

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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- Through the Bible with the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
- Congregational Praise – the singing of our Church during Worship Services
- Sermons preached by Dr Needham and Mr Seaton
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham



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"Ready to Die"

(The Pastor's Letter March 1976)

Dear Friends,

One of the many great resolves that fell from the lips of the apostle Paul is found in the 21st chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and at verse 13. Paul has just been warned, in the most vivid fashion, by the Prophet Agabus, of the fate that awaits him if he continues in his plans to go up into the city of Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost. The Jews at Jerusalem are going to "bind" Paul, Agabus warns him as he takes Paul's girdle and binds his own hands and feet to demonstrate that utterance. The believers, who are looking on during this display, are greatly moved at the thought of what lies in store for the great apostle, and they endeavour to turn him from that course with their entreaties and overtures. Then follows Paul's great resolve: "Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

That first part of that statement – where Paul announces his perfect willingness to suffer those things that Agabus has spoken of – itself sets out Acts 21:13 as one of Paul's great resolves. But it's when Paul soars away and beyond the very worst that Agabus has spoken concerning him that we really get the full force of the determination that belongs to the Lord's apostle at this time. "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?" he says, "for, I am not only ready to be bound at Jerusalem, I am ready to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And surely that is a word to be reckoned with? "***I am ready to die,***" says Paul. A word that each and every one of us needs to be able to say within our heart; for even though we may never be called to die a martyr's death for the sake of the Lord Jesus, nevertheless (in the normal run of things) we will most assuredly die and need to know the comfort and the assurance of being "***Ready to die.***"

Now, there are an awful lot of people in our own day who imagine and think that they are "ready to die" simply because they feel willing enough to say goodbye to this present mode of life they now find themselves in. "When your time comes you have to go," is an outlook that many adopt, and they settle themselves on that philosophy. But this was not the readiness of the apostle Paul. Indeed, it was *part* of it; he *was* ready in the sense of being willing to leave this present world through the gates of death. But that was only part of the story. The real readiness lay, not just in a willingness to turn his face from things that he had to leave in this world, but in an ability to turn his face towards the face of his God whom he had to meet in the next. Being "ready to die" in the way that the apostle Paul was ready to die, involves being *able* to die as well as being *willing* to die.

You may know something of the encounter between the Evangelist and the burdened Pilgrim in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Evangelist asks the Pilgrim why he is crying out, "What must I do to be saved?" "He answered, Sir, I perceive by the book in my hand, that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgement; and I find that I am not willing to do the first, nor able to do the second. Then said Evangelist, Why not willing to die, since this life is attended with so many evils? The man answered, Because I fear that this burden that is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave ..."

That's it, my friends. There was the grave; but that man with the "burden" on his back – the knowledge and guilt of his sin before God – knew that that burden would sink him "lower than the grave," as he puts it. Not only was his body bound for the grave, but beyond the grave both body and soul would be cast into hell fire. He had a "book" in his hand, you remember – it was the Bible – and in that book he read two things: 1. He was condemned to die; 2. After that, to come to judgement. And says he "I am not willing to do the first, nor able to do the second." The one is dependant on the other you see. The reason that he is not willing to die is because he is not *able* to

come to the judgement. He knows that he is not able to face the face of his God in heaven above, and for that precise reason he is not willing to turn his face from the things of this present existence that he now finds himself in.

Ready to die? Do you mean willing to leave this world? That was not Paul's readiness. Indeed he was ready in the sense of being willing to leave it; but only because he knew he was able to enter into that eternal world where he must stand before his God at last. What made him able? Only one thing: he believed in the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart, and through faith in Christ's name he had salvation through Christ's blood that was shed for all them that believe. The sight of the cross was the thing that lifted that burden from the Pilgrim's back at last; it did the same with Paul, and filled his mouth with that resolve that day, "I am ready to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

Yours,
W. J. Seaton

Gleanings in the Psalms

(Psalm 71 concluded)



Verse 9. "Cast me not off in the time of old age ..." David was not tired of his master, and his only fear was lest his master should be tired of him. The Amalekite in the Bible history left his Egyptian servant to famish when he grew old and sick, but not so the Lord of saints. Even to hoar hairs He bears and carries us. Alas for us, if we were abandoned by our God, as many a courtier has been by his prince! Old age robs us of personal beauty, and deprives us of strength for active service; but it does not lower us in the love and favour of God. An ungrateful country leaves its worn-out defenders to

starve upon a scanty pittance, but the pensioners of heaven are satisfied with good things.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Verse 14. "But I will hope continually, and I will yet praise thee more and more." Christian! Every day swells the tide of your mercies, adds to your heap, increases your treasure, and heightens your stature. Therefore, as the coat thou didst wear as a child, would not become thee now thou art a man, neither will the "garment of praise" with which thou didst clothe thyself when a young convert, become thee now when thou art an old disciple. Thou standest deeper in God's books than ever before, and God expects according to what every man received. You would not rent a farm now at the same rate that it bore fifty years ago. And why then may not God raise the rent of His mercies to you?

William Gurnall

Verse 17. "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth ..." God taught David by his shepherd's crook, and by the rod and sceptre of a king He also taught him. He taught him by the shouts of the multitude – "Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands" – and He taught him just as much, if not more, by the contempt he met within the courts of the Philistines. He taught him by the faithlessness of Abiathar, and the faithlessness of even his faithful Joab; and He taught him by the faithfulness of Abishai, and the faithfulness of Mephibosheth – and let me add, also, by the rebellion of Absalom, and the selfishness of Adonijah. They were *all* means by which the Lord taught His servant. And be assured, you that are under His teaching, there is nothing in your lives, but He can teach you by it. By comforts and crosses, by your wounds and your healings, by what He gives you and by what He takes away. He unteaches His child that He may teach him; shows him his folly that He may make him wise; strips him of his vain confidence, that He may give him strength; makes him know that he is nothing, that He may show him that he has all in the Lord – in Jesus His beloved.

J.H.Evans

Verse 18. "Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not ..." Those ships that have been in long voyages at sea, and have gone through hot climates and cold, and have run through many a difficulty and great storm, and yet have been "kept alive," as they say – when they meet one another, how many greetings pass between them? And old disciples should do likewise, because God has kept grace alive in their souls. I would ask you, how many ships have you seen cast away before your eyes? How many that have made "Shipwreck of faith and a good conscience," as the apostle speaks? This and that profession that has run into this and that error damnable, or false opinions and teaching; others that have struck upon quicksands of worldly preferments, and may split upon rocks, and yet, you have been kept. This should move you to bless this your God, the God of all grace.

From Thomas Goodwin

Verse 20. "Thou, which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again ..." The number of great works that have been born out of "great and sore troubles" in the history of the Church of Christ are far beyond the telling. Just over a hundred years ago, a man knelt by the grave of a departed loved one in a little cemetery sitting under the shadow of the Swiss Alps. As he plucked away the dead leaves of a rose bush, he was interrupted by the opening of the cemetery gate, and the sound of footsteps making their way towards a grave nearby. Not long afterwards, the night air was heavy with the sobs of a man's heart. They were strong, manly tears that fell on the mounds of earth over which the visitor had stretched himself, and the unperceived watcher was only too aware of the story that lay behind those tears. The man in question was the great Merle D'Aubigne – the historian of the Reformation period – and below the earth where he was prostrated in his "great and sore troubles" lay the infant bodies of four of his dear children. In the mysterious providences of God one child had died in turn as each of the four volumes of his great work had been issued, and now the fifth volume must soon appear, and there were yet two children at home. But God stayed His hand in mercy.

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

Mark had a very bad habit of crunching his teeth. Oh how it annoyed his sister Julie. Each time he did it she would shout at him, "Stop it! Stop it!" Mark, at first, had not realised he was doing it. But when he saw it annoyed his sister he crunched his teeth all the more.

Now, one day when Mark and Julie's mother was quietly going about the house tidying up she heard a commotion and calling the two of them over, asked what all the noise was about. When they told her the whole story mummy sat down, and this is what she said, "Well children, you're both wrong! Mark you have a habit that you know irritates your sister, so you should do your very best to break the habit and thank Julie when she tells you that you are doing it. And, Julie, you are very wrong in screaming and being impatient with Mark. What you have to do is to be patient, and try and help your brother overcome his bad habit."

As soon as mother had finished speaking, both children chimed in together, "It's easier said than done, mum," Mother then told them both to sit down, and she began to show what she meant by telling them a story that Jesus had told: -

A certain king decided to reckon up with his servants what each one owed him. One was brought to him who owed him ten thousand pounds. He didn't have the money to pay his debt, and his master commanded him to be sold. The servant fell down and pleaded, "Have patience with me and I will pay you all I owe." The king then had pity on him, and set him free, and forgave him the debt. But that same servant went out and found another servant who owed him a

hundred pence, and taking him by the throat, he shook him, saying, "Pay me what you owe me." The poor man fell down at his feet and cried, "Have patience with me and I will repay you all that I owe." But he refused, and had him cast into prison.

The other servants were sorry for the poor man, and went and told the king. The king then called the first servant to him and said, "You wicked servant, I forgave you all your debt, because you asked me, and yet, you would not have pity on your fellow-servant." The servant was then cast into prison until he could pay what he owed. He lost the forgiveness that he could have had, and our Lord Jesus finished the story by saying that if we could not learn to forgive others their sins, then God would not forgive us our sins.

"Now, that's not an easy lesson to learn, children," said Julie and Mark's mother, but it's what our Lord Jesus Christ said. And remember, of course, all that Jesus did when He died on the cross so that we might have our sins forgiven by believing in Him and trying to follow His example. As the hymn says: -

'O dearly, dearly has He loved,
And we must love Him, too;
And trust in His redeeming blood,
And try His works to do.'

Love,
Mrs Seaton

Preaching Eternities



"When Dr. Chalmers occupied the chair of philosophy in the College of St. Andrews, he used to gather into his house on a Sabbath evening, the poorest and the most ignorant of the vagrant children of the neighbourhood. His biography states that for that audience, he prepared himself (with pen in hand) as carefully as for any class in the university.

Likewise, on a winter's day, through frost and in the face of a driving snow-storm, you might have seen him trudging five miles to fulfil an appointment of religious worship with a little company of rustic people at Kilmany. There amid some illiterate shivering cottagers, too few for a church building or chapel, and met in a damp room – a congregation that many men would have thought it expedient to dismiss at once 'On account of the weather' or would have put off with some crude, unpremeditated talk – he preached as laboured and eloquent a sermon as would have moved to rapture and wonder the learning and fashion of Glasgow or London".

J. C. Gray



What sin promises:	Life, Pleasure, Profit:
What sin pays:	Death, Torment, Destruction.

Weigh up, then, what it promises with what it pays before you make another bargain with it.

Spurgeon's Eccentric Preachers

Part 6 – John Berridge, 1716-1793.

John Berridge, the vicar of Everton, was commended by John Wesley as one of the most simple as well as most sensible of all whom it pleased God to employ in reviving primitive Christianity. He was a man of remarkable learning, being as familiar in the learned languages as in his mother tongue, and well instructed in theology, logic, mathematics, and metaphysics: he was not, therefore, eccentric because he was ignorant. He possessed a strength of understanding, quickness of perception, depth of penetration, and brilliancy of fancy beyond most men, while a vein of innocent humour ran through all his public and private discourses. His biographer tells us that this softened what some might call the austerity of religion, and rendered his company pleasant to people of a less serious habit; and yet he adds, - "It is very singular that it never overcame his own gravity; he remained serious himself while others were convulsed with laughter."

Before he was converted he preached mere morality, but after he was called by the Holy Spirit he was zealous for the doctrines of sovereign grace, and preached the gospel in the clearest possible manner. In his ministry he was diligence itself, journeying through the counties of Cambridge, Bedford, Hertford, and Huntingdon continually, preaching upon an average from ten to twelve sermons a week, and riding from place to place on horseback. He wrote to a friend – "I fear my weekly circuits would not suit a London or a Bath divine, nor any tender evangelist that is environed with prunello. Long rides and miry roads in sharp weather! Cold houses to sit in, with very moderate fuel, and three or four children roaring or rocking about you! Coarse food and meagre cordial; lumpy beds to lie on and too short for the feet; and stiff blankets like boards for a covering. Rise at five in the morning to preach; at seven breakfast on tea that smells very sickly; at eight mount a horse, with boots never cleaned, and then ride home, praising God for all mercies."

A complaint was lodged against him, and the bishop sent for him and reproved him for preaching "at all hours and on all days." "My lord," said he modestly, "I preach only at two seasons." "Which are they, Mr Berridge?" "In season and out of season, my lord."

The revival which resulted from his efforts was remarkable for depth and continuance, and for the personal persecution which it brought upon the good man. The clergy and gentry made common cause with the lowest mob against him. "The old devil" was the only name by which he was distinguished for between twenty and thirty years; but none of these things moved him. Crowds waited upon him wherever he journeyed, and his own church was crammed, we had almost said up to the ceiling, for we have heard of men clambering up and sitting upon the cross-beams of the roof, while the windows were filled within and without, and even the outside of the pulpit, to the very top, so that Mr. Berridge seemed almost stifled. There is no wonder what the people thronged him, for his style was so intensely earnest, homely, and simple, that every ploughman was glad to hear the gospel preached in a tongue which he could understand, and with an earnestness which he could not resist.

His discourses were not after a set fashion, and were frequently well nigh impromptu. Mr Berridge says that sometimes on entering the pulpit he found himself unable to exercise his thought on his subject, and felt himself to be "like a barber's block with a wig on"; but his hearers did not think so, for they were excited to a passionate fervour by his words. On one occasion, while mounting the stairs of the pulpit at Tottenham Court Road, his memory seemed to fail him, and he commenced his sermon by saying, "I set out to this place to-night with a sack well filled with well-baked wheaten bread, which I hoped to set before you, but the bottom came out of the sack as I walked up-stairs, and I have nothing left for you but five barley loaves and a few small fishes. You will have these loaves hot from the oven; may they be food convenient for your souls."

His voice was loud, but perfectly under command; ten or fifteen thousand persons frequently composed his congregation in the open

air, and he was well heard by all. People came to hear him from a distance of twenty miles, and were at Everton by seven o'clock in the morning, having set out from home soon after midnight. In the early years of his ministry he was the witness of strange scenes, when the revival took the same form as it did a few years ago in certain parts of the north of Ireland, and was accompanied by physical manifestations. The phenomena then presented were very remarkable, but we must confess that we have no faith in their spiritual character, and are sorry to hear of their occurrence. After a while the shoutings and contortions came to an end, and the work proceeded steadily and after the usual fashion. Amid all the excitement Berridge never lost his head or became a fanatic, neither was he exalted above measure, but remained one of the humblest and most genuine of men.

There is no doubt that his style was very remarkable, and entirely his own. In one of his letters he writes: - "I have been recruiting for Mr. Venn at Godmanchester, a very populous and wicked town near Huntingdon, and met with a patient hearing from a numerous audience. I hope he also will consecrate a few barns, and preach in them to fill up his fold at Yelling; and sure there is a cause when souls are perishing for lack of knowledge. Must salvation give place to a fanciful decency, and sinners go flocking to hell through our dread or irregularity? While irregularity in its worst shape tranverses the kingdom with impunity should not irregularity in its best shape pass without censure? I told my brother he need not fear being slandered for sheep-stealing while he only whistles the sheep to a better pasture, and meddles neither with the flesh nor the fleece, and I am sure he cannot sink much lower in credit, for he has lost his character right honestly by preaching the gospel without mincing it. The scoffing world makes no other distinction between us than between Satan and Beelzebub; we have both got tufted horns and cloven feet, only I am thought the more impudent devil of the two."

Little cared Berridge if the wicked world treated him as it did his Master, he only longed to save those who loved to revile him.

Home Missions and the Highlands

A short account of home mission enterprise in the Highlands of Scotland in the 18th Century.

(From – The History of the Baptists in Scotland)

If sacrificial service for others be a mark of a living church, the brethren of the Baptist faith manifested its spirit early.

Time was necessary to permit of the growth of the organism before a church could venture with effect on missionary activity, and hence individual effort led the way. A zeal for the salvation of his fellows burned in the heart of ***Henry David Inglis***, and in 1783 he was set apart by the Edinburgh church to preach the gospel in the surrounding towns and villages – a work to which he devoted himself twice or thrice a week after discharging his daily duties.

The spiritual condition of the Highlands excited the compassion of earnest-minded men in the later years of the 18th century. The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge had catechists and teachers in some districts, and in Ross, several evangelical ministers stood out as stars in the night. But the region as a whole was in thick darkness, and soul-concern was viewed by the official clergy as a species of insanity. There was little sympathy with the vital religion, and a revival in Easdale, which arose about 1780 from the public reading of Alleine's "Alarm to the Unconverted" – a book that awakened ***Peter Grant*** twenty years later – was crushed by the local presbytery, who inveighed against the converts and threatened with excommunication any family that retained a copy.

The memorable first tour of ***James Haldane*** was not, however, to Highland districts, but to the towns and villages of the east and north coasts; but enough of gospel destitution came into view to shock the Christian conscience and to provoke it to consider redress. "We hardly found," said the itinerants on their return, "an instance of that

zeal which leads many ministers and others in England to go to the neighbouring towns and villages, proclaiming the joyful sound where the gospel is not preached." The novelty of lay preaching, and that by gentlemen in their ordinary coloured coat and tied-back hair of the period, and their direct appeals startled, as they attracted the multitudes. Their audiences were summoned by hand-bell or tuck of drums, and town halls, barns, market places, church yards, and the meeting houses of the Secession and Relief Churches, when given, were used, and experiences were diverse. At Montrose they were not welcome; the town "had already enough of the gospel." In Fort George preaching was delayed as the Governor had "never heard of a sermon in any fort on a week-day." In crossing from Burghead to Orkney the sailors, out of respect, made a law that anyone guilty of swearing should suffer corporal punishment. Caithness and Orkney were responsive to the Word; multitudes heard and many hearkened, but the conclusions formed regarding the parochial ministry were more than disquieting. The Orkneys were, as regards preaching, as much need of the gospel as any of the islands of the Pacific while in Caithness the public profession of repentance for a moral offence was commuted for a money payment, and thereafter the offender was received to the Communion. The final judgment was that multitudes were "taught to put their trust in a refuge of lies."

The publication of the Journal of their tour and the sending out of missionaries to the neglected districts by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home raised a storm of opposition in the Church of Scotland. The intrusion into their parishes was bitterly resented by the ministers. But the evangelical zeal of other bodies was fired. The Scotch Baptist church in Edinburgh, under its three pastors, following its earlier appeal for Foreign Missions, now issued in November 1798 an urgent message on behalf of Home Missions to all the churches in the connection, inviting them to co-operate in the spread of the gospel through the efforts of their elders and preachers as far around the places of their abode as possible. It also suggested a monthly collection to provide a fund for the expenses of journeys and meeting-places. The proposal must have succeeded beyond hope, for from 1804 onwards we find the Edinburgh church administering an

Itinerant Fund contributed by itself, Glasgow, Paisley, Dunfermline and one or two other churches; and rendering aid to missionaries in the north as well as meeting the expenses of elders who visited throughout the connection or made Highland tours. *Archibald M'lean* paid an annual visit to the churches both in Scotland and England, and while this may be regarded as having been more of a connectional duty than a strictly missionary activity, both were combined. In like manner his colleague Henry David Inglis, an advocate by profession, comforted the churches and preached the gospel in various parts of the country during the summer vacations of the Court.

In the meantime James Haldane had continued his tours and the Church of Scotland had fulminated against "vagrant preachers" and teachers of Sunday Schools. The Acts of Assembly and the Pastoral Admonition of 1799 suggested that these faithful ministrants of truth were seditious persons who pretended to "some novel method of bringing men to heaven." The result was persecution and interference. At Ayr, even before this, James Haldane's address was interrupted by the magistrates, and he was forbidden to continue. In Kintyre he and his companion were arrested and carried many miles to the Sheriff, before whom, to the confusion of their persecutors, the freedom of field preaching was vindicated. And in North Berwick he was ordered off the street by the Provost and some boon companions, and when he retired to a neighbouring field they tried to drown his voice by beating a drum. *John Farquharson* was seized for preaching in Braemar and imprisoned in the cell in Aberdeen where Samuel Rutherford had written many of his imperishable letters a century and a half before.

But all these things turned out rather for the furtherance of the gospel, and lives were renewed and little companies of Christians gathered. With *Mr. Innes* a tour was extended as far as northern Shetland and seed sown that bore fruit in due season. These long tours were continued for nine years, and nearly all the English-speaking parts of Scotland were visited and much attendant blessing enjoyed.

The Public House Bar

"A BAR to heaven, a door to Hell,
Whoever named it named it well

A BAR to manliness and wealth,
A door to want and broken health.

A BAR to honour, pride, and fame,
A door to sin and grief and shame.

A BAR to hope, a bar to prayer,
A door to darkness and despair.

A BAR to honoured useful life,
A door to brawling senseless strife.

A BAR to all that's true and brave,
A door to every drunkard's grave.

A BAR to joy that home imparts,
A door to tears and broken hearts.

A BAR to Heaven, a door to Hell,
Whoever named it, named it well"

Author Unknown.