

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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Incorporating the Protestant Beacon and The British Protestant

New Series
No. 1604

JANUARY — FEBRUARY 1999

Old Series
No. 2604

Editorial

“MY PRESENCE SHALL GO WITH THEE”

Exodus 33:14

HERE IS A LOVELY PROMISE as we begin a New Year. The promise is a benediction in itself and will be an encouragement at this particular time.

The promise was given to Moses in connection with a deplorable incident – the lapse of the Israelites into idolatry when his back was turned. Moses was a thoroughly disappointed man, heart broken, disillusioned and apprehensive for the future. It was to this man and at this time that this comforting word was given. If there is a dull ache in your heart because of your present circumstances, ask for the fulfilling of this promise.

Moses was a man bending beneath the weight of a great responsibility, he felt the burden was more than he could bear. He was leading a people who were not easy to govern, they had on numerous occasions displayed their stubbornness and unbelief. Is it any wonder that he longed for the assurance of the divine presence with him?

God graciously gave to Moses the assurance he needed. He would have the companionship of One who was sufficient to meet all his need.

The same gracious assurance is given to us. No matter how rough the path may be, or how many the trials and disappointments we encounter, the Lord is with us. We are ignorant of the burdens we shall be called upon to bear in the days ahead but we have the promise of the unfailing Presence.

May you know much of the Lord's presence throughout 1999.

Doxology

A Sermon by the Editor

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 24-25)

THE EPISTLE OF JUDE is a very grave Letter and it is full of painful warning and vehement denunciation, and Jude says in verse 3: “it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” He was urged on with this task of dealing with the situation as he found it. There was a sense of necessity with him – there is an urgency of tone. Read it through and you will see that moral corruption had crept into the Church. We ourselves sometimes see things in a wrong way – we imagine that the evils we see today are something unique to our own day and generation. When we go back to the very earliest days we find that most of the New Testament Letters were written in order to deal with situations that should not have been there, and when we come to this Epistle of Jude we are staggered when we find the prevailing situation. Moral corruption had crept into the Church, and Jude was not concerned so much with heretical belief as with evil doers in practice and so, having dealt with the situation, he turns with a great sigh and sense of relief as he draws his Letter to a conclusion and he tells his brethren who are still faithful how they are to comfort themselves in the midst of these prevailing corruptions.

Let us get our text into context. In verse 20 he says: “**But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.**” That is a safeguard against error and corruption, to be built up in the faith which was once delivered to the saints. When we look around on Churches today there are so many who are not built up; yes – they are believers, they have launched out on the Christian pathway, but progress has hardly ever been made. They are still babes in Christ; they are still feeding on the milk instead of on the strong meat of the Word. But here is the first thing that Jude would say to such: “Building up yourselves on your most holy faith.” You do not build without effort, and you do not build up in the Christian life without effort. It would be better if we took our Bibles more seriously than we have done before and more regularly attend on the public means of grace. So here is the first thing: “Building up yourselves on your most holy faith.”

Then next he says: “**Praying in the Holy Ghost.**” Prayer will keep us from the defilement of the world and often the cause of our failure is to be found in our lack of prayer.

The next injunction is: "Keep yourselves in the love of God." You will remember how our Lord said just prior to the Cross, "Continue ye in my love" (John 15:9). Jude said the same: "Keep yourselves in the love of God." Well, here is set a task for us all.

Having dealt with the situation, with *denunciation, exhortation, warning*, all this is to end in the *peaceful gaze upon God* and the *triumphant recognition* of what *He* is able to do for us, and so he ends with these tremendous words: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

Is not this a rich and radiant passage? Here is one of the fullest New Testament Doxologies and Jude's ascription of glory to God is called for by his contemplating God's power and His majesty. We should do well likewise to follow his example, to sit down and contemplate the glory of the Divine Being, and then we shall be moved to say in the words of that lovely hymn:

" My God, how wonderful Thou art!
Thy Majesty how great.
How beautiful Thy mercy seat
In depths of burning light."

And here is Jude sitting back in reverence and contemplation and much of that contemplation is to ascribe glory and majesty and power to God.

"To the only wise God our Saviour." He is the solitary and the all-sufficient stay of the believer, the only wise God. Jude has spoken a lot about the corruptions and the evils threatening the Christians in those days, and he now turns away from them to contemplate One who is all-sufficient and he says: "To the only wise God." He is the only Refuge from the evils that dog our steps and from the temptations and the foes that assail us at every point and, if we put our trust in and commit our treasure to anyone else than God, then we are doomed to disappointment. "To the only wise God."

" Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee,
Leave, ah leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me."

God alone is the stay and the strength of the believing heart. In a country churchyard there is a pathetic inscription over a little child and it reads like this:

" Her parents put all their wealth into one vessel,
and the shipwreck was total."

It is madness to trust in anyone else, unless that Refuge be the eternal God. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27). If we are wise we shall be like the disciples on the Mount

of Transfiguration: "They saw no man, save Jesus only" (Matthew 17:8). He can be our solitary stay and our refuge and our companion, because He is sufficient and He abides *ever faithful*.

Before we come to grips with the rest of the verse notice, in passing, the unusual attributing to *God the Father* of the Name "Saviour". "To the only wise God our *Saviour*." This is almost a unique phrase and yet it is in full harmony with the teaching of the New Testament. Normally we speak of *Christ* our Saviour, and so He is because He suffered on the Cross, but God is spoken of as "Saviour" because you cannot in the end divide the three Persons of the Trinity. They *all* have a share, a part, in the work of redemption. The Father then, he says, is the *Source* of salvation – the eternal, the infinite love of the Father is the source of our redemption. Therefore our text takes us into the very councils of eternity when it ascribes praise to the only God our Saviour through our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are two main thoughts that emerge from our text. First –

GOD'S POWER TO PRESERVE

Look back to verse 24: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling." God's *power to keep*. Our great danger is of falling, but our great safety is in divine ability and faithfulness. Only the Lord Himself can keep us – we cannot keep ourselves, but God is able to do it and to enable us to walk upright as believers without sliding, slipping or stumbling. "He is able to keep you from falling."

The New Testament repeats **over and over again** the ability of the Lord. Let me remind you of some of the great statements that we find in the New Testament. Hebrews 2:18: "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." What a comfort that is in our temptations that He is able to meet our situation there and then. Ephesians 3:20: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." 2 Timothy 1:12: "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Philippians 3:21: "He is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Hebrews 7:25: "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Now the writer says here: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling." Now literally it means here, "able to keep you from stumbling" and, when you come to think of it, it is stumbling which precedes a fall. You always stumble first before you fall, and this is what the Lord is able to do, to keep you even in the act of stumbling before you get to the falling stage. We are kept from falling over the stones that are in our way, and God is able to hold us when we are in perilous places when we cry out with the Psalmist: "When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up" (Psalm 94:18). He is the unseen Guide and He will be very near to us as we take our way through the dark and worst places of human experience.

The Christian life in the New Testament is spoken of under various figures. It is referred to as a walk, as a journey, a pilgrimage, and the idea is that all that is before us is unknown and often it is rough and treacherous and hazardous, but He is able then to keep us from stumbling, He is able to exercise His gracious guardianship over us that our feet are kept from falling. Furthermore, He is able to make the Christian walk a bracing experience and to invest it with a glad serenity. He will go before and make the rugged places plain – He will guide our steps with His unseen hand. The only reason why, with such an abundant provision, Christian people stumble and fall surely, is their lack of faith. There is a dynamic which is ours *in Him*. He is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”. God’s ability far surpasses our thought or our asking. Consider the words in Isaiah 40:29-31: “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” Second –

GOD’S POWER TO PRESENT YOU FAULTLESS

Take a note of this word “faultless”. The word applies originally to the requirement that the sacrificial offerings should be without blemish. This was a requirement reiterated time and again in the Old Testament: “Your lamb shall be without blemish.” There were those in Malachi’s time who thought that they could get away with a cheap offering; they brought those that they thought would not sell in the market and Malachi said to them: “Do you think God is going to be pleased with them?” Not at all. They were to bring a lamb, the best unblemished lamb. Why? Because these sacrificial offerings were at that time a picture of the perfect offering of our Lord Jesus Christ. They were to be faultless. Then the word would apply to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself expressing His perfect, immaculate sinlessness. Again, the words apply to the future condition of believers stating that they would be presented before God at the last as sinless and stainless as a sacrificial lamb, and conformed to the image of God. “He is able to present you faultless.” Here is *anticipation* and, as Jude anticipates what lies ahead, he is overwhelmed at the thought of appearing in the presence of God at the great coming in glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and he says: “We will be presented faultless and with great joy.” Paul, writing to the Colossians (3:4): “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” Now those first century Christians lived with their eye on the future. They lived in anticipation of that great and glorious day, and here is Jude looking on to the end of time and saying He will “present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.”

There is also here not only great anticipation but deep conviction. Jude believed that Christians would be presented faultless on that great day. What a

transformation that will be! Paul in Ephesians 5:32, speaking about marriage, links this with Christ and the Church: "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." In verse 27 of the same chapter he says: "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." There is also the testimony of the Bride in the Song of Solomon 4:7: "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." This stood in contrast to the day when Jude was writing because the Church was then surrounded by all kinds of evil and error; he does not hide the difficulties of the day but he says that God will preserve His people and then present them faultless.

If there is anticipation and conviction, surely there is an exaltation. How will He do it? He will present them with exceeding joy because there will be the fulfilment of the ancient word: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11).

There will be joy, too, for those who share in the work of the Gospel. Paul, writing to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20): "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." That will be a day of triumphant joy when the kingdoms of this world shall be the kingdoms of our God and His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever. Is it any wonder, then, that Jude bursts out in his Doxology as he does?

This is the *consummation* of all believers. This is the *end* of God's great work of redemption. Why did God set about this work? Read about it in the beginning of Ephesians chapter 1: "That we should be holy" (verse 4).

" Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,
My beauty are, my glorious dress.
Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed
With joy shall I lift up my head."

Surely, as we survey afresh and wonder at our redemption, we too shall be moved to wonder, love and praise when we realise that God should set His love upon us, that He should do *all this* for us, this great *hope* of being presented *faultless* before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Our highest praise, our deepest thankfulness ought to lie in the assurance of this in any measure of it becoming an actuality in ourselves. We should indeed be moved to the praising of the great God who loved us and sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world and that we are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation". May we know these things, not just in word only, but indeed and in truth, and know them as a living reality. Take with you, then, this great Doxology and may we indeed say from the heart: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." And we say with Jude to that, "Amen". Amen.