

# 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
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham
- Podcasts on Various Subjects
- Audio Archive of Sermons from 1970 to 2002. (A Work in Progress)

***“I stand, I can do no other”***  
***The Pastor's Letter (February 1978)***

Dear Friends,

There was something almost inevitable about those words that Martin Luther spoke as he stood arraigned before the power and authority of Papal Rome: "Unless I am convinced of error by the authority of Scripture, I cannot, and will not retract; however I stand, I can do no other ...." Something almost "inevitable," we say, because at that point in his Christian life Martin Luther was making more than an isolated statement relevant only to his own situation.

Luther was expressing a divine principle that must govern each believing soul in Christ if the "peace of God" is to be known and felt in the Christian walk. The principle involved is the inevitability of obedience to the Will of God when that will has been clearly revealed to us through the truth that the Lord has committed to us in His Word. We make the standard of salvation that the sinner must "believe" and "do" what the word of God directs and demands of him. Why should we then jettison this course once we have been "brought to Christ?" Luther had explored the word of God and had discovered that the sinner is justified by faith, and as long as the doctrines and dogmas of Rome denied that precious truth, then he had no alternative but to oppose himself to that system regardless of the cost that might have to be met. He could do "no other."

We get something of the same thing in the life of that man that the Bible calls, "Caleb the son of Jephunneh;" that one who "wholly followed the Lord." Together with Joshua,

he had returned to the camp of the Israelites and, in opposition to the other ten spies that had gone out with them, he told the people that they *could* possess the land of Canaan that they had just spied out. He stands almost alone in the face of popular opinion, but the "trouble" was that God had spoken His word to Caleb concerning the conquest of the land of promise, and says he, "I only brought them word again of what was in mine heart." You see the "inevitable" flavour of those words? The Lord had spoken to Caleb, and now Caleb could do "no other" but repeat what the Lord had placed within his heart: "I brought them word again, as it was in mine heart." As Amos would have put it, "The Lord has spoken, who can but prophesy?" Or Paul - when he stood before his own country-men the Jews, having been "brought bound" to the city of Rome - "it is for the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain." Blessed inevitability! And we are all to know something of this blessed inevitability in our Christian walk and profession.

The greatest thing that a believer can be, under Christ, is a servant to His word. In this, the believer emulates his Lord Who comes "in the volume of the book" of which it was written of Him, "delighting" to do the Father's will. Modernism would call this "Bibliolatry" - worship of the Bible. But we would say that apart from the Bible it is absolutely impossible to know Christ savingly or to do the will of His Father with intelligent obedience. Those who would want to minimise our servitude to the Word of God merely want to overthrow the demands of its truth for their own lives. But to the obedient child of God, by the enabling of God's performance of grace in his life, there is a delight in "doing the truth" - indeed, it is inevitable that it should be done. If the believer is to enjoy the peace of God in his soul, he ought to know that he can do "no other."

This alone explains a Luther's stand against the might of Papal Rome. This alone sees that a Caleb will deliver the burden of his heart in the face of all opposition. This alone gives the ring of assurance to the prophet's message and shows that it is merely the "echo" of what the Lord Himself has uttered. This is the one thing that grants that perfect freedom of life and conscience though a man should be "bound" for the hope of the gospel.

We often hear people praying, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah! Where is the God of Luther, and Whitefield, and Knox" - and so on. We greatly appreciate that sentiment. But we must be careful that it is not an excuse for complacency. After all, the Lord God has not changed; and instead of praying, "Where is the Lord God of these saints of the past, " perhaps we ought to be praying, "Where are those kind of saints of the Lord God!"

The truth of God has "ever stood," as the hymn has it; but how easy it is for our attitudes towards that truth to change - almost imperceptibly at times. "Doing the truth" no longer seems to be the same blest inevitability in the general run of things. "Here *I need not stand*, I can do *all* other," seems to characterise an awful lot of thinking and conduct in our churches' lives today. The Lord make us faithful: make us faithful.

Sincerely,  
W.J. Seaton

## **Catechising In Days Gone Bye.**

One of the best-known traditions of the Scottish Church of a bye-gone day was that "diet of examination" known as Catechising.

This was the time when the Minister of the church set off around his parish to call on his members and examine them as to their spiritual growth from the words of the Westminster Catechism and from the Word of God itself.

Needless to say, this was an exercise that was of great spiritual worth to many, but, man, being what he is, it was also a time that produced much that was humourous and homely. Many of the "examining brethren," such as the great Dr Chambers, were kindly disposed towards their "pupils" and were always ready to take the blame for not receiving the right answer by saying that they had asked the question rather badly.

The people learnt to play on such kindness. "Master Wilson," asked the visiting minister, "What is the chief end of man?" "Deed, sir," came the reply, "it's not for me to presume to answer such a question as that, I fain would hear it from yourself." Taken aback by such "humility" the minister was forced to pass on to the next member of the household who happened to be the ploughman. "Tell me," the minister asked, "What kind of a man was Adam?" "Oh," said the ploughman, "just like other folk." This time the minister refused to be sidetracked by such generality, and he pressed for an "exposition" of the reply. "Well, sir," ventured the ploughman, "Adam was gey like Joe Sim, the bookmaker." "Oh," said the minister, his interest aroused, "in what respect, James?" "In this way, sir: nobody got anything from him, and many lost."

That was right sound theology even though "James failed to couch it in theological terms, but "experimental" theology is of the cream of the milk.



"Old William" found it so, as well. "William," asked the minister of the old worthy who was reckoned to be an exponent of the Book of Job, "do you mean to tell me that you find the Book of Job simple?" "Well," said the old man, "here and there are few dark places, but it's simple enough." "Oh," said the visitor, "then show me one of these simple places." William's reply was of the most "experimental" nature. "Well," he said, "when Job asks, 'Is there any taste in the white of an egg?' A body soon knows the answer to that if there's nae salt on the table."

Turning the tables on the minister was one of the favourite occupations of some of those examined, and for this, they had gained a reputation. It was the chief weapon of an old woman

of Loudon to get the Minister to "gang owre the fundamentals" before he would begin so that she be sure that he himself was "sound." By the time this was done, of course, there was little time for anything else. Others had their own methods, and some of the greatest of Divines fell foul of their ingenuity.

So it happened with the famous Ralph Erskine. Having been requested by his brother Ebenezer to catechise in his parish of Abernethy, he was also warned by the latter not to tangle with one, Walter Simpson, the local blacksmith. "You'll find all my folk easy to examine except one," said Ebenezer, "and him I reckon you had better not meddle with. He has an old-fashioned way of answering a question by asking another, and maybe he'll affront you." The learned doctor of divinity was indignant: "Do you think he can foil me with my own natural tools?" he asked. "I'm giving you fair warning," said the anxious brother, "you'd better not call him up in your catechising." That evening, in the crowded church hall, the great man decided that he would lay his Goliath low with the very first stone of the night. "Tell me," he thundered out, directing his question to the swarthy blacksmith, "how long did Adam remain in a state of innocence?" "Just till he got a wife, sir," came Walter's answer; "But, can you tell me, minister," he added in characteristic style, "how long did he stand after that?" The noted Divine had no answer, and Walter was respectfully asked to resume his seat.

A similar fate befell the minister of the fishing village of St. Vigeans. Having failed to get any kind of an answer to his "deep" theological query, he began to upbraid his flock. Setting the question to them – as if in a final effort that would exhaust his patience for ever – he drew this comment from an aged fisherman. "You see, minister," he said, "we canna exactly say what the answer to your question is, but can you



tell us, minister, how many hooks it takes to bait a fifteen-score haddie line?" Our source of information fails to supply the minister's answer, and suggests that there is none on record.

However, the "pupils" didn't have it all their own way, not even when it came to physical tuition that a few of our Highland ministers sometimes thought their flock stood in need of. On one occasion, the minister called on a house whose tenant was both a strong man and a strong sinner before the Lord. "I come to discharge my duties to God, to your conscience, and my own," stated the minister. "I care not for any three," resorted the man, and set about the minister. It was a fatal mistake that he made, for he ended-up on the floor of his own house bound hand and foot receiving the words of instruction.

*(Article by W.J. Seaton 1970)*

Dear Boys and Girls,

**BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE**

I wonder, boys and girls, what your favourite story in the Bible is? I know some boys and girls, and at least one of their favourite stories is, very definitely, that time when Jesus and His disciples were in a boat, and a great storm arose. The disciples were very, very afraid. Jesus was fast asleep, and the storm didn't seem to be bothering Him at all.

However, the disciples were so afraid that they awoke Jesus, and said, "Lord, save us, we perish!" Jesus woke up and said, "Why are you frightened?" Then He rose up and rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a complete calm. The men



were amazed and said, "What kind of a man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

Now I wonder why this story is such a favourite? Is it, perhaps, that we are afraid of something and needing Jesus' help, it helps us to remember this story of the frightened fishermen and how they asked for Jesus's help and got it in such a spectacular way? He saved them from drowning.

You see, boys and girls, many times doubts or questions might come into your minds about Who Jesus really is, and if He can save us from our sins. These can all be answered for us by careful reading of the Bible. We cannot see Jesus or hear Him, but we can read all about Him in the Bible, and by believing we can be just as happy and comforted as the disciples were. We can learn day-by-day how to love and trust Jesus, and believe all His promises.

Here is a poem by a very Godly minister called Robert Murray McCheyne, who loved children.

"Peace be to thee, little boy,  
Many years of life and joy;  
Love your Bible more than play,  
Grow in wisdom every day;  
Like the dove that found no rest,  
'Til it flew to Noah's breast;  
Rest no in this world of sin,  
'Til the Saviour takes thee in."

## ***Gleanings in the Psalms***

### ***Psalm 79***



A Psalm of complaint such as Jeremiah the prophet might have written amid the ruins of the beloved city. It evidently treats times of invasion, oppression, and national overthrow.

**Verse 1. "O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled ..."** This was not only the highest degree of the enemy's inhumanity and barbarity ... but also a calamity to the people of God never to be sufficiently deplored. For by the overthrow of the true worship of God, which had been instituted at that temple alone appeared to be extinguished, and the knowledge of God to vanish from among mankind. No pious heart could ponder this without the greatest grief.

*Mollerus*

**Verse 4. "We are become a reproach to our neighbours ..."** It is the height of reproach that a father casts upon his child if he commands one of his slaves to beat him. Of all outward judgments, this is the sorest - to have strangers rule over us. If once the heathen come into God's inheritance, no wonder the church complains that she is "become a reproach to her neighbours, a shame and a derision to all round about her."

*Abraham Wright*

**Verse 5. "How long Lord? Wilt thou be angry for ever?"**

The voice that is here lifted up in prayer doesn't ask, how long will the wickedness and strength of our enemies endure, or, how long will we be made to see this desolation. But, it asks how long, O Lord, *wilt thou be angry?* The unregenerate attribute their afflictions to the strength and malice of their enemies, but the people of God should know what it is to trace God's hand of judgment, and, by so doing, trace their own sins and failures which has brought that correcting hand upon them.

*Musculus*

**Verse 8. "O remember not against us former iniquities ..."**

The psalmist counts himself with the people, not only in their time of affliction, but also in their liability to the anger of God on account of the crimes committed. He was not a partaker in those enormous sins by which they had provoked the swift justice of God, and yet, he does not exempt himself from the people as a whole. So, in the following verse, he says, "And purge away our sins." He does not say, "Purge away *their* sins," but, "remember not our iniquities, and purge away our sins."

*Musculus*

**Verse 9. "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name; and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake."** The good which God does for His church, be it temporal or spiritual, He does for His own sake. That they were preserved in Babylon, was for his holy name's sake; that they were replanted in Canaan, was for his holy name's sake; that they had a temple, sacrifices, priests, prophets, ordinances again, was for his holy name's sake; and when they were near to destruction in any of the former days, God did a work, for his holy name's sake. It is not for the enemies' sake that God

doth preserve or deliver his people, nor for their sakes - their prayers, tears, faith, obedience, holiness - that he does great things for them, and bestows great mercies upon them. But it is for his own name's sake that he blessed it. The greatest mercies that God 's people have, are for his name's sake; they have pardon of sin, for his name's sake, Psalm 25 verse 11; purging of sin, for his name's sake, Psalm 79 verse 9; leading in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake, Psalm 23 verse 2; quickening of their dead and dull hearts, for his name's sake, Psalm 143 verse 11. And though his people offend him, yet he forsakes them not, for his great name's sake.

*William Greenhill*

**Verse 11. "... according to the greatness of thy power, preserve those that are appointed to die."** How consoling it is to desponding believers to reflect that God can preserve even those who bear the sentence of death in themselves. *A lamb shall live between the Lion's jaws if the Lord wills it.*

*C. H. Spurgeon*

**Verse 13. "So we are thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will show forth thy praise to all generations."** The gratitude of the Church is lasting as well as deep. On her scrolls are memorials of great deliverances, and, as long as she shall exist, her sons will rehearse them with delight. We have a history which will survive all other records, and it is bright in every line with the glory of God.

*C.H. Spurgeon*

## *Introduction to the Prophets*



The spiritual guidance of the Jewish people after the delivery of the Law by Moses was placed in the hands of the priesthood.

The priests in addition to their ministrations in holy things, they were also the teachers of the people, interpreters of the Law, and the medium of communication between the nation and God. The gradual degeneracy of the Priesthood - culminating in the wickedness of Eli's sons and their rejection, paved the way for the introduction of the Prophets.

Samuel was the first of the Prophets. Thenceforward the order played an important part in the history of the nation. The "Schools of the Prophets," founded by Samuel, continued until the time of the Captivity to Babylon and furnished an ample supply of religious teachers and guides. They instructed the people in their moral duties, setting before them their obligations to the covenant, and pointing them in the right way with regards to the ordinary relations of life.

From amongst these were ordinarily taken the prophets who were more directly inspired with the Spirit of God to declare His way to the people. They acted independently of the political leaders and very often in antagonism to them - more especially during the period after Solomon's reign, when kings and people alike (with few exceptions) fell away from the worship of God into degrading idolatry.

As well as being made the bearers of the Divine warnings and reproofs and judgments, some of them, gifted with a more clear perception of God's will and purpose and speaking "as

they were moved by the Holy Ghost" kept alive the promise of the Messiah and pointed forward to His coming. Of such were the number whose writings are recorded in the Holy Scriptures and who have preserved to later ages an authentic and inspired record of the events of their respective periods. Through this, we can clearly trace the progress of the purpose of God marching steadily on to its fulfilment.

The "writing" prophets are divided into two groups, each of which is arranged in chronological order and distinguished as the "greater" and "minor" prophets. The first group consists of Isaiah, Jeremiah (including Lamentations), Ezekiel, and Daniel. The second group extends from Hosea to Malachi.

## The Prophet Isaiah

Of Isaiah's history very little is known beyond what he himself records. Jewish tradition makes him to have been of the royal house of Judah, but this is doubtful. His father's name was Amoz, of whom nothing is known.

That Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of four kings of Judah (from Uzziah to Hezekiah), and that he was married with two sons, whose names, like his own, were symbolic, is nearly all that is known of him. The Jews say that he lived into the reign of Manasseh, by whom he was put to death by being sawn asunder in the trunk of a tree. From what is known of Manasseh's cruelty, this may not be improbable, and is thought by some commentators to be referred to by Paul in Hebrews eleven where he speaks about being "sawn asunder."

His period of prophecy extends over a great number of years. Commencing in the reign of Uzziah, (his sixth chapter recording the vision which he saw in the year that the king died, seems to indicate the period of his call to the prophetic office), and living into the reign of Manasseh, it would extend over a period of sixty-two years.

Isaiah has been called the great Evangelical prophet, and the Apostle of Christ on account of the vividness of his prophecy and the accuracy of his prophetic details as to the sufferings and death of the Saviour. His fifty-third chapter is one of the clearest Old Testament indications of the Saviour's work of atonement for His people. None of the prophets is so frequently referred to in the New Testament, both by our Lord Himself and His apostles - quite one-fifth of all the New Testament quotations from the Old Testament being from his writings.