

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

Editor

MAURICE HANDFORD

9 Birtlespool Road, Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire SK8 5JZ

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Editorial

May I bring to you a word of **encouragement**? There is much that makes for depression today both in the nation and on the religious scene.

I find great encouragement in these words of the apostle “be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). We should note that this was addressed to believers — “my beloved brethren”. Christian service is described as “the work of the Lord”; it is well for us to remember this.

God’s work is never easy — the devil sees to that. We need to guard against the temptation to give up or to become frustrated.

We must be **resolute** — “steadfast”. Here is a call to personal faithfulness. We need to have settled convictions and principles and not to be tossed about with every wind of doctrine. We need to be rooted and built up and stablished in the faith.

We should be **reliable** — “immoveable”. We are not to be fickle and go from one thing to another. It was said of Bishop Ryle that he was “a man of granite with the heart of a child”.

Further, we should be **resourceful** — “always abounding”. In Christian work we must never work to rule, we should be active and diligent, using our time and our gifts to the best advantage. We are not to be slothful but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

Christian service is never wasted or to no purpose. We have the assurance that our labour is not in vain in the Lord. Let this thought be a constant source of challenge and encouragement to us.

Four Key Words

A Sermon by the Editor

"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." 1 Peter 1:8 & 9.

None of us have seen our Lord Jesus Christ as Peter saw Him, so, to Peter, as to the other disciples, our Lord was a physical presence. They had eaten and drunk with Him. They had trudged the dusty roads of Galilee; they had sat at His feet and drunk in His gracious words and ministry. Sometimes we are apt to envy them the privilege. We say "If only we had seen Jesus with our mortal eyes how different it would be. If we could have lived with Him and talked with Him and consulted Him about our personal difficulties that tangle our lives: How different we say it would be. Why, one single day with Jesus would solve all our private problems and straighten out our spiritual confusion." Yet as the poet said,

"Dim tracts of time divide
Those golden days from me."

If only! But, natural as such thoughts may be, they are really mistaken, for they forget one essential fact that Jesus Christ is alive today. He is risen from the dead; He is alive. He is more free than He was in the days of Galilee, nearer to His own than when they walked through the cornfields and in the vineyards and kept vigil beneath the Syrian sky. We can still see Christ today with the eye of faith. "Whom having not seen ye love" says Peter. You remember how it is put so well in Horatius Bonar's lovely hymn,

"Here O my Lord I see Thee face to face
Here faith would grasp and handle things unseen
Here grasp with firmer hands the eternal grace
And all my weariness upon Thee lean."

It is possible to see Christ with the eye of faith and, as someone else has put it,

"And earth has ne'er so dear a spot
As where I meet with Thee"

And wasn't it William Cowper who says,

"Jesus, where'er Thy people meet
There they behold Thy mercy seat."

Yes, the cry of our heart is, "Sir, we would see Jesus." It is no myth or make-believe when men declare that they have met with and found the Lord Jesus Christ. "Whom, having not seen, ye love." Look at Peter's message. What is the main thrust of it? Peter is seeking to define the essential Christian experience and condensing it to a single sentence. Notice Peter has packed into these two verses four short, decisive verbs. Notice them.

“You love.” “You believe.” “You rejoice.” “You receive,” and that’s what it means to be a Christian. It is a four-fold progression.

Christian experience explained in four key-words.

Peter says “Whom, having not seen, ye love.” The first thing, we love the Lord. Pause and ask the question, “What, in essence, is the Gospel? What is it? Let us answer it negatively for a moment. It is not a philosophy of life, though it will provide one. The Christian message is ultimately the only thing that can make sense of the universe. It is only when you have the Gospel in its right place we get a right understanding of life today. When the storms arise and beat against us and when hope lies wrecked in the dust philosophy won’t be any use to you then. Nor is it a moral Code, as so many seem to think it is, though, of course, the Gospel does provide us with that. It is a most sublime and noble ethic in the world. It is lofty, and yet, men are never set on fire by things so distant and impersonal as moral maxims or ethics and idealism. Something more is needed than that. Nor is it a social creed as again so many seem to think in our own day. It has indeed had an uplifting effect on mankind. Think of what the Evangelicals did in their abolishing of slavery, the Factory Acts and so on. Read the history of the Evangelical Party by G. R. Balleine and it will give you some idea of what the Gospel did, but all this, in a sense, is a side-product, not as a main object.

What, then, is the Gospel? Peter says the first thing is “love” to Christ. This is the essential of the Gospel, a personal attachment to our Lord Jesus Christ, and, without that, there is no vitality in our religion. Do you remember that searching question that our Lord put to Peter? There was never a more searching question “Simon Peter, lovest thou Me?” As simple as that, yet very far-reaching and very profound.

Knowledge and orthodoxy and correct views are all good and essential but of themselves they are insufficient. Without love to Christ we are not believers. This is how Paul put it when he was describing that which motivated him and sent him on his great task of evangelism, he said “The love of Christ constraineth us.” Love to Christ is no secret, hidden thing. Like light it will be seen and like heat it will be felt. It is not some vague abstraction but a wonderful affection. It is not an argument but a friendship. You remember how John put it “We love Him because He first loved us”, and we sometimes speak of love at first sight. Two lives are brought together, each knows the other as life’s complement — only a look and love was born. And isn’t that true on the spiritual level?, Here’s the first thing, Peter is saying, as a mark of definite Christian experience, love to Christ. We need to pause and ask “Do I know anything of love to Christ?” Not just admiration of Him as a figure of history or a great religious Leader. It is something far above that. Do we love Him because He first loved us?

Notice the second thing Peter goes on to say “Whom ye love, although ye see Him not yet believing”. This is the second thing belief. In the Bible and the New Testament particularly when it speaks of belief and faith it doesn’t just mean an intellectual assent to a theory, but it means a committal of life. James had a startling thing to say in his Epistle. He says about barren orthodoxy and barren so-called faith he says, “Why the devils also believe and tremble.” They go so far and they tremble. The New Testament belief is not just an acceptance of a set of dogmas. There is more to it than that, and Martin Luther put it like this “The only faith which makes a man a Christian is that which casts itself on God for life or death.” It is a committal.

Look again at this word ‘believe’. It is a figure that is suggested of a leaning posture. It is an idea of dependence, a confident resting of our weight on the Christ who has loved

us and given Himself for us. "Faith" itself, says Paul, "the gift of God." Faith too is the response to the Divine grace. Faith is putting our trust in and relying upon the Lord for what He has done for us, believing He has died for our sins and rose again for our justification. What was the message that Paul gave to the startled and the convicted Philippian Jailor when he cried out at that midnight hour, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And it was so terribly simple, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." That is the message to the convicted sinner and by means of faith we receive the blessing of the Gospel. Faith brings us into a living union with God. Faith is the hand that reaches out and takes the proffered blessing, and the New Testament goes on to say that, God-given faith affects our life and character. It is a belief that behaves. It is not just sentimentalism. It is a life that is brought into touch with God and a life that is consistent with what we believe.

So we need to ask the second question, not only 'Do I love?' but 'Do I believe?' to the saving of the soul'.

Then will you notice, thirdly. He goes on to say, "Believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable." Just look back to v.6, and he has touched on that thought there. He says "Wherein ye greatly rejoice though now if need be ye are in heaviness through manifold temptation, but rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's suffering that when His glory shall be revealed ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." This is the dominant note and says Peter, "Rejoice." Notice he does not blink at the hard and painful facts of life v.6. "Ye rejoice greatly although ye are in heaviness." This is the paradox. We can be going through the mill, going through trial and yet have a deep rejoicing in the Lord. We cannot be truly happy until we are really His. Have you ever thought of it that the New Testament is the most joyous Book that was ever written. It deals with men who were committed to the hilt — they had crossed their Rubicorn. They sang their Hallelujah Choruses across the world and many of them went singing to their death. They "rejoiced with joy unspeakable." Yet today many people have got it all out of perspective. They seem to think that being a Christian is a tame, hum drum sheltered monotony. Here is Peter writing to encourage these Christians who are facing the most rigorous persecution instigated by Nero and he says "Although this is your outward experience yet inwardly ye can rejoice;" Rejoicing with joy unspeakable. And this is not just Peter's word. Take up the Pauline Epistles and you will find the note is there just the same. Think of Paul when he is concluding his Letter to the Church at Philippi while he is in prison, a man under sentence of death, looking death in the face and what does he say "Rejoice in the Lord". I think when he wrote it he felt "Well, my readers will wonder if I am exaggerating the point, so he says "but again I say rejoice." Go back again to the Philippian jailor, what happened when he embraced the Gospel, he rejoiced. It didn't make him miserable. What about the Ethiopian eunuch to whom Philip ministered and opened and expounded to him the great prophetic Scriptures in Isaiah? The eunuch we read "Went on his way rejoicing." What about Paul and Silas when they were in the inner prison at Philippi? Physically they were below par — they were smarting and bleeding from the treatment they had received. What did they do? Sick and moan? Call down the wrath of heaven upon them? We read "At midnight they prayed and sang praises to God and the prisoners heard them." They praised God even there for His goodness. What about John Bunyan? And how we are indebted and shall be indebted to the end of time to this great but humble man who has enriched our lives with his writings. He wrote "Pilgrims Progress" and "Grace Abounding" in the prison in Bedford and even there he could speak of the

overflowing of God's peace and joy in the midst of trial. What about Samuel Rutherford another prisoner for Christ in covenanting days in Scotland. Take up his Letters that have been republished fairly recently. There is not a moan or groan in them but this sense of rejoicing, and they were written in prison. Oh have you got hold of this word "Rejoice with joy unspeakable". When you come to think of it all the deepest and richest things of life are unspeakable. They cannot be put into words. Take, for instance, a mother's love. Who can adequately describe it? No-one yet has been able to invent a symbol to express it. It is something wonderful, something that cannot be put into words, something unspeakable. How much more, then, this joy that Christ gives. Isn't it interesting that Paul speaks of God's peace as something that passes our understanding, and here Peter speaks of joy which is something unspeakable.

"But what to those who find ah! this
Nor tongue nor pen can show
The love of Jesus what it is,
None but His love ones know."

We have looked at three of these words, love, believe, rejoice, and notice the last word, in v.9, "**Receiving** the end of your faith even the salvation of your souls." "Receive". Now salvation and Saviour are become rather threadbare words but oh that we could grasp the meaning throbbing in them, "Receiving the end of your faith even the salvation of your souls". Salvation is a wonderful thing. It covers past, present and future.

Dealing with the past — sin has been blotted out — forgiveness is experienced — "Being justified by faith we have peace with God." "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." It also has a present meaning. We are being saved as a present daily experience, and it has a future meaning, we shall one day be saved from the very presence of sin. And what does Peter say of this salvation? It is salvation received, "Receiving the end of your faith". We don't win it; we can't do that. We can't earn it because it is not a wage. We can't buy it, because it is not for sale. It is something to be received as a free gift. Do you remember John as he comes to the end of his prologue to his Gospel? He says "But to as many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God." What is Paul when he is writing to the Colossians saying? He says "Ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, therefore" he says "being built up in Him." If we receive this salvation of which the New Testament and the Old Testament are so full, we can only receive it with a bowed head and broken spirit and take it as a free gift from God.

How do we stand as we look at these four marks of a Christian. These are questions we need to put to ourselves. Do we love Christ, do we really believe, do we rejoice, have we received the salvation that has been so graciously and so freely provided? Here are questions we need to put to ourselves and not rest until we find a satisfactory answer.

Take with you these words. "Whom having not seen ye love, who though now ye see Him not yet rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, Receiving the end of your faith even the salvation of your souls." May God write His Word upon all our hearts for His Name's sake. Amen.

Four Great Things

C. B. HARRIS (Long Eaton, Nottingham)

1 John Ch 3. verses 1-3

The first three verses of this chapter surely are overwhelming in their vastness. Who can comprehend these things without the gracious enabling of the Holy Spirit?

1. A GREAT LOVE.

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us”.

John is truly overwhelmed by this panoramic view. It is breathtaking in its vastness. It causes him to be speechless. “Lost in wonder love and praise”.

We need to rivet our attention on the word BEHOLD. “Look and see”, but this does not bring out the true force and wonder of the subject.

A “look” can be of a casual nature, but to “behold” is even more wonderful.

We are reminded of two things.

i. The quality of that love.

“What manner of love”

- a. From all Eternity. “I have loved thee with an Everlasting love”.
- b. Undeserved and unmerited. “Depth of mercy can there be. . . .”
- c. Unknowable. “The love of Christ which passeth knowledge”.

ii. The quantity of that love.

“Hath bestowed upon us”.

The word BESTOWED is very telling and powerful. It means to DRENCH or to POUR OUT. The same word is used in 2 Cor. ch 8.1-4 where Paul speaks of the giving and liberality of the Macedonian Churches. They gave freely not counting the cost.

As we meditate on these words surely we need to ask ourselves three questions.

- a. Do we take these things all for granted.?
- b. Have we lost something of the sense of wonder and awe.?
- c. Has it affected our lives and simulated our love for such a Saviour.?

2. A GREAT MIRACLE.

“That we should be called the sons of God”.

The word CALLED is of special significance, and rich in meaning.

It has within it the meaning;

a. Called — Effectually.

As in Gal. 1:15. “But when it pleased God who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace”.

It has also the note of Adoption, and those who have been adopted know it.

The words of Thomas Watson are very precious on this theme.

1. That God should adopt us when He had a Son of His own.