

Scripture Truth



Hope
Leaven
Little Things
Lessons from Ezra
The Gospel in Job
Suffering and Glory
Lessons from Isaiah ch.40 for Today

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SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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Lessons from Isaiah ch.40 for Today

Part 5. vv.27-31

Mark Davison

“[He has] given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Enjoy some of God’s precious promises in this final article on Isaiah 40.

In the previous article in this series, we saw that v.27 was addressed to a despondent people. The prophet had just told them that they were facing exile to Babylon. Little wonder, then, that they were feeling so despondent! The doubts they had had about God’s ability and willingness to help them had been answered in vv.12-26. Through Isaiah, God had showed them that He is not too great to care; rather He is too great to fail!

These last five verses of this sublime chapter hold important lessons for us today on how to approach life’s experiences, good and bad.

Verse 27

“Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God?”

The people were bewildered. How could God do this to them? The word translated here as ‘hidden’ implies an accusation that God has deliberately shut His mind to their cause. He has turned His back on them and left them to fend for themselves. In these words, they display their *wrong understanding* of God. Had He not made promises to their ancestors that He would be their God (see Exodus 6:7)? Furthermore, this is the same God who in ch.1 had charged them to “seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (v.17). How could they think that such a God would now desert them in their hour of need? No, to accuse Him of shutting His mind to them is to display a wrong understanding of Him.

Then they say that their “cause is disregarded by my God”. The force of this expression in the original is to say that their ‘case keeps being dismissed’. God is an unfair Judge, they say, and refuses to hear their plea, denying them justice. Yet, if only they had looked back over the history of their nation, they would have found so many occasions where God had defended them, even in times when they were quite undeserving of it! Had He not brought them from Egypt right across the wilderness and into a land of their own, despite their grumblings and rebellions? To accuse God of dismissing their case is to show a *wrong experience* of Him.

But can we not identify so readily with these people? When we go through a difficult period, we find that our perception of God can become distorted. So the One whom we know to be kind, gracious and always ready to hear us, now seems harsh, unforgiving and

far away. We must always guard against judging God according to how we feel. Feelings and emotions fluctuate according to many influences, and sometimes we have little control of them. In times of trial and testing, we must hold on to what we have learned about God in His word and in better times, and not rely on how we feel about Him.

Verse 28

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no-one can fathom.”

The prophet then goes on to remind them what it is exactly that they have learned about their God. He sums up all he has laid before them in vv.12-26. God is eternal; in all His ways and plans He is eternal. By contrast, the Israelites (and we ourselves) are temporal, constrained always to look at the clock or the calendar.

God is the One who created all things and, as such, is greater than all. God is universal and His vision is global, understanding and controlling what happens to all peoples in every part of the world. The Israelites, by contrast, were very much more local (and so are we, despite the modern advent of global travel and communications). They were concerned primarily with what occurred immediately around them. How, therefore, can they possibly understand what He is doing for or to them? How, too, can they think that they know better than He?

But this is just the way in which we so often think, behaving as if we know better than God! Job had to learn this bitter lesson. After his desperate trials were over, he had to admit, “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know” (Job 42:3). Going through this process will also be painful for us, but the sooner we come to that point where we trust God fully, even in the face of conflicting evidence, the more at peace will we be.

Verse 29

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.”

Now comes the real encouragement. Addressing these disconsolate people, Isaiah points them to the only source of lasting strength and true compassion. For those who are weary (fainting under life’s pressures), and for those who are weak (lacking strength within themselves to go on), Isaiah gently shows that God is One who habitually shares strength. This is not an occasional action, but is presented as the very nature of God Himself. And not only that, but He causes that strength to multiply and abound in them (the literal meaning of ‘increases’).

Whilst these assurances were being brought to the nation as a whole, at the same time they addressed the thoughts and feelings of individuals in their personal circumstances. These



God is universal and His vision is global

same words come to us today in our personal circumstances. For some, there is the habitual temptation from which it seems impossible to break free; for others, there is the discouragement which comes from living in a society which so roundly rejects God. Perhaps it is more personal, as close family and friends remain indifferent to the claims of Jesus. For others, it may be that the ‘weakness’ comes through old age, making more difficult those things which previously we did without a thought. The restrictions and resultant frustrations drag us down and the outlook seems bleak.

Take a look at the word ‘power’ (translated ‘might’ in the A.V.). The original Hebrew word is related to the word for ‘bone’, and from this we get the sense of what it is that God is promising us. He will give us the durability to stand in adverse times. He will support us when the going gets tough. He will provide the stability which we so badly need in an ever-changing world. This same thought is taken up by Paul, albeit by use of a different metaphor, when he writes, “Put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, *you may be able to stand*” (Ephesians 6:13).

Verse 30

“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall...”

It is not only the older ones today, however, who can grow weary. We are often guilty of not taking the difficulties of young people seriously, perhaps dismissing them as part of the learning curve of life. This verse speaks of those who are in the prime of life – even they can become weary and weakened.

In our modern society, young people face the fiercest pressures and temptations. There is peer pressure exerted on them to take illicit drugs. There is a permissiveness about sexual behaviour. There is also an ‘anything goes’ attitude towards religious beliefs. Experiment is the order of the day. See what suits you – ‘if you like it, it must be ok.’ All these things place young people who wish to live according to the teaching of Scripture under severe pressure. Some will faint under it. Let us ensure that our response towards them is compassionate, whilst not condoning their sin (if, indeed, sin is involved).

Verse 31

“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Finally, this glorious chapter ends with a triumphal statement of the promise of God’s presence. It is made to those who hope in (wait on) the Lord. The thought behind the word ‘hope’ includes much of which we should be aware. It is not just simply waiting for God to do something, but actively *anticipating* His intervention – expecting God to work. At the same time, it must mean that we do not try to do it by ourselves, but rather allow God to act in His own perfect timing. Problems encountered are referred to Him and His answer is awaited.



Renewal is promised to those who behave in this way. The Lord will help them to rise above the difficulties and distractions of life and to begin to see things from His viewpoint. The imagery of the eagle is used here. There are three things we can learn from the eagle.



Firstly, it has *penetrating eyesight*. God reminds Job that the eagle is able to detect its food from afar (Job 39:29) and an eastern proverb says that an eagle in Babylon can see a carcass in Palestine! Even we use the expression ‘eagle-eyed’. As we draw close to God, we are helped to see things from His perspective, to see beyond the present circumstance and to understand better the way in which He is leading us.

Secondly, the eagle is often used as a *symbol of strength*. It is described as the lion of the air – the king of the birds. The Romans used it as the symbol of their legions, and the USA has it even today. So it is that Isaiah says those who ‘renew their strength’ will ‘soar on wings like eagles’. This strength is no ordinary, natural strength, but that which can come only from

God – the ability to keep on through adverse conditions, however extreme. It might be said that such become like God Himself as He is described in v.28. This surely is the strength which has enabled many down the centuries to remain faithful through suffering, immense persecution and death for their faith. That same strength is available to us today!

Thirdly, the eagle has the ability to *soar high in the sky*. In the book of Proverbs, the eagle is described as flying ‘off to the sky’ (23:5). In figurative language, and perhaps from our point of view, we might say that it flies close to the sun. This again brings before us the thought that the one who remains close to God can rise above the circumstances and praise Him at all times. This is the position in which God places us when we seek to follow Him and keep close to His word. The Holy Spirit will reveal truth to us, guide us in the right way and give us the strength to walk that way.

In conclusion, it has been suggested that those who ‘soar’ are the young ones, full of vitality and energy; those who ‘run’ remind us of the middle-aged who, whilst no longer able to ‘soar’, still go on faithfully in God’s way; and those who ‘walk’ are the older people, now much slower through the natural results of the passing of time, but yet even they are still making progress! God’s care and help is available to all who truly seek His will and way.

How wonderful to know that God is not too great to care – rather, He is too great to fail!

*God is not too great to care –
He is too great to fail!*

Lessons from Ezra

Part 7

Ted Murray

This is the last in our series on Ezra. It still has important lessons for us today about God's attitude towards us and our response to Him.

Ezra – the man of action (ch.10)

In this last chapter of the book of Ezra, we see the reaction of the people, the sorrow and fortitude of Ezra, and the response of a leader of the people in a day when all seemed lost. What a picture is before us here! Sorrow and anguish seem to run throughout the chapter but, thanks be to God, it ends with restoration!

We, today, can take heart that, in spite of the abject failure of the remnant here, God provides the means of restoration. He has a “Man after His own heart”! If we are conscious of the sorrow we have caused Him, repenting of sin that so easily besets us (Hebrews 12:1), and are open to His instructions, we, too, can look forward to restoration. In this last chapter, as we focus on Ezra, his reactions and, in particular, his actions, we shall find many more lessons to consider.

The weeping man

In our day, we very rarely see a weeping man. Such a man, emotionally affected by what he sees, hears or comes in contact with, has a tender heart. In v.1, we have such a man. Ezra was not ashamed to display his emotion publicly before the house of God. We should ask ourselves why we are not moved to tears when we look at the failure and breakdown that surrounds us. Sad to say, we are largely unmoved and take the attitude that we just have to get on with what is left. Here the people assembled to Ezra, weeping bitterly and repenting of their sin. It is very rare to see corporate repentance but seeing Ezra bowed down weeping had that effect on the people. Behind the scenes, as Ezra was weeping and praying, the Spirit of God was working in the hearts and consciences of the people to bring about restoration. We can thank God that His desire has always been to have a people after His own heart. Here we see the beginning of this in Ezra's day.

The spokesman

In vv.2,3, we see how Shechaniah speaks for the people when he identifies himself with the people's sin. Using words which must have brought some joy to Ezra, he says, “We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives”. Shechaniah does not attempt to justify his or the people's actions. He realises that what was common practice amongst them violated the Law of God given by Moses. Today, in society in general, we also see that which was ordained of God being disregarded and, in many cases, set aside as being no longer expedient. Sad to say, we also see these trends in the assembly.

A man who was able to carry their burden

However, at the end of v.2, we are reminded of hope but, before this hope was realised, there was to be a lot of grief and sadness. There are some things in life that cannot be put right by our actions, no matter how much we try. The grief and heartache that would be experienced by the heathen wives could not be alleviated in this life. It behoves us to be very careful in our dealings with unbelievers.

Shechaniah's confident hope was based on God's mercy. We today can express our hope with that same assurance. Hebrews 6:19 reminds us that we have such a hope as an anchor for our souls. Any hope of future blessing for these people was based on the fact that evil had to be manifested and judged in the putting away of the heathen wives. The principle still applies today. When judgment is made, action must immediately follow. Only then will God's mercy and grace flow out. Shechaniah now invites the people to make a covenant with God and to acknowledge the leadership of Ezra. We can thank God for the many today who preach the Gospel, inviting men and women to repent of their sins and acknowledge Jesus as their Lord.

The dependable man

Shechaniah (whose name means 'the Lord is my neighbour') acknowledges on behalf of the people that they had found a man who was able to carry their burden (v.4). Ezra was dependable – honest, trustworthy and upright. What a picture Ezra is of our Lord! Moreover, the people express their absolute confidence that Ezra was able to fulfil the awesome task before them: "This matter is your responsibility" (v.4). They reinforce their affirmation by stating, "We also will be with you. Be of good courage, and do it" (v.4). These words must have cheered Ezra's heart. The people identified themselves with him.

Today, we are asked to identify ourselves with our dependable Man. We are asked to show forth the Lord's death, till He comes. Are we regularly at the Lord's table? Do we each take up our privilege of telling Him that we are with Him? We will not do this by staying away at home, or week after week not opening our mouths in thanksgiving. That dependable Man, the Man of God's choosing, wants to hear from us.

That remnant had this one opportunity to affirm their allegiance to Ezra. We, too, have only this short time, "till He comes", to tell the Lord that we love Him and trust Him fully. Let us remember that it was for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross, despising its shame (Hebrews 12:2). The leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swore an oath that they would carry out the task before them (v.5). Are we true to the commitment we made to the Lord Jesus to follow Him and to remember Him?

The burdened man

We now see the heavy burden that Ezra accepted on behalf of the people. Ezra takes himself out of the public spotlight and, in secret, he fasts and mourns because of the guilt

of those from the captivity (v.6). This burdened man did not make a show of the load that was placed upon him. We sing, “O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head! Our load was laid on Thee.” If Ezra suffered anguish in his day, how much more did Christ suffer for us in order to put right our wrong! We should be prepared to assist and to stand with those who are burdened about the weak and broken down testimony that exists today.

The authoritative man

Vv.7,8 show Ezra in a different light. Conditions were stated for restoration. What conditions they were! The people had three days in which to make their decision. It was either to join with Ezra and the leaders or suffer the extremely harsh consequences – their houses would be confiscated and they would be excommunicated. In other words, they would no longer be part of God’s people.

Today, God’s Man of authority speaks to this world, “I am the way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). There is no way to the blessing of knowing God as Father other than Christ’s prescribed way. Note the reaction of the people! “All the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain” (v.9). The people realised the severity of the judgment and were deeply affected by it. We need to take heed to the words, “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27), and to allow them to have their full effect in our lives and upon our testimony.

The fearless man

Ezra now stands before the people, reminding them of their sin and guilt before God and calling on them to make confession to the Lord God of their fathers (vv.10,11). Today, we can echo those words of Paul, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). Preachers of the Gospel have to be fearless in whatever day they live. In days gone by, many suffered physical hardship; today it is likely to be ridicule and indifference. We thank God for those who are fearless in the preaching of the Gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

It also takes a fearless man or woman to follow the Lord and live for Him in today’s society. Let us realise that He who is for us is greater than he who is against us (1 John 4:4). So let us go on to victory, showing our allegiance to our Lord and devotion to His will. We can take to heart the Lord’s words to Joshua prior to the crossing of the river Jordan, “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

The understanding man

Conditions were harsh. It was the rainy season, but the people affirmed “with a loud voice” (v.12) that they would carry out what had to be done to put things right. However, because of the weather and the magnitude of the task that lay ahead, the people asked for more time (vv.13,14). Then we see the understanding man coming forth. Ezra did not reject their request out of hand nor was the task put off till a more convenient season. We see here a picture of the One who understands our weaknesses and infirmities – the One

*Meet Him at the throne of mercy,
He is waiting for you there*

whose ear is ever open to our cry. The hymn writer puts it this way: “No one understands like Jesus; He is One beyond compare. Meet Him at the throne of mercy, He is waiting for you there”. Just as the remnant relied on Ezra, we can rely on our understanding Saviour!

The orderly man

The task that had to be undertaken, as already stated, was massive. All the pagan wives had to be put away. The sin was in every corner of society – priests, leaders, and the common people. Romans 3:23 reminds us that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It would have been easy to group all the people together but, in vv.16,17, we find that careful investigation was made into individual circumstances. The investigations began on the first day of the tenth month and last until the first day of the first month. Three months work! Mistakes could not afford to be made. It would have been tragic if a wife, of the seed of Israel, was unjustly put out of her house, home and family. This surely reminds us that we, in our day, have to be orderly in our dealings in assembly matters. It was not all left to Ezra – he had helpers in this onerous task (v.16). What a shock it must have been to them when Jonathan opposed the ways of God and was backed up by Meshullam and Shabbethai (see v.15, NIV, JND trans.)! Meshullam had been one of Ezra’s trusted companions (8:16). He was a man of credibility who was held in high esteem, but here we find him opposing God’s will. Only when crisis occurs do we find out the true standing of others. The lesson for us in these verses is to be like the orderly man, not to jump to conclusions, and to expect shocks.

The restoring man

The chapter ends with a list of those who had taken heathen wives. Some of these had had children by them. We should remind ourselves that God records even our tears and keeps them in a bottle (Psalm 56:8). In this ignominious list of names, there were those who held places of privilege in the society of that day. They fell from grace. However, even in this sad situation, the restoring man has the remedy. The priests are highlighted as those who gave their promise that they would put away their strange wives. An offering was made and restoration took place (v.19).

Today, we have an Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1) who can, and does, restore us when we fall. But we must first confess our sins (1 John 1:9). When we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Conclusion

The long list of names closes the record of Ezra and his God-given task to restore the remnant of Israel to be the people, chosen of God, to represent Him on earth. We can thank God that only a small proportion of the remnant is named as having gone astray. Even so, so far as the Lord is concerned, this was a serious matter.

We can see the same seeds of disaffection today. It can be termed the “my way” syndrome. We may not be looking for “strange wives” today, but we do like to have our own way. This wish, sadly, is not limited to home and work spheres; it is prevalent within the Christian fellowship and we suffer the consequences of it.

In Ezra’s day, fellowship was restored. Today, we find that, because of the “my way” syndrome, there is little or no desire for restoration. Efforts that are made are continually being thwarted. We need to remind ourselves of our place, our privileges and our responsibilities as being amongst those who also are chosen and called by God (see Ephesians 1; 2 Peter 1). This act of grace was not for our blessing only, but that we should shine as lights in this world’s darkness.

Throughout this series on Ezra, many lessons have been highlighted regarding our privileges and our responsibilities as those who seek to uphold a testimony for our Lord. As we have seen how God’s mighty hand guarded and guided the people of God in Ezra’s day, so let us rejoice that God’s hand is still there to help us today. Let us take courage from that wonderful doxology of Jude: “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.” (vv.24,25)!

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Cor Bruins has served the Lord for more than forty years, firstly in Egypt and Lebanon, and latterly in Britain, France, Germany, Holland and Switzerland. He now lives near Leeds with his wife, Audrey.

The Gospel in Job

Part 2

Yannick Ford

In this article, we are reminded not only of the age-old truths of life and death but also how these truths should be presented today.

Job's first complaint (Job 2:11-3:26)

The next section in the story of Job begins with the arrival of his three friends: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite. These three must have been deeply affected by what they saw, for they did not speak for seven days. After this, Job cursed the day of his birth. His complaint is bitter and full of anguished questions. It can be divided into three sections:

- Vv.1-10, where Job curses the day he was born because he did not die then.
- Vv.11-24, where Job speaks of the advantages of death.
- Vv. 25-26, where Job mentions his earlier fears.

We shall look at each of these in turn.

Today we have the New Testament revelation which shows us clearly what lies beyond death. Before this revelation, men and women had only very shadowy ideas about this subject. Prosperity in this life was looked on as evidence of God's blessing, but the grave and beyond was unclear territory (see, for example, Psalms 6:5; 88:11). Job himself had some knowledge of a future resurrection (Job 19:25,26). So did Martha of Bethany, when she spoke with the Lord Jesus about the death of her brother, Lazarus (John 11:23,24). Nevertheless, their knowledge was very limited. This may explain why Job would rather not have been born than go through the trouble he was now experiencing. The prophet, Jeremiah, also expressed himself in a similar fashion (Jeremiah 20:14-18).

The Lord Jesus drew back the curtain to reveal more exactly our state after death. We should seriously consider His account of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). Here two possibilities are strikingly presented – two very different destinations after the death of the body. The time to choose and fix our future destination is now. So Abraham in Paradise must solemnly inform the rich man in Hades that “between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those

Our light affliction... is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory

from there pass to us” (v.26). Through this study of Job, we shall see how we can be certain of attaining the heavenly destination, and not the place of torment.

If we are assured of heaven, we can consider Paul’s words: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17,18) and “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). These statements are very different from Job’s cursing the day he was born. Of course, it is easy to make this comment; few of us have had to suffer as Job did. Nevertheless, we know that there will be a time when all will be well, and we know that there is a purpose to our suffering. Considering the glory that is ahead of us, how could we seriously curse the day of our birth?

Job did not, however, have the benefit of New Testament revelation. In 3:11-24, he expresses how death would have been preferable to what he is now experiencing. In a sense, he expresses what we might call the popular view of death – rest from the trouble and difficulties of this life. He says, “There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they do not hear the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there, and the servant is free from his master” (3:17-19). But Jesus’ account of Lazarus and the rich man shows clearly that death is not simply a release from suffering and rest from trouble. In the case of the rich man, it was anything but that. ““There is no peace,” says the LORD, “for the wicked”” (Isaiah 48:22; see also 57:21). These thoughts put a rather different light on the idea of seeking death as a release from earthly circumstances.

In the last two verses of ch.3, Job confesses that even prior to all his troubles, he had not enjoyed complete security and confidence: “For the thing that I greatly feared has come upon me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes” (25,26). Similarly today, despite all the modern systems that we use to try to secure our future, such as insurance, pension schemes, etc., we still cannot predict every outcome in life. But if we learn anything from this book of Job, it is that we can count on God, and that all is in His control. Adverse circumstances may come along, but they do not hinder His purpose.

Eliphaz’s first speech (Job 4,5)

We now come to the main part of the book of Job. Job’s three friends speak about Job and his sufferings, and Job replies to their arguments. Eliphaz begins by accusing Job of self-righteousness (4:1-6). The thrust of his argument seems to be that Job had helped others when they were in trouble, but that now he didn’t like trouble himself. But was Eliphaz helping Job by saying this?

Eliphaz speaks mainly from his own experience. In v.8 he says, “Even as I have seen...”; in v.12 he says, “Now a word was secretly brought to me...”. Our experience can sometimes be of help but, in general, it is not a firm foundation on which to build arguments concerning important issues. Some of what Eliphaz has to say is true, and is

Do not despise the chastening of the Almighty

even quoted elsewhere in the Bible. However, the application of it to Job was not right. We see this in vv.7-11, where Eliphaz states that it is the wicked who are punished, implying that Job must have committed some crime, otherwise he would not be suffering his misfortunes. It is true that we will reap what we sow, as Eliphaz states in v.8. So Paul writes, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). Yet we know from God’s own words about Job (see chs.1,2) that Job had not committed some great wickedness. Indeed, as will be discussed later, sometimes the wicked do *appear* to succeed in their schemes – yet ultimately no one can escape God’s judgment of his life. However, suffering in this life is not necessarily a consequence of wrongdoing.

Eliphaz further states, “For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble spring from the ground” (5:6). Again, he implies that evil does not just happen – there must be a cause. But we have already seen (chs.1,2) the origin of Job’s sufferings: they were brought about by Satan as a result of his challenge to God.

Eliphaz continues his speech by exhorting Job to look to God (5:8-27). His comments, “[God] frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot carry out their plans. He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the cunning comes quickly upon them”, are quoted in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 3:19). Such words are a comfort to us, as we realise that God will not allow the wicked finally to succeed, and that their evil plans against us will, in fact, be their undoing. Proverbs 11:18 expresses a similar thought: “The wicked man does deceptive work”, i.e. a work that deceives him.

“Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty” (v.17) is another of Eliphaz’s comments that is alluded to in the New Testament (see Hebrews 12:5,6 – the words here are actually a quotation of Proverbs 3:11,12, but the thought is very similar to that expressed by Eliphaz). This comment, in fact, is a fitting summary of the whole book of Job, in that God was correcting Job for his profit, so that Job would realise his true position before God, and would not rely on his self-righteousness. God was not correcting Job, however, for some particular crime, as Eliphaz implied.

Finally, Eliphaz ends, “Behold, this we have searched out; it is true. Hear it, and know for yourself” (v.27). This sounds very much like forcing our opinions down someone else’s throat! We could paraphrase it as follows: “This is what our research on your case shows, Job; it’s quite clear, so listen to us and you will be all right.” Even if we think we are right, we always need to be careful and tactful when speaking with others. Peter gives us valuable advice in the matter of explaining the Christian Gospel: “Always be ready to give a defence

to every one who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, *with meekness and fear*” (1 Peter 3:15).

What can we conclude from Eliphaz’s first speech? Many true things were said (even some comments that have been quoted in the New Testament) but they were not said in a sensitive way, and they were not applied in the right way. Eliphaz gives us a very practical example of what to avoid when seeking to help others in trouble!

Job’s reply (Job 6,7)

In ch.6, Job replies to Eliphaz. Vv.1-7 imply that Eliphaz had not properly considered the extent of Job’s sufferings. “Can you not see what I am going through?”, he seems to ask. “A wild ass or an ox would not normally complain when they are being fed (see v.5) – it is because I am suffering so much that I am complaining so bitterly.” Job then returns to his earlier theme of desiring death (vv.8-13). He feels that he simply does not have the strength to go through.

“To him who is afflicted, kindness should be shown by his friend, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty. My brothers have dealt deceitfully like a brook, like the streams of the brooks that pass away” (vv.14,15). Job rebukes his friends for their failure to support him in his trouble. Friends should be expected to show pity to one who is suffering but, like a stream that dries up before we can quench our thirst from it, Eliphaz had not helped Job by his speech. Job complains that he had not asked them to come and try to help him (vv.22,23), and now they were reproving him for some supposed error that he must have committed (vv.24,25). “Tell me, then. What have I done to deserve this suffering?” he asks (v.24). Eliphaz’s words were true enough, but they did not apply to Job (v.25) and Job, in his bitterness of spirit, accuses Eliphaz of undermining him (v.27). A comparison of vv.28 and 21 may suggest that Job had been greatly disfigured by his illness, so that Eliphaz and his friends did not even like to look directly at him. If this was so, how much more hurtful would have been the accusing speech delivered earlier by Eliphaz!

In ch.7, we have further graphic details of Job’s sufferings (vv.1-10). In vv.11-16, Job turns from Eliphaz and his friends and instead addresses God. “Why can You not just leave me alone?” is his question. The dreams and visions that had terrified him (v.14), however, may well have been due to the devil, rather than God directly. We have already seen (chs.1,2) that it was the devil who was directly responsible for all that came to pass, and we saw the hateful speed with which he accomplished it.

It is instructive to compare vv.17,18 with Psalm 8. Job asks, “What is man, that You should magnify him, that You should set Your heart on him, that You should visit him every morning, and test him every moment?” In other words, “Why, O God, do You bother Yourself about men and women anyway – why can’t You just leave me alone?” How different this is to the expression of wonder in Psalm 8:3-5: “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made Him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honour.” Here David, the writer of this psalm, considers God’s greatness and His

wonderful condescension in caring for men and women. This passage in the Psalms is also quoted in the New Testament, where it is applied to the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 2:5-10). Here, indeed, we see the full expression of God's wonderful condescension, in that the Lord Jesus concerned Himself about us to such an extent that He was willing to come to this earth, in the limitations of a human body, and even to die for us so that we might be brought to glory rather than to judgment.

Job however, perhaps understandably, could not see this. He did not want God to look him over. In anguish and irritation, he asks God why He cannot just forgive him (v.21). This forgiveness is, in fact, what God does offer each and every one of us, but it was not such an 'easy' thing for God to do. God is love (1 John 4:8), but God is also holy – "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). God in His love does not desire that any of His creatures should perish (2 Peter 3:9), but simply to overlook our sins would deny His character of holiness.

Most people, if they were to think about what God ought to be like, would expect Him to judge the perpetrators of the atrocities and injustices that have been so frequently committed throughout this world's history. They could not imagine a God who would simply pass over these matters! Indeed, such terrible deeds will be judged (Revelation 20:11-13), but if God is to deal with these things, He must also deal with every issue of our lives. God's standard is immeasurably higher than ours, and none of us can attain it (Romans 3:23). God, in His infinite wisdom and love, has solved the problem by having Another suffer the righteous and full penalty for our sins, so that all who accept the fact that they are sinners in the eyes of God, and need forgiveness, can be forgiven, in such a way as not to compromise either His holiness or His love (Romans 5:6-10).

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Harold Primrose Barker (1869-1952) spent many years among the brethren. His written ministry is still greatly appreciated and sought after.

Hope

Ernie Bartlett

“...God our Saviour and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope”. So Paul begins his first letter to his son in the faith, Timothy. How good it is to be reminded that our Christian hope is no wishy-washy possibility but is securely centred in a Person!

Introduction

The word ‘hope’ is not explicitly mentioned in the first seven books of our Bible. What does this mean? It indicates that, in general, those under the law had no hope. On the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies with the blood of the sacrifice, the people outside waited in trepidation to see whether the offering had been accepted. Any flaw in the animal would bring instant death on the High Priest. The only way those on the outside would know that the sacrifice was accepted was by the continuing sound of the bells which were attached to the High Priest’s garments. Even between those annual offerings, there was really no hope for the worshippers, since they might subsequently sin, knowingly or unknowingly.

While ‘hope’ is not explicitly mentioned in these first seven books, it is clear that there were a few, even in these early times, who had hope. The events described in the book of Job are generally thought to have occurred in patriarchal times, as in the days of Abraham. There are a few references in this book to ‘hope’. (Apart from the book of Psalms, there are more references to ‘hope’ in the book of Job than in any other Old Testament book.) The first reference is in 4:6: “Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, *thy hope*, and the uprightness of thy ways?” These are the words of Eliphaz, seeking to convince Job that his trial came upon him because of his sin.

In Romans 4:18, Paul describes Abraham as “who against hope believed *in hope*”. These words refer to Abraham’s faith in God’s promise to him that Sarah would bear a son, even when she was past age. Abraham was strong in faith and staggered not at the promises of God.

A varied hope

In Hebrew, there are several different words which are translated as ‘hope’. “My flesh also shall rest *in hope*” (Psalm 16:9). The underlying thought here is *confidence*. This Messianic psalm gives details of the resurrection of Christ and indicates His confidence in God. “The LORD will be *the hope* of his people” (Joel 3:16). In the context here the thought is *refuge*. “*The hope* of the righteousness shall be gladness” (Proverbs 10:28). Here the thought is *expectation*.

No hope

The word ‘hope’ is not only brought before us in these positive ways, but it is also used in a negative way. Paul describes Gentiles in their pre-conversion days as “*having no hope*, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). The Jews at least had the promises of God.

They had some hope of the eventual restoration of Israel, and even of resurrection from the dead. But these promises were exclusively to Israel at this time. Sadly, today men in general have no hope: "...that ye sorrow not, even as others which have *no hope*" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). The man in the world says, "When you are dead, you are dead." They do not expect a future after death. Nevertheless, they will have to face the awfulness of future judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

Uncertain hope

Then there are those who have an *uncertain hope*. We have an instance of this in Acts 24:26. Felix *hoped* that Paul would have given him money as a bribe. Then Felix would have released Paul. But after two years, Felix was replaced as governor by Festus, without any bribe having been given! Today, men hope that they may get to heaven by their good works, but they are unable to be confident about their future state.

A certain hope

The believer's *hope is certain* because it is based on God's word. Let us briefly consider two examples of this. David had a *hope to be king*. He had been anointed by Samuel at God's command for this express purpose. But Saul would not give up his throne. He hunted David and sought to kill him. But David's certain hope to be king sustained him through many years of exile and hardship, even though there were moments of despair. "One day Saul will kill me," he confessed in a moment of unbelief.

Daniel was another whose certain hope was based on God's word. From the writings of Jeremiah, he knew that the captivity in Babylon would last for only seventy years, and he prepared himself accordingly. "I Daniel understood by books...that [the LORD] would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:2; Jeremiah 25:12).

Saved by hope

Paul reminds the Christians at Rome that "we are saved *by* (or '*in*') *hope*" (Romans 8:24). The context makes clear that that hope is nothing less than "the redemption of the body". From the moment of having first believed the Gospel, we can be confident of our ultimate salvation. So Paul can write, "And *hope maketh not ashamed* (or, '*hope does not disappoint us*'); because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5). If we tell someone that something will definitely happen today and it does not, we have to hide our faces in shame. But we can have full confidence in God's word.

A door of hope

In Joshua 7, we see that, after the tremendous victory at Jericho, God allowed Israel to be defeated by their enemies at Ai. Joshua inquired of the LORD, "Why?" God gave the

Full confidence in God's word



answer, “Israel hath sinned” (v.11). Achan was the culprit; he had taken a Babylonish garment and a wedge of gold (v.21). As a consequence, Achan and all his family were stoned to death in the valley of Achor. In this way, judgment was turned away from Israel. That is a picture, in a way, of the judgment for our sin that fell on Christ at Calvary. “He bore, that we might never bear, the Almighty’s righteous ire.” Centuries after the incident at Ai, Hosea could describe the future restoration of Israel as follows: “And I will give her...the valley of Achor for *a door of hope*” (Hosea 2:15). In a coming day, Israel’s deep trouble will be turned to her salvation. That salvation then, as ours now, is based on the work of Christ at Calvary.

Hope of resurrection

Our hope is based not only on the cross of Christ but on His resurrection also. In his trial before the High Priest, Paul reminded Ananias, “Of *the hope and resurrection of the dead* I am called in question” (Acts 23:6). Later, before Agrippa, Paul pleaded, “And now I stand and am judged for *the hope of the promise* made of God unto our Fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, *hope to come...* Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26:6-8).

In that great chapter on resurrection, Paul reminds the Corinthians, “If in this life only we have *hope in Christ*, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:19,20). That hope of resurrection enabled Paul to endure beatings, prisons, hunger, weariness, cold and nakedness (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Even today, many of our brethren are suffering for the name of Christ. That we may suffer in a smaller measure here may be due to the fact that we don’t do what our brethren in other countries do.

We need ever to remember that our hope is not here. The Thessalonians were concerned that those who had died would miss out when Christ returns. So Paul writes to reassure them, “The dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The world will not witness this occasion. We are often reminded that when Christ was raised from among the dead, the stone was rolled away, not to let Christ out, but to give His disciples assurance of His resurrection. In the same manner, sleeping saints will be raised; not a blade of grass need be disturbed. What a wonderful God we have!

A sure hope

The world’s hopes are uncertain – it may happen or it may not. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us of our sure hope: “...*which hope we have as an anchor* of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for



us entered, even Jesus” (Hebrews 6:19,20). Where there is a forerunner, it follows that there must be those who will follow on.

An unselfish hope

In 1 Thesalonians 2:19, Paul describes an unselfish hope: “For *what is our hope...*? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” Paul’s desire was not for his own blessing, but to see these dear saints in the Lord’s presence. They were trophies of His grace. He writes in a similar way to the Philippians: “Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you” (Philippians 1:23,24).

A purifying hope

In John’s first epistle, we have a purifying hope: “And every man that hath *this hope in Him purifieth himself*, even as He is pure” (3:3). This hope looks on to that time when we see Him and are like Him. We should be living for that day, watching and waiting, not in idleness but in service. The Lord praised the faithful servant who occupied himself with his master’s business during the master’s absence: “Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing” (Matthew 24:46). He then went on to describe the behaviour of the evil servant who says in his heart, “My lord delayeth his coming” (v.48). Those words led to bad behaviour and to disruption amongst the household. We need to take these words as a warning for today.

Faith, hope and love

1 Corinthians 13 is one of several scriptures where faith, hope and love occur together (v.13). Faith and hope will cease; love will go on for eternity. Then we will not need hope, for we shall see Him as He is and be with Him for ever (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Till that time, may the Lord keep us *rejoicing in hope* (Romans 12:12).

Rejoicing in hope

Little Things

Part I: Little but wise!

George Stevens

“Little is much when God is in it” is not a scriptural statement but it has the backing of Scripture. This is the first of a series on the ‘little things’ of Scripture. It is based on a talk given on London’s Premier Radio.

“There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet they go forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces” (Proverbs 30:24-28).

These little known words of an even less well-known Agur contain some important lessons for us today. The ants teach us the necessity to prepare; the conies, or rock badgers, teach us the need for protection; the locusts teach us the secret of power; and the spiders, or possibly geckoes, teach us to grasp the promises of God.



Ants – the necessity to prepare

There are about 8,000 kinds of ants found throughout the world. Many different kinds of ants are found in Israel, but the context of our passage identifies this one as the harvester, or agricultural, ant. It collects many varieties of seeds, especially those of grasses, during early summer. It often removes the husks and allows them to blow away in the wind. The resulting debris is one way in which its

colonies may be discovered. It then stores these seeds in underground galleries. Interestingly, some of the workers of the colony are fed so well that their abdomen swells to the size of a pea and they serve as barrels of liquid food that others can tap.

The ant is twice mentioned in the book of Proverbs. In 6:6-8, it is presented as a pattern of industry: “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer and gathereth her food in the harvest.” Agur presents it as a model of wisdom. Both scriptures reveal that the ant prepares in the fruitful times (summer) for the times of dearth (winter). There is here a very solemn warning to the non-Christian: “Prepare to meet thy God!” (Amos 4:12).

Prepare to meet thy God

In Acts 17:22-31, Paul was passing through Athens and found an altar inscribed, “To the unknown God”. He then spoke to the people about this God, describing Him as follows:

- The Maker of the world and all in it;
- The Lord of heaven and earth who does not dwell in humanly constructed temples;
- The Source of life who needs nothing from men but upon whom men depend for their very existence, whether they like it or not;
- The Creator who has made all people of one blood;
- The Surveyor who has measured nations’ dwellings and set their boundaries;
- The Timekeeper who has determined peoples’ seasons and times;
- The Righteous and Loving One who cannot be represented by images sculpted by men’s hands.

At the end of this description, Paul states that this God has commanded all men everywhere to repent because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained. This judge is the One whom God has raised from the dead – even His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know that all judgment has been committed to the Son (John 5:21-23). Revelation 1:12-18 presents us with a description of Christ as Judge. There His robe expresses the dignity of His office. The golden girdle about His breasts shows that the glory of God is the motive for His judgment. His white hair proclaims His wisdom, while His flaming eyes show true discernment. His feet of white-hot brass speak of the glory of divine righteousness towards mankind and His voice sounding like many waters expresses the power of His authority. His mouth wields a sharp, two-edged sword which represents the word of God, and His personal glory is seen in the metaphor of the sun shining in its strength. What an awesome picture!

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Death is the separation of man’s spirit, soul and body. The body may well return to dust in some way; the spirit goes back to God who gave it; the soul goes, in a conscious state, into the unseen world. For the unbeliever, this means the torments of Hades until the day of resurrection and final judgment.

In Jesus’ parable (Luke 16:19-31), after death the soul of the poor beggar, Lazarus, went to Abraham’s bosom – the place for the faithful Jew. The rich unbeliever was found “in torments” in Hades. Denied even a drop of water to cool his tongue, he was not allowed to pass from torments to the place of comfort. Furthermore, he was not permitted to return to his family to warn them about the torments of Hades. Instead, he was told that they would not believe even if one rose from the dead. His family had Moses and the prophets – that should be enough. These solemn words are the words of the Lord Jesus Himself who, as God, knows all things. People comfort themselves at the death of a loved one by saying, “He’s at peace now”. Sadly for the unbeliever, that is not the teaching of Scripture.

After the thousand years' reign of Christ on earth, the Son will hand everything back to God. The bodies of dead unbelievers are raised in another form and reunited with their souls. They all stand before the Great White Throne where they are righteously judged and then cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, otherwise Hell – a place of separation, torment and ruin. That same destiny faces the devil and the angels who have rebelled against God.

So the first action in preparing to meet God is one of repentance. This is a complete change of mind. It requires a judgment of your own sinful life which is in rebellion against God, so making you a child of the devil. Repentance is the result of God's word acting upon you in the power of His Spirit, who convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11).

In John 3:1-8, Jesus describes how a man is born again by the convicting application of the word of God (water) in the power of the Spirit to that man's heart. Those who are born again are directed to Christ by that same Spirit (John 1:10-13). They are not born of human descent, or by human design, or by human desire. They are born of the Spirit, according to the nature of God and by the will of God. As such, they are no longer children of the devil but are children of God.

Conies – the need for protection

The coney is about the size of a rabbit. It has a round head, short round ears and a very short tail. It has fine, soft, tawny fur with a single pale spot in the middle of its back. The four toes on each of its forefeet have tiny hooves – as do the three toes of each hind foot. It lives in holes between rocks. Sentries are on guard when a group of conies feeds. One shriek from these sends them all racing to the rocks for refuge. So the sinner, wishing to be sheltered from the judgment of God must run, not to the rocks, but to the Rock of God's providing.

This is also what John 1:10-13 emphasises. We must *receive* the Lord Jesus Christ. Some may ask, "What does this mean?" Scripture explains itself – by *believing* in His name. That is to say, you are to put your full trust in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you.

But you may ask, "Why must it be through Christ?" In turn, it may be asked of you, "In what way other than the death of Christ has God dealt with the question of man's sinfulness?" Albert Midlane put it this way,

The perfect righteousness of God
Is witnessed in the Saviour's blood.
'Tis in the cross of Christ we trace
His righteousness, yet wondrous grace.
God could not pass the sinner by.
His sin demands that he must die;
But in the cross of Christ we see
How God can save, yet righteous be.

We must remember that God, in His nature, is both love and light (1 John 1:5; 4:8). This means that He is gracious, but also that He is holy. He is of purer eyes than to behold evil (Habakkuk 1:13). If God is to forgive sin, then it must be on a righteous basis. The death of the Just One for the unjust is the righteous ground upon which God is able to forgive: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). In this verse, we see first the sinless Christ as the sin offering – answering to the claims of God upon mankind. He is the One who took God’s judgment against sin. Secondly, we see Him as our Substitute – the One who took God’s judgment on our behalf. So Midlane’s hymn continues,

The judgment fell on Jesus’ head,
’Twas in His blood sin’s debt was paid;
Stern justice can demand no more,
And mercy can dispense her store.

Finally, we see Him as the One who has reconciled us to God. That is, whereas we were enemies of God, He is now able to make us God’s allies. This is indicated in the last verse of Midlane’s hymn:

The sinner who believes is free,
Can say, “The Saviour died for me;”
Can point to the atoning blood
And say, “This made my peace with God.”

Just as the conies run to the rocks at the first sign of danger, so the sinner must run to the Rock of Ages, the Lord Jesus Christ, if she or he wants to be safe from God’s judgment. Augustus Toplady knew this truth and was inspired to write those precious words:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.
Let the water and the blood
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure –
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Locusts – the secret of power

The Hebrew word for ‘locust’ is ‘arbeh’ which, in turn, comes from a root word meaning ‘to multiply’. In the plague which came upon Egypt in Moses’ day, the locusts covered the earth so that the ground could not be seen. So they stripped the land of all its vegetation (Exodus 10:1-15).

It is the fact that they have no king, yet they move about in bands, that Agur commends as wise. It reminds us today that our Lord has ascended to heaven. There He sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Yet His church remains on earth as a living witness to Him. Everyone who has confessed Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, is a member of that church. Its secret power lies in the fact that its members band together.

The inherent unity of the church is seen in names by which it is described in Scripture. It is: the flock of Christ, the body of Christ, the house of God, the bride of Christ, the

Not to forsake the gathering of ourselves together

assembly of called-out ones. Every member is cemented into this mighty assembly by the Holy Spirit – a bond which cannot be broken. This must be remembered in a day when the responsible Christian churches have compromised the truth of Scripture and, thus, have failed in their responsibility to God. As a consequence, we have the many denominations of Christendom – a name given to a system formed by all those who profess the name of Christ but, sadly, including many who do not truly know Him as Lord and Saviour.

Sometimes we hear people say, “You don’t have to go to church to be a Christian.” This is true but you cannot be a *faithful* Christian unless you do assemble with fellow believers. God commands us not to forsake the gathering of ourselves together, especially as the coming of the Lord draws closer (Hebrews 10:25). If you are a nomadic Christian, flitting from one church to another, then you will be unable to exercise effectively the gifts that God has given you.



Spider – the promises of God

The Hebrew word for spider, *semamith*, may actually refer to the gecko, a lizard which is able to cling on to surfaces even when inverted. Whichever is actually referred to, we can see that it is able to grasp hold and is found in kings’ palaces. 2 Peter 1:4 speaks of the “exceeding great and precious promises” of God. We need to grasp hold of these so that, as partakers of the divine nature, we may

live godly lives. We have the promise of an inheritance reserved in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:4). It is an inheritance that will never be corrupted, will never fade away! It will be an eternal joy. But there’s more! We have the promise of a new body, one like the glorious body of the Lord Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15 describes this as a glorious body, a spiritual body, a heavenly body, an incorruptible body, a powerful body and an immortal body. We have also the promise of the Lord Jesus Himself, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2,3).

The Son of God went to the cross, into the grave, rose again and ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us in that marvellous realm above – in the Father’s house where love, light, life, peace, praise and joy will always reign. Let us hold fast to the promises of God and we will be found in the palace of the Eternal King for evermore!

Leaven

Arthur Hodgett

The errors which, sadly, crept into the early Christian church provided the opportunity for written apostolic ministry to deal with these situations. This was valuable not only to address the problems of that day but also for us in our day. This serious, but vital, study is by a new contributor to Scripture Truth.

“A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” That this statement occurs twice in Scripture (1 Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9) is an indication of its importance. The statement is true:

- Potentially – at the time of Paul’s writing, the Corinthians had not recognised the seriousness of tolerating immorality.
- In its working – Jezebel was an accepted teacher in the church at Thyatira, although a few in the church at Sardis had not defiled their garments (Revelation 2:20,21; 3:3,4).
- In its finality – Galatia had imbibed the error from false teachers.

As individuals, these scriptures warn us that the allowance of something not according to God in our lives will gradually take over our lives, not to our detriment only, but also to the detriment of those believers with whom we meet. Whilst this effect is true of anything not according to God, Scripture explicitly mentions several different types of leaven of which we need to be aware: the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees - hypocrisy (Matthew 16:6); immorality (1 Corinthians 5); false doctrine (Galatians 5:9); malice and wickedness (1 Corinthians 5:8); the leaven of...Herod – worldliness (Mark 8:15).

In corporate action, a local assembly is responsible before God for what it allows in its midst. The assembly at Corinth was told to purge out the old leaven that they might be a new lump (1 Corinthians 5:7). We are not told to purge out the little leaven as a corporate action; this would be impossible (a little hypocrisy, malice etc. are often noted in individuals in a company). We are told to repent, that is, to judge the evil (fire was the only thing which arrested the work of leaven (yeast) and fire, in Scripture, is always a picture of judgment). The little leaven is a danger we come across all the time we are occupied with anything other than our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul places before the Corinthians what they are in Christ, “as ye are unleavened”, to raise them to the Lord’s standard by attraction to Him. Elsewhere, Paul writes, “Ye are light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8). Corporate recovery comes about by individuals correcting, or judging, themselves under the hand of God. At Galatia, that hand of God was the letter from the apostle Paul; the method used in Revelation chs.2 and 3 is not given, but the fact is that He gave them space to repent.

‘Old leaven’ is in contrast to ‘new lump’. To understand the analogy the apostle is using, we need to consider the preparations for the Passover and the Feast of unleavened bread. The children of Israel were told to remove completely all traces of leaven from their

dwellings (Exodus 12:15). (N.B. It is likely that this commandment was only observed subsequent to their leaving Egypt. The urgency with which they left Egypt was such that they ate unleavened bread on that occasion simply because there was not time for the normal leavening process to take place.) The punishment for having leaven in their houses was death.

The concept of old leaven was that a piece of yesterday's leavened dough was kept to start the process in today's dough. (In the Congo, DRC, for example, the Africans call this piece of dough "mama na manga", mother of bread. It breeds more leaven.) So each day, a piece of dough was kept to make tomorrow's bread.

The Corinthians were told to purge out the old leaven, i.e. that which related to their old life. This involved the putting away from their midst of the one who was immoral (1 Corinthians 5:3-5). Such immorality was unacceptable even to the Gentiles and was totally unsuited to those who had professed Christianity. In fact, it was so serious that recovery was not to be attempted, but the man was to be put outside, like the leper of old, and left with God to deal with him. (Happily, in the mercies of God, recovery did take place (2 Corinthians 2:5-8)).

Leprosy, an Old Testament picture of that which was to be put away from among God's people, could only be cleansed, or healed, by God. So the king of Israel in Elisha's day could say to Naaman, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive?" (2 Kings 5:7). He realised that only God could give leprosy and only God could cure leprosy. Indeed, every time in Scripture where leprosy is distinctly given, it is from God Himself or one of His prophets (Exodus 4:6; Leviticus 14:34; 2 Chronicles 26:19,20; 2 Kings 5:27). As a proof of His deity, the Lord said to tell John, "The lepers are cleansed" (Matthew 11:5).

So the one who was excommunicated was left alone with God; recovery is finally left with God. Prior to excommunication, those who are spiritual try to recover the one taken in a fault. Where error was held, Paul would always use teaching to combat the error. It is noteworthy that in Galatia, where serious error had been imbibed – the truth of the Gospel was at stake – the apostle uses those wonderful words, "Ye which are spiritual, restore such an one" (Galatians 6:1).

Many problems might have been avoided if we had taken this divine course of action. The practical truth of the one body demands such care. The one taken in a fault would be laboured with so that they might be recovered. Naturally speaking, we would avoid amputation of any of our limbs until it was a last resort; we would try every other available remedy before we would consent to amputation! So in the body of Christ, where each member belongs and is precious, the love which binds us together demands no less care. If a person is excommunicated, however, *all* contact ceases. We have to wait until it is obvious that the work of the Lord is completed in their soul.

Restore such an one

It would appear that the Corinthians failed to look for such recovery – hence the appeal of the apostle in his second letter. When one in *serious* error has been laboured with unsuccessfully, it is imperative that he or she be put away so that the holiness of God be practically maintained in the Christian company. However, we should be looking for evidence of recovery in the one put away. Discipline, other than the removal by death, must have recovery in mind.

After the Feast of unleavened bread, the Israelites would start with a new lump of dough, completely clear of leaven. It was new in the sense of fresh – new as to time; ‘neos’ (new as to time rather than new as to character is used of the new lump in 1 Corinthians 5:7). Leaven was, however, gradually introduced so that each year they had to go through the process of purging their dwellings of leaven.

The Christian life, by contrast, is always the week of unleavened bread, as it were. Seven days would speak to us of the complete life. We should not allow in our lives any evil of which leaven is the picture. “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Corinthians 5:6); our lives will suffer if we allow leaven in them.

Corporate action i.e. excommunication is, however, only appropriate for serious moral or other wrongs. It is to be used only when the one so involved cannot be recovered but has to be outside of practical fellowship while the Lord deals with the one who has strayed so seriously. Outside of practical fellowship is a terrible place to be. Those who are only able to enjoy a little fellowship seek it at any opportunity. Indeed, Scripture specifically commands us not to forsake “the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25). The leper of old would feel the cold of the place outside the camp; they would lack the warmth of human fellowship with their loved ones. Such is the place of the one put away. Divine wisdom is here designed to bring about repentance and recovery because the one put away is still precious to the Lord.

In Scripture, we have details as to this rare but important matter. Like many biblical doctrines, human reasoning and expediency sometimes changes the divine to that which we deem more suited to our needs. We define put away as a denial of the Lord’s supper or, if felt more serious, we do not join with them in the Lord’s work, but rarely do we see Scripture applied in a divinely approved manner. At the same time, if we recognised the seriousness of putting away from God’s side, we would be extremely careful before embarking on such action.

In conclusion, we are responsible as individuals for what we allow in our lives. The little leaven, if unjudged, will eventually affect the spiritual condition of the brethren with whom we meet. Corporately, we are jointly responsible for judging and putting away old leaven, that which is not fitted for the company to be associated with as a people ‘holy unto the Lord’.

Holy unto the Lord

Suffering and Glory

Donald Hill

In a day when there is a danger of Christianity being presented as entertainment, this article is an important reminder that the Lord Jesus challenges us to take up the cross and follow Him. Yet the promise of God remains true, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

Suffering followed by glory is a recurring theme found in both the Old and New Testaments. The line from the hymn, "We bear the cross and seek the crown", is a clear indication that cross bearing must precede crown wearing.

Joseph



Joseph is a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus. His life story is recorded for us in the book of Genesis. Hated by his brothers, he was sold as a slave into Egypt. Here he was falsely accused when serving as a slave in Potiphar's household and was imprisoned. His exaltation followed when he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. He was made Lord of Egypt with the decree from Pharaoh, "Bow the knee to Joseph". When his brothers visited Egypt to buy corn during the seven years of famine (as indicated in Pharaoh's dreams), Joseph said to them, "Ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt" (Genesis 45:13). Glory followed suffering.

David

David is another beautiful Old Testament picture of the Lord Jesus.

Following David's defeat of Goliath the giant in the Valley of Elah, the womenfolk proclaimed, "Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7). This made King Saul jealous and for many years he sought, along with his army, to capture David, hunting for him in the woods, in the wilderness, and in the mountains, caves and rocks. David even spent time in Philistine country, hiding from Saul. When Saul died fighting the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, David was proclaimed king. He then went on to defeat all Israel's enemies. For David, like Joseph, glory followed suffering.



The Lord Jesus

On many occasions, the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples about His forthcoming sufferings. "And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be

Resurrection and glory would follow!

rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). He made similar statements in Mark 9:31; 10:33,34,45. His words to Nicodemus were, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14).

When the Lord Jesus met with His disciples in order to celebrate the Feast of the Passover, He said to them, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). The Lord Jesus was the true Passover lamb about to die for the sin of the world (1 Corinthians 5:7). For Him, the sufferings of the cross at the hands of men and also of a holy, sin-hating God were inevitable. But resurrection and glory would follow!

In resurrection, the Lord Jesus said to His two disconsolate followers on the Emmaus road, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). And so, forty days after His resurrection, the Lord Jesus returned to heaven from the Mount of Olives. Stephen bore witness to this fact as he made his defence before the Sanhedrin, “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). Faith today can say, “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour” (Hebrews 2:9).

Following His statement in Mark 8:31 about His forthcoming rejection and suffering, the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples about the cost of following Him and bearing His cross. For His true followers also, suffering would precede glory. That pattern has not changed today!

Paul

Following the incident on the road to Damascus when Saul of Tarsus was blinded by the light from heaven, and heard the Lord speaking to him, Ananias was instructed by the Lord to visit Saul in Straight Street. The Lord also told Ananias about Saul, “I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). Some of Paul’s sufferings are outlined for us in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33. Paul certainly suffered for the name of the Lord Jesus. At Philippi, he was publicly flogged along with Silas, his companion. They were then imprisoned though miraculously delivered by an earthquake sent by God (see Acts 16). Later on, Paul was imprisoned in Rome on two occasions before his execution. Yet he could still write about these same sufferings, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Paul could look beyond the suffering to the glory!

The glory of the coming kingdom

James was executed by Herod for the name of Christ. About the same time, Peter was imprisoned by King Herod with a view to execution. However, God sent a delivering angel (see Acts 12). John was banished to the Isle of Patmos and it was here that he wrote the book of the Revelation. It was after Peter's confession, "Thou art the Christ" (Mark 8:29) and its enlargement, "The Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), that the Lord Jesus not only warned His followers about His own rejection and suffering, but began to speak to them about taking up His cross. If the Lord Jesus was to suffer, so also would His disciples.

Then in Mark 9, we have a picture in miniature of the coming kingdom and glory – the suffering would be followed by glory. Peter, James and John are singled out by the Lord Jesus perhaps because of their forthcoming sufferings. He takes them to a mountain top, away from the world at large and from the rest of His disciples. He is transfigured before them. "His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow" (Mark 9:3). "His face did shine as the sun" (Matthew 17:2). Moses and Elijah appeared on the scene and spoke with the Lord about His coming death at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31).

So the three disciples were given a glimpse of that coming day of glory. Moses is representative of every believer who has died (asleep in Jesus) and will be raised and taken to glory. Elijah, who was taken to heaven without dying, is representative of all those believers who will be alive on earth when the Lord Jesus returns to take His Church out of this world and home to the Father's house (see John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). This is the heavenly side of the coming day of kingdom glory.

Peter, James and John represent the earthly side of that coming day of kingdom glory. Those on earth will be blessed under the righteous reign of the Lord Jesus as Son of Man. This will be the day of the Lord's supremacy. The Church, the bride of Christ, will be with Him, blessed in heaven along with Old Testament saints, friends of the bridegroom. Those who are on earth will be blessed during the 1,000 year reign of the Lord Jesus.

Peter, James and John had a glimpse of this coming day and, as a result, said, "It is good for us to be here" (Matthew 17:4). Peter never forgot that experience. As an old man, he could write, "We...were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:16-19).

It will be good for us, too, when we are with Him there in glory. In the meanwhile, may that hope of being with Him encourage us to go on following Him, whatever the cost. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him

We Rejoice

We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Hebrews 2:9

Lord, we rejoice that Thou art gone
To sit upon Thy Father's throne;
Thy path of shame and suffering o'er,
Thy heart shall grieve and mourn no more.

We love to look within the tomb,
Robbed by Thy death of all its gloom,
The stone forever rolled away;
Thy death the power of death did slay.

We joy to see Thee, Lord, arise
Triumphant through the opening skies;
And hear all heaven united own
Thee worthy to ascend the throne.

Lord, now we wait for Thee to come
And take us to Thy Father's home.
What everlasting joy 'twill be
To spend eternity with Thee!

J.G.Deck

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself.

John 14:3