

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 53 issued March 2005

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The Lost Art of Christian Musing

(The Pastors Letter - March 1968)

My Dear Friends,

I want to share just one thought with you, and it's this: The Lost Art of Christian Musing. It's strange how some particular words embed themselves in the mind for a time after you have read them, and that word "musing" has been with me now for a good few months since reading it in Luke's Gospel. It was that time when John the Baptist was conducting his ministry in the wilderness of Judaea and when "all Judaea" as it says "had gone out to him." As they watched John's actions and listened to his preaching, it says, they "mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not." They "mulled" it over, to use another picturesque phrase: they "pondered" it.

Now I wonder have the believers today lost the art of "musing" on the things of the Lord and of this age in which we find ourselves? The Psalmist David certainly knew all about the art in his own day: "I muse on the works of thy hands," he told the Lord. And, in the only other place that the word occurs in the Scriptures, it has a wealth of advice to offer to us in these days of perplexity: "My heart was hot within me," says David, in verse 3 of Psalm 39; "while I was musing the fire burned...". David was perplexed as he saw the prosperity of the wicked in the land of the living, and he resented their progress in this world at a time when he himself seemed to be downcast. His Heart was "hot" within him, as he says himself; his old carnal desires and ambitions were getting more and more kindled, and the more he "mused", the hotter the oven burned - "While I was musing the fire burned." BUT, THEN, his "musing" moved from the superficial to the spiritual, and the outcome was a very different thing from the commencement: "THEN spake I with my tongue, Lord make me to know mind end...". It drove him to the Lord for HIS counsel. And "superficial musing," you see, can be a dangerous thing, for that amounts to little more than a carnal assessment of a given situation; so we must muse and muse until it takes us to God for the answer to whatever we are musing on.

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Old John Bunyan knew all about "musing." When he was under the conviction of sin by God's Holy Spirit he "mused." "At another time," he tells us, "I sat by the fire in my house, and was musing on my great wretchedness...". And how we could do with gospel preaching in our day that would make the unconverted "muse" on the things of eternity and of their God. And Bunyan went on "musing" the whole of his christian life, for, as he says himself in his "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," "... the whole of the Bible is one long muse...". "I mused, I mused, I mused," he says.

I wonder, brethren and sisters, why we have lost this art of Christian musing in our churches today? As you probably know, when we place the letter "A" in front of a word it can act as a negative to that word. Thus, as a "Theist" is a person who believes in God, an "A-theist" is a person who does not believe in God and says there is no God. I wonder! I wonder, have we so little "musement" in our churches today because we have had so much "A-musement"? I wonder!

Yours musingly,
W. J. Seaton (March 1969)

A Sermon for
Parents
by
J.C. Ryle

"Train up a child in
the way that he
should go".
Proverbs 22:6

Part 3

Train your children with this principle continually before your eyes; that the soul of your child is the first thing to be considered.

Precious, no doubt, are these little ones in your eyes; but if you love them, think often of their souls. No interest should weigh with you so much as their eternal interests. No part of them should be so dear to you as that part that will never die. This is the thought that should be uppermost in your mind in all you do for your children. In every step that you take about them, do not leave out that mighty question "How will this effect their souls?"

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Soul love is the soul of all love. A Christian must be no slave to fashion if he would train his children for heaven. He must not be content to do things merely because they are the custom of the world; to teach them and instruct them in certain ways merely because it is usual. He must not be ashamed to hear his training called singular and strange. What if it is? The time is short - the fashion of this world passeth away. He that has trained his child for heaven rather than for earth - for eternity rather than for time - for God rather than for man, he is the parent that will be called wise at the last.

Train your children too to a knowledge of the Bible. You cannot make your children love the Bible, I allow. None but the Holy Ghost can give us a heart to delight in the Word. But you can make your children acquainted with the Bible; and be sure they cannot be acquainted with that blessed Book to soon, or too well. A thorough knowledge of the Bible is the foundation of all clear views of religion. Any system of training that does not make a knowledge of Scripture the first thing is unsafe and unsound. See that your children read the Bible **reverently**. Train them to look on it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, written by the Holy Ghost Himself. See that they read it **regularly**. Train them to regard it as their soul's daily food - as a thing essential to their soul's daily health. See that they read it **all**.

You need not shrink from bringing any doctrine before them. You need not fancy that the leading doctrines of Christianity are things which children cannot understand. Tell them of sin, its guilt, its consequences, its power, its vileness. Tell them of the Lord Jesus Christ. Tell them of the Holy Spirit. Give them the Bible, the whole Bible.

John Bunyan in "The Life and Death of Mr Badman" says: -

"The children of godly parents are the children of many prayers - they are prayed for before, and prayed for after they are born; and the prayer of a godly mother and godly mother doth much."

"They have the advantage of godly instruction, and of being told which be, and which be not the right ways of the Lord."

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BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

By Mrs Seaton

Dear Boys & Girls,

Remember the last time you ran a race, it may have been in school, perhaps at the school sports on sports day. Today I want you to remember what it was like to run in that race.

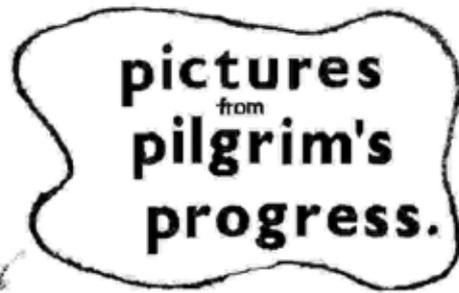
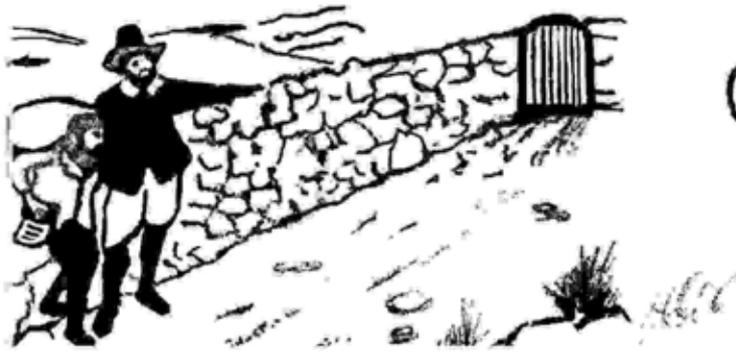
There was a certain way and a certain distance that you had to run; there was a "course" set out for you; there was a "finishing post"; there was a prize for the winner, of course; and there were those who stood around and watched you and cheered you on until you had finished the race. Listen to what the Bible says at one part: - "Therefore", it says, "seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses ... let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith".

The Apostle Paul, when he wrote these words, was reminding the people to whom he was writing what it was like at the annual sport's day in their city. There were the runners out there on the track, and the crowds of people would be in the "stands" cheering them on as they neared the finishing post. The winner of the race would be given a crown made out of laurel leaves, and as he would stand up with the crown on his head, all the people in the arena would cheer because he had finished the course so well. That's what our Christian life is like.

The Apostle Paul is saying in those words that we read above. Our Christian life is like a "a race"; and "seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses"; in other words, boys and girls, "because we are surrounded by a whole lot of spectators who are watching us - **then**, let us run well the race that is set before us". **How?** Well, boys and girls, there is only one way to run in the Christian race, and this is by "looking unto Jesus". By believing in Jesus and trusting in Jesus. Make sure boys and girls, that you finish the Christian race.

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This month we are going on a conducted tour through the rooms of John Bunyan's *Interpreter's House*. The *Interpreter* is the man who is going to teach the Pilgrim - Christian many things concerning his new found faith, and within the wall of his unique building there are seven illustrations placed before us as we move from room to room.

In the first instance, the Interpreter is a type of the Christian minister and the Interpreter's House a type of an Evangelical Church where the way of the Lord is expounded to those who are "Marching to Zion". But, in a broader sense, every believer, in some measure, should be an Interpreter of the way of salvation and the believer's heart and mind should be an Interpreter's House - well - stocked with "pictures" and "illustrations" which make the way of salvation plain to those who seek it.

We won't be able to visit all of Interpreter's rooms this month, or linger around all of his illustrations; however, our purpose will be served in spending a few moments with a few of Interpreter's lessons. This month we need simply refer directly to the words of the Pilgrim's Progress and see for ourselves the greatness of this great book.

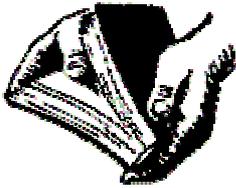
- (1) Let us look, first of all, at that room in the Interpreter's House where "The Gospel Sprinkler" does her work. In this room we are shown. (a) Man in his natural state; (b) the workings of the *Law* of God on man's heart; (c) the effects of the gospel of Christ. "Then he took him by the hand," Bunyan tells us, "and led him into a very large parlour, that was full of dust, because never swept; ... the Interpreter called for a man to sweep. Now, when he

began to sweep, the dust began so abundantly to fly about that Christian had almost been choked. Then said Interpreter to a damsel that stood by, 'Bring hither water and sprinkle the room;' the which, when she had done, it was swept and cleansed with pleasure. Then said Christian 'What means this?' The Interpreter answered 'This parlour is the heart of a man that was never sanctified by the sweet grace of the gospel. The dust is his original sin and inward corruptions that have defiled the man. He that began to sweep at first is the **LAW**; but she that brought water and did sprinkle it, is the gospel.'

The Law, when it sets to work on a heart, doesn't cleanse that heart from its sin, but only makes the sin "appear exceedingly sinful." Only the gospel brings "peace in believing".

- (2) **Passion** and **Patience**. This is really the story of the Prodigal son, and is an illustration of Christian contentment. "I saw moreover in my dream that the Interpreter took him by the hand and led him into a little room where sat two little children, each one on his own chair. The name of the eldest was **Passion** and the name of the other **Patience**. Passion seems to be much discontented, but patience was very quiet. Then Christian asked 'What is the reason of the discontent of **Passion**?' The Interpreter answered 'The governor of them would have him stay for his best things until the beginning of next year, but he will have all now; **Patience** is willing to wait'".
- (3) **The Fire in the Wall** is a lovely picture of comfort and encouragement for the heavy-laden believer, because it tells of the Lord's Persevering Grace that has been shed abroad in our hearts. On one side of this wall there is a man standing throwing buckets of water upon this fire in an effort to put it out; "Yet did the fire burn higher and hotter," we are told. "Why is this?" Pilgrim asks Interpreter. It's the devil who throws water upon the fire of grace which burns in the believer's heart, Pilgrim is told; but see, on the other side of the wall, there is another pouring oil upon that same fire, and that's why it burns and keeps on burning. "This is Christ," Interpreter explains, "who continually, with the oil of His grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart". He stands hidden, on the other side of the wall, the Interpreter goes on, but this is to show that sometimes it is hard for us to realise that Christ really is still maintaining His work in our souls.

How much Interpreter had to show the Pilgrim - Christian; and yet, before they were hardly half-way round the building the young Pilgrim wanted to be on his way. "Now," said Christian, "let us go hence". How typical of us all! How quick we are to leave the place of instruction, even though we are being taken by the hand by the Divine Interpreter Himself. Never let us be quick to say "Now, let us go hence;" for surely our Divine Interpreter will always say to us, as Bunyan's Interpreter said to his Pilgrim, "Nay, stay until I have showed thee a little more."



Gleanings in the Psalms

(Psalm 18)

This appears to be a version of 2nd Samuel chapter 22 slightly revised to make it suitable for general use. The title indicates the circumstances of this jubilant thanksgiving. His deliverance from "all his enemies" (see title) would suggest the period after 2nd Samuel chapter 8, when his life was crowned by almost unbroken success.

LS M'Caw

This psalm, though placed among the first, was penned among the last, as the preface assures us, and is left as the epitome of the general history of David's life. It is twice recorded in the Scripture (2nd Sam. chapter 22, and in this book of Psalms). Holy David, being near the shore, here looks on his former dangers and deliverances with a thankful heart, and writes this psalm to bless the Lord: as if each of you that are grown into years should review your lives and observe the wonderful goodness and providence of God towards you; and then sit down and write a modest memorial of His most remarkable mercies, for the comfort of yourselves and posterity; an excellent practice.

Richard Steele

Verse 2. "The Lord is my rock and my fortress". Dwelling among the crags and mountain fastness of Judea David had escaped the malice of Saul, and here

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he compares his God to such a place of concealment and security. - "**My deliverer**". - Interposing in my hour of peril. When almost captured the Lord's people are rescued from the hand of the mighty by Him who is mightier still. - "**My God**." - That is all good things in one. - "**My strength**". - This word is really "**my rock**", in the sense of strength and immobility. The first time it is a rock for concealment, but here a rock for firmness and immutability. - "**In whom I will trust**".- Faith must be exercised, or the preciousness of god is not truly known; and God must be the object of faith, or faith is mere presumption.- "**My buckler**". - Warding off the blows of my enemy. The Lord furnishes his warriors with weapons both offensive and defensive. - "**The horn of my salvation**." Enabling me to push down my foes, and to triumph over them with holy exultation. - "**My high tower**." - We may conclude with Calvin that David here equips the faithful from head to foot.

C.H. Spurgeon

Verse 3. "I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from our enemies".

"No fearing or doubting with Christ on our side,
We hope to die shouting "The Lord will provide".

Verses 6 & 7. "In my distress I called upon the Lord...then the earth shook and trembled." The prayer of a single saint is sometimes followed with wonderful effects: "In my distress I called...THEN the earth shook". What then can a thundering legion of such praying souls do? It was said of Luther "That man could have of God what he would". His enemies felt the weight of his prayers; and the Church of God reaped the benefits thereof. The Queen of Scots confessed that she was more afraid of the prayers of Mr Knox than of an army of ten thousand men.

John Flavel

Verse 10. "And he rode upon a cherub, AND DID FLY: YEA, HE DID FLY UPON THE WINGS OF THE WIND". When God comes to punish his foes and rescue his people, nothing has ever surprised his friends or foes more than the admirable swiftness with which He moves and acts: HE FLIES "upon the wings of the wind".

William Plumer

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Verse 16. Now comes the rescue. The author is divine - "HE SENT:" The work is heavenly - "from above:" The deliverance is marvellous - HE DREW ME OUT OF MANY WATERS:" Here David was like another Moses, drawn from the water; and thus are all believers like their Lord whose baptism in many waters of agony and in his own blood has redeemed us from the wrath to come.

C.H. Spurgeon

Verse 23. "I was also upright before Him, and I kept myself from MINE iniquity". As in the hive there is one master-bee, so in the heart there is one-master sin; there is one sin that is not only near to the man as the garment, but dear to him as the right eye. This sin is Satan's Fort-Royal... The devil can hold a man as fast by this one link as by a whole chain of vices. The fowler hath the bird fast enough by one wing. Herod did many things, but there was one sin so dear to him that he would sooner behead the prophet than behead that sin.

Thomas Watson

Verse 23. "Mine iniquity". A man's darling sin may change with the change of man's condition, and some occasion that may present itself. Wantonness may be the darling of a man's youth, and worldliness the darling of his old age.

William Strong

(To be concluded in the next edition)

The House of Interpreter

(By Alexander Whyte)

Now, if it is indeed so, that every gospel minister is an Interpreter, and every Evangelical Church an Interpreter's house, what an important passage this is for all those who are proposing and preparing to be ministers. Let them be students not in idle name only, as so many are, but in intense reality, as so few are.

Let them read everything that bears upon the Bible, and let them read nothing that does not ... so that they may have always something to say when their

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future people come up to Church hungry for instruction and comfort and encouragement. Let them look around and see the sin that sinks the ship of so many ministers; and let them begin while yet their ship is in the yard and see that she is fitted up and furnished, stored and stocked so that she shall, in spite of sure storms and sunken rocks, deliver her freight in the appointed haven.

And then with a sly stroke at us old ministers, our significant author points out to us how much better furnished the Interpreter's House was by the time Christiana and the boys visited it compared with that early time when Christian was entertained in it.

Our Pilgrim got far more in the Interpreter's House of delight and instruction than he could carry out of it, but that did not tempt the Interpreter to sit down and content himself with taking all his future pilgrims into the same room, and showing them the same pictures, and repeating to them the same explanations. No, for he reflected that each coming pilgrim would need some new significant room to himself, and, therefore, as soon as he got one pilgrim off his hands, he straightway set about building and furnishing new rooms, putting up new pictures, and replenishing his woods and his waters with new beasts and birds and fishes. I am ashamed, he said, that I had so little to show when I first opened my gates to receive pilgrims, and I do not know why they came to me as they did. I was only a beginner in these things when my first visitor came to my gates.

Let every long-settled, middle-aged, and even grey-headed minister read the life of the Interpreter at this point and take courage and have hope. Let it teach us all to break some new ground in the field of divine truth with every New Year. Let it teach us all to be students all our days.

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