

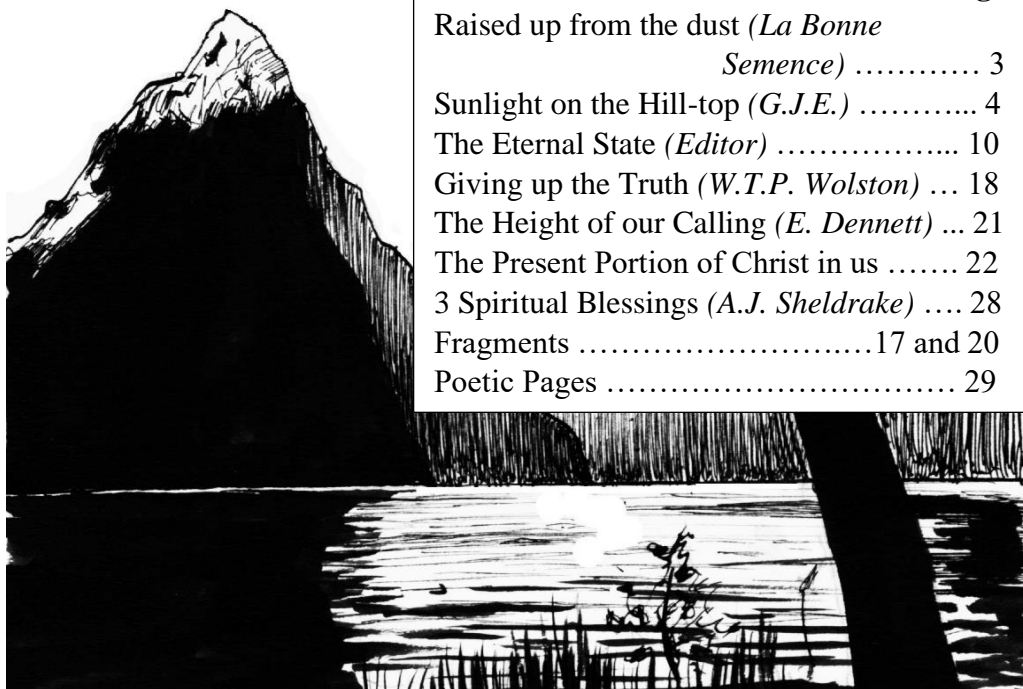
Words of Peace & Truth



No. 118: January – April 2023

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WORDS OF PEACE & TRUTH

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

No. 118: January – April 2023

Editorial

Quite a number of believers whom we know, or have known, are afflicted in their bodies (either by illness or by the infirmity of old age), or are limited in their circumstances, or have lately been elevated to glory. These things make their impact on others – friends and relatives, including Christian believers who have enjoyed fellowship with them.

Such things can cause discouragement and contribute to a sense of decline and weakness. But in the Holy Scriptures we find that God works through apparent weakness. Indeed, we are told that “God has chosen the weak things of the world, that He may put to shame the strong things” (1 Corinthians 1:27). In Hebrews 11 we read that some “by faith ... became strong out of weakness.”

What could seem weaker than a babe lying in a manger? – yet this is how the eternal, almighty God chose to come among us. Then as to the close of that perfect life of Christ we read: “if indeed He has been crucified in weakness, yet He lives by God’s power” (2 Corinthians 12:4). Earlier in that same chapter we find that the apostle Paul had learned to boast in his weaknesses, “that the power of the Christ may dwell upon me.”

Let us, therefore, not despise what is apparently weak, either around us or in our own circumstances, but let us be like Abraham, who “found strength in faith” (Romans 4:20). G.S.B.

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Raised up from the Dust

“Dust thou art; and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19).

“[God] raiseth up the poor out of the dust” (1 Samuel 2:8).

“[Jehovah] remembereth that we are dust” (Psalm 103:13, 14).

This morning a ray of sunshine enters my room through a chink in the shutter. Fine particles of dust float in this beam of light and my thoughts turn to the above verses. Am I not like one of these specks of dust before my Creator?

I blow gently on these suspended particles and they revolve in every direction before recovering a certain equilibrium. I think then of the almightiness of God. What am I before Him? Nevertheless, I know that He knows me and loves me, I who am so insignificant among all His creatures. Although our bodies must return to dust because of man’s sin, I know that God holds open through Jesus a way to heaven. “He raises up the wretched from the dust.” How has this become possible?

“Thou hast laid Me in the dust of death” (Psalm 22:15): this psalm alludes to the death of Christ; He had to bear my sins in His body on the cross (*see 1 Peter 2:24*). The door of heaven is open to me when I believe in the work of Jesus who saves me from death and gives me eternal life. Placed in God’s light, I can then confess my sins to Him and say like Job: “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job: 42:6).

I recognize myself in one of these fine particles of dust lightened by the sunshine. I belong to the Saviour God who will raise me to heaven to be with Him. While I wait, He concerns Himself with my fragility, for He “remembers that we are dust.”

Translated from “La Bonne Semence;” reading for 9th January, 2023.

There's Sunlight on the Hilltop

MANY years ago an unusual experience befell two friends, whom we will call James and Ernest, travelling for a holiday in the north of Ireland. Sleeping one night at two different coastal resorts in County Down, they arranged to meet at twelve noon the following day at the top of Slieve Donard, a mountain some 2,800 feet high not far distant from the sea coast, which rose in its grandeur before them.

The morning broke in a dismal wet fog and James had two minds as to keeping the appointment, but considering he was the elder, and the one that had suggested the rendezvous, he determined to set out.

OBSTACLES BESET HIM

from the start; soon after leaving the town, his path led through a wood thick with undergrowth, through which, at times, he had to force a way, only to find that in the fog he had missed it more than once, and got wet as well; at last somehow he emerged, and passing over some broken ground, he arrived at the base of the mountain.

As James now

BEGAN TO ASCEND

he began also to experience a new difficulty: added to the fog and roughness of the mountain-track, the wind commenced to rise, and the farther he went, the worse it became; until, strong, hearty fellow as James was, he had to crawl along clutching the mountain to save being blown down the side; but the effect of the wind was to dispel the fog, and as James worked along and gradually rounded the side, he came for a time into a quieter part of the path, and for some distance it was pleasant, though steep and difficult, and

BEYOND LAY THE GOAL,

far off, in the glorious sunshine, seen in momentary glimpses

through the dispersing fog. James breathed again, and took fresh courage to persevere, wondering whether his friend would meet him at the top, for there were other ways up.

Proceeding at a good pace, James soon gained a position on a portion of the mountain-side which jutted out, and where he could look around him, when, instead of what he had hoped for, a clear path to the top, he saw

GREAT, HEAVY BLACK CLOUDS

coming, rolling up from all parts of the compass, making, as it were, for the mountain and him.

Though apprehensive, James yet pressed on and up, and as he rounded the side again, came into thick darkness, and huge drops of rain began to fall. James was brought to a standstill, alone on the rough and uneven side of a mountain, unable to see hardly a yard on either side, meeting no one.

THE SOLITUDE WAS AWFUL.

A measure of fear possessed James as a flash of lightning illuminated the scene, and then darkness over all again amid the roar of thunder reverberating all around: another flash, an awful roar, peal after peal. James stood spellbound. Suddenly the path in front of him came into full view in dazzling light, and was stamped upon his brain, and a feeling of

NOW OR NEVER

came over him, pushing him forward as fast as his feet would take him over the steep and rugged way.

The path now ascended rapidly, and was seen more clearly, as James, leaving the clouds and darkness behind him, soon after, with all fear gone, emerged into the

BRILLIANT SUNSHINE ABOVE THE STORM;

over him the open vault of heaven, around him a view as of another world springing out of the masses of thick dark clouds below him, which entirely shut off all trace of the lower world from which he had come.

Onward and upward still, until the

TOP WAS REACHED, AND REST

was found in a cairn amidst the happy surroundings of warm sunshine, the singing of birds, and peace on everything.

As James reposed in all this delightful serenity, the storm that he had come through, and left now far below him, broke out down there afresh, and he beheld from his place of vantage all nature in that lower world convulsed, and all the while James, far removed from and

ABOVE IT ALL,

in an entirely different scene, suffused with the sunlight, sat and just enjoyed his present surroundings.

Loath to leave, James waited on in the indescribable charm of the

PEACE AND JOY

he had in all things around him, in the luxury of such a haven enjoying the beautiful sun until the storm below him should have passed away.

But James was still alone; Ernest did not come.

In an hour's time all the clouds underneath had dispersed, and the countryside below James came into view, unfolding lovely hills and valleys, and he started off in exhilaration, refreshed by his rest, to make his way across it to a distant town.

How James enjoyed that walk! All nature seemed to be exulting in the sunlight and the freshness of everything after the storm.

In the evening James met Ernest in the town of N-----, miserable and dejected, having spent the day in the valley in mist and fog first, and thunderstorms after, and a rickety vehicle to finish with, he not having the heart to attempt the ascent on such a day.

-- o O o --

Now, our Lord Jesus Christ has gone to the top and **“is set down at the right hand of the throne of God,”**

“THE LEADER AND COMPLETER OF FAITH”
(*Hebrews 12:2*); on His way there He could say in view of death, **“Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy”** (*Psalms 16:11*); and He goes right through, alone, so unutterably alone, as regards any human aid; through storms and darkness, sorrow and stress, agony and bloody sweat, forsaken, despised, He still goes on, **“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.”** God's will was done by Him. God's love was in His heart. He has reached the goal: **“Whither the Forerunner is for us entered”** (*Hebrews 6:20*).

JESUS IS IN THE GLORY OF GOD.

Now, have you and I got the goal in view? and the One who is at the goal, **“the glory of God and Jesus”** (*Acts 7:55*). **For God ... hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”** (*2 Corinthians 4:6*). He is in it and the light of it in His face is in our hearts.

A LIVING MAN,

Jesus, the Son of God, has passed through the heavens to the throne of God.

His place is ours, He Himself has said so : **“If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be”** (*John 12:26*).

It is a blessed thought that we are pressing forward to the place where Jesus, the Forerunner, is entered.

There are two qualities that we especially require in climbing the steep ascent, they are

PURPOSE AND PATIENCE;

the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy says, “**Thou hast fully known my ... purpose**” (2 *Timothy* 3:10) and we are exhorted in Hebrews to **run with patience ... looking unto Jesus,**” (*Hebrews* 12:1,2) kept in activity surely, as our hearts and eyes are engaged with Him. How beautifully both are set out in Philippians 3, and the goal at the end “**the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.**”

It is a great thing to know by the Holy Spirit that we are

LOVED BY DIVINE PERSONS,

Who desire our company in a place and condition suitable to Themselves, and that now. To bring this to pass in our souls, all the power of God is at our disposal: Christ on high, the Sun in the heavens, to attract us, and the Spirit in us to energise us, and to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, including the things to come. Thus James on the mountain-side sees through the vivid flash in the storm the goal in front and the pathway to it, and is energized at the same time to press forward to it, even though it be through death, in figure. Thus Abraham, in his day, after many a trial and testing, went up a mountain at the word of God, the God he knew by grace, when all nature would have held him back, with the horrors of death to all his hopes here in front of him, tasting it in its intensity and bitterness in his soul, and, as faith reached its climax, finding at the mountain-top, beyond the storms, God,

THE GOD OF RESURRECTION,

the Builder and Maker of the city which hath foundations.

With many of us there is a good deal of wandering in the fogs and undergrowth of the wilderness until after many a failure, and needed lessons learnt, our ears, attentive, hear a word

saying, **“This is the way, walk ye in it”** (*Isaiah 30:21*), and the mountain and its summit come into view.

As we ascend, the fogs are dispelled and we begin to see plainly and in just proportion; but other things retard our progress; there is determined opposition by the Adversary, yet we learn what it is to be **“out of weakness made strong”** (*Hebrews 11:34*), and for a time we press on joyfully, every step taking us further and further from this earth, and nearer and nearer, as we follow after, energised by the Holy Spirit, the place where the Forerunner is. But

TO REACH HIM WHERE HE IS

it must be by the way He has gone, appropriating His death. Thick darkness around, earth below blotted out, but there *is* a pathway. He has made it, and trod it, and there is light vouchsafed for the pathway through the awful gloom; and with Him by the Spirit we go forward, and presently emerge above in the light. **“Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”** (*Romans 6:4*). Now

ALL IS CHANGED,

the man is transformed; we live in the life of the Blessed Man who lives to God having died to sin (*Romans 6:10, 11*), a life to which sin and death do not attach, where the sun shines in a cloudless sky, where in the conscious enjoyment of divine love we rest in peace and joy, where **“Christ is all, and in all”** (*Colossians 3:11*), where, learning the measure of His separation from this world is the measure of ours, the new world,

THE FATHER'S WORLD,

fills the vision of our souls, and in quietness we wonder and adore. The blessed atmosphere of that scene of joy and peace fills our hearts and subdues us to Himself; the light and the warmth of the

Sun possess us. From this serene elevation and separation how differently is earth viewed and all its commotion and confusion, and as we necessarily come down once more to pursue our journey here through the hills and valleys of this life, the ups and downs of the wilderness pathway, it is with the song of Zion on our lips, and peace within our hearts and coming out in our ways.

May “**the glory of God and Jesus**” there so fill our eyes and hearts by the Holy Spirit that we may count all things loss for the excellency of that sight, and, moving forward in that light, be for the praise of His name until what is so real to faith now and made good in us by the Holy Spirit becomes actual to sight and sense, and then in bodies like His own we shall behold His glory.

G.J.E.

I have seen the face of Jesus –
Tell me not of aught beside;
I have heard the voice of Jesus –
All my soul is satisfied.
In the radiance of His glory
First I saw His blessed face,
And for ever shall that glory
Be my home, my dwelling place.

THE ETERNAL STATE

1 Corinthians 15:24-28; 2 Peter 3:12,13; Revelation 21:1-8.

There are things that, in our present condition, our minds cannot grasp. Infinity and eternity are two such things. If, for example, we try to think of space – the universe – we insist on a boundary somewhere; but if there *is* a boundary, we cannot but inquire, what is beyond that? Similarly with regard to time, we have to think in terms of days, weeks, months, years, centuries and millennia. But what about eternity – as one hymn composer has

written, “when time shall cease to be”? Our finite minds cannot grasp this.

Do we therefore forget about the subject of eternity? No, because God has made reference to it in His word, the Holy Bible; if He has done so, it is surely because He intends us to pay attention to what He has said. Man in his pride would presume somehow to master every subject (often in the process plunging himself into greater darkness) but here we are shut up to divine revelation. Indeed, is it not only by this that we can understand any truth? “The things of God knows no one except the Spirit of God. But we [*believers*] have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which have been freely given to us of God” (1 Corinthians 2:11, 12). We do not understand the truth by penetrating into it with our natural minds but by laying hold, with the Holy Spirit’s help, of what God has been pleased to reveal of Himself, His purposes, His counsels and His ways. “The hidden things belong to Jehovah our God; but the revealed ones are ours and our children’s for ever ...” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

In communicating with us, God graciously uses words and expressions that are meaningful to us. Thus Psalm 90 speaks of God being “from eternity to eternity,” meaning that He has been, always is, and always will be there; but we could construe the expression as indicating a past eternity and a future eternity, whereas eternity is outside of time – God tells us that He inhabits eternity (present continuous tense – Isaiah 57:15). Again, Peter speaks of “the day of eternity,” whereas literal 24-hour days will be over. It is difficult to find words that can convey to us things that at present are really beyond us.

In fact, we find little in the Holy Scriptures that directly describes the eternal state. God in His word has told us what we *need* to know, not what may satisfy our *curiosity*. He reveals such truth to us as is calculated to have an impact on us and affect us in

our thoughts and ways. But clearly some appreciation of the eternal state comes within this scope, because Peter, in telling us how “the day of the Lord” will give way to “the day of God,” challenges us as to what we should be “in holy conversation [*behaviour*] and godliness” in view of these things (see 2 Peter 3:10-14).

Through God’s grace, we already, as believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, have many *blessings* that are eternal: examples include an eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:9), eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12), eternal life (1 John 5:14) and the words of Christ (Matthew 24:35). But the possession of such blessings – wonderful as this is – is not the same as being in eternal *conditions* . The verses alluded to in 2 Peter, together with many other passages of Scripture, show that much has to take place before such a state is ushered in. Let us briefly mention some of these things.

We are told (and take comfort in the fact) that true believers will be kept out of an “hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole habitable world” (Revelation 3:10). Old Testament scriptures foretold this time, with particular reference to the revived Jewish nation; see, for example, Jeremiah 30:7 and Daniel 12:1. Then we read in the later chapters of Revelation that, amidst increasing judgments from God, two beasts will arise, political and religious (Rev. 13), who will act with the power of Satan. Again, Scripture abounds with references to, and descriptions of, “the great and terrible day of the Lord” (Joel 2:31 – see also Isaiah 2:19), when the Lord Jesus Christ as Son of Man shall come “on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30), not now to take believers to Himself (they being already with Him) but to execute judgment upon all wickedness (as long before prophesied by Enoch – see Jude 14) and to inaugurate a reign of righteousness and peace on the earth.

This reign of the long-awaited Messiah is described in many Old Testament scriptures; for example, Isaiah 32 and 35, and Micah 4. The same period is described by Paul as the “day of Jesus Christ”

and “Christ’s day” – see Philippians 1:6, 10. The writer to the Hebrews refers to it as “the world to come” (Hebrews 2:5 and 6:5) and speaks of its being subjected to Christ as Son of man, citing Psalm 8. Similarly in 1 Corinthians 15:27 Paul writes of all things being subjected by God to Christ (see also Ephesians 1:10). This again refers to the time when the kingdom of God will be publicly established on this earth – when Christ will take His place as King of kings and Lord of lords. We learn from Revelation 20 that this reign of Christ and His saints will last a thousand years – hence the use of the word ‘millennium’ in relation to the world to come.

But Paul tells us in the passage in 1 Corinthians 15 that this reign will be *until* He has “put all enemies under His feet,” death being the last enemy to be destroyed. Then, when Christ has brought everything into conformity with the will of God, He “gives up the kingdom to Him who is God and Father” in view of God being “all in all” (see verses 24-28). Likewise in Revelation 20 we have death being abolished – “death and hades were cast into the lake of fire” (verse 14) – and then in the next chapter the eternal state comes into view (verses 1-8). Again, Peter tells us (2 Pet. 3:10 and 12) how “*the day of the Lord*” (Christ coming in judgment and to introduce a reign of righteousness) will give way to “*the day of God*” (the eternal state).

We may pause here to consider with wonder and worship the intimation that “the Son also Himself shall be placed in subjection to Him who placed all things in subjection to Him” (1 Corinthians 15:28). The condescending stoops of Christ, first into manhood and then into death, are beautifully described in Philippians 2; now, at the threshold of eternity, He again demonstrates His subjection as Son to the Father. Although in His Person never less than God, he clearly remains in His condition a Man for ever. Happy for us it is that this should be the case, for “no-one has seen God at any time” (John 1:18 – see also 1 Timothy 6:16) but surely we shall ever see “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

There are several things that distinguish the eternal state from the world to come, or millennium. Firstly, many Old Testament scriptures foretell that the (existing) earth will be *renewed* in the world to come, but we read that in transition to eternal conditions the present heaven and earth will pass away and be *replaced* by “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 20:11 and 21:1). Secondly, we have already referred to the abolition of “the last enemy,” death. Although probably infrequent in the world to come, we learn from Isaiah 65:20 that it will then occur. In the eternal day of God, “death shall not exist any more” (Rev. 21:4).

Thirdly, as we have noted, during the millennium Christ reigns “until He put all enemies under His feet.” Other scriptures also indicate that there will – at least at first – be pockets of resistance to the reign of Christ; see, for example, Psalm 18:43-45. Again, when Satan is released from his prison at the end of the millennium, he is allowed to rouse a rebellion, which of course God will put down (Rev. 20:7-10). No enemies will be extant in eternity. Fourthly, there is the interesting detail that at the outset of the world to come ships will be used to bring Israel’s sons from the various countries where they have been scattered (Isaiah 60:9); but in eternity “the sea exists no more” (Rev. 20:1). It is also interesting to note that in none of the passages of Scripture which directly describe the eternal state is there a reference to rule, dominion or reigning. It has been remarked that now righteousness *suffers* (1 Peter 3:14); in the world to come righteousness will *reign* (Isaiah 32:1); and in eternity righteousness *dwells* (2 Peter 3:13). In the eternal day there will be no elements requiring to be subjugated.

The idea of ‘dwelling’ characterises the eternal scene. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, their God.” It will be a state of rest. Perhaps then the prophecy “He will rest in His love; He will joy over thee with

singing” (Zephaniah 3:17) will be fulfilled in a wider way than simply in regard of the earthly Zion.

The distinction between heaven and earth is maintained in the eternal state; there will be “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). It is noticeable that throughout the book of Revelation the focus is on what happens on the earth, although these happenings proceed from heaven. Thus again, God dwelling with men on earth is inaugurated by the descent of “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God.” This holy city is clearly the assembly, or church, the bride, described in verse 9 (in a millennial setting, to which the narrative here reverts) as “the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” but here in the glimpse given of eternity in the first part of the chapter described “as a bride adorned for her husband.” It has been suggested that, contrary to usual custom, the assembly is now, in one sense, a *widow*, in the absence of her husband; in the world to come she will be the Lamb’s *wife*, joining in His administration; and then in eternity she will for ever be the *bride* of Christ. As to present widowhood, the church is, of course, already united by the Holy Spirit to Christ in heaven, and her hope and joy are in Him while awaiting the day of presentation; but as towards the present world, she (that is, the true church) mourns the absence of the One she loves, who has been rejected and crucified. By way of contrast, the false church (being immersed in the world) says “I sit a queen, and I am not a widow” (Revelation 18:7).

The purpose of the church is to express Christ – “the assembly, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:23). The fulness of the Godhead – all that can be expressed or known of God – was pleased to dwell in Christ when here on earth (Colossians 1:19) and now dwells in Him bodily (ch. 2, v. 9). In turn, the assembly (or church) is intended to display Christ. This is a sobering consideration for us in the present day. God’s glory shines in the face of Christ and this is the light with which, in the gospel, God has shone into our hearts “for the shining

forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). We may indeed be concerned about how much this reflected shining from us can be seen by people now around us but there can be no doubt that in the world to come the heavenly city (the church) will illuminate those on the earth, “for the glory of God has enlightened it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb;” see Revelation 21:23, 24. In the Epistle to the Ephesians too we read how that in the coming ages God will display “the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus” (ch. 2, v.7).

Thus we have God revealed in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and Christ in turn expressed in His assembly, “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Rev. 21:9). It is evident that this outshining of God in Christ through the church will continue in eternity; she will be the vehicle through which the presence of God will be known among men on the new earth (Rev. 21:2, 3). But her own true position remains heavenly. From the time when the Lord with an assembling shout summons to Himself all “the dead in Christ,” together with the living believers who remain, “we shall be always with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). Our privileged place will be in the Father’s house, received there by Christ Himself – to be among the many sons brought to glory (Hebrews 2:10). Even now, the church, comprising all true believers in Christ, is united to Him by the Holy Spirit, but when He, our heavenly Bridegroom, has presented His glorious assembly to Himself (Ephesians 5:27) we can be sure that she will never be parted from Him. “Such as the Heavenly One, such also the heavenly ones” (1 Corinthians 15:48). Perhaps we can say that, unlike those who populate the earth during the world to come, as believers on the Lord Jesus and of His assembly we will, at least in some respects, be in eternal conditions as soon as we are with Him and like Him? After all, we shall then be without sin, free from all that is adverse and fully occupied with the glorified Christ. As another has said: “the eternity of a Christian is to be with Jesus,”*

We have spoken of the role of the assembly as disseminating the glory and influence of Christ, to Whom she is united, over the earth, both in the world to come and continuing in eternity. We must not, however, forget another privileged function that she has, namely to be the vehicle through which Christ brings praise and glory to His God and Father and ours. In the Epistle to the Hebrews (ch. 2, v. 12) the Lord Jesus says, “I will declare Thy name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly will I sing Thy praises.” We cannot think that this will ever cease. Indeed, Paul writes (Ephesians 3:21): “to Him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages.”

We may have difficulty in reconciling the church’s role sharing in Christ’s dominion over the earth in the world to come, and then her influence over the earth in the eternal scene, with her place with Him in heavenly glory and relationships according to the Father’s counsels. Perhaps we should accept that we cannot yet understand everything relating to such great matters and be happily content with what has been revealed to us. But the challenge remains: in the light of what we *do* know, “what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God?” (2 Peter 3:11, 12 – KJV).

G.S.B.

This article was prompted by a Bible reading in Coulsdon on 12th November, 2022.

**Dr. W.T.P. Wolston: “Simon Peter – His Life and Letters,” page 20.*

Fragment

The *moral* change in the saints takes a lifetime, but the *physical* change takes place in “the twinkling of an eye.”

From the notebook of W. Mawdsley.

GIVING UP THE TRUTH

2 Peter 2:12-19

It is a very solemn state which the Spirit of God shows us here. These verses describe the persons who get into this line of things and show what their end is.

The description is most dreadful. It contemplates this character of things even among the teachers. They prophesy for gain merely, like Balaam, and the effect is, “they allure through the lusts of the flesh, ... those that were clean escaped from them who live in error;” because, you must remember, for every form of temptation there is some distinct response in our nature, something in us to answer to what Satan presents. We could not have believed this could come in among professing Christians, unless God Himself had said so. But He has warned us that we may have our eyes open to it, and be on our watch to guard against it day by day. Those spoken of here call themselves Christians, yet indulge their lusts, and despise authority in a way angels would shrink from. They would feast with the real Christians – taking part, I suppose, in their love-feasts (*see Jude 12 – Ed.*) – deceiving themselves, while corrupting others. They yield themselves unreservedly to evil, and while promising others liberty, become themselves the very slaves of moral corruption. Such would Christendom become, Peter tells us. Such has it become, we know. The best thing is always the worst if it become corrupted.

(Verse 20.) “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.” These have been for the moment practically delivered from the pollution of the world; not by conversion, not by having been born again, but through the outward knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus

Christ. Now, to be thus re-entangled in evil, after having once escaped it through the professed knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, was infinitely worse than if they had not known the way of truth at all.

Those who refuse and despise Christianity forget to tell you how much man owes to Christianity. The world has benefited morally, civilly, and socially from the light God has given in His Word, and by the effects of Christianity; but now-a-days all this is forgotten, and it is the fashion to pooh-pooh the whole thing, as an old-world fable.

The effect of Christianity has been to deliver people from the pollutions of the world. The truth has been mentally received, and thus has delivered them, but it has not been received by the conscience, else it would have remained, and worked by divine grace in the heart.

When people have given up the truth they once have known, if even intellectually only, they become always the bitterest enemies of the truth of Christ; therefore let us beware of giving up one bit of the truth God has given us. Here it runs the length of open apostasy from God. It is a far worse thing to have known the truth and given it up, through flesh being allowed, and the world pandered to, than never to have known it.

(Verse 21.) “For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” In the early part of the chapter it was the godly and ungodly who were spoken of. Here it is the holy commandment, in contrast with what these evil teachers tried to bring in, and did bring in.

(Verse 22.) “But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” Who

vomited? The dog. And who went back to the vomit? The dog. It was a dog all the time, not a clean beast ever. And though the sow was washed, it was still a sow, only washed, and never made a clean beast, never anything but a sow, not a sheep. You cannot wash a sow into a sheep. Before the sow was washed, she was a dirty sow, and after she was washed she was a clean sow, so long as she was restricted by some external influence, as a rope, for instance. That rope she soon gnawed through or broke, and back she went to wallow in the mire, just because she was still a sow. Her nature was unchanged. So is it with the unconverted, but only externally affected, professor of Christ.

He is not a person born of God, or renewed, but is merely externally affected by the truth of Christianity. It is man as man, and as soon as the restraint is taken off, back he goes to the thing he likes. If a Christian gets away from Christ and gets mixed up with the pollutions of the world, he is miserable. Take a sow to the mire, what will it do? Wallow in it again; it has no shrinking from the mire. But take a sheep to the mire, does it desire to get into it? No, it is only too thankful to be taken out, if through accident it has fallen in. So is it with the real Christian. He may, and alas! often does fail and sin; but, like Peter, he is never happy till he has got back to his Lord, and been washed, and restored and forgiven.

Extracted from "Simon Peter: His Life and Letters" by Dr. W.T.P. Wolston (published 1896); chapter on "denying the Lord that bought them."

Fragment

It has been said that the most serious error comes from the place which has the greatest light; the principle is seen in the apostate Judas.

Faith is the heart's response to God; service is the life's response.

From the notebook of W. Mawdsley.

RISING TO THE HEIGHT OF OUR CALLING

.... Then follows, as we judge, a note of sadness: "But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid" (*Ezra* 3:6). The people had responded largely to the grace and goodness of Jehovah in their restoration; they had rejoiced to place themselves under His protection, and had ordered His worship according as it was written in the law of Moses the man of God. But at present they went no farther. Instead of entering into God's thoughts respecting His house, they rested in the blessings into which they had now been brought. Their spiritual energy had in measure expended itself in their first efforts, and their temptation was now to pause before going farther. Such has ever been the history of all the revivals in the church of God. ...

We learn, therefore, that the safety of God's people lies in their rising to the height of their calling. He calls us to fellowship with Himself, and with His Son Jesus Christ. If, forgetting this, we are satisfied with the enjoyment of our blessings, and lose sight of God's desires for us, feebleness and decline will soon mark us, whether as individuals or as companies of believers. If, on the other hand, God's objects are ours, if our minds are set upon what is before Him, He will ever lead us on into fuller intelligence of His purposes of grace, as well as of His ways, and into larger blessedness. He delights in our happiness, and He would ever increase this by associating us in His grace with His own objects and aims. ...

When believers work with God, their apparent difficulties and obstacles become the servants of faith to bring God in, before whom crooked things are made straight, and rough places plain.

Extracted from Edward Dennett's commentary on Ezra (1886).

THE PRESENT PORTION OF CHRIST IN THE BELIEVER

*As believers in the Lord Jesus, we may well focus on the many blessings that **we** have in **Him**, but how much do we think of what **He** desires to find in **us**? The following article is directed at this question. It requires thoughtful reading but will, I am sure, reward this – Editor.*

The divine side of every subject is necessarily its brightest and best, and the more elevated our point of sight, the more truthfully we possess ourselves, not only of the proportions of the respective parts, and their relation to each other, but of the full character of the whole.* In divine things God's special part must be the antecedent and primary one, and it is this which gives a true character to the rest. Had not the wave-breast and heave-shoulder been first presented to God, and **His** satisfaction in the whole thus secured, the residue would have been unhallowed, and that which was the true portion of the priests, merely a carnal thing. § So, as one is ever finding in the path of a saint, things which God has ordained, painful enough if looked at only with such feelings as properly arise in the human heart, yet their character signally changed when, seeing His part in them and viewing them from no lower standpoint than His own, we not only accept them but appreciate the aspect they present to Him. We are then led to adore as much the wisdom and prudence of His ways, as the love and grace of His eternal counsels! On the other hand, like Marah's waters, † the cheeriest circumstance in my lot, as it first appears, if I be truly treading a pilgrim path with Him in

* *Think of the very different view we get of a landscape when seen from a mountain or aircraft, as compared with our being down amongst it – Editor.*

§ *See Leviticus 7:29-36 for the directions as to the wave and heave-offerings; 1 Samuel 2:12-17 for a serious case of breaching these.*

† *For Marah's waters see Exodus 15:22-25.*

company with Him in the comfort of His faithful and tender love, proves the most gloomy and dispiriting unless, or until, God has had His full part in it through the test of the cross. Brought to Himself we learn our first wilderness lesson in the discovery that the most coveted thing here possesses inherent bitterness beyond all human means to correct, and not until after that the second lesson, that the bitterest thing here, He will sweeten as we practically learn death in the cross of Christ. Faith then sees the hands of the mighty One which rent to pieces the roaring lion to be dropping with honey from the comb; out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong comes forth sweetness (Judges 14:5-14).

That Christ our Head is in heaven and that we are not, is palpable enough; but a connected and consequent line of truth is revealed which exerts a wonderful influence in modifying the hard outlines of the latter fact, namely, that He is our life (*Colossians 3:4*), and we are in Him there, while we are His representatives, and He is glorified in us here! Our union with Him by the Holy Ghost is a blessed and benignant corollary to the fact that at present “we are absent from the Lord” (*2 Corinthians 5:6*). Once He was with His own, but they were not united to Him; it is now the converse of this – we are united to, but not with, Him; but both shall be brought to pass on that fair morning about to dawn when we shall be ever with, nor cease to be united to, Him, according to the eternal counsels of God!

Meanwhile we have to work out here that which shall constitute His present portion in His saints, the very first essentials to which are that we should let our loins be girded (the expression of practical separation from the world to Himself), and have our “lights burning” in testimony to it about Him (Luke 12:35). When He is manifested in the world again, “He shall come to be glorified in His saints (*2 Thessalonians 1:10*).” Evidently His visible and resplendent presence will have, as an

adjunct, the saints clustered as a galaxy of beauty, all His own, around His beloved Person, forming a glorious zone of radiating beams transmitting while displaying the light of His glory! Now that which will then be produced in a completely effective, literal and manifest way is just what we have morally and spiritually to make good, according to the sufficiency of His grace, during His absence.

When He was in the world He was the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His Person (*see Hebrews 1:3*) – every ray of divine glory that emanated from Him to man, He expressed in full relation to Him who sent Him; and when going away He gives to us His own place before the Father, and equally before the world. (*See John 17:22, 24, 18 – Ed.*) He had counted upon the presence of the Holy Spirit being not merely a bubbling spring within them for their own refreshing but of so mighty a volume as continuously to flow forth river-like for the blessing of others (*John 7:38*). He counted, too, upon His presence with the Father, supplying motive and power for “greater works” to be done by them during His absence than had been done by Himself (*John 14:12*); then in that unequalled *John 17* He says, “As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world;” and in the same chapter (*verse 10*) “I am glorified in them.” Surely no language could prefer (*or, 'present'*) before us more forcibly than these hallowed strains an inexorable claim (*i.e. a claim impossible to deny*), nor confer upon us in answering to it a more singular dignity!

And if we turn now from the blessed Master to the blessed servant, Paul, we see how thoroughly his whole soul was not merely swayed but governed by the power of that fundamental truth, that we are here in established and accredited identification with a glorified Christ on high. In the first few chapters of *2 Corinthians*, as is well known, the power of His life is unfolded in

various aspects, and the light of His glory displayed in its operations. “Thanks be to God,” he says, “who always leads us in triumph in the Christ, and makes manifest the odour of His knowledge through us in every place. For we are a sweet odour of Christ to God in the saved and in those that perish” (2:14, 15). Clearly every saint ought to be thus redolent of Christ, whether in service or aught (*anything*) else. Then in chapter 3, “We all, looking on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory,” &c.; according to which the glory of the glorified One is produced in a multitude of polished mirrors upturned towards Himself, and which His own loving hand with tender care is burnishing, to receive with ever-increasing fidelity the grace, beauty and excellency of His image!

In chapter 4 (*of 2 Corinthians*) he speaks of the radiancy of the glad tidings of the glory of the Christ, the image of God, adding, “because it is the God who spoke that out of darkness light should shine who has shone in our hearts for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” showing the positive fact fully recognized, that the light of the glory has shone into our hearts that the knowledge of it might shine forth again, as expressed before our souls in the face of the Man in the glory! Then (verse 10), “Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body,” teaching how essential it is that the dying of Jesus should be borne about in our mortal bodies that His life may be an exhibited thing in us in spiritual power and moral glory. Again, in chapter 5, “He died for all, that they who live should no longer live to themselves, but to Him who has died for them and has been raised,” indicating that we are to be vessels displaying a life which has Him for its essence, and object. And this life is so thoroughly a new deposit in the vessel, a new graft on the old stock, that we see at once the fitness of God’s choosing foolish, weak, base and despised things, that it might be clear that it never sprang from the

qualities of the individual. Then in Colossians 3:17, “And everything, whatever ye do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by Him.” This presents a demand so large and so comprehensive that it might well appall any soul taking it legally, but how blessed is it when seen to be rather the privilege of connecting the value of His name with everything we do, and finding divine power in it, also, for the doing it in a way to yield Him the glory which is His right!

Unquestionably every true-hearted disciple will account it a wondrous grace conferred, that he should be ranked among the confessors of a glorified Christ, and made competent by the Holy Ghost given us to witness for Him, that He should be glorified in these bodies of ours – in the very scene, too, in which His own Person was refused, and refused by a world which, being morally unchanged, loves those who are loyal to His name no better than it loved Him who crossed its path in purest grace!

“Ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). Again, “I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain” (*verse 16*). Surely this fruit to Christ, which is really Himself seen in His members, is His present portion in the believer. And while every bit of it is fruit that will abide for eternity, it possesses in the freshness of its bloom in so uncongenial an atmosphere, a peculiar attraction to His heart; being the product of His culturing care and heavenly sunlight, divinely applied by the Holy Ghost, during the night of His enforced absence! Thus every saint of God should be as a night-blooming Cereus* to the eye of Christ, which in the darkness of an approaching midnight, unfolds all its perfections; the dead of night supplying the very conditions suited for bringing into display the

* *The Royal Horticultural Society's Gardeners' Encyclopedia of Plants & Flowers* says that *Cereus* is a “Genus of columnar, perennial cacti” bearing “cup-shaped flowers usually open at night.”

otherwise undisclosed beauties of its magnificent bloom!

Let me be impressed ever so strongly then with the deep and solemn importance of my own present portion as a believer, with its wondrous privileges; yet is it a real joy to know there is a step beyond this; a higher, nobler, more unselfish consideration is that of the present portion of Christ in us! His portion in the present, and ours, are equally unique, and at many points must in their very nature coalesce, but one cannot be insensible to the difference as to motive, between being occupied with that which shall make good to Him His own portion, and the being occupied with working out or enjoying that which is ours. The apostle recognized this – and in a very painful way – when he said “all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s” (Philippians 2:21). If intent on His having His own present portion, I shall know no deeper joy than seeking the things which are Jesus Christ’s *for His own sake!*

While we cannot maintain too emphatically the force of the apostle John’s word, “he that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also to walk, even as He walked” (1 John 2:6), yet is it well on the other hand to set forth the incomparable blessedness of *being privileged* to feed with joy the heart of our gracious Lord during the period of the deprivation of His rights in the world, and – alas that one should have to add – in the house of God also. But the refused of Jerusalem and its temple was the illustrious guest of Bethany; “there they made Him a supper”! (*John 12:2*). Is it not our sacred and august privilege as saints to constitute a Bethany for Him, saying too, in more than words, “Let my Beloved come into His garden and eat His pleasant fruits”? (*Song of Solomon 4:16*). Will He not reply in every ear which affection for Himself has opened, “I am come into My garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with My spice; I have eaten My honeycomb with My honey; I have drunk My wine with My milk; eat, O friends, drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved” (S. of S. 5:1).

Anon., extracted from “Voice to the Faithful” Vol. XII (circa 1880)

Three Spiritual Blessings

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ ...” (Ephesians 1: read verses 3-7).

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the source of every spiritual blessing. These blessings are not material; they do not consist in everyday life but in the heavenlies. Just as Israel had to overcome idolatrous nations who occupied the promised land, so we have to confront the “spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies” (Eph. 6:12) in order to enjoy heavenly blessings and relationships. Further, they are in Christ; we have nothing outside of Him. The first three chapters of the letter to the Ephesians are occupied with these blessings.

Firstly, we have been “chosen in [Christ] before the world’s foundation.” We read of the creation in Genesis 1, but before that, God chose us in Christ, having in mind that we should be “holy and blameless before Him in love.” Everything contrary to that has been dealt with at the cross.

Secondly, God has “marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself.” We are not sons by birth; we are *children* of God by birth, according to John’s gospel (ch. 1, vv. 12, 13) but *sonship* is by adoption. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only-begotten Son of God but we become sons by adoption. God has “marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.”

Thirdly, God “has taken us into favour in the Beloved.” The Beloved, of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ and in Him we are not only accepted but – more than that – we are taken into favour (*Darby rendering*). What a wonderful position we

are brought into – to enjoy forever the love and favour of God!

Then in that same One, the Beloved, “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offences.” All these blessings are ours in Christ and, while we shall enter into them more fully in a coming day, they are ours now to enjoy by the Holy Spirit, because all our liabilities have been met and all our offences put away through His blood-shedding and this is “according to the riches of [God’s] grace.”

These blessings are ours, whether or not we understand them, but it is a wonderful thing to enjoy them. We do not have to work to attain them; they are ours through God’s grace. We can enjoy them collectively at such an occasion as this.

Substance of a word given by Tony Sheldrake in a meeting for the breaking of bread at The Vale, Coulsdon, on Lord’s Day 5th February, 2023.

POETIC PAGES

The Last Words of J.G. Bellett (1795-1864)

My pilgrim days are waning, the voice of Him I love,
Has called me to His presence in my Father’s house above.
Long, long by faith I’ve known Him, but now I’m going to see
The One that lives in glory, the Man that died for me.

But ere I left the desert, I longed that I might know
What joy His blessed presence could give me here below;
A few short fleeting moments, oh, I would nearer be
My precious loving Saviour, the Man that died for me.

He gave me all I asked for, and more than I can tell;
He filled my heart with rapture, with joy unspeakable;
The loving hand of Jesus seemed gently laid on me;
I had for my companion, the Man that died for me.

The glories of the Kingdom are coming bye-and-bye,
And I shall see the brethren, be crowned with them on high;
I know that I shall reign, but before it all for me,
There's a time alone with Jesus, the Man that died for me.

To fall asleep in Jesus, 'tis that I think of now,
To be forever with the Lord, before Himself to bow;
Oh, yes, with Him who stayed to call Zacchaeus from the tree,
With Him who hung upon the cross, the Man that died for me.

To have a time with Jesus, Himself to gaze upon,
To see the Man I've read about oft in the eighth of John;
To change this scene of sadness, 'tis wonderful to me,
For the sweetness of His presence, the Man that died for me.

I'm going to be with Jesus, who in this world of pain
Gave back the widow's only son, outside the gate of Nain;
His heart was filled with pity, His word caused death to flee;
Oh! now to see Him as He is, the Man that died for me.

It is the Man, Christ Jesus, with whom I'm going to dwell,
The very Man of Sychar, who sat upon the well,
Whose matchless love filled that poor heart, and gave her eyes to
That He was God's anointed, the Man that died for me. / see

To leave the world that cast Him out, and to be with Him there,
Before the Kingdom glories, or the many crowns appear.
Oh! the Man of Sychar, it is Himself to see,
The One that sits in Heaven, the Man that died for me.

The available records of J.G.B.'s last days show how accurately the above lines represent his thoughts. They are unquestionably his own utterances, although some think that another may have put them into poetry.

Face to Face

He is coming! He is coming!
I shall see my Saviour soon;
In the dawning, in the gloaming,
Be it night, or be it noon,
This my cheer, His coming soon.

I shall see Him! I shall see Him!
In His own transcendent place;
His the joy that I am with Him –
Mine – to see Him face to face,
Top-stone of His wondrous grace.

Brightest glories may enfold Him,
Radiant hosts around Him shine,
But my Saviour! I behold Him!
Hear Him own in light divine
I am His, and He is mine.

In the darkness, ere the dawning,
Shines the harbinger of day;
As with girded loins I'm hasting,
Lights my path, and cheers my way,
With its bright unclouded ray.

Oh! The gladness that is springing
In my heart as I press on,
All its joy-bells softly ringing,
Every mist and shadow gone
As that Star I gaze upon.

He is waiting, I am waiting,
Soon the waiting will be o'er;
Now, a little while of patience,
Then, to see Him and adore
In His presence evermore.

Miss Ceuta Thompson (1822-1909)

Seven Humble Instruments

Shamgar had an ox-goad,
Rahab had a string.
Gideon had a trumpet,
David had a sling,
Samson had a jaw-bone,
Moses had a rod,
Dorcas had a needle –
All were used for God.

Anon.

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.