

Words of Peace & Truth

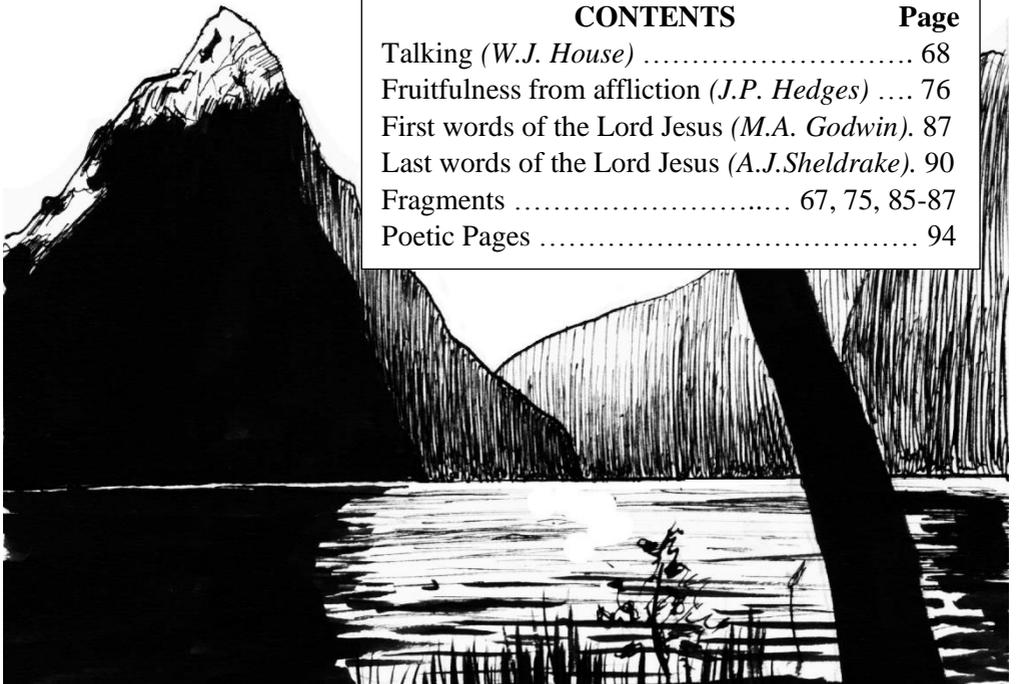


No. 114: September-December 2021

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WORDS OF PEACE & TRUTH

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

No. 114: September – December 2021

Editorial

What is the basic reason for the world being in such a mess today? And for Christendom being so corrupted? We may frame our answers in various ways. As believing Christians we may even rightly say, Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. But there was something previous even to that; Eve had listened to the query raised by Satan, "Is it even so, that God hath said ...?" She entertained the possibility that when God had said to her husband, "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest of it thou shalt certainly die," the words did not have to be taken at their face value. That led to her making her own appraisal of that tree and arriving at her own decision about it. Her behaviour, and Adam's, had catastrophic results, which have continued to our own day.

Sadly, the same attitude of exalting oneself above God's word is still rampant. In today's world, including (alas) Christendom, it seems that nothing is taken as sacrosanct: marriage, the family, human relationships of all types, even gender itself, the need to speak the truth, and so on; everything is apparently up for re-appraisal, never mind what God's word says. With particular reference to professing believers, did God really mean it when He put it into His word, the Holy Bible, that Christ Himself is the subject of the gospel (Romans 1:3, Galatians 1:16); that He alone is "the Head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18); that believers

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Editorial *(continued)*

“are not of the world” (John 17:14, Galatians 1:4); that our calling is heavenly (Hebrews 3:1); that we should “depart from iniquity” (Psalm 34:14, 2 Timothy 2:19); that all believers are priests (1 Peter 2: 5 and 9, Revelation 1:6); but also that women should remain silent in the assembly (1 Corinthians 14:34, 1 Timothy 2:11-13) and cover their heads when at prayer (1 Cor. 11:1-10)? These are just some of the issues raised over recent years.

Alas, a veritable industry has grown up in re-interpreting or explaining away God’s plain word. Often freer translations, which obscure the true meaning of the Bible, are employed to this end. People also help themselves to excuses such as, ‘that was only cultural,’ or even ‘that is myth and legend,’ or ‘science has shed more light on that subject.’ This last ploy was anticipated by the apostle Paul when he warned Timothy of “science falsely so called.”

In the dark and difficult days in which Haggai prophesied, God said to His people, “The word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, and My Spirit, remain among you: fear ye not.” The people might have replied, ‘But that was nearly a thousand years ago! Things have completely changed since then.’ Yet God would still be faithful to His word and expected His people still to cling to it. The Lord Jesus commended the assembly at Philadelphia for keeping His word; may He be able to do so concerning ourselves in this day. Indeed, our only means of safety lies in adhering to “the living and abiding word of God” (1 Peter 1:23) – that word which saves, sanctifies, guides, corrects, encourages and sets before us the glorious hope of the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. G.S.B.

Fragment

“We have found the Messiah” (*John 1:41*): “five words with my understanding” (*1 Corinthians 14:19*) – David Robins (25.03.2000).

TALKING

Luke 24: 13-35; James 1:26,27 and 3:1-12

ONE desires, dear brethren, to speak a little as to the character of the talking that goes on amongst us. It is evident that God would have us speak. When God said, "Let us make man in our image and after our likeness," every member was taken account of. Indeed, the Psalmist says, "In thy book all my members were written ..." (Psalm 139:16). That indicates to our minds that God took account separately of every member of the human body, so that each member has its part in forming a vessel intended of God to represent Him. I am sure that applies to all our members – the divine intent is that man should rightly represent God. We could think and speak a great deal about the various members of our bodies; but I wanted to speak about our speaking particularly – our talking. 'Talking,' of course, is different to preaching, and it is different to teaching. 'Talking' implies a mutual condition in which each is free to speak; it involves that we are at liberty together. I wanted, with the Lord's help, to call attention to the necessity of having our intercourse, our conversation, controlled from heaven.

There is indeed much to speak about. In Malachi, which corresponds with the day in which we are, just before the coming of the Lord, we read, "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another ..." (*ch.3, v.16*). That was not 'preaching,' nor was it an 'address.' And it says, "And the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written." They met together, and spoke together, not only in meetings, but in one another's houses, and the Spirit of God says that what they said was so acceptable to the Lord, that He hearkened and heard. That is in the days at the end of Israel's history, and it is what the Lord wants to-day – that in our intercourse when we meet and talk together, there is something heaven can value, something acceptable in

heaven.

It is continued beautifully in Luke – it says of certain who had the light of the coming in of Christ, and who had some conception of His supreme greatness, that these things were the subject of conversation of those who dwelt in the hill country. There had been an exodus from the low moral condition of the world, the religious world included. They had come to live in the hill country; they *lived* there, and these things were the subject of their conversation – the coming of Christ, the preparation of His way so that He would be suitably received. What a theme, what holy conversation! We get some of the conversation recorded verbatim; Mary’s conversation with Elizabeth is wonderful.

It is one of the things in the book of remembrance, the holy utterances of Mary to Elizabeth in Elizabeth’s house. This is for our instruction. What sort of conversation goes on in our houses? Mary says, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (*Luke 1:46, 47*). And then she goes on to speak of the coming of Christ, and how He is going to put down the high and exalt the lowly, fill the hungry and send the rich away empty. These are the themes of conversation in the hill country.

Well, then, dear brethren, you see that continued in Luke 24. There are those two on the journey to their own home from Jerusalem, and talking. “They talked together.” God’s word tells us they talked – they had something to say, and they talked, and the Lord draws near and says, “What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another?” What are they? A very right question for us! You have two brothers walking together anywhere; you have two sisters, or more: let the Lord come in and say, “What are these communications?” What do we talk about? What is the

subject of our conversation? They tell Him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth.” That is the subject. Maybe they needed enlightenment, but their conversation is concerning Him, and then He goes on with them and He talks to them. They say, “Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way?” It was not a meeting like this; it was simply the three of them – the blessed Lord with them, walking along the road talking to them, and they said, ‘Our heart burned within us.’ What did He talk to them about? He said, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things?” He spoke about the sufferings of Christ. Dear brethren, let us speak about them. I appeal to each one and to all, brothers or sisters: if you meet together, what do you talk about? You say, ‘What is there to talk about?’ The sufferings of Christ. He spoke of them; He said, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things?” What a theme – the sufferings of Christ! Shall we ever exhaust them? Shall we weary of hearing of them? Never, to all eternity! The range of them, who can tell? The sufferings of Christ, how varied they were! How intense they were! How fathomless they were! But the Lord talked to them about them. And then it says, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?” It makes you feel ashamed to think of the things we talk about sometimes. When the Lord joined these two He talked about His sufferings and His glory. Who will ever come to the end of the glory? The glory of that blessed Person is a theme for all eternity, as well as His sufferings.

And it says, “He began at Moses.” There are the Scriptures, precious Scriptures! God is endearing the Scriptures to the hearts of the saints in a most intense way at the end, as the 2nd Epistle to Timothy would confirm (*see ch.3, vv.15, 16*). The Lord takes the Scriptures from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, and expounds to them from the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. These were the

subjects of the holy conversation, the talking – mutual talking. What was the source of this speaking? It was in heaven. And it burned! It burned within their hearts. It was a fire originating in heaven, and it warmed their hearts as He talked with them by the way.

So the Lord continued for forty days assembling with them and speaking to them concerning the kingdom. That is a wonderful thing, literally I mean, for the Lord to sojourn here forty days after His resurrection and assemble with them and speak to them. They heard Him speak to them concerning the kingdom of God. That is another theme to speak about – the kingdom of God, His everlasting kingdom, where God's sway, God's rule, is recognised. It makes the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them look small. The Lord assembled with them forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. What He could tell them about it!

It reminds one of Elijah and Elisha. After Elijah crossed the Jordan, having shown to Elisha that he had authority over that river in that he smote it with his mantle and the waters divided, and having the light in both their hearts that the Lord would take Elijah to heaven, they went on and talked. Elisha is in the company of a man who is going to heaven – and he knows it. After they two crossed the Jordan they went on and talked. It does not say what they talked about, but we may be sure it was wondrous conversation. Those 'talkings' are recorded in heaven, undoubtedly. Here is a man who was so acceptable to God that He *would* take him to heaven. He *would* take Elijah to heaven; nothing in the universe would stop Him. Elijah knows it and Elisha knows it, and they went on and talked. That is the kind of talking we want, dear brethren – talking related to what is the other side of death.

Then on the Mount of Transfiguration we have the same thing. There appeared Moses and Elias, who talked

with Jesus of His decease which He should accomplish. They appeared and talked with Him – suggesting that, I have no doubt, as one of the occupations of eternity. They appeared in glory: it is a scene of glory; it does not belong to earth. They talked with Him; it is wonderful to think of the mutuality that will exist in eternity between Christ and His own. We shall be able to talk with Him. It implies that He is going to speak. One would present that to our hearts as something that is going on for ever, the mutuality of intercourse with Christ. We can draw near and talk to Him; it is true He will talk to us, but we are going to talk to Him.

Well, I believe that brings before our hearts the conversations that God would have marking His people. It tells us the themes worthy of talking about – the Scriptures, the sufferings of Christ, the glory that should follow, the kingdom of God; these are the themes of the hill country, they are the subjects of conversation in the hill country. I wanted us to see that before I touched on James, where we have the other side.

James says, “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue ... this man’s religion is vain.” It is empty. James recognises, dear brethren, that the tongue has to be controlled. He goes on to say that naturally it is uncontrollable. Every species of animal, of birds, of serpents even, has been tamed, but the tongue can no one tame. Do not let us think that means we are to go on giving rein to our lawless tongues. God has come in for the Christian and given him a new tongue. You remember when the hundred and twenty were together, the whole Christian company being represented, there appeared cloven tongues as of fire and sat on each of them. That is to say, they are each to have a new tongue. The old tongue is worthless; they are to have a new tongue marked by holiness, marked by discrimination, a

tongue in the power of the Spirit of God. So Paul speaks of words which the Holy Ghost teaches, communicating spiritual things by spiritual means – by the power of the Holy Ghost (*see 1 Corinthians 2:13*). So we approach James in the recognition that God has given the believer a tongue marked by holiness, by discrimination. One's religion is vain unless the tongue is bridled. We cannot rub that out of Scripture, and we would not. "If any man seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue . . . that man's religion is vain." I would beseech all of us to face the reality of this as far as our natural tongues are concerned – if our tongues are uncontrolled our religion is empty. There is a sphere where we can speak freely – the holy talking we have been looking at – there is no need to bridle one's tongue there. But, dear brethren, in regard to what marks us naturally, it is imperative that the tongue should be bridled.

James goes on to show the awful place the tongue has in nature. It sets on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell. Put that in contrast to Luke 24. There we have a fire that makes the hearts of those two burn as He talked with them. Here is another fire that has its origin in hell and sets on fire the course of nature. One has its origin in heaven; the other has its origin in hell. Let us, dear brethren, face this matter: when we come together, when brothers meet to talk, when sisters meet in their homes to talk together (and God intends them to talk), is the conversation energised from heaven or from hell? You say, 'You are speaking to christians.' I know it. So is James. That is the position; what we talk about either has its origin in heaven and warms the hearts of christians and attaches them to Christ, or it has its origin in hell and sets on fire the course of nature. Which is it? I speak practically. Sisters love to come together to talk; God would put this exercise before you and all of us: is what we say energised from heaven or from hell? One has been

made to feel painfully of late how the Lord has been grieved, and the liberty of the Spirit interfered with, by what we have been talking about. When things that are evil come to light, alas, amongst the people of God, the tendency is that they become the subject of conversation. I know they must be spoken about at times, and the Apostle tells us how to speak of them: “I ...tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ” (*Philippians 3:18*). If there is something dishonouring to the Lord in the behaviour of a brother or a sister that has to be spoken about, let us tell it weeping. Let us not spread it. For love would always seek to cover, not to expose. Divine love never exposes anything unnecessarily. If it has to be spoken about, it is spoken of in tears, and if there is reproof necessary it is face to face. I would earnestly appeal to all that if you feel you have been wronged, see the brother or sister face to face before you say one word to anybody on earth. That is the divine way. Have not one word to say to anybody on earth till you have seen the brother or sister face to face. That is how Paul did it. Peter acted in a way that was not transparent; Paul calls it dissimulation. But Paul withstood him to the face. How much sorrow has come in through talking behind the scenes, talking in our own homes, and when we meet together, when we have never said a word face to face with the brother or sister. And if what we have said is right, if it is true, there are many things that are true which are not necessary to repeat. Love does not do that. Love finds every possible means to cover, not to expose, and if the thing is wrong and has to be spoken about, the Apostle says, “I tell you weeping.” I would earnestly commend that to each one of us, because one knows that there is often lack of liberty in the presence of the Lord through things being talked about – subjects of conversation unsuitable to the people of God.

The conversation that marked the hill country – let us

go on with that right to the end. The conversation on the road to Emmaus – yes, let us go on with that, and the Lord will join us. The conversation on the Holy Mount, as they talk of His departure – a vast field to speak about there. The conversation as to the blessed One whom God would take to heaven – He *would* take Him. He was so delightful to heaven He *would* take Him and set Him at His own right hand. Speak of Him as often, as freely, as we have power to do so; but let us keep more definitely before our hearts that there is another kind of talking that marks the natural tongue which is untameable and hopeless. Let our conversation be in the power of the Holy Spirit. I believe that is what underlies the Spirit coming in tongues of fire – fire representing divine holiness, and as cloven, discrimination. God has given to the believer the capacity to speak and talk; let it be the talk proper to the hill country. I believe the hill country is coming to light at the end of this dispensation. Many believers are moving definitely towards it to live there, to be there when the Lord comes – to have a moral and spiritual elevation at the end suitable for the coming in of Christ. One would suggest that we take this up with God, moving to the hill country, and as moving there to see that these things are the subject of our conversation.

Address by W.J. House; date uncertain but probably 1930's.

Fragment

The Searching of the Holy Spirit

In 1 Corinthians 2:9-12 the Spirit “searches all things, even the depths of God,” and brings the great things of God down to us by way of revelation. In Romans 8:26, 27 the Spirit searches our hearts and carries up to God by way of intercession what He finds there. We also have, I believe, an indication of the Spirit’s searching in Luke 15:8, 9, bringing to light in a soul God’s work in redemption.

FRUITFULNESS FROM AFFLICTION

2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Hebrews 11 :24-26;
1 Chronicles 22:14; 29:1-5

I would like to spend a little time on a subject that may not be considered to be very attractive, but one that nevertheless has an impact on all our lives whether believers or unbelievers in this materialistic world in which our lot is cast. It relates to the subject of the affliction and adversity that is inherent to our human condition. As most here are believers my remarks will be primarily addressed to such, but the opportunity to receive the blessing of salvation is still open to all.

We are constantly reminded how vulnerable the frailty of our human condition is when exposed to adversity and suffering, and although constant efforts are made to mitigate or eliminate such limitations by whatever means human endeavour can employ, the unpalatable truth is that in the final event such activity is proved to be powerless because it always ends in death.

The root cause of all the suffering and death is that sin has come into the world, and by sin death, and thus death has passed upon all men for all have sinned (*see Romans 5:12*). The only solution is to accept the provision that God has made in the Person and work of His beloved Son, The Lord Jesus Christ, who alone has dealt with the whole question of sin and sins once and for all on Calvary's cross.

The preaching of this Gospel or good news is rejected by many as being "foolishness," but God has been pleased by the foolishness of the preaching to save those that believe (*1 Corinthians 1:21*). As believers we not only enjoy the forgiveness of sins, but we can experience the support of our great High Priest

as One who can sympathise with our infirmities and provide the reasonable help and grace in time of need.

It is in this connection that I have read the passage in 2 Corinthians 4. Paul in this chapter makes some quite extraordinary statements about the afflictions that we may experience in the frailty of our human condition; he says that they are momentary and light, and you may think that that hardly describes what you are going through.

Now I am very much aware that many here have experienced trials that have been excruciating and protracted and also that many of our younger ones have lost opportunities to further their careers or relationships and it is my desire that we might receive mutual comfort and encouragement as we seek help from what scripture presents on the subject. Having said that these afflictions are momentary and light, Paul then adds something equally amazing by saying that they work *for* us in surpassing measure an eternal weight of glory. How can they possibly work for us? Nothing could be much more surprising or encouraging than to discover that the things that you feel are working against you can actually work for you. How can this be? I believe this passage shows us exactly how. We have already spoken of the frailty of our human condition and Paul aptly describes this as earthen vessels. He then says that we possess a treasure in these earthen vessels and he leaves us in no doubt as to what this treasure is; it is the treasure of the radiancy of the gospel of the glory of the Christ – that God Himself has shone into the heart of every believer – and it is the radiance of that treasure shining out from weak earthen vessels that secures a further yield of eternal glory for God.

So it is by the working of God's grace and power through the suffering and affliction of weak earthen vessels that the eternal weight of glory is secured.

Paul gives an illustration of this when he recounts a painful bodily affliction that outwardly appeared to be such a disadvantage to him that he thrice asked the Lord for it to be taken away and the answer he received from the Lord was, "My grace suffices thee; for my power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9), reminding him that the resource of the Lord's grace and power to sustain him in his disability was far greater than the perceived disadvantage of his affliction. To get some impression of the surpassingness of this power, just read the list of some of the privations that he suffered, given in the previous chapter of this same letter to his Corinthian readers:-

"From the Jews five times have I received forty stripes save one. Thrice have I been scourged, once I have been stoned, three times I have suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I passed in the deep: in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my own race, in perils from the nations, in perils in the city, in perils in the desert, in perils on the sea, in perils amongst false brethren; in labour and toil, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, the crowd of cares pressing on me daily, the burden of all the assemblies. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is stumbled, and I burn not? If it is needful to boast, I will boast in the things that concern my infirmity" (2 Cor. 11: 24-30).

Well, what can you say about your problems in the light of this? If you experienced just one or two of them you would scarcely say that they were momentary and light, but think of the history that enters into the catalogue of these sufferings. Paul does not say, as

we might well do, that all these are against him but includes them all as momentary and light affliction that are working for him in securing an eternal weight of glory, confirming as he does elsewhere that the suffering of the present time is not worthy to be compared with the coming glory (Romans 8:18).

If I were to ask you to look back over your history and indicate the times when you were conscious of making real spiritual progress it would no doubt be when you were under pressure seeking the Lord's help in facing critical problems. The answer may not be what you might have expected or hoped for, but as passing through it you can be assured that it is a proof of the Lord's unbounded love for you (for whom the Lord loves He chastens) and also that that there will be an 'afterwards' when the surpassing riches of God's grace will be displayed in the glory that He has secured from it.

I would like now to illustrate what we have been speaking of by referring to Moses in Hebrews 11. He was a man who was in the most favourable circumstances that the natural man could wish for, surrounded by the greatest wealth, culture, and education that the world could possibly offer; and the time came when additionally he had the prospect of being awarded the greatest honour of being called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. What is his reaction to such a prospect? I believe he is reminded of his earliest days when the faith of his parents shielded him from the true character of a sinful world for a world where what was beautiful to God (literal translation, Acts 7:20) would be expressed in his life. It was now time for him to make a critical decision and it may be that you and I need to make a fresh assessment of the direction and goal that we have in view for our lives. Two factors are involved in such a decision; one is refusal and the other is choice. Moses refuses the temporary pleasure of sin and worldly recognition and chooses what we have been referring to, viz. to suffer affliction along with the people of God. What is the

governing principle in making such a choice? – he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt for he had respect to the recompense.

It is exactly the same reasoning that Paul uses when he says “what things were gain to me these I counted, on account of Christ, loss. But surely,” he says, “I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (*Philippians 3:7, 8*).

The challenge therefore for each of us is what valuation we place on the things that are seen, which will exist only for a time, however advantageous they may appear, and what valuation we place on the things that are not seen which are eternal.

We already have eternal treasure in these earthen vessels and as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ we are able to add to that treasure whilst we are down here and ultimately all the treasure will be gathered up in a coming day and displayed as a product of the surpassing riches of God’s grace (*Ephesians 2:7*).

We now come to the passages in Chronicles which show how treasure for the glory of God was accumulated in David’s history, all of which was to be used for the house of God that Solomon built. David indicates that there were three areas of activity that were fruitful in producing this treasure. They were, in his **power**, in his **affection**, and in his **affliction**.

David learned early in his history that the source of power to secure anything for the pleasure of God was supplied by God Himself. Just look at him as a stripling youth in overcoming Goliath and all his subsequent exploits. I think he exemplifies what we have already referred to in the surpassingness of the power coming from

God and not from us, a power that we cannot possibly quantify but it was this power that enabled him in affection and affliction to provide the riches for Solomon to build the house of God. He says that he had prepared according to all his *power* the materials for the house of God and then adds – “And moreover in my *affection* for the house of my God I have given of my own property of gold and silver . . . ”

When we come to the valuation of what is for God it is interesting that scripture generally uses the measure of weight; we have already seen this in the reference to an eternal *weight* of glory, and so it is here. According to his *power*, David had prepared three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver. Have you any idea of the value of a talent of gold or a talent of silver?

If we check on the available helps a talent weighs about 102 lbs., so 3000 talents of gold weighs 136 tons., and 7000 talents of silver would be 318 tons.

I would suggest it would good if you checked the current value of a ton of gold and the value of a ton of silver and see what this adds up to as I believe it will be difficult for you grasp the wealth that this represents. What it will indicate to you is that David had a wonderful affection for the God that he served by contributing his personal wealth for what was going to provide a dwelling place for the One that he loved.

But there is more; little wonder is it that David says “And behold , in my *affliction* I have prepared for the house of Jehovah a hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver;” well, 100,000 talents at 102lbs. a talent is 4,550 tons, and 1,000,000 talents of silver is 45,500 tons.

This gives a whole new perspective that we may have of the words, ‘exceeding’ and ‘surpassing’ for even if the conversion figures are not completely accurate you cannot begin to comprehend the value of what is stated here and we do well to acknowledge that the power that secures it is far exceeding above all that we can ask or think.

I am not in any way seeking to belittle what is offered in affection, but the inescapable conclusion is that far more is secured through affliction than we could possibly quantify and I trust that this will leave an impression that will remain with you and sustain you in whatever chastening you may experience.

You will notice that the silver increases disproportionately to the gold and I think that in affliction the more we are tested the more we are cast on the Lord to consider what the cost of His sufferings was in making that supreme sacrifice, when in the shedding of His precious blood He provided the basis for our salvation, which is what the silver represents.

In thinking of some of the experiences that David had that involved extremely testing circumstances which produced much fruit, I am often reminded of Ziklag (the name means enveloped in grief) when he lost not only much of his wealth but also the dearest objects of his life – his two wives Ahinoam and Abigail. It was a huge disaster because it was more than his personal loss as the men that were with him also lost their families, wives, sons, and daughters. They all wept sore until they had no more power to weep and it looks as if they were blaming David for their calamity, for they spoke of stoning him. It is at this utterly hopeless point of surrender that David strengthened himself in Jehovah his God and makes enquiry as to what he should do. The answer is Pursue, Overtake, and Recover. Victory is assured and David not only

recovers everything that was lost but there was much additional spoil as well and they said, “This is David’s spoil” (*1 Samuel 30:20*).

We can think of other examples where persons suffered great loss; Job lost his business, his family, and finally his health, but in all this his faith held firm although he had much to learn through the discipline. When he gets to the point of surrender God lifts the limitations he was labouring under and he is enriched by twice as much as he had before.

Naomi lost everything that was precious to her naturally and was deprived of spiritual food when she left the place of spiritual blessing – and this is a challenge to all of us because if we do so it may well be that we lose the present enjoyment of our inheritance – but she gets to the point of surrender and returns and has to admit that she went out full but came back empty.

It is again at the point of surrender that God comes in for her in the most remarkable way. Let it be a warning to all of us not to surrender the place of blessing in the pursuit of natural gratification, because if we persist in self-will we could lose the enjoyment of both.

In conclusion I would like to say a word on what is collective.

It is interesting to see how what is worked out in the experiences of individuals can have an effect on those who may witness the sacrifice and affliction that such pass through. We see this in the examples we have been considering. After summarising all that David had made available, many of those in positions of responsibility and influence were prompted to answer to the appeal, “And who is willing to offer to Jehovah this day,” by adding significantly to the treasure with gifts of gold, silver, brass, iron, and precious stones. David’s experience at Ziklag is another example, for not only did it provide spoil for those who were too exhausted

and weak to engage in the conflict, but the quantity of spoil that was secured was distributed to a large number of localities throughout Israel, “to all the places where David himself and his men went about.”

We have thought too of Moses, and who could quantify what was secured for the glory of God in the multitudes of worshippers in the tabernacle system? Joseph is another example of one, who, through affliction and suffering as a type of the Lord Jesus, becomes the sustainer of life for the whole world.

Coming now to the present dispensation, the shadows and types in the Old Testament are completely eclipsed by the sufferings of the Lord Jesus and what fruit the travail of His soul has secured. It is as contemplating the Lord’s sufferings that the apostle Paul can speak of his own sufferings being momentary and light affliction, and we see how this works out in fruitfulness for God in the many localities in which his sufferings and labours were experienced.

The assemblies in Macedonia are an example of this for it was out of that experience in the Philippi prison that the gospel first came into Europe and thence into the whole western world, and who can measure the eternal weight of glory that this has yielded? And what was the characteristic feature of the assemblies in Macedonia that bore such fruit? Listen to what Paul says:-

“We make known to you, brethren, the grace of God bestowed in the assemblies of Macedonia; that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty has abounded to the riches of their free-hearted liberality. For according to their power, I bear witness, and beyond their power, they were willing of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty to give effect to the grace and fellowship of the service that was to be rendered to the saints” (2 Cor. 8: 1-4). There was power, (albeit a *little power*), there was affection, and there was affliction.

Well, where does this find us in our localities? How can we respond to that appeal – “and who is willing to offer to Jehovah this day?” We do not have the astonishing resources of silver and gold that we have been thinking of, but we *do* have that which is much more precious. How can that be? Peter, although he had no silver or gold to offer to the lame man in Acts 3 says this to his suffering hearers: -

“For a little while at present, if needed, put to grief by various trials, that the proving of your faith, *much more precious than of gold which perishes* though it be proved by fire, be found to praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus Christ: whom, having not seen, ye love” (1 Peter 1: 6-8).

It is in these earthen vessels that the proving of our faith is to be experienced and this works out not only for our individual blessing but also for the enrichment of what is for God in our local companies.

May these few thoughts be fruitful and encourage us to this end.

Based on an address given by John P. Hedges in San Francisco on 25th October 1996, edited by him.

Fragments

(see John 6:13)

The Love of Christ

The Church is the only thing, I suppose, that Christ is said to love. We get “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,” and in the death of Christ the kindness and love of God towards man has been made manifest (*see Titus 3:4*). God commends His love towards us, in that Christ died for us (*Romans 5:8*), so that the kindness and love of God are expressed towards the whole world. It is world-wide, but when you come to the love of

Christ – I am not speaking of His love to the Father, but to man – the Church is the only family that Christ is said to love; He loved the Church and gave Himself for it (*Ephesians 5:25*).

Extracted from an address given by “J.B----d,” at Quemerford, May 1904. The only possible exception I can think of is the man in Mark 10:21; perhaps he eventually found his way into the church? But generally the love of Christ, as such, is spoken of in the context of His love for His own, or His assembly; see, for example, John 13:1 and Eph. 3:1, this letter being addressed to believers. Editor.

The Faithful and True Witness

T.H.R. If I remember rightly, in the setting up of the candlestick of old, the lighting of it and attention to it belonged to Aaron **and his sons** (Exodus 27:21), but in the end of Leviticus, after failure had come in (*see Lev. 10 – Ed.*), we find the responsibility devolved upon Aaron alone to maintain the light in the house of God (*see Lev. 24:2 – Ed.*), and that shows me that while there is the general fact of the church as associated with Christ being responsible for the testimony, yet after all Christ, as the great High Priest, maintains it, though the candlestick has failed to give light. In Laodicea, where there is no testimony in the church, the Lord speaks of Himself as the faithful and true Witness. He maintains, as the true Aaron, the light even now, no doubt through those that have ears to hear.

E.D. The church is always in the place of responsibility until the Lord comes.

T.H.R. When Laodicea is here pure and simple, then the Lord will come.

Extract from a Bible reading in Quemerford in May 1904. “T.H.R.” is Thomas Reynolds; “E.D.” is probably Edward Dennett.

The Inward Divine Life

It is important to remember that there is an inward divine life

which dwells and joys in God, having nothing to do with circumstances, though enabling us to go through them, and *in us* helped by them, because annulling the flesh and the will, so that we live more entirely of the inward life with God.

Extracted from a meditation on Psalm 16 by J.N. Darby (1800-82); see "Collected Writings" Volume 17 [Practical No. 2], page 23 [New Series].

FIRST WORDS OF THE LORD JESUS AS RECORDED IN THE GOSPELS

There is, I'm sure, a blessing to be found in considering the first recorded words of the Lord Jesus in each of the four Gospels.

In Matthew's account, Jesus speaks to John the Baptist as to why He wished to be baptized: "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness" (*NKJV*).

This gospel presents Jesus as the King. The Hebrew Scriptures promised that "A King shall reign in righteousness" (*Isaiah 32:1*). And certainly very soon He will return for His church and at a later date rule over this planet for 1000 years. He is from eternity to eternity, as pictured in Melchizedek, whose name means King of righteousness; see the letter to the Hebrews, ch. 7, vv. 15-17, 21. No other ruler on Earth has been marked by complete righteousness. But what grace! That Jesus should condescend to be baptized, identifying Himself with the repentant ones of the Jewish nation. We may recall that He spoke elsewhere of the baptism He would undertake by going to the cross to die for lost sinners such as you and me (*Luke 12:50*). Each Christian should ask, "Does He rule MY life?"

Jesus' first recorded words in Mark's Gospel are to people living in Galilee. He said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent [literally, 'change your mind-set,'] and believe in the gospel."

The word ‘gospel’ is old English, meaning ‘good news’: the original Greek word ‘*euangelion*’ is where we get the term ‘evangelist’, someone who passes on the good news of God’s salvation available through the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Note that He said these words about three years before He died on that cross, but He promised God’s blessing in the light of what He was going to do.

The apostle Paul called himself ‘bond servant’ and spread the message all the way to the heart of Europe. He told believers to follow him in the measure that he followed Jesus. So it is fitting that it is Mark’s Gospel, which shows Jesus as the perfect Servant, that also presents Him spreading the good news as well as emphasizing its urgency. Likewise we are told elsewhere: “Behold, NOW is the accepted time; behold, NOW is the day of salvation” (2 *Corinthians* 6:2); and again, “TODAY, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (*Psalms* 95:7, 8; *Hebrews* 3:15).

Luke’s is the gospel of the perfect Man. We see glimpses of Jesus’ birth and childhood, in every respect the only faultless human that ever walked the Earth. He said to his worried parents, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?” So He reminded them as He would remind us: He was and is the Son of God, yet in human terms He was twelve years old and at every stage of growth He acted in an appropriate way. Thus He accompanied Mary and Joseph back to Nazareth and was subject to them, His public ministry not starting until eighteen years later. But from birth at Bethlehem through to the crucifixion, He always was about His Father’s business: everything He did, everything He thought, all He was, all He said was pleasing to His Father in heaven. Luke’s account, with Jesus’ dealings with His Nazareth family shows how God sets great value on the family bond, even if duty sometimes transcends family ties.

In John’s Gospel Jesus is revealed in all the fulness of the Godhead. The first recorded words of Jesus here are (to two of John

the Baptist's disciples) "What do you seek?" This raises a question as to what *we* are seeking. Do we seek the light, life, grace and truth that are expressed in Christ, as brought out in this Gospel? When the two disciples reply, asking, "Teacher, where are You staying?" they are not given a location address. There is no spot in modern Israel or Jordan that could be labelled Jesus' house or home. Here on earth, by contrast with even foxes, there was nowhere for Him to lay His head. But He was, and is, ever "in the bosom of the Father." Consider His answer: "Come and see."

His call is still "Come and see," as the prophet and psalmist had written, "COME now, and let us reason together" (*Isaiah 1:18*); and again, 'Oh, taste and SEE that the Lord is good" (*Psalms 34:8*).

Later He said, "COME to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (*Matthew 11:28*); and again, "Let the little children COME to me" (*Mark 10:14*).

One of those two disciples, namely Andrew, not only came himself, but then told his brother that they had found the Christ, that is, God's promised anointed One [Hebrew 'Messiah'], and then brought him to Jesus. Are we just as keen to bring family and friends to Him?

When doubting Thomas came to see the risen Jesus, he addressed Him as "My LORD and my GOD". It is the divine wish that we come and see that Jesus, the Word, is no less than God, and put our trust in Him as such. That, John tells us, is why he wrote this gospel – "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ..." (*ch. 20, v. 31*). So we can sing, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the incarnate Deity!" "In Thee most perfectly expressed, The Father's Self doth shine: Of the full Deity possessed, Eternally divine;" and so many other wonderful, biblical hymns of praise and worship.

He would say to us all: "Come and see."

Based on a word given by Michael Godwin on 5th September, 2021.

THE LAST RECORDED WORDS OF THE LORD JESUS IN THE GOSPELS AND THE ACTS

Matthew 28:16-20.

The Gospel of Matthew is divided into two parts. The first part, from chapter 1 to chapter 11, records the Lord's genealogy, His birth, His baptism, His teaching, His works of power and His sending forth His disciples. When we come to chapter 11 we have His rejection, the cities in which He had done the works having failed to repent. Finally in that chapter, the Lord turns to the Father and then makes a beautiful appeal to all who labour and are burdened. "Come," He says, "take My yoke ... and learn from Me."

The second part of Matthew leads up to the Lord's crucifixion, His death and resurrection. And it is in resurrection that He gives us His last words in Matthew. Matthew does not record the Lord's ascension, because He speaks of Himself as the One who is with us all the days until the completion of the age, that is until He comes again. So when the disciples saw Jesus at the mountain in Galilee they did homage to him and the Lord accepts that homage by saying "All power has been given to Me in heaven and upon earth." "Power" here is in the sense of authority, so the disciples, and all in fact, are under the authority of the Lord. And, through the disciples, the Lord gives a commission, often spoken of as 'the great commission:' "Go, make disciples of all the nations, baptising them to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have enjoined you." That commission is the counterpart to the appeal at the end of chapter 11. In chapter 11 the Lord says "Come." In chapter 28 He says "Go" to the disciples. In chapter 11 He says, "Take My yoke;" in chapter 28 He says "make disciples." In chapter 11 He says "learn of Me;" in chapter 28 He says "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have enjoined you."

So in the last words of Jesus He commands His disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations, putting them on Christian ground by “baptising them to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” We have the Trinity set out here, the three Persons of the Godhead. The disciples were going to teach them “to observe all things whatsoever I have enjoined you” – that is, they were to take on themselves Christ’s easy yoke. Christ’s yoke is in contrast to the yoke of the law, which Peter says “neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10).

Then the Lord concludes with this wonderful promise: “Behold, I am with you all the days until the completion of the age.” And how that has been experienced by saints down through the dispensation, to know the Lord’s presence with them as they go out in service to Him, even in small circumstances: “where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them”!

Mark 16:15-18.

In contrast to Matthew, we have the Lord risen from the dead, reproaching His disciples for their unbelief and then giving them a simple commission to go into all the world and preach the glad tidings to all the creation. The response to it is believing and being baptised, and there were signs following which the disciples experienced; some we are told of, such as Paul taking up a serpent in Acts 28:3-6. But Mark records Jesus as saying, “Go into all the world, and preach the glad tidings to all the creation.” The Jewish nation would be set aside as the gospel was to go out into all the world – “glad tidings to all the creation” – and the response for those who heard it was believing and being baptised to be saved. Mark makes a clear division between those who have believed and those who have disbelieved.

Then finally we have the Lord taken up into heaven and sitting at the right hand of God and the disciples going forth and preaching

everywhere, “the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs following upon it.”

Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:6-9

The Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles were both written by the same author but they give us different accounts of the Lord’s last words before His ascension. In fact, reading Luke 24 only one might think that the Lord ascended on the same day that He rose from the dead, but Luke himself tells us at the beginning of Acts that the Lord was with them for forty days. This must have been a very special time with the Lord, risen from the dead with a company of the disciples, who were going to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit shortly after His ascension.

In Luke 24 the Lord appeared to His disciples and brought peace to them, assuring them that it was Himself risen from among the dead. He took food and ate it before them and then He said “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was yet with you, that all that is written concerning Me in the law of Moses and prophets and psalms must be fulfilled.” They had, in a certain sense, understood this, but now the Lord was going to open their understanding to understand the Scriptures which they could not possibly have understood until the Lord Jesus Himself had suffered and died and risen again – scriptures such as Genesis 22, Psalm 22, Isaiah 53. It would be very difficult to understand them before the Lord Himself had fulfilled those prophecies. But having fulfilled them “He opened their understanding to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise from among the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem.” They would be witnesses; the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, would come upon them; but they were to remain in the city until they were clothed with power from on high, as recorded in Acts 2. Then the Lord led them out to Bethany, blessed them and was carried up into heaven. They

returned and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.

Acts gives us these details in a much fuller way. Luke here records the forty days, when He spoke of the things which concern the kingdom of God and they, for their part, asked Him, “Lord, is it at this time that Thou restorest the kingdom of God?” The Lord explained that these things were in the Father’s hands; their part was to be witnesses “both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Then He was taken up from them “and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”

The disciples, having received the Holy Spirit, did indeed witness to Him in Jerusalem, and then, as recorded in chapter 8 of the Acts, preached in Samaria and then, through Philip, preached the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, who took that gospel back to his own land, which was at that time “the end of the earth.” The “end of the earth” has indeed changed from those days but the gospel has spread out all over the earth and there is not now a nation in which there are not believers on the Lord Jesus Christ.

We still await the day of His return; we do not know when it will be but we know that it will be soon.

John 21:18-23

When John wrote his gospel, many years had passed since the Lord’s ascension, and during that time various heresies had begun to circulate among the believers. It was to meet those that John in his gospel presents the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God. He does not record the Lord’s ascension, although the Lord speaks of it directly Himself on at least two occasions (ch. 6, v. 62 and ch. 20, v.17). John does, however, give us His commission to Peter and His prophecy as to how Peter would die. Peter understood His words, because he speaks of them himself in his epistle (2 Peter 1:14). Here in John 21 they record how his death should glorify God, after which Jesus said to him, “Follow thou Me.” Peter, being Peter, then turns

round and sees John following and asks Jesus about him. And the Lord, in His final word, says, “If I will that he abide until I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me.” And then we are told how the brethren thought that it meant that John would not die before the Lord came again but the Lord did not say that. However, John did live to a very old age and was the last of the disciples, it seems, to die.

If it is true that John’s Gospel was the last part of the Scriptures to be written, then the words “follow thou me” were the Lord’s final words to Peter and to all of us. May we all be found following the Lord with a view to the testimony continuing until He comes again.

Contributed by Tony Shel Drake.

POETIC PAGES

Alert

Voice of the truth is dumb,
Lukewarm is Christendom,
The latter days have come,
 Wake then, O sleeper!
Faith, once so clear and bright,
Like an expiring light
Dies, and the shades of night
 Seem to grow deeper!

Doctrines of earth and hell,
Balaam and Jezebel;
Who shall the deepness tell
 Of the Deceiver?
Surely, as with a pall,
Shadows come over all;
Wake, ere the judgment fall,
 Wake, O believer!

Wake! ere thy love grow cold
Buy of Him precious gold,
Prized by the saints of old;
 Buy of Him vesture,
Garments of purest white,
Salve to correct thy sight,
So to discern aright
 Truth from imposture.

Not to deny Thy name!
Not to forget Thy claim!
Jesus our Lord! The Same
 Now and for ever!
O give us grace to stand
Till time's last grain of sand
Fall, and Thy potent hand
Us from earth sever!

E.L. Bevir (1847-1922)

Always Confident

I have a mighty Friend
 In heaven above;
All who on Him depend
 His care shall prove:
In every trial here,
All through the desert drear,
I can have nought to fear:
 His Name is Love.

Only a little while
 He is away:
Soon will my Saviour's smile
 Turn night to day.

P.T.O./

Oh, joy beyond compare
To meet him in the air,
His home of light to share
Soon and for aye!

Home! How that word so sweet
Thrills to the heart!

Home! Where the children meet
Never to part.
Then like Him I shall be,
Whose blood was shed for me;
Then, Jesus, I shall see
Thee as Thou art.

Miss Hannah K. Burlingham (1842-1901).

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.