

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Tim. 2-19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk**Freedom!!**

A cry that resonates throughout time and in all peoples but what is it?

The word itself can be seen as two parts “free” and we all know what that means in our particular circumstances, the second part “dom” is the beginning of the word dominate and we all know what that means do we not? so we could logically conclude that freedom is being free from domination by any one or any system.

The most basic desire of carnal people is to be free from anything that they perceive to hinder their happiness or wellbeing. They long to be free from all restraints, all pain, all fears, all forms of suffering physical or otherwise. We can all relate to that, no one is immune to those desires.

Both God and Satan appeal to this fundamental desire of man.

Satan promises freedom to do as one pleases, he promises love without sacrifice or responsibility and peace and satisfaction based on the exercise of one's so-called rights or what some call freedoms. All of Satan's promises are based on the fallacy that freedom lies in a man getting his own way. That is an utter falsehood!

God on the other hand however promises precisely the opposite.

He promises freedom from our own will and then gives us His will in exchange. God promises to free us from the greatest of all restraints, the restraint of sin and its consequences, and then He gives us eternal life and eternal joy. All of God's promises are based on the truth that freedom lies in taking His way. John 8:32 tells us that you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. Scripture also tells us that Jesus is the Truth, he said I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, John 14: 6.

If we try to take our own way we will not find freedom, we are bound by our evil nature or carnal desires which can never be satisfied, the more we indulge them the greater our desire for the things of the world and there is no lasting fulfilment or happiness in them.

We all seek happiness in life and oftentimes find it quite elusive but God in his wisdom has given us the Scriptures to find direction in this desire for contentment and freedom. Philippians 4:8-9 gives some direction as to what we should be applying our mind to and then carrying out the instruction in the last part of verse 9, —practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

J.v.L



From the Pulpit

A VISIT TO DEATH VALLEY – EZEKIEL 37
From a message by Brother Merle Ruth

Would you like to go on a trip? We do a lot of that these days don't we, maybe too much, maybe we ought to take more trips of the kind that don't require getting into a car. I'm proposing that we take that kind of a trip. Our destination is reflected in my title which is entitled: A Visit to Death Valley.

There is a place in California called Death Valley, it would be interesting to know if anyone in this audience was ever there? Might there be someone in the audience who actually paid a visit to Death Valley, well if you did raise your hand. All right, I see a number of hands. What kind of place was it? Hard to describe perhaps.

Well according to the World Book Encyclopaedia Death Valley holds the record for having the lowest elevation in all the Western Hemisphere, also the highest temperature ever recorded in the United States was registered there in 1913, 134°F. In many respects it is a very desolate place and that is why it has got the name it has, Death Valley. Now many of us will never visit that Death Valley but Oh, that there would be greater awareness of the fact that there is another death valley that may visit us right where we live.

In the Bible we read about people who had a death valley experience. No they did not die physically they were still existing, but God depicts them as the driest audience that any preacher ever preached to. Spiritually they were in that Valley.

Someone tell us where is the death valley chapter of the Bible? I would like a volunteer. Jeremiah? Thank you for that attempt. Is he right? Some of you may know it as the Valley of dry bones, does that give you a clue? What chapter of the Bible do we turn to, to learn about the Valley of dry bones? Ezekiel 37. Yes.

Open your Bible to Ezekiel 37. This book of Ezekiel bears the name of the Prophet whom ministered to the Jewish captives who had been taken to Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem, the last Jewish stronghold in those days.

Ezekiel sat where they sat and he was used of God to put stars of hope in their night of despair. Their plight was indeed sad, they have suffered much, they had been forced to leave behind most of their possessions, in the war many of them had lost loved ones, all had lost their native land and because they had apostatized they were at a very low ebb spiritually or low.

God had warned them that this would come upon them if they did not repent and turn from their sins, but they ignore those warnings. Finally it happened.

Nevertheless the Babylonian captivity was not intended to mark the end of the Jewish nation, in the councils of God it was necessary to keep old testament Israel in existence for it was the nation of whom, concerning Christ as concerning the flesh, was to come, and so in addition to the warnings of judgment in their captivity the Prophet spoke also of future blessings, both in the remainder of the old testament era and in a new-age that would presently follow.

The first of those blessings was the end of their captivity and the restoration to their land. Now there are many prophecies of that event but perhaps none is so vivid as the account here in Ezekiel 37.

Ezekiel 37:1-3 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which *was* full of bones,² And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, *there were* very many in the open valley; and, lo, *they were* very dry.³ And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest.

Let's listen now to the words of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel is here relating an unusual personal experience; I suppose we could call it a vision. He is taken by God whether in the body or the spirit it is difficult to say, and he is set down in what appeared to be a Valley of dry bones and then he is prompted by God to circulate among the bones and after that little stroll among the bones Ezekiel registers two observations.

What two things does he say about those bones?

One, they were going to remain and they were very dry. Although it is not specifically stated we may assume that Ezekiel recognized that these were the bones of people, it was as though a battle had been thought long before in that Valley on both sides had left their slain unburied.

Next Ezekiel hears a voice, it is the voice of God speaking to him and as is so characteristic in the book of Ezekiel God addresses Ezekiel by the title "son of man" Son of man can these bones live?

Many a one would have been ready with a quick reply: Why, no, of course not, they are not even connected! You cannot even discern the form of a skeleton! But Ezekiel knowing God as he did would not put anything out of the realm of possibility and so Ezekiel admits his limited knowledge and pays respect to God; Lord, I don't know, but I'm sure you know.

Now let's read on: Ezekiel 37:4-6 Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD.

Again God speaks to Ezekiel, this time he gives him not a question to answer but he gives him an order to carry out, Ezekiel is to preach to those scattered bones. What a strange assignment!

I've heard of preachers preaching to their pals to practice but I never heard of a preacher preaching to a cemetery, have you? It's bad enough preaching to people that are asleep but Ezekiel was called to preach to a bunch of dried up bones.

Along with his preaching assignment Ezekiel received the message that he was to preach, God said; You tell them Ezekiel, that I, the Lord, will put flesh upon them, that I will replace their muscles, that I will also cause them to be covered with skin and most important of all I will put breath in to them. Consequently they will live and know that I am the Lord!

What a message! To call that good news is almost an understatement, never was a more hopeless audience given a more hopeful message.

Let's listen now to what happened:

Ezekiel 37:7-8 So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. ⁸ And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but *there was* no breath in them.

Now previously God had only indicated what he would do, when he would do it was left unsaid, that he would do it so soon and in response to Ezekiel's preaching was not stated, nevertheless, it happened. There was immediate action in the wake of Ezekiel's preaching.

Did he expect this to happen or was he surprised?

Although I'm not real sure I'm inclined to believe that he was astonished at the almost incredible commotion that occurred in that Valley as he delivered God's message.

Now let's try to remember that all this happened in something of a vision but it was God inspired and it was filled with meaning and to Ezekiel it was very real and unforgettable.

Now I hope that you took note of that last clause in verse eight, although there had been among the bones a lot of noise and commotion there still was no breath in them, no real life. Like Felix, many a soul has trembled under the preaching of God's Word but the convicted person is still not alive spiritually.

The next step was designed to supply that deficiency. Although there was movement, although there was you would say conviction, yet there was no life, and again this next move involved God using Ezekiel, verse nine:

Ezekiel 37:9-10 Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

Here again Ezekiel is instructed by the Lord, he is told to command the wind to breathe upon these slain bodies, Ezekiel does so and suddenly there is a massive resurrection. The corpses come to life, stand to their feet and present the appearance of a mighty army. Now thus far Ezekiel has been given no word as to the meaning of this vision, this experience. Imag-

ine then how grateful he was as God continue to speak and to throw light on the meaning of what he had just witnessed and shared in. The interpretation follows immediately here in verse 11: Ezekiel 37:11-14 ¹¹ Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. ¹² Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ And ye shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, ¹⁴ And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken *it*, and performed *it*, saith the LORD.

. Ezekiel now learns that this Valley of dry bones that he was shown as representing the whole house of Israel in the state that they then existed. God reminds Ezekiel of how his fellow captives are reflecting their dependency, in verse 11 God quotes what they are saying among themselves; our bones are dry, our hope is lost, we are cut off! Generally speaking they had given up all hope of ever again returning to their land, the land that was once their homeland and of ever again gaining national existence, it was for their encouragement, it was to revise their spiritual life that God so graciously gave to Ezekiel this vision and its meaning along with its promise, it was him to take back to their in order to revive their dying hope. They were to be made to know that their future was as bright as the promises of God. He had not forgotten them and in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles He would be able to perform his promises.

God kept his word; he did bring to pass this miracle of restoration.

At the end of the 70 year captivity, the time specified for the captivity, the king of Babylon was unexpectedly overthrown and replaced by a new king, Cyrus, whom God called His anointed. Now that is very significant because that is the meaning of the name Christ, and so like Christ, Cyrus filled the role of a liberator, he opened the door for the return of the Jews to their homeland, and although by that time they had become somewhat acclimated to life in Babylon God was able to create in many of them a desire to avail themselves of this God provided opportunity.

I am turning now to Ezra chapter 1.

Here in verses five through seven we have a brief account of how it was when on God's prophetic time clock that great hour finally arrived.

Ezra 1:5-8 ⁵ Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all *them* whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem. ⁶ And all they that *were* about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all *that* was willingly offered. ⁷ Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; ⁸ Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

Surprisingly, their one-time enemies now treated them as friends. Even the valuables of the Temple are restored to them. All restrictions against returning are removed.

Let us turn next to Psalm 126 here we get a more subjective view of what it was like to be one of those returning Jews Psalm 126:1-3 ¹ When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. ² Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. ³ The LORD hath done great things for us; *whereof* we are glad.

The writer appears to be saying that it seemed almost too good to be true! In focus here is that new life and that new hope that was breathed into those once “dry bones.” Even their heathen neighbours admitted that their God had produced in them a great change!

Now, I wish to emphasize that behind all this was God's long range plan for a still greater restoration. Their settlement back in their own land by the decree of Cyrus set the stage for the Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ! And with His appearance there began that greater restoration that you and I, as spiritual Israelites, are benefiting from today for that greater restoration is still in progress.

I am returning now to Ezekiel 37. The remainder of the chapter forms another unit of thought. Although I cannot dwell on it at length, I will touch

on it briefly since there is some continuity of thought. From dead bones we now move to dry sticks. We learn from verses 15 through 20 that God commanded Ezekiel to take two sticks – one representing the Northern Kingdom and the other representing the Southern Kingdom. These two marked sticks he was to hold together before the people so as to form not two but one. Then, God gave him the reply that he was to give to the people when they asked about the meaning of his action.

That reply begins with verse 21:

Ezekiel 37:21-24 ²¹ And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: ²² And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: ²³ Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. ²⁴ And David my servant *shall be* king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.

Now this as I see it is a beautiful prophetic preview that reaches even further forward than the previous one. Here the emphasis is on the reunion that was to come eventually out of that the revival. Although the return from captivity brought about a small scale reunion a still more grand and more spiritual reunion was to be experienced with the appearance of the Messiah and the dawn of the gospel era.

And that I believe is what these verses depict, God planned for uniting the true Israel under the reign of their Messiah King, the greater David. The fulfilment of this is seen in the chapter we have already heard this evening, Ephesians 2, and the church, the wall that once separated Jew and Gentile is broken down and those who were once divided by enmity of any kind are made into one new man, so making peace. (Ephesians 2:15)

We have seen now that this great chapter revolves around the twin themes

of revival and reunion, both brought about by the power of God working through the Spirit of God.

Really we just looked at the story of humanity, through sin the whole world has become a valley filled with the bones of men and women slain by sin, if left alone they would be doomed to remain in that hopeless state, but the gospel of good news is that there is yet hope for those slain by sin. By the Word of God and the Spirit of God sinners can be reborn, rivalries can be healed, one-time enemies can be united and deliverance from spiritual Babylon can be experienced today.

As far as God is concerned the Valley of dry bones is still with us but the Word of God is still being preached, the Spirit of God is still breathing over the dead and that process of divine recovery and restoration is still in operation and in that sense the vision is still in the process of realization.

I'm going to share now some further observations drawn from this great chapter of Ezekiel 37

Observation Number one: Spiritual death can hide behind the appearance of life.

Who would have thought that Ezekiel's friends and neighbours were as destitute of spiritual life as God depicted them to be, who would have thought it?

The Babylonians no doubt thought that they were adjusting quite well, but that was the problem. In the eyes of many they may have been nice successful people giving an impression of being well satisfied and inclined to let well enough alone.

Judging from the way they viewed Ezekiel they were probably more interested in profits of money than in prophets of the Lord, but God saw them as a valley of dry bones

I repeat again: Spiritual death can hide behind the appearance of life!

Number two: God's people do not belong in Babylon.

Their stay in Babylon was to be temporary only, a form of corrective punishment for their past sins, God did not want them to feel at home in Babylon, the day came when the call went forth: Come ye out of her my people! (Revelations 18:4).

Babylon however lives on and whenever a once spiritual Israelite takes up residence in a modern Babylon he soon loses the joy of salvation and dies spiritually.

No, God's people do not belong in the Babylon of this world; they belong together as one spiritual nation under the rule of Christ, the greater David, who is the one Shepherd of the one fold in which every lost sheep can find security.

Have you my friend found security in this fold, this one fold?

Observation number three: We learn here that God is intensely interested in the plight of those who feel hopeless and forsaken.

He acts on their behalf, he takes the initiative, his love impels him to do something for them, to do what they cannot do themselves.

The form of this vision gave Ezekiel something to take back to his despairing people, something that would inspire them with new hope. They were to be made aware of all that he planned to do with them and in them. This chapter is punctuated with expressions beginning with; I will, I will do this, I will do that, God only is the one who is able to do the humanly impossible.

Like Ezekiel we too have a message of hope for the humanly hopeless because we serve the God of the impossible, the God who is still bringing men and women out of spiritual death into spiritual life.

Number four: No real improvement can be achieved on the human level apart from the power of God.

Whether it is Egyptian bondage Babylonian captivity deliverance is possible only through the agency of God.

In that vision Ezekiel found himself face-to-face with the humanly impossible. And every soul winner faces the same thing, if in your soul there is no life from God I cannot give you that life neither can Brother Clarence, but God can! Deliverance is possible through the power of God.

Number five and this is the other side of that coin: Although God himself is the reviver, the giver of life he nevertheless does employ human instruments. He enlisted Ezekiel both in this vision and in actual life, and Ezekiel was available, are you available? With God availability counts more than ability.

Are you living a life through which Christ can live? Are you living a life through which Christ can reach out and touch others with this message of hope?

Number six: This account highlights the fact that the operation of God's Spirit is the indispensable element in the work of creating new life. The climax of this vision came after Ezekiel called upon the wind to breathe upon these lifeless bodies. Now to you that may seem strange until you discover that in the Hebrew and in the Greek the word for wind is the same word as the word spirit. Actually it Ezekiel was calling upon the holy spirit of God to breathe upon these lifeless bodies the Spirit of God. Symbolically this part of the vision declares that after that preaching has done all he can, after the sower has done all he can there remains the vastly more vital work that only the Spirit of God can do, namely the implantation of life or the reviving of life already possessed but in a declining state. He that has not the spirit of Christ has not life.

Observation number seven: It is made evident in the latter part of this chapter that spiritual decline among God's children is a source of grief to Him. We too easily shrug it off. We Mennonites are inclined to part ways too easily.

In verse 22 God declares they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more. (Ezekiel 37:22) God is not satisfied to leave disunity alone; he works persistently to heal ruptured relationships. Until I clear up matters with my brother or my sister God will not give me a clean slate.

Lastly, number eight: Is the fact that both the sinners deliverance and the saints revival issues in joy.

Isaiah puts it this way; The redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing into Zion and everlasting joy shall be upon their head (Isaiah 51:11). Every genuine turning to the Lord brings joy to the soul, joy to the group, joy to heaven.

And so we made our visit to Death Valley, we have seen the consequences of sin, we have seen God's great concern for those who feel forsaken, we have been given a demonstration of what God can do in the lives of the

dried up, humanly hopeless. We caught a glimpse of how God wants his people to live together in the unity of the spirit.

Where are you this evening? What is your condition?

Are you enjoying the Fellowship of the redeemed or are you like a lone dry stick?

Perhaps I'm speaking to someone who is still in Death Valley, you have no life of God in your soul and you know it. It doesn't really matter what you have been for God is able to take whosoever will and make him what he ought to be. But He must have your consent, you must want Him to, you must be willing to bow to His terms.

If you're willing He will help you to meet His terms, He will help you to believe the Bible, He will help you to repent of your sin.

Let's turn in our Christian Hymnal to number 227.

Come, by sin every soul oppressed, there is mercy with the Lord. He will surely give you rest by trusting in His Word.

If you don't have victory over sin, if you're a backslider, if you have never yet made that initial commitment that you know you ought to make to the Lord, we are giving you an opportunity to act now before it is for ever too late. If you're willing to have someone help you to get right with the Lord tonight while we sing, show that by standing to your feet until you are recognized.

Come every soul by sin oppressed, there is mercy with the Lord.

He will surely give you rest by trusting in His Word.

Only trust Him, only trust Him, only trust Him now,

He will save you, He will save you, He will save you now!

Jesus once told about a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho but before he got there he was seized, he was beaten, he was robbed, he was left half dead. (Luke 10)

That is precisely what the devil does to his victim. We saw that tonight.

My friend if you are in that condition tonight Jesus, the good Samaritan of heaven, wants to come to your rescue, He has the balm of Gilead He wants

to pour into your wounds. He has already paid for your healing. Don't turn Him away! receive Him with open arms, if you are spiritually sick, if you have been wounded by the devil, if you are half dead or wholly dead, your only hope is to cry to God for mercy.

For Jesus shed His precious blood, rich blessings to bestow,
Plunge now into the crimson flood, that washes white as snow.
Only trust Him, only trust Him, only trust Him now,
He will save you, He will save you, He will save you now!

Hopefully this is an indication that you have all made your peace, calling and election sure.

I trust you with me will allow the Spirit of God to continue to search our hearts and would like to leave with you this closing thought:

You may be the best Christian that someone will ever know, perhaps the only one!



FOUNDATION OF FAITH

That we, you and I, may be found in Him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Philippians 3:9.

The topic of faith is sometimes considered to be deep and complex, requiring a close walk with God, as well as an intellectual understanding; to be truly comprehended. In reality, faith is the cornerstone of every Christian believer's life, young or old, educated or illiterate. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" Ephesians 2:8. Faith can be likened to a hand reaching out to God to accept the gift He is offering us. The greatness of our faith is less important than the greatness of our God. Jesus said, "If ye have faith as 'a grain of 'mustard seed ... nothing shall be impossible unto you" Matthew 17:20. As we study this lesson together, may we be inspired to root out the unbelief that hinders our walk of faith with the Lord.

When Paul wrote to the Galatians he had this to say about faith and some of the fruits of faith:

Galatians 3:1-9 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? ² This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³ Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? ⁴ Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if *it be* yet in vain. ⁵ He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, *doeth he it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ⁶ Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. ⁷ Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. ⁸ And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed. ⁹ So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

And Galatians 3:23-29 ^{But} before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. ²⁴ Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. ²⁶ For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Many of the Israelites throughout the Old Testament lived according to the law of God. When they followed in humble, heart-felt obedience, they were blessed spiritually and materially. The law taught them how to live, how to have their sins forgiven, and how to worship God in a way that would please Him. Many times they stood back, astonished at the mighty power of God displayed before their eyes as walled cities and great armies fell before them. What awe and reverence must have filled their hearts at the recurring proof that they were indeed the people of the living God!

In today's text, the apostle Paul points his readers back to an earlier time when Abraham, the father of faith, walked this earth. Abraham was a believer who understood the voice of God. He was called out from his world to follow God in a walk of faith. Like us, he did not always fully understand the reasons or what the results would be of doing what God was ask-

ing of him. However, he left a shining example of believing in God in spite of difficult and trying circumstances, and thus he is lifted out even today as someone we can imitate.

We can only come to God by faith. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The Scriptures warn us that we must continue in faith. Just as we are justified by accepting in faith that Jesus died for our sins, so we must continue in sanctification with our faith in nothing else but our Savior. It is dangerous to believe that our works contribute to our salvation. Abraham was justified by his complete and unswerving obedience to God and not by the beauty or goodness of his works.

The law is a schoolmaster, or tutor, to lead us to Jesus. One translation of the Bible has a footnote explaining the role of the schoolmaster in Paul's day. He was the slave who brought the children to school in the morning and then returned to take them back home in the evening. Because we could not keep God's perfect law we stood condemned as sinners, and, because of the perfection of that law, there was no man good enough to save us or even to save himself. The Spirit then led us to Jesus, and as our weary, sin-sick souls caught a glimpse of the only sacrifice that could free us, we reached out in faith, caught hold of the gift of salvation, and were liberated. The slave is still waiting for us outside the schoolhouse door. If we tire of receiving instructions from Jesus, the old law can lead us away again. Let us be true children of Abraham and "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

Faith is the basis of our relationship with God. If we do not have faith in God, we are out of touch with Him and are living in unbelief. Sometimes, however, we ask ourselves if we have enough faith or where our faith is. These are valid questions, and our great God seems to delight in answering our sincere questions. Perhaps as young children we have been taught to pray about our trials and difficulties. I remember a time when I was about six years old and had lost a pocket knife that was special to me. Something moved me to prayer, and my eyes soon fell on the lost item. As we grow older, our trials seem more difficult and complex. We see that self is the cause of many of our struggles, and we are ashamed to bring them to God when we already know where the problem lies. God loves to answer our prayers and wants us to communicate often with Him. Even when we ques-

tion and doubt Him, let us consider those thoughts as temptations and openly share our hearts with our Lord. He wants to be our closest friend.

The Bible teaches us that faith is meant to be used. Paul wrote about faith that works by love, Jesus said that faith could move mountains, and James tells us that faith without works is dead. What does our faith do for our lives? A living faith in God will surely prompt us to action. Many people today are trapped in despair and unbelief. The terrible plague of suicide is on the increase because life looks meaningless and hopeless. Faith in God dispels this deception. It says that Someone cares and wants to be our friend. Someone understands how hard and unfair life can be and wants to walk by our side. Someone loves us and wants to live with us eternally. Is my faith speaking this message to the world?

As we believe what God says about judgment and eternity, we will earnestly seek to make our calling and election sure. Our burden and urgency for the salvation of the souls of men will increase. The words of Jesus in the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) will move us to be among the wise in these latter days.

Salvation is only through faith in Jesus Christ. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). When we are broken in repentance, we realize anew there is nothing we can do to save our souls. It is a challenge for the Christian to keep a repentant spirit in his heart. For one reason or another, as life goes on, we can become indifferent to the sufferings of Jesus on the cross. This soon leads to shallowness in our walk with the Lord, and we may feel somewhat uneasy about our relationship with God. Then, too often, we begin to justify ourselves with our accomplishments or works. If we continue in this line, our lives tend toward legalism, and we start to believe that God will reward us according to our works or even our good intentions. This makes us hard and unyielding to new and unaccustomed ideas that challenge our security.

On the other hand, we are sometimes buffeted by feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy. We wonder how we will ever be able to make it to heaven. We worry about how our children will turn out. We fret about the evils of this present world and find little reason for joyfulness. Does God have something more to offer us? Faith replies with a resounding Yes! A joy-filled life is available to us as we reach out and give our all to our Savior in simple, trusting faith.

Some points to ponder:

1. Can knowledge assist our faith? For example, does the knowledge that God has helped us in the past boost our faith today?
2. What causes us to turn from a walk of faith to a life of legalism? What are the warning signs?
3. Is it harder to have faith when everything goes well materially?

Another question yet: Can we rest too securely on the fact that God wants us to be saved? Will such an attitude cause us to view sin less seriously?

Yes we are justified by faith but let us always remember that it is not just faith alone that saves but that we are to do the works meet for repentance (Acts 26:20). Jesus clearly warns us that we are not only to hear His sayings but that we are also to do them as clearly pointed out in the parable of the wise and the foolish builders.

James reminds us also that faith and works are a needed combination in our lives. (James 2:18-20)

The book of Romans also has some pertinent points in regard to being justified by faith. Let us just briefly look at what the Apostle Paul had to say about this subject: "He [Abraham] staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:20-25).

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Romans 5:9).

The Christian's hope lies in the above scriptures. There is no other place or work by which a mortal can hope to be saved. His most noble deed and confession will not merit salvation. All of man's works must be bathed in the blood of Christ in order to have peace with Him.

To be justified is to be free from blame and fault. At Calvary Christ does not excuse blame and fault, but they are removed by His blood. To be justified will bring peace into the conscience. There is only one way to bring the peace of God to the heart and that is by faith in the atoning blood of Christ.

Faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ is the core of the hope of eternal life. Works that are not prompted by faith in God have little value. No person will be able to bring forth such a perfect work that his work would merit the peace of God. The peace of God is not an accomplishment of perfection by man; it is the reward of faith in the perfect work of Calvary. Jesus' Calvary work is so complete that it encompasses all of man's misbehavior. Through repentance man brings his total life's conduct to the cross of Calvary. Calvary's cross does not look for a perfect work on man's part but, rather, for a perfect desire. This perfect desire, which is a fruit of true faith, Calvary observes and rewards with perfect peace.

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16).

No person is able to satisfy the perfect intent of the Law with his works. But by believing in the perfect Lamb of God, all sinners can be justified. Then produced by faith, revamped works will satisfy the Law, "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:4). Works are able to quiet the conscience, but they do not bring the peace of God to the heart. This peace, which is received by faith in Calvary (Romans 5:1), is the gift of God to a penitent sinner.



CHOSEN FOR GLORY

An alternative title could be "Predestination as Portrayed in Scripture."

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began

2 Timothy 1:9.

Not a single soul is predestined to be lost for eternity without an opportunity to be saved. The Word of God teaches that Christ has made atonement for the sins of the whole world, that God loves us all, and that He is not willing that any should perish; that light, witness, and conviction have

come to every sinner; and that God's blessed invitation is to whosoever will.

On moral matters, mankind is left with warnings and entreaties but with freedom to choose. On the matter of loving and serving God or of rebellion, disobedience, and unbelief, all of mankind has been able to make a choice. God's high aim was for men to live in close fellowship with Him in life, and, after death share in His unspeakable glory for which he was created 1 Peter 1:8-9.

Recognizing and acknowledging God as the source of all blessings, both natural and spiritual, will result in an attitude of devotion in the heart of the Christian. With Christ as the indwelling presence, there will be a quiet confidence and purposefulness in the Christian that is not produced by his own effort. This in turn will result in a blameless walk of life motivated by love for God and his fellowmen.

That God wants us to reach heaven is amply clear because He is the one who calls us to salvation. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). He moves toward us because He knows our frailty and takes our fallibility into account and is never shocked by it. He surely anticipated man's fall and already at that point foretold Satan's defeat (Genesis 3:15). Our salvation, though purchased at tremendous cost, was never a narrowly contested victory with our sins grudgingly forgiven or the offer of His grace subject to withdrawal.

Scripture states clearly that our adoption into God's family was planned from the beginning,

Ephesians 1:3-13 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: ⁴ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. ⁷ In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ⁸ Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹ Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰ That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth;

even in him: ¹¹ In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹² That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. ¹³ In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, And then we have this in the next chapter of Ephesians showing what God has done and continues to do for us:

Ephesians 2:4-10 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love where-with he loved us, ⁵ Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) ⁶ And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: ⁷ That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 1:4-5 shows that He delights in accepting us through Christ. As we are accepted in the beloved (v. 6), we understand that Christ is the guarantor of our salvation and it is through Him that we reach out to God and He to us. The riches of His grace will always remain a mystery to us (Ephesians 2:7), and the unstinting measure of His kindness causes us to exult with the songwriter: "There's a wideness in God's mercy, Like the wideness of the sea, There's a kindness in His justice, Which is more than liberty" (Hymns of Praise, No. 225).

As a son born into a family of some means is heir to his father's holdings, so we as children born into the family of God receive, through Christ, forgiveness of sins and eternal life. To realize that we inherit only because of God's benevolence and by no merit or effort of our own helps us to appreciate the significance of God's planning for our salvation from the beginning. This rules out all thought or occasion for pride or self-worth and overwhelms us with wonder that we as unworthy creatures "should be to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:12) after that we believed and "were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13).

In the first verses of the second chapter of Ephesians the apostle Paul

gives us a glimpse into the idolatrous and wicked conditions prevailing among the people of Ephesus. By the quickening power of the Spirit (verse 1) many of these found grace to turn to the living God. His forgiving mercy was graciously extended, and they were not only forgiven and cleansed but were made to sit with Christ Himself in "heavenly places," that is, in a state of rest and enjoyment among the people of God.

Today we live "in the ages to come" (verse 7) and we as His people can testify that the riches and kindness of God have not diminished in the least degree. If indeed we are His workmanship and were specifically created unto good works, it is abundantly clear that such a grand design will not be terminated at death but that all who have put on Christ and His righteousness will enjoy Him in glory through eternity.

In nominal Christian theology there is a doctrine called predestination that sets forth the belief that God determines the eternal destiny of man. The word predestination comes from Latin and means "determined beforehand." This doctrine is based on Romans 8:28-30. The Scriptures, however, give overwhelming proof that God wants all mankind to be saved and that all men decide their own destiny by their own deliberate choice. Furthermore, to believe that our eternal destiny is already settled could result in irresponsible living and lost souls; hence the theory of predestination is false and must be avoided.

God has expressed His concern for the whole world to be saved. Christ is the "Saviour of the world," the "Savior of all men," and the "true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). In not a single case in the Bible is it even hinted that any person was foreordained to be lost, that he would not hear the gospel, or have a chance to repent. With these facts established in our minds, let us now examine the evidence for man being predestined for glory.

God has stated expressly, "Behold, all souls are mine" (Ezekiel 18:4). Furthermore, He has stamped upon every soul clear signs of that divine ownership. Man's power to reason, his capability to make moral decisions, and his ability to communicate with his Maker sets him apart from all other created beings. That this divine ownership was contested in the Garden of Eden and that the beautiful relationship between God and man was marred is all too clear. Yet, in spite of all that the enemy of the soul of man has devised and brought to bear on that original bond, it has not been possible for him to obliterate that divine image first placed there.

That man is created for glory is evidenced by his instinctive abhorrence for evil. Though the sins of sensuality and selfishness rise powerfully in his soul, something within tells him that they are intruders and remind him of a higher allegiance and vows that were made to God and the church possibly years ago. It should be understood by all that the tendency to live on a lower plane is a deliberate, calculated plan of the archenemy to destroy the soul. God's plan is that His unbroken hold on us would never permit us to feel right when we do wrong. Let us realize that we are made for that which is high, noble, and good, and that our true home is within the Father's will. Let us choose the road that leads to the abundant life.

The Scriptures are clear on God's requirements for man. He has a program for His people and honors us by allowing us to work out our own destiny and by calling us to be coworkers with Him. In the time of the old dispensation with myriad laws to govern the people's lives and worship, His design was always that everything would bring glory to Himself and blessings to His people. After the new dispensation was ushered in, the goal remained the same. Knowing Jesus Christ is not a magic formula for overcoming sin and destructive habits.

God expects you and me to make responsible decisions, and we honor Him for giving us the power of choice by doing so.



VOICES FROM YESTERYEAR SELECTED QUOTES OF THE FAITHFUL

The Bride of Christ

"Even as there was but one Adam and one Eve; one Noah and one ark, one Isaac and one Rebecca, so there is but one church of Christ, which is the body, the city, the temple, the house and bride of Christ, having but one gospel, one faith, one baptism, one supper, and one service; walking in the same way and leading a pious, unblameable life, as the Scriptures teach." (*Complete Works of Menno Simons, Part 1, p. 76*)

"Say, beloved, if you are the church of Christ, why are you not obedient unto him? If you are the body of Christ, why destroy its holy members? If you are the children of God, why trample upon your brethren? If you are the servants of Christ, why not do the things he has commanded? If you are the bride of Christ, why not hear his holy voice? If you are the truly regenerated, where are, then, the fruits? If you are the true disciples of Christ, where is your love? If you are the true Christians, where are your Christian

ordinances of baptism, supper, deacons, ban and life as commanded in His word? If you are the truly baptized ones of Christ, where is your faith, your new birth, your death unto sin, your unblameable life, your good conscience, your Christian body into which you were baptized, and your Christ whom you have put on?

"O beloved brethren, error has been rampant long enough! Christ Jesus will be no longer mocked as a fool." (*Complete Works of Menno Simons, Part 2, pp. 230-231*)

"To the scattered saints and the others at Dortrecht...

"Therefore, thou beautiful daughter of Zion, fear not, since your entrance is prepared so abundantly.

"O thou fairest among women, therefore the filthy wrinkles that disfigure thee must be put from thee. Canticles 1:8. O thou fair bride of Christ, constantly adorn thyself more and more with the wedding garment of righteousness, and also trim your lamps with glorious faith and imperishable love, that you may not lack these, as did the foolish virgins, but that you may ever possess them abundantly, that thereby the light of Christ may shine in you, and be manifested by you, to the praise of God, the edification of your neighbor, the salvation of your souls, and as a light to the world, and for a testimony unto them. Although they then hate you, because the bright, morning star, Christ Jesus, has arisen in your hearts, bear it, and be not surprised at it, for Christ, who is the light Himself, was hated and cast out by the darkness before you. 2 Peter 1:19; John 1:5...

"O thou fair queen, remember at all times, how loathful and unwashed thou didst lie in thy blood as an outcast, and that the most mighty, richest and eternal King, the fairest above all men, chose thee, washed thee, purchased thee with His own blood, and accepted thee as His queen. And if we always think of our redemption, it is, or ought to be, an admonition, to cleave to the royal Bridegroom alone, and not to forsake Him through wantonness or presumption, and run to others; for he that forsakes Him, him He will also forsake. His jealous love cannot bear or tolerate it, that one loves another more than Him; such a one is not worthy of Him." (*Martyrs Mirror, pp. 907-908, by Jan Wouters Kuyck, 1572*)

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