

# THE HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

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## And the Door Was Shut...

*"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins...." -- Matthew 25:1*

In offering this meditation on the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) we do not present some new interpretation. Instead, it is our purpose to offer encouragement to those who have responded to our Savior by reflecting on the fact that no one can shut the believer out of the promises of God -- except the believer himself. One of those promises, the one hope of our calling (Eph. 4:4), is that we might be part of the marriage of the Lamb.

Scripture presents Jesus as the bridegroom. Similarly, the solemnity of the marriage ceremony is uniformly upheld. That Jesus and his church are jointly the subject of Scripture is also evident, as we see from these examples:

Psalm forty-five depicts the union of Jesus and the church.

The parable of the king's son (Matt. 22) gives another picture of this marriage union.

St. Paul uses these words: *"I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband"* (2 Cor. 11:2, RSV).

St. John in the vision on Patmos refers to the church as the Lamb's wife.

Turning to the parable we ask, Whom do the virgins represent? Is it not the visible church of Christ: professed followers and friends of Jesus? Using virgins as an illustration, Paul demonstrates the loveliness and purity of Jesus' followers. In these we look for a holy affection for Christ and obedience to his authority. Indeed, our profession of faith must show that we love Christ and desire to exhibit that love in cheerful obedience to his commands.

Note an important detail. All the virgins are of the professing church -- else they would not have gone out to meet the bridegroom. They are not of the world. Yet, five of the virgins enter into the reward they sought and five fail. We must conclude that belonging to the professing church does not guarantee an entrance into the kingdom of heaven even though organizational minds claim that only the members of some particular church, or channel, or fellowship are assured of such an entrance.

However, Paul says, "*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves*" (2 Cor. 13:5, RSV). He does not say examine whether you are in the correct church, but whether you are in the faith. Why then should we attend church, or meetings, or have fellowship with other believers? Because it is the church's purpose to teach the Word of God which inculcates faith in the hearer. It is here that you are taught -- from God's Word -- what his will is and what his plan is to accomplish.

Look further. Knowing about the Bible is, of itself, to no avail. Anyone may learn Scriptures and know them well. Yet, these may not be what their Creator destined them to be. The aim of Christian teaching is to enable divine grace to operate in the heart, the mind, and the lives of those who are taught.

Knowledge will vanish away (1 Cor. 13:8). It is only as the holy Spirit brings the Word of God alive and activates it in the experience of an individual that it produces a spiritual effect. The elder cannot bring a pupil to life in Christ; the elder cannot grow for his pupil. After the pupil receives life, by the spirit, and in Christ (John 6:63), he stands alone.

This is not to say that teachers are without value. Quite to the contrary, teachers are to be highly valued. A Christian teacher can teach the truths of the Bible, but he can also go far beyond, praying that the holy Spirit will activate those truths in those who are taught and allowing himself to be used by the holy Spirit in guiding, helping, and encouraging his pupils. Such may share the Word with others, but they do so in such a way that God may use the Word to lead the pupils to faith in Christ. It is faith which opens human eyes to their Christian responsibility towards those who do not know God.

Notice the operation of the Spirit. The teacher teaches the pupil. The pupil then becomes the teacher. Each receives a chance to tell others of God. Your destiny depends upon your reaction to meeting the Master. When have we met him? -- Through our association with others who have met the Master (cp. John 14:7; 1 John 4:7-12).

### **How Do We View the Savior?**

Among those who have met the Savior some have been unimpressed. These see no need for his healing touch in their lives. They live their lives unchanged by the Savior. Others are intrigued by his novel approach to life but postpone any decision until later in life. Frequently it happens that no decision is made.

There is, however, another group. Some are overwhelmed by their Master's love. These are overcome by love's power. The love of Christ constrains them (2 Cor. 5:14): by his mercy, his grace, his kindness; and they yield themselves wholly to him. From that time forward they are different people. The change may not be instantaneous. Nor is it always readily noticeable. Nevertheless they are different. Their actions may often belie their conviction, but there is always a point of return for them. And when returning, they plead for and receive forgiveness of their sins and short-comings from the heart of their loving Lord.



## Count the Cost

Our Lord tells us to count the cost. We know that we are unable to amount to anything. What then does he mean by the admonition "count the cost"? Are we to evaluate our position only to decide that we are unable? This is the difference between the wise and the foolish virgins. Wisdom weighs the advantages of each side of an argument. With pencil in hand we begin to list in columns what each offers to us:

<u>The World</u>	<u>Jesus</u>
Home	Eternal life
Position	Joint-heirship
Fame	Peace of mind
Short term reward	Freedom from sin

Some say, "What of the trials, the troubles, the arguments in the church, the disunity." But what merit is there in such an argument? Are we like the Prodigal's brother, refusing to enter the open door sulking or angry because of slight or criticism? Who is hurt by such stubbornness? Is the church? Are the brethren? Maybe. But we hurt ourselves most of all.

And what of the trials? The sacrifices and sufferings? Shall we, who have come to the Father, leave because of the attitude of the Prodigal's brother? We have entered the opened door. The Prodigal's brother refused to enter.

## The Wise And Foolish Differ

The wise planned for the present and the future. They provided themselves with oil for any emergency which might occur. They prepared and acted for the future. That is why we meet with other believers: to fill ourselves with the oil of the Spirit for any emergency. The foolish, on the other hand, had lamps but no oil for future needs. Their religious profession had reference only to the present.

Wisdom fixes its attention upon the most important matters and arranges chiefly for them. Folly is to have our gaze fixed upon the present, uncertain, flitting "now." Folly neglects to prepare for the sure and momentous future. A mere profession of faith may suffice for the present fading years of life but it alone will not endure the realities of death, judgment, and eternity.

There came a time when the bridegroom tarried and the virgins slept. Christ did not appear as soon as expected -- this has been true of the entire gospel age. Jesus promised to return and take them (his followers) unto himself. But, in God's plan, many things lay between Jesus' promise and his return. And so they fell asleep, one and all -- the sleep of death, awaiting the final day.

But what did the virgins hear? A cry! The momentous proclamation! "*Behold the bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet him.*" When did it happen? At midnight -- during the night -- before the dawn of that great day of the Lord.

How sublime is this announcement!

"*Behold the Bridegroom cometh*" -- in all his magnificence, in all his glory! He comes as predicted -- comes to establish his kingdom on this earth. But there is a work to do. First, he reckons with the wise and foolish. How important, therefore, is the command, "*Go ye out to meet him!*" They had been waiting a long time. Now they were startled and awakened into life. How

simply and grandly Paul expresses this event! For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a *cry* of command, with the archangel's call, and the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16,17, RSV).

NOW -- Now is the grand crisis of the age. The day of destiny and judgment has arrived.

### **The Difference is Discovered**

It is only now that difference between the wise and foolish is discovered. The foolish have no oil. Their profession died with them. They have no real grace and therefore cannot join that nuptial procession. The wise trim their lamps and go forth, as they had prepared to do, as they had desired, as they had expected. The difference is apparent when it is too late. The foolish attempt to buy -- in vain. The wise have no oil, no grace, no merit, no righteousness to benefit others; therefore the door is shut to the foolish virgins. The wise enter with the bridegroom. Their faith is now realized in sight. They see the bridegroom. They are face to face with the Lord. Their hope comes to fruition. They are to be forever with the Lord.

The foolish are excluded! *"The door was shut!"* How terrible that short sentence! The door is shut, and that forever. Their cries are vain: *"Lord, Lord, open unto us!"* But the answer comes: *"Verily I say, unto you, I know you not!"* Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man comes.

### **How We Watch**

Are we to watch the sky for signs? Are we to watch prophecy? No. We watch in order to be ready when he appears (Matt. 24:44). It means preparing now. Have you done so? Not in word or some symbolic action. Have you decided to come to Christ. Have you gotten the oil of the spirit in your lamp? *"...Let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation"* (II Thess. 5:8-10). Don't be a foolish virgin having eyes only for the present. Let us both desire and expect our salvation.

"...God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with him" (vss. 9-10).

Have you counted the cost? Have you recorded what the world offers and what Christ will do? Have you determined, as did Joshua, *"...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"* (Josh. 24:15)? People find the time and money to do what they really want to do. What we do depends upon what we emphasize and value. Values rightly placed will afford time, money, and energy for the Lord's service. You have already believed. Are you now valuing things of the present more highly than the promises of God's Word for your future? Have you counted the cost, because only you can shut the door! *"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation!"* May we learn to be wise virgins, prepared for the marriage feast when the bridegroom comes to take his Bride. -A. Jarmola

*"The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it."* - Proverbs 10:22.

## With What Measure Ye Mete

*"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."* - Matthew 7:1-2

If these words were but grasped by the man in the street they would revolutionize his life. He, of course, does not believe them. Most people who do something wrong entertain the hope that they can avoid paying the penalty. If they have injured another they hope that the injured party will forgive them, or at least be powerless to take revenge. Better still, they hope their misdeed will never come to light.

This is true of the man in the street. How is it with us? Do we *really* believe this statement of our Lord? Of course, we mentally assent to its truth. But to *believe* a thing in the scriptural sense is to act as if it were true. Do we always act as though we were thoroughly convinced that with what measure we mete it shall -- *shall*, not *may* -- be measured to us again? Yet what psychologists term the law of retribution, here enunciated by our Lord, is as sure and certain as the law of gravity.

No one ever supposes that the law of gravity has been repealed or is likely to be. It is a cosmic law, inevitable, inescapable, and men shape their lives accordingly. The law of retribution is also a cosmic law. There is no such thing as escaping it. Only the Divine Architect could repeal or suspend its operation, and nowhere in the Scriptures does he give us the slightest hint that he intends to do so. On the contrary, the apostle declares: *"...God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"* (Gal.6:7). It has been truly said:

Sow a thought, reap an act;  
Sow an act, reap a habit;  
Sow a habit, reap a character;  
Sow a character, reap a destiny.

As a hymn-writer has suggested: Sow flowers, and flowers will follow You whithersoever you go;

Sow weeds, and of weeds reap a harvest;  
*You'll reap whatsoever you sow.*

This does not mean that every man is to reap in the present life everything he sows. That was the doctrine once held by Job, but which through his experience of unmerited suffering he learned could not be true. While even in this life, men do, as a rule, get what they deserve, this is not absolutely true. There are many exceptions even to this general rule. Within the span of a human life, the law of retribution lacks sufficient scope to operate to its fullest extent.

But, if we catch the Master's thought correctly, his words do mean that somewhere or other, sometime or other, in this life or the next, our actions will be measured back to us -- grain for grain. If I have practiced deceit, I myself will be deceived. Unkindness to another on my part will be repaid in kind. Every time I neglect a duty, evade my responsibility, misuse my authority over someone, I may be certain that some where, sometime, I shall receive the due reward of my deeds -- possibly in this life, but if not, then certainly in the next. This is the law of the universe, the law of God -- a law more sure than that of the Medes and Persians.

However, while those disposed to evil may come to recognize it as a law, those who have the mind of the Master know it to be also a gospel -- the Gospel of Retribution. And what a wonderful gospel it is, when seen in its proper light! All we have to do, if we desire lenient judgment for ourselves, is to judge others leniently; if we wish for ourselves *"...good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over..."* we have but to give this to others and it shall be given us. - P. L. Read

## Perfect Peace

The hand of the Lord is upon me,  
I delight to do his will --  
Sacrifices and burnt offerings thou wouldst not,  
Only trust him and be still.

When the storms of life break around you  
He whispers, the storm shall soon cease;  
Only put your trust fully in him,  
He will keep you in perfect peace.

When your heart is sad and lonely  
And your troubles seem to increase,  
Remember the words he has spoken,  
"I will keep you in perfect peace."

Only give your heart to Jesus,  
His love will never decrease;  
Don't trouble and fall by the wayside,  
He will keep you in perfect peace.

When your heart is heavy laden  
And the load you cannot release;  
Ask the Lord, he will help you lift it,  
He will keep you in perfect peace.

When the trials of life have ended  
And we see our loved ones de cease,  
He draws us nearer and whispers,  
"I will give them peace, perfect peace."

## Words for Love in the Bible

*"The father loveth [phileo] the Son" - John 5:20*  
*"The greatest of these is love [agape]." 1 Corinthians 13:13*

When the apostle Paul celebrates "love" (1 Cor. 13), he places this quality above such other Christian graces as faith and hope. Bearing in mind that the Bible was originally written in ancient languages (Hebrew and Greek), it seems proper to ask, To what extent do our Bible translations succeed in correctly expressing that which the Spirit caused to be written on this great theme of love?

We are impressed by Job's exclamation (Job 6:25): *"How forcible are right words!"* However, a student of language soon learns the imperfection of words. It is difficult to translate precise thoughts between different tongues. Translators of the Scriptures into primitive languages for use by missionaries realize this fact more than others. A language often lacks the synonyms necessary to denote slight changes in meaning found in the original tongue.

### In the Hebrew

The Hebrew word for love *"ahav"* is a notable example. Hebrew is a language which uses many synonyms. There are eight words for axe, nine for wine, eighteen to describe fear, and twenty-five which in English can only be rendered "deliver". It seems remarkable, therefore, that the one word *ahav* serves to represent love of any kind (religious or secular), from the love of God to sensual love. One word denotes the love of Jehovah for Israel and Isaac's love of savory meat (cf. Deut. 23:5; Gen. 27:4), the "wonderful" love of Jonathan to David, and the impure love of the licentious (II Sam 1:26; Ezek. 16:37). As we look at the Old Testament, then, we need not expect to find the various kinds of "love" finely discriminated by the use of synonyms.

The word for "hate" is also used in more than one sense. Its meaning in one passage is explained by its use in another.

The statement *"If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated"* (Deut. 21:15) is difficult to understand until it is explained by Genesis 29:30,31. *"Leah was hated"* (vs. 31) is explained in the preceding verse to mean that Jacob *"...loved Rachel more than Leah"* (compare the New Testament use of "hate" in Luke 14:26). The precise meaning of the word "love" in the Old Testament must be determined from the context. This is also true in English. Both languages lack the necessary synonyms for clear, literal translation of these words.

The ancient Hebrew language was poor in some respects but rich in others. It was "the most suitable of all to give to mankind the elementary religious truths and facts of divine revelation" (Briggs). When the time came for a fuller revelation of divine character and purpose through the Son (John 1:18), of which revelation "love" was the central theme (John 3:16), it was no accident that a more developed language became the vehicle to carry its sublime truths to the peoples of the earth.



## In the Greek

Greek was the language of the New Testament. Not secular Greek (the classical Greek of Plato and Demosthenes), but "Hellenistic Greek." This form of the language which had been profoundly influenced by the Septuagint -- the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures which had been made by Jews in Alexandria in the centuries immediately preceding the Christian era.

The Septuagint had gone far toward producing a Greek vocabulary to express the deepest things of the religion of Israel. And this vocabulary was profoundly influential in the New Testament. Moreover, the originality of the New Testament writers should not be ignored. They had come under the influence of new convictions of a transforming kind, and those new convictions had their effect in the sphere of language. Common words had to be given new and loftier meanings, and common men were lifted to a higher realm by a new and glorious experience (Dr. J.G. Machen).

The Septuagint gave the New Testament writers a new vocabulary. *Agape* is a noun meaning "love." The corresponding verb *agapao* had been used by classical writers, but not in the New Testament sense. The Septuagint frequently used the word to render the Hebrew *ahav*.

In classical Greek, three words meant "love": *agapai*, *phileo*, and *erao*. The last of these meant sensual love. It does not occur in the New Testament. Evidently, the inspired writers shunned this word in favor of *eipthumeo*. *Agapao* and *phileo* are frequently found in the Greek Testament. Since they are both translated "love" it is necessary to consult authorities to learn the precise meaning of these words. Their definition is given by Dr. M.R. Vincent in his scholarly work *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Vol. 2, Page 135):

*Agapao* indicates a reasoning discriminating attachment, founded in the conviction that its object is worthy of esteem, or entitled to it on account of benefits bestowed. *Phileo* represents a warmer, more instinctive sentiment, more closely allied to feeling, and implying more passion.

Thus, we see why the Greeks used *phileo* as the love of family or of friends, but *agapao* as a love based on esteem. Most authorities derive *agapao* and *agamai*, a verb meaning to admire.

## In the New Testament

This distinction between the two words appears to be generally preserved in the Greek Testament. The love of Jesus for Lazarus is expressed by the warm *phileo*, while his love for the sisters (Mary and Martha) uses the more reserved *agapao* (John 11:3,5,36). It is true that in many passages the two words appear to be used almost interchangeably (cp. Matt. 23:6 and Luke 11:43; John 13:23 and 20:2; John 3:35 and John 5:20; John 14:23 and 16:27). "And yet there is often a difference between them, well worthy to have been noted and reproduced, if this had lain within the compass of our knowledge" (Trench).

Latin has in its vocabulary two words which seem to exactly express the difference between *agapao* and *phileo*. The Vulgate renders these words *diligo* and *amo* respectively (cf. John 21:15-17). Rheims' English version (translated from the Vulgate) makes no attempt to discriminate between the two Latin words in this same passage, but renders both "love."

Some of the more literal modern (English) versions attempt to differentiate between *agapao* and *phileo* when used in the same context. In comparing five of these, we will look at John 21:15-17. All render *agapao* by "love," but each translates *phileo* differently.

The American Standard Version uses "love" for both Greek words, but in a footnote informs the reader that in these verses the word translates two different Greek words; it fails, however, to state what those words are, and whether or not they differ in meaning.

Of the other four versions three render *phileo* by words denoting an emotion similar to but less intense than love: "be fond of" (Rotherham); "affectionately love" (*Diaglott*); "have affection for" (New World). Young's Literal Translation, however, renders *phileo* by the words "dearly love" (a stronger expression than "love"), with which the *Diaglott* interlinear agrees. This comparison thus illustrates the problem of discriminating between *agapao* and *phileo* in an English version. The terms "fondness" and "affection" are too weak to translate the word *agapao* on the one hand, and on the other the translation of *phileo* by "dearly love" is to give the reader the wrong impression that *phileo* is a stronger word than *agapao*.

### Charity

The King James Version renders the noun *agape* by "charity" in nearly thirty occurrences. Those translators were strongly influenced by the Latin Vulgate. The Vulgate uses two words, *dilectio* and *caritas* (mostly the latter), to render *agape*. Since from the Middle Ages *caritas* had entered the English language as "charity," and because in their time "charity" had the same meaning as *agape* (*i.e.*, love), the translators of the Common Version used that word along with the Anglo-Saxon "love." But, three hundred and sixty-five years have now passed. The language has undergone many changes during that time. For example, the word "charity" is now restricted to tolerance and benevolence. That word no longer suitably expresses *agape*. "Charity" is now replaced by the word "love."

### The Elevation of Agape

The prominence of *agape* in the New Testament as the distinctive word for holy, divine love is better understood if we recall the history of that word in both its noun and verb forms. The noun does not appear to have been used in classical Greek but it does occur (about fifteen times) in the Septuagint, though not with the same force which it has in the New Testament. The verb form *agapao* is, however, common in classical Greek and in the Septuagint. In the former it was considered a weaker word for love than *phileo*, and sometimes it merely meant "to be content with" (Liddell and Scott). At other times the two words seemed to be used interchangeably. In the Septuagint, *agapao* had no significance beyond the English word "love."

It remained to the New Testament to elevate *agapao* and its derivatives. These writers redefined the word as the highest type of love. It is this which the apostle describes (I Corinthians 13). In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord stated a new law which was to govern his followers (the new creation). This was to be a law of universal love -- transcending the standard by which publicans and sinners loved those that loved them (Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 6:32-36). A word was needed to express such love. Through the spirit, the New Testament writers chose *agapao*, a word with which they were already familiar from its use in the Septuagint. They, however, gave it a meaning that it had not previously possessed. Accordingly, the New Testament usage of *agapao* and *agape* describes several ideas:

The love of God to the Son, to his followers, and to the world of mankind  
The love of our Lord to the Father, to his footstep followers  
The love which prompted his sacrifice on behalf of men  
The love of believers for fellow-Christians (in a few instances this is expressed by a compound of *phileo* -- *philadelphia*)  
The love which Christians must have for their enemies (Matt. 5:44).

Love of enemies was not commanded in the Law, and it appeared contrary to Jewish tradition. Yet, the germ of this doctrine is found in Exodus 23:4 and in Proverbs 25:21.

### **Duty -- Love**

This term, "duty-love," has been used to discriminate between the words *agapao* and *phileo*. Let us consider this term in connection with the original words.

*Phileo* denotes a love which is natural, spontaneous, involuntary (as of a mother for her child). *Agapao* signifies a love based on esteem (one drawn forth by the goodness of another, as the love with which we loved the Lord, having "...tasted that he is gracious..." "*Whom not having seen ye love [agapao]*" (1 Pet. 1:8). It is evident that only the latter could be commanded or enjoined as a duty. We find that whenever the New Testament commands men to love it is the *agapao* form and not *phileo* to which we are enjoined. "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love [agapao] one another*" (1 John 4:11; cf. Matt. 22:37, 39; Luke 6:27; John 15:17; Eph. 5:25). Abbott-Smith's Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament (page 3) refers to the distinction between these words and adds: If this distinction holds, *agapao* is fitly used in the New Testament of Christian love to God and man, the spiritual affection which follows the direction of the will and which, therefore, unlike the feeling which is instinctive and unreasoned, can be commanded as a duty.

Men have sought to describe *agape*, but how can words express the essence of the divine character? *Agape* is the "greatest" of all Christian graces, "a heavenly flame, kindled by God's redeeming love, the crowning gift of the Spirit, the surest test of Christian character, the fulfilling of the law, the bond of perfectness!"

Of love divine, so wonderful,  
The half was never told.

- W.A. Eliason

## Behold the Bridegroom

"Go ye out to meet him." - Matthew 25:6

*Editor's Note: The subject of our Lord's Return has been hotly discussed for nearly two thousand years. This fact notwithstanding, we joyfully present this discussion of the matter because of the Author's careful attention to what may, perhaps, be the most important aspect of this clearly scriptural teaching: What does Jesus' return mean to you and to me in the living of our lives?*

What a tremendous time to be alive! Some may say that "*all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation*" (2 Pet. 3:4), but we can see with our eyes what previous generations could not conceive in their minds. Today's events develop so rapidly that men's hearts are *literally* failing them for fear as they consider the advances of technology. Knowledge has outpaced man's moral development. Man has not learned to control himself and selfishness reigns in the hearts of men. The forces of destruction grow more powerful, and "might" is the god which men and nations worship. They can only hope that the god of "might" will not boomerang, destroying all civilization.

In this awesome time only a comparative few of earth's millions have fixed their eyes upon the Word of God. We, whose trust and confidence is in it's Author, see things being fulfilled which were recorded centuries ago; the steps of the Almighty God moving toward a purpose which will surpass every utopian dream of man.

### What Does the Lord's Return Mean to You?

No lover of God, can fail to be interested in the epoch-making events of today. God's Word points toward this very time. If we have been praying: "*Thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven,*" we will watch these events eagerly, in contrast to the complacency common to many professing Christians.

What does the Lord's return mean to you? Can we think about it, can we talk about it, and not experience the emotions of those two travelers to Emmaus? Do not our hearts burn within us? Something is wrong if we do not find this true of us, and our interest in the subject can be nothing more than academic. His return is the greatest event of all time. If we appreciate its import there will be a zeal, a warmth, a liveliness of spirit which can be likened only to those early days of church history after the Pentecostal outpouring.

### "They knew not"

There have been other world crises. The first was the Flood, in which all but eight persons were destroyed. Through it a "world" passed away. Now men realize how stupendous the event was, yet of those who were immediately affected, our Lord said:

"In the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away" (Matt. 24:38,39).

"*They knew not.*" It has always been so. The majority of people seem unable to appreciate the significance of events in their own lifetime, even though they are able to look at past events and

see how the world's course has been changed by events which were not understood at those times. It has always been so, and it is so even today.

Consider our Lord's First Advent -- an event which has had its affect upon every part of the world. That was the greatest crisis up to that time. Not only has it affected world history, but every human is vitally concerned with the First Advent of our Lord.

How did those then living view this event? Jesus' advent attracted little attention from the world; just faint ripples upon the waters of mankind. Among those in the land of his birth who should have known and understood its implications, all were either indifferent or poured scorn upon his claims. And yet all Israel were in expectation of the Messiah. *"He came to his own, and his own received him not."*

He was in their midst for thirty-three and a half years -- the one of whom all the prophets had spoken -- the one who was to change the world; yet *"they know him not."* -- they *"knew not the time of their visitation"* (Luke 19:44).

### **So is the Presence of The Son Of Man**

It does not take keen insight to realize that this could become *"a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation."* Many recognize this fact. Others -- the professed people of God -- discern in these events a fulfillment of Bible prophecies. These speak of the overthrow of Satan's empire preparatory to the establishment of God's Kingdom of righteousness and peace. But few see further than this, to the indications of our Lord's return and to the church's near deliverance and glorification. These see their calling to be associated with the great Messiah in the uplifting of mankind. Their's is to be a ministry of reconciliation, bringing man gradually to perfection and harmony with God, their Creator.

Hidden in these events is something which many Christians dismiss from their minds. To them it is only worthy of passing reference; an incident in the panorama of world history. Yet, we see the beginning of the next important stage in the divine plan of the ages. Those who have an understanding of God's purposes should thrill to see that we are passing out of one stage of this plan into a new era which is vital and essential BEFORE mankind can receive those blessings of life, health, and peace determined by God from the foundation of the world.

### **Developments in God's Plan**

There are parallels between the ends of the Jewish Age and of this Gospel dispensation. Both are periods of transition. During both there is a gradual change in God's dealings with mankind. During both of these periods the majority of those to whom the oracles of God have been committed (Rom. 3:2) have found it difficult to grasp the changing situation. Nor do they discern the implications of the times in which they live.

At the close of the Jewish Age the eyes of God's people were fixed upon an earthly kingdom. Most of them were blind to the development of a spiritual aspect of God's kingdom. Even after the resurrection of our Lord, this earthly kingdom so filled the minds of the disciples that they asked of him: *"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel"* (Acts 1:6)? But, the last words of the risen Lord prior to his ascension indicated that their future work would not be confined to Israel, but would extend beyond *"...Jerusalem, and all Judea, into Sarnaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."* It was hard for the apostles to grasp the changing situation.

Now, at the end of this Gospel age, the eyes of God's people are fixed upon the spiritual phase of the kingdom. They are so transfixed that many do not appreciate the fact that the earthly phase of that kingdom is about to be manifested to all the world. Ours is a spiritual calling, and our goal is to be associated with Christ in the spirit realm of the kingdom; but, let us not minimize the great beginnings of a new phase in the outworking of God's great plan.

### Two seeds

Recall the Scripture teaching that much remains to be done before any blessing can come to the nations of the earth. -- There is a "seed" to be developed and prepared. That "seed" is not only to be *"as the stars of heaven,"* but also *"as the sand which is upon the seashore"* (Gen. 22:17); in other words there is an earthly seed to be prepared as well as a spiritual. Until then the gentile nations must remain unblessed. *"All Israel"* must first be saved. That is the clear teaching of Peter, the apostle to "the circumcision", and of Paul, the apostle to the gentiles. One can not be reminded too often of Peter's words recorded in Acts (Acts 15:14-17). Verse fourteen reads: *"Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the gentiles to take out of them a people for his name."* There we have recorded God's selection of the church from among the gentiles -- a work which has occupied the whole of this Gospel age, now drawing to its close.

This is the same work to which Paul refers in his Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 11:17,24). The apostle speaks of *"natural branches"* which were broken off from the root because of unbelief, while gentile believers, represented by the *"wild olive tree"* were grafted in. Paul, does not suggest that *"the natural branches"* have no further part in God's plan for man. No, he says that this cutting away of *"the natural branches"* was for a limited period -- *"until the fullness of the gentiles be come in."* *"For I would not, brethren,.."* writes the apostle,

*"That ye should be ignorant of this mystery [or secret], lest ye be wise in your own conceit; that blindness [or hardness] in part is happened to Israel, until the filling up of the gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved"* (Rom. 11: 25,26).

Paul wrote these words, in part, to guard the gentile believer against a spirit of pride and superiority, *"Boast not against the branches,"* he writes. *"Be not highminded, but fear"* (see vs. 18-20). These words accord with the sequence of events recorded by Peter: *"After this..."* that is, after the calling out of the gentiles, "I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up."

Not until then will the scripture be fulfilled that: *"the residue of men will seek after the Lord, and all the gentiles, upon whom my Name is called, saith the Lord"* (Acts 15:16,17).

### Signs of The Coming Kingdom

If *"the fullness of the gentiles"* is nearly complete, and if we are convinced concerning the signs of our Lord's return, then we should look around us and scan the pages of God's Word to see this new phase of God's plan which must synchronize with the closing days of the church on earth. If it is God's plan, we cannot, we dare not be indifferent to what is taking place in the earth. Our eyes should turn to the land of prophecy, the land of Israel. As we do, there will be an incentive to greater diligence and faithfulness in our Christian walk.

Our Lord indicated some of the signs that his followers should look for at the time of his return, preparatory to the establishment of his kingdom:

"And he spake to them a parable; behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand."

Then he adds words which mean much to us: *"Verily I say unto you, this generation [the generation that sees these things come to pass] shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled"* (Luke 21:29-32).

Why did Jesus use the illustration of the fig tree? The interpretation is provided by Jeremiah (Jer. 24). After Nebuchadnezzar had carried away the Jews into Babylon, the Lord showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs. One basket contained *"evil figs"* (Jer. 24:8-10) and represented the overthrow and captivity of the Jews at the commencement of *"the times of the gentiles,"* and their subsequent experiences throughout the period of gentile dominion. The *"good figs"* (Jer. 24:5-7) represented their re-gathering in their own land and their conversion:

"Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have send out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart."

Just as the fulfillment of Jer. 24:8-10 extended beyond the Babylonian captivity, so this prophecy of the *"good figs"* was not fulfilled at the end of the seventy years captivity. Not until the Lord's return would the fig tree show signs of God's returning favor. This prophecy of Jeremiah is one which cannot be spiritualized without doing despite to reason. The people were to be dispersed because of their idolatry and waywardness. They were *"a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse."* These are those whom God has pledged to re-establish in the land of Israel.

Some might ask: "What about the other trees of which Jesus spoke in this parable of Luke 21? Why single out the fig tree?" The fig tree is significant because Jesus singled it out. As a sign of the his *parousia* he informs us in parabolic language that the fig-tree nation would shoot forth its leaves at a time when other nations also would give evidence of life in their struggles for independence and national sovereignty.

### **A Significant Sign**

Was there ever a time like this? Races, who for centuries have been subject to the powers of earth, have thrown off the yoke of servitude. Peoples have claimed their rights and now exist as sovereign, independent nations. The British Empire, which for many years derived her wealth from the toil, labor, and resources of subject peoples, bowed to the demands for independence of those who were once described as "backward races." India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, Africa -- indeed *"all the trees" are "shooting forth."* The French Empire has likewise disintegrated. Now, in the mid 1980's, the vestiges of Dutch power and the policies of apartheid are the next to feel the melting power of revolution. The government of South Africa is now melting before our "eyes" of understanding.

At such a time, the Lord's disciples should look up, and lift up their heads as they see the nearness of their deliverance. Oh, how circumspect we would be if we were convinced that the last days of our pilgrimage had been reached! If we could count the days to the time of our change, how eagerly we would throw aside the trivialities which claim our time and attention. The petty

grievances, the arguing about non-essentials and things that do not profit, would give place to that warmth of love and zeal which characterized the earliest days of the Christian church.

Alas, we see the majority living their lives as though *"all things continue as they were from the beginning."* What if it were tomorrow! Would we find it necessary to reshape our affairs, to alter our plans, to scrutinize our motives, and to break down the barriers which have separated us from fellow-brethren in Christ? Do we long for *"his appearing"* ? May we pause to honestly answer the question: "How great is my desire to 'meet the Lord' and to see him face to face?"

As pants the hart for water brooks,  
So pants my soul for Thee;  
O, when shall I behold Thy face,  
When wilt Thou call for me?

Are we ready if the call should come? How blest we are if we can say "Yes"; if from the heart we can utter those words; *"Even so, come Lord Jesus."* That is what the Lord's return is all about! *"If I go away, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also"* (John 14:3). Do Jesus' words stir your heart? Or would the return of a loved one from another country stir you more? If so, you are not ready for him -- and the time of our deliverance is at hand! *"Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away,"* said Jesus (Luke 21:33). How essential that we not only discern the signs which indicate the Lord's return; if it means anything to us we must also recognize its implications, for they have a direct bearing upon our lives and daily walk. Peter wrote: *"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved"* (- today we can say "seeing then that all these things are being dissolved",) *"what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holi-ness and godliness"* (2 Pet. 3:11,RSV).

### **"Watch Therefore"**

Our Lord indicates that at this time there would be the greatest tendency to become occupied with lesser things; the need for watchfulness would be more urgent than ever before.

"Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare" (Luke 21:34, RSV).

There must be a sense of urgency and eager, joyful anticipation -- a daily living in the imminence of *"his appearing."* *"The cares of this life"* are linked with the indications of worldliness -- *"dissipation and drunkenness..."* They tend to crowd in upon every one of the Lord's people to deaden the awareness of the nearness of *"his appearing."*

Our Father designed that all followers of the Lord, throughout the age, should live in expectation of the Lord's return and of their deliverance and gathering together to him. How can we who have been enlightened concerning the *parousia* of the Lord do otherwise? Jesus said, *"This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled"* and we must accept his word! *"Behold the Bridegroom; go ye out to meet him."*



## One Certain Sign

We shall consider an Old Testament prophecy which is connected with the "fig tree" nation, for this sign of the "fig tree" is one of the near "appearing" of the Lord. There have been many wars during this Gospel age; there have been many times of trouble, each increasing in severity and encompassing more and more of the nations; but never before has there been a budding "fig tree." Jesus informs us that this is the one certain sign that "he is at the doors" and his appearing is at hand!

Jesus did not say that we were to look for a fig tree full grown and mature. The first signs of life were to be the indication that our deliverance is near at hand.

Matthew's record says:

"From the fig tree learn its lesson: As soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates." (Matt. 24:32,33, RSV).

It is the "watcher" who will notice the beginnings of a revived Israel.

## The Valley of Dry Bones

Israel is a nation. But, many things will transpire before Israel is fully reconciled to God and enjoying the destiny which he has marked out for it. This is portrayed in Ezekiel's vision of the "dry bones" recorded in chapter 37. In the first fourteen verses we read:

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest."

"And again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold I *will* cause breath to enter into *you*, and ye shall live: and I *will* lay sinews upon *you*, and *will* bring up flesh upon *you*, and cover *you* with skin, and put breath in *you*, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. So I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them."

"Then said he unto me, prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, Son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

"Then He said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophecy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord."

## Living Bones

Note the sequence -- "a noise" -- "a shaking" [or earthquake], and then bone being joined to bone. Then sinews and flesh upon the bones, and all covered with skin.

Thus far, in symbolic vision, Ezekiel sees a complete organism or entity, but without life!

And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them (vs.8).

It is recorded: *"These bones are the whole house of Israel"* (vs. 11). What, then, should we expect to see? What are we seeing today?

During forty years prior to 1914 the longings of scattered Jewry, the Diaspora, were to be united as one nation in the land of their fathers. These found expression in the Zionist movement. But the "bones" were dry and withered. There seemed little hope that the ideals of a Jewish zealots would ever be realized. *"Can these bones live?"* would seem to express how humanly impossible it was. For nearly two thousand years that people had been dispersed among the nations. While they retained their identities, they lived in environments which varied as widely as the nations among whom they were scattered.

How wonderful is our God! This people, designed to be God's channel of blessing to all the families of the earth, gained experience by contact with every race and kindred. Yet these were the sentiments of many: *"Dried are our bones, and lost is our hope; we are quite cut off"* (vs. 11, Leeser).

In 1914 there was a "shaking" or earthquake! One rendering of verse 7 is: *"There was a noise, and behold a commotion, and the bones came together, bone to its bone."* In 1917, during this commotion, when Palestine was freed from Turkish oppression, the re-gathering of Jews began. The "earthquake" has not yet subsided; the "noise" and commotion continue, but in it Ezekiel's words are being fulfilled. Bone joins bone. Jews of the earth have gathered together until the Jewish population of Israel has swelled from fifty-six thousand (1914) to some three and a quarter million (1984)!

The prophet saw more: the skeleton took shape. *"And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above (vs. 8).* Have we reached this point today? Turning to the land of Israel, we see not a skeleton, but a nation. In May of 1948, the "bones" took shape and form. For the first time since the days of Nebuchadnezzar, twenty five hundred years ago, Israel is a sovereign and independent nation.

## No Breath In Them

Few of the returned Jews have faith in the scriptures.

Fewer still have accepted Jesus as their Messiah.

They abide in unbelief.

The Ancient Worthies and those who will be 'princes in all the earth' have not been resurrected to their position as the leaders of restored Israel.

We agree that there are points of objection! All of these objections are true and they accord with the words of prophecy: "*But there was no breath in them*" (vs 8). Spiritually, Israel is not yet alive!

### **A Covenant After Those Days**

What is Israel's next step towards revival?

It is the loosing of the '*four winds*' that brings life to the nation. Then God's spirit will be poured upon the nation, and he will make them a new covenant, putting his law "*in their inward parts, and writing it in their hearts.*" The giving of life to the nation is the next stage in her development. But, and this is where we are concerned, "*they without us shall not be made perfect*" (Heb. 11:40). The church must first be glorified; her deliverance accomplished; her course on earth completed! Israel waits for the appearance, the manifestation of her Messiah, "*...and when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is...*" (1 John 3:2).

Have we lost that urgency which these truths bring? "*Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed*" (Rom. 13:11, RSV), yet the expectancy and anticipation seem to decline. Surely, the knowledge we have received concerning the Lord's *parousia* should keep us alert and increasingly watchful! It is not sufficient to produce reasons why we believe the Lord is present. Do reasons satisfy the longings of the heart? "*I shall be satisfied*" -- when? -- "*when I awake in thy likeness.*" That must be the sentiment of every lover of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what we should be looking for; it should be the prompting motive of our lives -- the one thing with which we are concerned. "**BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM!**"

How many of the Lord's people have rejoiced in that proclamation. Alas, how many have quarreled about it. How many have reiterated their conviction that we are living in the days of our Lord's *parousia*, and have joined in the proclamation -- "*Behold the Bridegroom!*" But, what has it done for us? What is it doing in us? Can we remain unmoved as we meditate upon it? Does it stir our hearts? Can "*his appearing*" be long delayed? Have the things of earth lost their attraction? Have we redoubled our efforts to put on more of the graces of the spirit and those qualities of heart and mind which the Lord will expect and delight to see in us "*when he appeareth?*"

"*Behold the Bridegroom!*" is part of the proclamation. But there is something more to be done. "**GO YE OUT TO MEET HIM!**" That is just as essential as recognizing the time of our Lord's return. Very soon "*The door will be shut,*" and the last member of the Bride will have "*made herself ready.*"

... We haste, because That door once shut  
Will never ope again.

- Edwin Allbon, England

## The Separated Life

As long as the church remains amid earthly environments and more or less subject to the enticements presented by the world, the flesh, and the devil she will find it necessary to keep in mind the facts of the separated life God expects of his people. She will find it necessary to be reminded that it is an important part of Christian experience to spend and be spent in the service of God. Inasmuch as the New Testament abounds in references to self-effacing sacrifice as a feature of our privilege in imitating Christ, let us give consideration to some of these.

Turn first to the words of Jesus,

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain in my love .... My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends (John 15:9, 12,13) .... Now that I, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you (John 13:14,15, NIV).

### True Nature of Love

In these texts Jesus tells us to imitate him -- "*...do as I have done for you.*" He demonstrates that there must be a laying aside of all feelings of superiority in our approach to our brethren. He does not encourage anyone to note the soiled feet of others and then in self-congratulation to assume that one's own feet are not soiled, nor are we encouraged to display the infirmities of others -- some of which infirmities are real enough to be seen, and others of which may be wholly imaginary.

It is the nature of love to cover a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8). It is the spirit of sacrificial love to believe that circumstances are better than we might think -- if only we understood. Truly, the noblest trait of Christian character is that of loving one's neighbor as oneself. Will not such a love "*esteem other[s] better than themselves*" (Phil. 2:3)? Will it not lead us to minimize the defects, and "*if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise*" (Phil. 4:8) to magnify these? With this love, which is the love of God and of Christ, abounding in all hearts, will it not be easier to make provision and allowance for differences. These after all, will be found amongst believers so long as the church is in the flesh.

We are told, in God's word, why love for the brethren is so vital and why our sonship to God is dependent upon our love for them. We are pointed to the Son of God, in whom God was pleased. The Son did not please himself (John 6:38). It was his purpose to reveal the love of God sinful, selfish men. He came to separate his followers from the world and its spirit by implanting in them his love for righteousness and his hatred for sin. Jesus came to unite in a heavenly unity the church which he would redeem; not by creeds and rituals, but by cords of that same love with which he had loved them. Self love must be eradicated before this feature of Jesus' sacrificial love could control a man's life.

## United by Benevolent Love

Much has happened between the Pentecostal blessing and our day. Characters have differed over the years. Experiences, knowledge, and opportunities for service have also changed. But the heart of a true saint is still the same. There is still one faith, because there is faith in one Lord. There is still one hope, because we wait for the same consummation, "...that blessed hope..." (Tit. 2:13). We are one with them -- as long as we allow the love of God to be shed abroad in our hearts. Blessed is that tie.

When believers are rivals in their love for the Lord, each heart absorbed with the greatness of the love and mercy by which salvation and sonship have come to them personally, they can be united one to another in a bond of benevolent love. Daily experiences will not shake this bond. To the contrary, eternity will enlarge and confirm it.

The highest blessing of heaven will rest on those who labor by word and deed to foster a spirit of consideration for others, to those who by life and conduct strive to remove the barriers between brethren by bringing them to gather in the bonds of Christ's love. There are barriers which exist between men which will only grow when attempts to tear them down are made. But even these will melt under the warmth of the love of God shining forth from sanctified, loving Christian hearts.

Beloved, if we want a place in the heart of God, the only pathway leads us directly through the pierced heart of the beloved son of God. That heart knew no selfishness, no enmity. That heart overflowed with love to God, and to man. Let us try, by perseverance, to be "*imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us*" (Eph. 5:1,2, NIV).

I would not seek in earthly bliss  
To find a rest apart from thee,  
Forgetful of thy sacrifice  
Which purchased life and peace for me.

- Contributed

## You Tell on Yourself

You tell what you are by the friends you seek,  
By the very manner in which you speak,  
By the way you employ your leisure time,  
By the use you make of the dollar and dime.

You tell what you are by the things you wear,  
By the spirit in which you burdens bear,  
By the kind of things at which you laugh,  
By records you play on the phonograph.

You tell what you are by the way you walk,  
By the things of which you delight to talk,  
By the manner in which you bear defeat,  
By so simple a thing as how you eat.

By the books you choose from the well-filled shelf,  
In these ways and more you tell on yourself,  
So here's really no particle offense  
In effort to keep up false pretense.

- The Lighted Pathway

## Obedient to the Heavenly Vision

*"Rise, and stand upon thy feet: for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to make thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will yet appear unto thee. Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" - Acts 26:16,19.*

A man cannot surpass the ideal or vision which is set before his mind. Nor can a life achieve a higher objective than that around which it centers. He that focuses upon earthly things will conclude that his life is the sum of the things which he possesses (Luke 12:15), and if we lay up treasures on earth, moth and rust will eat and destroy them, leaving us poor indeed. But if our eyes have been opened by heavenly vision and if we do not disobey that vision, we discover that such an earthbound horizon is not life at all. Such existence is merely *"vanity and vexation of spirit"* (Eccl. 1:14).

But what if, instead of such vanity, we recognize life's brevity and turn our eyes heavenward? Will we not learn, by using our lives to lay up treasures in heaven, *that "...where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"* (Luke 12:34)? By so doing, we experience a drawing of our character toward that heavenly treasure.

This teaching is clearly stated: *"For as [a man] thinketh in his heart so is he..."* (Prov. 23:7). -- A man aims his life in a certain direction and by the force of his own thoughts he becomes the man at which he aims.

This is why Paul testifies that his life and outlook were changed by the vision which he experienced. He says that the vision of Jesus Christ revolutionized his life. That was the "heavenly vision": by it the bigoted, persecuting Paul was halted and humbled; by it he was transformed into a servant of the church with a heart full of compassion (like the Master whose slave he became). The vision taught him that wealth (as he had known it) was paupery. The vision stabilized his ministry, centering his mind upon Christ crucified. Yet more than that: upon Christ formed within the hearts of believers. This transformation became the object of his devotion to Christ and his church.

What was Paul's secret? He faced unparalleled opposition. He was persecuted by bigoted Jews and by false brethren within the ranks of those called believers. And even though he was deserted by his co-workers in times of crisis, yet he remained undismayed and undiscouraged.

Paul proclaims: *"I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" therefore, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me -- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace"* (Acts 20:24, NIV).

In ordaining him to service the Lord had said, *"I have appeared unto thee, to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you"* (Acts 26:16, NIV). Thus, Paul had been assured of the ministry committed to him. He saw the Lord! He felt his power! And Paul was consumed with the desire to share that which he saw and heard!

Paul had experienced things, *"whether in the body or out of the body"* he could not tell, but this experience so transformed his vista of God that his precepts and example rebuke forever all lukewarmness in service, all narrowness in concept, all un-loving selfishness within the circle of the family of God. Paul would not have been the Paul we know without these experiences, and

the example we have in him continues to this day: Each servant, commissioned of the Lord, goes forth "...according to the measure of the Spirit given to every man..." to be "...a witness of the things wherein thou hast seen me..."

### **The People Perish**

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish"* (Prov. 29:18). How plain a statement of the importance of a true vision of the will of God. The word "perish" originally meant to "become naked" or to be "uncovered," "exposed," or even "to cast off restraint." The text might be paraphrased saying, "Where there is no vision at which the eyes gaze intently, the people cast off restraint; they are made naked and exposed." This view is supported by the Lord's words to the church at Laodicea -- and to all Laodiceans since, Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and blind and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear (Rev. 3:17,18).

Only one remedy is offered to cure this condition in Laodicea, *"Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."*

What an unfortunate state of mind this is for any Christian to exhibit. Laodicea's lukewarmness resulted from her boast of riches and goods. She became self-satisfied and grew lukewarm. By contrast to this improper view, when Paul looked upon Jesus, his own righteousness was swept away. In Jesus Paul saw strength and righteousness, enough to do all that Jesus asked.

The Spirit warns us that Laodicea's self-deception may be reproduced in us. But, Jesus offers the eye-salve and by it's power our eyes are fixed on his work in us and opened to the:

"...riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself" (Eph. 1:7-9).

Paul focused his attention on one fact: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. And of these, Paul considered himself chief. This simple gospel of Christ is *"the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."* (Rom. 1:16). Paul visualized a *"high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:14), one which was open to as many as the Lord would call (from the Jews or gentiles). The hearts of these have been touched -- as had his own. In them there was a willingness to *"count all things but loss and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:8).

Paul saw a church purchased by the blood of Jesus. Being thus purchased by Jesus' own blood, it was a precious treasure to Jesus. He loved her. He died for her. He stands in the presence of God for her. He comes again in the end of the age to receive her unto himself *"a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing"* (Eph. 5:27). Paul envisioned a church enthroned in power with Christ. These would be fully qualified (because of their experiences in this life) to become the world's judges. Then their own probationary testing will be complete, the world will come forth from the prison house of death, and the church will judge righteously, with patience, longsuffering, and in tender mercy. This was Paul's vision, the impelling force behind *his* years of suffering and devotion, *the* vision that made him a man of determination, warm of heart, of mature discernment, and an epistle of Christ in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.



Look within your heart. Are you leaving behind a similar record to Paul's? Oh, we might do "all right" to look at Paul and imitate him. But No! Let us rather follow his example of following Christ, because we too must have our eyes fixed upon him who filled Paul's vision. To fix our eyes on Paul would be to allow a carnal mind to control and a limited perception to rule our growth.

But, "*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith...*" (Heb. 12:2) we shall be like him. Out of this vision we will grow in grace and knowledge, in service and fruitage. By growth we will glorify God, bless his people, and be strengthened to finish our course with joy.

### **Consecration Depends Upon Vision**

What an inestimable blessing to see the grace of God in Christ Jesus. It is possible to have a limited vision of this grace. In fact, we have not truly had such a vision until we (as Paul did) have seen ourselves as the chief of sinners. Not until we recognize our righteousness as rags and the sum of our works as unprofitable service, will we reach a place where boasting is excluded. Not until

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to thy cross I cling,

becomes a fixed conviction in our heart can we enter the realities of true consecration. Love must draw us to Christ, "*...who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption...*" (1 Cor. 1:30) -- everything -- that no flesh should glory in his presence.

Is it possible to remain humble? -- Only by seeing our own poverty! No other viewpoint will prevent us from thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. To so err is to fall into that spiritual blindness in which we judge our own standing before God by the actions and words of others. Paul warned us about this tendency. Some commend themselves, Paul says, but in measuring themselves by themselves and in comparing themselves to others like themselves they are not wise (2 Cor. 10:12). The foolishness of such a course is obvious; it indicates clouded vision, and proclaims that our eye has strayed from the Lord Jesus. By comparison to his example of self-abnegation, devotion, obedience, love, and sympathy, our lives pale. We recognize our salvation in him: "*...by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*" (Eph. 2:8).

Do we have proof that consecration must spring from a true affection for Jesus himself? Consider Revelation chapter two, verses one to six. This affection for our Lord starts in the sacrificial love of Jesus for us. It follows that our vision of Christ crucified must never be dimmed. Our minds must constantly say

...All for Jesus, all for Jesus  
All my being's ransomed powers....

The church at Ephesus was commended. They had not grown weary in well doing. They were patient -- a virtue of outstanding worth. They possessed a proper hatred of those that were evil. They were versed in doctrine -- so much so that they were alert to detect the false position of any "*...who claim to be apostles but are not...*" - Rev. 2:2). They had suffered much for Christ's sake - - an important feature of true consecration.

All this notwithstanding, the Ephesian brethren were still to be accused. To be acceptable to God, a consecration must be true, and the Ephesians had lost their first love (Rev 2:4). They still loved the truth which they had received. They remained zealous for its defense and promulgation. But their personal devotion to Christ Jesus himself had slipped. This loss, in the eyes of Jesus, was too vital a matter to overlook.

We find that this Ephesian message is directed to us. *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* (Rev 3:22, NIV).

### **Open Thou Mine Eyes**

The center of the dedicated life is Christ Jesus himself. Here center two essential features of Christian life:

The unity of the Spirit (as pertains to our fellowship).

The service of the Lord and his people.

This is what we must have a personal vision of Christ. Paul could say that the risen Lord was seen by *"Peter, and then to the Twelve after that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time..."* (1 Cor. 15:5,6, NIV). But if he could not say, *"Last of all he was seen by me"* (vs. 8), the proof of his apostleship would have been in doubt. That power which influenced his daily life and ministry would have been lacking. That vision proved to Paul that his previous zeal had been misplaced. In fact, he had been disloyal both to God and to his saints. This opening of his eyes made him our beloved brother Paul, an outstanding example of love and of lawful striving.

Seeing his Master sparked the fire in Paul's heart. From that time forward Paul yearned to see his Master's character formed in the heart of every believer. From this impression of his Master, Paul later drew the inspiration for the personification of love which he left to the church (1 Cor. 13). The vision was unerasable. And so, he longed to have the church cleansed and purified, a chaste virgin for Christ, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Let us aim our vision at Christ. Fixing our eyes upon him and being transformed by his person we will see as clearly as did Paul. May we learn, with faith and with patience, to follow the heavenly vision and to inspire others to do likewise. Then we shall learn, and others through us, to *"...know him and the power of his resurrection..."* (Phil. 3:10).

### **"What Seest Thou?"**

Paul's writings illustrate the degrees of spiritual sight to be expected in his brethren. -- And there are few who progress beyond the first stage! Natural men make details (rules, observances, regulations) of paramount importance. To such men a humble character and the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ is trivial.

This trait is seen in one of Jesus' miracles. The blind man who received healing at the Savior's hand (cp. Mark 8), first remarked that he saw *"men as trees walking"* (vs. 24). The man had received sight, but out of proportion. Soon, however, a second touch of the Savior's hand put all things clear. It is reasonable to suppose that had there been no second touch given this man's eyes, he would have gone his way thinking himself just like other men. But, the second touch convinced him that his previous sight had been partial. We find ourselves similarly situated. Our former sight is only recognizable when we have matured into fuller vision.

Now we can understand why Paul was so grieved by the spiritual immaturity of his contemporaries. He saw many things clearly and tried to elevate the minds of his brethren into the lengths and breadths of the love of Christ. They, however, could not yet see clearly. Paul was tested by those who were babes in Christ. They should have been ready for strong meat, but like the blind man at the first stage of his healing, they thought that they saw clearly.

The Corinthian church understood much. In his first letter, Paul opens by thanking God that they had received much grace and had been "...enriched by him, in all utterance, and all knowledge" (1 Cor. 1:5). He was encouraged that they were lacking "in no gift"(vs. 7). But later in the letter serious problems are revealed. Contentions existed among them. They argued about the merits the three ministers sent unto them: Paul, Apollos, and Peter. They disputed about ordinances, personal rights, and opinions. Logically, they reaped the natural result of such contention: they were "...puffed up for one against another" (1 Cor. 4:6). Their opinions were elevated but common decency was outraged. They fought for their opinions but failed to look through spiritual eyes to see that righteousness, purity, and godliness were the prime requirements of God's saints.

We find, then, another reason for the heavenly vision. "*The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are, and if any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy*"(1 Cor. 3:17). Jesus expresses an underlying principle in the words, "*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God*" (Matt. 5:8). Only the pure in heart do see God. Only they have spiritual vision. Could the Lord impart a heavenly vision to any other? Could he impress his revelations on an uncleansed and carnally defiled heart? --

It is possible to sit under God's deep truths, yes, even to rehearse them in our minds, without seeing the law of God which requires first a "*single eye*" (Luke 11:34) and then "*clean hands and a pure heart*" (Ps 24:4).

As an illustration we think about how careful the photographer is about his film. Too much light or too deep a shadow will ruin a picture. How much more care should be exercised by us to see that no "...roots of bitterness..." (Heb. 12:15) ruin our vision of God and his Spirit. Along this line we are reminded of faithful words: "Greater than the fault you condemn and criticize is the sin of criticism and condemnation." John Bunyan created a character to represent this visionless personality. The man with the "muckrake," his head bent earthward, never saw the crown which hung overhead. The man may have thought that by diligence he might have eventually merited a crown, but Bunyan was right in concluding that there was no more certain way to forfeit the crown than this.

What about ourselves? Are our eyes fixed on heavenly things. Do we behold a "*land that is very far off*" -- far off from all earthly standpoints? Can we echo Job's thoughts? He had heard much, but finally Job said, "*my eye seeth thee*"(Job. 42:5). Are we led to the high ground where men no longer seem larger than life. Have matters of little eternal worth vanished from our skies leaving us free to behold his face? Do we see that our task is to receive the impression of his character in ours? Have we recognized that in this day "to be purified is to have sin burned out; to be made white is to have the glory of Christ burned in -- the one as cleansing, the other as illumination and glorification"? These are the important things, for

There are voices in the air, filling men with hope and fear;  
There are signals everywhere that the end is drawing near.

*"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness" (2 Pet. 3:11)? There is no better way in which to prepare for the change we so fervently desire than to commit ourselves wholly to Christ. Let him have dominion in our lives and hearts. His influence will control our thoughts, "...bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ...." (2 Cor. 10:5) His example will direct our daily walk. His character will become our aspiration. This is the revealed object of God's predestinated purpose for his church. Let us learn to pray, ...O may no earthborn cloud arise,*

To hide Thee from Thy servant's eyes... and daily walk in the light of his face. Let us remain faithful to that heavenly vision of his love and grace. When his power has completed the work begun in us then may we be ushered into his presence to see him face to face.

- Contributed

## **Entered into Rest**

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