

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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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

Thoughts Around Easter-time

(Pastor's Letter April 1977)

Dear Friends,

With “Easter-time” approaching, it is, perhaps, good to remember that the actual term “Easter” is found in the Bible – at least in the older translations of it, - in Acts chapter 12 and verse 4: “And when (Herod) had apprehended (Peter) he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quarternions of soldiers to keep him; intending *after Easter* to bring him forth to the people.” the justification of that translation, of course, is open to question in many people's minds, but the marginal notes of our Authorised Version make it clear to us that it was simply “Passover time” in the city of Jerusalem; in fact, as verse 3 states, “Then were the days of unleavened bread.”

The setting of the verses, then, in Acts chapter 12, whether we call it Easter or not, is most certainly that same period of time when Christ was crucified some years before, and when He rose again from the dead three days after His death on the cross. The fact throws much light on the behaviour of king Herod and the people of the Jews in Jerusalem, for there wasn't a greater blot on Jewish history than the remembrance of how that “Jesus of Nazareth” had (to their way of thinking) “supposedly” risen from the grave and laid the foundation for this “sect of the Nazarenes” that was everywhere spoken against in the nation.

At that precise time of year, then, Herod began to “stretch forth his hand to vex certain of the church.” He killed “James the brother of John with the sword,” and when he saw how that “pleased the Jews”, he had Peter cast into prison, “intending *after Easter* to bring him forth to the people.” What Herod obviously intended, then, was to “wipe away” something of the blot of that earlier Passover time, when the “death” of that Jesus the Nazarene had so badly misfired in the claimed resurrection, and the church of Jesus Christ had gone on from strength to strength. So, Herod would slay Peter, one of the

recognised heads of that church, and he would slay him at that very time – Passover time; the church would suffer a fatal blow, and Herod's standing in the eyes of his subjects would rise by leaps and bounds.

But it would not be so! And if Herod and the Jews reckoned to eradicate their old shame in this new act of death, God would vindicate his ever-abiding glory in a new act of “resurrection” power!

And is that not what the release of Peter from prison at that time is all about? Read the details – the soldier-guards etc. It is God's answer to man's malice. How dear old Peter himself realises that in the 11th verse of the chapter: “Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.” They had “Great Expectations” indeed; but they were brought to nothing – as surely as those expectations of an earlier Passover time had been brought to nothing – as surely as every expectation of fallen man and angel will be brought to nothing when Christ's voice shall sound at the last resurrection and all the purposes and perfect will of God will be vindicated for evermore.

We may briefly note one other thing with regards to that time of year in the city of Jerusalem which Acts chapter 12 refers to as “Easter”. It is this – and may the Lord lay it well to our hearts in our day:- What was the church of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem doing during that “Easter-time” so long ago? We desist from drawing a nauseating picture of what she was *not* doing. But, verse 5 tells us what she was occupied with: “Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him”.

It is to that “prayer-meeting”, of course, or, at least, to one like it in Jerusalem – that Peter eventually turns in the wee small hours of the morning after God has completed his release from the dungeon. It is that prayer meeting also – the one in Mary's house – that has come under so much fire in a certain kind of preaching and thinking in our day, because of the so-called “lack of faith” exercised in it. But would

to God we could pray like those dear ones of that day, and would to God the professing church of God employed its “Easters” as that church in Jerusalem employed the one of Acts chapter 12.

No doubt, but there are elements of “nerves” and confused behaviour abroad that night – the middle of the night, in fact! But let's not overlook the circumstances; Herod is on the prowl; the Jews have received a new confidence against the church; James is dead, and Peter is locked away in the bowels of the earth. Things are black; days are hard. Note the closed and locked door at Mary's house; note the sending of the wee girl, Rhoda, to open the door; note how Peter “beckons with the hand” to subdue their excitement when he is admitted. And once we have weighed up their circumstance aright, then it is admiration that is due from us to them, not criticism.

Listen again to how they were employed that “Easter:” “but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” Those two words “without ceasing” might well have been rendered “fervent;” “fervent prayer” was made for Peter by the church. They might also be read, “stretched out;” “stretched out prayer” was made for Peter by the church. It's the same expression that Peter uses in his First Epistle – chapter 4 verse 8, “And above all things have fervent (stretched out) charity among yourselves ...” Does he remember with gladness how that church in Jerusalem behaved herself as the “pillar and ground of truth” during that “Easter” so long ago? “Stretched out prayer;” stretched out in desire, with fervency, in duration itself – for they prayed when Peter was first put in prison, were praying while he was in prison, and would have been praying when the assassin's sword would have swung through that morning's air had not God intended the release of Peter rather than the death of Peter to be to the glory of His name.

May we end with that thought? Was that church faithless in being surprised when Peter stepped into its presence that morning? Was it not able to receive “the answer” to its prayer, as we are usually told? But, where do we ever read that the church was praying for Peter's release in the first place? It would be praying for Peter in the

way that the church of old ever prayed for any of its members – that God might be glorified in them, whether by life or by death, according to the good pleasure of His will. Those “Jerusalem-sinners-saved” have little to receive from us by way of censure with regards to what occupied their church life that “Easter-time;” we have much to receive from them in our day – the Lord teach us from His Word.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton

A Letter of Mary Winslow.*

My Dear Friend,

How is it, above everything else, with thy soul, that better part, that must live for ever? And yet, though we know this, how much more are our thoughts engaged with this present evil world, and our poor decaying bodies, than concerned to know what awaits us in an endless eternity.

Is this not one of Satan's devices? He will endeavour to engage our thoughts with often the veriest trifles that would shame a child, in order to hide from us the eternal realities of the glory that awaits the believer. Oh, let us beware of Satan's devices! Many hard conflicts have I had with him through my long and chequered life; and, had I not been upheld by Jesus, the sinner's Friend, I should have made shipwreck of my faith long since. But this dear Friend stands ready to help you too. Recollect, He is a present help in every time of need. You are now in a wilderness; but a wealthy land awaits you. Make your calling and election sure. Make sure your acceptance in Christ. Is there, or can there be, anything on earth of equal consequence to this? A soul saved, or a soul lost! Come, just as you are, to Jesus. The prayer, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” springing from a real sense of our need, and breathed from a heart feeling its awful sinfulness, and the utter impossibility of salvation in any other way, will, in due time, be responded to by the Holy Spirit. We cannot utter

one real prayer but by the Holy Ghost. He it is who shows us our iniquity and helplessness, teaches us how to pray, and what to ask for, and then responds to our prayer.

Oh, dear friend, pray over your Bible, that this same blessed Spirit (the third Person in the blessed Trinity) may unfold to your mind the precious truths it contains. You do not know how anxious I am for your soul's welfare. I long to see you going on your way rejoicing. Never rest until you can say, "I have found Jesus, and my soul is saved!" You can go to Jesus the same as did the disciples when He walked the streets of Jerusalem. He is the same loving, tender, condescending Jesus that he was then, and will never deny Himself to any who feel their need of Him. I am looking forward to my great change. *Absent from the body, present with the Lord.*

The only thing worth living for is to be prepared for the full enjoyment of the glory that is now prepared for all who come to Jesus. Come, just as you are. Be assured of this, if you have one wish in your heart to love Jesus, it is because he has first loved you: and the Holy Spirit is giving you the desire to wish to love Him.

Excuse all blunders. Make allowance for poor old *eighty*. I am not far from my happy home, and it looks so inviting. Oh, the welcomes! Oh, the joy! Oh, the meetings with those who have gone before! We meet to part no more for ever!

Your sincere and affectionate Friend.
M. Winslow.

*

Mary Winslow, a woman of considerable Christian character and ability; mother of Octavius Winslow who wrote the biography from which the above letter is taken. "Life in Jesus. A memoir of Mrs Mary Winslow, by her son, O. Winslow, D.D."

The letter was written in her eighty-first year to a lady of her acquaintance.

Gleanings in the Psalms

(Psalm 77)



This Psalm has much sadness in it, but we may be sure it will end well, for it begins with prayer, and prayer never has an ill issue. The psalmist did not run to man but to the Lord, and to him he went, not with studied, stately, stilted words, but with a cry – the natural, unaffected, unfeigned expression of pain.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Verse 1. “I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me.” At the second knock - “even unto God with my voice” - the door of grace flew open - “he gave ear unto me”.

John Collings

Verse 2. “In the day of trouble I sought the Lord ...” Days of trouble must be days of prayer; in days of inward trouble, we must seek him, and seek till we find him. The psalmist, in the day of his trouble, did not seek for the diversions of business or recreation to shake off his trouble that way, but he sought God and his favour and grace. Those that are under trouble of mind must not think to ***drink*** it away, or ***laugh*** it away, but pray it away.

Henry

Verse 2. “... my sore ran in the night, and ceased not ...” Mr Flavel, in reckoning up those things wherein the sorrow of believers is distinguished from the sorrow of hypocrites when it comes to the question of sins, says - “The believers' troubles for sin are more private and silent – their 'sore' runs 'in the night’”.

Touchstone of Sincerity.

Verse 4. “... I am so troubled that I cannot speak.” Words are only the body, the garment, the outside of prayer; sighs are nearer the heart work. A dumb beggar gets an alms at Christ's gate, even by making signs, when his tongue cannot plead for him – yes rather, because he is dumb. **Objection:** I have not so much as a voice to utter unto God, and Christ saith, “Cause me to hear thy voice.” **Answer:** Yes, but some other things have a voice besides the tongue; “the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping.” (Psalm 6 verse 8) Tears have a tongue, and grammar, and language that our Father knoweth. Babes have no words for the breast, apart from weeping; but the mother can read hunger in the weeping.

Samuel Rutherford

Verse 6. “I call to remembrance my song in the night ...” The Songs in the night is as a favourite a word in the Old Testament as “Glory in tribulation” is in the New, and it is one of those words which prove that both Testaments have the self-same root and spirit.

John Ker

Verse 6. “... I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.” This duty requires diligence. External acts of religion are facile: to lift up the eyes to heaven, to bow the knee, to read a prayer – this requires no more labour than a papist to tell over his beads. But to examine a man's self, to take the heart all to pieces like a watch and see what is defective, this is not easy. Reflective acts are hardest. The eye can see everything but itself. It is easy to spy the faults of others, but hard to find out our own.

Thomas Watson

Verse 8. “Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore?” Let not apparent impossibilities make you question God's accomplishment of any of his gracious words. Though you cannot see how a thing will be done, it is enough that God has said that it will be done. Cast not away your confidence because God defers his performances. Though providences run at cross-purposes, though they move backwards and forwards, you have a sure and faithful word to rely upon. Promises, though they seem for a time to

be delayed, cannot be finally frustrated. Dare not to harbour such a thought within yourselves. The **being** of God may as well fail as the **promise** of God. That which does not come in **your** time will be hastened in **His** time, which is always the more convenient season.

Timothy Cruso

Verse 9. “hath God forgotten to be gracious ...” In what pangs couldst thou be, O Psalmist, that so woeful a word should fall from thy lips? “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” Surely, thy temptation has gone so high, that the next step would have been blasphemy.

Joseph Hall

Verse 9 “Selah.” Thus was he going on with his dark and dismal apprehensions, when all of a sudden, he checked himself with that word. “Selah;” - stop there; go no further; let us hear no more of these unbelieving surmises. And then, he chides himself in verse 10, “this is mine infirmity.”

Matthew Henry

(concluded next edition).



In my last letter we began the story of a soldier called Luke Heywood.

You remember how he put his soul at risk by swearing that he would not pay a certain price for a piece of mutton, which he then paid. He was rebuked by a faithful Christian man who pointed out to him his sin. “You have given your immortal soul for it, and now what is to become of you?” and this is where we left off:-

“Really,” thought Luke, “this stranger is quite right. I have a soul, though I had almost forgotten about it; I have sold it for a piece of mutton, too. Well I didn't mean that, but I have done it.” the thought wasn't pleasing, so he tried to put it out of his mind, but it wouldn't go. His conscience was at work, and the words of the stranger kept pealing in his ears. “You have given your immortal soul for it, and now, what is to become of you?”

By this time he had reached the Fort, and on entering, sat down on his bed. How sad he was; what could he do? At last, jumping up, he rushed back to the ferry, and breathlessly asked the ferryman if he knew who the man was who had spoken to him. “Oh, you mean Mr. MacPhail? He is the Minister at Resolis, and you will have a long trek before you catch him, for he crossed the water more than an hour ago.”

Luke decided there and then to board the ferry and search out this man whose words had so wounded him. How agitated and restless he was as he went on his way seeking out the Minister. However, eventually he reached the manse at Resolis. At last, he was face-to-face with his accuser. For two days he stayed there with Mr MacPhail who patiently explained all that Luke wanted to know about *his soul, his sin*, and also the *only Saviour* for sin, the Lord Jesus Christ.

At the end of the two days Luke fully understood that he was a sinner; but much more important, he was completely sorry for his sin, and sincerely repented. He became a true believer in Jesus, and continued throughout his life to serve God.

He became a faithful Minister of the gospel, telling others, as he had been told himself - “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Love,
Mrs Seaton.

— MARTHA —

Mis—Read / Mis—Represented / Mis—Applied

One of the most misrepresented characters on the pages of the New Testament is that woman Martha, sister of Mary and Lazarus, who lived at Bethany.

The misrepresentation of Martha results from a misreading of the words that we have concerning her, and, sad to say, this often results in a misapplication of her case to our hearts and minds.

The incident that seems to settle the case of Mary and Martha in a lot of people's minds is the incident that we read about in the 10th chapter of Luke's gospel. The Lord comes to their home, Mary “sits at His feet,” but Martha busies herself with the household chores, being “cumbered about with much serving.” When she solicits the Lord's support against Mary, the Lord speaks a famous and tremendously true word to Martha:- “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” That is a tremendously true word; how could it be anything else, seeing that it came from the lips of Him who spake as never man spake? But, this is the burning question: have we any right to make that word concerning Mary and Martha the *last* word on their persons, and deduce from it a whole outlook which has no support whatsoever in the word of God? The application of the case of Mary and Martha goes something like this: Martha represents mere service in the church, while Mary represents that desire to attend to the “deep things of the faith.” Therefore, service tends to be downgraded as a second best, while the really spiritual woman (or man) is the one who attends as many extra “meetings” as possible – choosing the “better part” of the Christian life and calling. Who wants to be a Martha? Better to be a Mary.

Now then, there is one thing that ought to be first borne in mind when we refer to Luke chapter ten, and it is this; just when did the events occur? In other words, was Martha anything like a believing person when Jesus spoke to her as He did? Her sister had certainly “chosen that good part;” she had not. Was that “good part” the gospel? Was Christ not applying the gospel to Martha at that point of her life? To fail to take that into account is to establish an unsure foundation for the rest of the building we are going to erect. However, whatever particular time the words were spoken, one thing is clear, they were spoken well before the events of the 11th chapter of the Gospel of John – the raising of Lazarus – and that is the chapter that must compliment and complete any full picture of Martha that we might want to have. The events of the chapter are full of interest:-

Christ is on his way to Bethany, having received word that Lazarus is sick; however, in the meantime, Lazarus has died, and in verse 20 we read this; “Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.” Typical, we are told; that is typical of both women: Martha bustling about, Mary sitting “still” in the house: composure as opposed to restless activity. But, unless we had already settled the characters of both women in our minds it is doubtful if we would read it like that. You see, the expression for Mary sitting in the house is an expression used in connection with deep mourning as known among the Jews. It is a time of deep mourning in the house at Bethany; verse 19 tells us that “many Jews” had come to comfort the two sisters. In verse 31, when Mary learns “secretly” from Martha that Jesus has come, and goes forth to meet Him, the Jews in the house assume that Mary has gone to the grave of Lazarus “to weep.” They were mistaken, of course. But, from Mary's whole behaviour and attitude during those days of bereavement, those visitors to the house assumed she had flown away in distress to the tomb of Lazarus to weep there – something that she had probably already done before. But, the general picture of Mary is clear: she has “collapsed” under the crisis that has struck the household – she sits a mourner, preoccupied with the blow that has fallen upon them. And Martha? Martha has obviously “risen above”

the situation; and when the news of the approach of Christ comes, she is in a position to go forth to meet Him.

Note her words in verse 21: “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” Do we need any better evidence of a heart and mind of faith than that from Martha? Of course, she wavers, and ebbs and flows throughout the chapter; but don't we all in the things of faith? But, here is faith from Martha - “if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” In fact, that is exactly the same word that Mary speaks when she goes out to meet Jesus in verse 32 - “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” “Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.” If the words are commendable in Mary, they are commendable in poor old Martha; if they are not a full enough expression of faith from Martha, they then cast a doubt on the depth of Mary's faith also. But one thing is clear, Martha's next word to Christ rises to the very heights of faith, and it is *not* repeated by Mary when she meets the Saviour:- “then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. ***But I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.***” Not bad for a woman whose spiritual stature is hardly recognised. As we say, Mary makes no such addition to her statement.

The words concerning the “resurrection” follow, and again, there is an ebbing and flowing of faith with Martha – which again, we say, belongs to us all, - Mary included. But they too, are good basic words: “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection of the last day.” Not everyone in Israel in those days would have made such a statement; Sadduceeism was prevalent; the resurrection was denied by many. But, Martha again soars to the heights in verse 27: “She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” Mark that confession well; she confesses *who* He is, *what* he is, *where* He had come to, and *why* He had come; He is The Lord, the Son of God, the Christ, the One who should come, the One who should come into this world. In that confession, Martha stands absolutely apart from the whole of Jewry almost, which in a short time will take and nail the Saviour to the

cross. She is a woman of full stature in that day when the revelation of God was yet only partial to the hearts of the faithful.

But so, she comes to tell Mary, in verse 28 and following that “The Master is come, and calleth for thee.” and it's at this point that we find dear old Martha absolutely maligned, even by those commentators who rank among the best in our evangelical and reformed tradition. Their comments make sad reading: “Why does she go to Mary after the words concerning the resurrection and the Life?” One commentator asks: and the answer he gives: “She didn't fully grasp the fulness of that truth, so she goes to Mary; *she* will be able to understand.” Another comments: “Martha now makes amends; as she had tried to pull Mary *away* from Jesus on an earlier occasion, now she will endeavour to draw her to Him.” We could go on and on; a glance at many commentaries will show the same emphasis. And when it comes to Martha at the actual tomb of Lazarus with Jesus, she again comes under fire. She draws back, you remember, from the idea of the tomb being opened: “Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days.” Her faith has ebbed; she has forgotten that Christ is the resurrection; don't we all! But note this, she at least has come to grips with the reality of the death of her brother “four days” after the event, and has begun to gather up the threads of life and get on with the task of living. And Mary? Well, four days after the event, Mary is still being “comforted” within the walls of the house at Bethany where she “sits” in the position of deep sorrow, yet to draw out the solace of the truth of the gospel to her soul. Is this to “down” Mary, or any who sorrow deeply over a loved-one departed? Indeed, no: but it is an appeal to re-dress the balance of truth in our minds.

But so the miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the dead is completed, and then, when you come into chapter 12 of John, you are confronted with a heartsome picture. A “supper” has been served in the house of “Simon the leper” at Bethany, (see other gospel accounts:) and John tells us that “Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Jesus.” So, sitting at the table with Jesus is this leper, Simon, who has now of course, been cleansed of his leprosy, and this man Lazarus, who has been raised from the dead in that miracle of

resurrection when Christ “cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.” And what you have there, at that supper, of course, is a “token” of that coming day when Christ shall appear from heaven “with a shout” etc., and when the *dead* in Christ shall be *raised* and those that remain on the earth in their old leprous bodies shall be changed.” Then, we shall all sit down at the supper above where “the king sitteth at his table.” it's at that supper at Bethany that Mary anoints Christ's feet and earns the everlasting memorial for what “she hath done;” Note that – what she hath *done*: - Mary is remembered for a sacrificial *service*. And it's at that supper that we read, “And Martha *served*.” “The same old Martha,” say some. We would say, Amen, for she completes the resurrection picture - “And they shall *serve* him day and night in his temple,” in sanctified service.

This is Martha:- No mean saint.

Redeemed

Your time is redeemed; use it as a consecrated talent in His cause.

Your minds are redeemed: employ them to learn His truth, and to meditate on His ways.

Your eyes are redeemed; let them not look on vanity.

Your feet are redeemed; let them trample on the world, and climb the upward hill of Zion.

Your tongues are redeemed; let them only sound His praise, and testify His love.

Your hearts are redeemed; let them love Him wholly and have no seat for rivals.

A redeemed flock should live in redemption's pastures. The Redeemer's freemen should evidence that their holy liberty is holy service.
(Henry Law)