

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)

Evangelism and The Church

The Pastor's Letter

Dear Friends,

One of the two great areas of the Church's life is her evangelism to the uttermost parts of the earth. (The other great area is her worship of God and praise of God, as that one, supreme agent that God has set in the world for this purpose.) But, just as there is that part of our worship that can only be fulfilled in a "corporate" way – in a Church of the Lord's people met together for that purpose – so it is with regards to a vast area of the Church's mission and evangelism. The Church is the place *in which* God's worship is conducted and enjoyed; the Church is also the place *from which* God's word is spread and God's work in the gospel is performed. The great commendation given to the Church at Thessalonica was that "from you sounded out the word of life." The idea of the Church, *in and of itself*, as God's evangelist in this world is a precious truth and one that is neglected at our peril, as some are possibly beginning to now see. There are various individual ministries, and gifts, and offices, given within the Church and to the Church; but none of these is to make the Church's *own* total ministry redundant; they are, rather, to foster, and cultivate, and increase her ministry in all respects – her evangelism included.

The situation that we now find ourselves in is one that has developed over a good many years of neglect. For the best part of a hundred years, and certainly for the whole of this past century, when the Church, in general, has thought in terms of "evangelism" it has thought in terms of "evangelistic campaign," or an evangelistic "effort," with an "Evangelist," etc., to "head" the campaign. All that was normally required of the Church was that the members be in attendance at the campaign meetings and, for the zealous, to attend any special prayer times, as well. What it was, in fact, to a large extent, was evangelism "by proxy:" evangelism by "substitution," or "delegation." The

churches, in general, “delegated” some “specialist” person, or persons, to take on almost the whole stance of the church’s evangelism; and now, like the famous ostrich, the Church in general, has obviously lost the use of its wings by failure to employ them. Instead of exercising its God-given function in the area of corporate evangelism – that *is*, the church as the evangelist – it handed the task over to this body of “specialists.” Small wonder, then, that it now finds that to a large extent it has lost the ability to function at all in that direction. There is no principle clearer in scripture than the one that assures us that when we fail to exercise various “limbs” in the Body of the Church we eventually lose the power and usage of those limbs. Within that principle lies much of the explanation of the Church’s present plight.

Another aspect of the whole question that very much deserves our diligent attention is the *means* that we turn to in our efforts to recapture this “forgotten factor” and this “Cinderella doctrine” of the Church. As we endeavour to get the truth “out of the ashes,” we must never lose sight of its great central feature and, thus, be found guilty of evangelism by substitution still. What we mean is this: if the corporate evangelism of the Church consists in anything, it consists in the Church’s face-to-face confrontation in the issues of the gospel with the men and women of this hard-bitten, materialistic, twentieth-century world in which we live. That thrusting out with the gospel into the midst of an alien world whose inhabitants will question us, query us, insult us, humiliate us, and manys a time, slay us in the battle. That standing toe-to-toe and heart-to-heart with our contemporary counterparts and telling plainly of sin and righteousness and judgment, and of the Saviour who died, “the just for the unjust to bring us to God.” Whatever else the Church’s evangelism may *involve*, that, in its essence, is what the Church’s evangelism really is and primarily is.

Now, you can see where “substitution” can so easily enter where we are not constantly aware of That? And instead of specialist *people* we can end up with specialist *things*. Literature work, children’s work, “ansa-phones,” cassette ministries. Any of these things, or all of these things, or any combination of them may play a vital part in a Church’s total evangelism in that place where the Lord has set it, *provided* –

provided they are not being used in isolation to that *first* task in the Church's evangelism; and worse, so long as they are not being used as a "substitute" for that first task.

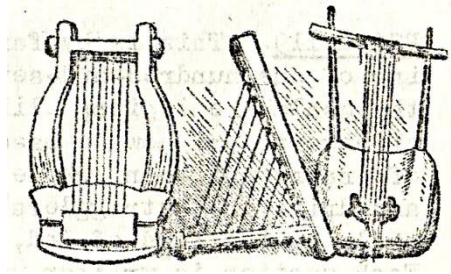
It is hard to confront the world; of that there can be no doubt. But, so often, it is in that confrontation that the Church's valour is really put to the test. It's much easier to convene a children's meeting than to come heart-to-heart, and toe-to-toe with an adult "homo sapien" like ourselves! It's a cosy kind of evangelism that installs and answering service with a telephone and, then sits back to see the results – "For the way of salvation Dial -----". It much less painful to thrust a book or a tape into somebody's hand with the remark "maybe this will help you," than to actually say something that really needs to be said from us to them!

Should we despise these things, and other things, as well! Not in the least; not in the least. And we may and must feel free to employ as many means legitimate in the light of scripture that we can employ. The burning question is, are we using these things *without* doing that one thing necessary, or *in place of* that one thing necessary? If we are, then, we are no less guilty of the practice of "evangelism by proxy" than many sections of the Church have been for the best part of a hundred years, and we are no nearer regaining the use of our God-given evangelistic wings.

May God grant us all enabling grace to be up and about that grand calling that we have. Like a great many others, how feeble we feel ourselves to be in this gospel endeavour; but, at least, may God give us grace to see our need and grant us enough strength from day-to-day to, at least "flap our wings" a wee bit, in recognition of the fact that we still possess them! Apart from that greatest commendation of all – that a Church loves its Saviour and worships its God aright, can there be a greater commendation than that Thessalonian one that we mentioned? "From you sounded out the word of life." Indeed, is that not simply the outward display of the inward love and worship that our God demands?

Yours Sincerely,

W. J. Seaton. (Nov. 1980)



Song of Songs *Song of Solomon*

Probably one of the most generally neglected books in the whole of the Bible is The Song of Solomon. The reason for the neglect is, no doubt, to be partially found in the failure to decide just what “kind” of a book the Song of Solomon is, and just what it is supposed to be saying to us as the believing people of God in our own day. May we just make the subject of our letter for this time, then, a brief outline of the background and meaning of Solomon’s Song, and a turning of our eyes to one of the greenest pastures in the whole of the Scriptures?

The great Puritan John Flavel describes the Song of Solomon as, “A crystal stream of pure spiritual love, gliding sweetly betwixt two pleasant banks – Christ and the Church.” So it is. There are two main characters in the book, the “beloved”, and the “spouse”, sometimes referred to as “the Shulamite”, or as “my love”. On the surface, the “beloved” of the song is Solomon himself, and the “spouse” is that young Shulamite woman whom Solomon has betrothed to himself. The songs that “glide sweetly” between them constitute the words of the book, and they are the expressions of their deeply-rooted devotion to one another – the “beloved’s” devotion never failing or waning, but the devotion of the “spouse” very often ebbing as well as flowing. But “a greater than Solomon is here,” so that those expressions of devotion become, as John Flavel says, “a crystal stream of pure *spiritual* love,” and the “two pleasant banks” that those words glide between are not just simply King Solomon and his bride, but King Immanuel and His Spiritual Bride – the Church – for the Church is the Bride of Christ.

Essential to the understanding of the Song of Solomon is some kind of a background against which to set the book; and for this purpose, it is good to remember the customs and procedures that surrounded a Hebrew marriage. The first thing that took place was the “betrothal” of the young bride to her bridegroom. This took place when the father of

the bride gave his daughter in marriage to the bridegroom, and when the bridegroom paid a “dowry” for “the hand” of his young bride. There then followed a time of separation called “the interval.” During this time, the bridegroom returned to his father’s house, and the bride remained in her own home, preparing herself for marriage, until that day when her beloved would come for her with a great procession of his friends, and would convey her back to his father’s house where the wedding feast was spread and enjoyed for a period of seven days.

How vivid that background! Has the Church of Christ – Christ’s Bride – not been “betrothed” to her heavenly Husband in the Covenant of grace from time immemorial? Was it not that very fact that Christ rehearsed before His disciples in the upper room when He prayed to His Father in the great High Priestly prayer – “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me”? Indeed, it was as Paul reminded the Church at Corinth, she was “betrothed to Christ as a chaste virgin,” and should labour to remember such a great blessing in her soul. With regards to the payment of the “dowry”, could anything be more precious than the fact that this has been paid with crimson coin drawn from the Heavenly Bridegroom’s very veins.

“From heaven He came and sought her,
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.”

There is no more astounding truth in the whole of the Bible than the fact that the Church of God is purchased with “his own blood”, in the person of “the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” So precious is the church to God – because she is to be “to the praise of the glory of his grace” – that He would only redeem her and betroth her to Himself with “his own blood”, and nothing or no one else is under that enormous dowry price, but the Bride for whom Christ bled! We are now in the “interval” of the old Hebrew marriage: our Bridegroom has returned to His Father’s home above, and we are left in our “house of clay” for the time being. During this time, there is much “preparation” on hand if we know the sanctifying work of God’s Holy Spirit in our lives. And then,

one day, a day which the Father has set in His own purposes, the cry will go up, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh,” and Christ shall appear “with clouds descending.” Then, will come the “wedding feast” for all the ransomed church of God. Then, she will be “adorned as a bride” to meet her Husband, and that eternal union will never be broken, for it is what “God has joined together.”

Such is the union, then, that the Song of Solomon is pointing us to; and we may read that book, reading far beneath that earthly love that is set forth there in the devotion of Solomon and his bride, to that heavenly and “spiritual love” which is meant to flow between Christ and the Church. It is, therefore, well called, “the Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s.” Again, on the surface, it is the greatest of all the songs that Solomon ever wrote. It is the one which he himself has entitled in that way, and this is because it speaks of the young Shulamite whom he has chosen above all others – although there is little in her for any to see – “what will ye see in the Shulamite?” she herself asks of him. But, again, “A greater than Solomon is here,” for, in heavenly language, it is the song of the King of kings. He, too, has chosen a bride out of this world of sin and unbelief; He has done it for the glory of His own name and mercy, for, indeed, there is nothing to be seen in *this* Shulamite who, by nature, is as “black as the tents of Kedar,” and who must often say of herself, “They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.” *Yet*, this same “peasant maid” will one day occupy the great King’s banqueting house where His banner over her will be perpetual love. How much, then, should this “Song of songs” be upon her lips? The Bible itself is “The Book of books,” for it is the one Book which speaks of our soul’s salvation. We may well think of that prayer of Christ in John 17 as “The Prayer of prayers,” for how much a prayer of our salvation that prayer was? “Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.” And so, this Song of Solomon’s is well-entitled, “The Song of songs”, for it is the song of our salvation. As Solomon forsook the courts of his palace to seek out this bride who was going to be the subject of his song of songs, so our Lord Jesus Christ came forth, “Out of the Ivory Palaces, into this world of woe”, to “seek and to save that which was lost”.

Who else could, or should, sing such a song as this, as those who are redeemed with “the precious blood of Christ”? In “comparing earthly things with earthly”, it is the song of Solomon and his spouse; but, in “comparing heavenly things with heavenly”, it is nothing less than the very psalm of Christ and His Church in this “song” the unbeliever has no part, until it is placed within their mouths as “a new song”, when the old heart of unbelief is taken away and a “heart of flesh” implanted. Like the love of Solomon’s bride of course, the believer’s love very often ebbs and flows. But, as we are shown the love of the bridegroom as ever steadfast, so we may gladly remember that the love of our heavenly Bridegroom – a million times more – “endures unchanging on”. This song can be our “song in the night”.



Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 89 (Continued)

Verse 5. “And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Lord: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints.” It is a wonderful salvation, and it is such a salvation as the angels desire to pry into it; and it is such a salvation, that all the prophets desire to pry into it. It is almost six thousand years since all the angels in heaven fell into a sea of wonder at this great salvation, and it is almost six thousand years since Able fell into a sea of wonder at this great salvation. And what think ye is Abel’s exercise this day? He is even wondering at this great salvation.

Andrew Gray

Verse 5. “And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Lord: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints.” As the heavens are a proof of God’s power, in respect of his first framing them out of nothing, so are they a pattern of God’s faithfulness, in their constant and orderly motion, according to His word since their first framing: “The

heavens shall praise thy faithfulness also.” However the power and faithfulness of God may be seen and heard in the work and speech of the heavens by all men, yet are they not observed and hearkened unto except in the Church by God’s children. Therefore saith he, “They shall praise thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints.”

David Dickson

Verse 6. “For who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord?”

The Dutch have translated these words, “Who can be shadowed with him?” That is, they are not worthy to be accounted shadows unto such a comparison with him.”

Thomas Goodwin

Verse 9. “Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.”

Surely the Spirit of God would have us to take notice, that though the sea be indeed such a giant, such a monster, as will make a heart of oak shake, or a heart of brass melt, yet what is it to God, but an infant? He can bind it and lay it to sleep, even as a little child. And if the great sea be in the hand of God as a little child, what is great to God! And how great is God! What is strong to God! And how strong is God! What or who is too great, or too strong for God to deal with?

Joseph Caryl

Verse 11. “The heavens are thine, and the earth also is thine; as for the world, thou hast founded it.” Therefore we praise thee, therefore we trust in thee, therefore we will not fear what man shall do against us.

Matthew Henry

Verse 12. The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.” These hills, the one to the east and the other to the west, in Canaan, were much frequented by the saints of God. David speaks of the sacred hill of Hermon and compares brotherly-love to the dew of it. (Psalm 133:3.) and Tabor, yet more memorable as the spot of Christ’s transfiguration, and from whence God the Father proclaimed His perfect love and approbation of Jesus as His

dear Son. Well might this hymn therefore, in allusion to those glorious events, call even the holy hills to rejoice in Jehovah's name.

Robert Hawker

Verse 14. "Justice and Judgement are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face." As if the psalmist had said, "The ornaments with which God is invested, instead of being a robe of purple, a diadem, or a sceptre, are, that he is the righteous and impartial judge of the world, a merciful Father, and a faithful protector of his people." Earthly kings, on account of them having nothing in themselves to procure for them authority, and to give them dignity, are under the necessity of borrowing elsewhere what will invest them therewith. But God, having in himself all-sufficiency, and standing in no need of any other helps, exhibits to us the splendour of his own image in his righteousness, mercy, and truth.

John Calvin

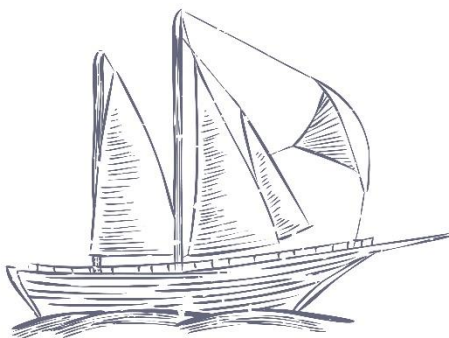
Thus has the poet sung the glories of the covenant God. It was meet that before he poured forth his lament, he should record his praise, lest his sorrow should seem to have withered his faith. This is such a course as every wise man will take who desires to have an answer of peace in the Day of Trouble.

C. H. Spurgeon

(To be continued)

Mrs Seaton's Letter To the Boys and Girls.

They Were Unaware of Danger!



This is the story of a little ship named "Lorna." It was given that name by its owner and called after the owner's little girl. It was a very brightly painted little ship and always had lots of flags flying in the breeze.

One day, this little ship was sailing on the Niagara River in America. It was on its way from Chicago to New York and intended to enter the canal leading to New York. The river where the canal enters is quite safe and no fear was felt, but the “pilot” missed the entrance to the canal and sailed on down the river, thinking all the time that he would soon come to the canal. The water became swifter and swifter, but the little ship sailed gaily on and when the people along the shore, knowing the danger, tried to signal the ship, those on the little cruiser waved back cheerily and sailed on merrily down the river, unaware that they were headed for the rushing water-falls and certain death.

Suddenly a great gust of wind blew the ship on to the rock reef at the foot of a little island. If it had sailed on ten minutes more it could not have escaped plunging over the Falls. The ship turned over on its side and the four people on board had to cling to the wreck for more than an hour before they were taken off by strong men in a rowboat who risked their lives to save them.

There is a verse in the Bible, boys and girls, which says, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.” The danger came for that little boat by missing the right “path”, for there are paths in the water as well as on the dry land. There are paths on land and sea which lead to safe harbours, and there are paths which lead to danger and death. The pilot of the little ship “Lorna” missed the entrance to the safe water. The way he took seemed right to himself, but it was the way of tragedy.

How important, then, it is, boys and girls, that we have a “Pilot” who can safely guide us through this life and take us to heaven to be with Himself at last. There is only One who can do both these things, and that is Christ, the Son of God. Perhaps you know –

“Jesus Saviour pilot me,
Over life’s tempestuous sea.”

Love,
Mrs Seaton.

***The Believer's Prayer
For Divine Teaching
By
Robert Murray McCheyne***

“Open thou mine eyes that I may
behold wondrous things out of
Thy Law.”

Psalm 119 verse 18.

The “law” of God here spoken of is the Bible. In the days of David, the Law, or the Five Books of Moses, formed the greater part of the Bible, and so the whole was often called the Law. “The wondrous things” seem to be the great things of an eternal world. David had looked on the wonders of this world – he had turned his enquiring eyes upon the wonders of nature, but now he wanted to see the spiritual wonders contained in the Bible. He wanted to know about God Himself – in all His majesty, purity, and grace. He wanted to learn the way of salvation by a crucified Redeemer, and the glory that is to follow. Open mine eyes.” David was not blind – his eye was not dim. He could read the Bible from end to end; and yet he felt that he needed more light; to see deeper – to have the eyes of his understanding opened. He wanted divine teaching, and therefore he would not open the Bible without this prayer, “Open Thou mine eyes.”

We Need Divine Teaching to See the Wonders of the Bible.

This is plain from the few that are converted under the preaching of the gospel. “Many are called but few are chosen,” has been the rule from the earliest times. If human teaching could reveal the wonders of the Bible, then all who are taught by man would believe. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, but with how few did he prevail. Isaiah complains, “Who hath believed our report?” In what plaintive terms did Jeremiah preach? And when our Lord was on the earth in the days of His humiliation how many thousands heard Him on the mountain, and by the seashore, and in the streets of Jerusalem? When Paul preached at Mar’s Hill, he stood among thousands, yet, scarcely more than one man and one woman believed.

So now, many a faithful minister feels the same. There is much preaching, little saving. Many millions of Bibles – many children taught – many pious books spreading abroad the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. How we need to cry, “Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!”

God is the Only Effectual Teacher.

Because He only knows those wondrous things as they really are. Ministers have but a glimpse of those wondrous things, and it is no wonder that they cannot teach them effectually. They see but a very little of sin, the mountains of guilt, the shortness of time, the depth of hell, the love of God. They see but little into the heart of Jesus, His amazing atonement, His free righteousness. Books also are infinitely imperfect. The best of books are but sparks from the Bible, mingled with human darkness. But God knows; “all is naked and open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do. “He knows our sins, the mountains that are over us. He knows the shortness of life. The awful depths of hell are naked to his view. He knows His own love, the glory of Jesus. Do any of you feel your need of divine teaching? Then cry, “Open thou mine eyes.”

God is the only effectual teacher because He only can teach the heart. Man can speak to the ear, to the understanding, to the memory, God alone to the heart. The reason why human teaching cannot convey light to the soul is that the heart is dead. But when God teaches, He breaks the heart, and it melts; He awakens concern in the dead heart, so that the person runs to hear the word preached. None can teach like God. He can teach a little child as easily as the oldest man; He can teach an idiot as easily as the wisest. We cry to God, “Open thou mine eyes.”

What is Divine Teaching?

It is giving the soul as sense of the wondrous excellency of the gospel way of salvation, “that I may see wondrous things.” Before conversion, the man read the same words in the Bible, repeated the same truths in the Catechism, but he saw no wonder in them. Now, he discovers the

wondrous nature of them. A man looking at the sun in a mist, may see nothing wonderful; but if the mist be drawn away, and the sun shines out gloriously, the man is filled with a wondrous sense of the glory. So with the glory of Christ, that better Sun. If there were ten thousand other ways of salvation, he prefers *this* to all – giving glory to God, and safety to his soul.

Marks of Divine Teaching.

It causes souls to cleave sweetly to Christ. This is the sure mark of all who are taught of God. Before, they were quite puzzled about coming to Christ, believing on Him, closing with Him. But now, they see no difficulties at all; they cannot but believe. Just as one cannot doubt that the sun is shining when they see it, so they cannot doubt the word of Christ, or their interest in Him. They forsake their own righteousness for ever – pushed themselves aside as condemned – deny themselves – “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.” They take up the cross; they let go what hides Christ.

Divine teaching sanctifies. Human teaching does not. A man may have the head-knowledge of an angel, and the heart of a devil. Human teaching civilises, it does not make Christians. But this sweet teaching of God sanctifies – it separates us unto God – and the sanctified one cries, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Divine teaching gives a desire that others might be taught. The heaven-taught soul delights to obey the command of Jesus, “Go home to thy friends, and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for thee.” He wishes that all the world might come to know Him who is so sweet, so full, so free. He prays – “Open thou *their* eyes that *they* may behold wondrous things out of thy law!”

So you, dear friends in Jesus, go home and ask – what can I do for Christ? How may I teach by words, by looks, by deeds, “by righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness?” How may I teach by letters, by books, by tracts? Dark, cold, and powerless in

themselves, yet, filled with the Spirit of God, they may convey life, and light, and gladness into thousands of dwellings. The smallest tract may be the stone in David's sling. In the hands of Christ, it may bring down a giant soul.

There is something inexpressibly pleasing to a justified mind to know that God has all the honour in our salvation, and we have none; to know that God's honour is not violated, but on the contrary, shines more illustrious; to know that God's law is not injured, but magnified and made honourable; to know that we are safe, and God has all the glory.

Robert Murray McCheyne



Snippets.

Joy. Joy is threefold, says one of the "Fathers;" the joy of the world, the joy of thyself, the joy of the Lord. The first springs from worldly affluence, the second from a good conscience, the third from the experience of entering eternity.

A Warning! "If thou be upon a mountain, look not back at Sodom, as Lot's wife did; if thou be within the ark, fly not again into the world, as Noah's raven did; if thou be going towards the land of Canaan, think not on the fleshpots of Egypt, as some Israelites did; if thou be well-washed, return not to the mire – if thou be upon the housetop, come not down – if thou hast set thine hand to the plough, look not back. Say like the psalmist, "I am purposed that my heart shall not transgress."

Thomas Playfere.

Amazing!

How many seem amazed to read, that God could Esau hate,

But surely this betrays that they their natures overrate.

If they but thought how sin appears before their God above,

The thing that would amaze them is, that God could Jacob love.