

# Prepare<sub>the</sub>Way

*Preparing the Bride of Christ for the return of Christ*

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## The Faith Issue

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**COVER:** "Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one (Ephesians 6:16)."

## Talk to us..

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by Andrew Murray

**I**N a sermon I recently heard, the speaker said that the blessings of the higher Christian life were often like the objects exposed in a shop window – one could see them clearly and yet could not reach them. If told to stretch out his hand and take, a man would answer, “I cannot; there is a thick pane of plate glass between me and them.”

Even so, Christians may see clearly the blessed promises of perfect peace and rest, of overflowing love and joy, of abiding communion and fruitfulness, and yet feel that there was something between, hindering the true possession.

What might that be? **Nothing but pride!**

The promises made to faith are so free and sure, the invitations and encouragements so strong, the mighty power of God on which it may count is so near and free – that it can only be something that hinders faith that hinders the blessing being ours. In the following text Jesus discovers to us that it is indeed pride that makes faith impossible:

“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God (John 5:44)?”

“How can you **believe**, when you receive glory from one another?” As we see how in their very nature pride and faith are irreconcilable, we shall also learn that faith and humility are at their root one.

We never can have more of true faith than we have of true humility.

We may have strong intellectual conviction and assurance of the truth while pride is kept in the heart, but pride makes the living faith which has power with God an impossibility.

We need only think for a moment what faith is. Is it not the confession of nothingness and helplessness, the surrender and the waiting to let God work? Is it not

in itself the most humbling thing there can be – the acceptance of our place as dependents, who can claim or get or do nothing but what grace bestows?

Humility is simply the disposition which prepares the soul for living on trust. Even the most secret breathing of pride, in self-seeking, self-will, self-confidence, or self-exaltation – is the strengthening of that self which cannot enter the kingdom or possess the things of the kingdom, because it refuses to allow God to be what He is and must be there – the All in All.

Faith is the organ or sense for the perception and apprehension of the heavenly world and its blessings. Faith seeks the glory that comes from God, that only comes where God is All.

As long as we take glory from one another, as long as ever we seek and love and jealously guard the glory of this life, the honour and reputation that comes from men, we do not seek and cannot receive the glory that comes from God.

### *Pride renders faith impossible*

Salvation comes through a cross and a crucified Christ. Salvation is the fellowship with the crucified Christ in the spirit of His cross. Salvation is union with and delight in, salvation is participation in the humility of Jesus. Is it any wonder that our faith is so feeble when pride still reigns so much, and we have scarcely learned even to long or pray for humility as the most needful and blessed part of salvation.

Humility and faith are more nearly allied in Scripture than many know. See it in the life of Christ. There are two cases in which He spoke of a great faith.

The centurion, at whose faith Jesus marvelled, saying, “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel!” had spoken, “*I am not worthy* that You should come under my roof.”

The mother to whom He spoke, “O woman, great is thy faith!” accepted the

name of dog and said, “*Yes, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs.*”

It is the humility that brings a soul to be nothing before God that also removes every hindrance to faith, and makes it only fear lest it should dishonour Him by not trusting Him wholly.

Have we not here the cause of failure in the pursuit of holiness? Is it not this, though we knew it not, that made our consecration and our faith so superficial and so short-lived? We had no idea to what an extent pride and self were still secretly working within us, and that only God by His incoming and His mighty power could cast them out.

We did not understand how nothing but the new and divine nature, taking entirely the place of the old self, could make us really humble.


We knew not that absolute, unceasing, universal humility must be the root-disposition of every prayer and every approach to God, as well as of every dealing with man. We might as well attempt to see without eyes, or live without breath, as believe or draw near to God or dwell in His love, without an all-pervading humility and lowliness of heart.

Have we not been making a mistake in taking so much trouble to believe, while all the time there was the old self in its pride seeking to possess itself of God’s blessing and riches? No wonder we could not believe. Let us change our course. Let us seek first of all to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God: *He will exalt us.*

The cross, and the death, and the grave into which Jesus humbled Himself, were His path to the glory of God. They are our path also. Let our one desire and our fervent prayer be to be humbled with Him and like Him. Let us accept gladly whatever can humble us before God or men. This alone is the path to the glory of God.

“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another?” Nothing can cure you of the desire of receiving glory from men, or of the sensitiveness and pain and anger which come when it is not given but giving yourself to seek only the glory that comes from God.

Let the glory of the All-glorious God be everything to you. You will be freed from the glory of men and of self, and be content and glad to be nothing.

Out of this nothingness you will grow strong in faith, giving glory to God, and you will find that the deeper you sink in humility before Him, the nearer He is to fulfil the every desire of your faith. 





# Doubt that destroys faith

by Peter Pollock

**A FAMOUS Easter sermon quoting John 20:1-8 nutshells those eight verses. The preacher starts by saying that Mary was confused – “They have taken away the Lord.” Then he says Peter took stock because he noted the linen cloths and the handkerchiefs. And then, the crunch of the message, John SAW and BELIEVED!**

John, of course, wrote this biblical account and we remember that he boasted that he won the race to the tomb. But it was Peter who went in. Matthew’s account of these profound Easter happenings, revolve around an earthquake, an empty tomb and an angel. “He is not here, He is risen!” And there was both fear and joy.

It was the Roman soldier who stated “Truly, this was the Son of God,” and the guards matter-of-factly reported the resurrection simply by saying “He is missing.”

The priests and elders had been to Pontius Pilate to secure the tomb at all costs. “He has promised to rise on the third day.” That threat worried them. Heaven forbid. What a major catastrophe! But He had done it! He had risen from the dead!

A large amount of money passed hands as a bribe to the guards to admit they were sleeping. This was the ultimate sin for a soldier on duty, worthy of death, but they were desperate to cover it all up. The origin of fake news!

But explain it. Excuse it. Deny it as you will. This is what happened! But they did not believe! Read Mark 16:9-14, it’s

all there. Matthew 28:7 says: “The eleven disciples... but some doubted.”

The great commission in Mark 16:15&16 tells us to go into the world and make disciples... whoever does not believe will be condemned. Luke 24:11: “But they did not believe the women because their words seemed like nonsense.”

John 20:25 “Unless I see the nail marks in His hands... I will not believe.” That was doubting Thomas, of course. But verse 29 quotes Jesus: “Because you have seen Me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.”

I don’t think that we have really come to grips with what it actually means to truly *believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ! Year after year, we celebrate Easter Sunday. Triumphant we declare that He is “risen” and He is not here as we preach and emphasise the Cross and the Resurrection.

They go hand in hand; hand in glove. No Good Friday; NO Easter Sunday! The one is not more important than the other. The latter did not replace the former; the one did not cancel out the other. Jesus did not rise from the Cross, but from the grave.

The Cross and the Empty Tomb are the key issues in the greatest weekend in the history of mankind. But it is all meaningless, mere words, semantics, or just historical fact that makes absolutely no difference to your life except that you believe it utterly, totally and unreservedly. Yes, and unless you appropriate it with heart, soul mind and strength.

Friends, this is not important or urgent.

No! No! No! It’s far, far more serious than that. It is a matter of life and death! UNBELIEF is a huge problem!

And it’s an even bigger problem because simply we don’t think it’s a problem or a big deal.

The bottom line is that everything begins and ends with faith, faith to accept totally and utterly an awesome God. To be a true believer is radical, life-changing and mind-blowing. And it’s high time for us to accept Christianity in this dimension.

DOUBT destroys FAITH – and we need to hear that loud and clear.

Knowing about Easter will not change your life one iota. Also it is not just a “decision” or a “commitment” but it is more in keeping with making an oath or a vow. It is an act of the will and what is involved is to abdicate the throne of your life and give up your independent right to yourself, all of which does not remotely appeal to the human nature or psyche.

Repent and be baptised, means firstly acknowledging your sin and wretchedness and then dying to self. That wonderful hymn “I have decided to follow Jesus” talks about the Cross before me and the world behind me and not looking back. Yes, it’s all of those things together combining to produce a true testimony.

Without faith it is impossible to please God – and that is a pretty categorical statement. The definition of faith as per Hebrews 11:1 is to be (absolutely) sure of what we hope for and (absolutely) certain of what we do not see.

I once presented this definition to an intellectual non-believing friend of mine and he just stared at me blankly, incredulously, because of the huge gulf that exists between the man who has the spirit and someone who does not.

There is a veritable chasm between experiential and intellectual understanding of faith and it's a bridge that can only be crossed in the SPIRIT. In the flesh, faith blows your mind because it is scientifically irrational.

To a scientist anything that cannot be totally understood or explained is irrational. It can't be rationalised, debated or pigeon-holed and that is frightfully frustrating to the scientific mind, not to mention that it seriously challenges all intellectual thought processes.

Hebrews 11 tells us that by faith we "understand" that the Universe was formed at God's command. We understand and do not question it. By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain and it involved blood, something that God has specifically ordained. It's the Blood, and there is no other way. Wrong sacrifices consequently cause strife, jealousy and murder, as it did then in the early days, and ever since.

By faith in "holy fear" Noah condemned the world and became an heir of righteousness. By faith he preached fire and brimstone and by faith we believe that the end will come "as in the days of Noah." By faith Moses regarded "disgrace" for the sake of God as "greater value" than all the treasure of the world. By faith Enoch was "raptured," and the cherry on the top is that with all these great men of faith, they did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them at a distance and admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

It's all pretty tough stuff, you will agree. Faith is an incredible challenge. Mostly, faith does not make sense! "As high as the heavens are above the earth... so are My ways above yours," says God.

So often it defies logic. It's hard to see or define going out or looking out, but so clear to recognise in the footprints left behind. In other words, it's hard to foresee but very clearly traceable to record!

Faith often transcends reason or argument but does not deny it. The Bible never set out to be a history book yet never denies, refutes or contradicts history. And God's truth does not depend upon you and me understanding it. It is so because God says so!

We concentrate much on John 3:16 but John 3:19 is the crunch of the gospel mes-

sage. This is the condemnation. This is the verdict. This is the judgement. The Light came into the world and we rejected it! We did not believe – that is it in a nutshell!

Because we live in a world of so many lies and exaggerations, we find it extremely difficult to submit our wills to genuinely accepting things, however truthful or factual they might be. "I believe" these days means little more than just "I think" or "would like to think." Nothing more than that. And Satan smiles!

The Bible has consequently become just another book, another option. Unbelief has been downloaded as acceptable, and post-modernism and humanism are both entrenched in our societies and in our ways of thinking. John 3 tells us if we don't believe we "perish," "remain condemned" and the "wrath of God remains upon us" – all underlining that "unbelief" is the greatest of all sins. It's the mother of all sins, the very worst, the most damning of all!

It is the original sin because the Fall of Man was the consequence of Adam and Eve not believing God when they were tempted by the devil. Also it's the only sin Jesus did not die for, because every other vile transgression carries forgiveness if you come to Jesus – but if you don't believe you won't come to Jesus.

## A spiritual virus

God's wrath and condemnation rests on unbelief. It is the spiritual Aids attacking the Christian immune system. It is a spiritual virus of pandemic proportions.

"Yes, but..." is blatant, bold and brazen unbelief; it is a one-way ticket to Hell.

Luke 9:57-62 Jesus says: "Don't look back... Follow Me." Wait Lord, let me first say goodbye. No man looking back is fit for the Kingdom, was the response from Jesus. A bit harsh, we might think, but Jesus knew that returning home for him would see him affected by the unbelieving relatives, weeping, nagging and manipulation.

Worldliness is terribly infectious and nobody knew that better than Jesus. The company we keep affects us.

"Let the dead bury the dead." The faithful disciples did not look back. Even though they were witnessing a minor exodus, when confronted they responded "where can we go?" There was no place for them in the world. They had closed the door.

Somehow we don't seem to want to look at commitment in the same vein these


days. Looking back in any way is, in fact, questioning, doubting and lacking faith. Many are doing that these days, and instead of being salt and light they are in fact becoming like Lot's wife – a pillar of salt. And that is definitely not what you want to be!

Without childlike faith and trust, the Christian stands naked and exposed to all doubts, fears and unbelief. Sadly there are multitudes of naked believers, tired of the struggle, the hardship, the long delays, lonely times and pains and sorrows. Many have set aside all confidence in God. Some are lukewarm, some are angry, others are disillusioned and much of this is because "wickedness and evil is on the increase the love of many has grown cold (Matthew 24:12)."

UNBELIEF is SIN! It is the summit of arrogance, the monarch of sins, the prolific parent of all guilt and begets and fosters all iniquity – so says Spurgeon. Somehow we in the modern world don't think that spiritual poverty is a big deal. We do everything in our power; move heaven and earth to avoid financial, physical or material poverty, almost going to obsessive lengths in our efforts. But any mention of being spiritually empty and vacant doesn't seem to foster any reaction!

Hebrews 12:1-3 talks about the besetting sin of unbelief. Friends, belief that admits doubt is not faith. Often I am asked how come I am still so excited about Jesus, after all these years in the ministry. Some even ask how I can be so sure. Others confess of a huge battle in trying to keep Jesus number one in their lives – and from time to time I am even accused of being frightening and scary because of my utter conviction about Jesus and the truth of the Gospel. If you truly have faith you will believe!

Unbelief is, in fact, disobedience because unbelief and disobedience are the direct consequence of not recognising a higher authority in your life. Faith is personal, intimate and experiential. In the wilderness the people lived off Moses. They had no faith of their own even though daily they were surrounded by miracles and true men of God.

There were more than 12 000 signs, wonder and miracles yet they didn't make it into the Promised Land. In Revelation 9 we read about a third of the world being wiped out and even then we are told, that those who remained did not repent. Doubt destroys faith. Unbelief IS a huge problem. And it is rife and rampant in the modern church! 



# Shafts of Light 38

by Helen Gardiner

*"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts. 'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace to it (Zechariah 4:6&7)!'"*

**A**LTHOUGH I am a Gardiner, I am not a gardener. However, some years back, the Lord gave me a little pink sweetheart rose. Roses have special meaning for me in the Lord, so I put the rose bush in a big pot and nurtured it. A couple of years ago, the Lord directed me to put the pot under my window.

Then some months back, He said obey My instruction and watch the rose. I began to tend it more diligently; to water it more. Then I felt led to prune it – radically.

I thought I had killed it.

Over time, green shoots appeared, and some little fresh green leaves. It shot out a little and produced some clusters of blooms.

There was one cluster that had five flowers blooming on it simultaneously (see the photograph on this page). The Lord directed me to the Scripture above, and the Lord said He was going to bring forth the capstone of the Lord Jesus Christ in His End Times Church. She would rise to her full stature in Christ.

He, was, He showed me, going to do this by His grace. Five being the number of grace.

Soon after, the bush of roses came under tremendous attack, as often happens to us when a prophetic word is brought. It became infested with aphids.

I sprayed the blooms with soapy water. The aphids died, but the flowers and leaves looked terrible and brownish.

I thought I had misheard the Lord. But I continued watering in faith.

Rather suddenly there was a dramatic recovery. Even though I stopped spraying with soapy water, the aphids did not return. The bush started springing forth. The leaves were fresh green and twice their size.

And then the buds came. Lovely pink



buds – and there were many of them. The rose started climbing up my wall.

The Lord told me, "This battle is over. I will bring forth my capstone by My grace."

There is His grace. Great grace. And by that same grace He will empower us to do and to be what we need to do and to be.



Of interest and importance in these days is Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish virgins, which appears in Matthew 25:1-13. Let's read it and consider it.

"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose

and trimmed their lamps.

"And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'

"And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered, and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

Let's look at it closely...

The ten virgins are the Bride of Christ. They are dressed in white. They wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb when those robes get dirty. They are consecrated. They are set apart. They follow the Lamb.

Not everyone who calls themselves Christian is a virgin. They are vessels of

honour. They depart from iniquity. They are disciples and not converts. They are waiting for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

However only half of them are wise.

The lamps symbolise the word of God. Those lamps run on the oil of the Holy Spirit.

Extra oil is needed, because there is a delay in the coming of the bridegroom.

(When you walk with God, you discover that He is never early because He desires to work patience, faith and faithfulness into us.)

We need as much oil as we can get. A key Scripture here is Acts 5:32: "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Obedience gives us more of the Holy Spirit. We need to obey His written Word in its full counsel. But we also need to have an intimate relationship with Him so that He can give us daily instructions for our lives. That we may obey Him. That we may abide in Him.

It is also highly important that we recognise the importance of the Holy Spirit. It is all about the Spirit and the Word. Don't neglect one at the expense of the other. You need to be in a born-again, Spirit-filled church.

The virgins all had faith, so they slept when they needed to.

But then the bridegroom came at an unexpected hour.

The virgins all arose and trimmed their lamps. But the foolish ones had no extra oil.

They approached the wise ones to share. But the latter declined. We need to understand that we all need to get our own oil – so walk in obedience and bring all your internal vessels to be filled.

The parable ends with the foolish ones going off to buy oil and when they get back the door to the bridegroom is shut. They implore the Lord. He declines and says, 'I do not know you.'

Knowing Him and being known by Him is crucial. Intimacy is crucial. Spending time with Him is crucial. Involving Him in every area of your life is crucial.

Jesus says in Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

Obedience to the Father is key. It is remarkable that these ones rejected by the Lord, actually call Him "Lord." He is more than "Saviour" to them.



God is highlighting so much in these days. He has much to say. There is much exhortation. There is much light. We need to embrace the light.

An encouragement for many comes from Hebrews 10:35 to the end:

"Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after

you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.'

"But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."


Now we know that basic salvation from hell is by grace. It is not a reward for our good works. Nevertheless there is reward offered here – for endurance, for obedience. God will fulfill His promises. There will be delay, but we must not draw back to damnation. God takes no pleasure in us if we do that.

If we press through, our souls will be redeemed and conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, beloved, we want to please Him. For that we need to have faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

Believe that He is real. Believe. amazingly, that He actually rewards those who diligently seek Him.

So do be diligent.

Beloved, this is our year for taking Him seriously. If you name the name of Christ and are living in the periphery of His Kingdom. It is time to come in and embrace the light. 

## The faith that receives

by Alvin J. VanderGriend

*"Have faith in God," Jesus answered... 'Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours (Mark 11:22-24).'"*

**F**AITH is a requirement of true prayer. Prayers without faith are incomplete. Millions of prayers have been prayed with no faith and have thus failed in their intent. They have not been true prayers.

The astounding promise Jesus makes in Mark 11:24 seems to offer too much. How can God offer to do "whatever we ask for in prayer?" And why have so many believers asked, trusting God, and not received?

The difficulty we have with this passage is really a difficulty in understanding faith. We tend to think of faith as a personal possession that exists wholly within us. We figure that if we have enough faith,



we will get what we ask for – and if we do not, we will not get it.

But faith is not simply a possession. It is an aspect of relationship. It is not something we own like an idea or a feeling. Faith always involves another person. It trusts the other person to think and act in a certain way.


For example, throughout all the years my parents were alive, I knew they would welcome me anytime I came home. I knew they loved me. I trusted that they cared for

me and were willing to help me anytime. In other words, I had faith in them. This faith was based on what I knew about them.

Faith in God is like that. It is a conviction about who God is, what He is like, and how He will always act.

Praying in faith is not an inner conviction that God will act according to our desires if only we believe hard enough. It involves believing that God will always respond to our prayers in accord with His nature, His purposes, and His promises.

God does not want us simply to toss requests at Him, hoping that some of them will be answered. He wants us to ask, knowing He is there, claiming what He promises, trusting that He will act in line with His nature and that His purposes will be achieved.

That is praying in faith. 





# Faith in life's difficult places

by H. W. Smith

*"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6&7)."*

**BE careful (anxious) for nothing. This is not meant to teach carelessness, but care without anxiety. "For nothing." This covers all possible grounds for anxiety, both inward and outward. We are continually tempted to think it is our duty to be anxious about some things.**

Perhaps our thought is, "Oh, yes it is quite right to give up all anxiety in a general way, and in spiritual matters anxiety is wrong, but there are things about which it would be a sin not to be anxious – about our children, or those we love, or about our church affairs and the cause of truth, or about our business matters. It would show a great lack of right feeling not to be anxious about such things as these. These we ought to be anxious about, for if we are not, they will be neglected."

To such suggestions and to all similar

ones, the answer is found in our text: "In *nothing* be anxious."

Our Lord develops this and shows us the reason why we are not to be anxious, in His sermon on the mount (Matthew 6:25-34). The illustrations used here are such as we can not misunderstand. The birds and the flowers are before us continually as living examples of what real trust is. With them it is unconscious trust, but with us it must be an intelligent and conscious act.

We all know the relief it is to lay off a care or a burden upon an earthly friend whom we trust. Just like this, only infinitely greater, is the relief that comes to the soul that has "cast all its care" upon the Lord.

"Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved (Psalm 55:22)."

## He can bear them...

He upon whom our cares are to be cast, is able to bear them, no matter how great they may be. Yet, we who trust our choicest things often to our fellow men and feel no fear, are afraid to trust our Lord.

Think of the blessed confidence with

which children cast their cares upon their parents, without a fear. Recall how the parents love to have it so. How often a mother, when her child is tempted to be anxious or worried over carrying out of a plan, will say, "Do not worry; leave it all to me and I will attend to it. Only trust me, and do as I say, and all will come out right."

The only thing a mother asks of her child is that he or she will yield to her care and obey her voice, and then she will take charge of all the rest. Just so it is with us and our God.

No mother can make all things go right for a disobedient child, and neither can God (Psalm 81:11&12). If we will carry our own cares, and manage things in our own way, and walk "in our own counsels," sorrow and suffering can not fail to be the result (Proverbs 3:5&6). We must give everything to Jesus and trust Him and wait. Our worry is a waste if He takes our care.

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me... Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you: not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:1&27)."



Here the Master commands us not to be troubled or afraid. Every time we yield to anxiety or fear we are disobeying Him. There are three instances recorded where our Lord rebuked the little faith of His disciples, and yet in each case the circumstances were such as to make anxiety seem the natural and proper thing. They were certainly such as would cause great anxiety in many Christian hearts now.

## He rebukes them for their fear

First, it was in a storm at sea (Matthew 8:24&25). Their fear led them to cry to Him, and yet He rebukes them for their fear. They ought to have known that with Him aboard, they could not be other than safe, and they ought to have rested in quiet confidence through the storm.

The second instance was when Peter found himself sinking in the waters (Matthew 14:29-31). The third was when the disciples were troubled because they had no bread (Matthew 16:8-10).

In the latter, Jesus referred them to past experiences when He had supplied all their need as a reason why they should trust Him now. He was grieved at the doubts of His disciples, just as we are grieved when those whom we love and whom we are trying to serve, are anxious and fearful about the things we have undertaken to do for them.

Three instances from the Old Testament illustrate this lesson also. The first is the story of Hagar when she was sent out from her home into the wilderness, apparently to die (Genesis 21:14-19). The second was when Elijah went, during the time of famine, to the house of the widow (1 Kings 17:12-16). The third was when the army of Syria encompassed the city where dwelt the man of God (2 Kings 6:15-17).

The causes for anxiety in each of these cases were very great, but God was in each instance behind the scene with His perfect supply, and those who were afraid only needed to have their "eyes opened" to see it, and be delivered from all their fears.

"Trust in the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for

Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass (Psalm 37:3-7)

Seven things are mentioned here. Trust in the Lord; do good; delight yourself in Him; commit your way to Him; rest in Him; wait patiently for Him; and finally, do not fret.

Our part then is to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. That is, we must make it the first object of our lives to accept His will and to do it under all circumstances, and then trust Him for all the rest. No one can in the very nature of things, be "careful for nothing," who is not fully surrendered to the Lord. Unless we are satisfied with His will, we cannot trust Him to manage for us.

There is no way but the way of full surrender and simple childlike obedience. The Lord knows what is best. We do not. Therefore we must leave the arrangements all to Him and must say, "Thy will be done," about everything.

## Speaking against God

Remember that all questioning is of the nature of doubt. It is called in the Bible, "speaking against God."

"Yes, they spoke against God: They said, 'Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? Behold, He struck the rock, So that the waters gushed out, And the streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Can He provide meat for His people?' There-


fore the Lord heard this and was furious; So a fire was kindled against Jacob, And anger also came up against Israel, Because they did not believe in God, And did not trust in His salvation. Yet He had commanded the clouds above, And opened the doors of heaven, Had rained down manna on them to eat, And given them of the bread of heaven (Psalm 78:19-24)."

Their sorrows came upon them because they did not trust. God was equal to the emergency, but they did not believe it, and their doubt grieved Him more than all their other sins.

"And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not (Exodus 17:7)?"

Here their questioning is called "tempting the Lord." How common is this sort of questioning among Christians, who little dream what a sin it is!

Listen to our Lord's own words: "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? And not one of them is forgotten before God; but even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore: you are of more value than many sparrows (Luke 12:6&7)."

In the face of such an assurance, who could doubt? The sparrows and the hairs of our head, two strikingly insignificant and valueless things! Yet they are noticed and cared for. Then surely He will care for me! 



## A Puritan prayer for faith


My God,

I bless you that you have given me the eye of faith, to see you as father, to know you as covenant God, to experience your love planted in me; For faith is the grace of union by which I spell out my entitlement to you: Faith casts my anchor upward where I trust in you and engage you to be my Lord.

Be pleased to live and move within me, breathing in my prayers, inhabiting my praises, speaking in my words, moving in my actions, living in my life, causing me to grow in grace.

Your bounteous goodness has helped me believe, but my faith is weak and wavering, its light dim, its steps tottering, its increase slow, its backslidings frequent; It should scale the heavens, but lies groveling in the dust.

Lord, fan this divine spark into glowing flame. When faith sleeps, my heart becomes an unclean thing the fount of every loathsome desire, the cage of unclean lusts, all fluttering to escape, the noxious tree of deadly fruit, the open wayside of earthly tares.

Lord, awake faith to put forth its strength until all heaven fills my soul and all impurity is cast out. Amen. 



# The shield of Faith

by Charles H. Spurgeon

*"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked (Ephesians 6:16)."*

**F**AITH is here compared to a shield. There are four ways in which we may liken faith to a shield.

**The natural idea which lies upon the very surface of the simile is, that faith, like a shield, protects us against attack.**

Different kinds of shields were used by the ancients, but there is a special reference in our text to the large shield which was sometimes used. I believe the word which is translated "shield," sometimes means a door, because their shields were as large as a door. They covered the man entirely. You remember that verse in the Psalms which exactly expresses the idea, "For You, Lord, will bless the righteous; with favour You will compass him as with a shield (Psalm 5:12)." Just as the shield enveloped the entire man, so, we think faith envelopes the entire man, and protects him from all missiles wherever they may be aimed against him.

Faith protects the whole man. Let the assault of Satan be against the head, let him try to deceive us with unsettled notions in theology, let him tempt us to doubt those things which are truly received among us; a full faith in Christ preserves us against dangerous heresies, and enables us to firmly hold those things which we have received, which we have been taught, and have learned, and have made our own by experience.

Unsettled doctrines generally spring from a weakness of faith. A man who has strong faith in Christ, has a hand that gets such a firm grip on the doctrines of grace,

that you could not pry it loose, no matter how hard you tried. He knows what he has believed. He understands what he has received. He could not and would not give up what he knows to be the truth of God, though all the schemes that men devise should assail him with their most treacherous art.

While faith will guard the head, it will also guard the heart. When temptation to love the world comes in, then faith holds up thoughts of the future and confidence of the reward that awaits the people of God, and enables the Christian to esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt, and so the heart is protected.

Then when the enemy makes his cut at the sword arm of a Christian, to disable him, if possible, from future service, faith protects the arm like a shield, and he is able to do exploits for his Master, and go out, still conquering, and to conquer, in the name of Him who has loved us.

Suppose the arrow is aimed at his feet, and the enemy attempts to make him trip in his daily life – endeavors to mislead him in the uprightness of his walk and conversation. Faith protects his feet, and he stands securely in slippery places. Neither does his foot slip, nor can the enemy triumph over him.

Or suppose the arrow is aimed at the knee, and Satan tries to make him weak in prayer, and tells him that God will ignore his cry, and never listen to the voice of his supplication; then faith protects him, and in the power of faith, with confidence, he has access to God, and draws near to His mercy seat.

Or let the arrow be aimed at his conscience, and let it be winged with the

remembrance of some recent sin; yet faith protects the conscience, for its full assurance of atonement quenches the fiery darts with that delightful text, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7)." So there is no part of a man which is not secure. Although Satan will certainly attack him in every direction, yet, let him come where he wants.

Not only does faith protect the whole man, but if you will think for a moment you will see that the apostle suggests the idea that it protects his armour too.

After recounting various pieces, he says, "Above all." The man of God is to put on the belt and the breastplate, and he is to be shod, and he is to wear his helmet. But though these are all armour, yet faith is an armour for his armour; it is not only a defence for him, but a defence for his defences. Thus faith not only shields the man, but shields his graces too.

All our virtues are unable to live by themselves, they need grace to preserve them, and that grace is given to us through faith. It is not simply the head, but the helmet; nor merely the feet, but the shoes; not the waist, but the belt – all must be shielded and secure by this all-covering, all-protecting, all-triumphant shield of faith.

**In the second place, let me suggest, that faith like a shield receives the blows which are meant for the man himself.**

Some Christians think that faith would enable them to escape blows – that if they had faith everything would be quiet, everything would be peaceful and calm.

I know how young Christians imagine this. They think as soon as they have come out of their first convictions of their own



sinfulness and found the Saviour, oh! now they are going to ride softly to heaven.

Why did they put their armour on if there were to be no battles? Why have they put their hand to the plough if they are not to plough to the end of the furrow and often to wipe the sweat from their face through their hard toil? Why enlist, young men, if you are not needed to fight? What is the good of a fair-weather soldier, one who stays at home to live at the public expense?

No! Let the soldier be ready when war comes; let him expect the conflict as a part and necessary consequence of his profession. But be armed with faith, it receives the blows. The poor shield is knocked and hammered and battered like a lighthouse exposed in the time of storm; blow after blow comes rattling upon it, and though it turns death aside yet the shield is compelled itself to bear the cut and the thrust. So must our faith do this – it must be cut at, it must bear the blows.

On, champion, on! In the name of Him who is with you. No lance can pierce that shield; no sword shall ever be able to cut through it; it shall preserve you in all battle and in all strife; you shall bring it home yourself, through it you shall be more than conqueror. Faith, then, is like a shield, because it has to bear the blows.

### **Thirdly, faith is like a shield, because it must be strong.**

A man who has some cardboard shield may lift it up against his foe, the sword will go through it and reach his heart. He who would use a shield must take care that it is a shield of proof.

You will say, how then are we to know whether our faith is the right faith, and our shield a strong one? One test of it is, it must be all of one piece. A shield that is made of three or four pieces in this case will be of no use. So your faith must be all of one piece, it must be faith in the finished work of Christ; you must have no confidence in yourself or in any man, but rest wholly and entirely upon Christ, or else your shield will be of no use.

Then your faith must be of heaven's forging or your shield will certainly fail you; you must have the faith of God's elect which is the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit who works it in the soul of man.

Then you must see to it that your faith rests only upon truth, for if there is any error or false notion in the fashioning of it, that shall be a joint in it which the spear

can pierce.

You must take care that your faith is agreeable to God's Word, that you depend upon true and real promises, upon the sure word of testimony and not upon the fictions and fancies and dreams of men.

And above all, you must mind that your faith is fixed in the person of Christ, for nothing except a faith in Christ's divine person as "over all, God blessed for ever (Romans 9:5)," and in His proper manhood when as the Lamb of God's Passover He was sacrificed for us – no other faith will be able to stand against the tremendous shocks and the innumerable attacks which you must receive in the great battle of spiritual life. Look to your shield.

### **Faith is also like a shield because it is of no use except it is well handled.**

A shield needs handling, and so does faith. He was a silly soldier who, when he went into battle, said he had a shield but it was at home. So there are some silly believers who have a faith, but they do not have it with them when they need it. They have it with them when there are no enemies. When all goes well with them, then they can believe, but just when the pinch comes then their faith fails.

## *The sacred art of handling the shield*

Now there is a sacred art in being able to handle the shield of faith. Let me explain to you how that can be. You will handle it well if you are able to quote the promises of God against the attacks of your enemy.

The devil said, "One day you shall be poor and starve." "No," said the believer, handling his shield well, "He has said, 'I will never leave you, nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5);' " "bread shall be given to you and your water shall be certain (Isaiah 33:16)."

"Indeed," Satan said, "but you will one day fall by the hand of the enemy." "No," faith said, "for I am persuaded that He who has begun a good work in me will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6)."

"Indeed," Satan said, "but the slander of the enemy will overturn you." "No," faith said, "He makes the wrath of man to praise Him; remainder of wrath He restrains (Psalm 76:10)."

"Indeed," Satan said, as he shot another arrow, "you are weak." "Yes," faith said, handling his shield, "but, 'my strength is

made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore I will rather glory in my infirmities, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Corinthians 12:9)."

"Indeed," Satan said, "but your sin is great." "Yes," faith said, quoting the promise, "but He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God by Him (Hebrews 7:25)."

"But," said the enemy again, drawing his sword and making a tremendous thrust, "God has cast you off." "No," faith said, "He hates putting away, He does not cast off His people, neither does He forsake His heritage (Psalm 94:14)."

"But I will have you, after all," Satan said. "No," faith said, "He has said, 'I give to My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand (John 10:28).'"


This is what I call handling the shield.

"**Above all**, taking the shield of faith." If you sent a servant upon an errand, and you said to him, "Get so-and-so, and so-and-so, and so-and-so, but *above all* now see to such-and-such a thing," he would not understand that he ought to neglect anything, but he would realise there was some extra importance attached to one part of his mission. So let it be with us.

Above all, as the most important we are to see to it that our faith is right, that it is true faith, and that it covers all our virtues from attack.

You know in the old Greek fights the aim of the enemy was to get near enough to push aside the shield, and then to stab under the armour. And that is what Satan wants to do. If he can knock aside the shield and get under it, then he can stab us mortally.

Take care of your shield. Do not live in perpetual unbelief. Do not be always cast down. Pray to your God until you can say – "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him (1 Timothy 1:12)."

Oh! the old saints were not always doubting. Solomon said, "My Beloved is mine and I am His." David said, "Say to my soul, I am your salvation... the Lord is my salvation... the Lord is my Shepherd." Job too could say, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Paul could speak very confidently in very many places. And why should we be content to say, "I hope, I trust," – when they said they *knew*, and were *persuaded* – all was well between God and their souls? Let it be so with us. 

by A.W. Tozer

*"Nicodemus answered and said to him, How can these things be (John 3:9)?"*

**T**HE account of Nicodemus seeking out our Lord Jesus Christ prior to His death and resurrection is of great importance in the realm of the Christian faith.

Out of the billions of people who have lived in the world, out of the millions of Jews who have lived in the world, and out of the tens of thousands who were part of the tradition of the Pharisees, the Holy Spirit has seen fit to let a penetrating pencil of light fall upon the head of one man – Nicodemus, the Pharisee of Israel.

The Holy Spirit of God is rigidly economical in the use of words in the divine revelation. Through John, the Holy Spirit has devoted a total of 21 verses to this story of Nicodemus visiting Jesus; we learn what he said to Christ and what Christ said to him.

### A story of great importance

This, without any other consideration, would lead us to believe that this is a story of great importance. If it were not important, God would never have put it in the record at all.

Therefore, we want to approach it respectfully, reverently, and with an inquiring mind.

Let us consider this man Nicodemus within the context of his own day and time. He was a Pharisee. He was a member of the strictest sect in the religious life of Israel. He was a fundamentalist *par excellence*, following Judaism in its strictest and straightest interpretations of the letter of the law.

Also, we are made aware that Nicodemus was a ruler in Israel, being one of the 70 members of the powerful Sanhedrin, a tribunal not quite equivalent to our own Supreme Court, but very much like it, with some executive as well as judicial authority.

Members of the Sanhedrin were from the privileged families of Israel. The high priest was the president. Former high priests still living were members. Some elders and legal assessors were members, along with powerful scribes of the day.

The Bible record plainly tells us that only one of the seventy members of the Sanhedrin at that time bothered to seek an interview with Jesus of Nazareth, and that was Nicodemus. He crossed over the great gulf that separated them in that day.



# The essence

Does this tell us anything about the essence of faith?

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, evidently feeling his way. He surely knew something about what it would cost him to show any serious interest in the person or the ministry of this Jesus of Nazareth.

He knew that the disciples of Jesus had abandoned all, left all behind. Their faith in His cause did not come without costing each of them something.

In our day, there is a tendency for enthusiastic Christian promoters to teach that the essence of faith is this: "Come to Jesus – it will cost you nothing! The price has all been paid – *it will cost you nothing!*"

Brethren, that is a dangerous half-truth. There is always a price connected with salvation and with discipleship.

But some will say: "Isn't that what the missionaries teach all around the world? Don't they say, 'Come! Everything is free. Jesus paid it all?'"

God's grace is free, no doubt about that. No one in the wide world can make any human payment towards the plea of salvation or the forgiveness of sins.

But I know the missionaries well enough to know that they would never go to people anywhere in the world and simply teach: "You do not have to do a thing. Your faith in Jesus Christ will never cost you anything."

I have been receiving a magazine in the mail – someone sends it to me in a plain wrapper with no return address. I wish he

or she would stop sending it.

The man who edits this paper also preaches on the radio and the philosophy he spreads is this: "Everybody in the world has faith. All you have to do is turn your faith loose in the right direction. Turn it towards Christ and everything is all fixed up!"

Now, that is truly a misconception of what the Bible says about man and about God and about faith. It is a misconception fostered by the devil himself.

The Apostle Paul told believers plainly and clearly that "not everyone has faith."

Actually, faith is a rare plant. Faith is not a plant that grows everywhere by the way. It is not a common plant that belongs to everyone. Faith is a rare and wonderful plant that lives and grows only in the penitent soul.

The teaching that everyone has faith and all you have to do is use it is simply a form of humanism in the guise of Christianity. I warn you that any faith that belongs to everybody is a humanistic faith and it is not the faith that saves. It is not that faith which is a gift of God to a broken heart.

I think it must be apparent to us that Nicodemus, a ruler in Israel, would have known what it might cost him to inquire of Jesus about the things of faith and of God's plan and of eternal life. He was feeling his way.

Some scholars believe that this Nicodemus was Nicodemus Ben Gorian, a brother of the celebrated Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus. This Nicodemus was said to be one of the three richest men in Jerusalem at that time.

Whether history or legend, the story passed





# voice of faith

down through the centuries tells us that the daughter of Nicodemus Ben Gorian was reduced to picking up corn or grain off the streets of Jerusalem, where it had been thrown from the feed bags of horses as they travelled down the street. She picked up what she could in order to roast it and have something to eat.

Why was the daughter of one of Jerusalem's most wealthy men reduced to such a state of hunger?

The historians suggest at least that when Nicodemus finally threw in his lot with Jesus the Christ, he was stripped by the ruling society of all that he had. His property was confiscated and he was turned out as if he were the scum of the earth.

It is plain enough that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night – and that has resulted in a great deal of abuse being heaped on his memory throughout the centuries. But he came feeling his way. He came inquiring. He came asking questions. From our vantage point in time, we believe that he was spiritually sensitive and that he was seeking answers about the things of God which he himself did not know.

Let me tell you what his coming to Jesus suggests to me. It suggests that the soul of man is too nobly conceived and too highly born and too mighty and mysterious a universe in itself ever to be satisfied with anything less than Jesus the Christ, the eternal Son of God.

His coming to Jesus suggests that only Jesus Christ is enough; only in Jesus Christ are there adequate answers to the questions men have always asked about God and eternity, of life, forgiveness and blessing.

I can stand and assure you without any embarrassment that no matter who you are, either now or later in your life or at death or in the world to come, you will find that only Jesus Christ is enough.

Now, as far as we know, of the total of 70 ruling men in the Sanhedrin at the time we are speaking of, only one crossed over and came to Jesus asking questions about eternal life and the kingdom of God.

Why was Nicodemus that one? He was separated from Jesus Christ by the same wide gulf of religious tradition and practice that separated Jesus from the other 69 rulers in Israel.

Nicodemus was in a high ruling position and Jesus was a common carpenter turned teacher.

By their very nature, men of the Sanhedrin majored in religious bigotry while Jesus surely was anything but a straight-laced bigot.

Beside the pride of high position, Nicodemus would have inherited the sharp prejudice that every educated Jewish member of the ruling Sanhedrin would feel for lowly carpenters and unschooled fishermen.

Why would Nicodemus knowingly seek to cross that gulf?

What mysterious power could lay hold of the mind and conscience of the man Nicodemus and none of the other 69?

Could it be that as a man, he was simply more sensitive to the voice of God and the inner strivings of God in his being?

There is something called the prevenient grace of God – that mysterious, secret working of God in the souls of men; turning them toward Himself, influencing them toward Himself and magnetically attracting them to Himself.

It is surely true that if it were not for the prevenient work that God does within the hearts of men and women there could never be a conversion. So I wonder if this man Nicodemus was simply more sensitive to this operation of God than the other 69.

Oh, you think that God picked out Nicodemus, selected him alone and let the other 69 go?

## Sensitive to His voice

No one, not even in 1 000 years of jumping up and down on the family Bible, could ever make me believe that God showed anything like partiality. The heart of God that yearned over Nicodemus yearned over the rest of those men in the Sanhedrin.

But only Nicodemus came – and I think it was because he was more sensitive to God's voice and God's Spirit.

We have the same conditions in our churches today. I am talking to some of you right now who have been reared in Christian homes. You have been brought up in the Sunday school. You cut your first baby tooth on the back of a Bible when your mother was not watching.

Still, to this day, you are not right with God. Some of you have made a kind of halfway profession but you have never been able to delight yourself in the Lord. The reason is that you lack sensitivity to the voice of God and you could not care less about the will of God. If the voice and the concern of the Spirit of God does not move something within your own spirit every day, you are not going to be much of a Christian – if you are a Christian at all!

I think Nicodemus had a sensitivity within his own spirit that caused him to move and to act and to inquire. I think he must have been more receptive to spiritual impulses than other leaders among the Jews in their day.

Consider this man: although he was a strict Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, cursed we might say with the pride of high position and religious prejudice and bigotry, he still revealed a receptivity to spiritual impulses.

Brethren, I don't mind telling you that I want to keep that kind of spiritual receptivity alive within my own soul.

I would rather lose a leg and hobble along



# The essence of faith

*Continued...*

throughout the rest of my life than to lose my sensitivity to God and to His voice and to spiritual things. Oh, I want to keep that within me, within my soul!

I believe something else about this man Nicodemus: he must have possessed a basic humility that others did not have.

I caution you that there are many people among us who are not ever going to get right with God, and the reason is that they simply will not humble themselves. Ever!

Some cannot even humble themselves enough to go to church where the preaching is plain and the gospel is narrow. We know about that here – in this particular church. We have a good reputation – we pay our bills on time and we help people who are in need, and not many go to jail from this church.

But in spite of that, many on the outside think we are eccentric, a little bit off centre, too dogmatic where the things of God are concerned. You know, it takes some humility to cast in your lot with people who are serious enough about spiritual priorities that it causes those on the outside to feel that we must be in need of psychiatric help.

Well, I remind you that our Lord Jesus had that kind of a crowd around Him all the time. He was considered to be a very strange kind of man in His time – so those who gave up all to follow Him were also thought to be very strange.

I think Nicodemus must have had some gracious sense of humility to come to Jesus.

Actually, pride is an awesome quality in mankind; not only in Jesus' day but in ours as well.

As an example, I heard a newscast in which one of India's highest officials was trying to apologise to the world about an international report that Christian missionaries were being hindered in their work in India.

"I want you to know that the report is not true," he said. "We are not hindering the propagation of the Christian doctrine



in India. In fact, we understand that there have actually been a few people of low caste who have believed the Christian teaching."

Oh, the rising pride that must have been in that official's voice as he made his statement. The helpless and the hopeless in the lowest caste of his country – he was not going to get in their way if they wanted to believe in Jesus Christ.

The bigotry of human pride – you will find it everywhere in the world. It feasts on almost anything that will make it fat!

Against this background of the visit by Nicodemus, I would like to consider with you the example of several others who came to Jesus from various levels of life and culture.

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## The model man

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There was the rich young ruler – and everyone who has read the Bible will remember him, for he is considered by so many to have been an example of the model man.

He had four things going for him, things that everyone might want to emulate and possess. He had wealth and morality, position and youth.

I can just hear the mothers in Israel holding up this man as an example for their own children: "If you want to be like someone in particular, choose this rich young fellow as your example!"

In the minds of most people, they are sure they would be enjoying peace of mind if only they were young, wealthy, of high position and living with good moral standards.

But when this young ruler came to Jesus, his very first question gave the clue to his own dissatisfaction in life: "What *good*

thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life (Matthew 19:16)?"

He was young but he knew that he looked forward to a day when he would be withered and palsied and shaking with age, and that ultimately he would lie down stiffly on the bed from which he would never rise again.

He knew also that his wealth could not help him then. He knew that he would lose his position and his place would be filled by another. Even his morality was not sufficient answer for the life to come.

He realised that he had to discover and find out about something with eternity in it.

Brethren, let me say that until we are really converted to Christ and the holiness of Christ enters our hearts and lives, we are all part and parcel of a mighty deception: we are called upon to pretend that we can have peace of mind within and that we can be relatively happy and make a big success of our human lives if we have youth and wealth and morality and high position.

In that sense of what is going on all around us, David never had to apologise for writing that "all men are liars (Psalm 116:11)."

This whole human concept of success and happiness and inner peace based upon who we are and what we have is completely false, just as the rich young ruler found out.

The one important word is missing from it all, and that is the word eternal.

That young ruler knew, just as we all know, that there is not a person alive who has eternal youth, or eternal wealth; who has an eternal righteousness or an everlasting position or dominion.

The word eternal is not there. The rich young ruler found that within the will God had given him, he had to make a choice between things that pass away and those things that are of eternal value.

Think with me also of the Ethiopian chancellor whose story is in the 8th chapter of Acts.

Notice the things he could offer on the human side. He had great authority, plenty of prestige and an acquired religion. He had power and authority because of his position under the queen of Ethiopia. He was a Jewish proselyte, having gone through the religious rites that brought him into the Jewish religion.

He had come to Jerusalem to take part in one of the religious festivals of his new-found religion.

But he was a discriminating man, a



thoughtful man, an unfulfilled man.

The swinging of the censers in ritual, the chanting of the priests, the majesty of the forms of worship – none of these made his own heart sing, none of these brought him to the point of rejoicing and gladness.

But when the evangelist Philip had preached Jesus to him, when he had met Jesus through active and saving faith, the Bible record tells us that he went on his way rejoicing.

Only Jesus, the Christ, the eternal Son of God, is enough. Man has to face up to the fact that religion is not enough – and it never will be.

Oh, it is amazing how many things religious people want to do to you. They can start when you are eight days old with circumcision and end up with the last rites when you are 108 years old – and all of that time they will be rubbing something on you, or putting something around your neck, or making you eat something or insisting that you should not eat something.

They will manipulate you, maul you, and sweetly massage your soul all the time – and when it is all done you are just what you were. You are just a decorated and massaged sinner – a sinner who did not eat meat or on the other hand, a sinner who did eat fish.

When religion has done all it can, you are still a sinner who either went to the temple or did not go to the temple. If you attended church you are still a sinner who attended church. If you did not go to church you are still a sinner who did not go to church.

Measured in any direction and approached from any point of view, we are still sinners if all we have is that which religion has offered and tried to do for us. Religion can put us on the roll and educate us and train us and instruct us and discipline us; and when it is all over there is still something within our being that cries, “Eternity is in my heart and I have not found anything to satisfy it.”

So, you will be searching and searching forever until you find Christ, for only Christ is enough to satisfy the eternal longing in our souls.

Now think with me, too, of Lydia, in Acts, chapter 16.

Lydia was a career woman in her own right. I would say she was born out of due time, long before there were laws and amendments to set women free.

I have to tell the women of our day that we have set them free to be just as bad as the men – and just as miserable! We have set them free to curse and swear and tell dirty stories and smoke cigarettes. We

have made them free to set their own morals, to make nasty political speeches and, of course, to vote as blindly as men do.

God knows that I cannot do anything about it, ladies. You just look at me and shrug; push past me and take my seat in the bus!

Well, Lydia was a woman who surely thought she had found freedom and satisfaction in that era when they did not count women at all; they just counted the men. She was a seller of purple. She travelled in the nations of that day. She should have been the happiest woman in all of Asia Minor.

In the city of Philippi, by the riverside where some women met on the Sabbath to pray, Lydia heard the Apostle Paul tell of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the record shows that the Lord opened her heart. She gladly put her faith in Christ and was baptised.

She said humbly to Paul: “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there (Acts 16:15).”

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## They lacked the word eternal

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That was Lydia. She had found that her career and her freedom and her abilities lacked the word eternal. Now she had found the answer and the only answer in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, the Saviour.

Nathanael came to Jesus and he was an interesting case. The Bible record does not tell us too much about him – but I think it could well be said that he was a fellow full of prejudice like any other man on the street.

When Philip told him that the disciples had found the Messiah of whom the Old Testament had spoken, Nathanael gave his cynical reply: “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth (John 1:46)?”

You see, Nathanael was a plain and simple man living from day to day, but he lived under the shadow of his humanness and he just could not get the sun to come out.

But when he came to Jesus and found that Jesus already knew him better than he knew himself, he was suddenly in the radiant sunlight and he confessed to Jesus, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel (1:49).”

Truly, the way of man is not in himself, and that is what the Holy Spirit has said. Only Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, is enough.

We have asked why it was only Nicodemus who came. We could ask why Lydia’s

heart responded while many other women of her day felt no response to Christ’s claims. Why did Nathanael respond to the appeal of Jesus on that day when so many others were either indifferent or filled with hatred?

I do believe in that secret and mysterious working of God in the human breast, deep within the beings of men and women.

I think the same questions could be raised of my testimony of finding the forgiving and converting grace of God in the Saviour, Jesus Christ.


There was something in the line from which I came that was almost antireligion. Morality to a certain level – but not religious. Attitudes that were cold, earthy, profane. This I must say of both my father and my mother. High human standards, morality – but completely without any thought of God. God might as well not have existed. My parents appeared to be without a spark of desire after God.

Can you tell me why, then, at the age of 17, as a boy surrounded by unbelief, 100 percent, I could find my way to my mother’s attic, kneel on my knees and give my heart and life in committal to Jesus Christ? Can you tell me how I could be thoroughly and completely converted without help from anyone on the outside? In my case when I came in faith to Jesus Christ there was not a single human being to help. There was nobody with a marked New Testament showing me how easy it is. There was no friend placing an arm over my shoulder to pray beside me.

I cannot answer the questions of “Why?” I can only testify that my conversion to Jesus Christ was as real as any man’s conversion has ever been. You tell me why. I do not know why. I can only say that I know there is such a thing as the secret working of God in the human being who has a sensitivity to hear the call of God.

Oh, man – if you feel the tug of God in your breast, what a happy man you should be. What a marvellous and mysterious privilege if you feel the inner tug of God in your bosom and hear the secret whisper that not many men hear; to be on God’s prospect list, to be on God’s active list for inner working.

My fellow man, do something about it. Of everyone in your family, your workplace, perhaps you are the only one who that feels that tug. God yearns over them all, but they do not listen. They will not hear and they kill it within them.

If it is still alive and tugging at your heart, thank God, and follow the light – “Come every soul by sin oppressed, there’s mercy with the Lord.” 



# With God all things are possible

by A. B. Simpson

**P**RAY for the impossible! These words belong to the language of faith and the kingdom of heaven.

God loves hard things. God combines the little and the great. It is His glory to treat the hardest and mightiest things as mere trifles.

When promising one of His greatest miracles, through the ancient prophet, He added, "This is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord (2 Kings. 3:18)..."

When Jesus was about to heal and save the poor paralytic His words were very strange and striking, "Which is easier (Mark 2:9)?" But man would have said, "which is harder?" But the greatest thing was very easy for Him.

All God's greatest acts have been things impossible for any but God. Creation was making a universe out of nothing. Redemption was overcoming a difficulty that was absolutely impossible for any human wisdom or power, to be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly.

Of the salvation of the rich, Christ Himself says, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:16-26)." The sanctification of an unholy soul is simply impossible. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing? Not one (Job 14:4)."

The promise to Abraham, the father of believers, was something impossible. It was when his body was as good as dead – that God called him to believe in the birth of a son, and then fulfilled that promise by giving him Isaac, when he was past age (Hebrews 11:8-12).

Israel's deliverance did not come until they had reached the lowest depths of despair and all human hope was dead. God's hour is the impossible, and God's opportunity is man's emergency. The support of Israel, as a nation in the wilderness for half a century, was a miracle of Providence.

David could not have his kingdom until he was reduced to such a helpless condition that

it had to be a miracle of divine power.

Jehoshaphat's mightiest victory came in the hour when baffled, perplexed and helpless, he could only say, "We have no might against this great company... neither know we what to do: but our eyes are on You (2 Chronicles 20:12)."

Hezekiah's healing came after even God had declared that he must die and could not live (2 Kings. 20:1-6).

Daniel's wonderful deliverance was accomplished after Darius had laboured till the going down of the sun to find some way of escape for him, and had found it impossible (Daniel 6:12-22).

Esther was used of God to save her people even after the decree of doom had gone forth irrevocably from the king, and even he could not take it back (Esther 9:25-32).

## ***Mightiest promise***

Jeremiah's mightiest promise came to him when he was shut up in the inner court of the prison, and the Chaldeans were thundering at the gates of the city, and all earthly hope was cut off. Then it was that God made him step out before the people and perform the mightiest act of faith of his whole life – by purchasing the field in Anathoth, as the pledge of the restoration of the land (Jeremiah 32:1-15).

One of Christ's sweetest parables is the story of the friend at night, the hour of service past, the house closed, the family in bed, the time too late for any reasonable hope of help, but it was then that the friend proved himself a friend indeed, and rose and gave him as much as he needed (Luke 11:1-13).

It was when Paul reached a physical condition of helplessness and self-despair and having the sentence of death in himself – that he was able to rise to the very height of faith and victory, and write that wonderful passage: "We would not... have you ignorant of our


trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead: who delivers us from so great a death, and does deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us (2 Corinthians 1:8-10)."

Surely, with these examples before us, we need not fear to pray for the impossible; to claim our Master's glorious promise, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes (Mark 9:23)." And again, "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you (Matthew 17:20; also 21:21)."

Beloved, have you some loved one or friend beyond the reach of all human help? Pray for the impossible! Have you a temptation that you have been unable to overcome and that has for many a year baffled, defeated, and trampled you in the dust? Pray for the impossible!

Have you a physical infirmity beyond the reach of human skill, threatening your life and destroying your usefulness? Pray for the impossible! Have you trials and difficulties in your pathway – too hard for you and too difficult for any human power to remove? Nothing is too hard for God, pray for the impossible (Matthew 19:26)!

Have you work you long to do for God? Are your resources cramped? Is your strength insufficient? Does it seem too vast for even the highest faith and the strongest hand? God loves a hard work and chooses the weak things to confound the mighty (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). Pray for the impossible – and you yet shall sing with a joyful heart:

*"Nothing is too hard for Jesus,  
No man can work like Him."* 



# The patience of faith

by C. Judd Montgomery

*"For you have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise (Hebrews 10:36)."*

*"And so, after he had patiently endured, Abraham obtained the promise (Hebrews 6:15)."*

**A PECULIAR blessing is pronounced in the Bible upon those who in loving patience wait upon God for the fulfilment of His promises. We all know how necessary is the faith which overcomes the world.**

We pray, it may be, in great faith, and then because God tries that faith, to work His beautiful patience in our souls, then we straightway murmur and allow our faith to waver.

Through faith and patience the saints of old inherited the promise, and we are exhorted to be "followers of them (Hebrews 6:12)." Abraham's great faith, as recorded in the Scriptures, is a marvel to our doubting hearts, but have we thought much about the wondrous *patience* of Abraham's faith? After he had patiently endured he obtained the fulfilment of the promise.

David, the man after God's own heart, was blessedly taught by God's Spirit this waiting upon the Lord. Again and again does he declare his patient trustfulness in the Rock of his salvation, in words like these:

"Truly my soul waits (literally is silent) upon God: from Him comes my salva-

tion... My soul, wait only upon God; for my expectation is from Him (Psalm 62:1&5)."

"Our soul waits (literally waits earnestly) for the Lord: He is our help and our shield (Psalm 33:20).

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word do I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning (Psalm 130:5&6)."

"I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart: wait, I say, on the Lord (Psalm 27:13&14)."

"I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry (Psalm 40:1)."

There are many weary souls whose prayers have seemed to return unheeded from the throne of God, whose hearts are sick with hope deferred, and who are almost ready to say, like the discouraged King of Israel, "Why should I wait for the Lord any longer (2 Kings 6:33)?"

Will you not, then, dear disheartened ones, cease your impatient struggles, and having presented your petitions in Jesus' name, rest in the sweet patience of faith, and wait in calm expectation before the Mercy Seat?

The trying of your faith works patience, and thus the very waiting time is devel-

oping precious fruit to the glory of the Father.

To those who in sickness and weakness of body are looking for the "goodness of the Lord in the land of the living," let the reminder come just now with peace and power: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

And not only shall their former strength return, but through the Spirit of God quickening their mortal bodies, they shall experience a fullness of life which "shall mount up with wings as eagles" and which shall enable them to "run and not be weary" and to "walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31)."

Nor is this restful waiting upon God for the manifest fulfilment of His promise at all inconsistent with that active faith which declares the work already accomplished by the finished work of Christ.

While we are exhorted to the patience of faith, we are warned against the slothfulness of unbelief. "Do not be slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:12)."

Like one of God's warriors of old, we may say in this good fight of faith, "Help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this great multitude (2 Chronicles 14:11)."

"And therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious to you... blessed are all they that wait for Him (Isaiah 30:18)."





# Faith unlocks the treasures of heaven

by D. L. Moody

**WE** are not told that Jesus ever taught His disciples how to preach, but He taught them how to pray. He wanted them to have power with God; then He knew they would have power with man.

In James we read: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God... and it shall be given him; but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering (James 1:5&6)." So faith is the golden key that unlocks the treasures of heaven.

It was the shield that David took when he met Goliath on the field; he believed that God was going to deliver the Philistine into his hands.

Someone has said that faith could lead Christ about anywhere; wherever He found it He honoured it. Unbelief sees something in God's hand, and says, "I cannot get it." Faith sees it, and says, "I will have it."

The new life begins with faith; then we have only to go on building on that foundation. "I say to you, Whatever you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them (Mark 11:24)." But bear in mind, we must be in earnest when we go to God.

Bishop Hall, in a well-known extract, thus puts the point of earnestness in its relation to the prayer of faith:

"An arrow, if it be drawn up but a little way, goes not far; but, if it be pulled up to the head, flies swiftly and pierces deep. Thus prayer, if it be only dribbled forth from careless lips, falls at our feet. It is the strength of utterance and strong desire which sends it to heaven, and makes it pierce the clouds.

"It is not the arithmetic of our prayers, how many they are; nor the rhetoric of our prayers, how eloquent they be; nor the geometry of our prayers, how long they

be; nor the music of our prayers, how sweet our voice may be; nor the logic of our prayers, how argumentative they may be; nor the method of our prayers, how orderly they may be; nor even the divinity of our prayers, how good the doctrine may be – which God cares for.

"He looks not for the horny knees which James is said to have had through the diligence of prayer. We might be like Bartholomew, who is said to have had a hundred prayers for the morning, and as many for the evening, and all might be of no avail. Fervency of spirit is that which avails much."

## *The moving sense of it*

Archbishop Leighton says: "It is not the gilded paper and good writing of a petition that prevails with a king, but the moving sense of it. And to that King who discerns the heart, heart-sense is the sense of all, and that which He only regards. He listens to hear what that speaks, and takes all as nothing where that is silent. All other excellence in prayer is but the outside and fashion of it. This is the life of it."

Brooks says: "As a painted fire is no fire; so a cold prayer is no prayer. In a painted fire there is no heat; so in a cold prayer there is no heat, no warmth, no omnipotency, no devotion, no blessing. Cold prayers are as arrows without heads, as swords without edges, as birds without wings; they pierce not, they cut not, they fly not up to heaven.

Cold prayers always freeze before they get to heaven. Oh that Christians would chide themselves out of their cold prayers, and chide themselves into a better and warmer frame of spirit, when they make their supplications to the Lord!"

Take the case of the Syrophenician woman (see Matthew 15:21-28). When she called to the Master, it seemed for a time as if He were deaf to her request. The disciples wanted her to be sent away. Although they were with Christ for three years, and sat at His feet, yet they did not know how full of grace His heart was.

Think of Christ sending away a poor sinner who had come to Him for mercy! Can you conceive such a thing? Never once did it occur. This poor woman put herself in the place of her child. "Lord, help me!" she said. I think when we get so far as that in the earnest desire to have our friends blessed – when we put ourselves in their place – God will soon hear our prayer.

I remember, a number of years ago at a meeting, I asked all those who wished to be prayed for to come forward and kneel or take seats in front. Among those who came was a woman. I thought by her looks that she must be a Christian, but she knelt down with the others.

I said: "You are a Christian, are you not?" She said she had been one for so many years. "Did you understand the invitation? I asked those only who wanted to





become Christians.” I shall never forget the look on her face as she replied, “I have a son who has gone far away; I thought I would take his place today, and see if God would not bless him.” Thank God for such a mother as that!

The Syrophenician woman did the same thing – “Lord, help me!” It was a short prayer, but it went right to the heart of the Son of God. He tried her faith, however. He said: “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and cast it to dogs.” She replied: “Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” Jesus responded: “O woman, great is thy faith!”

## ***He gave all she asked for***

What a tribute He paid to her! Her story will never be forgotten as long as the church is on the earth. He honoured her faith, and gave her all she asked for.

Everyone can say, “Lord, help me!” We all need help. As Christians, we need more grace, more love, more purity of life, more righteousness. Then let us make this prayer today. I want God to help me to preach better and to live better, to be more like the Son of God. The golden chains of faith link us right to the throne of God, and the grace of heaven flows down into our souls.

I do not know whether that woman was a great sinner; still, the Lord heard her cry. It may be that up to this hour you have been living in sin; but if you will cry, “Lord, help me!” He will answer your prayer, if it is an honest one. Very often when we cry to God we do not really mean anything.

You mothers understand that. Your children have two voices. When they ask you for anything, you can soon tell if the cry is a make-believe one or not. If it is, you do not give any heed to it; but if it is a real cry for help, how quickly you respond!

The cry of distress always brings relief. Your child is playing around, and says, “Mamma, I want some bread,” but goes on playing. You know that he is not very hungry; so you let him alone. But, by and by, the child drops the toys, and comes tugging at your dress. “Mamma, I am so hungry!” Then you know that the cry is a real one; you soon go to the pantry, and get some bread.

When we are in earnest for the bread of heaven, we will get it. This woman was terribly in earnest; therefore, her petition was answered.

Sometimes, when your child talks, your friends cannot understand what he says; but the mother understands very well. So

if our prayer comes right from the heart, God understands our language.

It is a delusion of the devil to think we cannot pray. We can, if we really want anything. It is not the most beautiful or the most eloquent language that brings down the answer; it is the cry that goes up from a burdened heart. When this poor Gentile woman cried out, “Lord, help me!” the cry flashed over the divine wires and the blessing came.

So you can pray if you will; it is the desire, the wish of the heart, that God delights to hear and to answer.


Then we must expect to receive a blessing. When the centurion wanted Christ to heal his servant, he thought he was not worthy to go and ask the Lord himself, so he sent his friends to make the petition (see Luke 7:2-10). He sent out messengers to meet the Master, and say, “Do not trouble Yourself to come; all You have to do is speak the word, and the disease will go.”

Jesus said to the Jews, “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.” He marvelled at the faith of this centurion;

it pleased Him, so that He healed the servant then and there. Faith brought the answer.

In John 4:46-53 we read of a nobleman whose child was sick. The father fell on his knees before the Master, and said, “Come down, before my child die.” Here you have both earnestness and faith; and the Lord answered the prayer at once. The nobleman’s son began to mend that very hour. Christ honoured the man’s faith.

In his case, there was nothing to rest upon but the bare word of Christ, but this was enough. It is well to bear always in mind that the object of faith is not the creature, but the Creator; not the instrument, but the Hand that wields it.

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Verily I say to you, If you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if you shall say to this mountain, “Be removed, and cast into the sea,” it shall be done. And all things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive (Matthew 21:21&22).’” 

# **TRUSTING IN TIME OF TEMPEST**

*by Alexander Carson*

*“And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea (Matthew 8:24)...”*

**WHAT! Is the ship which carried Jesus overtaken in a storm? If there is a Providence, might we not expect that when the Son of God was sailing, the sea should be quiet? Shall the rude winds heave the waves on high, or assail the ship which carried the Creator? Would not human wisdom forbid every rude blast, and command gentle breezes to fill the sails?**


Not so in the wisdom of Divine Providence. Jesus goes aboard, and the howling tempest is let loose: the ship reels, and the yawning abyss threatens to overwhelm all in ruin.

*“Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing!’ But He said to them, ‘Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?’ Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marvelled, saying, ‘Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him (Matthew 8:23-27)?’”*

And this was a wise Providence. It glorified the Son of God by giving Him an opportunity of manifesting Himself as the Lord of the seas and of the winds. “Peace, be still,” said the Lord, and the sea was as smooth as a pail of milk. This was the same power that spoke the world into existence. This Providence was also for the good of the disciples. It increased their faith in the Son of God.

When the Lord’s people sail, they should not fanatically suppose that Providence will certainly give them fine weather. If the Son of God experienced a storm, His people cannot plead exemption. But they have ground to pray for a prosperous voyage, and reason to expect that Providence will give it, if Divine wisdom has no purpose to serve by a tempest.

The Lord does not put His people to trial without necessity: if He presents dangers before their eyes, it is to stir them to call on Him, and trust in His power and love.

Jesus rebukes the fears of the disciples. Where was their faith? Was not Jesus at hand? And is not Jesus always at hand with His people? Let them, then, with confidence call on Him, “Lord, save us!” 

# He practiced faith

*"Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed (Psalm 37:3)."*

*In this article, Dr F. Howard Taylor, son of J. Hudson Taylor, gives an account of the faith and work of George Duncan who served as a missionary with China Inland Mission under the direction of Hudson Taylor. Dr Taylor prefaces the story with an overview of his father's confidence and reliance upon the faithfulness of God.*

**A**FTER J. Hudson Taylor's conversion at 17, and when he had yielded himself utterly to God – to do what He chose, to go where He pleased – he began at once to practice faith.

And that was how a man naturally weak and even timid became a spiritual athlete, a giant of faith.

No athlete ever grows strong by just thinking about it. He must exercise; and he must subordinate other things to his ambition, if he would succeed. So, no Christian ever grows strong in faith by just thinking or talking about it.

He must practice faith.

At the great crisis of his life 16 years later, when God wanted my father to set about the evangelisation of inland China, he was ready. And he discovered just then that our Lord's meaning of Mark 11:22 was "Hold fast the faithfulness of God," in the sense of count on, reckon on, His faithfulness.

It was a new and wonderful light to him on the meaning of faith in God. It was not so much the greatness of his personal faith that mattered, if he had faith at all, so much as the greatness of God, His dependability, His faithfulness.

From that day on my father banked on God's faithfulness. And never did he present an inspired promise at the bank of heaven, in the name of the Lord Jesus, without getting what he was authorised to claim. Practicing faith in Him who remains faithful, he was never put to shame.

In 1867, a young missionary named George Duncan attempted what might well have been regarded as impossible. He was a tall, wiry Scotsman. He had been in China only a year, and in those days a mission station was seldom opened without a riot. But he felt called to open Nanking, even then one of the greatest cities in China, and later its capital.

How could a man with little of the lan-



guage, and little experience, hope to succeed in opening Nanking? He consulted the director of the Mission, my father, about the matter – saying that he felt God had been laying it on his heart.

After some hesitation and very definite prayer, he was encouraged to go forward. A couple of weeks' journey in a houseboat brought him to his destination, and there he was at last, alone with a heathen servant, in that great, proud, ancient city.

The authorities were surprised to hear a foreigner had come, and determined to make it impossible for him to stay. They invited him to the city hall, entertained him with hospitality and Oriental courtesy, while police officers were hurrying all over the city warning innkeepers that if they dared to harbour the foreigner their inns would be razed to the ground and they themselves cast into jail.

As the day wore on, Duncan bade his civic hosts farewell, and set out to find a lodging. But hotel after hotel seemed to be full. No room, not even a bed, was to be had. At length, as twilight was deepening into dusk, he found himself at the central "Drum Tower."

Accosting the Buddhist priest in charge,



he said he was a stranger in their "honourable city," would it be convenient for him to stay the night in the tower – of course for a consideration. No civic threat had come to the priest, and he was glad to make an honest penny.

Duncan's bedroom on the second story was open to the four winds – there was no difficulty about ventilation – and the rats ran over his padded quilt in the night. But little did such trifles matter to the pioneer. All day long he went about his Master's business, getting a hearing wherever he could, and night after night he slept in that airy bedroom.

A couple of weeks later, on a quiet back street, he found a carpenter willing to rent half his shop, if the stranger would pay in



advance and would meet the cost of the partition and necessary furniture which, of course, the carpenter would make. Duncan's little room, so acquired, had a two-metre frontage and went back seven metres. Such was the first missionary home and chapel in Nanking!

Benches along either side of the narrow room and a table and chair at the far end was his entire equipment. But even these things made considerable inroads into his limited supply of funds. Meanwhile my father was making every effort to remit further supplies to Nanking, but found it impracticable. Often he got up in the night to pray for his friend.

There came a day when Duncan's man had to spend the last dollar for food. That morning, before the missionary went out for his day's work, the cook, in great distress, said to him: "What shall we do now, the money has come to an end?"

With a quiet smile, the missionary replied as he departed: "We shall trust in the Lord, and do good; so shall we dwell in the land, and verily we shall be fed."

After supper that evening the cook evidently had something on his mind. "Sir, I have saved up \$5 from my wages and I want you to take it and use it." Looking at him closely, Mr. Duncan replied, "Are you thinking that funds will soon be coming from Mr Taylor and that then I shall repay you? If so, that would be a loan, and as you know, we never

go into debt."

"No," replied the man, "I have been listening to you each evening in the little chapel, and I have determined to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus. This is my first gift to Him for His work."

So on this unexpected \$5, the missionary and his man lived as long as they could make it last. But naturally it came to an end; and the cook, a very young believer, said, "What shall we do now, your money is gone, and mine too?"

"What shall we do?" replied the missionary. "We shall trust in the Lord, and do good; so shall we dwell in the land, and verily we shall be fed." With an untroubled heart, strong in faith, Duncan went about his work as usual.

Some days previously another pioneer missionary had come to consult my father from a newly-opened station in another part of China. "Mr Rudland," he said, "these matters of yours are not very pressing, and I am concerned about our Brother Duncan. I fear he must be at the end of his resources. Would you be so kind as to carry him a roll of dollars?" A little boat was hired, and commended to God.

Rudland set out on his errand. With a remarkably favourable wind he made rapid progress, till the boatman said, "Foreign teacher, I think your God must be the God who controls the wind and waves" – affording the missionary an excellent text for his message.

But after a couple of days they came to a bend where the grand canal had burst its banks, and its bed was dry. Going ashore to make inquiries, Rudland found they had reached a point opposite Nanking, and that by travelling overland he could be there in two days. He arrived in Nanking on the afternoon of the very day when the cook's last dollar was spent.

There was no difficulty in finding the home of the only foreigner in Nanking. But when the cook opened the door he nearly fell on Mr Rudland's neck for joy. Forgetting his Chinese politeness, he blurted out, "Have you brought any money? We're at the very end of everything!"

Rejoicing in God's timely provision, the young convert soon provided the traveller with hot water for a wash, and a cup of tea, and then asked for a dollar to go to the market.

When supper was ready, the cook stationed himself at the door to await Mr Duncan's return. Towering head and shoulders above most of the citizens, it was easy to see him several blocks away, and the cook ran as fast as he could go to carry the good news.

Unsurprised, the missionary put his hand on the man's shoulder and replied, "Didn't I tell you? It is always right to trust in the Lord, and do good; so shall we dwell in the land, and verily we shall be fed." 🐟

# Will you help us be a blessing?



Did you know that *Prepare the Way* is sent free of charge to church leaders in many African countries, as well as overseas missionaries and prisoners? But this **only** happens through the support and donations of people just like you.

If you have a heart for the nations and a desire to see churches built up through sound, Biblical teaching, then please would you consider supporting this ministry?

*Prepare the Way* is a 100% non-profit ministry. No-one associated with the magazine draws **any** form of salary or income from the magazine – so, very simply, every cent you give goes straight towards sending out more magazines! The more gifts we get in, the more magazines we give away – it's as simple as that.

If you are able to help, please fill in the form below, or simply do a direct deposit into the magazine's account (Prepare the Way, Standard Bank, Howick Branch, Branch code 058325, Account number 052449815)

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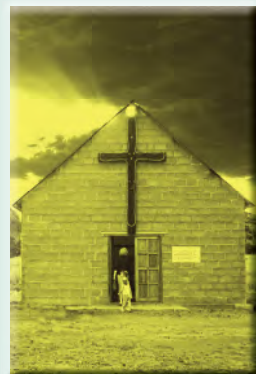
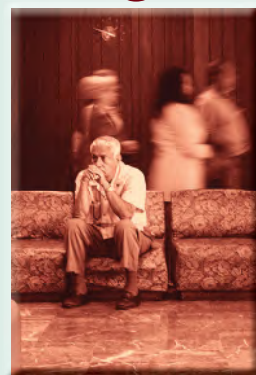
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# 'I EXPERIENCED HELL, AND SAW CHRISTIANS WHO REFUSED TO FORGIVE...'

by Mark Ellis

**A**LEC Rex was driving down a busy street in Adelaide, Australia on February 15, 2016 when he suffered a massive heart attack and his heart stopped.

He slumped forward on the steering wheel, traffic stopped around him, and a woman (Alicia Hurt, picture here with Alec) came rushing over to his car.

"She opened the door and tried to get me out but I was in a seatbelt," Alec recalls.

As she struggled to free him, she forgot to turn off the ignition and the car began moving forward. "The car took off and got up to about 50 kilometres per hour. She was still hanging on to the car."

When she saw they were going to hit another vehicle, she let go and fell headlong to the pavement. "It was a miracle she wasn't killed. She hit the ground and saw me hit the vehicle. She pulled herself together and ran 100 metres."

The young woman was a corrections officer who just left her shift. When she started CPR she was certain Alec was dead.

Providentially, an ambulance was among the vehicles caught in the traffic jam. "A couple of doctors raced over and started working on me. In the police report it says they resuscitated me five times. That means I died five times. They put me in the ambulance and took me to the hospital. I was dead."

Doctors could find little reason for hope, but then Alec surprised them. "They didn't know what to do with me. I came back to life. I was thrashing about, punching them. I

came back to life. They were stunned.

"According to the MRI, my heart was badly damaged because one of the main arteries was blocked. They put a stent in there."

The hospital also discovered pneumonia in his lungs, so they placed Alec in an induced coma following his surgery.

"My heart was so badly damaged they said to my wife I would have a 10 percent chance to live. If I survived, I would be a vegetable."

But God was about to demonstrate his power in a way that would surprise the doctors. And while Alec was hovering between life and death, he was transported to a nether region beyond this world.

## At the gates of hell

"In front of me was like a veil, the gates of Hell," Alec recounts. "I was at the gates of hell, but not in hell." Everything appeared two-dimensional to him, as if he was watching a TV.

Then he heard a voice say, "Jesus I know but you I don't."

But to his right another voice said: *I am the Lord God. I am going to heal you and make you new.*

Alec recognised that Jesus was speaking to him and He could read Alec's thoughts.

Jesus' presence provided the light for Alec to see. "Others there couldn't see Him or hear Him.

Then Lord impressed on his heart, *I will do what I want to bring your healing. I will show you the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Then an astonishing sight met Alec. "Around me was a sea full of people," he recounts. "I couldn't see their faces. They were joined together in chains."

Jesus impressed on his heart: *These people call themselves Christians but they couldn't forgive their brothers and sisters.*

Jesus mentioned to Alec to



pay attention to the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant and instructed him about its meaning. "I was taking this all in. He only allows you to remember what he wants you to remember. I can't add to what he told me."

During his near-death experience at the gates of hell, Alec says that Jesus also told him a worldwide revival is coming that will be greater than Azusa Street or the Welsh revival. *There will not be anything like it,* Jesus told him.

"It is not just people getting saved," Alec adds. "It is the bride being made perfect, without spot or blemish.

The Lord communicated to him, *What the world deems insignificant is what I am going to use in this revival.*

Alec was in the coma for three weeks. During that time, doctors debated about whether or not to turn off his life support.

But then God breathed new life into his body. "They were going to switch off the machine," he recounts. "God brought me back to life. It is a medical fact I was dead for 20 minutes in the hospital. My brain is now 100%.

"Praise God everything changed. I am one miracle after another."

After Alec came out of the coma, the head ICU nurse told his wife Beth, "Your husband's vital signs are 100%."

The next morning Dr Matthew Worthley, a cardiologist and professor at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, came into his room, looked at his file and said, "You were dead but you're alive. You're a miracle!"

Other doctors were equally amazed. "At the surgery there was a vascular heart surgeon, Dr Raja. He shook his head and said, 'I was there when you came back to life. I was there when they took the MRI of your heart. It was so badly damaged. I can't understand it. There is no sign of a heart attack, no sign of any scarring. Your heart is 100%.'"

When Alex left the hospital he got a standing ovation from the nurses. "They said, 'This is the guy who was dead and came back.' I thanked all the nurses and doctors. There were doctors there with tears."

While Alec is grateful to be alive, he is even more ecstatic about what God is doing. "I believe the bridegroom is coming soon – two years, five years, 10 years – I don't know when, but it's exciting.

"The bride is going to be beautiful – her appearance, her apparel and her beauty." 🐟



# WATCH & PRAY

Thanks to  
Elizabeth Kendal

## TURKEY IN SYRIA: AFRIN FALLS; CHRISTIANS IMPERILLED

On March 18 Syria's mostly Kurdish city of Afrin fell to Turkish-backed forces. Fighting alongside Turkish regular troops and special forces were some 25 000 Free Syrian Army fighters, mostly battle-hardened Islamists. Though backed by the U.S. when smashing IS in Syria, the Kurdish YPG and Kurd-Arab-Christian Syrian Democratic Forces found themselves abandoned in Afrin. Though Syrian government forces came to assist, they were routed in a barrage of shelling and air-strikes. Hundreds of civilians have been killed and wounded; many thousands are now displaced from what had long been one of Syria's great safe havens. Sources on the ground report that "Jihadists allied with Turkey are hunting down Christian and other religious minorities to kill them in Syria's north-west and along its border."

Please pray for Syria and its Christians!

## A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION FOR NORTH KOREA

The March 8 announcement that US President Trump has agreed to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un rocked the world. Understandably, observers are cautious;

some deeply sceptical; others derisive. Many are pessimistic, insisting we have seen all this before. Yet, in reality, the strategic situation today is entirely different and the persons involved – North Korea's Kim Jong-un, USA's President Trump and South Korea's President Moon Jae-in – are all new and are beginning, not ending, their terms.

Detente could pave the way for the slow but sure transformation of North Korea. It could also draw North Korea out from the shadow of Communist China and into the sphere of predominantly Christian South Korea, Russia and the USA to the benefit of the Church in North Korea! Please pray.

## MALI & BURKINA FASO: CAPTIVES IMPERILLED AS BATTLE HEATS UP

Battles rage between the Mali-based al-Qaeda alliance known as JNIM and the French and G5 Sahel Cross-Border Joint Force troops tasked with combating terrorism in the Sahel. On February 14&15 French troops scored a major victory against JNIM in north-east Mali, killing six of its senior leaders, including its co-founder. On March 2, having already promised retaliation, JNIM militants co-ordinated attacks in Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou. The attacks, targeting the French Embassy and Army HQ, left 30 dead

and 85 wounded.

As violence has escalated so too has JNIM's need for cash. Consequently, JNIM – which is holding four Christian aid workers and a Romanian for ransom – has released two videos, featuring two of its five hostages. These captives are gravely imperilled.

Please pray that God Almighty will intervene.

## CHINA: LAWYER DEAD AS PERSECUTION FLOODGATE OPENS

China's new Religious Affairs Regulations came into effect on February 1. In the early weeks of February churches were warned that the crackdown would begin after the Chinese New Year festivities which commenced on February 16. Churches without official government permits will be fined or demolished. Crosses are to be dismantled



(even indoors) and replaced with a Chinese flag; the national anthem is to be sung at services. Buddhists and Muslims are being subjected to the same repression.

On Monday, February 26 well-known Chinese Christian human rights lawyer Li Baiguang (49) died suddenly, allegedly of liver failure, in No 81 People's Liberation Army Hospital. Human rights advocates regard the circumstances as highly suspicious; especially considering Li was known to be a non-drinking, non-smoking, healthy young man. According to the authorities, Li was admitted with stomach pains; he died only hours later.

## Prepare the Way days 2018 June 3, November 4

These are the dates for this year's *Prepare the Way* days at Mount Zion Church, Merrivale (near Howick, KZN). Please come and join us as we bring the ministry of this magazine before the Lord. Peter Pollock will be ministering at all three events, and you're welcome to stay for (free!) lunch.



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## Manna for mahala!

If you'd like to receive Peter Pollock's Daily Manna devotional, which will also take you through the whole Bible in a year, then go to our website ([www.prepare.co.za](http://www.prepare.co.za)), and on the home page go to the "Daily Manna Sign-up" at the top, fill in your details and we will e-mail it to you every morning. What's more, it's absolutely free!



# And they crucified Him

by Art Katz

**I**THINK we, every one of us, ought to be humiliated of humbled every time we pick up the book of Acts and read the Glory that attended the life of that first Church. By contrast the most successful kind of Christianity that we know, the most charismatic, the most to be lauded and applauded is utterly anaemic and does not bare comparison.

How is it that these rude men, fishermen and louts, who had no advantage of the kind we have enjoyed were able to turn cities upside down and shake the earth? Why is it we have not had a corresponding affect in our own generation?

The answer, in my opinion is, that in missing the cross we have missed the power of the resurrection, we have side-stepped the cross as a subject let alone as experience because we have no tolerance or sympathy for suffering.

The denial of self in any form is suffering and we have not been encouraged to that.

We have overindulged and spoiled our youth, compromised truth in our marriages, suffered causalities and losses among our ministers and given ground to the spirit of independence and rebellion in the churches.

All because we cannot stand pain.

We parents who indulge our kids rather than chasten them, are we being loving or self-indulgent?

We pastors who condescend to placate men, rather than speak the truth to them in love, why are we so sparing?

We saints who see the defects and things that need to be corrected in each other, why are we silent?

Where are the Pauls of our generation

who will confront the Peters who have compromised the Gospel by being one thing with one group and another thing with another? Paul said he would not entertain that situation to go on, for the purity of the Gospel's sake (Galatians 2:14-21).

I call that love. But you know, that kind of love is painful and it's humiliating.

It's easy to be misunderstood. For which reason we prefer to keep quiet, for which reason the world is running amok with us, and for which reason we move into increasing carnality – not being corrected by one another.

The avoidance of pain is a costly avoidance. And the symbol of the cross at the heart of the faith is an invitation to share in His sufferings. In a word, our Christianity is degenerating into a middle-class culture, a sanctifying cover-up for the *status quo*, a vacuous praise club, an equating of gain as godliness, a comfortable religiosity that leaves our real interests unchallenged and undisturbed in the avoidance of the cross of Christ Jesus.

Somehow am I naive to think we ought to look different, speak differently, act differently – that there ought to be such a savour and fragrance about us of Christ that it is a savour of death unto death to self and life unto life to others.

The fact that the world can so easily tolerate us, the fact of the almost complete absence of reproach, let alone persecution, is itself a shameful testimony that we are so like the world that we cannot be distinguished from it.

We have lost even the difference, the sense of the difference, between that which is sacred and that which is profane.

I believe that God could lay at the door of the church the full responsibility for the present condition of the world.

And the things over which we cluck our tongues and point our fingers and look disdainfully down our noses at are the things which can be attributed to us. For we have not established in the earth a standard and an alternative to which a dying world might have turned.

They simply did not know that there is such a thing as that which is holy and that which is sacred. For we ourselves are wallowing in the things that are earthly, common, unclean and profane. The only alternative to that which is earthly, carnal, sensual and devilish is that which is heavenly. And there is no way to attain to that which is heavenly independent of the cross of Christ Jesus.

If the prophet Isaiah seeing the Lord high and lifted up cried out, "Woe is me, I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5)" – what then shall we say who are not prophets and oracles of God?

We need to have our vision and our sight corrected. We need to address our lives to the plumbline of God, the standard of God – to the cross of Christ Jesus. Not academically, religiously or superficially but in the actual experience of our lives as those who have come willing to abandon everything.

Paul said, "I am determined to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2)."

We desperately and urgently need to know Him.

Exactly as He is. 