

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, Mr Seaton and Pastor G.S. Marley
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham
- Podcasts on Various Subjects
- Audio Archive of Sermons from 1970 to 2002 by Jack Seaton
- Audio Archive of Sermons from 2004 to 2021 by Dr Needham

Comforting and Assuring Words

Dear Friends,

It was a lovely word of comfort and assurance that our Lord gave the dying thief, when He told him that that very day he would be with Him in paradise.

It was a word of super-abounding grace towards that man and, in a very real sense, must have exceeded all the expectation at what he had asked for in the first place. His original request, you remember, was that the Lord would "remember" him when He came into his kingdom. – or, when He came in His kingdom. In all probability, that man was looking towards the day of resurrection, and to the fulfilment of the Messianic kingdom of this Lord and King in whom he had exercised his faith in a remarkable way. He was not to be disappointed in his request, of course, and we may be assured from the whole narrative of the dying thief that when the resurrection morning comes that man will be among those who rise unto "the resurrection of life". What our Lord also assures that man of, however, is that he isn't going to have to wait until some far-distant time at the end of this world of ours for a blessing to his soul but that right there and then – that very day – his blessedness was to begin with his Lord and his Saviour in paradise. In a very real sense, then, that old penitent thief was permitted to anticipate the knowledge that the Apostle Paul arrives at in his epistle to the Ephesians, namely, that God is able to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think". It should always be a comfort to our hearts to realise that whatever we ask, or whatever we think concerning eternity, both our requests and our thoughts will be outstripped and out measured by what the Lord will finally give to us and grant to us.

It should comfort our hearts, also, to realise that as the Lord knows all about our eternity, He also knows all about our "times".

Just a few hours after our Lord spoke those words to the penitent

thief, a request was put to Pontius Pilate by the leaders of the Jewish nation that he would send out a party of his soldiers to break the legs of the three prisoners that had been crucified that day. This was the normal way of bringing death by crucifixion to a comparatively merciful and speedy end. The crucified person's feet rested on a small block of wood, or a sloped platform, on the upright beam of the cross; this helped to bear the weight of the body. If after three or four days the crucified person had not died (and this was normal), the executioner might be inclined to order the breaking of the legs as a merciful measure. When the legs were broken, of course, all support for the body was removed, and as the body collapsed on the cross all remaining vestiges of life were crushed within it. It was excruciating, but swift.

It was not out of any sense of mercy, of course, that the Jewish leaders requested Pilate to have the legs of Christ and the two malefactors broken; they had an entirely different reason. The Bible tells us that the next day was "an high day". In fact, it was the Sabbath of the Passover Feast in Jerusalem. That being the case, then, those leaders of the nation no doubt thought it would be uncomely in the light of their Law to have those crucified men – especially this pretended Messiah – still hanging on their crosses on such an occasion; hence their request.

As we know, of course, when the soldiers came to Jesus He was "dead already". That was a remarkable thing. Even Pilate himself was struck by the information that any one crucified on a cross should have died so soon. The two malefactors, however, were not dead, and so, the soldiers proceeded to break their legs and thus usher them into their respective eternities – *that day* – that *very* day! Oh yes, those Jewish leaders were filling up their hearts' desire, to get that one, Jesus of Nazareth, out of their sight that very day – before the Passover Sabbath would arrive the next day. But in filling up their own desire, they but filled up the Saviour's unerring word to that penitent soul – "Verily I say unto thee, *today* shall thou be with me in paradise". Not tomorrow, or the next day; but *today*.

It should always comfort our hearts to know that not only is our

eternity in God's hands, but all our "times" that but lead us unto that eternal day are there as well.

"Not a single shaft can hit,
Till the God of love sees fit."

Undoubtedly the greatest comfort and assurance that the penitent thief must have experienced in his soul, was the realisation from the lips of the Saviour, of what the sum and substance of "paradise" really consisted of. We should realise the same. Our Lord indeed, assured that man that he would be "in paradise"; he assured him that he would be in paradise that very day; but we are never to overlook what stands connected with both of those assurances, and makes them full in all their fulness. Says our Saviour to the penitent thief, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be *with me* in paradise". In paradise, indeed; in paradise that very day; but thou shalt be "with me" in paradise, says our Lord, and that makes it "grace upon grace".

Needless to say, it is a pointless and a fruitless exercise to try and figure-out how the Saviour could be with that penitent thief in heaven that day when He was going to be lying in Joseph of Arimathea's new tomb; or, indeed, preaching to the "spirits in prison", that Peter tells us about. His Omnipresence covers it all, and our souls need not be perplexed for on moment. What that man was to know is what all the saints of God, with the apostle Paul, can rest assured of, namely, that to be "absent from the body", is to be "present with the Lord". The glories of the resurrection are yet to come, but as that same apostle Paul was inspired to tell us, to "depart" this life is to be "with Christ".

There are a few lines in that famous hymn that was woven around the words of Samuel Rutherford that appear puzzling at first glance, but which very readily fall into place in the light of the incident of the dying thief.

"I shall sleep sound in Jesus,
Fill'd with His likeness rise.
To live and to adore Him,

To see Him with these eyes.
'Tween me and resurrection
But Paradise doth stand;
Then – then for glory dwelling
In Immanuel's land.

Rutherford's own last words explain the lines:- "There is nothing now between me and the resurrection", he said, "but 'This day thou shalt be with me in paradise'." That day his body fell asleep in Jesus until the day of the resurrection, but that day he was to be with Christ in paradise. That's what the penitent was told; that's what all the saints may rest on and stand on.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton (April 1982)

Spurgeon on Henry & Calvin.



In order to be able to expound the scriptures, and as an aid to your pulpit studies, you will need to be familiar with the commentators: A glorious army, let me tell you, whose acquaintance will be your delight and profit.

Of course, you are not such wiseacres as to think or say that you can expound scripture without assistance from the works of divines and learned men who have laboured before you in the field of exposition. If you are of that opinion, pray remain so, for you are not worth the trouble of conversion, and you would resent the attempts as an insult to your infallibility. It seems odd, that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what He has revealed to others.

My chat this afternoon is not for these great originals, but for you who

are content to learn of holy men, taught of God, and mighty in the scriptures. A respectable acquaintance with the opinion of the giants of the past might have saved many an erratic thinker from wild interpretations and outrageous inferences. Usually, we have found the despisers of commentaries to be men who have no sort of acquaintance with them; in their case, it is the opposite of familiarity which has bred contempt. It is true that there are a number of expositions of the whole Bible which are hardly worth shelf-room; the authors have spread a little learning over a vast surface; but who will deny the pre-eminent value of such expositions as those of Calvin, Ness, Henry, Trapp, Poole and Bengel, which are as deep as they are broad? And yet further, who can pretend to Biblical learning who has not made himself familiar with the great writers who spent a life in explaining some one sacred book? Caryl on Job will not exhaust the patience of a student who loves every letter of the Word; even Collinges, with his nine-hundred and nine pages upon one chapter of the Song, will not be too full for the preacher's use; nor will Manton's long-metre edition of the hundred and nineteenth psalm be too profuse. With attempting to give in detail the names of, I intend in a familiar talk to mention the more notable, who wrote upon the whole Bible, or on either Testament.

First among the mighty, then, for general usefulness, we are bound to mention the man whose name is a household word, - ***Matthew Henry***. He is most pious and pithy, sound and sensible, suggestive and sober, terse and trustworthy. You will find him to be glittering in metaphors, rich in analogies, overflowing with illustrations, superabundant in reflections. He delights in apposition and alliteration; he is usually plain, quaint, and full of pith; he is deeply spiritual, heavenly, and profitable; finding good matter in every text, and from all deducing most practical and judicious lessons.

His is the kind of commentary to be placed where I saw it, in the old meeting-house at Chester – chained in the vestry for anybody and everybody to read. It is the poor man's



Reproduced by J. J. Johnson from an original picture.

commentary, the old Christian's companion; suitable to everybody, instructive to all.

You may be aware, perhaps, that the latter part of the New Testament was completed by other hands, the good man having gone the way of all flesh. The writers were Messrs Evans, Brown, Mayo, Bays, Rosewell, Harriss, Atkinson, Smith, Tong, Wright, Merrell, Hill, Reynold, and Billingsley – all Dissenting ministers. They have executed their work exceedingly well, and have worked in much of the matter which Henry and collected, and have done their best to follow his methods, but their combined production is far inferior to Matthew Henry himself, and any reader will soon detect the difference.

Every minister ought to read Matthew Henry entirely and carefully through once at least. Begin at the beginning, and resolve that you will traverse the goodly land from Dan to Beersheba. You will acquire a vast store of sermons if you read with your notebook close at hand; and as for thoughts, they will swarm around you like twittering swallows around an old gable towards the close of autumn. If you publicly expound the chapter you have just been reading, your people will wonder at the novelty of your remarks and the depth of your thoughts; and then you can tell them what a treasure Henry is. William Jay's sermons bear clear evidence of his having studied Matthew Henry almost daily. Many of the quaint things in Jay's sermons are either directly traceable to Matthew Henry or his familiarity with that writer. I have thought that the style of Jay was founded upon Matthew Henry: Matthew Henry is Jay writing, Jay is Matthew Henry preaching. What more could I say in commendation either of the preacher or the author?

It would not be possible for me too earnestly to press upon you the importance of reading the expositions of that prince among men, *John Calvin*. I have often felt inclined to cry out with Father Simon, a Roman Catholic, "Calvin possessed a sublime genius", and with Scaliger, "Oh how well has Calvin reached the meaning of the prophets – no one better!"

You have forty-two or more goodly volumes worth their weight in gold.

Of all commentators I believe John Calvin to be the most candid. In his expositions he is not always what moderns would call Calvinistic; that is to say, where scripture maintains the doctrine of predestination and grace he flinches in no degree, but inasmuch as some scriptures bear the impress of human free action and responsibility, he does not shun to expound their meaning in all fairness and integrity. He was no trimmer and pruner of texts. He gave their meaning as far as he knew it. His



honest intention was to translate the Hebrew and the Greek originals as accurately as he possibly could, and then to give the meaning which would naturally be conveyed by such Greek and Hebrew words: he laboured, in fact, to declare, not his own mind upon the Spirit's words, but the mind of the Spirit as couched in those words. Dr King very truly says of him, "No writer ever dealt more fairly and honestly by the Word of God. He is scrupulously careful to let it speak for itself,

and to guard against every tendency of his own mind to put upon it a questionable meaning for the sake of establishing some doctrine which he feels to be important, or some theory which he is anxious to uphold. This is one of his prime excellences. He will not maintain any doctrine, however orthodox and essential, by a text of scripture which to him appears of doubtful application, or of inadequate force."

If you needed any confirmatory evidence as to the value of Calvin's writings, I might summon a cloud of witnesses; here is the opinion of one, who is looked upon as his great enemy, namely, Arminius: "Next to the perusal of the scriptures, which I earnestly inculcate, I exhort my pupils to peruse Calvin's commentaries, which I extol in loftier terms than Hemlich himself; for I affirm that Calvin excels beyond comparison in the interpretation of scripture, and that his commentaries ought to be more highly valued than all that is handed down to us by the Library of the Fathers; so that I acknowledge him to have possessed above most others, or rather above all other men, what may be called an eminent gift of prophecy."

(From Commenting & Commentaries.)

Mrs Seaton's

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

As I have been reading over the life of that great man Joseph in the Bible it has occurred to me how important it is to know the "whole story" of a person's life, or else we will always have a wrong idea about that person and who he really was, and what he really did.

Most of us know the "first part" of the life of Joseph very well, and how he was taken by his brothers, who were jealous of him, and was placed in a pit and then sold as a slave to some people who were going into the land of Egypt. We know of how the brothers took his "coat of many colours" and after they had torn it and dirtied it and smeared blood on it, showed it to his father Jacob, pretending that a wild animal had caught Joseph and ripped him to pieces. But here we sometimes leave the story of Joseph, and the only remembrance we have of him is that dirty and dusty coat with the blood on it, or that pit in which he was thrown, or the men who carried him away to sell him as a slave in Egypt.

But, that wasn't the end of the life of Joseph! The Bible tells us that God was with Joseph and that he soon became the most important person in the whole land of Egypt, with the exception of the King himself. A great famine came to the land of Canaan, where Joseph's brothers lived and the next time we see Joseph and his brothers together again it is very different from that time when they put him in the pit and took his old, crumpled coat of many colours back to his father. Now they stand before Joseph, and they see him dressed in his royal robes,

they one who rules the land for the King of Egypt. What a change, boys and girls; and you only know about the change by reading all that the Bible has to say about Joseph.

But, the Bible tells us of a greater change than that, boys and girls. How many people only think of our Lord Jesus Christ when He was a baby in the manger? Or when He, too, was sold for the price of a slave by Judas Iscariot? Or when he died upon the Cross and was laid in the grave? But, that wasn't the end, boys and girls, and Jesus is now exalted at God's throne, and one day He is coming back to the world again.

Do you want to meet Him then, as your Saviour? Then, believe with all your heart.

Lots of Love,
Mrs Seaton.



Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 95

For the expounding of this Psalm we may gather a great deal of light from the apostle's discourse – Hebrews 3 and 4 – where it appears both to have been penned by David and to have been calculated for the days of the Messiah. For it is there said expressly (Hebrews 4 verse 7) that the day here spoken of in verse 7, is to be understood of the gospel day, in which God speaks to us by His Son in a voice which we ought to hear, and that he proposes to us a rest besides that of old Canaan.

Matthew Henry

Verse 1. "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation." "Come, let *us* sing unto the Lord ..." Let *us* join in singing to the Lord; not others without me, nor I alone, but others with me. ***Let us come together before his presence, in***

the courts of his house, where his people are wont to attend him and to expect his manifestations of himself. Whenever we come into God's presence we must come with thanksgiving that we are admitted to such a favour; and, whenever we have thanks to give, we must *come before God's presence*, set ourselves before him, and present ourselves to him in the ordinance which he has appointed. "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker," (Verse 6). Though bodily exercise alone profits little, yet certainly it is our duty to glorify God with our bodies by the outward expressions of reverence, seriousness, and humility in the duties of religious worship. We must praise God with our voice; we must speak forth, sing forth his praises out of the abundance of a heart filled with love, and joy, and thankfulness.

Matthew Henry

Verse 2. "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving ..." We may make bold to come before the immediate presence of the Lord – for the voice of the Holy Ghost in this psalm invites us. But when we do draw near to him we should remember his great goodness to us and cheerfully confess it. Our worship should have reference to the past as well as to the future; if we do not bless the Lord for what we have already received, how can we reasonably look for more. We are permitted to bring our petitions, and therefore, we are honour-bound to bring our thanksgivings.

C. H. Spurgeon

Verse 7. "... To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and in the day of temptation in the wilderness ..." If we put off repentance another day, we have a day more to repent of, and a day less to repent in. (*W. Mason*). He that has promised pardon on our repentance, has not promised to preserve our lives till we repent. (*Francis Quarles*). You cannot repent too soon, because you do not know how soon it will be too late. (*Thomas Fuller*).

Verse 7. "To day ..." Lord, I have discovered a fallacy whereby I have deceived myself in the past. I have always chosen to begin some amendment or resolution on a birthday, or from the first day of the year,

or from some eminent festival etc. This I have done so that my repentance might bear some remarkable date. I am resolved not to fool myself in that way again. I see no day but *to-day*: the instant time is always the fittest time. In Nebuchadnezzar's image, the lower the members the coarser the metal; so, the farther off the time, the more unfit. Today is the "golden" opportunity; to-morrow will be the "silver" season; next day but the "brazen" one, and so on, until at last I shall come to the toes of "clay" and be turned to dust. Grant therefore that "to-day" I may hear Thy voice. And if this day be remarkable on the calendar for nothing in itself, grant that it may be made memorable to be as beginning the reformation of my life, with Thine assistance.

Thomas Fuller

Verse 9. "When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works." The meaning of the ninth verse is, that when the children of Israel tempted God, they "proved" him; that is, they found out by bitter experience how great his displeasure was, and saw his works and his dealings with them for forty years. He retained them in the wilderness that period, until the death of all who had disbelieved his word at the return of the spies. He gave them the proof of his displeasure.

John Owen

"To day if ye will hear his voice."

The Assurance of Faith.

Trail.

Never did a believer in Jesus Christ die or drown in his voyage to heaven. They will all be found safe and sound with the Lamb of Mount Zion. Christ loseth none of His – *yea nothing of them!* Not a bone of a believer is to be seen in the field of battle. They are all more than conquerors through Him that loved them.

Hildersam.

Upon what ground is this certainty built? Surely not upon anything that is in us. Our assurance of perseverance is grounded wholly upon God. If we look upon ourselves, we see cause of fear and doubting; but if we look up to God, we shall find cause enough for our assurance.

Rutherford.

Our hope is not hung upon such an untwisted thread as, "I imagine so," or "it is likely." The cable – the strong rope of our fastened anchor – is the oath and promise of Him who is eternal verity. Our salvation is fastened with God's own hand, and Christ's own strength, to the strong stake of God's unchangeable nature.

Watson.

We cannot come amiss to him that hath assurance. God is his. Hath he lost a friend? - his Father lives. Hath he lost an only child? - God hath given him His only Son. Hath he scarcity of bread? – God hath given him the finest of the wheat, the Bread of Life. Are his comforts gone? - he hath a Comforter. Doth he meet with storms? - he knows where to put in for harbour. God is his portion, and heaven is his haven.

***Special Helps and Rules
Against Satan's Devices***

***Adapted from
Thomas Brooks***

The First Help.

If you would not be taken by any of Satan's devices, then walk by rule. He that walks by rule, walks most safely: he that walks by rule, walks most honourably: he that walks by rule, walks most sweetly.

When men throw off the Word, then God throws off them, and then Satan takes them by the hand, and leads them into snares at his pleasure. He that thinks himself too good to be ruled by the Word, will be found too bad to be owned by God. Them that keep to the rule, they shall be kept in the hour of temptation. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall

come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the whole earth." (Revelation chapter 3 verse 10).

The Second Help.

As you would not be taken with any of Satan's devices, ***take heed of vexing and grieving of the Holy Spirit of God.*** It is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ that is best able to discover Satan's snares against us. It is only He that can point out all his plots, and discover all his methods, and enable men to escape those pits that he hath digged for their precious souls. Ah! If you set that sweet and blessed Spirit a-mourning (who alone can secure you from Satan's depths) by whom will you be secured? Man is a weak creature, and in no way able to discover Satan's snares, nor avoid them, unless the Spirit of the Lord gives skill and power. Therefore, ***whoever*** be grieved, be sure the Spirit is ***not*** grieved. It is only the Spirit that makes a man too great for Satan to conquer. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world". (1st John chapter 4 verse 4).

The Third Help.

If you would not be taken with any of Satan's devices, then ***labour for more heavenly wisdom.*** There are many ***knowing*** souls, but there are but a few ***wise*** souls. There is oftentimes a great deal of knowledge, but there is but a little wisdom to improve that knowledge. Knowledge without wisdom is like mettle in a blind horse, which often is an occasion of the rider's fall, and of his bones being jostled against the walls. It is not the most knowing Christian, but the most wise Christian that sees, avoids, and escapes Satan's snares. Ah, souls you had need of a great deal of heavenly wisdom to see how and where Satan lays his baits and snares; wisdom to find out proper remedies against his devices, and wisdom to apply those remedies seasonably, inwardly, and effectually to your own hearts.

The Fourth Help.

If you would not be taken with any of Satan's devices, then ***make present resistance against Satan's first motions***. It is safe to resist, it is dangerous to dispute. Eve disputes, and falls in paradise; Job resists, and conquers upon a dunghill. He that will play with Satan's bait, will quickly be taken with Satan's hook. The promise of conquest is made over to resisting, not to disputing. "Resist the devil, and he will fly from you" (James chapter 4 verse 7). Ah, souls! Were you better at resisting than at disputing, your temptations would be fewer, and your strength to stand would be greater than now it is.

The Fifth Help.

If you would not be taken with any of Satan's devices, then labour to be filled with the Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord is a Spirit of light and power; and what can a soul do without light and power "against spiritual wickedness in high places"? It is not enough that you have the Spirit, but you must be filled with the Spirit, or else Satan, that evil spirit, will be too hard for you, and his plots will prosper against you. He that thinks he has enough of the Holy Spirit will quickly find himself vanquished by the evil spirit. Therefore, labour more to have your hearts filled with the Spirit than to have your heads filled with notions you shops with wares, your chests with silver, or your bags with gold; so shall you escape the snares of the fowler, and triumph over all this plots.

(To be continued.)