

The Young People's Magazine

Vol 68

April 2003

No 4

Happiness – or Holiness

Everybody wants to enjoy life. Of course, people have always wanted to be happy. That is perfectly natural. The danger is that too many people want to find their happiness *away from God*. Most people today assume that they will find happiness, not in following God, but in a successful career, for instance, or with ungodly friends, or in some of the various forms of worldly entertainment which are made to seem so very attractive.

But in this sinful world we need not be surprised if difficulty, trouble and sadness intrude into our happiness. And when this happens, it should remind us that we do not deserve to be happy. Indeed, we should not *expect* to be happy if we ignore God. All who ignore God are making their way to a lost eternity – where there can never be any happiness.

Many people have been disturbed to see how much happiness the wicked have enjoyed – although some who seem to be enjoying life to the full are experiencing secret heartbreak. As Asaph looked around him, he confessed: “I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain” (Psalm 73:3-6). Asaph may have been looking too much at the outward side of things, but it is certainly true that some people seem to experience very little difficulty in life – and sometimes they are the very ones who are obviously wicked. Asaph found a solution for his problem, but only, he tells us, when he “went into the sanctuary of God”. Only when he went to God’s house, did he grasp the truth of the matter. Then, he says, “understood I their end”. And what did he see? The answer comes in his prayer to God: “Thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction”.

But sinners need not go down to hell. God has sent preachers, as His ambassadors, to tell people everywhere that there is another way through life – a way that ends in heaven, not in hell. So as sinners rush down those slippery places that lead to destruction, they may hear the voice of one of God’s ambassadors crying after them, bringing to their attention the words

of God: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?"

Yes, God in His kindness is sending preachers of the gospel to tell sinners that they are on a dangerous way – one which leads to a lost eternity. But He has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked". He is calling them to turn from the ways of sin. He is telling them that Jesus Christ died for sinners; so they do not need to suffer eternal death. Why should they go to a lost eternity when there is another way through life, a way that leads to the perfect *happiness* of heaven?

But will sinners listen? Sadly, not many do. Few believe what they are told. Some are willing to accept that the way they are on is dangerous. But they very much want to believe that this way, the way of sin, will go on and on for a very long time. Indeed they would like to believe that it will go on and on for ever. Of course, they realise that this is not true; death will come sometime. But most people want to believe that death is very, very far away. And they cannot believe that they would be happy on the way to heaven.

A student was working during the summer in a cemetery cutting grass. His foreman did not like Christianity. One day the foreman pointed to a man walking through the cemetery. "There's a man who was ruined by Christianity", he said. During the Second World War, the foreman explained, this man used to sell things on the black market – illegally. At that time, most goods were in short supply, and it was almost impossible to buy some things. But if you were prepared to pay a high price – on the black market – you could get almost anything. "He was raking it in", the foreman said about the man walking through the cemetery, "but then he got converted and give it all up. Christianity ruined him."

In fact, what the foreman saw suggested that God had changed the man's heart. The man saw that it is wrong to break the law and that there are better things in life than money can buy. Money cannot buy the forgiveness of sins. Money cannot buy peace of conscience. Money cannot buy a happy eternity. It cannot even buy happiness in this life. It may buy moments of pleasure, yet it cannot guarantee happiness. "But the *gift* of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Yes, the best of all possessions is absolutely free. Christ has done everything necessary to redeem sinners from eternal misery. But no payment we can make is great enough to buy God's favour. Not even our best works can earn salvation; they cannot buy eternal life; they cannot purchase happiness.

Only by believing the gospel – the good news about Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the guilty – can we be saved. Ministers warn sinners about the

consequences of going on in their sins. They proclaim Christ crucified as a perfect Saviour – One whose salvation is perfectly suited to sinners and who will never cast out anyone who comes to Him. As sinners career down the slippery slope which leads to a lost eternity, ministers call on them to repent and believe the gospel. But does anyone pay attention?

Many close their ears to the message. They do not want to listen. The message is not interesting, they will tell you. They do not want it to distract them from seeking their happiness in the ways *they* choose. They say the message is not relevant to this modern age; they accept that it may have been suitable enough for the past, when people were naturally superstitious. But this modern age is more sophisticated. Yet, if one stops to think about it, most people today are perfectly comfortable with superstition – keeping their fingers crossed and all that sort of thing. No, the plain truth is that sinners do not want to come to Christ; it is still true that “the carnal mind [the mind of the unsaved sinner] is enmity against God”. And the gospel is as relevant today as ever it was; it meets the needs of sinners perfectly. When the Holy Spirit deals with the enmity of the natural heart, it becomes obvious that Christ in the gospel is more desirable than anything else in the world – “more to be desired . . . than gold, yea, than much fine gold”.

Some people stop for a short time to listen to the gospel message. Perhaps their consciences are awakened; they know that they are guilty before God and on their way to a lost eternity. They hear the minister pointing to Christ, but they do not want to turn away from their sins. They cannot be persuaded that true happiness is to be found in the narrow way that leads to life. They refuse to believe the truth although it comes to them with God’s authority. The devil’s lie seems so much more attractive. So they turn away; they stop listening. But their hearts are now much harder than before. In the future they will be much more resistant to the truth; they will find it much more difficult to stop and listen. It is highly dangerous for people to reject the call of the gospel and to go back to their sins.

Yet there are some who really do respond when they are arrested by God’s Word. When the preacher, as God’s ambassador, calls on them to turn, they do turn. The Holy Spirit has changed their hearts; they have new attitudes. They no longer give happiness the first place in life; instead they seek after holiness and they trust God to make them as happy as He sees is good for them. If they have to experience various difficulties in this life, they have God’s promise that He will never forsake them. But there is no doubt about it: they will be perfectly happy in the next world.

Surely it is time for you to turn from the ways of sin and, by faith in Christ, to begin the journey to heaven, in the ways of holiness. And to do so *now*.

The Book of Ruth

61. A Kinsman Nearer than Christ

Rev Keith M Watkins

Ruth 3:12,13. "And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman; howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth; lie down until the morning."

Ruth wanted to marry Boaz because he was her "near kinsman". In other words, he was a close relative. In fact, it was Ruth's late husband (Mahlon) who was related to Boaz. Mahlon had died before he and Ruth had any children. The God of Israel had made a special provision to rescue a poor widow like Ruth out of these circumstances. One of Mahlon's close relatives was to marry her and "redeem" her. Boaz was one of those close relatives. And he was very willing to marry Ruth and be her kinsman-redeemer.

However, there was an even closer relative. It seems that Ruth did not know this, but Boaz did: "There is a kinsman nearer than I". That closer relative had the first right of marrying Ruth. Would Boaz ignore that man's rights? He could not do that; he was an honest man. Even though he greatly wanted to marry Ruth, he was not going to break God's law to get her. Instead, he would give that man the first opportunity. He told Ruth: "If he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part".

Boaz knew that if it was God's will for him to marry Ruth, the Lord would bring it to pass. And so it turned out! For, in fact, the nearer kinsman did not want to marry Ruth. Here is a lesson for us all. However much we want something, we must never break God's laws to get it. We never need to break God's laws! Let us be obedient like Boaz, and rest in God's great power to take care of us.

As usual in the Book of Ruth, there are also gospel lessons for us. Boaz is like Christ and Ruth is like the sinner. Ruth marrying Boaz pictures the sinner being united to Christ through saving faith and being redeemed from sin. But, just as Boaz was not the only one who could marry Ruth, so in spiritual terms union *with Christ* is not the only possibility for the sinner. There is someone else, apart from Christ, that sinners may be married to! Who is it?

As fallen sinners by nature, we are more closely related to this other person than to Christ. He was given the first opportunity to do everything necessary for the good of the human race. When left to themselves, sinners

look to him before they turn to Christ. So the Lord Jesus can say to us what Boaz said to Ruth: “There is a kinsman nearer than I”.

Who is this nearer kinsman? His name is *Adam*, the first man. Before God revealed the covenant of grace in Christ, He entered into a covenant with Adam. We call this first covenant the *covenant of works* because Adam had to work obedience to the whole of God’s revealed will in order to obtain the covenant promise of eternal life. However, you know what happened. Adam did not keep the covenant. He sinned against God by eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In doing so, he brought on himself the covenant’s curse, which was death.

We are very closely related to Adam. As our covenant head, He was representing us in that covenant. If he had remained obedient, he would have obtained eternal life not only for himself, but also for all of us. Instead, through his disobedience we were all made sinners and came under the curse of death.

Now, can the first Adam help us? No, he cannot! Yet, when we feel troubled for our sins, it is in our nature to go to the covenant of works for relief. In order to get rid of a guilty conscience, the first thing we think of is to do good works and keep God’s laws. But that is going to Adam! In that sense, Adam is a *nearer kinsman* to us than Christ. It is so natural for us to turn to our own good works to please God. Immediately, we try to redeem ourselves by our own obedience.

Through the words of Boaz, the Lord Jesus issues us a challenge. “If he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman’s part”. If Adam can help us, let him help us. If he is able to redeem, let him redeem. But have you ever tried Adam’s way of getting right with God? I hope that you have discovered that he cannot help. You cannot do the good works required by his covenant. Even if you could, good works cannot take away the smallest of your sins. You need a better husband than Adam! You need to be in a better covenant than the covenant of works!

The Lord Jesus Christ is the better husband. The covenant of grace is the better covenant. In this covenant, Christ as Redeemer has done everything poor sinners need. Do they need a righteousness in which God’s law has been kept perfectly? Christ has kept all the commandments. Do they need their sins taken away? Christ has taken away sin by His death on the cross. Just as Boaz was ready and able to marry Ruth, so Christ is ready and able to marry sinners. This is wonderful news!

But do you really want to be married to Christ? It is more natural to go to Adam’s covenant. And your own righteousness appears to be the best way to redeem yourself. While you think like this, Adam is a “nearer kinsman”

to you than Christ. But Adam cannot redeem. Good works cannot save. Have you learned this by experience?

Hear the words of Boaz to Ruth, and think of Christ's offers to you in the gospel: "If he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee". If you have found that Adam cannot help you, then go to Christ. For He certainly will help you. If you have tried the covenant of works and know that it cannot save, turn to Christ in the covenant of grace. He will redeem you, uniting you to Himself for ever.

Christ is called "the last Adam" and "the second Man" (1 Corinthians 15:45,47). This is marvellous grace! While sinners try to save themselves by their own works, Christ waits for them to learn that the first Adam cannot help them. All that time, He Himself is being rejected. As "the second Man", He is being put in second place. Yet when they turn to Him, He seems to say: "You did not come to Me in the first place. You looked to another before thinking of Me. At last, you have found that he cannot help you. Now, as a last resort, you turn to Me, the last Adam. Be ashamed for this! But will I receive you after all this? Yes I will! Poor sinner, I will marry you. Even though you have come to me in the last place, I will save you." When the nearer kinsman has failed to redeem them, Christ says, "Now I will do the part of a kinsman unto thee; now I will redeem thee".

For Younger Readers

Lions, Antelope and a Warthog

The antelopes were drinking happily at a water hole. They were not afraid of anything. They did not seem to notice any danger.

Then along came a little warthog. He stopped. He must have smelt something. He knew there was danger not far away. He soon turned round and ran in the opposite direction.

The little warthog was wise. In a hollow near the water hole, three lions lay on the ground. The warthog knew that lions are dangerous. He could not see them but he caught their smell. He did not want to stay near dangerous lions. That was why he ran away.

The antelopes should have run away too. Antelopes make tasty meals for hungry lions. But the antelopes were not like the warthog; they did not notice the lions. They felt quite safe, yet they were not really safe.

The antelopes were left to drink in peace, but only because these

lions were not hungry. Not long before then, the lions had eaten a meal. Perhaps they had eaten some other antelope!

What does all this teach us? You may live a very long way from hungry lions. You may feel quite safe. But in the Bible, Peter speaks about someone who goes about like a roaring lion. Do you know who that is? It is Satan. He wants to make people sin – people like you and me. In other words, he wants to tempt them to sin.

Yes, Satan is very dangerous, because sin is very serious. And why is sin so serious? Because sin is against God.

Remember the warthog. He knew that lions are dangerous. We should know that Satan is dangerous. We should try to get away from him.

We should never be like the antelope, who did not think there were lions so near them. We should never forget that Satan is always trying to get us to do what is wrong. He is very clever. He knows all sorts of ways of making people sin.

He has been doing so for a very long time – ever since he came into the Garden of Eden and made both Eve and Adam to sin. And he will try to make you sin too. He is very dangerous.

What can you do? You should ask God for two things. One thing is that God would change you so that you would not want to sin. Then Satan will find it more difficult to make you sin.

The second thing is to pray in the words of the Lord’s Prayer: “Lead us not into temptation”. Or you could put it in your own words: “Do not let Satan tempt me”.

“The Lord Was with Joseph”

3. Hated for His Dreams

Rev N M Ross

This paper was given at the 2000 Youth Conference. Last month’s instalment dealt with Joseph’s godly upbringing. It went on to speak of him as his father’s favourite, and how he told his father about the evil doings of his brothers.

Joseph also spoke to his father and his brothers about *his dreams* – the dream of his family’s sheaves bowing down to his own sheaf, and then the dream of the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to himself. Genesis 37:10 says, “His father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come

to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" It is surprising that godly Jacob did not acknowledge openly that these extraordinary dreams were from the Lord, but it is obvious that he was deeply impressed. "His father", we read, "observed the saying," – that is, he took careful note of it and reflected on it.

One writer asks, "Was it frankness, pretentiousness or simplicity which made Joseph tell his dreams?" and then concludes that it was a combination of all three – but he is mistaken. While Joseph was frank, it was not for lack of wisdom that he related his dreams, nor was he drawing attention to himself. He realised, I believe, that by those dreams God was revealing to him something of what lay ahead of him, and was thus preparing him for some important work in the future. So he was convinced that it was his duty to reveal his dreams to those who were closest to him. Of course, the fact that the dreams were fulfilled to the letter showed eventually that they were indeed a revelation from God.

In thinking about the revelation God gave to Joseph, let us note that God revealed His will to men before He committed His Word to writing. Among other ways, He gave visions at night. We see this, for example, in Genesis 46:2: "God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob". Today we have the privilege of possessing the whole written Word of God – the word of salvation – in which is revealed the will of God for our salvation. We are not to look for dreams and visions in order to know the mind and will of God. The infallible test of right and wrong, of truth and error, is the Bible. "The law of the Lord is perfect . . . the testimony of the Lord is sure The statutes of the Lord are right" (Psalm 19:7,8). So we must turn to the Scriptures if we are to know what we must believe and do. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

If God has, by His Word and Spirit, revealed to us the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, to the saving of our souls, we should try to make this fact known in a wise and proper way. We should tell others, just as surely as Joseph made known what was revealed to him. "Go home to thy friends," said Jesus to the healed demoniac of Gadara, "and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee and hath had compassion on thee." So the believer has a duty to tell what the Lord has done for his soul, as the Psalmist said: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul" (Psalm 66:16).

The reaction of Joseph's brothers to his dreams was predictable: they *hated him more than ever*. Genesis 37:8 states, "His brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? Or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words."

They had begun to hate him long before this, not only for reporting their crimes and because he was the favourite of his father – but especially because of his piety. Their hatred was basically the hatred of the ungodly towards the godly.

We can be certain that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”, as we are told in 2 Timothy 3:12. When persecution comes from those who are close to us, as in the case of Joseph, it is all the harder to bear. As his father said in blessing his sons, Joseph “was separate from his brethren”. He was separate from them not only in being torn away from his family, but also and especially in loving and serving the Lord. If we are obedient to this call of God to be separate from the world, we must be prepared to suffer as Christians. And when we see believers being hated by the ungodly for resolutely doing what is right, let us be like the Psalmist who said in his prayer to God: “I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts”.

His brothers’ hatred towards Joseph came to a height when he visited them again as they herded their father’s flocks. As Joseph approached, they made a plan to kill him there and then and to throw his dead body into a pit. However, they put him alive into a deep pit instead, and left him there to die although he pleaded with them to have pity on him.

It was a terrifying experience for Joseph to be trapped in that deep hole where there was not a drop of water. He knew that he would soon die from thirst and hunger. In these circumstances he had what Genesis 42:21 calls “anguish” in “his soul”. This indicates to me that he *prayed earnestly to God*. His cries were, I believe, more than cries to his brothers to have pity on him (against which they hardened their hearts) – they were cries directed to the Lord. In any case, when we are in trouble we must look beyond the people we ask to help us. We are to depend upon God Himself, instead of our fellow men, however able and willing they may be to help us. And, however much God may use them for our help, let us honour Him by depending upon Himself. Psalm 118 tells us:

Better it is to trust in God
than trust in man’s defence;
Better to trust in God than make
princes our confidence.

Help soon came to Joseph. Soon afterwards he was hauled out of the pit by his brothers and sold to some Midianite merchants who came on the scene. His envious brothers were certain that, one way or another, they would prevent his dreams coming true. Genesis 37:18-20 says, “When they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired

against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams" – as if to say, That will put a complete end to his dreams. In fact, the means which they used to prevent the fulfilment of his dreams were the very means used by God to fulfil them.

So today the Christian is often taught this lesson: God sometimes overrules adverse providences which appear likely to bring about the opposite of what the Christian hoped for. God overrules, or uses them, to accomplish the very things hoped for. The fact is that all things, including troubles, work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Note also that God uses apparently *insignificant happenings* to accomplish His purposes. At the very time when Joseph was in the pit, the Midianite merchants happened to come along unexpectedly. God meant Joseph to be in Egypt, and these passing merchants were sent in the providence of God to take him there. So God uses what may appear to us to be very unimportant events to accomplish His purposes for ourselves and for His Church. "You and I very little consider and very little understand", said a godly minister, "how the minutest circumstances in the histories of God's dear children are most important links in a great chain, and that these circumstances sometimes involve the very greatest results."

For Junior Readers

Danger on an Ice Floe

Have you ever seen pictures of icebergs or icefloes? Most of them are in the icy waters of the Arctic Ocean and in the seas around Antarctica. Many explorers who were trying to reach the South Pole were prevented by dense ice packs of bergs and floes. Ships have hit them and sunk, and sometimes the sailors were then forced to camp on the ice floes.

This happened to some explorers in 1916. Their ship sank and they had to camp for a long time on a huge floe. However, although it seemed so solid, the floe cracked one morning and then split up. The men had to pull all their possessions to safety quickly. They felt very relieved and settled down again. But soon after they fell asleep, the watchman called out in alarm. Another crack had opened only two feet from one of the tents. Again there was a big panic trying to make all their possessions safe in the dark.

Of course, the ice floe was getting smaller. One of the men acknowledged

their helplessness: “Pray God we may find a landing”, he wrote. “But we are in the hands of a Higher Power and, puny mortals [little dying creatures] that we are, can do nothing to help ourselves against these colossal forces of nature.” The floe split again, and yet again, until it was only an irregular rectangle of ice, hardly 50 yards across. All they could do then was to launch their boats and escape from the ice into the small boats and the equally dangerous ocean.

Is that not like life? There is no security in this world. We cannot settle here. Life is short. Even godly men like Abraham, whom we read about in Genesis, felt that they were “strangers and pilgrims on the earth”. They were just passing through the world on their way to the endless eternity.

Samuel Rutherford was a godly minister in Scotland long ago. He compared this world to a forest. He warned: “Build your nest upon no tree here, for ye see God hath sold the forest to death. And every tree whereupon we would rest is ready to be cut down” and we are to “fly and mount up and build upon the Rock.”

He is telling us not to settle here, in this world, but to flee to “the Rock”. What, or who, does he mean by the Rock? Surely he means Christ, who is often referred to in Scripture as a rock. When Paul is writing about the Israelites he says that “they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ”. Christ is the only safe place for sinners to flee to. He is higher than all the dangerous seas and dying forests of this life.

Everything in this world will come to an end. “Man goeth to his long home”, as Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes. We are all going to the house of eternity. Death will then fix us in a state that cannot be changed. Surely, then, you should be preparing for the world to come. The Bible tells you: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near”. If you seek the Lord, you will be able to speak of death as Samuel Rutherford did:

“The sands of time are sinking,
The dawn of heaven breaks,
The summer morn I’ve sighed for,
The fair sweet morn awakes:
Dark, dark hath been the midnight,
But dayspring is at hand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Immanuel’s land.”

Samuel Rutherford knew he was going to Immanuel’s land, the place where Christ is – and that is heaven. We cannot be safe unless we are on the way to heaven.

J van Kralingen

The Good Shepherd

This article has been reprinted, with slight editing, from an earlier issue of *The Young People's Magazine*. The minister who wrote the story lived perhaps 200 years ago.

One of my first churches was in a wild district in the west of Ireland. My parishioners' homes were few and far between, either perched on a rocky mountain-side or else sunk in boggy hollows, still more troublesome to reach. Few even of the Protestants could read or write, and their religious condition was very low. They were also miserably poor, depending chiefly for their existence on the cultivation of a small plot of potato ground, or a field or two of oats. There were no roads, and even bridle paths were few. The only way of reaching my people was on foot. I was beginning to think that my work was nearly hopeless, when something happened which, like a ray of sunshine on a dark, cloudy day, seemed to give me at once hope and encouragement.

I was sitting, at the close of a cold February day, in my room in the farmhouse where I lodged, and was trying to make myself comfortable with my books, which were my only companions in the evenings. After a hard day's work, I was resting comfortably before my peat fire when there was a knock at the door. My landlady told me that a very poor man whom she did not know wished to see me.

Of course, I let him in at once. I had never seen him before, and he appeared to me a most desolate-looking being. He introduced himself by asking pardon for interrupting me at that unseasonable hour, but he had one son and he feared the boy was dying. He was most anxious that I should visit him. I therefore rose immediately and, wrapping my cloak around me as a defence against the bitter mountain wind, I prepared to follow my visitor. Arriving at their cabin on the mountainside, I could scarcely feel surprised that I had not discovered it before. It was shut out from the rest of the world so that, until I was near the door, I had not noticed a trace of a human habitation. We entered the miserable hovel. I looked around and at first saw no sign of anyone except an old woman who sat crouching over the embers of a peat fire. She rose with the natural courtesy of the Irish poor and offered me the low chair, or rather stool, on which she had been sitting.

In one corner of the hut, on a heap of straw, lay the poor boy. About 17 years of age, he was evidently in a state of extreme suffering, and in the last stage of tuberculosis. His eyes were closed, but he opened them when I approached and stared at me with a kind of wild wonder, like a frightened animal. I told him, as quietly as possible, who I was and why I had come. I then put a few very simple questions to him. I discovered from the few

words he uttered that he had heard something of God and of future judgement, but he had never been taught to read. The Bible was a sealed book, and he knew nothing of the way of salvation.

What was I to do? What way was I to explain to him at the eleventh hour the simplest truths of Christianity? I could do nothing – that I knew full well. But God could do all. I therefore raised my heart to Him and asked Him to help me to tell in a way that the boy could understand the good news of a Saviour's love.

"My poor boy," I said, "you are very ill."

He replied with difficulty: "Yes, my cough hurts me greatly".

"Have you had it long?" I asked.

"O yes, a long time."

"And how did you get it?"

"I was quite well, your reverence, until that terrible night a year ago when one of the sheep went astray. My father keeps a few sheep on the mountain. When he counted them that night, there was one missing, and he sent me to look for it. There was snow on the ground, and the wind pierced me through and through; but I didn't mind it much, I was so anxious to find my father's sheep."

"And did you find it?" I asked with increasing interest.

"O yes! I had a long, weary way to go, but I never stopped until I found it."

"And how did you get it home? You had trouble enough with that too, I dare say. Was it willing to follow you back?"

"It was dead beat and tired, so I just laid it on my shoulders and carried it home that way."

"And were they not all glad to see you return with the sheep?"

"Sure enough and they were. The people round us had heard of our loss and came next morning to ask us about the sheep, for you know that the neighbours are mighty kind to each other in these matters. Sorry they were too to hear that I was kept out the whole dark night. It was morning before I got home, and the end of it was that I caught this cold. Mother says I will never be better; God knows best. Anyway I did my best to save the sheep."

How wonderful! I thought. Here is the whole gospel history: the sheep is lost; the father sends his son to seek for it and find it; the son goes willingly, suffers all without complaining, and in the end sacrifices his life to find the sheep; and, when recovered, he carries it home on his shoulders and rejoices with his friends and neighbours over the sheep which was lost but is found.

My prayer was answered, my way made plain. I explained to the dying boy the whole message of salvation, making use of his own simple story. I read to him the four verses in the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel, where

the care of the shepherd for the stray sheep is so beautifully told: "And He spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing."

He at once saw the likeness and followed me with deep interest while I explained to him the meaning of the parable. He saw himself as the lost sheep, and Jesus Christ as the good shepherd who was sent by the Almighty Father to come down to earth and search for lost ones like him. He received it all; he understood it all. I never saw a clearer proof of the power of the Holy Spirit to apply the words of God. He died humbly, peacefully, rejoicing, with the name of "Jesus, *my* Saviour and *my* Shepherd!" the last words upon his lips."

The Lord's Supper

J B Waterbury

This is another edited chapter from the book, *Advice to A Young Christian*. The previous chapter was printed in January. This is chapter 21; it continues the series on self-examination.

There are so many excellent books¹ on how you should prepare your heart before coming to the Lord's Supper that I shall do little more than refer you to them. The only objection which I have ever felt to using them is that, because they recommend too many points to think about, I have been confused, and sometimes discouraged, in the work of self-examination. Some of them would, in my opinion, be far more useful if they were very much shortened and many of these points taken out, as it is impossible to remember them all. Still I would regularly consult them. Most of them are written by men of the deepest piety, who take a serious view of communion.

When the views in these books are drawn directly from the clear testimony of Scripture, they will save you much trouble in gathering together all the verses which apply to the subject. After all, the Word of God is the only true standard, and no one who is familiar with it will find it wearisome to select the verses which speak about self-examination. I have always found it satisfying to go straight to the fountain head. Take the Bible in your hand, think over its teachings and sift the evidences of your Christian character. At the same time, pray earnestly to God for light and knowledge.

¹One of the best of such books was written by Archibald Alexander, a friend of Waterbury. It is called *Remember Him* and costs £2.95. You can get it from the F P Bookroom.

Think of a communion season as one of your most precious privileges. It is then that you are invited to the King's table, and it is proper for you to have your soul clothed in the beauties of holiness. If you were invited to the table of some earthly monarch, how eagerly you would look forward to the honour! And how concerned you would feel that your clothes would be appropriate and your conduct correct! But what is this honour compared with that of sitting at the table of your Lord? See then that you are adorned with the wedding garment, and do not rush into the presence of your King with the carelessness with which someone would go to an ordinary meal.

Not that I would make the Lord's table terrifying to you. I am convinced that many throw around the elements such a solemnity as to frighten the timid and faltering believer. He feels, that if someone so vile as he should touch the elements, he would eat and drink damnation to himself and seal for ever his hopelessness and ruin. It was never the intention of our Lord to hold up such fearful views of this feast of love. Everything about it is inviting, even to the troubled soul. It calls the weary and heavy-laden to come and find rest. It is not Sinai, but Calvary. It is not the smoke or the lightning or the thunder; it is the simple memorial of Christ crucified, whose blood speaks peace from every vein. Is there *any* terror in this scene? Is it not all peace and love and mercy?

The sacrament of the Supper is a memorial of the love and compassion of Christ, a vivid emblem of His suffering for sin. It is a public acknowledgement of our attachment to His cause. If we have seriously and sincerely examined ourselves and find that we can humbly claim to see in ourselves the evidence of a true disciple, we may come to this feast of love. We can there commune with our Lord and with one another in a composed and humble frame of mind. If our greatest burden is sin, and our only ground of confidence is the Saviour, we have nothing to fear, but everything to hope, from this ordinance. Much of the profit of partaking of this sacrament, you will remember, depends on your faithfulness in the work of self-examination. If that is neglected, you have no reason to look for a blessing. If it is performed hurriedly and superficially, you need not expect much enjoyment in the ordinance. God must be glorified in those who approach so near to Him.

When you come to the table, I would recommend you to think of things as simply as possible. If you try to think of many things, your mind becomes confused. Having lifted your soul up to God for light and feeling, look on the elements and try to view them as the appropriate memorials of your dying Lord. What do you see in the broken bread? Is it not the emblem of the broken body of the Lamb of God? What does the flowing wine mean? Is it not the emblem of the blood, which was shed for the forgiveness of

sins? And why was that body broken and that blood poured forth? O my soul, let your guilt and transgressions answer: Without the shedding of that blood, there would have been no forgiveness. What then can I render to my Lord for all this dying love? I am speechless in gratitude. Here, blessed Saviour, I give Thee all I have: this broken, contrite heart. Take it, O take it as Thine own, wash it in Thy blood, and seal it for Thyself.

Looking Around Us

Respect for Others

Home Secretary David Blunkett has announced plans to fine hooligans as young as 16. They may have to pay up to £80 as part of his attempt to outlaw anti-social behaviour in England and Wales. "It's time", he declared, "to stop thinking of anti-social behaviour as something that we can just ignore. Anti-social behaviour blights people's lives, destroys families and ruins communities." He hopes that the changes he proposes will lead to respect for other people.

We should welcome changes in the law which will reduce crime and bring youngsters and older people to respect others. But other Home Secretaries have tried to work similar wonders and have failed. It is easier to speak about respect for other people than to persuade people to practise it. One problem is that for too long people have been taught that we came into existence through evolution. God has been ignored. How can Mr Blunkett really expect youngsters or adults to have respect for others unless they have respect for the Most High God who created them?

Laws and punishments are useful for restraining sin, but something more is needed. Yet the Government shows no sign of recognising this. In today's godless society, is it any wonder that people ignore the laws of God and of man? The foundation for respect for others lies in the Ten Commandments, which are summed up: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". That love obviously includes respect for others.

A new heart is what the youngsters most need who are upsetting Mr Blunkett with their anti-social behaviour. But how will they get a new heart? They must first come in contact with the gospel. Has the Home Secretary ever given any encouragement to the preaching of the gospel? And not just any gospel, for there are many preachers who do not really believe the Bible and its doctrines. Yet the Bible still proclaims, as all true preachers must proclaim: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved". The gospel is a perfect remedy for sin of every kind.

Youngsters for Priests?

A Scottish Roman Catholic archbishop is calling for youngsters to be encouraged to become priests. The number of priests, Archbishop O'Brien admits, "has fallen drastically" and he is desperate to do something that will bring the numbers up again.

But to become a Roman Catholic priest is a very solemn matter. Every priest has to believe and teach many false doctrines – particularly the doctrine of the mass, when the priest claims to change the bread and wine of the sacrament into the body and blood of the Saviour. He also claims to offer up Christ as a sacrifice for sin. And by getting involved in hearing confessions, the priest is claiming to be able to forgive sins.

We hope that youngsters will be spared from becoming entangled in doctrines and practices which are so dishonouring to Christ.

Only the Sinner Finds the Saviour

Based on the words of Jesus: "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:13). The name of the poet is not given in the issue of *The Young People's Magazine* from which this is taken.

Life was once to me like summer,
With its glitter and its smile;
I, as thoughtless as the insect,
Trifled through the little while.
All was buoyant life within me,
All was jubilant around.
Need of Jesus then I felt not,
So I sought Him not, nor found.
But the summer soon was ended
And the gloomy winter came.
All my brightest joys were withered
Into griefs of every name.
Still I hoped the change of season
Would bring summer round again;
But instead the gloom grew blacker,
And I sought the Saviour then.
Yes, I sought with cries and weeping,
But no answer was returned.
Echo flung me back my prayers,
'Twas as if my cry was spurned.

Sore distressed at the silence,
I with fervour did entreat;
Still the ear could catch no answer
Save the heart's distracted beat.
Well I knew 'twas but through Jesus
That the sinner comes to God;
But with what we come to Jesus?
Ah, 'twas here I missed the road.
I was bringing Him obedience
When I should have brought but sin;
So my knocking, though half-frantic,
No admittance thus could win.
Then I studied to know better
What already well I knew;
And the good things that I practised
Better still I strove to do.
Yet, the deeper grew the darkness,
And the silence grew more dread.
So I owned my ease was hopeless,
And my soul among the dead.
Then I cast me, self-despairing,
On the Saviour's boundless grace.
Not a hope had I of blessing,
If He met not such a case,
And I felt that need so urgent
Scarce on earth could ever be;
So I begged, for one so ruined,
Mercy instant, mercy free.
Then at once the peace of pardon
Did my sinking soul restore,
And the love sprang up spontaneous,
Which I could not force before.
When I took the place of sinner,
And at Mercy's footstool lay,
Jesus took His place as Saviour,
And at once put sin away.