

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 124 issued January 2017

Index

1. The Pastor's Letter – “But I Can't do Much!”
2. Gleanings in the Psalms – Psalm 76
3. Whitefield's Sermon on a Pane of Glass
4. John Tanner's Narrative of his Conversion
5. Mrs Seaton's Letter to the Boys and Girls - The Soldier (part 1)



At the Web Site of the Wicket Gate magazine www.wicketgate.co.uk you will also find the following recordings:

- 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

But I Can't Do Much!

(The Pastor's Letter December 1976)

Dear friends,

Among the sons of men, it is harder to find one that more challenges us than that man Paul the apostle. Whether he is rising to the heights of magnificent service in the cause of the gospel, or engaged in those things that some might reckon below his dignity, Paul's example speaks out boldly to us to go, and endeavour to do likewise.

At one point in his life, you may remember, (Acts chapter 28 verses 1-6,) Paul was shipwrecked on the island of Malta. On that island, the apostle displays many signs apostolic, and even in the first few verses of the chapter it is evident that this is “no ordinary man”. We are told how the “barbarous people” of the island showed the survivors of that wrecked ship “no little kindness”, for they had kindled a fire on the beach “because of the present rain, and because of the cold.” There then comes that vivid incident when a sleeping viper, apparently laid on the fire in a bundle of brushwood that has been gathered, is aroused out of its sleep, darts out of the heat, and fastens itself on Paul's hand. Every eye turns in Paul's direction, and they wait for him to fall down dead at their feet. But, we are told, Paul simply “shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.” He is, of course, among that number, of whom it was said that they “shall take up serpents;” he is an apostle, and displays an apostle's mark in that memorable scene around that fire on the beach of the island of Malta so long ago.

However, there is another action of Paul that morning that deserves every bit as much attention from us, if not more, as far as our practical Christian testimony and witness are concerned. You see, when that bundle of wood was laid on the fire, it was Paul himself who laid it there. Here is what we read, “And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat,” etc. Let's not lose the force and the significance of that

statement for one moment. “And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks ...” Let's not be so interested in those speculations about just what kind of a viper it was that bit Paul, or whether he was really bitten in the first place, and so forth; let's not be so keen to rush on to the vivid that we absolutely miss the tremendous challenge and lesson to our hearts concerning those areas of a professing Christian life that Paul's life so often teach us to follow. I doubt if any of us could “take up serpents!” but we can “gather sticks”, in one way or another, as the occasion demands it in our Christian life and calling.

We may as well visualise what took place that cold, rainy morning on the beach at Malta. It may do well to remember that Paul has been the innocent victim of that shipwreck: he has warned the captain and owner about proceeding with the voyage, but they have disregarded his advice and have now brought disaster upon themselves and upon Paul, as well. There are two-hundred-and-seventy-six souls altogether that have scrambled up that beach from that shipwreck that morning, and it would seem that the one thing in their minds is to get a bit of heat into their perishing limbs. So, we may well see them, jostling and pushing for position around that fire that has been kindled for them. But there is one thing about a fire – it doesn't keep itself going! And out of that circle slips that wee apostle of the Lord God, and begins to gather up some fresh supplies of wood – Paul gathers a bundle of sticks.

How deeply that should touch our hearts. In the Christian estimation of things, a man's greatness is very often not reckoned in what he rises to, but in what he stoops to. The apostle Paul was no “armchair exhorter.” Read his practical words to our hearts in all his epistles, and be assured of this, he wrote what he also performed. Paul was the kind of man that would have sat down for a meal at your table, eaten it with relish, thanked you sincerely from the bottom of his heart, and then have said, “Right now, let's get the dishes done!” Why would he have said that? Because, my friends, he would have known that dishes don't wash themselves. And fires don't keep themselves going. And so, off goes Paul – up onto the sand dunes, perhaps – and begins to rummage around for the fuel that was needed

that morning to keep something of a glow present until all their frozen limbs were thawed out a bit.

You see how much application there ought to be in a bit of behaviour like that on the part of this challenging man? It might well come home to those who profess themselves to be called as ministers of the Word of God. There is generally a great tendency in the ministry to hold to one form or another of “apostolic succession”. Would to God we all desired to follow such apostolic example as Paul here sets before us. It is a searching word that Peter writes when he tells pastors how they ought to behave themselves in the office that the Lord has given to them in the church: “Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.” How many there are, and they could fill the “Laird's” place quite well in their general behaviour within their pastoral calling. “But being examples to the flock,” says Peter. That means, among other things, don't ask your people to do what you are not willing to do yourself. We don't read that Paul cast an eye around for a suitable “lay-man” to go and gather the sticks for the fire on Malta. Oh yes, there are those “peculiar” things, as you might call them, that belong to the pastoral calling. But we must ever be careful that we don't hide behind those things for not taking our “general” part in all the works of the church's many needs and outworkings. Paul was possibly the only one on Malta who could withstand the viper's sting; he was most certainly *not* the only one on Malta who could gather sticks; but his “peculiar” calling didn't in any way eliminate his “general” usefulness when such usefulness was required for the benefit of all concerned.

And, of course, the whole incident has that “general” application about it to every professing child of God within the context of the church of Jesus Christ and its needs. It is one of the sweetest words of encouragement that our Saviour ever spoke when He said concerning that woman, “She hath done what she could.” If the lives and attitudes and behaviour of some Christians were to be aligned with those scenes on Malta that morning, we could well imagine them standing round the fire and complaining that it was “going down”, and there was not the same heat as there used to be. You see something about the apostle Paul there? Now, he didn't do what he did out of any

selfish motive, and yet, once Paul would begin to climb up those dunes and pull away at bits and pieces of undergrowth, and carry his bundle back to the fire again, he would have, in fact, been warming himself in trying to bring a bit of warmth to others who needed it. We shouldn't lose that fact. Dear old Paul probably felt as “chilled to the marrow” as the rest of them, but believing in the absolute sovereignty of God as he did, he knew that God had provided various means for bringing warmth to cold bodies – and the circulating of the blood was one of them.

And need we speak of the various means that God has given to us, even in the coldest days of our spiritual winters? “Is not my Word like unto a fire? saith the Lord.” And how we need to begin to gather in and gather round that Word of God in our day. What about our prayers? Big sticks and little sticks; pile them on the fire. Why should we complain about the coldness of a prayer meeting when we are either never there, or never come with prayer on our lips or in our hearts? And fellowship, too, in the work of the gospel for the souls of men. As long as the coals are unlit, they lie apart; put a match to them, and they are fused together in the one common cause of bringing light and heat into a dank and darkened world.

“But I can't do much,” says some one. But, is that not the whole point of Paul gathering sticks on the island of Malta? He is not yet in the position to “preach before the kings of the earth” at Rome: that day will come. But, he can gather sticks for the fire; and that he does – it is the present necessity. And surely we have seen how a fire starts, or is rekindled when it has gone down? Not with a half ton of coal being dumped on it, but with the twigs, the shavings, the kindlings. Has that not been God's way so often in beginning a fire in His church that has warmed many souls in the world? Indeed, yes, for God has a way of not allowing any flesh to glory in His presence, and delights to take the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. May the Lord be with us all in our cold days, and may He grant us a spirit to desire that simple, yet profound, commendation, they have done what they could.

Yours sincerely, W.J. Seaton

Gleanings in the Psalms

(Psalm 76)



Verse 1. “In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel.”

God is known in his works as a God of power; in his providence as a God of authority, wisdom and order; in his common mercies as a God of bounty; and in his punishments and judgements as a God of justice. But, in Christ opened and preached in the gospel, God is known with a clear and saving knowledge as a Father of grace, mercy and loving-kindness

Alexander Grosse.

Verse 4. “Thou art more glorious and excellent than the

mountains of prey.” God was not known in Babylon, in Egypt, and in other nations; his tabernacle and dwelling place was not amongst them; therefore, they were not glorious. But, see what it says in this verse, “Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey.” Thou Judah, thou Israel, thou Salem, thou Zion, that hast spiritual mercies and blessings, art more glorious than they whatever their glory be. Have the nations abroad goodly towers? Thou hast the Temple; have they stately cities? Thou hast Jerusalem, the city of God; have they wise men? Thou hast the prophets; have they gods of gold and silver and stone? Thou hast the true and living God, Jehovah, to be thy God; have they human laws that are good? Thou hast divine laws that excel, have they temporal excellencies? Thou hast spiritual; have they the glory of the world? Thou hast the glory of heaven.

William Greenhill.

Verses 8 & 9. “Thou didst cause judgement to be heard from heaven; the earth feared and was still, when God arose to judgment...” This great judgement was wrought upon the enemies

when God “arose.” It was not done when God sat; for the whole time that He “sat” his enemies were abroad, raging in murder, oppression and blood. But the psalmist brings in God here after the manner of earthly judges and after the custom of our own judges. First they sit down, they try, they seek out an advise; after consideration they resolve, and after resolution they rise up, give forth the judgment and pronounce the sentence. Even so, the prophet brings in God after the same manner; sitting, and after sitting, rising and pronouncing the sentence.

Robert Bruce.

Verse 10 “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.”

“Surely the wrath of man ...” In the original, it is the wrath of *clay* – weak, impotent man. It is the wrath of “Adam” - of red clay. How contemptibly doth the Spirit of God speak of man and of the power of man in the Scriptures? “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?” The wrath of man, even when it is lengthened out to its utmost boundaries, can only go to the length of killing the body, or of breaking the sheath of clay in which the soul lodges, and then it can do no more.

“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee ...” What work of God in the church is advanced by the wrath of man? (1) His *discovering* work; for by the wind of man's wrath he separates the precious and the vile – the chaff and the wheat. In the day of the church's prosperity and quietness, hypocrites and true believers are mingled together, like the chaff and the wheat on the barn floor. But, the Lord, like the husbandman, opens the door of his barn and puts the wind of man's wrath through it, that the world may know which is which. (2) God's *purging* work is advanced among his own children by the wrath of men. There is much of the dross of corruption cleaving to the Lord's people while in the wilderness. Now, the Lord heats the furnace of man's wrath, and casts his people into it, that when he has tried them, he may bring them forth as gold. (3) God's *uniting* work is thereby advanced. In a time of peace and external tranquillity, the sheep of Christ scatter and divide among themselves; but God lets loose the

dogs among them, and then the flock runs together; or like pieces of metal cast into a fire, they run together in a lump. (4) God's *enlarging* work – or his work of spreading the gospel – is sometimes advanced by the wrath of man. Remember Acts chapter 8, verses 1-5. The gospel, the more it is trodden upon, the more it spreads.

“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” the remainder of wrath is what is left over after God has glorified himself and his purposes through the wrath of man. God will only let out as much of the current of man's wrath as shall serve the end of his glory, but the remainder of the stream and current he will turn another way, and restrain. All this comfort is sure and certain; the flame of man's wrath shall praise the Lord, and the superfluous fire shall be quenched, or hemmed in.

Ebenezer Erskine

Whitefield's Sermon on a Pane of Glass.

It is stated that George Whitefield stopped for several days at the house of a General, at Providence, Rhode Island. The General, his wife, his son, and three daughters, were serious, but not decidedly religious.

Whitefield departed from his usual custom, which was to address the residents in the house where he stayed, individually, concerning the welfare of their souls. The last evening came, and the last night he was to spend here he retired to rest; but the Spirit of God came to him in the night, saying, “O man of God! If these people perish, their blood be on thy head.” He listened, but the flesh said, “Do not speak to these people. They are so good, and so kind, that you could not say a harsh word to them.” He rose and prayed. The sweat ran down his brow. He was in fear and anxiety.

At last a happy thought struck him. He took his diamond ring from his finger, went up to the window, and wrote these words upon the glass: ***“One thing thou lackest.”*** He could not summon courage to

say a word to the inmates, but went his way. No sooner was he gone than the General, who had a great veneration for him, went into the room he had occupied, and the first thing that struck his attention was the sentence upon the window - "One thing thou lackest." That was exactly his case, and the Spirit of God blessed it to his heart.

A grand-daughter of his family has now in her possession the pane of glass, with the monitory inscription

From "The Christian Treasury," (1860).

John Tanner's Narrative of his Conversion.

It was in the spring of 1743, as I was working in the service of my master (as a shipwright), on board a ship, near the New Quay at Plymouth, that intelligence was brought by one of our fellow-workman, that a minister of the name of Whitfield was going to preach in the open fields, at Teat's Hill, opposite where we were at work. Soon after we heard his voice; and, concluding that the man was mad, we resolved to go over, and knock him off the place whereon he stood. We were six of us, as well as I can recollect, which joined in this resolution. And I cannot even now proceed in the relation of the account, without stopping to admire and adore, in this instance as well as what happens in many others, the distinguishing riches of grace. For one of my six companions, not a great while after this, died by the hands of justice, shamefully at Tyburn.

Away we ran, as if going to take a rich prize; and so indeed it proved to me, and to me only, of the whole company. As soon as we had passed the wall of the French prison, Mr Whitefield opened to our view, extending his arms, and calling with his voice poor sinners to Christ Jesus. I was struck with amazement, and, indeed, so arrested, that I could not go a step farther until I had given attention to his words. He was preaching, as I afterwards learnt, from Acts 17:19,20. I had read somewhat of what he said in the Bible, yet knew no more the meaning than a wild indian; but I was instantly led to conclude

that the man was not, as we had supposed, mad. The tide being out at the time, I went over the mud, ashamed of my engagement with my companions, and stood behind some of the people to avoid them. They went round in quest of me, as I supposed, but used no violence because they had lost their leader.

Every sentence in Mr Whitefield's sermon was delivered in such a divine, pathetic, and energetic strain, as cut me to the heart, and was enough (God applying it), as it seemed to me, to raise the dead. I went home very different from what I came out, much oppressed in spirit; and, as in the close of the sermon notice was given that he would preach again on the following evening, I not only resolved to be present, but the time seemed long until the evening arrived. Little did I know that my eternal Lord was thus ploughing up the fallow ground of my heart, in order to sow the seed of eternal grace. Little did I apprehend the gracious designs of His everlasting love toward me, and that He was now “making me willing in the day of His power.”

The clock on the succeeding evening no sooner struck six than I threw down my tools, and ran so earnestly, that my feet seemed but scarcely to touch the ground, influenced by a very different spirit from what I had felt before. Oh! Well may I exclaim, “What hath God wrought!” I arrived at the blessed spot (a very Bethel to my soul) about ten minutes before Mr Whitefield came. I got near to the table on which he was to stand; and instead of knocking him off, would have knocked any man down if any had dared to molest him. When he arrived, and had given out a hymn, and offered up a prayer for a blessing on his labours – in which he prayed as if he would engage heaven on his side, and pull down showers of Grace upon the people – I thought I beheld heaven in his very looks. My heart was melted at once. His subject was Jesus' mercy to the Jerusalem sinners, from Luke 24, last sentence of 47th verse, “Beginning at Jerusalem.” From these words God the Spirit led him to show the atrocious sin of crucifying the Lord of Glory. Secondly, he noticed the instruments who perpetrated this dreadful deed (from whence sprang such infinite good), which were the Jews and Roman soldiers. Then came the never-to-be-forgotten moment, as it concerned me. I stood at this left hand. He was not at this time looking towards me, but had just been observing, “I suppose

that you are reflecting in you minds on the cruelty of those inhuman butchers who imbrued their hands in innocent blood.” When, on a sudden, turning himself towards me, as if designed (and I do believe from my heart the Lord designed it for me), he looked me full in the face, and cried out, “Sinner, thou art the man that crucified the Son of God.”

Then, and never before, I felt the word of God quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. I knew not whether to stand or fall. My sins seemed to stare me all in the face. I was at once convicted; my heart bursting, mine eyes gushing forth with floods of tears. I dreaded the instant wrath of God, and expected that it would instantly fall upon me. None but those who have waded through the deep waters of a convinced conscience can form any idea of the horror I endured.

It was happy for me that Mr Whitefield, in the prosecution of his sermon, followed up his observations on the Jerusalem sinners with the merciful designs of the Lord Jesus. Having thundered out the terrors of the law, he proceeded to bring before us the allurements of the gospel. And never surely were the rich promises, invitations, and calls of the word of God, more sweetly delivered. His heart seemed to be so enlarged, his soul so melted, his voice and hands so extended, inviting the vilest sinners to come and accept of a full, free, and complete pardon in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Come,” said he, “Come to Jesus just as you are. Come thou Jerusalem sinner. Jesus bids me call and invite thee to come. He saith Himself, all that do come He will in no wise cast out. Here is grace to pardon you; a fountain, to cleanse you; a righteousness, to clothe you; a full, finished, complete salvation in His blood. Come, sinner; come, come, come! My master bids you come! Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation! Hark how He calls you!”

It is impossible to describe what my feelings were, and with what different sensations I returned home. Sometimes I was led to think that any pardon could be for me; neither could I reconcile it with the view I now had of a Holy God and His Holy laws. At other times a glimpse of hope would arise, that as those Jerusalem sinners were

pardoned, so might I. There was efficacy enough in Jesus' blood to cleanse from all sin. Thus, for a considerable time, was I variously agitated and exercised. Neither, till after many an attendance on the means of grace, was my soul brought into the happy liberty, wherewith the Lord makes His people free.

Oh, ye souls that war this holy warfare, what a wonder-working God you have to deal with! How infinitely gracious, how infinitely tender, are His dealings with His people! After that the Lord, hath brought you on, and brought you out, how sweetly manifested to your experience is that Scripture, “Many waters cannot quench love; neither can the floods drown it.” Truly it is said, “Thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net: thou laidest affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water, but thou broughtest us into a wealthy place.”



“Take a long look at Jesus – often, often. If you wanted to know a man again you would take an intense look at his face.

Look then at Jesus – deeply, intensely – till every feature is graven on your heart.”

Robert Murray McCheyne



BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

I wonder, boys and girls, what comes into your mind when you think of a soldier? Guns, tanks, shooting, excitement, adventure? Well, I'm going to tell you a story about a soldier and mention none of these things. Here is how the story begins:

One day, many years ago, a man by the name of Mr McPhail, was waiting at Fort George for the ferry to take him over to the Black Isle. Just near the water's edge, was a kind of market, where the soldiers from the Fort used to buy their meat. As Mr McPhail waited, he saw a young soldier coming up to a meat stall and heard him asking the price of a quarter of mutton. The butcher named the price. But the soldier with a terrible oath – a swear word – refused to pay such a price. After a good deal of arguing, however, he eventually agreed to the butcher's price and took up the meat and walked away. Mr McPhail heard all this and was very sad to know how that young soldier had put his soul in terrible danger. He quickly went after the boy and started to speak to him.

“A fine day, soldier,” said Mr McPhail.

“A fine day, indeed,” replied the young man.

“What is your name?”

“Luke Heywood, sir.”

“That seems a fine piece of mutton you have there.”

“So it is, and cheap, too.”

“What did you pay for it may I ask?”

(The soldier told him the price).

“Oh my friend,” Mr McPhail replied, “you have given more than that!”

(Luke Heywood looked astonished.)

“No sir, I gave no more; ask the butcher, he will tell you.”

“Pardon me, friend, you have given your immortal soul for it!

You prayed that God might damn your soul if you gave the price you have just named. And now, what is to become of you?”

With this Mr McPhail got on to the ferry boat, while Luke walked away with his piece of mutton. These words kept ringing in his ears - “You have given your immortal soul for it, and now, what is to become of you?” he remembered the swear words he had used; his heart was heavy and unhappy – he was convicted of his sin.

Well, boys and girls, I wonder what Luke Heywood did about his sin. You think about it, and perhaps you will come to the same conclusion as Luke did.

I will tell you the rest of the story in my next letter.

Love,

Mrs Seaton.