

The Wicket Gate Magazine

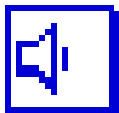
A Continuing Witness



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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
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- Podcasts on Various Subjects
- Audio Archive of Sermons from 1970 to 2002

Reality of our Spiritual Tests

(The Pastors Letter September 1980)

Dear Friends,

There is hardly another thing that more puts the reality of our spiritual life to the test than the inner conflicts of temptation that arise within us, due to the outward circumstances that sometimes surround us. Very often we miss this point, and we are inclined to imagine that the outward evil of a situation in which we find ourselves is the great issue with which we must contend; and yet, most often this is not the case at all. Generally speaking, the *real* issue in a trial, or circumstance, or situation, is not the outward aspects of it, but the inward reactions that it is going to produce on our hearts and minds, and, therefore, on our spiritual well-being and existence. Thus, as we say, in fact, the reality of our spiritual life is put to the test, not by the outward things that surround us, but by our inward reactions to those things.

This area of the Christian life is beautifully borne out in that famous eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. We all readily recognise the chapter as setting forth the great conquests of faith wrought at the hands of those gallant Old Testament saints. And, indeed, it is all that. How it should ever inspire the Church of Christ to realise that it is surrounded by “so great a cloud of witnesses” those, whom John Calvin says, “were guided to heaven by only a shaft of light”. But, as we read of them being “stoned,” and “sawn asunder,” and “slain with the sword;” and being “destitute,” “scourged,” and “afflicted,” let us never forget that they were flesh and blood, just as we are. They were not “paper people!” – the creation of some talented author; they were the people of God, under persecution for the sake of the things of God.

Once we remember that, then we readily see that area of the Christian life that we have mentioned; for, tucked away in the 37th verse of that Hebrews chapter 11 is one very telling wee phrase. Says Paul, “they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were *tempted* ...” That’s the phrase; “they were tempted”. In other words, the outward aspect of the stonings and everything else was one thing, but there was something else, as well: - there was an inner conflict and crisis of faith as they were forced to weigh-up what was happening to them. And because they were flesh and blood, then, says the apostle Paul aright, “they were *tempted*”. The stones beat down upon their bodies, the swords made great gashes in their flesh; but there was another conflict, capable of inflicting deeper wounds, and it was being fought out in their innermost souls, and they could only gain the victory through their faith beholding “the evidence of things not seen”.

In this country today, we have no stakes, or bonds, or imprisonments for the sake of the gospel, but we do have temptations. We are faced with issues, and pressures, and accepted standards which can cause a turmoil in our hearts and minds; and it is, so often, within our hearts and minds that we are first called to be martyrs for the faith. How often we must fight against the temptation to follow that which is most easy and pleasing to the self-life; and how many arguments our natures can set before us to do just that. “The cause makes the martyr,” we say, and although we can’t all be “stoned,” or “sawn asunder” for the cause of the gospel, we can all be *tempted* for the cause, and therein lies the battle for true spirituality. Circumstances may change, but no matter how they change, they will still react on the inner life of the child of God. And there – in that inner life – the child of God is tempted and must learn not to “yield” to the temptations. Noah had to fight the temptation of running contrary to public opinion as he laboured away on the ark; Abraham, Moses, and all the other valiants fought inward struggles as they faced outward situations. Before those old saints overcame the sword, or the stone, or the rack, they first of all, had to overcome the heart and the mind, the emotions and the flesh, the thoughts, and the feelings; they were *tempted*. One of the fiercest battles that John Bunyan had to win was, not the thought of the bars on

the windows of Bedford's jail, but the thought of the poor blind daughter that he was leaving behind on the other side of those bars.

We may settle it in our hearts, whatever else the Lord's people will know until Christ shall come, they will know temptation. So, it is ever-important to know that there is a victory that overcometh the world (in all its fashions and workings), even your faith. It is no wonder, then, that we read that all those who were stoned, and sawn asunder, and scourged *and* tempted, did all that they did, "by faith". It was faith that worked within, ultimately dealt with the temptation that raised its head there and then, learnt to view aright that which appeared before their eyes. Let our faith ever interpret our circumstances; God forbid that our circumstances should *mis*interpret our faith.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton.

A Handful of Hymn-Writers

John Fawcett, 1739 to 1817

Another of those who was led to a knowledge of Christ in the gospel through the preaching of George Whitefield. Like Doddridge and Wesley, Fawcett adopted the habit of summing up the leading ideas of his sermon "in a few plain verses" to be sung after the service. "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love", was written to mark his decision to refuse a call to a large London church, and to remain with his poorer but much-attached country congregation. Dr Fawcett took a deep interest in the early missionary movements of the Baptist body to which he belonged and was one of Carey's helpers. Among the letters in his biography is one giving an account of Carey's famous sermon on Isaiah 54, memorable for its two illuminating heads –

"Let us expect great things from God."

"Let us attempt great things for God."

Robert Murray McCheyne, 1813 to 1843

Towards the end of the last century, if one had been asked to make out a list of Scottish “Aids to the Devout Life”, they would undoubtedly have put high on the list Andrew Bonar’s “Memoirs of M’Cheyne”. There are few more impressive pictures of spiritual intensity; few more inspiring records of ministerial devotion.

He was ordained to the ministry in 1836, his first and only charge being that of St Peter’s in Dundee. In 1839 he was one of a deputation sent to the Holy Land by the Church of Scotland to investigate the condition of the Jews, an investigation which led to the establishment of Jewish Missions by the Church of Scotland and by the Free Church. On his return to Scotland, St. Peter’s, Dundee, became the centre of an evangelical revival which profoundly influenced the religious history of the east of Scotland at that time.

Once on being asked if he was not afraid of running short of sermons, he replied, “No, I am just an interpreter of scripture in my sermons; and when the Bible runs dry, then I shall”.

Of the several hymns he wrote, “When this passing world is done”, is one of the most frequently sung, but probably the greatest favourite, and full of gospel truth, is “I once was a stranger to grace and to God.” This hymn rejoices in the title Jehovah Tsidkenu (the Lord our righteousness) – the watchword of the reformation.

Robert Murray M’Cheyne was a Pastor to his flock in every way, young, or old, rich, or poor, high rank or low, he ever attended to the flock under his care. He even took time to write the following to a little boy of his acquaintance.

"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,
'Till it flew to Noah's breast,

Rest not in this world of sin,
'Till the Saviour take thee in".

William Williams, 1717 to 1791

Though ordained a Deacon of the Church of England, Williams never received Priest's Orders as he was frowned upon by the ecclesiastical authorities of his day for associating with Whitefield and other revival leaders. He worked chiefly among the Calvinistic Methodists of Wales, where he was held in high esteem.

At the request of the Countess of Huntingdon he prepared a small hymnbook for the use of Whitefield's Orphan Homes in America. In this book there first appears his stirring missionary hymn, "O'er the gloomy hills of darkness". "Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah", is of course, the English rendering of a hymn first written by Williams in Welsh and translated by Peter Williams (1721 to 1796).

Henry Francis Lyte, 1793 to 1847

Born at Ednam near Kelso, but of English parentage. Educated in Ireland, he entered the ministry of the church of England in 1815.

An experience at the death bed of a fellow-minister in 1818 led him to look at "life and its issues with a different eye than before, and to study the Bible and preach in another manner than he had previously done".

The greater part of his ministerial course was spent at Lower Brixham, a fishing village on the Devonshire coast. Here, for twenty-five years, though far from robust, he laboured devotedly as a minister of Christ. Here, too, he "made hymns for his little ones, hymns for his hardy fishermen and hymns for sufferers like himself".

In a poem entitled "Declining Days", Henry Lyte express the desire of his soul with regards his writings:

“Might verse of mine inspire
One virtuous aim, one high resolve impart –
Light in one drooping soul a hallowed fire,

Or bind one broken heart,
Death would be sweeter then, ...”

That wish was, surely, realised in his “Abide with me”.

In September 1847, before going to Nice (France), he preached to his congregation at the afternoon Breaking of Bread. “In the evening of the same day,” it is recorded, “he placed in the hands of a near and dear relative his little hymn ‘Abide with me,’ together with a melody of his own composing adapted to the words.” That hymn has proved “a song that will not die”. It has helped to bind not “one”, but many a “broken heart”.

Henry Lyte never returned from Nice but died and is buried there.

[Paul Gerhardt, 1607 to 1676](#)

A Lutheran pastor who ranks next to Luther himself as the most gifted and popular hymn-writer of his own denomination. Gerhardt had many sorrows. He did not obtain a pastorate until he was forty-four years of age; for four of his five children died in early youth; his wife died after a long illness during the time he was seeking for a pastorate in Berlin. Yet his hymns have no morbid touch, but are fresh and healthy in tone, ever turning our eyes to what Christ has done on our behalf.

Probably his best-known hymn as far as English-speaking people are concerned is his rendering of Bernard’s, “O Sacred Head once wounded”. Gerhardt translated Bernard’s hymn from Latin into German, and J. W. Alexander, in turn, translated it from German into English. Although having passed through three tongues, it proclaims in all, says Dr Schaff, “with equal effect, the dying love of our Saviour, and our boundless indebtedness to Him”.

Dr Alexander, the translator of Gerhardt’s version, was born in Virginia in March 1804, and was Professor at Princeton, and Presbyterian minister in New York. He died at Sweet Springs, Virginia, on July 31st, 1859.

Harriet Auber, 1773 to 1862

Miss Auber was born in London on the 4th October 1773. Her father was Rector of Tring. She spent the greater part of her life at Broxbourne and Hoddesdon in Hertfordshire, where she died on 20th January 1862.

She compiled a collection of her own hymns and hymns from other writers under the title, “Spirit of the Psalms”. A good many of these versions of the Psalms have passed into other hymnbooks and Mr Spurgeon included about twenty in his own Tabernacle hymnbook which appeared in 1866.

Her most famous hymn is, undoubtedly, “Our Blest Redeemer, ere He breathed His tender, last farewell”. At some date, someone wrote the words of this hymn on a pane of glass in her house at Hoddesdon. A minister who afterwards lived in the house offered to buy the pane of glass, but the landlord would not consent. At a still later date, the pane of glass was removed and has never been traced.

Miss Auber lived with a dear old friend by the name of Miss Mackenzie, and the two old saints were greatly loved in the district. Miss Auber was buried in the Churchyard opposite her house at the age of eighty-nine. Remember her own sentiments concerning the Spirit of God:

“And every virtue we possess,
And every vict’ry won;
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone”.

Note – The Wicket Gate Magazine hopes in the coming months to produce a free PDF booklet titled, “A handful of Hymnwriters”. This will be made available on the web site.

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

One morning many many years ago, a little girl called Anna Grey was sitting at the table having her breakfast. “Mother”, she said, “I want some honey with my wheat flakes”. “There isn’t any honey”, said her mother, “but you can have some syrup”. “I don’t like syrup”, said Anna, “and if I can’t have honey, I won’t eat my breakfast; I hate wheat flakes without honey”.

Mrs Grey looked sadly at her little daughter and was just about to speak to her when the door opened and Jane, the cook came in, saying, “Please ma’am, here’s a poor little girl who wants something to eat.”

Anna’s mother kindly led the poor girl to the fire to warm herself. She said her name was Mary Willis; her father was dead, and her little baby sister was crying for something to eat. “I have never ever begged before”, she said, “but I could not bear to hear my baby sister cry so sore”.

Mrs Grey left the room, and presently came back with some warm clothes for Mary. Then she took a basket and filled it up with some bread and milk, and some meat, to take to Mary’s mother and baby sister. Anna, who was feeling a bit ashamed of herself, asked to go as well.

They found Mary’s mother in a small room sewing. She managed to earn some money in this way, but after the rent was paid there was very little left for food. While hearing all this, Mrs Grey had given the

baby some milk and bread. Then she promised to get Mary's mother more work so that she could earn a little bit more.

After tea that night, Anna was alone with her mother. She came and knelt down beside her mother and cried. "Oh, mummy", she said, "I see how wrong I was this morning; please forgive me". Her mother kissed her, and then both of them kneeled down and asked God to forgive her and teach her to be content with all the many blessings that she had. Anna never forgot the lesson she learned that day.

Nobody needs to beg in this country nowadays, boys and girls, but still withal, because of sin and greed in the world there are places where people, even little babies, are starving with nothing to eat. God's Word has many, many lessons for us. In 1st Timothy, chapter 3 verse 8, we read – "If we have food and clothes let us be content". That can be a hard lesson to learn, boys and girls, but we can take Anna's example and kneel down and ask God to help us, and He will.

Love,
Mrs Seaton.



Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 88

Title and Subject. "A Song or Psalm for the sons of Korah, to the chief musician upon Mahalath Leannoth, Maschil of Heman the Ezrahite".

This sad complaint reads very little like a *Song*, nor can we conceive how it could be called by a name which denotes a song of praise or triumph; yet perhaps it was intentionally so called to show how faith

“glories in tribulations also.” Assuredly, if ever there was a song of sorrow and a psalm of sadness, this is one. The sons of Korah who had often united in chanting jubilant odes, are now bidden to take charge of this mournful dirge-like hymn. Servants and singers must not be choosers.

C.H. Spurgeon

This psalm stands alone in all the Psalter for the unrelieved gloom, the hopeless sorrow of its tone. Even the very saddest of the others, and the Lamentations themselves, admit some variations of key, some strains of hopefulness; here only all is darkness to the close.

Neale and Littledale

The prophecy in the foregoing psalm of the conversion of all nations is followed by this Passion-Psalm, in order that it may never be forgotten that God has purchased to Himself a universal church by the precious blood of His dear Son.

Christopher Wordsworth

All the misery and sorrow which are described in this Psalm, says Brentius, have been the lot of Christ’s people. We may therefore take the psalm, he adds, to be common to Christ and His church.

David was not the only man acquainted with sad exercise and affliction of spirit, for here is another, to wit, “Heman the Ezrahite”, as deep in trouble of spirit as he or any other beside. They are not all men of weak minds and shallow wits who are acquainted with trouble of spirit, and borne down with the sense of God’s wrath; for here is Heman, one amongst the wisest of all Israel, (and inferior to none for wisdom, except to Solomon alone), under the heaviest exercise we can imagine possible for a saint.

D. Dickson

Verse 1. “O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee”. That little word “my” opens for a moment a space between the clouds through which the Sun of righteousness cast one solitary beam. Generally speaking, you will find that when a psalm

begins with lamentations, it ends with praise; like the sun, which rising in clouds and mist, sets brightly, and darts forth its parting rays just before it goes down. But here the first gleam shoots across the sky just as the sun rises, and no sooner has the ray appeared, then thick clouds and darkness gather over it. The sun continues its course throughout the whole day enveloped in clouds and sets at last in a thicker bank of them than it ever had around it during the day. “**Lover and friend hast thou put far from me. (In the last verse of the psalm) and mine acquaintance into darkness**”. In what dark clouds does the sun of Haman the Ezrahite set!

J. C. Philpot

Verse 2. “let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry”. “Let my prayer come before thee”; that is, as an ambassador is admitted into the presence of a King with his request and petition, let my prayer find an audience with Thee, O Lord my God. And then, having gained an audience, “**Incline thine ear unto my cry**” – hear the request and petition that my ambassador-prayer brings, and be pleased to grant me an answer in peace.

Verse 3. “For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave”. He felt as if he must die, indeed he thought himself half-dead already. All his life was going, his spiritual life declined, his mental life decayed, his bodily life flickered; he was nearer dead than alive. Some of us can enter into this experience, for many a time have we traversed this valley of death’s shade, ay and dwelt in it by the month as well. Really to die and be with Christ will be a gala day’s enjoyment compared with our misery when a worse than physical death has cast its dreadful shadow over us. O Lord be pleased to set free Thy prisoners of hope! Let none of Thy mourners imagine that a strange thing has happened, but rather rejoice to see the footprints of brethren who have trodden this desert before.

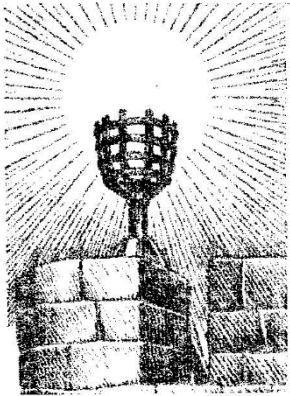
C. H. Spurgeon

Verse 7. “Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves”. Now, seeing that so horrible a flood did not prevent the psalmist from lifting up his heart and prayers to God, we

may learn by his example to cast the anchor of faith and prayer into heaven in all our shipwrecks.

John Calvin

(To be Continued)



The Lower Lights

Paul's Hired House

By no stretch of the imagination could the apostle Paul be looked on as a “lower light” in the cause of the gospel. There were times, however when the providence of God placed him in what could only be described as lower light situations - places or circumstances which, humanly speaking, might have been more fitted to snuffing-out the gospel rays than promoting them.

One such time and place was the “two whole years” when Paul found himself under house-arrest in “his own hired house” in the city of Rome; but, as in so many other similar situations, God proved *to* Paul and *through* Paul that His Word is in no way “bound,” (Acts 28:30-31).

“And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house,” we’re told. And those two years of confinement for Paul very much set before us the great lesson of the Word of God, that God has His own ways of performing His own will. It isn’t all that easy to come to a precise timespan with regards to the apostle Paul’s life, but it was probably something like 28 years since Paul had been converted at Damascus. He preached for a few days in Damascus itself and then, God took him away down into the Arabian desert for three whole years where He taught him the depths of the faith into which he had now entered.

After those three years, he came back to Damascus for another few days, escaped “over the wall in a basket”, and came to Jerusalem for “fifteen days” where he met Simon Peter etc. From Jerusalem he was sent back to his hometown of Tarsus, and it was there, eight years later on, that Barnabas found him and brought him to the work at Antioch. There then began his great missionary journeys from the Church at Antioch, until the Jews’ opposition rose to such a height that he was eventually imprisoned under Felix and then Festus for three-and-a-half years. It was from this imprisonment that he was brought to Rome at this point, and here he was to remain for this further “two years” in his own hired house, the prisoner of the Lord Jesus.

Now, when we begin to tally-up such an outline of Paul’s days in the Christian life, we discover that out of that proposed 28 years or so, Paul spent something like sixteen of them in comparative obscurity or in prison. And now; two more years under close arrest! What can we say? “God’s ways are not our ways.” And not only is God pleased to employ a good many lower lights in His service, but He even places His “brighter” lights in some very dark corners at times. However, no matter how dark the corner, it need in no way keep a true light – higher or lower – from shining; so, with Paul.

When the great apostle was first taken into custody in Jerusalem some three-and-a-half years before this time, the Lord gave this word to him; “fear not,” said the Lord to Paul, “thou must bear witness of me at Rome also.” Therefore, although Paul found himself in Rome as a prisoner, he still knew that he was there under divine commission and he would act accordingly. He couldn’t work “outwith” his hired house, but he could work *in* it, and he could work *from* it, and so he did.

Matthew Henry has a lovely word concerning Paul’s hired house in Rome “When we cannot do what we would in the service of God,” he says, “we must do what we can.” And then he adds, “Those ministers that have but little hired houses should rather preach in them, if they be allowed to do that, than be silent.” That’s a choice word in its own right; but there is something very tender and very thankful behind it, as well.

Matthew Henry's father was Philip Henry, one of the ejected Puritans of 1662, and among the strictures that were placed on those men were two Acts of Parliament – the Five Mile Act and the Conventicle Act. The first forbade them to preach anywhere within a five-mile radius of their former churches, and the second meant that they couldn't preach to more than eight people at any one time; in fact, something like their immediate family and a few others. But Philip Henry did just that; and for something like twenty years his main congregation was his own family. But one of the fruits of that house ministry was Matthew – a man surely, whose praise is in the Church, even up to this day. “Those ministers who have but little hired houses should rather preach in them, if they be allowed to do that, than be silent.” And for those “two whole years” what use the apostle Paul made of his own hired house in Rome.

Paul's *pen* was busy in his own hired house. Humanly speaking, had there been no two-year confinement in Rome at this time there would have been no Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, or Colossians; or no Philemon either; for it was from this first Roman imprisonment that Paul wrote these epistles. Paul's *zeal* was busy there, as well. It was there that Onesimus was born again of the Spirit of God – “Whom I have begotten in my bonds,” says Paul, as he sends Onesimus back to Philemon with that epistle in his grasp.

His *hands* were busy in that hired house. It was a “hired” house; we might well ask how did Paul pay the rent? And, of course, it's what all that activity at the Church at Philippi was all about as they put their heads together and sent off their “gift” to Paul at the hands of that good man Epaphroditus. But remember what happened to Epaphroditus? He took ill - an illness that was “nigh unto death” Paul tells the Philippians in his letter back to them. And the one who had come to willingly “minister” to Paul finds himself being ministered to by Paul until God has “mercy” on them both, as Paul says, and Epaphroditus gets well again.

I don't suppose Paul had a leather-bound Guest Book in his own hired house at Rome; if he had had such a thing, what names would have been recorded in it – lower lights, and higher lights, the local members of the

local church at Rome, of course; those who had set out to meet Paul at Appii Forum and the Three Taverns as he was conveyed along the Appian Way by the soldiers of Caesar's Band. When Paul first saw those brethren and sisters coming to meet him, we're told in Acts 28, "he thanked God and took courage". He would, no doubt, still be thankful and still be encouraged by their visits to him in his own hired house; and what blessings they must have carried away with them from that place! Aquila and Priscilla, who had "laid down their necks" for Paul at one point, would have made their way there more than once; and Adronicus and Junia, who had themselves endured some imprisonment with him. The mother of Rufus; what kind of service did she carry out for Paul during that two-year period? "His mother and mine", as Paul calls her, writing back to the Romans. Tychicus, John Mark, Jesus called Justus, and Timothy. Just a wee hired house, but, surely, its sound has gone out into all the earth.