

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
- Podcasts on Various Subjects
- Audio Archive of Sermons from 1970 to 2002. (A Work in Progress)

The Two Famines

(Pastor's Letter March 1980)

Dear Friends,

There are two “Famines” made mention of in the Word of God regarding the Church of Christ and, in token of that, the particular area or nation where a particular Church (or Churches) is called to witness to the saving grace of God. The first is a famine of the *preaching* of the Word of God, and the second is a famine of the *hearing* of the Word of God. The two are not to be confused, although very much inter-acting upon one another, The first has to do primarily with the “pulpit,” the second with the “pew.”

Just prior to the emergence of Samuel as the prophet of the Lord, we are told that “the word of the Lord was rare in those days, there was no open vision;” and then, in the prophecy of Amos, the nation of Israel is threatened with a famine – “Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water,” says the Lord through Amos, “but a *famine* of hearing the words of the Lord.” Either of the two famines – either of preaching or of hearing – can have a tremendously detrimental effect upon the testimony of our God and upon the Church of His Son where He has seen fit to deposit that testimony.

From the pulpit side of things: where there is no real preaching of the Word of God in all its fulness, then the Church eventually moves into a situation spiritually comparable to the judgment that fell on Israel (on account of their neglect of the ministry of truth) when the Ark of God was taken from them and the cry of “Ichabod, the glory has departed,” echoed around the land in every Israelite’s heart.

From the pew side of things: when ears become accustomed to hear only those things that are most palatable to them then, eventually, they become completely stopped-up altogether and no fruits of comfort,

or blessing, or instruction can be reaped from the Word of God, even though a harvest may be there for the taking.

Where *both* conditions prevail, then the result is a double famine, and the Church of Christ in the land appears to be almost non-existent as far as a real and vital Christianity is concerned. The recapture of either of these graces, then – either of preaching or hearing – must, indeed, always prove a stirring from the dead for the Church. But, and this is what we would like to stress, if there is ever to be a real reviving of true and vital Christianity to act as salt in this wicked and perverse generation then, there must not only be a loosening of the tongues of preachers, but an unstopping of the ears of hearers.

This is an aspect of “reformation” that some seem unwilling to take into account in these days when there is so much talk on that subject. There is a great deal of hope placed in the fact of – “Pastor so-and-so exercising *a reformed ministry*.” But this is only part of the issue; for although there may be a veritable harvest, even of reformed preaching, there may also be a veritable famine of “*hearing* the words of the Lord.” Reformed ministries in the pulpits is only part of the required answer to the present need. The Lord always calls for a faithful ministry and a faithful listening to constitute His Church wherein He has deigned His honour to dwell. And the crying need is not simply that a man exercises a reformed ministry, but that he exercises it within the context of a reformed church. As we endeavour to move in that direction so we will, by the grace of God, be stretching out towards the Church’s great calling, which is the worship of God by the people of God.

The witness of the church can only be fully realised in proportion to the worship of the Church being a true worship of its God and Saviour. And this must involve the church in its totality – in pulpit and pew, in pastor and people, in preaching and hearing – so that there is neither a famine with the one or the other. This must in no way be met with the old “red herring” of looking for a “perfect” Church. Far from it. No one can rightly hold the doctrine of the natural depravity of the human heart and think such a thing. There will always be those within a congregation whose hearts are hard and whose ears are stopped. That

fearful verse of Paul's to the Corinthians just about says it all, "For there must also be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." Indeed, any saint at any given point under the sound of God's truth might suffer from an *un*hearing ear, and an *un*-understanding heart. But if we hold that true preaching of God is the preaching of His free and sovereign love towards us in Christ, then true hearing must fall into the same basic concepts and all that flows out from them. Therefore, true worship is both the glad preaching and the glad hearing of that whole counsel of God.

In what other environment of worship might God be more glorified than where a preacher extols something of the height and breadth and depth and length of the sovereign love and acts of God, in Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and where the people's hearts are able to respond in a glad Amen (audible or inaudible) to the presentation of such truths? There is no other environment quite like that in the normal run of things in God's dealings with His people.

So we would emphasise again that the recapturing of a reformed ministry in our day, although desirable and the cause of a good deal of thanksgiving, is not the complete and full answer to our general state today. It may be valid to assume that the preaching will precede the hearing; that is a valid assumption in many ways – just so long as the preaching doesn't outstrip the hearing! Just so long as the pulpit doesn't get so far out in front of the pews that it looks like a separate entity, with a separate identity. Reformed ministries are, indeed, needful, and desirable, in so far as reformed congregations and Churches is the end-product aimed at and desired. We cannot rest with a half-way-house type of reform or advance and, of course, we all have to realise that any other kind involves us in a slow, steady-as-she-goes, holding-on and pressing-out in hope, kind of approach. There is always a desire for a "gentle" reformation, but we will search history's page in vain for any reform in any area that was carried out in a painless fashion. The re-discovery to the souls of many of the great truth of Justification by faith alone came in on the shock waves of a movement that cost a good few a good deal. There is little reason to believe that our present needs will be met in any other way.

Let us endeavour to get the “whole argument” before God’s throne of grace. Not only that He would reverse the general famine of the preaching of God’s word, that has beset the Church over many years but that He would also take away the general famine of the hearing of his word, so that there might not only be a “Thus saith the Lord,” from many pulpits, but a determined and confident, “So be it,” from many pews.

Yours sincerely
W. J. Seaton.



Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 87

Verse 1. “His foundation is in the holy mountains.” The foundation of the church, which is the mystical Jerusalem, is laid in the eternal, immutable, and invincible decrees of Jehovah. He wills that the church shall be, He settles all arrangements for her calling, her salvation, maintenance and perfection; and all His attributes, like the mountains round about Jerusalem, lend their strength for her support. Not on the sand of carnal policy, nor in the morass of human kingdoms has the Lord founded His church, but on His own power and Godhead, which are pledged for the establishment of His own beloved church, which is to Him the chief of all his works. What a theme for meditation is the founding of the church of God in the ancient covenant engagements of eternity; the abrupt character of this first verse indicates long consideration on the part of the writer, leading up to his bursting forth in wonder and admiration – “His foundation is in the holy mountains!”

C. H. Spurgeon

Verse 2. “The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.” The Lord had His eye on every house and tent in the land of Israel where the descendents of Jacob lived as families or individuals to the praise of His name; but His special pleasure rested on the gathering together of His people for the worship of His name within “the gates of Zion.” So, says Mr Spurgeon. “God delights in the prayers and praises of Christian families and individuals, but He has a special eye to the assemblies of the faithful, and he has a special delight in their devotions in their church capacity.” As William Gurnall puts it, “A father is glad to see any one of his children, and makes him welcome when he visits him, but much more when they all come together; the greatest feast is when they all meet at his house. So, the public praises of the church are the emblem of heaven itself, where all the angels make but one concert.”

Verse 3. “Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God.” The idea of the text presents the church as “the city of God;” let us touch on some of the “glorious things” that are spoken of it. There are glorious things with respect to the *erection* of the city. There is the plan of its erection: - there was never a plan so faultless, so complete, so wonderful for its beauty and grandeur. The gates, the walls, the buildings, the streets, the monuments, the fountains, the gardens, unite to proclaim it a masterpiece of skill. The Architect was He who built the skies. There is the *date* of the city’s erection. In a case like this, a halo and a glory attach to it on account of its great antiquity. It is a long time since the city was built: it was standing in the days of Paul – “Ye are come unto the city of the Living God.” (Hebrews 12:22). David, as he shows here, was well acquainted with it. It was standing before the flood. Noah, Enoch, and Abel dwelt in it. It is almost as old as the creation itself. There are glorious things to tell of the *defences* of the city. It has been besieged ever since it has been a city at all, and it is not taken to this hour. There are glorious things in connection with the *stores and supplies* on which the city depends: - there excellence, their abundance, their source. There are glorious things respecting the *King* of the city: His name, His person, His character. And there are glorious things in connection with the *citizens* of the city.

Andrew Gray.

Verse 4. “I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold, Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there.” “Rahab, “Philistia,” “tyre,” “Babylon,” “Ethiopia.” This is the glory of the church, that into her the fulness of the nations shall enter: - the proud from Egypt, who for her haughtiness is called Rahab; the worldly from Babylon, the city of confusion; the wrathful from Philistia so long the enemies of Israel; the covetous from Tyre, the rich city of the traders; and the slaves of ignorance from Cush and from the land of Ham. All these shall learn the love of Christ and confess His truth, and shall enter into that all-glorious city, and be admitted and acknowledged as citizens of the celestial Zion.

From “A Plain Commentary”

Verse 5. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her ... The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the people that this man was born there.” When events shall be traced to their sources at the last day, many a scene will come forth into prominence, which now is of little regard. Humble churches will then prove to have been the birthplace, and stately palaces the graves, of many an immortal soul.

Edward G. Marsh

The Lower Lights



In the last edition of the Wicket Gate one of the articles was given the title of “A Bunch of Everlastings.” That article is a direct lead into the series we are now beginning. The link below will take you to the article.

http://www.wicketgate.co.uk/issue143/e143_2.html

Jesus Which is Called Justus.

In the last chapter of Colossians, verse 11, we find the apostle Paul linking the name of one, “Jesus, which is called Justus,” with the names of a few others who have been a comfort to him, and fellow-workers with him in the things of the gospel. “Jesus, which is called Justus,” was a Jew by birth, as Paul tells us there, and there is a world of significance in what that man was first called within the context of his Jewish home, and what he later called himself when the grace of God had taken hold upon his heart.

Like a good many Jewish homes, the home in which “Jesus, which is called Justus,” was born and reared-up was a home that had a certain expectation. A good many of the people of Israel were looking for the coming of their promised Saviour and Messiah. Although many of their ideas about what kind of a Saviour and Messiah he would be were far off the mark, they still held firmly to the expectation, as such. When this particular mother in Israel, then, gave birth to a baby son, the parents gave vent to that expectation in their own lives and called their baby boy, “Jesus.” The name Jesus in the New Testament times was the equivalent to Joshua in the Old, and as Joshua had been Israel’s Saviour of long ago, so this family called their son, Joshua – or Jesus, as it then was. So this particular child was named, grew-up, advanced into manhood, and was known by one and all as Jesus.

Then came the day of his salvation. We are not told how this Jesus was converted; we are not told who preached, or witnessed, or what the text was, or any of these details; but converted he was. Neither are we told any specific details about what work he did in the church of Christ, or what office he held, if he held any at all. But one thing that we are told about him marks him down as well worth remembering, indeed, among Paul’s collection of saints at the end of Colossians. There obviously came a day in the life of this man called Jesus when he began to look at that name that his Jewish parents had given him, and he began to realise how incongruous that name really was for him. He was no Saviour: how much he must have realised that! He was no Saviour – and, indeed, was it not the case that he had needed a Saviour to save him from all his

sins. And what was that Saviour's name? His name was "Jesus;" not by any popular choice of his earthly parents and guardians, but by divine command – "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." And so, this dear man whose mother and father had named him Jesus, began to say, in fact, "Call me no more Jesus, but call me Justus, for there is only one Jesus who bears that name aright among all the sons of men." And from that day forward, that Jesus began to call himself Justus.

The significance of that name-change – not only *from* the name of Jesus, but *to* the name of Justus goes without saying. Justus conjures up pictures of the "justified one" – the one who has been made "just indeed" through the merits of that Saviour whose name he once bore. And when the Holy Spirit of God retains both of those names together for us for those few brief seconds on the pages of the Word of God, He is, surely, speaking volumes to us concerning that man's heart and mind. No man is his own Saviour, nor the Saviour of others but all men need the one and only Saviour whom God has sent forth in Christ His Son.

Well then, Paul tells us, this man became a "fellow-worker" with him in the things of the gospel of justification by faith alone, and he also proved himself to be a "comfort" to Paul in so many of those earthly labours. The two terms are general, but they are precious. Again, as in the case of this man's conversion, we are not told any details about those "works" that he carried out with Paul, nor in what precise way he was a "comfort" to him; but the terms are precious. The labours of the apostle Paul were herculean, but we always find Paul ready to speak of those who laboured with him in the gospel, both men and women. The strength of the apostle Paul in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ was powerful and mighty to the casting down of Satan's strongholds, yet we see here that Paul needed and enjoyed the "comforts" of the saints in the good fight of faith. Such an one was "Jesus which is called Justus." He was Paul's fellow-worker and proved himself a comfort to Paul in the heat of the day. He took his place in the Church of Christ as a member in particular in that body, and brief and all as the record of his life is, the

Spirit of God has written it clear, and written it down for all generations of “lower lights” that were to come.

Note – several years ago this series was sent out as a series of podcasts which are still available at:

http://www.wicketgate.co.uk/podcast_the_lower_lights/podcast_the_lower_lights.html

The Abiding Presence ***By*** ***Hugh Martin***

“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah: and when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preached the gospel to the poor ...”
(Luke 4:16 forward).

We behold our Lord in the synagogue of Nazareth exercising His prophetic office. And while all the *sensible and temporary* circumstantialia of the case have vanished, all the *essentials* survive to this hour.

Take the scene in Nazareth on that Sabbath-day as a manifestation of the presence of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Separate the *temporary* from the *permanent*, and you will find you have separated the accessory from the essential – thus leaving all that was essential permanently present in the Church here below. For what are the essentials? First, there is the *Word*; “He stood up for to read.” And then, there is the spiritual agency that reaches the heart and enlightens the mind – the *Spirit*. Mark the first utterance of the oracle, “The Spirit

of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.” When, therefore, “all that heard him witness, and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth;” when “they were astonished at his doctrine, for his word was with power,” – the entire *essential* of the gracious words and powerful doctrine was the *Scripture*; and the entire essential of the grace and power was of the Spirit.

That is to say, Christ executed the office of a Prophet that day in Nazareth in revealing to men by His *Word and Spirit* the will of God for their salvation. Those features of His visible countenance, and the pulsations of the air from His audible voice, did not enter into the matter at all. So that His bodily presence (or, as it ought rather to be called, the *bodily manifestation* of His presence) may have vanished, but His presence is with us in our sanctuaries now, essentially and exactly as in the synagogue of Nazareth then.

A thousand times shall faith assert this claim (His presence is with us in our sanctuaries,) and every time, faith will deny that there is any trace of illusion or fancy or fanaticism in her assertion of it. Knowing that her prophet is the Christ because the Spirit of the Lord rests on Him for ever; and knowing also that the Word also lives and abides for ever, she will maintain that she enjoys her Lord’s presence in all the essentials as fully as the spectators in the synagogue of Nazareth – and more fully than those who were mere spectators only.

Are we to be in such bondage – so deliriously intoxicated and enslaved – to the senses of this vile body, as to maintain that whatever has vanished from the eyes of our flesh is lost to us? Are we to subordinate and subject thus shamefully the things that are unseen and eternal to the conditions of space and time and the body of our humiliation And are we never to be satisfied that “the King Eternal, immortal and invisible” is near, unless He submit a proof that shall be cognizable to those eyes and hands which are soon to be hidden in the grave? “Thomas; because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they which have not seen me, and yet have believed.” With adoring reverence let a

supposition be made – “We beseech Thee, O Emmanuel; show us Thy glory.

Even though Jesus were with you in the sanctuary bodily, He would bring no new revelation: He would read from “the book.” He would speak of “this *scripture* of amazement upon your soul from His visible person or audible voice: He would seek no such poor triumph over His audience. He would hazard all the effect of His Work on the demonstration of the Spirit. His own Word and your soul He would leave in the hand of the Spirit. By the Word He would send forth His truth; and by the Spirit He would send forth His light. “O send forth thy light and thy truth.”

But does the bodily manifestation of His presence at all enter into the essence of this great transaction? No, verily. And, therefore, verily, and essentially you have Christ’s presence in your sanctuary, even in the synagogue of Nazareth. If we have the Word and the Spirit of Christ, we have that presence of Christ in the Sanctuary.

The Preaching Place

By J. D. Burns

The pulpit belongs to the “congregation” rather than to the “schools.” It addresses itself to the indiscriminate many, rather than to the select few. Its business is not to solve problems but to stir and quicken souls; and it does so, not by the development of a philosophy, but the delivery of a message.

What it was in the days of Paul, such it is still – the proclaiming of certain great facts concerning human sin and the divine remedy. These required not so much to be proved as to be manifested; and when so manifested, are themselves their own witness. So its speech and preaching are not with excellency of speech or man’s wisdom, but by manifestation of the truth commending itself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

Two little children were playing in their sitting room one evening. They were brother and sister and their names were George and Sheena. Their mummy brought into the room a lovely plate of creamy cakes and laid them on the table.

“Oh, I want one of these cakes cried George, jumping up as soon as mummy left the room, and going over to the table. “No, no,” said Sheena, pulling him back; “No you mustn’t touch.” “Mummy won’t know, she didn’t count them” he cried, shaking her off and stretching out his hand. “If she didn’t, perhaps God counted,” answered his sister. George’s hand dropped down and he was stopped from taking the cake.

Now, boys and girls, here is a little lesson to remind you that our God in heaven surely does know all and sees all. This should be a great comfort and help to us as we grow up through life. It can stop us from many foolish and unwise actions, and it can also give us help when we are troubled and frightened. However, the greatest comfort of all is to be sure that God knows that we are sinners, and yet, in His love and mercy, He sent Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners. God knows us all; may we all learn to know Him.

Love,
Mrs Seaton