloquize in the twilight, as translated into words by David:

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

Editor's Note: The above article has been reproduced from a manuscript notebook which used to belong to a beloved aunt of mine, now with the Lord. I do not know from where she transcribed it, so I am unable to clear any question of copyright and apologise for any infringement. Further, being neither a shepherd nor acquainted with the history and geography of Palestine I am unable

to corroborate what is averred in the article, but I present it at its face value, thinking that it offers an interesting perspective on what is undoubtedly the best known of the Psalms. Perhaps it may serve in a simple way to bring home to the reader the peace available to all those who can trustingly say, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

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TWO HEADS, TWO MASTERS, TWO HUSBANDS

Romans 5, 6 and 7

The death of Christ in Romans chapter 5, v. 18, is rather looked at as the burnt-offering, the peculiarity of which was that the whole animal underwent the judgment of God, but it was for the offeror's acceptance, not for the pardon of his sins (compare Leviticus 1:1-9). At the cross of Christ not only was the justice of God satisfied, as to the sins committed by man, but God was glorified in His nature in the very place where sin was condemned. His love and righteousness were fully manifested and glorified by an obedient Man, so that God gave Him glory in answer to it, and we are accepted in the Beloved! (*see Ephesians 1:6*). This explains the term "abundance of grace" (verse 17). Adam and Christ are here looked at as the Heads of two races, but not so till after their acts of disobedience or obedience. Adam became Head of a fallen race after his disobedience. (See Gen. 4:1.) Christ became Head of a new race after His obedience unto death. We are attached to one or the other. Reader, which are you? In chapter 6 two masters, sin and righteousness, attach themselves to the Heads of these two families, and of those that belong to them. In chapter 7 two husbands, law and Christ, apply themselves to the descendants of each in these two conditions. If I am in Adam, sin is my master, and the law was the Jew's husband in that condition. But if (*I am*) Christ's, righteousness is my master and Christ is my husband and the new rule of my life!

Excerpt from "A Summary of the Epistle to the Romans," by Lord Adalbert Cecil (1841-1889).

THE CROSS: THE TURNING POINT OF EVERYTHING

... The double effect of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ will be noticed here. There was, we have seen, (*our*) responsibility to God on one side as born of Adam in the world, and on the other God's purpose to bring us to glory and privilege in the second Adam. * Christ has perfectly met the one for us, and entered Himself into the other, consequent on the work of redemption.

He has glorified God as to the first Adam's state, but has died to it; not that He was ever in any of the sin of it, save as bearing it, but as with us here below as men, in like manner taking part of flesh and blood with the children in the likeness of sinful flesh, and made sin for us on the cross, when fully manifested as in that state knowing no sin. Now He is entered into the glory, the glory He had with the Father before the world was, as second Adam* according to the purpose of God as to man, and according to righteousness; John 16, 17.

Our state, our salvation, hangs on this: and we may add, the whole condition of the Jews or the fulfilment of promises on the earth. The sure mercies of David† are based on and identified with the resurrection of the Lord, as surely as He died for that nation also.

The cross is for God's glory, our salvation, and our state before God; it is the turning point of everything.

First: our sins, and sin, are put away. All is clean gone in God's sight according to God's glory.

But as alive and having our place in Christ, we see and are in Him as having died to that whole estate and condition, suffering as Son of man. The cross showed man's rejection of Him as come into the world in grace, and it breaks in an absolute way with all He was in as alive down here. (There is nothing so

The Scriptures speak of the Second **Man and the **Last Adam** – Editor.*

†See Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 89:49 – Ed.

absolute as death to close our connection with what we lived in, and the rather as He was rejected in will by man.) Our guilt as responsible men has been perfectly met for God, but by the cross we have done too in Him as to our life and standing before God with all down here. We are baptized to His death. It is the point we come to, we are crucified with Christ, nevertheless we live, but not we, but Christ lives in us. “We are dead and our life is hid with Christ in God” (*Colossians 3:3*); we are to reckon ourselves dead (*Romans 6:11*). Hence we say with the apostle, “when we were in the flesh” (*Romans 7:5*); we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of Christ dwell in us (*Romans 8:9*); if not, we are none of His. If we are Christians, our only true standing is in Him, as having died and risen from the dead.

I can well understand a Christian knowing only that, he being a sinner and guilty, Christ has died for him, and so seeing what he can rely on before God as a judge; and he is blessedly right; but his true standing, his place with God, is in Christ risen. “If Christ be not risen, . . . ye are yet in your sins” (*1 Corinthians 15:17*); and in this is for the Christian, as quickened, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which makes him free. The standing and the life of the Christian, as such, rest in this; for he is risen with Christ, in this place before God, not in Adam state or nature: Christ has died, the Just for the unjust, so that, for faith, he is not in that at all, but alive from the dead through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Extracted from “Either in Adam or in Christ?” by J.N. Darby (1800-82); Collected Writings Volume 23 (lightly edited).

Fragment

Take a long look at Jesus – often, often. If you wanted to know a man again you would take an intense look at his face. Look then at Jesus – deeply, intensely – till every feature is graven on your heart. *Robert Murray M’Cheyne (1823-1843)*

REPENTANCE

There is no true repentance without faith. Any change in a man's course or conduct without faith would be simply reformation, or turning over a new leaf. It could only lead to a man going about to establish his own righteousness. It would not have reference to God. There must be some light from God in the soul to produce repentance. Repentance is a change of mind produced by the knowledge of God in grace, so that man takes account of his sinful course and of all the evil he has done, and takes up a new attitude in regard to it. Instead of justifying it and going on with it, he condemns it and separates himself morally from it. He judges it in presence of divine goodness, and in presence of the grace revealed in the glad tidings. We have been seeing how God in righteousness can justify men who have sinned, but this requires repentance. It would not be a righteous act on God's part to justify an unrepentant sinner. Repentance, where it is genuine, is "towards God" (*Acts 20:21*); the soul begins to review its state and course in relation to God; it is not merely a question of how we have behaved before men, but like Psalm 51:4, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done what is evil in thy sight."

Excerpt from "Outline of Romans" by C.A. Coates (1862-1945).

GOD'S TITLE TO THE EARTH AND CALLING A PEOPLE OUT OF IT

We have to distinguish between these two things: *God's assertion of His title to the earth, and God's call of a people out of the earth.*

These different things have been again and again exhibited in the progress of the dispensations. And they have been

exhibited, as I have long judged, alternately.

The Lord began, in Adam, to claim and display His rights on the earth. The man in the garden was to own the sovereignty of God, and the earth was the rest and the delight of the Lord, and the place of His glory.

Sin entering and polluting all, and the pollution being left uncleansed, in Seth God called a people away from the earth to an inheritance in heaven.

Then in Noah the Lord God re-asserted His rights here, and took up the earth as the place where His elect might find a home, and His own presence be known again.

After this Abraham is separated from kindred, and from country, and from father's house, to be a heavenly stranger on the earth, with his altar and his tent, looking for a city whose builder and maker was God.

Israel, in their day, then take up this mystic tale of the heavens and the earth, and in the land of Canaan become the witness of the scene of God's sovereignty. The ark passes over the river as "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth."

And now the Church is set for the full testimony of heavenly mysteries again; and strangership here is the divine idea, till our being taken to meet the Lord in the air.

This wondrous tale these dispensations of God, like day and night alternate, have thus been telling from the beginning; and still are telling. And millennial days ere long will make these pledges good and be the glorious substance of these foreshadowings.

Extracted from "The Patriarchs" by J.G. Bellett (1795-1864).

ETERNAL THINGS

“He that overcometh shall inherit all these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” – Revelation 21:7.

IN Revelation 2 and 3 we see all that connects itself with the name of Christ in this world, as all passes in review under His eye, and about it all we have the declaration of His mind. Nearly the whole of it is found contrary to Him, and is threatened with judgment. He would have us feel the intense seriousness of this; we are called to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Then, while He bids us hearken to His judgment of things, He encourages us to rise in spiritual energy above the moral elements which surround us, and to overcome. This He does by presenting various things which are present to His eye, and which He would have steadily kept before the faith of His people. These things are not connected with the existing state, which is so hopelessly ruined, but either with His own kingdom, which He will shortly establish in power, or with eternal blessing. We can only overcome in the present state of things as our eye is steadily fixed upon that which is future. Yet that which is future becomes a present reality and joy to the man whose eye rests on it in faith and whose heart is stirred in affection to reach the Lord. In reaching Him we get anticipatively the delight of heavenly and eternal things by the power of the Holy Ghost. And as we enter thus into the delight of all that is found with the Lord Himself, we are conscious that we have reached that which can never fail, for it is the fruit of divine love, and is sustained in divine power.

In chapter 4 a heavenly scene is before us. There God's rights as Creator are celebrated. Man has refused to own them, but they are owned in the mind and praise of heaven. In the following chapter the One is found who is pronounced worthy to open the book which is sealed. It is the Lamb that has been slain. In the recognition of all that is suited to God, and in devoted obedience to His will, our Lord Jesus has suffered even to death. As the holy Sufferer He has overcome all the moral elements of the world, and has proved

Himself the suited One to take up everything and subdue it to God. The chapters which follow show how He clears away by judgment all that which is hateful to God, and He eventually takes up the kingdom. The kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ comes to pass. It will be a blessed day for the earth when He, whose feet once trod it in holy strangership and suffering, shall rule over it! In those days which are past, He fully showed what was the heart of God in compassionate goodness and power to relieve man, whom Satan had led captive; in the day of His rule He will make all this good, establishing in divine power upon earth all that is in God's heart for man. "In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth" (*Psalms* 72:7).

How sweet it is to have the eye directed to these scenes of peace and bliss, away from all the existing confusion and misery! In the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ everything which has been committed to man, and in which he has so grievously failed, will be taken up, and God's thought in it all carried out. Thus will God be glorified in the very world in which He has been dishonoured, and man will be blest according to all the previous indications of God's mind. But when all this shall have come to pass, and when every question which has been raised in the course of time has been divinely solved, God will make all things new, leaving no trace of that which formerly existed, A new heaven and earth will be brought in, the first having no place. The holy city will be found in perfect suitability to the whole scene, for she is described as New Jerusalem, and is seen in bridal beauty and adornment, the object of Christ's love eternally, and His everlasting glory. She is the centre of administration during His reign (for those who suffer with Him shall reign with Him); but she passes into the eternal state as perfectly suited to it.^{1 2}

(Author's note:) ¹ Some may not know that *Rev. 21. 9 to 22.5* is a kind of supplement in which the city is described minutely, but in its relation to the millennial earth. ² *(Editor's note:)* The author is distinguishing between the millennial reign of Christ, when the present earth will be renewed, and the eternal day beyond that, when there will be new heavens and a new earth (*2 Peter 3:13*).

The blessedness of those who are on the new earth consists in this, God's tabernacle shall be with them, and He will dwell with them; they shall be His people, and He shall be with them their God. They are simply spoken of as men, for all the governmental distinctions which God has formed and recognized, even on the millennial earth, shall no longer have place. They shall be one complete, happy company; happy with God's own presence. Not as in Eden, when man was innocent and God visited him, but in the full intelligence of all that God is, as it has been demonstrated in His wonderful ways; and thus known and loved He will dwell with them. All that has marked the present course of things shall be abolished, death, sorrow, crying, pain, and God Himself shall have wiped away all tears from their eyes.

Now, the overcomer shall inherit these things. God has not only exposed for us all the workings of evil in this world, and shown us their judgment, but He has also given us a sight of all that He is about to establish, that, strengthened and deeply stirred in our souls, we may rise superior to all that surrounds us at the present time. As these eternal things are before us all man's glory becomes dim, and we grow independent of all man's resources. We find all our springs in that blessed God who triumphs over all the power of evil, and who will bring in everlasting blessing and glory. He was not ashamed to be called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who waited for the city which He has founded, and who were content to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth; thus, also, is He the God of the overcomer, who is to Him a son.

Oh, for eyes which look steadily upon the things which are not seen, and hearts that love the things which are eternal! One has said, "Our momentary and light affliction works for us in surpassing measure an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are for a time, but those that are not seen eternal" (2 Cor. 4: 17-18, Darby Translation).

Joseph Revell (1835-1900)

The Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus

A comparison of the accounts in the Gospels.

| Matthew 17: 1-9 | Mark 9: 2-9 | Luke 9: 28-36 |
|---|---|---|
| And after six days Jesus takes with [Him] Peter, and James, and John his brother, and brings them into a high mountain apart. | And after six days Jesus takes with [Him] Peter and James and John, and takes them up on a high mountain by themselves apart. | And it came to pass after these words, about eight days, that taking Peter and John and James He went up into a mountain to pray. |
| And He was transfigured before them. And His face shone as the sun, and His garments became white as the light; | And He was transfigured before them: and His garments became shining, exceeding white [as snow,] such as fuller on earth could not whiten [them]. | And as He prayed the fashion of His countenance became different and His raiment white and effulgent. |
| And lo, Moses and Elias appeared to them talking with Him. | And there appeared to them Elias with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. | And lo, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elias, who, appearing in glory, spoke of His departure which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. |

| | | |
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| | | But Peter and those with him were oppressed with sleep: but having fully awoke up they saw His glory, and the two men who stood with them. |
| And Peter answering said to Jesus, Lord, it is good we should be here. If Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles: for Thee one, and for Moses one, and one for Elias. | And Peter answering says to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good that we should be here; and let us make three tabernacles, for Thee one, and for Moses one, and for Elias one. For he knew not what he should say, for they were filled with fear. | And it came to pass as they departed from Him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles, one for Thee, and one for Moses and one for Elias: not knowing what he said. |
| While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and lo, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I have found | And there came a cloud overshadowing them, and there came a voice out of the cloud, This is My beloved Son: hear Him. | But as he was saying these things, there came a cloud and overshadowed them, and they feared as they entered into the cloud: and there was a voice out of the cloud |

| | | |
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| My delight: hear Him. | | saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him. |
| And the disciples hearing [it] fell upon their faces and were greatly terrified. And Jesus coming to [them] touched them, and said, Rise up, and be not terrified. | | |
| And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus alone. And as they descended from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no one until the Son of man be risen up from among the dead. | And suddenly having looked around, they no longer saw anyone, but Jesus alone with themselves. And as they descended the mountain, He charged them that they should relate to no one what they had seen, unless ... | And as the voice was [heard] Jesus was found alone: and they kept silence, and told no-one in those days any of the things they had seen. |

The above quotations are from the Darby translation of the Bible, generally held to be a very accurate, literal one.

In Matthew’s account, the Lord’s previous intimation of this coming event to His disciples was that they would see “the Son of man coming in His kingdom,” whereas Mark refers to the kingdom of God coming in power and Luke simply records that they would see the kingdom of God. Thus there is more emphasis in Matthew

on the glory of the *Person* whose kingdom it is, which is not surprising in the gospel which presents Christ as King.

Both Matthew and Mark give us an interval of six days between the Lord's words and their accomplishment, whereas Luke speaks of "about eight days." Perhaps the practical answer is that six days elapsed *between* the intimation and the event but the eight days *include* both. Luke does, however, write with method (see chapter 1, verse 3) and it has been suggested that in spiritual terms a six-day period represents man's day whereas the eighth day means an entirely new beginning.

It is noticeable that Mark writes of their being "by themselves" (verse 2) and of Jesus being "with themselves" (verse 8), perhaps emphasising the private and secluded nature of the experience which the disciples had with the Lord. Mark apparently was close to Peter (the reference to "Marcus my son" in 1 Peter 5:13 is generally linked to John Mark) and that apostle wrote of "being with Him on the holy mountain."

Luke alone refers to prayer (twice – verses 28 and 29). This is entirely in keeping with the character of his gospel, which opens and closes with references to the temple and contains more mentions of prayer than any of the others. It is very helpful to see the distinctive character that each of the gospels (indeed that each book of the Bible) has. We should here note that in his Gospel John, the only Gospel writer who was present on the mount, does not give us any record of the transfiguration. His Gospel is intensely moral and spiritual, rather than dispensational; in it Christ is glorified as the Son of God throughout, even in death.

The differences in the way in which the transfiguration is described in the three gospels are significant, although in each case the effect on the Lord's clothing is mentioned. Garments are that

which surrounds a person and may be taken as presenting his character and associations.

In Matthew the face of Jesus shone as the sun, which is symbolic of supreme power (see Genesis 1:16), and His garments were seen as “white as the light.” Taking these two features together, there may be a link with the fact that in Matthew the kingdom of God is described as the “kingdom of heaven,” perhaps looking on to the time when the Lord Jesus would be enthroned in heaven, having been rejected on earth.

Mark only does not mention the Lord’s face. He describes His garments by contrast with what a fuller *on earth* could not do. (The words *as snow* do not appear in all manuscripts.)

In recording that it was “as He prayed” that “the fashion of His countenance became different,” Luke surely encourages us to spend time in prayer and thus become even now more like the Lord Jesus, even as we shall soon be actually conformed to His image; see 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Philippians 3:21.

All three writers record the whiteness of the Lord’s garments. Everything in Him and all about Him was utterly pure and this continues to mark Him where He is, “become higher than the heavens” as our High Priest (Hebrews 7:26). Paul exhorts us to “purify ourselves from every pollution of flesh and spirit” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Likewise the three accounts all include that Moses and Elias appeared with Jesus and talked with Him, but only Luke tells us what they spoke about. With what dignity he describes the coming event in Jerusalem, writing not of the humiliation but of the “departure” that the Lord Himself would “accomplish” – a deliberate act on His part. It has been pointed out that Moses was connected with the inauguration of things and Elias with their

restoration; Luke emphasises that they both appeared in glory but also that when the disciples had fully woken up it was *His* glory that they saw.

Again, it is only Luke, “the beloved physician” who perceives the human element, that mentions the sleepiness of the disciples. How easy it is for us not to be alert when the greatest things are taking place! For example, when gathered together to remember the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread and to participate in the worship of God, are we awake to the way in which the Lord presents Himself to us and introduces us to His God and Father, who is also ours through great divine grace?

All three accounts record Peter’s verbal contribution; Mark and Luke mention his confusion of mind. Perhaps many of us have been in circumstances where we felt an urge to say *something* and simply blurted out whatever came into our minds, however inappropriate!

It is interesting that Matthew interprets Peter’s address to Jesus as “Lord,” emphasising His authority. There may also be an allusion to the fact that Christ is the Lord God of the Old Testament. Mark uses the word “Rabbi” (a Jewish teacher), perhaps more in line with the place that the Lord Jesus took on earth as a Minister or Servant. Luke here and elsewhere in his Gospel adopts as a form of address to the Lord a word not used by others but translated “Master,” meaning a superintendent over others.

All three writers record the cloud that overshadowed the company and the voice that came out of the cloud. This was surely what has been termed the Shechinah, symbol of the presence and glory of God as in Exodus 40:34, 2 Chronicles 5:13, 14 and other Old Testament scriptures. Peter describes it as “the excellent glory” (2 Peter 1:17) and it is significant that he says that the Father’s voice

was “to Him,” although His declaration was clearly for the disciples to hear because, as recorded in the Gospels, it drew their attention to Him: “This is My beloved Son.”

Luke records that the disciples “feared as they entered into the cloud;” Matthew tells us that they were terrified upon hearing the voice but also that, even in such a holy and glorious scene, the Lord Jesus extended His touch and His comfort to them. John had a somewhat similar experience when on the island of Patmos he saw the judicial glory of Christ (Revelation 1:17, 18).

All three writers tell us that eventually the disciples saw Jesus “alone.” How necessary it is that, however useful other servants of God may have been or yet be, the uniqueness of everything about the Lord Jesus Christ should always be impressed on our hearts and minds. He only is the Man of God’s right hand, the Son of man whom God has made strong for Himself (Psalm 80:17).

Although the three disciples had seen a preview of Christ coming in power and great glory, before that tremendous event could actually take place Christ would be rejected and other aspects of God’s purposes had to be fulfilled – particularly the sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ and the formation, testimony and catching up of the church. The scene that had passed had, therefore, to be a matter of strict confidence to those who had seen it. All three writers record that silence was kept as to it at that time.

On the mount the disciples had seen something of the glory of God’s Son but it is noticeable that both Matthew and Mark record that in relation to His death and resurrection Jesus spoke of Himself as the Son of man. It as Son of man that the Lord Jesus will soon come out with His saints in glory and, in virtue of the work He has already done, set everything right on this earth; see Matthew 24:27 and 30, Mark 13:26, Luke 21:27 and other references. *G.S.B.*

“HOLD THAT FAST WHICH THOU HAST”

Hebrews 2:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:3, 4, 14, 15
Revelation 3:11-13

I THINK, beloved brethren, if ever there was a day when this word in Revelation 3 should come home to our hearts and consciences it is this present moment: “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” It is a day which is characterised by the giving up of everything that is vital and true in the professing body of God’s people generally, everything of God revealed in Christ. The leaders of Christendom today (speaking generally) are unitarian or infidel, and those who are led by them are content to accept such a teaching as they get; it is the fulfilment of 2 Timothy 4:3. It is characterised by the profession of having new light and the deliberate giving up the truth. Everything is tending as fast as it can to apostasy. It will end in the giving up of the very profession of Christianity. The tide has set in and is running hard in that direction.

And if all this is going on in the professing body of which we are a part, there is grave danger of our being affected in the same way; doing what others have done and are doing, letting slip what God has given to us. We ought to take heed and it applies very forcibly at the present moment: “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” Do not surrender! Do not let Satan rob you. “Hold fast till I come” (*Rev. 2:25*).

We must be deeply conscious that we have received immense grace from God, great light; an immense deal has been committed to us. It seems to me the whole scope of God’s mind and ways has been recovered and brought to light in our days as it has not been known since the days of the apostles. We have had the testimony of the Christ, that is, Christ has been set forth; this includes three parts, first in what He is to us personally – every one begins with

that. I might speak to every one here and say, What is Christ to you? You say, He is everything to me, the One in whom the grace of God has reached me, in whom the light of God has shone to me; He is my Saviour, my Lord, my support, my Priest, my all. Let us cultivate the thought of this more and more; let us seek to realise more and more what Christ is to us personally.

Then another thing has been brought out very strikingly, what Christ is to the church, His body. He is the Head from whom the whole body having nourishment ministered increases with the increase of God (*Colossians 2:19; see also Ephesians 4:16 – Ed.*). He is the Head of the body, and the body while here on earth has in Him all it needs as resource and support. All that sustains the body, the nourishment, comes from Christ, and the grace that knits together comes from Him. We have come together in the faith of it to-day. If we did not know Christ in relation to the church, something of what He is to the church and what the church is to Him, we would not have come to these meetings. We came together counting upon His un failing grace to the church. If we fail He never fails, and never will fail any who look to Him. However small a company may be, if they are in the faith of the Head, they will prove that the grace of Christ is sufficient to supply all that is needed to sustain and knit together. We cannot knit ourselves together.

Again, He is in a way the Husband of the church, as we heard last night; He lives now to nourish and cherish the church; He is always thinking of the church; His interests are there; she is the object of His love. The church, the object of His undying love, is here, and the church will never lack whilst it looks to Him. She will always prove His sufficiency; He will never fail. The servants may go – one and another through whom He has ministered to us – and they do go; but He does not pass away, He remains, and He lives to nourish and cherish the church as well as to cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, and He will present it to Himself another day not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but holy and without blame (*Ephesians 5:27*).

That is part of the testimony of the Christ that has been ministered to us very distinctly.

And then one point more, that may have come to light more recently: Christ in what He is to God, Head over *all things*, the great Sun and Centre of the universe of God. The One in whom God will establish everything according to His mind. In the administration of the fulness of the times He will head up all things in Christ (*Ephesians 1:10*) and ultimately will establish the new heavens and earth, where God will be all in all, and all will answer to His pleasure and satisfaction, everything originating from Christ and sustained by Him who is Head of all. That is another part of the testimony of the Christ and gives us great thoughts of His glory, and the greatness of His Person.

As I said, I believe the whole scope and purpose of God's will has been manifested and kept before our minds through the Lord's grace. Now the great thing is, what are we going to do with it?

I am not looking for anything new; I think the whole scope of truth has been revived. We have been left a little longer in responsibility; do we value what we have received? A man will not cling to or hold fast very much what he does not value. "Hold that fast which thou hast;" are we conscious of having received anything? do we appreciate what we have received? "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." The words themselves show there is a great deal of opposition, a great effort of Satan to lead us to drop and to give up, as Christendom has done; the word says not only, Hold it; but, Hold it fast. And He gives the reason: "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." What does He mean by "quickly"? The force of that is, the time of testimony and conflict will soon be over; testimony and conflict always go together. If we are seeking to be here in testimony for Christ we shall be in conflict certainly. We have heard to-day of the apostle's conflict, and how he sought to identify the saints with him in the conflict. It must be opposition and

conflict in this world, but the time of testimony and conflict will soon be over. Hold on, He says, as it were, do not give up the conflict now; hold to the colours; do not let down the flag; I come quickly.

Then another thing. Not only the conflict will be over, but there will be a day of reward; see that no man take thy crown. If you give up just before the end you will lose your crown, the approval of the Lord which will be manifested in the day of glory. Let us seek grace to be faithful to the testimony of the Lord, to hold fast, to keep up the flag, and stand for Him, that when He comes we may be found faithful to what He has committed to us. That is the great thing to be exercised about.

One more word. There is only one way in which we can hold fast. It is not enough to have the truth as doctrine. Orthodoxy will not stand against the wiles of the devil. We must have it in the power of the Spirit of God and in connection with the person of Christ and maintained as life in our souls, or we shall surely let it slip.

It is a day of letting slip, and giving up. May we, by grace, be found holding fast till He come.

Word given in meetings at Quemerford by Dr. F.H.Bodman, in May, 1904.

Supplementary note by the author:-

I should like to add a few thoughts which were in my mind, but which I was unable to bring out at the meeting. The passages read indicate a gradual decline in departure from the truth. The beginning is what is spoken of in Hebrews 2:1, 2, that is, neglecting, or letting slip, the things which we have heard. It was so with Israel; they did not hearken to the word spoken to them. If the Holy Spirit is speaking, and He will never cease to speak as long as He remains here in the church, it must be a serious thing not to hearken to His voice, or to be negligent of

His ministry. If we let the word slip, we shall ourselves slip away. The next step in the downward path is the refusal of sound teaching, and the deliberate turning away from the truth; 2 Timothy 4:3, 4. Then the next step is quickly reached, that is positive opposition, as we see in the case of Alexander, of whom the apostle says, “He greatly withstood our words” (2 Tim. 4:15). It is painful to think of those who once professed to value the truth and to proclaim it, being found in such a path as set forth in these passages. This should serve as solemn warning to us all; what others have done and are doing, we are liable to do. We need to pray continually that the truth may be maintained in us in living power by the Spirit, and that we may not compromise it in our ways, so that we may be prepared as good soldiers to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. The Lord grant that we may be found so doing when He comes.

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I AM

in John’s Gospel

I AM the bread of life (chapter 6, verses 35, 48 and 51);

I AM the light of the world (chapter 8, verse 12; see also
Chapter 9, verse 5);

I AM the door of the sheep (chapter 10, verse 7);

I AM the Good Shepherd (chapter 10, verses 11 and 14);

I AM the resurrection and the life (chapter 11, verse 25);

I AM the way, and the truth, and the life (chapter 14, verse 6);

I AM the true vine (chapter 15, verse 1; see also verse 5);

Unless ye shall believe that I AM [He], ye shall die in your sins (chapter 8, verse 24). “Jesus ... said unto them, “Whom seek ye? They answered Him, ‘Jesus the Nazaraean.’ Jesus says to them, I AM [He]. ... They went away backward and fell to the ground” (chapter 18, verses 4-6).

FAITH AND LOVE

IN Ephesians and Colossians, the two epistles to the Thessalonians and the second epistle to Timothy, the apostle Paul speaks of faith and love, putting them together in each epistle, thereby showing the place they had in his mind as he wrote to the saints.

Recently many of the Lord's people have moved out to Him* being governed by faith in Him and love to Him. Indeed, we may see this illustrated in Peter in Matthew 14, when he left the ship to go to Jesus. It is true that the Lord Jesus has to say to him that his faith was small; nevertheless, he *did* walk, if only a few steps, on the water to reach the Saviour and what controlled him in his movements were these two great features – faith and love. How much it has meant to many, indeed to all who have thus moved out to Christ! A step in faith is in contrast to sight: when Peter took his eye off Jesus he was governed by sight and so it is with us, When we take our eyes off Christ we look at circumstances and other things the enemy would use to distract us; but faith looks steadfastly on Jesus, and as He fills the vision of our souls we are enabled to move towards Him and to reach *Him*; and so we step out in faith counting on Him to support us.

We should, however, continue in this pathway of faith. Jesus is spoken of in Hebrews 12:2 as the Leader and Completer of faith – what an Object for our hearts and what encouragement there is for us to go on in faith as we look steadfastly on Him! Our gaze is to be fixed upon Him, the One who is now at the right hand of God, having been here in perfect, holy manhood and having trodden a pathway so pleasing to the Father. Let us remember, too, that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6)

** This expression no doubt referred to a movement out from fellowship where the Lord's name and honour were compromised.*

Now as to love: what a wonderful power this is! Indeed believers are said to be partakers of the divine nature (*2 Peter 1:4*); not that they have part in deity, but love is of God and, as indwelt by the Holy Spirit, such are to come out like Him who is love. There is nothing more wonderful than the divine love expressed in the movements of the Lord Jesus.

Paul speaks to the Thessalonians as those who were taught of God to love one another. Let us then thus learn in this, so that our love for each other may abound. Peter speaks of loving one another fervently (*1 Peter 1:22*) and then we have Paul's exhortation to bear with one another in love (*Ephesians 4:2*). All this will help us in our relations with one another, resulting in happy, holy conditions which are pleasing to God. As we are thus taught of God and have Christ before us as the expression of divine love, so the Spirit, who has taken up His abode in us, brings about some correspondence to the Man of God's choice, and our love for God and for one another will develop and a holy atmosphere will be promoted (*see 1 Thess. 3:12, 13, where the connection between love and holiness is plain – Editor*).

This will work out testimonially because the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "By this shall all know that ye are disciples of mine, if ye have love amongst yourselves" (John 13:35). The apostle could speak of the word of the Lord being sounded out from the Thessalonians – those who, as we have seen, were taught of God to love one another.

May we then go on together in faith and love until the Lord Himself comes to take us to be with Himself – when faith will no longer be required and love will abide.

F.G. Hobbs, Croydon.

Reproduced from "Things Concerning Himself," April 1961.

Fragment

"Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The faith is *delivered*, not *discovered* – A. Worsley.

POETIC PAGES

His Name!

Hail to that blessed name
JESUS, the CHRIST, the LORD,
Let saints His worth proclaim,
By angels be adored.
Honour and might we now ascribe;
Worthy art Thou who for us died.

That wondrous name we praise,
JESUS, the lowly Man,
Yet God o'er all – His days
Eternity doth span.
Incarnate God! – that holy babe
Who, as a Man, God's thoughts displayed.

Come, magnify that name,
The CHRIST of God, the Son.
Ye saints, extol the fame
Of God's anointed One,
Exalted by the Father's will,
Above all things – all things to fill.

All hail that glorious name,
For He is LORD of all.
His kingdom shall remain;
No word of His can fall.
Soon earth's remotest ends shall ring
With praise to Thee, both Lord and King.

A.E. Barnes (1895-1984)

The above hymn may be sung to the tune "Darwall's 148th."

Victory

O lead me to the Man that died,
Who all God's nature glorified,
Descending to the depths of woe,
And for us vanquished every foe!

O lead me to the empty tomb,
His death has robbed of all its gloom;
He's risen! the Lord of life and peace,
And holds me in His fond embrace.

O lead me up to heaven's height
To see the Lord enthroned in light;
That, gazing on His glory there,
I may reflect His image here.

O lead me to that meeting rare,
So often looked for in the air;
Then, then, His blessed face I'll see
And praise Him through eternity.

O lead me on to Zion's hill,
To see the Lord His word fulfil;
His glorious King is sitting there,
Ruling o'er earth and sea and air.

O lead me to that scene sublime
Prepared by God before all time;
Sin, death and night have passed away;
Light, life and love are there to stay. / *P.T.O.*

There, too, th'Eternal three in One,
Blest Father, Spirit and the Son,
Rest undisturbed for evermore:
I wonder, worship and adore!

By Alfred Mace (1854-1944) and H.P. Smith.

NOTE

The Editor trusts that the selection and composition of material for this magazine has been undertaken with the Lord's guidance and that the contents are of moral and spiritual value and appropriate to present needs. The only infallible statement of truth, however, is found in the Holy Bible and the reader is, therefore, urged to follow the practice of the Bereans, who "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). The Editor is always happy to receive comments and inquiries, and to consider suggested articles for inclusion in future issues.