

Free Church **Witness**



JANUARY 2013 ISSUE



Some 'Musts' of the Ministry *Rev Kenneth Macdonald*



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Sick - Why?

Recently, reading John's Gospel, I was struck with the words, 'He whom thou lovest is sick' (John 11:3). Surely if God loves someone He will not allow them to suffer? Yet the reality is that we all know fine Christians who are suffering great pain and weakness. Perhaps you today are struggling through a serious illness and the devil is whispering in your ear that this is proof that God does not love you. Remember Satan is the father of lies. Here is a verse full of comfort. If Christ loved Lazarus and allowed him to suffer, the same could be true about you.

Why is someone God loves Sick?

Some argue that God cannot help it. He feels sorry for us and weeps with us in our pain. That would mean that God is not almighty and evil is just as powerful as God. Alternatively both God and man are subject to fate. Chance comes the way of all of us and God can only sympathise. We must totally reject all such ideas. God, to be God, must be all-powerful. Satan is only a creature. All that exists is the Creator and His creatures. Nothing happens by chance. There is no such thing as bad luck or fate. Rather all things are planned and 'predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will' (Eph. 1:11).

Others think that God is so great that He does not care about the little troubles which happen to insignificant man. He is a holy and distant God. The god of the Muslims seems to be like that – transcendent and not immanent. Actually the God of the Bible is a loving, caring God who is intimately concerned in all the details of our lives. God loves Lazarus and yet Lazarus is sick, and actually it is because God loves him that he is sick. This is shocking, yet true. If you are a Christian and a true believer, you are one whom God has loved from all eternity, one of His elect of whom it is true that all things work together for their good. Nothing happens to the child of God but that which their loving, almighty Father plans for them.

What is the purpose of Sickness?

1. To Convert Us

When we are healthy and wealthy it is easy for us to forget God, but when illness and weakness comes it can, with God's blessing, make us think seriously of death, the Judgment Day and eternity. I have heard many testimonies of those who were convicted of their need in times of illness and were truly converted. As one of the old Puritans put it, 'God whispers in health and roars in sickness'. Is God making you stop and think about your soul through the pain and disability you are suffering? I have known others who suffered with cancer and, during the prolonged period of treatment, became very concerned about their souls, but sadly, when they became better, all was forgotten. Could you be left to perish because you hardened your heart? Are you saying to God that He will have to send you a more painful illness to get you to really

turn and be converted? Those who find God in illness thank God for His saving mercies revealed in suffering.

2. To Correct us

All, who are Christians, sin and at times can backslide badly, either through open and scandalous sin, or through drifting away from God into worldly ways. The Psalmist said: 'Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word... It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes' (Ps. 119:67, 71). David suffered painful chastisement following his sin with Bathsheba. He learned something of the holiness of God and the wickedness of sin. To the lame man, who for 38 years lay helpless at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus said, following his healing: 'Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee' (Jn. 5:14). Hebrews 12:6 explains: 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth'. Yet we learn from the case of Job that trouble does not always come to the child of God because of specific sins and backsliding.

3. To Deepen our Faith

Gold and silver are melted in the fire to purify them. Job surmises: 'When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold' (Job 23:10). Abraham was asked to offer up Isaac: 'Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of' (Gen. 22:2). It is hard to imagine a more painful command. Having survived the trial, Abraham's faith became proverbial. Martha and Mary must have found Christ's delay in coming to Bethany, following the news of Lazarus' illness, very testing but, again, how deepening it was to their faith!

4. To Stir up Prayer

How easy it is for us to become lazy in prayer! When we have no great sense of need we are seldom earnest in supplication. In our anguish we sigh and groan and plead with the Almighty for deliverance. God loves to hear His children pray from the heart. He sends troubles to us so that we will 'come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need' (Heb. 4:16).

5. To Keep us Humble

There is nothing so offensive to God as human pride. It keeps many a blessing from us. Paul had wonderful visions, seeing and hearing what no one else saw and heard. But he tells us, 'Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness' (2Cor. 12:7-9). The thorn in the flesh was very likely an illness or disability. We are not told what it was so that it will be easier for us to identify with the Apostle. Troubles keep us humble.

6. To Make us a Witness to Others

Think of Naomi who wished to be called Mara. She said: 'Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted

'Sickness weakens our attachment to this world. We see the emptiness of money, success and pleasure. "Vanity of vanities" is written over all this world has to offer. In pain and weakness Christians long for heaven'.



me?' (Ruth 1:20-21). Yet she did not return empty, she had Ruth with her. Ruth had seen something in Naomi in the midst of all her afflictions which drew her not just to Naomi but to her God. The beauty of a Christian's faith often shines like a jewel against the black cloth of suffering.

7. To Make us Heavenly Minded

Sickness weakens our attachment to this world. We see the emptiness of money, success and pleasure. 'Vanity of vanities' is written over all this world has to offer (Eccles.1:2). In pain and weakness Christians long for heaven, that place where 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away' (Rev.21:4).

8. To Enable us to Comfort Others

Paul suffered many trials and tribulations but none of them was without point. He tells the Corinthians about Him 'Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God' (2Cor.1:4). What a wonderful privilege to be a sympathetic encourager and supporter of God's beloved people.

9. To the glory of God

Sometimes it is very hard to answer the question, Why am I suffering? There may be different reasons and these reasons can sometimes be hidden from us, but we can always be sure that it is for the glory of God and for our good. 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose' (Rom.8:28). Lazarus was raised from the dead and many believed on Jesus because of that miracle and so in this way Lazarus' illness and death was for the glory of God. James advises the sick person, 'Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him' (Jas.5:14-15). God is glorified in prayers answered.

Is Sickness always an Expression of God's Love?

1. Beginnings of Sickness

Initially sickness entered the world as punishment for sin and not as an expression of God's love. Our first parents were happy and healthy in the garden of Eden until they sinned, but then God's wrath and curse descended. Ageing, sickness and death became the common experience of man. 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return' (Gen.3:19).

2. Punishment of the Wicked on Earth

God does not punish His own people for their sins. Christ suffered the full punishment in our place. However 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness' (Rom.1:18). Already, even in this life, God's judgment begins and He shows His anger. The sufferings of some are clearly related to their sinful lifestyle – eg alcoholics, drug addicts, and immoral people.

3. Punishment of the Wicked in Hell

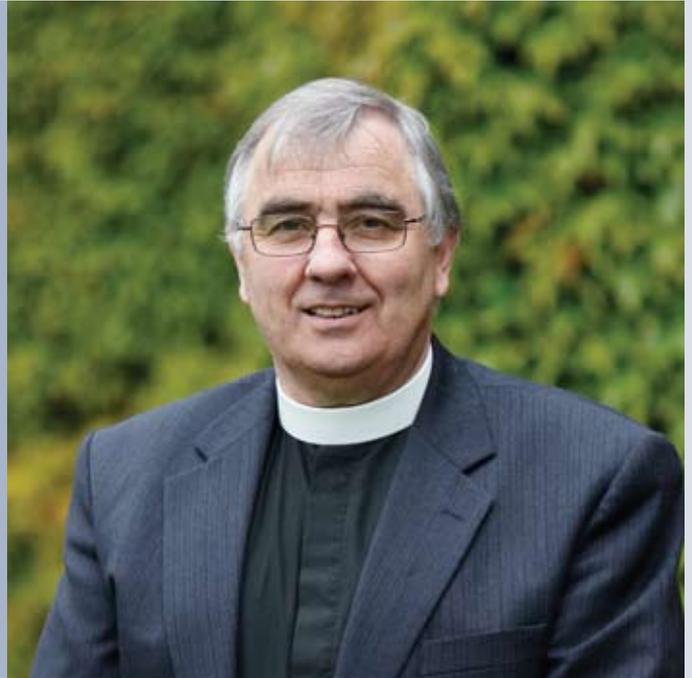
Hell is sickness unlimited. It amazed the Psalmist how healthy wicked people can be in this life. He felt his feet slipping and doubted the goodness of God till he went into the house of God and reflected on their latter end (Psalm 73). However painful an illness may be here, there are painkillers and there is the comfort of knowing that death will release us, but in Hell there are no painkillers, not even a drop of water to cool the tongue. The agony goes on forever and only gets worse. Here it is an expression of God's hatred for sin and for the sinner who will not repent.

What should the Christian's Response be to Sickness?

The Christian should rejoice when sickness comes. That is shocking and yet it is what the Bible says. James writes: 'My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience' (Jas.1:2-3). Paul states: 'Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice' (Phil.4:4). Rejoice always, and always means even in times of illness. In another place the Apostle says: 'We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us' (Rom.5:3-5). We are not to seek sickness but if it is God's will to send it we are duty-bound to receive it patiently and even joyfully. Remember, as one of the Puritans said, that the greatest Christians suffer the most. Think of Paul and of Calvin. 'Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed' (Heb.12:11-13). Jesus Himself encourages us: 'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world' (Jn.16:33).

Some 'Musts' of the Ministry

Rev Kenneth Macdonald



The term 'minister' is the one we commonly use today to speak about someone who is appointed by the church to preach the gospel. The first place the word 'minister' is used in Scripture is in reference to Joshua as servant of Moses (Ex.24:13). In New Testament Greek the same underlying word is used for 'servant' (Mt.26:58; Jn. 18:36), 'officer' (Mt.5:25; Jn.7:46) and 'minister' (Lk. 1:2, 4:20; Acts 13:5; 1 Cor.4:1). However it is clearly understood in 1 Corinthians 3:5-6 to refer to Paul and Apollos as those who preach the Word: 'Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase'. In 1 Thessalonians 3:2 Timothy is called a 'minister of God' again with reference to him being a preacher of the Word.

Who then should be in the Ministry?

The man who takes upon himself such a high calling must first be born again. In the past in Scotland, and still in the present, there were those who entered the ministry as a career, with no grace in their hearts, and so no desire to see lost souls saved. Interestingly, even in such dark days of Presbyterianism, there was no suggestion that women would be allowed into the ministry. Scripture makes clear that the leading and teaching has to be done by men. 'But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence' (1 Tim.2:12).

While there have been notable special cases throughout church history of God using men of little experience, that should be seen as the exception. A minister should normally be a man with a good measure of Christian experience and one who has had some exposure to the pressures that come with living the 'ordinary' Christian life as a follower of Christ in the world.

Such experience of life will undoubtedly be helpful in dealing prayerfully with pastoral problems as well as in preparing suitable sermons to deal with difficult situations which inevitably arise. However, while this should always be considered by a Kirk Session and Presbytery, it must be

recognised that the Lord can and does equip some in ways that make up for any shortcomings in such matters.

A good standard of education is important, and those especially gifted should be encouraged to foster such a gift. With this said, we know that letters after a name never made anyone a good preacher of the Word. It is far more important for any applicant to have what is asked of a man at his ordination, namely; 'zeal for the honour of God, love to Jesus Christ, and desire of saving souls'.

A minister is first and foremost a preacher of the Gospel and as has been said by another, 'Preaching is the primary task of the church, and therefore of the minister of the church, (and) everything else is subsidiary to this'.

Some 'Musts' when considering applying for the Ministry

1. A candidate must first give himself to prayer to seek to be sure that his desire arises from the leading of the Holy Spirit and not from his own carnal desires or pride in his own abilities.
2. He must therefore be someone called of God; that is, a man who is totally convinced of his call and that he is being led by the Lord to take such a step.
3. He must be convinced of all the doctrines of the Word and recognise in himself a God-given gift to expound that Word.
4. He must be disciplined in his Christian life and not prone to be easily distracted or waste time even on other lawful matters.
5. He must be willing to put his perceived gift to the test and be agreeable to preach before others to confirm his gift before embarking on full-time studies.
6. He must therefore have the approval of more experienced brethren and his Kirk Session.
7. He must be a diligent reader of the Word and of doctrinal books with a hunger to learn more, to equip himself to preach the Word faithfully and clearly.
8. He must seek to recognise the difference between a

desire to do what he can as a follower of Christ to see His kingdom extended here on earth (as every believer does) and the call to the full-time ministry.

9. He must be a 'people person' who does not find it difficult to speak with people on a personal level and should be found approachable by young and old.

10. He must realise that everyone and everything, even family, are to be subordinate to his responsibilities to any people he is set over.

11. He must be willing to accept that if he is not encouraged by those over him, that he may be wrong in his perceived call and humbly defer to their advice.

12. He must, even after officially beginning his training, be open to the fact that he may not be academically gifted enough or may have been mistaken as to the Lord's leading, and therefore may need humbly to look to another avenue of service.

Some 'Musts' when ordained to the Ministry

1. He must give time to prepare himself even before preparing his sermon.

2. He must give much time to prayerfully prepare sermons.

3. He must give thought to the type of preaching that his congregation need.

4. He must therefore know his people and show that he has a love for their souls.

5. He must be a regular visitor in the homes of his people.

6. He must be willing to preach, as the need arises, on subjects that may not be palatable to all.

7. He must remember the important place his office-bearers have, especially his Kirk Session, in the holy work of ruling the congregation.

8. He must give an example of a holy life, and so needs to rule his own home well.

9. He must know where the boundary lies between familiarity with his congregation and the separation his office requires.

10. He must continually be aware of his own need to continue learning.

11. He must diligently work at keeping his own soul right with God.

12. He must ensure all his sermons lead to Christ.

'He must give time to prepare himself even before preparing his sermon.'



Sri Lanka Mission Update

Herman van der Weerd



There has been a very interesting development with our mission work in Sri Lanka. A Dutch charity called Ceylon Christian Care has become interested in Parthee's work and has decided to give financial support to some projects connected with the work. The following is a list of the projects:

1. Start Support of One Preschool (infant Level)

Ceylon Christian Care agrees to start with the support of one preschool for 20 children. In the area of Vavuniya, where Rev Parthee lives, there is a lot of poverty and the majority of the people are Hindu. To help the children and to come into contact with the parents Rev Parthee asked for support for starting preschools.

The annual costs for the support of one preschool are roughly 550,000 LKR (£2,750)

These costs cover:

- A Teacher's Salary
- An Assistant's Salary
- Daily food and milk for the children
- Three Uniforms per child
- Stationery

(Note: Prerequisite for Ceylon Christian Care is that the teacher and the assistant have a Christian background.)

In addition to this support Rev Parthee will organise the following activities to get in good contact with the children and their parents:

Issue once a month a newsletter that will be distributed via the children. This newsletter will contain (Christian) articles/drawings/puzzles for both the children and their parents.

Once a year a sports day will be organised. Parents and Rev Parthee will attend this meeting.

Once per annum the children will receive a gift (normally we do this in December; this is also the period before the new school year starts in Sri Lanka).

This gift will contain for each child:

- a. A set of clothes
- b. A Christian calendar which can be used in the home.

2. Diaconal help

Ceylon Christian Care will provide a monthly budget of 10,000 LKR (£50) for diaconal help.

As mentioned, many people in Sri Lanka live in poverty. To help Rev Parthee in his work a monthly budget of this sum will be provided to cover the most urgent need.

Diaconal help will have to be provided carefully. If other people come to know that someone receives help, this can give rise to jealousy in a society such as Sri Lanka. This can cause problems. Also to avoid the wrong use of money the help should be provided as much as possible in kind.

3. Church Worker

Ceylon Christian Care will give financial support for a church worker. Parthee should as a pastor concentrate his work on the preaching of the gospel in the church and in teaching and pastoring the people. For the operational tasks therefore Parthee asked for the support of a church worker. Parthee proposed for this work Mr. Jivo Lasingtan (Maran) who is a Christian and a member of his new church. Mr Maran who is 42 years old speaks only Tamil.

It was decided to give support to this initiative for 7 months (until Jun 2013). Then Ceylon Christian Care will evaluate the situation and take a decision for continuation of this position. The all-in salary for Mr Maran will be 15,000 LKR (£75) per month.

4. Book printing and translation fund

For pastors and church workers there is an enormous need for good Christian books in Tamil. Some books were translated in the past but are out of print. A reprint is required. There is also a need for additional translation work because the number of titles in Tamil is limited. The cost of translating a 200 page book and printing 1,000 copies is roughly £1,600.

Ceylon Christian Care would like to support this initiative. The selection and approval of titles for translation should be a shared responsibility of Rev Parthee, Rev Vijay (brother of Parthee), Rev William Macleod and the board of CCC.

Ceylon Christian Care would like to set up a fund for this work with an initial target of two translations or reprints per annum.

5. All in one printer, copier, scanner

For his work Rev Parthee needs to have the ability to print, copy and scan documents. Ceylon Christian Care will provide a one-off donation of 35,000 LKR (£175) to purchase an all in one machine. This machine is also required to support Rev Parthee with his administrative tasks.

Contract Period

Ceylon Christian Care will support these requests for one year. At the end of 2013 the results will be analysed and a decision taken on whether to continue the support. Continuation will be based on annual contracts.

It is our wish and prayer that these projects will help Rev Parthee in his work, be a blessing physically to the people and finally aid in the spreading of the gospel in Sri Lanka.

Sincerely,
Herman van der Weerd

Looking up

Colin Wilson (Elder, Shettleston)

It is very easy to look for our blessings here on earth. I think this is more so in the affluent West. At times Reformed and Evangelical preachers can almost sound as if they are advocating something of the 'Health, Wealth and Prosperity gospel'. I have heard it said, 'If you give generously to the Lord now He will prosper you'. The Lord often prospers generous believers and this can be seen in men like George Muller. Other true Christians know much pain in their life here. Think of Christians, for example, in Iran where martyrdom is a real possibility. We may have blessings here in this world but the Christian's great blessings are in heaven. We should be looking upwards and not downwards – to our reward in heaven and not on earth. The Lord is a gracious Lord and often does give great blessings upon earth.

However, consider Abraham. He saw many blessings upon earth but his life was far from one of ease. The Lord took him away from his home country and family, Genesis 12:1; when he got to the 'promised land' of Canaan he was tempted away by famine (Gen. 12:10). Abraham endangers his wife's purity in trying to save his life, (Gen. 12:11 ff). He has to rescue his nephew Lot (Gen. 14:14-16). He is childless in old age and has a difficult time of waiting for a son (Gen. 15:2). He wrongly takes another wife besides Sarah and begets trouble for himself in Ishmael (Gen. 16:2). He knows domestic strife (Gen 16:5). After Isaac is born he is compelled to drive out his firstborn (Gen 21:9ff). He is told to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, Genesis 22, although Isaac is eventually spared. He does not possess the promised land but his descendants do. Some of Abraham's difficulties were caused by his own sin

(ie calling his wife his sister), some by the sins of others (ie Lot's wanderings) and some by the providence of God (the famine).

It is all too common to smooth over the difficulties of Abraham's life and romanticise it. The simple truth is that he had a very demanding and hard life on earth. It is encouraging to think of the end product but we must be careful not to gloss over the hard path that many a believer has to tread. It is hard, but not impossible, because the Lord will keep His people (Hebrews 13:5). If you would like to see how low a believer can feel then read Psalm 88. Of course we are not to stay in that state; there are plenty of Psalms to lift us up, but believers are not to pretend that there are no hard times (Job 1:21-22). At such times look up – remember heaven.

Why was Abraham not overwhelmed? Because he looked up – beyond the troubles on earth to the heavenly riches: 'For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God' (Hebrews 11:10). Abraham had something greater in mind than an earthly promised land which is only a picture of the real promised land. I am not arguing that Abraham was not blessed upon earth but rather that through all the strife and difficulties his eyes were fixed on something even higher. Abraham did not stagger back from the promise of God as impossible (Romans 4:20-21) but he had faith in the Lord – that the Lord will complete what He started and fulfil what He has promised. Abraham did not see the fulfilment of all the earthly promise as that was left to his descendants. By faith he looked to not only the earthly fulfilment but beyond that to the heavenly fulfilment.

Therefore, let us follow Abraham's example. Look up to that which is greater, heavenly and eternal. We may strive and have a very hard life on earth as believers; many do, but remember the reward. If your life is blessed with a measure of ease then thank the Lord and use that prosperity for His glory and keep in mind that your earthly reward is but a small taste of the wonders of heaven. Believer, Look up!



Accounts of the 1859-60 Revival: Fisherman's Widow, Cellardyke, Fife

Rev Alex Gregory, minister at Anstruther at the time

This case concerns a widow, one of the five widows who lost their husbands in a drowning tragedy which marked the beginning of the revival in Cellardyke. It solemnised the whole town. The fishing boat in which they were working sank on 1st December 1859 with the loss of its five crewmen. There was not one of those five widows on whom the stroke did not fall most heavily. The one to whom we now refer was the very picture of woe. Beneath the terrible storm which struck her, she bent like a broken reed. She knew the promises and hopes of the gospel; she was comforted, too, by Christian friends, and by her own godly father; but no gleam of light or consolation visited her desolate heart till the awakening came, and it brought joy to her by first plunging her into deeper grief. Her convictions were sharp and powerful. 'My distress at the loss of my husband', she said, 'was very great' - it was visible to everyone how true indeed that was; 'but oh, it was nothing to this - to this distress on account of my sins'. Her anguish became greater than she could bear. She must have relief. Under the pressure of her sore trouble she repaired to a dark cellar which she had never been able to bring herself to enter since her husband's death, and there she wrestled in solitary prayer for hours, till she at length 'prevailed', and light broke upon her darkness through the

words of Psalm 51, 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow'. She could not sleep for joy that night.

From that time her deep-brooding sorrow of spirit was gone, and a calm, sweet heavenly joy lit up her countenance, making her in this respect so completely a new creature, that one could scarcely recognise at first the desolate widow in that rejoicing Christian. God had turned her mourning into dancing; He had put off her sackcloth, and girded her with gladness.

Her joy could hardly be restrained; and one form in which it expressed itself was very touching. Her thoughts reverted to one of the widowed number, a former acquaintance, whom she had not seen since their common affliction. She was seized with a strong desire to visit this sister in tribulation, who was now also a sister in Christian faith and hope, - she, too, having undergone a happy change, and who felt a similar wish to exchange greetings with her friend. With this purpose, each left her own home to go to the other's. They met in the street, threw themselves into each other's arms, and gave way to the most lively expressions of joy at the new happiness they had found.

Congregational Remittances - October 2012

CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD	ORDINARY REMITTANCES		
	2012 Nov	2012 Total	2011 To Nov
Presbytery of Inverness			
Aberdeen	0	1100	13888
Duthil-Dores	0	1672	18791
Inverness	0	2000	24700
Kilmorack & Strathglass	0	1600	16388
Total Inverness	0	6372	75106
Northern Presbytery			
Assynt & Scourie	690	0	3277
Brora	1,015	2000	21694
Kiltearn	550	500	6707
Tarbat	0	0	12127
Total Northern	2,255	2500	43805
Southern Presbytery			
Arran	851	345	8463
Ayr	5,000	933	11004
Dumfries	0	0	0
Edinburgh	0	4100	31676
Glasgow - Partick	1,453	1500	30500
Glasgow - Shettleston	794	2000	23536
Glasgow - Knightswood	955	5744	28416
Rothsay	0	260	639
Total Southern	9,053	14622	133855

Outer Hebrides Presbytery				
Cross	0	2125	22520	21473
Harris - Leverburgh	337	1175	16247	15934
Harris - Scalpay	500	1800	24494	24492
Knock & Point	0	1655	15809	15293
North Uist	2,049	1000	13540	13164
Stornoway	5,231	6124	82339	78703
Total Outer Hebrides	8,117	13879	174950	169059
Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron				
Bracadale	125	0	10672	12191
Duirinish (Waternish)	445	0	5500	6215
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	1,001	1300	14873	17181
Lochalsh	500	1150	12154	8275
Poolewe & Aultbea	2,479	1059	12190	10714
Ullapool	0	0	51	102
Portree	0	1400	21107	19165
Snizort	1,000	1200	21824	24552
Strath	55	800	8203	1785
Total Skye/Lochcarron	5,605	6909	106572	100180
Total Congregations	25,030	44282	534288	518183
Other Donations	3,884	648	40843	26746
Legacy		4000	12114	18153
TOTAL	28,914	48930	587246	563082
Including Gift Aid	909		96214	98057



News



Presentation to Rev John Keddie

Rev Murdo AN MacLeod

On Friday 16th March 2012 the Congregation of Bracadale gathered at the Royal Hotel, Portree, along with friends from many parts

of the island and beyond, to mark the retirement of Rev John W Keddie.

A native of Edinburgh, Mr Keddie was converted whilst still in his teenage years. He and his brother Gordon became members at Holyrood Abbey Church of Scotland where they greatly

appreciated the ministry of the late Rev James Philip. Growing dissatisfaction with the position of the Church of Scotland in matters of doctrine and practice led them to the Free Church of Scotland and into membership in St Columba's Free Church. There he met the lady who was to become his partner in life and ministry. Shortly after their marriage he and Jean moved to England and set up home there.

In the process of time Mr Keddie left his work as an accountant and, having trained for the ministry in the Free Church College, he was ordained and inducted in August 1987 to Burghead Free Church in Morayshire. A decade later he accepted a call to Bracadale and so began a faithful ministry of fifteen years and it was with a deep sense of regret that the good folk of Bracadale learned of his intention to retire from the pastoral ministry.

During the course of the evening presentations were made to Mr and Mrs Keddie and a number of friends were invited to address the gathering. Reference was made to his years of service and his varied and invaluable contribution to the cause of the Lord. Besides ministering to his flock Mr Keddie served for many years as Honorary General Treasurer. He also found time to put pen to paper, producing, amongst other books, biographies of Eric Liddell and Dr George Smeaton.

Since the sad events of January 2000 Mr Keddie had also shouldered the additional responsibility of the Duirinish congregation, serving as their interim-moderator. In reality he was more than just an interim-moderator as most Sabbaths he conducted the afternoon service at Waternish and regularly on Thursday evenings he would travel there to conduct the midweek meeting. The

Desk



friends at Waternish are very grateful for Mr Keddie's willingness to assist them and they voiced their own thankfulness for his faithful service.

We wish Mr and Mrs Keddie the Lord's richest blessing in their new home at Kirkhill in Inverness-shire and look to the Lord Himself to provide a pastor for the now vacant congregation.

Spring Conference

The Spring Conference is due to take place on Friday 29th March in a new venue – the Kingsview Christian Centre, Balnafettack Road, Inverness (kindly loaned). As usual the conference will run from 10.00am to 4.00pm. The theme this year is 'Women and Children in the Church'. The speakers expected are Rev John Macleod (retired) on 'Women in the Church' and Rev James Clark (Inverness) on 'Children in the Church'. Please reserve the date in your diary and plan to attend if possible. God willing a brochure and booking form for the conference will be included with the February issue.

Parthee's Motorbike

Recently, Mr Murray Mackay became aware of Parthee's need for a new motorbike for travelling around the villages near Vavuniya as he preaches God's Word. Some of the roads are not good. The suspension in his old motorbike was failing and Parthee's back was giving him pain. The situation was made known through Murray's email list. The amazing result was that £2,160 was quickly raised. £1,600 was used to purchase a good bike (plus insurance and road tax). £500 was lodged in the bank for helping needy people in the future and £60 had been specified as a family gift. Parthee writes: 'Thank you all who contributed this money for the Lord's work in Sri Lanka. I am praying



for you all and thank God who gave you the heart to give for Lord's work here. I really appreciate your generosity!'

Arbroath Youth Weekend

The next Arbroath Youth Weekend will be held from Friday 8th to Monday 11th February 2013, God willing. The topic is 'Christ is All' and the speaker the Rev. Maurice J Roberts. The Youth Weekend is for those 16 years and over. It is an opportunity for good teaching and rich fellowship. The cost is £55 for unwaged and £60 for wage earners. All young folk are warmly invited. An application form and further information can be obtained from: Mr Murray Mackay, Mobile (text only): 07793 535227 Email (preferable): murray.mackay@gmail.com. Completed application forms and payment should be sent to Mr Murray Mackay, 27 Morison Avenue, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, HS1 2HQ.

Denial of Charitable Status to Brethren

Christian Institute

Scores of MPs from across the political spectrum have criticised the Charity Commission for denying charitable status to a Plymouth Brethren group.

MPs have signed a motion warning against 'politically correct bias' and the issue has also been debated in Parliament and attracted media comment. The Charity Commission has refused to register the group because its Holy Communion services are for members only. The Christian Institute is intervening in the case in a bid to protect religious liberty for all churches.

More than 60 MPs have signed an Early Day Motion saying they believe 'Christian groups who are serving the community have the right to charitable status and should not be subject to politically correct bias'. MPs from Labour, the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, and the Scottish National Party say that the Brethren group involved 'does a lot of good work for charity and community groups'. They warned that the case has 'widespread implications for all Christian charitable trusts'.

The denial of charitable status to this group of Plymouth Brethren could well be the thin end of the wedge. Many secularists see no benefit to the community in the preaching of the gospel and resent the church discipline which restricts participation in the Lord's Supper to those whom the church reckons to be fit - the born again who are living godly lives.

Christian Councillor continues to Fight

Christian Institute

A Christian councillor who was kicked out of her local party group after she took a stand against gay marriage says she will continue fighting after her

expulsion was upheld by national party officials. Christina Summers was banned from sitting with her Green Party colleagues on Brighton and Hove City Council last September after she voted against a motion that backed same-sex marriage. She appealed against the decision, but an inquiry panel has backed the local party's move. Miss Summers told her local newspaper, *The Argus*, that she was disappointed 'in every way' but not surprised. She said: 'I am now consulting with lawyers over a fundamental breach of a human right and will be issuing a full statement soon'. Miss Summers now stands as an independent councillor, representing Hollingdean and Stanmer. She had said during a council debate in July: 'When you touch marriage, you're touching family and you're hitting at the very heart of God and I have an enormous problem with that'.

We must remember people like Miss Summers in our prayers because of the stand which they make in very difficult settings.



Victory for Adrian Smith

Christian Institute

A judge has ruled that bosses at a housing trust were wrong to demote a manager who said gay weddings in churches would be 'an equality too far'. Adrian Smith, a Christian, made the remark on his personal Facebook page, which was not visible to the general public, outside work time. But bosses at Trafford Housing Trust, near Manchester, took action against Mr Smith saying the comments amounted to 'gross misconduct' and could bring the Trust into disrepute. Mr Smith went to court with the financial backing of The Christian Institute's Legal Defence Fund, which exists to protect the civil liberty of Christians. It emerged in evidence that the Trust was worried it could lose a gay rights charter award unless it took action against Mr Smith. But the judge, Mr Justice Briggs, said the Trust had no right to demote Mr Smith over his Facebook comments, and ruled that the Trust had breached the terms of his contract. Mr Smith says he is delighted to have won the case, but he is worried others may be in the firing line if the Government pushes ahead with its plans to redefine marriage.

He said: 'I have won today. But what will tomorrow bring? I am fearful that, if marriage is redefined, there will be more cases like mine – and if the law of marriage changes, people like me may not win in court. Does the Prime Minister want to create a society where people like me, people who believe in traditional marriage, are treated as outcasts? That may not be his intention, but that's what will happen. The Prime Minister

should think very carefully about the impact of redefining marriage on ordinary people'.

In his ruling the judge said: 'In my judgment Mr Smith's postings about gay marriage in church are not, viewed objectively, judgmental, disrespectful or liable to cause upset or offence. As to their content, they are widely held views frequently to be heard on radio and television, or read in the newspapers'. He also rejected the suggestion that Mr Smith's comments could be viewed as homophobic. The judge concluded: 'Mr Smith was taken to task for doing nothing wrong, suspended and subjected to a disciplinary procedure which wrongly found him guilty of gross misconduct, and then demoted to a non-managerial post with an eventual 40 per cent reduction in salary. The breach of contract which the Trust thereby committed was serious and repudiatory'.

In these days we are thankful even for one victory.

Man in a Vegetative State Communicates

Christian Institute

A man who has been in a vegetative state for more than ten years has communicated to doctors that he is in no pain – by the power of thought. His case calls into question court rulings which have allowed patients in a persistent vegetative state (PVS) to die of thirst and hunger. Doctors used a pioneering technique on Canadian Scott Routley, who was left severely brain damaged after a car crash. They put Mr Routley in a special brain scanner and asked him to imagine playing tennis and then walking in his house – blood flowed to a different part of the brain according to what he was thinking. Doctors then asked Mr Routley to change what he was imagining according to whether the answers to their questions were 'yes' or 'no'. It is the first time a patient thought to be in a vegetative state has answered a question relating to their care, showing awareness of their condition.

Professor Adrian Owen led the research at the Brain and Mind Institute, University of Western Ontario. He said: 'Scott has been able to show he has a conscious, thinking mind. We have scanned him several times and his pattern of brain activity shows he is clearly choosing to answer our questions. We believe he knows who and where he is'. Professor Owen believes this is a breakthrough which could improve the care of patients in a persistent vegetative state, allowing doctors to ask when they would prefer to be washed and fed. Around one-in-five PVS patients showed some level of conscious thought using this technique, according to the research team.

Great care must be taken to treat those in PVS with proper human dignity.

Saudi Women Tracked

Barnabas

Saudi Arabia has introduced a tracking system that monitors any cross-border movements by female citizens following the case of a woman who apparently converted to Christianity and fled the country. The measure, which uses SMS technology, came into force last November. It alerts a woman's male guardian (father, husband, or other male relative) by text message when she leaves the country, even if they are travelling together. In the ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia, women are not permitted to leave the country without the permission of their male guardian, who must sign a consent form at the airport or border. The latest move to further restrict their freedom was

condemned by Saudi writer Badriya al-Bishr, who said that women are held under a 'state of slavery' in the kingdom. It has been reported by Saudi media that the introduction of the tracking system was triggered by the escape earlier in the year of a woman from Al-Khobar who had apparently converted to Christianity. Two male colleagues have been accused of helping the woman, who went to Lebanon and is now in Sweden. Her expatriate Lebanese boss, Henna Sarkees (51), a Christian, has been charged with abusing his position to coerce her to convert, and an un-named Saudi national has been charged with helping her to leave the country. They were due to stand trial last September, but the case has been repeatedly deferred. It has also been alleged that an official from the passport office in Al-Kharj was complicit in her escape by providing falsified authorisation for travel. The woman's family have been trying to secure her return to Saudi Arabia; the Saudi Embassy in Sweden has been asked to find a diplomatic means of repatriating her. But she may face serious repercussions: conversion to Christianity is punishable by death in Saudi Arabia, where an extreme and puritanical version of Islam, Wahhabism, is strictly enforced. Women are severely restricted: they are obliged to wear the full veil, cannot leave their homes without a male companion and are not allowed to drive. There has been some reform; King Faysal introduced compulsory education for girls in the 1960s, and today female graduates outnumber their male counterparts. But unemployment among women is high, exceeding 30%. Last October, King Abdullah granted women the right to vote in

the 2015 municipal elections and reduced the powers of the religious police, who enforce compliance with *sharia*.
Let us thank God for the freedom we have in this country.

Nigerian Persecution

Barnabas

The attack on St Andrew's Protestant Church in a military barracks in Jaji happened around midday on Sunday 25 November during a service. First, a bus was driven into the wall of the church building and exploded; around ten minutes later, a car blew up outside the church. A military spokesman said: 'The first blast caused no casualties and curious worshippers gathered around the scene looking at the debris ... and that was when the second blast happened'.

It appears that the vehicles were driven into the barracks through the bush to evade the military checkpoints. The spokesman said that the incident was 'surprising and an embarrassment'. Officials said that 11 people were killed and 30 were injured, but several witnesses at the scene put the death toll at around 50.

Militant Islamist group Boko Haram is suspected of carrying out the atrocity. Christians in Kaduna state, which is in central Northern Nigeria, have previously been targeted. At least seven people were killed and dozens injured when a suicide bomber drove an explosive-laden vehicle into a church in the Malali neighbourhood during a service on 28 October.

Remember our Nigerian brothers and sisters as they suffer persecution.

Behold the Lamb of God!

John 'Rabbi' Duncan

From an action sermon on John 1:29 preached at Milton Church, Glasgow on October 25, 1840.

When he says 'Behold the Lamb of God', he meant it not for the Jews only, but for the sins of the whole world. But particularly we may remark that the atonement, and the salvation by atonement, of the Lord Jesus, bears a reference and aspect upon the particular condition and state of every child of mankind. Every man is in the world's sin fundamentally. In regard to anything of vital importance there is no difference, for all have sinned. Every man in the world needs this Lamb of God for the taking away of his sin.

Then, considered as exhibited to sinners of mankind in the Gospel, it is equally fitted for each sinner of the human race. The Gospel is just as much fitted for me as for you, and for you as for me. Christ and His sacrifice just meet your case, as they meet mine. The sinner's need corresponds to what is in the sacrifice of Christ, and what is in the sacrifice of Christ corresponds to the sinner's need...

Then, as there is a universality of command to proclaim this Gospel to the whole world, and every creature in it, so whenever it is proclaimed it contains a free and unfettered and universal and special invitation – universal to all, special to each – to look and be saved. It warrants my conscience to cast the weight of my guilt upon the atonement of Christ,

to cast the shameful depravity of my nature on the fountain

opened for sin and for uncleanness, to cast my whole state as a sinner on Christ the Saviour set forth before me in the Gospel. There is this universality which every creature needs: it is to be preached to every creature; wherever it is preached it contains a full and free warrant to every individual to betake himself to the Lamb of God as the only Saviour, with assurance that he shall not be cast out.

You have been, not so warmly as you ought to have been, but you have been invited, entreated to 'behold the Lamb of God'. Have you done it? Are you doing it? He will have others to reiterate this exhortation; but ah! must I part with any of you whilst you refuse to 'behold the Lamb of God'? Will you not now? Tell me not ye are blind. We know you are blind. It's part of our preaching; not however to be thrown in our teeth when we come with another part of our message. We know that, but God says, 'Look, ye blind, that ye may see'. Will you not look? Is there a soul here with eyes averted from the Lamb of God, shutting the eyes, and taking away the head, and refusing to behold the Lamb of God? Shall we not even now have some for a crown of joy and rejoicing in the day of the Lord?





Books

Christian Marriage From Basic Principles to Transformed Relationships

D Martyn Lloyd-Jones
Banner of Truth Trust,
pbk, 200pp, £7.00

As a young Christian, one of the first sets of books I purchased was Dr D Martyn Lloyd-Jones' sermons on Ephesians. Courtship and marriage were both on the horizon (or I hoped they were) and so one of the first volumes I read was *Life in the Spirit* - sermons on Ephesians 5:18-6:9. Those sermons were a source of great guidance and help to me then and I hope they will be to many more today as the Banner of Truth Trust in this book have made them more accessible to the world. The sermons on marriage have been brought out of the eight-volume set of sermons where they have somehow been lost, and been re-published in a book of less than 200 pages that could easily be read and studied by any prospective husband or wife, married couples no matter how many years of marriage, or perhaps in a pastoral book study in a congregation.

There are eleven sermons in total and they deal with the fundamental principles of marriage, which are rooted in Creation and illustrative of Redemption. The series deals with the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives. As you progress through the sermons there is a climax in the application to the man and woman after walking with Paul through the doctrine of the Gospel, and Christ's love and self-sacrifice of Himself for the church. In the process Lloyd-Jones happily does not shy away from the more sensitive issues of marriage such as sexual intimacy. He does handle them with maturity and sensitivity respecting the fact that such marital intimacy is not secret but it is private. In this, some modern authors could learn from him.

The book is sermonic. It is not like other books on the market on the subject of Christian marriage and is not designed to

replace them. The sermonic and exegetical nature of the book is both its strength and weakness. It is its strength because it does what other books on the subject often fail to do, that is, root their teaching not only in the context of a passage but in the context of the Gospel. There are too many 'how to' books on Christian marriage which are topical in nature but forget that the Christian life is a life lived in union and communion with Christ. This book is not one of them. Lloyd-Jones shows how Christian practice, as in the later chapters of Ephesians, flows from a heart experience and love of the Christian Gospel he expounds in the earlier chapters. This doctrine of Christ lived in the power of the Spirit is fundamental, the real 'how to' of a Christian marriage. The title to the original volume of sermons demonstrated this, *Life in the Spirit in marriage, home and work*. Without this, any book on Christian marriage will only result in temporary reform and frustration as we follow the formula, trying to do in our own strength what we can only do in Christ.

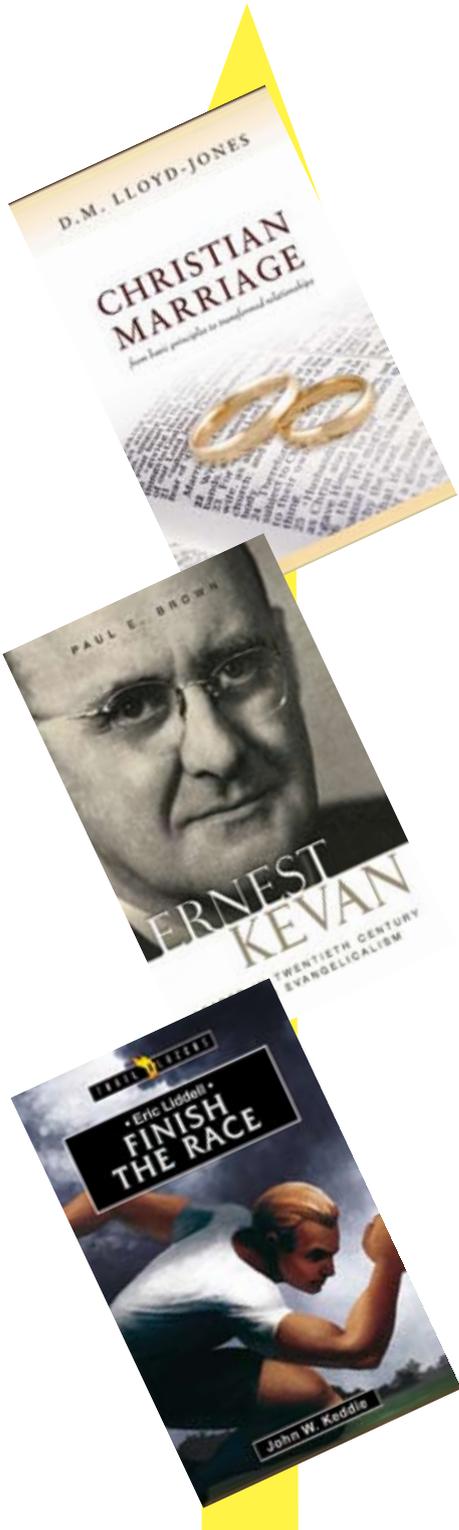
At the same time because these are sermons preached in a series on Ephesians, the book lacks the breadth in the issues covered which other books on Christian marriage have. This being said, we recommend the book and pray it will be used in the formation and reformation of Christ-centred Biblical marriages. It is not the only book you should have on the subject but it should be one of them.

Rev Gavin Beers

Ernest Kevan Leader in Twentieth Century British Evangelicalism

Paul E Brown
Banner of Truth Trust,
pbk, 320pp, £8.00

Ernest Kevan (1903-1965) knew prosperity and relative poverty in his youth and these experiences prepared him for the work God had for him. His father was



promoted to general manager of Bowen's Chemical Works. Seeing his son's ability as a student at Battersea Grammar School he removed him to Dulwich College, a private school, at the age of fourteen. Three years later his father had to give up work as he had developed a serious heart complaint and young Ernest had to leave school to find work as a tea taster and to support the family. He had professed faith at the age of fourteen after a struggle with assurance. Although lacking formal training he was clearly gifted for the ministry and received a call to Church Hill Baptist Church to be their pastor when he was only 21 years old. This was a Strict Baptist church and he laboured there for ten years, seeing considerable growth in the congregation. From there he moved to Zion Baptist Church where he ministered for nine years. In 1944 he moved to Trinity Road Chapel but after two years he accepted a call to become principal of the newly founded London Bible College. It was here that he came to national prominence. The College grew rapidly under his leadership. Many missionaries and ministers for Baptist and independent churches were trained. His sudden death in 1965 at the age of 62 was a great blow to the College.

Kevan's concern to achieve degree-awarding status through the secular universities left the College vulnerable after his death to ecumenical and liberal tendencies. This is an interesting book, perhaps more from a historical point of view than from a heart-warming one. An interesting appendix summarises Kevan's excellent book, *The Grace of Law*.

Rev William Macleod

Finish the Race - Eric Liddell

John W Keddie

Christian Focus Publications, pbk, 159pp, £5.99

Rev John Keddie has already written an excellent biography of Eric Liddell which is called *Running the Race*. It was designed particularly for those interested in sport but also clearly portrays the gospel. The present book is specially written for children and is part of the *Trail Blazers* series of biographies.

Eric Liddell was born in 1902 to missionary parents in China but then educated in a boarding school in England followed by Edinburgh University. He came to fame at the Olympics in Paris in 1924. Eric's strong belief in keeping the Lord's Day as a day of rest and of worship was challenged when his 100 metres race was scheduled for the Sabbath. Much pressure was put upon him to run in the race but he unhesitatingly refused. He then ran in the 400 metres, a distance at which he was not so experienced nor was thought to have much likelihood of success in and yet won gold, setting a world record that lasted for many years. However he turned his back on athletics and earthly fame to become a missionary to China. He died of a brain tumour in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in 1945, leaving behind him a fragrant Christian memory of a loving, faithful and godly man (aged just 42 years).

Mr Keddie acknowledges that Liddell was a challenge and inspiration to himself as a youngster. The book is very readable and will I am sure be appreciated by adults as well as the teenagers for whom it was designed.

Rev William Macleod

When the Clock Struck Thirteen

Soon after I retired from active service, I went to reside in an old-fashioned house in Devonshire. One evening, in the summer of 1885, I attended a public meeting in the village, and being delayed after the meeting with some friends, it was late when I started for home. The night was extremely dark, and I had not proceeded far before a very heavy shower of rain compelled me to seek shelter. I was quite near to the little village church, so I ran into the covered porch, and sat down on one of the seats to await the passing of the storm. Almost at the same moment a man, coming from the opposite direction, rushed into the porch beside me, to escape the downpour. While we sat waiting, the church clock began to strike the midnight hour. I began to count the strokes, and, to my amazement, counted thirteen! The man beside me started to his feet, exclaiming, 'That clock struck thirteen!' 'So it did', I replied, 'how strange it is that we should both have counted the strokes'. We chatted together till the rain stopped, then I went my way, and he went his.

Some months afterwards, I was awakened one night out of a sound sleep by a voice calling: 'Go to Bodmin!' I jumped out of bed and opened the room door expecting to find someone in the lobby. But no, all was still there, and I crept back to bed and towards morning fell asleep.

Again, I was roused up with a penetrating cry, 'Go to Bodmin!' What could it mean? I knew no one in Bodmin. I had never

even been to the town. The more I thought, the more puzzled I became. Some unseen power impelled me to get up so that I might start for Bodmin by the early train.

On reaching Bodmin, I wandered along one of the streets in an aimless fashion, wondering where I should go. By-and-by, I came to the County Buildings; a Circuit Court was being held, and I walked in to see what was going on. Just as I was entering, I heard the Judge say to the prisoner who stood in the dock: 'The evidence against you is so strong that the jury find you guilty of this terrible crime. Have you anything to say for yourself before I pass sentence?' The poor man gasped out: 'Oh, my Lord! I am innocent; I was miles away from this place on the night of the murder. There is one man who could prove my innocence, but I neither know his name nor where to find him'. 'Explain your meaning', said the Judge, 'you seem to be talking nonsense'. 'No, my Lord; this is the truth I am going to tell you. About midnight on July 9th, I was sheltering from a thunderstorm in a church porch. A gentleman was sheltering there too, and while we sat, the church clock struck thirteen. We had both counted the strokes, and remarked on the strange circumstance. That gentleman could prove my innocence, and I prayed often in my cell last night that God would send him to my help'.

As the prisoner finished speaking, I stepped forward, and said: 'My Lord, the prisoner's story is perfectly true. I am the man who sat beside him in the church porch on the night of July 9th'. Then, while the Judge and jury listened, spellbound, I related what had happened to me during the past night, and how I had been impelled to come to Bodmin that day.

Little Gleaner 1905

Casting Crowns

Rev Jerrold Lewis

(Free Reformed Church of Pompton Plains, USA)

The substance of an address given to the 2011 General Assembly

The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created' (Rev.4:10).

Introduction

The book of Revelation is full of both dark and bright mysteries. Often, we get caught up very easily in any number of its symbols and metaphors. Some time ago, in North America, we had the May 21st prophecy of Harold Camping come and go. Where I live, there were billboards, posters, and media messages along many important corridors of New Jersey and New York, claiming that God was about to come for the Judgment Day. Perhaps you also felt the impact of this false prophecy here in the UK. All along the East Coast, as May 21st approached, people became enamoured with the end times. Phone calls from wayward sons and daughters of the church came to their parents, wanting to know if this event was real, and if so, what to do. I had the pleasure of placing Thomas Watson's book, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, into the hands of one young man who was wanting something to read that would help him during this time. I had phone calls, drop-ins, and emails from complete strangers, wondering if this would be the end. There was much talk of the rapture, the mark of the beast, Armageddon and the Antichrist. The East Coast of the USA was in a tizzy over the end times. For a moment. Once the deadline passed, everyone went back to their regular ways. Yet in all of the talk of the end of days, and the book of Revelation, there was hardly any mention whatsoever of Christ. It became clear to me again that if the devil cannot get us to forget the Bible altogether, he will gladly have us sidetracked by secondary matters. What he wants us to stay away from is the first clause of the first line in the first verse, in the first chapter of the book of Revelation, 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ'. If we miss this, we miss the point of the book completely, not only in its complexities, but also in its simplicities.

The verse I want to draw your attention to is all about Jesus Christ. Revelation 4:10: 'The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created'. It is really the third clause I wish to focus on for a moment, 'and cast their crowns before the throne'.

I'm no novelist, that is I don't claim any new insight into this passage. I like to take the safe roads in interpretation. As James Durham rightly explained in his *Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, the elders here are none other than the

the elect in all ages; a part representing the whole. An elder (as it were) for each tribe, or a representative for each of the whole of the bride of Christ. It is the church once militant, now triumphant, represented by this semicircle around the throne. Sitting on it is the Lamb of God now described to look upon as 'jasper and a sardine stone'.

And these elect are doing something in this text, most remarkable. They are giving two things to the enthroned Lamb; the only two things they possess in eternity, their crowns and themselves. Now a crown in the Bible, as you all well know, represents a kingdom. Without getting into a lengthy apology of this principle, this is the fulfilment of the Lord's words, 'I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me' (Luke 22:29). Paul furthers this thought by saying in 2 Timothy 4:8, 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing'. The Lord and Paul are saying that the rewards of heaven are tangible, and they consist of a kingdom and a crown.

And as we read the passage, and peer as it were through a window into heaven, it seems a spontaneous act, doesn't it? We see here in this action an unprompted will. No script needs to be given. No prodding or reminding, 'Hey, place your crown there'. It seems there is a collective spontaneity in this act of worship. And my question this morning to us is, what is motivating it? As an assembly of elders this morning, is there something we can learn? Here, like those in heaven, we are a gathered assembly of representatives of the church of Christ. Is this not some good lesson for us today?

What prompted this act of casting crowns in our text? It is hard for us to know for sure, but I think we are safe to itemise three:

1. Perfect Meekness
2. Perfect Love
3. Perfect Thankfulness

Perfect Meekness

In the first place, this act was prompted by perfect meekness. Oh, what that must look like. When I wake up in the morning, and look at myself in the mirror, I do not see much of this quality. Do you? No one since the fall has ever demonstrated this quality perfectly on earth, besides Christ. Our first parents were not content with the crown given to them in the garden. They wanted His crown, and in so doing, took part in the same sin as the devil himself. Thomas Boston said, 'Pride is the very image of the Devil'. Ever since that sad and dark day, pride has made up a principal part of our fallen nature. From that day, there has been a constant struggle among us for preeminence.

Oh, we love the chief places and the uppermost seats, don't we, brothers? And when a little success comes with our office,

be it in preaching, teaching, or by the sick bed; pride so often forms the greatest obstacle in the heart. Sometimes our people look at us as super-Christians. But we know better, don't we? We are not given a pass from the sin of pride, are we? No. Even for the heart won by the meek and lowly Christ, pride is the very last, and often our greatest enemy. And if we are given momentary victory over this enemy, sadly, it is only after many victories it previously obtained over us. Our Lord's own disciples fell victim to this sin. Pride prompted frequent debates over who should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In fact, it made two of them so bold as to ask to sit on either side of the Lord in His kingdom. And are we unlike the disciples? No. If their Lord is kind enough to grant us any peculiar manifestations of His favour; if He is pleased to visit us with unusual help in preaching or prayer; if He is pleased to crown our efforts with some slight modicum of success, immediately this deep and busy sin begins to rise up. Self worth begins to increase. Quiet whispers enter the heart of 'gifted', 'brilliant', 'successful', and the Spirit Himself must withdraw. We find Elihu's words, echoing through our current experience, 'That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man' (Job 33:17). Even Paul, after being favoured with a transport to the third heaven, was given a thorn; a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure. And here we are, men of much smaller gifts, finding in us, far too easily, things sufficient to exalt us above measure.

In New Jersey you can walk through the Princeton Seminary Graveyard, and pause at the plots of J A and A W Alexander, Jonathan Edwards, and the Hodges. A few years ago I visited the grave sites of Halyburton and Rutherford in St. Andrews Kirkyard. So many men that dwarf us in every conceivable manifestation of gifts. Their lights will continue to shine in succeeding generations, but ours will go out. I walked on many unknown graves to get to theirs and others will walk on ours. Yet where are these bright lights now? Casting crowns. Oh, we often overrate our own attainments and fall prey to the pride of the heart. We conceal our deficiencies, find fault in others, and in many other ways, quench the Spirit of God. Why should

He give more gifts to those who are so proud already of the little we have? So often, we are like a servant being told by the master to go and give food to the poor. And when we do it, we act as if the provisions came from our own riches. And can we wonder that God should withhold his gifts from those who often make use of them to nourish pride and who take part of the glory to themselves? Oh, my dear brothers, I feel that this is the chief reason why we receive so little. The Spirit is able to give, He is willing to give, and inclined to give far more than we receive; but He must withhold His blessings, even hide His face from us, lest our pride should be increased.

But my dear brothers, is it not a wonder, that this pride will be left behind forever? What a glorious day that will be! For those we have read about this morning, there they are, even this morning, casting their crowns in perfect humility! This must be one of their motives, perfect humility at last! There they have no desire for the chief place before the throne. They are no longer concerned that one crown differs from another in splendour. There, we see no desire for admiration or applause. There, they don't keep back any part of the glory that belongs to their Saviour. It is perfect humility. As if in this act, they are saying, 'I have nothing. And even that which I now possess does not belong to me'. Oh, the cry of every heart will be, 'My salvation was wholly of the Lord. Jesus is the author, the finisher and rewarder of my faith. There, my Lord; there my dear Saviour; there is my crown!' Perfect meekness. What will that be like?

Perfect Love

The second thing I believe motivates these souls is perfect love. In this life we always crown the objects we love the most, don't we? And by nature the object we love the most is self. So we crown, we adorn, we exalt self. Pride springs from selfishness, and the one is always in exact proportion to the other. But when the heart is changed by Christ, when he is proven to be loved by Christ, he begins to love Christ supremely. But it is only the beginning. In the present life we live this love, and of course, its effects are never perfect. As there is some pride here on earth, so there is some selfishness,

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even in the heart of the most holy man among us. Our hearts are often divided. Divided between this world, and the world to come. We preach to others to not regard the world around us, but we do not always preach this to ourselves. Is it your prayer, dear brothers, to love Christ more? In heaven that prayer is finally answered, perfectly. The ones before the throne this morning, finally love Christ perfectly. Oh, what that must be like! For the first time, they love Him with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. For the first time, they love him far better than they love themselves. Bishop Ryle says, 'Of all the things that will surprise us in the resurrection, this, I believe, will surprise us the most; that we did not love Christ more before we died'. Oh, to have that perfect love! As ministers, as elders. No, as men, as sinners.

Dear brothers, the natural effect of gratitude for love received is a desire to make some return on that love. And the greater the love known, the greater the love given in return. Oh there, before the throne, they bring themselves, their crowns, all that they are, and all that they have, and cast it at Christ's feet. By this action they are saying, 'Lord, we desire to give something in return for all Thy goodness. Yet, we have nothing except what Thou hast given us. So the very reward of salvation, these crowns given to us by Thee, they are Thine. If we had more, we would give more'. And they cast their crowns at his feet. But there is one more motive, as I imagine, behind all of this.

Perfect Thankfulness

I would like to point out something that you all probably already know. The Greek for 'casting' here, is better translated 'shall cast'. 'And shall cast their crowns before the throne'. It is the future active verb tense, which means it is a repeated act, over and over. There is an eternity in the action. And the word is 'cast', not 'place or set'. That is, they did not place their crowns at the feet of the Lamb or set them there, but they threw them. That is what the word means. Casting it here means that the object is so worthy, that giving it becomes an imperative, a must. So walking over and placing it would take too long. The heart is too thankful. It is spontaneous. It must go now, and not wait to walk it over. 'Here it is, Lord, for all Thy love, and saving benefit'. So the last motive is perfect thankfulness for sins forgiven.

And oh how far short we come in all of this. Do we reflect on this today to discourage our heart in these things? No. I believe that the redeemed soul here on earth greatly desires, though imperfectly, to resemble those in heaven. So they differ from them only in degree. And you, dear brothers, can you listen to these things and not desire to reflect, to some degree, the motives now perfected in heaven? Something of the same love to a redeeming Christ, something of the same meekness, love and thankfulness for all His saving benefits?

This short span of existence here on earth is our place of practice. This world is the kindergarten of the School of Christ. And we will not graduate until the day we die. But we can practise, can't we? Casting our crowns. Until this course be completed, the race run, and we are finally raised to join those who have passed through Christ's School; whose education for heaven is finished. Dear brothers, fellow labourers; is this not a good place for us to practise casting crowns? At this General Assembly, for that General Assembly.



Rev Jerrold Lewis

“I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

Zechariah 12:10