

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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- Through the Bible With the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
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- Sermons preached by Dr Needham and Mr Seaton
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham



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“Change and the Everlasting Gospel?”

(The Pastor’s Letter – Nov. 1972)

Dear Friends,

In the month of November 1572 the great Scottish Reformer John Knox passed to his eternal rest under the grace of his Covenant God in heaven. The changes have taken place in the world at large over those four long centuries since Knox's death, would, no doubt, make it an unrecognisable place to the old Reformer were he able to walk the streets and speak to the men and women of the twentieth century. This, of course, is natural, for change is of the very essence of things that do change. But, what of those things that should remain unchanging, and, indeed, eternal on account of their very nature and institution? What of "the everlasting gospel" of the grace of our God in heaven that so wondrously worked in the heart of good John Knox and many thousands of others in those far and distant days of the church of Christ in the land?

The question, of course, will never really have an answer for us, and, no doubt, there are many who would have little or no interest in such an answer anyway. To a great many people, even within the bounds of the professing church of Christ itself, John Knox smacks of dark clothes and strictures, so that the true teaching and preaching of the man have been entirely set aside. Yet, the gospel of Knox, in common with the other reformers of his day was, indeed, that great and eternal gospel of the justification of the sinner only and solely through the ever-abiding merits of the death of Christ on the cross, and the application of that death by the Holy Spirit of God to those sinners.

Whether or not, then, John Knox would recognise the world of today were he able to stand once more upon the earth is, indeed, of little importance to us; but, whether or not the gospel of today would pass muster as that true and ever lasting gospel of the grace of God that he so faithfully preached is, surely, something worth, at least, a

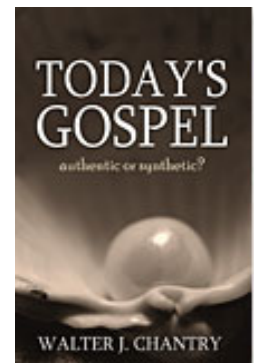
little reflection in the hearts and minds of those who profess to be the custodians of that gospel in this generation.

We recently dealt with the question, "Today's Gospel - Authentic or Synthetic?" at our Friday Evening Lectures. The Lecture was, in reality, a verbal book review of the Banner of Truth paperback of that name. On the following pages, we reproduce part of the opening chapter from the book, trusting that some will see fit to purchase and read the whole book for themselves, examine the core of the message that is preached and believed today in the name of evangelical Christianity, and lay firmer hold upon that which we can truly say is "truth unchanged, unchanging." Surely this would be the best "commemoration" of John Knox, or any other of the Lord's people who have honoured the Lord in the gospel which they have preached and believed, for, then, all honour would be to the Author and Finisher of that gospel. There is no "fashion" in the gospel of God, only in the heresies that surround it from age to age.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton.

1. Preaching the Character of God.

“And when he was gone forth into the way there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God.” (Mark chapter 10 verses 17 and 18)



What would your reflex be to such a circumstance? Here is an outstanding fellow begging to know how he can get to heaven! This is the evangelist's dream! Wouldn't you open your Bible and ask him essential questions? "Do you believe that you are a sinner? Do you believe that Christ died for sinners? Will you accept Jesus as your personal Saviour? Pray this prayer after me ..." He would answer in the affirmative to each question with very little instruction. Just show

him the usual verses. This rich man was ripe for our evangelism. Our enquiry rooms would have elicited his “decision” in a few moments, and given him assurance of eternal life besides. He would be added to the statistic sheet and his conversion reported across the world.

Aren't you a little disappointed to see Jesus handling this tender soul so roughly? How could our Lord use such obviously poor tactics with a sinner? He began with a rebuke, went on to talk about the Ten Commandments (of all things!), demanded immense sacrifice as a condition of having eternal life, and allowed the “fish” to get away! Didn't He know how to lead a soul to Himself? If you are surprised, surely you are the one who doesn't understand evangelism. Look again.

Jesus' rebuke. Jesus addressed his first response, not to the ruler's question, but to the incidental greeting given to Him. The young man called Jesus “Good Master.” But our Lord refused to accept the compliment. The inquirer was only aware that Jesus was a great teacher. He was ignorant that he was speaking to the Christ, the Son of the Living God. The Saviour took this opportunity to say in effect, “The goodness of any creature (and such only you take me to be) is not worthy to be named or taken notice of. It is God alone who is originally and essentially good.”

Jesus was rebuking the man for having a readiness to flatter men but little reverence towards God. At the outset of the discussion He wished to honour God and stir a respect for His holy character. So He seized upon the seeker's salutation as an occasion for instruction. Jesus began His message of evangelism by solemnly fixing attention on God's infinite holiness or goodness.

Jesus' motive. Our Lord was motivated in His conversation by love and compassion for the covetous youth. Verse 21 states explicitly that Jesus had a conscious love for the man as He talked with him. However, concern for the nobleman's soul was not the supreme motive that moved Christ to witness to this sinner. Running even deeper within His breast was a love of God. Though induced by a

desire to save men, Christ was primarily motivated by a longing to glorify His Father. You cannot carefully read the Gospels and fail to see that our Lord's chief aim in every act was to do the will of His Father and to make His glory known to men.

Jesus' message. Such motivation and determination will display itself in the evangelist's message. The questioner in this passage had centred attention upon his own need (of finding a way to inherit eternal life). Jesus, however, turned the primary focus of the interview upon God and His glory.

Much of modern preaching is anaemic, with the life-blood of God's nature absent from the message. Evangelists centre their message upon man. Man has sinned and missed a great blessing. If man wants to retrieve his great loss he must act thus and so. But the gospel of Christ is very different. It begins with God and His glory. It tells men that they have offended a Holy God, who will by no means pass by sin. It reminds sinners that the only hope of salvation is to be found in the grace and power of this same God. Christ's gospel sends men to beg pardon of the Holy One.

This does not mean that preaching about the character of God is isolated from seeking the salvation of a sinner. Preaching on the attributes is essential to the conversion of a man. Without a knowledge of God, a sinner does not know whom he has offended, who threatens him with destruction, or who is able to save him. Apart from some clear apprehensions of God, there can be no personal approach to God, and "personal Saviour" becomes a hollow phrase.

Jesus lifted the egocentric eyes of the wealthy ruler to One whose holiness caused Isaiah to cry, "Woe is me, for I am undone." Is that a secondary part of the gospel? If you think so, you don't understand the first things of the faith. The rich youth had come running because he understood that he might not inherit eternal life. But he didn't understand why. Whom had he offended? There was no remorse for having offended a Holy God. He was prepared to talk of religion; but he was ignorant of God. He was anxious to ask for the joys of

salvation; but he could not confess as David, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned; and done this evil in thy sight.” He was not acquainted with the Lord.

Although the inquirer was a Jew, and probably devout, Jesus did not assume that he knew who God was. He needed catechizing on the attributes of God. Evangelists today are making the dreadful miscalculation that sinners know who God is. The sad truth is that our age knows less than the Jews of our Lord’s day. Nevertheless, evangelicals plunge right in with “five things God wants you to know.” They all centre upon the man’s eternal fortunes and utterly ignore the question, “Who is God?”

Men today will readily use the name of God as would the rich man. But it is disastrous to assume that men are speaking of the same person as we are. When we say “God” we mean “Creator.” When our contemporaries say “God” they are often speaking of the one who has little to do with the world we see. When we say “God” we mean “One who is Sovereign in creation, providence, and in the redemption of His creature, man.” When sinners say “God” they usually refer to one who has committed himself to honouring the sovereign will of man at any cost to himself. Above all, when we say “God” we speak of One who has unflinching holiness, “Who will by no means clear the guilty.” Sinners frequently think of God as flexible so that He will by no means punish wonderful man.

“How shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard?” is a pertinent question for today’s evangelist. Sinners must know him upon whom they are to call to be saved. Eliminating the doctrine of God from evangelism is no innocent shift in emphasis but is cutting the heart out of our message.

*From “Today’s Gospel – Authentic or Syntehtic?”
by Pastor Walter Chantry.*

Note – Although Pastor Seaton wrote this article in 1972 the book is still published by “The Banner of Truth”. See their web page at www.banneroftruth.org

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Peter Waldo The Rich Young Man

Dear Boys and Girls,

Most of you probably know the story of the Rich Young ruler who came to Jesus once and asked Him what he must do in order to have "eternal life." Our Lord Jesus spoke these words to him: "If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor." The Bible tells us that the young ruler "turned away sorrowful", for he was very rich, and he didn't want to give up his riches in order to follow Jesus.

Many people are like that, boys and girls, but I want to tell you about another rich young man who heard those same words of Jesus, but who did what Jesus said. His name was Peter Waldo and he lived in the city of Lyons in France.

About the year 1170 - that's over eight-hundred years ago - Peter Waldo called to see one of the men who was a priest in one of the churches in Lyons. "Sir Priest," he said, "I have a question to ask. The other day, a friend of mine died. Men will die, I suppose; I will die. But, my friend was not ready to die. Sir Priest," he said, "tell me: what is the surest road to heaven?" The priest took down a copy of the Bible that he had which was written in Latin and read some words; then he spoke the words in Peter Waldo's own language. They were those words that Jesus spoke to that rich young Ruler: "If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." As day followed day, Peter Waldo thought on those words, and in the end, he said to the Lord, "I will do it."

Soon Lyons was ringing with the news, we read, "that rich Peter Waldo the merchant, had sold everything he possessed, and had given the money to the poor." He wasn't sad, however, for now he knew that he had that "treasure in heaven" that Jesus had spoken about. Like most people in his day he wasn't able to read or write, but he soon began to learn so that he could read the Bible for himself. He was disappointed, however, for he soon discovered that all the Bibles were like the one that the priest had and were written in Latin, or some other difficult language. But Peter refused to be beaten, and in a little time he persuaded two of his friends, who were great scholars to translate the Bible into the people's own tongue.

Now, as he began to read the words of Jesus for himself, he was struck by another saying of the Lord's: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Gathering his friends around him, he read these words, and said, "Then we must go." They had very little money, or even none at all; but they each had a copy of the word of God and off they went. Many of them used to carry a pedlar's pack with them full of the kind of things that the people in the lonely farms would want to buy. "Laces; fine needles; ribbons; dainty pouches," they used to call; and after the people of the farms would buy what they wanted, then, Peter Waldo and his friends would say, "But I have a treasure much more rare and precious than these. May I show it to you, mistress, and tell you all about it?" Then, out would come the Word of God and soon the gospel was being told to people who had never heard it before.

After a time, however, the priests began to forbid the people to listen to these "Waldensians" as Peter Waldo and his friends were now called, and they were greatly persecuted because they believed that they must go on preaching regardless of what the priests said. Many hundreds were put to death by the priests and their armies, and sometimes whole villages were burned and every person killed or taken prisoner to the dungeons. Some of them were frozen to death in the winter snows, and some others, who had hidden in caves to escape the armies, were smoked to death as the priests and soldiers lit great fires at the caves' mouths.

In spite of all this, though the Waldensians refused to deny the Lord Jesus Christ, or to give up His Word, the Bible. "We promise," they vowed, "to maintain the Bible without admixture ... persevering in this holy religion, though it be at peril of our life, in order that we might transmit it to our children intact and pure, as we received it from our fathers."

Peter Waldo has long-since died, of course, boys and girls, although there are still many Christians called Waldensians who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Peter Waldo gave up the treasure in this life that he had, because that is what Christ asked him to do, but, now that he has died, through faith in the Lord Jesus he has gone to be with Him in heaven, and there he will have that heavenly treasure that Jesus promised him.

Love
Mrs Seaton

Looking unto Jesus

Unto Jesus, and not to the apparent success of our efforts. Apparent success is not the measure of real success, and besides, God has not commanded us to succeed, but to work. It is of our work that He will require an account and not of our success. It is for us to sow the seed; it is for God to gather the fruit: if not today, it will be tomorrow; if not by us, it will be by others.

Even when success is granted us, it is always dangerous to let our eyes rest upon it complacently; on the one hand we are tempted to attribute something of it to ourselves; on the other hand, we thus accustom our selves to give way to relaxing our zeal when we cease to perceive its effects, that is to say at the very time when we ought to redouble our energy. To look to success is to walk by sight; to look to Jesus and to persevere in following and serving Him in spite of all discouragements, is to walk by faith. Looking unto Jesus, while we remain upon earth; to Jesus from moment to moment. Unto Jesus

now, if we have never looked to Him. Unto Jesus anew, if we have ceased to do so. Unto Jesus alone. Unto Jesus again. Unto Jesus always, with a look more and more earnest, more and more confident; "transformed into the same image from glory to glory;" and thus waiting for the hour when He shall call us to pass from earth to heaven, and from time to eternity - the promised hour, the blessed hour, when at length "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as he is."

Adolphe Monod
(1802-1856)



Gleanings In the Psalms

(Psalm 46)

Luther and his companions, with all their bold readiness for danger and death in the cause of truth, had times when their feelings were akin to those of a divine singer, who said, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" But in such hours the unflinching Reformer would cheerily say to his friend Melancthon, "Come, Philip, let us sing the forty-sixth psalm;" and they would sing it in Luther's own characteristic version: -

"A sure stronghold our God is He,
A timely shield and weapon;
Our help he'll be and set us free
From every ill can happen.

And were the world with devils filled,
All eager to devour us,
Our souls to fear shall little yield,
They cannot overpower us."

W. S. Christopher

Verse 1. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Not our armies or our fortresses. Israel's boast is in Jehovah, the only living and true God. The Lord stands his people in better stead than all the valour of legions or the boasted strength of chariot and horse. Soldiers of the cross, remember this, and count yourselves safe, and make yourselves strong in God. Neither forget the fact that God is our refuge just now, in the immediate present, as truly as when David penned these words. God alone is our all in all. All other refuges are refuges of lies; all other strength is weakness, for power belongeth unto God, and as God is all-sufficient, our defence and might are equal to all emergencies.

C. H. Spurgeon

Verse 2. "Therefore..." And as one has rightly said, "Whenever you see a 'Therefore' always look and see what it's there for." And as David has established the truth in his heart and mind that God is his refuge and his strength and a very present help in trouble, **therefore**, regardless of what is going to take place in this earth - the waters make a roaring sound, the earth be removed, the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea - he will not fear. How many of the "therefores" of the Bible come galloping in on the back of great promises.

Verse 2. "Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed." During an earthquake that occurred several years ago, the inhabitants of a small village were generally very much alarmed, and at the same time surprised at the calmness and apparent joy of an old lady whom they all knew. At length, one of them addressing the old lady, said, "Mother, are you not afraid?" "No," she replied, "I rejoice to know that I have a God who can shake the world."

James Lea

Verses 3 and 4. "Though the waters ... there is a river..." David contrasts the waters that will roar and thunder and the "streams" that do glad the city of our God. When this world will be thrown into final and utter confusion and turmoil the peace of God and the God of peace will still keep the church of Christ in the midst of it all.

"Though the waters of the earth roar and be troubled... there is a river, the streams whereof do glad the city of our God."

Verse 7. The Lord of hosts is with us... In seven short words the psalmist David unfolds the church's only hope in evangelism and all that she does. Either the Lord "is with us," or He is not. This is the one and only thing that determines success or failure in all that we attempt to do. We may march forth into the fray with all the weapons of modern gospel warfare and the strategies of men and angels, but if the Lord of hosts doesn't ride at the head of the column our ranks will soon be dispersed and our efforts distained. "One thing thou lackest," it may be said of the church of Christ today; but that is the all-important thing - the ability to say with a clear conscience, "The Lord of hosts is with us."

Verse 10. "Be still, and know that I am God..." It is often easier to *do* than to *endure* the will of God for our lives. A little grace, with favourable providences, may make a Christian hero. But abounding grace alone will suffice to make a Christian martyr.

Anonymous

Verse 10. "Be still, and know that I am God..." When Polycarp the martyr was exhorted to blaspheme the name of Christ in order to save himself from the stake his reply rang through the Roman arena in which he stood: "Fourscore years have I served Him, and how can I blaspheme my Lord and Saviour." When he was led to be tied to the stake, he refused the ropes, saying, "Leave me alone; for He that gave me strength to come to the fire, will give me patience to undergo the fire without your tying." "Be still, and know that I am God..."

“Read where I cast my first anchor.”
(John Knox, November 24th 1572)



“Go! Said the old reformer to his wife, as he lay a-dying, and the words were his last, “go, read where I cast my first anchor!” She needed no more explicit instructions, for he had told her the story again and again. It is Richard Bannantyne, Knox’s serving-man, who has placed the scene on record. “On November 24, 1572,” he says, “John Knox departed this life to his eternal rest. Early in the afternoon he said ‘Now, for the last time, I commend my spirit, soul, and body’ (pointing upon his three fingers) ‘into thy hands, O Lord!’ Thereafter, about five o’clock he said to his wife, ‘Go, read where I cast my first anchor!’ She did not need to be told, and so, she read the seventeenth of John’s evangel.” Let us listen as she reads it! “Thou hast given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou has given Him; and this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent.”

Here was a strange and striking contract! “Eternal life! Life eternal!” says the Book. Now listen to the laboured breathing from the bed! The bed speaks of death; the Book speaks of Life Everlasting! “Life!” The dying man starts as the great cadences fall upon his ears. “This is life eternal that they might **know Thee!**” “**Life Eternal!**” “It was **there**,” he declares with his last breath, “it was **there** that I cast my first anchor.”



How was that first anchor cast? I have tried to piece the records together. Paul never forgot the day on which he saw Stephen stoned; John Knox never forgot the day on which he saw George Wishart burned. Wishart was a man “of such grace” – so Knox himself tells us – “as before him was never heard in this realm.” In 1546, however he was convicted of

heresy and burned at the foot of the Castle Wynd, opposite the Castle Gate. When he came near to the fire, Knox tells us, he sat down upon his knees, and repeated aloud some of the most touching petitions from the Psalms. As a sign of forgiveness, he kissed the executioner on the cheek, saying, "Lo, here is a token that I forgive thee. My harte do thine office." The faggots were kindled, and the leaping flames bore the soul of Wishart triumphantly skywards.

And there, a few yards off, stands Knox! Have a good look at him! He is a man "rather under middle height, with broad shoulders, swarthy face, black hair, and a beard of the same colour a span and a half long. He has heavy eyebrows, eyes deeply sunk, cheekbones prominent and cheeks ruddy. The mouth is large, the lips full, especially the upper one. The whole aspect of the man is not unpleasing; and, in moments of emotion, it is invested with an air of dignity and majesty." Knox could never shake from his sensitive mind the tragic yet triumphant scene near the Castle Gate; and when, many years afterwards, he himself turned aside to die, he repeated with closed eyes the prayers that he had heard George Wishart offer under the shadow of the stake.

Was it **then**, I wonder that John Knox turned sadly homeward and read to himself the great High-priestly prayer in "the seventeenth of John's evangel?" Was it on that memorable night that he caught a glimpse of the place which all the redeemed hold in the heart of the Redeemer? Was it on that melancholy evening that there broke upon him the revelation of a love that enfolded not only his martyred friend and himself, but the faithful of every time and of every clime? Was it **then** that his heart was opened to the magic and the music of those tremendous words: "Thou hast given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him; and this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Was it **then**? I cannot say for certain. I only know that we never meet with Knox in Scottish story until after the martyrdom of Wishart; and I know that by the events of that sad and tragic day, all his soul was stirred within him. But, although I do not know for certain that the anchor was first cast **then**,

I know that it was first cast **there**. “Go!” he said, with the huskiness of death upon his speech, “read where I cast my first anchor!” And his wife read to him the stately sentences I have just rewritten.

Fierce as were the storms that beat upon Knox during the great historic years that followed, that anchor bravely held. To say nothing of his experiences at court and the powerful efforts to coax or to cow him into submission, think of those twelve years of exile, eighteen months of which were spent on the French galleys.

We catch two furtive glances of him. The galley in which he is chained makes a cruise round the Scottish coasts. It passes so near to the fair fields of Fyfe that Knox can distinctly see the spires of St. Andrews. At the moment, Knox was so ill that his life was despaired of; and the taunting vision might well have broken his spirit altogether. But the anchor held; the anchor held! “Ah!” exclaimed Knox raising himself on his elbow, “I see the steeple of that place where God first in public opened my mouth to His glory; and I am fully persuaded, how weak soever I now appear, that I shall not depart this life till that my tongue shall glorify His godly name in the same place.”

Again, as Carlyle tells, “a priest one day presented to the galley-slaves an image of the Virgin Mother, requiring that they, the blasphemous heretics, should do it reverence. ‘Mother? Mother of God?’” said Knox, when the turn came to him, “This is no Mother of God; this is a piece of painted wood! She is better for swimming, I think, than for being worshipped!” and he flung the thing into the river.” Knox had cast his anchor in the seventeenth of John’s evangel. “This is life eternal, that they might know **thee!**” And since he himself had found life eternal in the personal friendship of a Personal Saviour, it was intolerable to him that others should gaze with superstitious eyes on a ‘bit of painted wood!’ The thing fell into the river with a splash. It was a rude jest, but an expressive one. All the Reformation was summed up in it. Eternal life was not to be found in such things. “This is life eternal, that they might know **thee.**” That, says Knox, is

where I cast my first anchor; and, through all the storms and stress of those baffling and eventful years, that anchor held!

Nor was there any parting of the cable or dragging of the anchor at the last. Richard Bannatyne, sitting beside his honoured master's deathbed, heard a long, long sigh. A singular fancy overtook him. "Now, sir," he said, "the time to end your battle is come. Remember those comfortable promises of our Saviour Jesus Christ which you have so often shown to us. And it may be that, when your eyes are blind, and your ears deaf to every other sight and sound, you will be able to recognise my voice. I shall bend over you and ask if you have still the hope of glory. Will you promise that, if you are able to give me some signal, you will do so?" The sick man promised, and, soon after, this is what happened:

Grim in his deep death-anguish the stern old champion lay
And the locks upon his pillow were floating thin and grey,
And, visionless and voiceless, with quick and labouring breath,
He waited for his exit through life's dark portal, Death.

"Hast thou the hope of glory?" They bowed to catch the thrill
That through some languid token might be responsive still,
Nor watched they long nor waited for some obscure reply,
He raised a clay-cold finger, and pointed to the sky.

So the death-angel found him, what time his bow he bent,
To give the struggling spirit a sweet enfranchisement.
So the death-angel left him, what time earth's bounds were riven,
The cold, stark, stiffening finger still pointing up to heaven."

"He had a sore fight of an existence," says Carlyle, "wrestling with Popes and Principalities; in defeat, contention, life-long struggle; rowing as a galley-slave, wandering as an exile. A sore fight: but he won it! 'Have you hope?' they asked him in his last moment, when he could not longer speak. He lifted his finger, pointed upward, and so died!"

(Adapted from F.W. Boreham)