

Scripture Truth



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One Lord's Day...
John three sixteen

God's Rest and Ours
A tale of two tricksters
Jesus at God's right hand

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Editor: Theo Balderston

Editor's e-mail: editor@scripturetruth.org.uk

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SCRIPTURE TRUTH Publications

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Tel: 01270 252274

While it is day...

Recent tracting experience on the high streets of two local towns showed that, whilst (a) footfall is much lighter than before the epidemic, (b) take-up of tracts has been significantly brisker. Both my fellow-distributor and I have noticed this.

Maybe the epidemic has unsettled previously comfortable expectations of the future. Or maybe personal expectations are being darkened by the “big-brotherish” overtones of the policies announced (no doubt necessarily) for combatting the impending climate crisis. For it is consumer liberties that make the world go round in the eyes of the modern person-in-the-street.

Or the reason for higher take-up may be something quite different. Whatever the reason, people are currently putting their hands out to receive gospel tracts. Once they have glanced at these tracts, most of them may reject what they have read – but they will have been confronted with the gospel. We can pray that other recipients will be arrested by our tracts.

“Therefore, since we have received this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart” (2 Corinthians 4:1). The current readiness to receive gospel tracts may not last. By the time (God willing) this issue of *Scripture Truth* is in your hands, it may have slumped again.

Tract distribution, in itself, is rather a mechanical process. The hard part is the constant “preparedness [to declare] the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15). But you may prefer a better method of witnessing.

And many readers may no longer have the bodily fitness for gospel work. Then you can ardently pray for all gospel outreach that truly exalts the Saviour and His cross.

And the devil seeks to cripple most of us by reminding us how much we have failed and do fail regarding gospel witness. We need to remember Peter and John Mark. What the Lord has done twice, He can do again.

T. BALDERSTON

Jesus at God's right hand:

What does it mean for me?

David Hughes

Based on a talk broadcast on the truthfortoday.org.uk radio programme in July 2016.

“Why does it matter that Jesus is alive and in heaven?” Is this all just theological fancy or does it really matter to me? What’s the significance of the resurrection, of the fact that Jesus is alive, and – to come to the subject of this article – of the fact that He is at the right hand of God?

This article tries to answer this last question out of a wonderful passage of the New Testament – Hebrews 1:1-4.

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” [NKJV]

So many things we “rely” on today are insecure, even things that we think *are* sure:- banks, pension schemes, but also health, and the health of family members and friends. Things we once thought so certain can suddenly become insecure and changing.

But Jesus is not like that. Our future is secure because it is based on “Jesus, the Son of God” who has sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. When we think about the Lord Jesus, alive again and having sat down in heaven, we can realise how glorious He is, and be filled with admiration for our great Saviour.

The first two verses of our passage are a gentle rebuke to us if we’ve ever found ourselves asking why God *isn’t* speaking to us. They remind us of the fact that God *has* spoken. Actually, He has spoken at lots of times and in lots of ways (1:1). But, most particularly, He has spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:2). From this we realise that God isn’t distant from us, or remote and unwilling to communicate with us, but has spoken to us through a remarkable Person, the Lord Jesus, no less than His own Son, who is now seated at His right hand. This remarkable fact is worth our attentive consideration.

*God speaks clearly to us
as regards everything I need to know –
by Jesus, His Son, who is now at His right hand*

I want us to notice first something simple about it. I don't need to wake up after every dream and try to see if I can figure out whether God was speaking to me in it! I don't need to try to interpret circumstances in life to see if God has some secret message for me. Instead I can be confident that God speaks clearly to us as regards everything I need to know – by Jesus, His Son, who is now at His right hand. By listening more to what God has revealed to us in Jesus, by who He is, what He has said, and what He has done – both in His own specific words in the Gospels and in the explanations of His actions in the epistles – I can learn what God has to say to me!

Yet a question may lurk: given that God spoke [in the Old Testament] to the fathers through the prophets, why does it matter so much that God spoke to us through His Son? Why does that make any difference for you when you go about your business today?

Verses two and three answer this question, as we shall see. I'm told that the way the text between the word "Son" in verse 2 and the end of verse 3 is constructed emphasises that the words, "*His Son ... sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high*" are the main "message" of these two verses. All the other clauses state reasons *why* Jesus could sit down at God's right hand – why He is worthy to do it.

What are these "reasons"? Because He

- is the heir of all things;
- made the worlds;
- displays God's glory (or His excellence);
- is the image of God, showing us what God is like;
- upholds all things by His power; and
- purged our sins.

Surely we get a sense from this verse of how uniquely great Jesus is! No one else could be substituted into this verse, and it still be true. Only Jesus could be described in this way. Thinking about Jesus at God's right hand in heaven can't

help but remind us of the fact that He deserves to be there. If we think about that, we realise how different to us He is. Truly, God has spoken to us in a remarkable way. So we could read Hebrews 1, verses 2 & 3 as saying that

- “Jesus, the appointed heir of all things, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high”; and
- “Jesus, through whom God made the worlds, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high”; and
- “Jesus, being the brightness of [God's] glory, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high”; and
- “Jesus, the express image of His person, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high”; and
- “the Upholder of all things by the word of His power sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high,” and
- “Jesus, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.”

When we see verses like this we're suddenly aware that we're not being spoken to by a prophet or a preacher or by a dream, but by Someone who is able to sit at God's right hand! We need to take note of that. It's important to us today because it leaves us in no doubt that God Himself has something to say to you and to me!

Why, then, is Jesus worthy to sit at God's right hand in heaven in such a glorious position?

Let's look at the clauses just listed, plus one more.

Why is the first of these – “*Appointed heir of all things*” – so important? It's because it reminds us that the One who is speaking to us has the power to do something for us. Jesus is the heir of all things. One day He will inherit everything. You or I might be heirs of our parents' estate and that may or may not be worth very much. But Jesus is heir of all things. He will inherit everything. It is rightfully His. I want you to realise how significant this is. If I were to stand and say to you, “God has in these last days spoken to you through David Hughes” and I said, “If you believe in me I can forgive your sins and make you right with God,” it would be meaningless. Why? Because I can't do

Jesus: the appointed heir of all things

Jesus: through whom God made the worlds

anything to help you. I have no authority! But Jesus does, because He is the heir of all things. All things belong to Him. So when Jesus speaks to us and offers forgiveness of sins and a new relationship with God, He can do so with authority. The Person who is speaking to us has authority. As you think about Jesus, sat down in heaven, be encouraged that your salvation depends on someone who has authority to forgive sins.

The second clause says “*through whom also He made the worlds*” (Hebrews 1:2). This reminds us not only of the authority but also of the power Jesus has. I couldn't make the world, so I would have no power to put right its wrongs. But Jesus does! He made the worlds. This reminds us that our Saviour not only has the right or authority to reveal God's plans to us by speaking to us, He also has the power to bring them about. He is the one who made the worlds, such is His great power. We can trust, then, that He is able to bring about our salvation. As we think about Jesus in heaven, be encouraged to think that our Saviour is mighty and powerful.

Jesus is then described as “*the brightness of God's glory*” (Hebrews 1:3). He is inseparable from God. Just like the rays of the sun are indistinguishable from the sun itself, Jesus is the shining-out of God's glory and the demonstration of His greatness. So when we learn that God is speaking through His Son, the brightness of God's glory, we are really learning that God Himself is speaking to us. No longer a prophet or a preacher, but God Himself. Think about that! God speaks directly to us through Jesus!

Jesus is also “*the express image of His person*” (Hebrews 1:3). If you ever find yourself asking, “If there is a God, why doesn't He show Himself to us?” – the answer is, “He has”. God has shown us exactly what He is like. We only have to look at Jesus. So if you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus, God's exact image. And if you want to know what God thinks about sin, look at Jesus.

Jesus: the brightness of God's glory

Jesus: the express image of God's person

You'll see someone who never takes sin lightly, and ultimately gave His own life to take the judgement for our sin. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. You'll see that Jesus was filled with compassion, and so learn that God is compassionate. You'll see that Jesus showed love, and so learn that God is loving. You'll see that Jesus was powerful and performed miracles, and so learn that God is powerful and mighty. I could go on, but I want you to be clear that we are being spoken to by someone special – God Himself! Will you listen to what He has to say?

The next clause says “*upholding all things by the word of His power*” (Hebrews 1:3). This is another important characteristic of God's Son. He upholds even the air you breathe. The world is only the way it is because Jesus controls it. He sustains it. Maybe you think that you woke up this morning because it was something you felt like doing. In a sense that's true, but this little phrase is a striking reminder that the One who is speaking to us upholds our lives. We're only alive at this point because He has kept us. You might not realise that. It's easy not to. But the truth is Jesus upholds our lives. It's worth listening to what He has to say.

Another wonderful reason why Jesus is worthy to sit at God's right hand is in the next clause. Look at it again: “*when He had by Himself purged our sins*” (Hebrews 1:3). “Purged” is an old word that means to clean deeply, or to rid of whatever is impure. If you had a T-shirt with a big mud stain on it, you might purge it by washing it in hot soapy water. The writer wants us to see that although our sins are like impurities that stain us and tarnish us, Jesus has deeply cleansed us and made us pure.

Jesus: upholding all things by the word of His power

Jesus: by Himself purged our sins

The One who speaks to us is the same One who has purged, or made clean, this stain of sin, and can make us right with God. We are not being spoken to by someone who is just a prophet and could do nothing about our sin. Instead we are being spoken to by the Son of God who gave Himself to take away our sin and purge away its defiling stain, to make us clean and suitable for God's presence.

Have you ever realised that? Have you ever realised that God wants to speak to you and say, "I've made provision for the cleansing of your sin. I've made a way for you to be forgiven. I've made a way to put right what you have done wrong. I've made a way to make you new and clean"? That way was through the death of God's Son. So when I tell you that God wants to speak to us today, it's not by someone who is indifferent to our condition and situation. It's by someone who cares so much for us that He would give Himself in our place to make us right with God. Surely that's worth listening to?

I wondered for a while about why the writer describes God's dealing with our sin as a *purging*. Perhaps he uses this picture of sin to remind his readers of a promise in Isaiah 1:18, that the readers would have been familiar with then. There, God says to the people, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." I wonder if the believing Israelites ever pondered how that could truly be so? The writer to the Hebrews seems to almost say here, "Well, this is how it can be. Your sins can be purged. They can be made white as snow. By Jesus."

If it comes into your mind this week that Jesus is alive in heaven, pause for a moment. Don't let the thought pass you by without reminding yourself that the fact He is in heaven tells you He has purged your sin.

I suspect we all have actions that we regret, some perhaps deeply. There are lots of things that we would do differently if we had our time again. That's not necessarily bad, as it's good to be aware of our sinfulness and failings. But the reminder in this passage of Hebrews is that Jesus has purged our sins. If you're a believer you've been thoroughly cleansed. That means we don't need to live with the shame of past actions, because God sees us as made new. What a

remarkable act of grace and kindness to us on God's part! As you think of Jesus in heaven, remember with thankfulness that Jesus has purged your sins.

There is one final clause in Hebrews 1:4, which could be paraphrased as, "*Jesus is better than the angels and has a better name than they do.*" So there are seven "reasons" in all why Jesus is stated to be worthy to sit down at God's right hand. Once again, we're reminded that we are being spoken to by someone very special. No prophet has ever given his life for the whole world! Not even any angel has. But Jesus, the Son of God has, and is the one speaking to us today. So, then, how do we respond to the things we've considered together in this article? How will it change us this week? Do they just amount to an interesting fact? Let's read Hebrews 2:1-3:

"We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him." (NIV)

Did you see what the writer says? Pay even more attention. "*Give the more earnest heed...*" (Hebrews 2:1, NKJV). Since God has spoken to us through such a remarkable Person, make even more effort to listen. The words through prophets and angels were important; how much more the words of God Himself? Consequently, how much more serious the result of ignoring God's word. "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? It was spoken to us by the Lord Himself.*" Let's pay attention to what He says.

As we conclude this article, let's return to the question, "Why does it matter that Jesus is alive and in heaven?" I hope we've seen that this is a crucial truth in the Bible. Jesus alive in heaven reminds me that my sin has been purged. Is that something you can say with confidence? This truth helps us in a daily fight against guilt and shame. I've been cleansed and made new because Jesus has died in my place. What encouragement as we go about our lives! No need for gnawing, crippling guilt. Jesus has purged my sin. If nothing else, let that be an encouragement to you today.

*Jesus: better than the angels
and has a better name than they do.*

A tale of two tricksters

F.B.Hole

An alternative title for this lively and insightful survey of Genesis 28 -31 could be, “The perils of backsliding.” This series commenced in July 2017.

Jacob and his mother cheated Esau, Jacob’s brother, out of their father’s blessing, and Esau’s understandable wrath had forced Jacob to flee from Canaan (see Genesis 27). Nevertheless, Jacob’s flight to Haran was consistent with God’s direction regarding the marriage-partners of Abraham’s descendants (28:2-5). Therefore, as Jacob made his way north through the promised land towards Haran, God encouraged him by a dream. In it Jacob saw a ladder from earth to heaven (28:12-15). At the time of Babel men had sought to elevate themselves to heaven by a tower of their own construction, and it ended in scattering and confusion (Genesis 11). But here, as indicated by the ladder of Jacob’s dream, God established a link between heaven and earth that the angels traversed. The LORD (i.e., Jehovah) Himself stood at the top of the ladder, while Jacob, the poor fugitive at the bottom, needed a blessing, and got it.

Three things stand out clearly in what the LORD said to Jacob on this occasion (28:13-15). First, that the land that Jacob was running away from would indeed be the possession in time to come of his descendants – a “seed” which was to be greatly multiplied and spread out in all directions. Second, there was the promise of blessing for all the families of the earth in him and his seed. Third, there was the promise of the divine presence and preservation in all his wanderings, and of his ultimate return to the land. He would have some bitter experiences under God’s governmental hand, but God’s purpose would stand.

Verses 16-22 show us how Jacob responded to the dream. In the first place, it awoke him to the realization of the presence of God. That we may be in the presence of God and yet quite unaware of it, is a solemn thought. To Jacob it was not merely solemn; it was *frightening* (28:17). But that was because he had no assured standing before God on the ground of redemption. Only when the death and resurrection of Christ were accomplished facts could believers say, “We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, having received the reconciliation”

(Romans 5:11, KJV margin). For us the presence of God is not dreadful but delightful.

Then again, Jacob recognized that where Jehovah manifests His presence, that is where the house of God is. For he named the place “Bethel” meaning “house of God” (Genesis 28:19). Right through the Scriptures runs the thought of the house of God in its various forms and aspects, but here is the first mention of it. It is remarkable, moreover, that Jacob connected “the gate of heaven” with “the house of God.” The first mention of a gate is in Genesis 19:1, where Lot sat in the gate of Sodom. Here “the gate” signified the place of wisdom and execution of judgment. And therefore “the gate of heaven” also means that where God dwells in His house, that is the place of Heaven’s administration and judgment.

Jacob took one of the stones that had served him for a pillow, anointed it, and so identified it with God’s house. In ancient times pillars were used for support, as we see in Solomon’s temple. But they were also set up as witnesses to certain facts. Three times do we read of Jacob rearing pillars; here and in chapters 31 and 35, each time as a witness.

It is in this sense, we believe, that the word “pillar” is used in 1 Timothy 3:15. The church of the living God is the house of God and the pillar and ground, or basis, of the truth. “The church of the living God” is being built by “the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16: 16-18), and it is at the present time the standing witness to the truth, in the power of the Spirit of God. It is worthy of note that in our chapter Jacob poured oil upon the pillar, which we may take as a figure of the anointing of the Spirit of God.

But, though Jacob did all this, the ground that he took in his vow was about as selfish as ever to be found in a true saint of God. It came to this: if God will be with me, and look after me, and do for me what I desire, then He shall be my God, and I will yield to Him a tenth of all that He gives me. A bargain such as this is barely above the level of a decent man of the world. Yet God bore with him and evidently accepted his feeble vow, and did for him all that he wished – and more also.

In chapter 29, we find Jacob resuming his journey; and the merciful hand of God directing him and opening up his way is at once

manifested. Jacob's steps are guided to the very well where the sheep of Laban, his uncle, were watered, and there he met his cousin Rachel. Into the house of Laban he was received with an effusive welcome, but only to find himself there in the hands of a man who was his equal in duplicity.

After Jacob had sojourned there a month, serving Laban, the question as to his wages was raised and, loving Rachel, he agreed to serve seven years for her. The story of how Laban deceived him at the end of the seven years is given to us in verses 23-30, and Laban had a plausible excuse for acting as he did. We cannot fail to see in this the working of the government of God, and an illustration of our Lord's words, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." It was Jacob's turn now to complain of being tricked.

As a result, in order to win Rachel's hand, he had to serve twice the time he had bargained for (29:28).

Jacob's love was centred on Rachel and, in comparison with her, Leah was hated: so it was ordered of God that, while Leah bore children, Rachel was barren. The closing verses of the chapter give us the birth of four sons and their names. It is worthy of note that in each case the name was given by the mother, and was related to her own circumstances and feelings.

Jacob does not appear as having any say in the matter. During this period of his chequered career there is no record of his having an altar of sacrifice and communion. Being out of touch with God, he had no guidance as to the names of his children, and this indeed was the case with all his children except the last. (In that case, though Rachel named him, his father also named him, and Jacob's name prevailed. See 35:16-19.) The handmaids did not name their own sons, and the four tribes descended from these do not appear to have made any particular mark in the subsequent history of the nation.

*We find the merciful hand of God directing him
and opening up his way is at once manifested*

The rather sordid story of Jacob's children, and of the devices of both Rachel and Leah as each endeavoured to gain sons and thus establish themselves in his favour, is related in the first twenty-one verses of chapter 30. Here we have in these sons the origins of the tribes.

When we reach 30:22, we find God beginning to act. Here, clearly, is a son who was born as the fruit of God acting in response to Rachel's prayers, and the story is lifted to a higher level. The son appears, Joseph, who is to play a great part in the history of the nation, and who is to become a striking type of Christ – perhaps the most striking that the Old Testament affords.

In 30:25 we find that the birth of Joseph helped to lift Jacob himself to a higher level and, as a consequence, his mind became turned to the land that was his according to God's purpose. He desired to return there. We may take it as axiomatic, and true in every dispensation, that when the saint enters into communion with God, the purpose of God becomes to him all-important. Jacob freshly realized that there was a country that he could call, "my own place."

Laban, however, intruded into the question, and ultimately his thoughts prevailed. He delayed Jacob, as it turned out, for six years. Laban was a shrewd man who recognized that Jacob's presence with him had brought blessing. He wished to retain that blessing, and was prepared to allow Jacob to settle his own wages. As a result there ensued a further battle of wits, and this time Jacob and not Laban gained the advantage. Jacob bargained that all the spotted and speckled cattle should be separated and put under his sons, while he tended the others. Then, if these others produced young of the spotted and speckled sort, they were to be his, and added to his flocks (30:31-36).

In this we observe how true he still was to the meaning of his name – "Supplanter" (see 25:26). In reference to this wage bargain Jacob had said to Laban (30:33), "So shall my righteousness answer for me in time

*When the saint enters into communion with God,
the purpose of God becomes to him all-important*

to come” – which would seem to indicate that he had rather a low idea of what is right in the sight of God. It was quite clear that in time *past* Laban had taken advantage of him, but for Jacob to employ counter-devices in order to reverse the situation, while quite according to the way of the world, is not according to God.

The effect of all this is seen in the first two verses of chapter 31. The sons of Laban saw that Jacob had largely despoiled their father of his flocks, and Laban himself began to regard him with disfavour. The situation became critical, and the Lord Himself intervened to end it.

Jacob was to go back to his own land and kindred (31:3). In breaking the news of their impending departure to his wives, he related how Laban had dealt crookedly with him, and how God had acted in his favour. We are now permitted to see how God had intervened and caused the agreement as to the spotted and speckled cattle to work in his favour (31:8). In the light of this, our reflection would be that if he had rested with confidence in God, and *not* used the devices related in the chapter 30, the end God purposed would have been reached, and his “righteousness” would have answered for him in a much more convincing way.

From all this we may draw a practical conclusion. We have no need nor right to resort to plans of our own, as though we could help God to achieve His purpose. If, on the other hand, God instructs us by His word to act, it is our duty and our wisdom to do as He says. Jacob asserted that Laban had changed his wages ten times. This, if a fact, was great provocation, but to have relied upon God would have saved him from actions also open to question.

In calling him back to the land of promise, God revealed Himself to Jacob as “the God of Bethel” (31:13), reminding Jacob of the pillar he had anointed and the vow that he had made. Thus Jacob was called back to the beginning of his direct dealings with God. Such is always God’s

*If God instructs us by His word to act,
it is our duty and our wisdom to do as He says*

way with His people. We may wander away, but back to the original spot, whence we departed, we have to come. The point of departure proves to be the place of recovery.

Rachel and Leah entirely supported Jacob in his determination to return. Their attitude shows that they were convinced of their father's dishonourable and callous conduct, and furnishes us with further evidence of how Jacob had suffered at his hands. Their advice in the emergency could not be bettered – “Now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do” (31:16). Complete trust and obedience to God is the only right thing. It reminds us of the words of Mary, the mother of our Lord, recorded in John 2:5. God alone has the right to demand such unquestioning obedience.

But in the manner of his departure we see Jacob's character again revealed. Instead of dealing openly with Laban – meeting him face to face and then departing with due notice – he stole away unawares while Laban was absent shearing his sheep (31:17-19). In so doing he provided Laban with fresh ground of complaint, for Jacob had submitted himself to being a servant, working for wages though son-in-law to his master. Under those circumstances the parting ought to have been arranged by mutual consent.

A critical situation had been created, so critical that God intervened, speaking this time to Laban in a dream (31:24). (Laban had no direct knowledge of God, for to Jacob Laban speaks of Him as “the God of your father” – v.29) Laban was divinely warned not to overtake Jacob with violence of speech or action. Having regard to this, Laban adopted an attitude only of remonstrance, with a note of reproach in it as to the stealing of his gods. Verse 19 of the chapter had told us that Rachel had stolen the “images,” or “teraphim” of her father. who regarded them as his “gods.” (Teraphim were small images used for purposes of divination.) The incident furnishes us with a sidelight as to the way in

*A critical situation had been created,
so critical that God intervened*

which spiritist practices had spread. These little “household divinities” were revered and valued, and oftentime especially so by the women, hence Rachel’s anxiety to have them in her possession as they travelled away from her old home. Heathen practices are very infectious.

Of Rachel’s action Jacob evidently knew nothing, so Laban’s accusation of theft (v.30), correct though it was, stirred Jacob’s anger and led him to state his case (vv.36ff). His words to Laban at last were very vigorous, and he told Laban to his face of the hard conditions of service that he had imposed. Jacob regarded God’s warning to Laban (see 31:24) as not merely a considerate intervention in regard to himself but as a rebuke to Laban (v.42); and so it was, without a doubt.

Verses 43 and 44 indicate that Laban himself was conscious that this was the case, and so, while asserting his fatherly rights, he adopted a different tone altogether, and suggested that a covenant should be agreed and established between them. This was accordingly done. Again we find Jacob raising up a pillar of witness and also a heap of stones, according to the custom of those primitive days. Jacob undertook to deal rightly by Laban’s daughters, and both Jacob and Laban agreed not to pass beyond the stones of witness to harm each other. We do not read on this occasion of the anointing of the pillar, but we do find that Jacob solemnized the occasion not only by an oath but also by sacrifice. The name of God was invoked, as we see in verse 53, as the God of Abraham and of Nahor, since both those patriarchs would have been venerated by Laban as well as by Jacob. In addition Jacob swore by the fear of Isaac his father. Such was the esteem accorded to parents and ancestors in those far-off days – very good in many ways. But there was the danger of the fear of Isaac,¹ whom he could see, supplanting the fear of the God, whom he could not see. Hence the reminder of the unseen world that he got, as we find in the opening verse of chapter 32.

From Scripture Truth 36 (1948-50), pp.235-40. Slightly abridged, edited, and updated in language.

¹ Many translations and commentators understand “the Fear of Isaac” as a name of God. (Ed.)

God's Rest and Ours

John Alfred Trench

This wonderful talk explains to us the basis of "rest of soul."

It is a wonderful thing that we should be able to find *rest* on our way through such a world as this. But there is something before that, and more wonderful still – that God should speak of finding rest for Himself in the thoughts and ways of His love concerning us. God was not merely arranging rest for us when He revealed *Himself* in the gospel. First He had been working for *His own* satisfaction in the gospel. He *saves us*, but it is in order to “rejoice over you with gladness” (Zephaniah 3:17).

And this is the great and leading thought of that “parable of His heart” – “The lost son”. Jesus had been inhibited, we cannot but feel, in the Pharisee’s house (Luke 14); but now in the company of *sinners* He throws off all reserve, and reveals that it is the perfect, blessed joy of God, not only to receive and eat with such (as the Pharisee said – 15:2), but deliberately to *seek ways* that He might receive them, in order to eat with Him (v.1). He will not rest until the poor, convicted prodigal, now kissed, embraced, and clothed with the best robe, sits at His table – “and they began to be merry” (v.23). Doesn’t this illustrate, “He will joy over thee with singing”?

He “rests in His love”. It satisfies Himself, or, as the beautiful word of the original expresses it (see KJV, RV margin), “He will be *silent* in his love” – silent because He has no more to do, no more to reveal of what He has done and of the place into which He has brought us – before Himself. He has us before His gaze in the perfection of Christ, and is *satisfied*. What amazing blessedness for us! But the first-fruit of it is for Him. And this gives us the *source* of all rest for us, namely, the rest that there is for *God* in the thoughts of His love, and in their accomplishment. Primarily, the passage belongs to the still-to-come future of Israel, but much more fully to us.

But, as *He* rests in His love, then in Matthew 11:28 He brings *us* to rest in it. Mark the way it is introduced, for this is what gives it its full character. The Lord Jesus had been through this world and found no one – and no thing – to rest in. He had thoroughly proved this to be the case. Did He feel His rejection by the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done (11:20ff)? He felt it keenly, as no other heart could.

But He had a secret of rest: “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (11:25, KJV). He

*As He rests in His love,
He brings us to rest in it*

knew the Father. The trial that pressed upon Him was the outcome of infinite wisdom, and of a Father's love. He takes it from His Father's hand. He answered the rejection of the cities with – "I thank *thee*, O Father... even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." Thus was the Lord tested; and thus proved perfect in confidence and in obedience.

Then the deeper glory of His own person comes before Him, and also the work He had come to do: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him" (v.27). Rejected when presented as Messiah to Israel (cp. vv.20-24), He reveals *the Father* to whomever He wills.

But now comes the anxious question: To *whom* does He "will" to reveal the Father? "Come unto *me*, all *ye that labour and are heavy laden*, and I will give you rest" (v.28). *Have we* troubled hearts, hearts that have found nothing to satisfy and no source of rest in this poor world? He commands us come to Him that He may reveal the Father to us, and thus bring us into the secret of His own perfect rest, so that where *He* laid His head, the One who had nowhere to lay it in this world, we can lay ours now, i.e., on the bosom of a Father's love.

The direct connection between verses 27 and 28-29 must therefore be insisted on, for it gives both the aspects of "rest". The Lord speaks implicitly both of His rest (vv.26-27), and of the rest of the heavy-laden, in their full character and preciousness. "Rest" here is not merely rest of conscience in the forgiveness of sins, as it is commonly taken (though surely this must be first, and be included in it). It is nothing short of the revelation of the Father to our souls.

Forgiveness of sins will not carry us far as regards rest in going through a world like ours. The heart wants relationship, and nothing but relationships with the Father and the Son will satisfy it. This is what He brings us into. With most of us it is not all at once when born of God that we enter into the knowledge of the Father: and yet in 1 John 2:13 *the babes* in the family of God are addressed because they "know the Father". Thus it is *the privilege* of all. When we come to Jesus He would have us know that it is to the Father that we have come: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). What blessed rest it is!

Blessed Lord, Thou hast made good Thy word to us: we did labour and were heavy laden, and Thou hast drawn us to Thyself, and revealed to us the Father, and *it is rest*. Our hearts delight to acknowledge it.

This brings us to the source of every trial of ours, whatever its particular form may be. A *Father's* love has put us into it, irrespective of its immediate or even more remote cause. How remote the causes of the trial in His case might have seemed from the Father's ways with Him; but it is faith's title to take *nothing* any lower down than from a *Father's known love*. Then there will be something more present and real to the heart than the circumstances of the trial, namely, the One who puts us into them and the certainty of His wisdom and love in doing so — "I thank thee, O Father ... even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight."

But this leads us simply and naturally to the next character of rest, and this too was illustrated in the path of the Lord Jesus. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest to your souls" (v.29). This "rest" is the rest we enter into by submission and obedience to the Father's will. For what was the yoke of Jesus that He bids us take upon us? It was what we have just seen in Him – that perfect obedience that submitted itself in everything to the Father's will. It is wonderfully brought before us in the words of Isaiah 50:3-6. He who in Himself was Jehovah (v. 3) has taken in grace the path of the learner (as the last word of verse 4 ought to be). "Morning by morning he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the *learner*." "He learned obedience by the things which he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). Thus He can say, "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary."

What a "word in season" it was to each of us, beloved brethren, when He called us to Himself to reveal to us the Father! How deeply it enhances its preciousness to realise that He spoke it out of the experience that He had gained in His own path in the very world we have to go through. Now He calls us to learn from Him, to take His yoke upon us. He, always meek and lowly, bowed implicitly to the Father's hand in all that came upon Him.

This is the one necessary condition for our enjoyment of continued rest of soul. His rest was perfect in His path here through circumstances of unparalleled trial, because His submission was perfect; and He would have us know the same perfect rest in whatever we may have to pass through, making proof that "his yoke is easy and his burden light."

To have no will of our own is the only perfect liberty. It is the working of *will* in the trial that gives it its bitterness; God has to set Himself against any

The other “rest” is future — “There remaineth a rest to the people of God.” We are on our way to it

working of it in us, to smash it, for our blessing. Our wilfulness has increased the trial, but at last the will is broken, and we surrender to God. The instant we take God's part thus against ourselves, and submit ourselves absolutely to Him, the sting is gone out of the trial. We are brought into the path of Christ, and there is the full comfort of the sympathy of Him who knew no will of His own. We could not have, or expect to have, His sympathy in wilfulness. We have been sanctified to the *obedience* of Christ.¹ It is often a long and painful process in us to reduce us to it, but when once we are brought to submit to His yoke, the sense of crushing and bitterness is gone. It was the knowledge of the Father that He brought us into first, and the title we have thus to take all from *His* heart, and this it is that makes it possible and easy now to submit ourselves under His hand — “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.”

One more character of *rest* remains. It is that presented to us in Hebrews 4. The various characters of rest we have been looking at are to be experienced at *present*. This other “rest” is *future* — “There remaineth a rest to the people of God.” (v. 9) We are on our way to it. Believers enter into it (v. 3), but what gives it its character is that it is “*His* rest.” It is the rest of God, as the next verse says — “He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his” (v. 10). It is not the rest that a soul enters into now by believing the gospel, but a rest that remaineth to the people of God. It is rest at the end of the path, when the work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope, are over. The works from which God rested were not bad works. He saw that they were “very good.” He rested when His work was done, and into His rest the people of God will enter when their works are done. These “works” are not the works of vainly seeking to establish our own righteousness, but the work and toil and energy of faith that is needed at the present for every step of the path of our heavenly calling. But there is also a sphere of rest that God has; it is His own rest, where the work and toil of now will have place no longer.

Those who sought to stop the *work* of the Lord Jesus in a world where a man was afflicted with disease for 38 years (John 5:5,10) little knew the heart of God! When all was yet as fair, and as God had made it, “God did rest the seventh day

¹ Cp. 1 Peter 1:2. [Ed.]

At the present time we have to “labour” (or “use diligence”) to enter into that “rest”

from all his work” (Hebrews 4:4). But when sin came in with its attendant train of misery and death, all this was broken up, “My Father *worketh* hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17) – till that wonderful work was accomplished, through which we might be introduced – out of all the unrest here – into the rest of God. The “rest of God” is a place suited to the heart of God for the blessing of His own, where no trace of sin or its consequences, or tear or breath of trial, ever come.

At the present the path of faith has to be made good, step by step, with girded loin and earnest diligence of heart, through a world whose every principle rises up to oppose us. In “the rest of God”, “they rest from their labours”, but at the present time we have to “labour” (or “use diligence”²) to enter into that “rest” (Hebrews 4:10,11). And we have the word of God to be our most powerful and needed guard to detect for us, as a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart (v.12), all that would slacken our pace in pressing on through everything here, to reach the blessed scene that opens before our hearts — the bright vista of an eternal rest, the rest of God.

There God shall stand, as it were, on the threshold of a new heaven and a new earth, to wipe away all tears and every trace of the sorrow that came in by sin in the old creation. But it was in this ruined world, and by that very ruin, that we have been brought to know Him who has revealed to us the Father; and here the trials and exercises of our way through the world are made to yield fruit so rich in blessing for our souls. Learning then from the meek and lowly One who has trodden the path before us, and laying our heads on the bosom of the Father’s love, may we submit ourselves absolutely to Him, till the venue of His ways with us closes for us in the venue of His rest and glory for ever.

From John Alfred Trench, Truth[s] for Believers. New and Enlarged Edition (London, Morrish, 1906), pp.123-130. Language updated; text slightly abridged.

² ESV translates “strive”. [Ed.]

One Lord's day...

Revelation 1:4 – 1:19

Theo Balderston

Concluding a study of Revelation I commenced in October.

1:4 – 5a. “John to the seven churches which are in Asia” (NKJV). The book of Revelation is a letter. Daniel had been told not to publicise his book, but rather to “shut up the words and seal the book till the time of the end” (Daniel 12:4, 9). But since John’s book was a letter, i.e., intended to be read, the “time of the end” had evidently come, even if not the end itself. In fact, “the time of the end” was already approaching just before our Lord’s birth, for Gabriel, by revealing his name to both Zacharias and Mary (Luke 1:19, 26), was evidently signifying that the “sixty-ninth week” (that he himself had been used to disclose – Daniel 9:21-27) was approaching. But “the end” itself had not yet come as John wrote down his “Revelation”, for according to 1:3 it was still “near” not “present”, and according to 1:19 would not happen until “after these things” (see below).

Already, in Revelation 1:3, a blessing had been pronounced on whoever read or heard the words of “this prophecy” – i.e., chapters 4 onwards – wherever they lived. Imprisoned as he was on Patmos, John needed to entrust his book to persons who would guard and publicise it for him. He was instructed to entrust it to the seven churches. And in 22:10 John is instructed not to seal up the prophecy – “for the time is near”. It is always “near” until the time the Lord comes for us. It is always to be made known to all Christians, who are always to live their lives on the basis that the things described from chapter 4 onwards are about to happen.

Unless the churches in Troas, Hierapolis and Colosse (Acts 20:6; Colossians 4:13) had ceased to exist, there were certainly more churches in the Roman province of Asia than just the seven addressed in this book – in fact, probably many more. The number “seven” is uniquely prevalent in Revelation (about fifteen separate entities have seven members), and signifies “fulness” or “completeness”. It is also of special significance in the Gospel of John, with its “seven signs” and “seven ‘I am’s’”. There were also seven parables of the kingdom (Matthew 13), seven feasts of the LORD (Leviticus 23), and seven days of creation. Given this sense of “completeness” in the number seven, the seven churches represent the whole church as long as it is on earth.

1:4b. For these seven churches John desired a fulness of the gospel blessings of grace and peace from God. However the Source of these is not said, as in Paul,

Given this sense of “completeness” in the number seven, the seven churches represent the whole church as long as it is on earth.

to be “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ;” rather, the blessing comes (to translate literally) “from He who is, and He who was, and He who is to come,” from the “Seven Spirits who are before His throne”, and from “Jesus Christ...”.

The phrase, “He who is,” is exactly the translation of the “I AM” of Exodus 3:14 in the Greek Old Testament, and bespeaks God’s everlasting unchangeability, both as regards His faithfulness towards His covenant people (cp. Exodus 3:6-9), and also His wrath against those who hate Him (Exodus 20:5; Revelation 15:1.) This is the perspective of the book of Revelation. The church is not Israel (Revelation 2:9; 3:9), but unmerited grace and peace had reached the seven churches in the gospel; and Paul desires it in fuller measure for their daily lives. The “wrath” starts to be foretold from chapter 6.

In this book the Holy Spirit’s usual Name in connection with the churches is simply “the Spirit” (e.g., 2:7, etc.; 22:17). The phrase used here, however, occurs again in 3:1, and in 4:5 where He is also envisaged as “seven lamps of fire,” a figure which surely expresses the holiness energising the wrathful decrees from the throne (15:1). Yet this same “seven-fold Spirit before the throne” is the present power of the “grace and peace” that John desires more deeply for these seven imperfect churches.

1.5a. The Lord Jesus Christ is here designated in a threefold manner, in this sense similar to the designation of God the Father, but here indicating the three phases of the life of the *incarnate* Son:

- what He was in this world, in life and death – the Faithful Witness (note that the Greek for “witness” is the source of our word “martyr”);
- what He is now – the Firstborn from the dead;
- and what He will be as Man in time to come – the Ruler of the kings of the earth.¹

But the dread Ruler of kings, through His faithfulness to the point of death, is also Firstborn from the dead in relation to all the redeemed, so that the Triune God has blessed and will bless the churches with “grace and peace.”

¹ There is not space here to elaborate on the allusion to Psalm 89:27.

1:5b-6. In answer, John responds with a doxology:

- “Unto Him who loves us” [NB, not “loved” as in KJV and NKJV]. John gives glory and honour to the One who has loved us, who loves us now, and who will love us into eternity. In His love He
- “...loosed us from our sins in His own blood...”. Whereas “loves” is in the present tense, “loosed” is in the past (aorist), denoting a once-for-all-time action.² John knew this more keenly than almost all others: he had actually witnessed the atoning blood (John 19:35).
- “... and has made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.” Note that the word “kingdom” means, not a geographical area, but *the rights and powers that belong to kingship*. And they are bestowed on *us*, and not on the God-defying “kings of the earth”! The phrase, “a kingdom of priests”, originated in a promise made to the nation of Israel in Exodus 19:6, conditional on their keeping the covenant about to be declared at Sinai. This exact phrase is, to my knowledge, never used concerning the repentant and renewed Israel of the time to come. (The nearest is the consort-position of Jerusalem in that day, as described in Isaiah 62:3.) According to Revelation 1:6 (also 1 Peter 2:9; cp. Luke 12:32) Christ has bestowed that consort-sovereignty on the church. We see it displayed in Revelation 4 & 5.

Then follows the actual doxology: “To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

1:7. The thought of “glory and dominion” then sparks the exclamation, “Behold he comes with clouds...” The “clouds” recall Matthew 24:30 and its parallels, and, behind that, Daniel 7:13. Revelation 1:7 therefore speaks of the Lord coming one day to receive the sovereignty of the entire world. “[T]hose who pierced Him” will be the by-then-penitent remnant of Israel (Zechariah 12:10-14); and “the tribes of the earth” will be the redeemed nations who come to worship in Jerusalem according to Zechariah 14:17. The apostle concludes with a devout endorsement of this wonderful prospect: “Even so. Amen!”

1:8. This short section concludes as it began in v.4b. To believers it is most strengthening to know that our God is eternally unchangeable. But to unbelievers it is a warning. In the past century the mood of this country has passed from lip-service Christianity to outright atheism. However the use of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet in this verse perhaps signifies that the One who had the first word (Genesis 1:3), will also have the last.

² A point emphasised by William Macdonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, ed. Art Farstad (Nashville TN, Thomas Nelson, 2nd edn., 2016), p. 2458.

John and his addressees shared the kingdom in the sense of patiently waiting for it.

1:9. At this point the visions begin. They are described to the seven churches by someone they well knew, namely, their “brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.” Clearly he was experiencing the same kinds of troubles on account of the gospel as they were. What both were sharing in was nothing less than “the tribulation... of Jesus Christ” – that He had suffered in this world.

But in what sense did the imprisoned John and the seven churches share in “the kingdom”? Verse 6 of the chapter views them as already “a kingdom of priests”. This verse tells us that John and his addressees shared the kingdom in the sense of patiently waiting for it. (The word here given as “patience” is often translated “endurance”. But “patience” implies hope, where “endurance” does not, and so “patience” is preferable.) Our Lord is patiently waiting for the kingdom-in-power. If we do likewise, we too share in “the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.” Compare also 2 Thessalonians 3:5.

1:10. On one particular “Lordly day” (i.e., first day of the week) John had been “in the Spirit,” What was occupying John’s soul on that day? Maybe thoughts such as those of verses 5 & 6. But not, evidently, the terrifying manifestation of the Lord Jesus that suddenly commanded his attention (1:10,12) – for this seems to be the meaning of the fact that the vision appeared *behind* him.

1:11. He first heard a Voice commissioning him to record accurately in a book what he was about to see, and get the book delivered to the seven churches.

1:12. When John swung round, what first of all caught his eye was seven lampstands. This is rather puzzling: perhaps it was because, as he had been meditating during “the Lord’s day,” he had been conscious of his communion with the seven churches.

1:13 - 16. Then, immediately, John also saw in the midst of the lampstands, “One like the Son of man...” These seven churches, whom the rulers of the seven cities doubtless treated as peripheral nuisances, had in their midst the One to whom all dominion is committed! (See Daniel 7:14.)

This “One like the Son of man” bore features (v.14) attributed to the “Ancient of Days” in Daniel 7:9. These are the features of God as Judge. But John does not name Him as “the Ancient of days”: he is mindful of the distinction of Persons within the Godhead.

*The dread appearance of the Lord
was no threat to John personally.*

The One in the midst of the lampstands also bears a resemblance to the terrifying “man” who instructed Daniel in the future history of nations relevant to the people of Israel (cp. Revelation 1:13c, 15 with Daniel 10:4-6). The visions of Revelation are analogous to the revelations of Daniel 10:2ff. The prefaces to some of the seven Letters further clarify the meanings of some features of the description of Christ in 1:13-16 (see 2:1, 12, 18; 3:1).

1:17, 18. As with Daniel when confronted by that terrifying “man” (Daniel 10:8-9), John swooned at this sight of the Lord Jesus. But, also like Daniel, he received a touch (cp. Daniel 10:10-12, 19), and a word not to fear. The dread appearance of the Lord was no threat to John personally. To him, the One whom he saw is indeed “the First and the Last” – so that nothing that transpires or can transpire is outside His control, and the One who “lives, and became dead, and, behold [is] alive for evermore, and has the keys of hades and death.”

1:19 instructs us in how to understand the book of Revelation, and is therefore one of the most controversial verses in the entire book.

Firstly, “the things which you have seen” can be understood either as (1) the vision of vv. 9-18, or (2) as referring to all the visions that John records in the book, viewed as if from the point in time when he will start to write them down. The difference between these has no practical effect on the understanding of the rest of the verse. In the case of interpretation (1), however, a comma should be placed after “the things which you have seen”; in the case of (2), a colon.

Secondly, “the things which are” – obviously, as John was writing, but how far into the future? Answering this demands attention to the third clause.

This third clause reads, “the things which will take place after these things.” In Revelation 1:1 John had replaced the “in the last days” of Daniel 2:28 by “speedily”³, because the time was now near. In 1:19, however, John wrote “after these things,” reflecting the Aramaic of Daniel 2:45. Comparing Revelation 1:1 & 19 therefore, we have to infer that John meant (a) that the events of the last days were now near, unlike in Daniel’s day, but (b) that they had not yet started happening (1:19).

³ See the article, “The time is near” in the October issue.

*In Revelation 1:19 “the things that are”
includes the entire age
in which the church is still on earth.*

G.K. Beale argues the contrary, namely, that the phrase “after these things” (1:19) is to be interpreted as “having already started to happen”.⁴ However he cites no occurrences of this phrase [*meta tauta*] where it bears such a meaning – whether in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint), in the New Testament, or in early Christian writings. Without such support, he is implying that John had taught his readers in the seven churches a private code-meaning of “after these things” which included things that had already started to happen. But on this argument one could make Revelation mean anything, claiming that the original readers would know John’s esoteric code. Beale’s interpretation obviously collapses.

In the historical books of the Greek Old Testament the phrase “after these things” is used (among other things) to signify the conclusion of one historical episode and the commencement of another (e.g. 2 Reigns [i.e., 2 Samuel] 2:1 and 10:1). In Revelation the next occurrence of “after these things” after 1:19 is in 4:1, where it occurs twice. The first “after these things” in 4:1 refers to the change of *vision* that John saw – from a vision of the Lord dictating the seven letters from the midst of the lampstands, to a vision of heaven. But the second occurrence, at the end of 4:1, introduces “things that must take place” *after the conclusion of a previous historical episode*. Which previous episode? Given the location of 4:1, we must conclude that the previous historical episode was the epoch of the seven letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 & 3. As we have seen (see the third paragraph of this article), the seven churches signify the fulness of the church’s history on earth. Therefore the “after these things” introduces the period after the conclusion of the church’s history on earth.

And so in Revelation 1:19 “the things that are” includes the entire age in which the church is still on earth.

⁴ See G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, UK, 1999), pp. 152-70. His example (p. 154) of foreign troops landing on Boston’s north shore confounds “near” used in reference to place with “near” used in reference to time.

John three sixteen

J.T. Mawson

One night some time ago I dreamt that with a friend I was visiting some Yorkshire villages, distributing gospel tracts. I dreamt we gave a book to some women talking at a cottage door, and stood for a while to speak about God, and their souls, and eternity. They listened quietly until I quoted to them the splendid words,

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

I dreamt that then one of them laughed scornfully and long, and said, “*The old text again!*”

I awoke with the derisive sounds ringing in my ears. And I thought to myself, “Yes, that is the way the most wonderful announcement from God, brought into this world by the most glorious Person who ever came into it, is being treated by many – as an oft-told story, a fable.”

We, who have believed it, must proclaim this message earnestly and without tiring, for it is God’s best for men at their worst, their only hope for this life and the next. But as we tell it we must be in the spirit of it; ten thousand times better that we should hold our peace for ever, than that we take up these glowing words as though they were ordinary words, or treat the subject of them without the soul being profoundly moved by it. It is right to be careful as to our doctrine, but our danger lies in being correct and cold. When the love of God to a guilty world is our theme, it must burn in our souls as a fire. It should be that, “The love of Christ compels us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then all died...” (2 Corinthians 5:14).



*“For God so
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life”.*





“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life”.



Only in this way can love’s story be told. It is by the Holy Spirit alone that our souls can tell how God “loved” and “gave”. He alone can carry us in spirit all the way to the death of the only-begotten Son, when the powers of darkness were overthrown, sin’s full penalty borne, and every claim of divine justice was satisfied. He alone can give us a true conception of the wonderful results of this love in “everlasting life” for “whoever believes in Him”!

Enticing words of man’s wisdom can only spoil it, but if told “in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4) it must be effectual in winning men from perdition and bringing them to God.

No less a theme than this is given to us – the love of God, the sacrifice of His beloved Son, and everlasting life for men. It is God’s message for the world, and it does not lose its value because men despise it – even as they despised “His only-begotten Son” when He was in the world.

May God the Holy Spirit arouse us to the incomparable blessedness of it, that we may so use “the old text” that many who up till now have treated it with indifference may believe.

[Adapted and abridged from Scripture Truth 4(1912), pp. 220-221.].

The Importance of God's Word: Meditations on Psalm 119

by Truth for Today team

(David Anderson, Ian Britton, Brian Donaldson, Yannick Ford, David Hughes, Jonathan Hughes, Gordon Kell, Pete Ollerhead, David Pulman, George Stevens, Paul Thomson and Stephen Thomson);

Compiled and Edited by David Anderson;

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This book is an edited compilation of the transcripts of all the talks by *Truth for Today*, *The Bible Explained*, which were broadcast during the period September 2017 - March 2020. As several of the speakers referred to the structure of Psalm 119 during their talk, these comments have been collated, condensed, and incorporated into the Introduction of this book.

As many people know, Psalm 119 is the longest of the psalms — it has 176 verses — as well as being the longest chapter in the Bible. Perhaps for that reason all 176 verses are seldom, or never, read completely - either in public or private meditation. It is divided into 22 stanzas (or sections) of 8 verses each, with each stanza corresponding to one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It is a so-called 'acrostic' psalm. For example, in the original Hebrew text, verses 1-8 of Psalm 119 all start with a Hebrew letter ALEPH (English "a"); and so on. The meaning of these Hebrew letters often plays a role in being the dominant theme of the stanza. This was probably a memory aid, as it is a lot easier to memorise things if you can attach them to a simple structure in your mind. Of course, it's very difficult to reproduce this effect in an English translation!

What is Psalm 119 all about? Really, just one theme — the excellency and value of the Word of God. For Christian believers, the Word of God not only furnishes us with a knowledge of the living God, but it also speaks of the Christ who has revealed Him. In John 1:1-14, Jesus Christ is called "the Word". He is "the Alpha and Omega" (Revelation 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13) — the "A-Z" of God.



Man's smile

And have You, gracious Master, gone
for us a mansion to prepare?
Shall we behold You on Your throne,
and sit for ever with You there?
Then let the world approve or blame:
we'll triumph in Your glorious Name.

Should we, to gain the world's applause,
or to escape its angry frown,
refuse to countenance Your cause,
and make Your people's lot our own:
what shame would fill us on that day,
when You Your glory will display!

And who is man, or what his smile?
the terror of his anger – what?
Like grass, he flourishes awhile,
but soon his place shall know him not:
through fear of such a one, shall I
the Lord of heaven and earth deny?

What gladness soon shall fill our soul
when You with joy our names confess,*
when we shall reach You as our Goal,
and see “the Lord our righteousness;”
and, freed from sorrow and from sin,
the Father's house shall enter in.

* *Cp. Matthew 10:32.*

Thomas Kelly 1769 – 1854; changes mainly due to language-updating.