

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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Editorial

“REJOICE . . . PRAY . . . GIVE THANKS”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

IT HAS BEEN SAID that these three words constitute the standing orders of the Christian Church.

(i) The believers at Thessalonica probably lacked many things on which most people rely for happiness, yet they possessed a deep and abiding joy in Christ. We can rejoice because of what God has done for us and for His promises which never fail.

(ii) We are to live constantly in the spirit of prayer and should have the habit of referring everything to the Lord. Some of the most powerful prayers recorded in the Bible are very brief, like that of the Syrophenician woman – “Lord, help me.” Resolve to be regular in prayer.

(iii) The obligation to thankfulness is often neglected. We frequently forget to thank God for answers to our prayers; we take so much for granted. The Christian ought to be constantly lifting up his heart to God with gratitude for preservation and all the blessings of this life.

How well do we fulfil our standing orders?

A Desperate Situation Transformed

A Sermon by the Editor

*"And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue,
Jairus by name; and when he saw him he fell at his feet"
(Mark 5:22)*

WE KNOW NOTHING of Jairus apart from what we read here in this very moving incident in the Gospel. We know that he was a man of some social and ecclesiastical standing, for he is described as a ruler of the synagogue and, of course, there were not many of his class and rank who sought the help of the Lord Jesus Christ. If the scribes and pharisees were found in Christ's congregation, they were usually there, not as suppliants, but rather as critics, and so it was an unusual thing, and an almost unprecedented thing that one in so high an official position as Jairus should come with such a request and fall at the feet of Jesus.

I want to look at what is a familiar incident and notice –

1. A desperate situation

It was certainly that in every sense of the word. When Jairus' daughter became critically ill, his heart, in effect, became a battlefield where love and pride were brought together. Love suggested an appeal to the great Physician: pride, on the other hand, reminded him of the solemn warnings that had been given in the synagogue concerning the itinerant Preacher from Galilee. So Jairus was in a dreadful state because his little one was dying. The doctors that had been called in had done their level best but they were bound to admit failure, and it cost Jairus a good deal to approach the Lord Jesus Christ. It was much more difficult for him to come for help than it was for the beggars and for those afflicted with leprosy, but Jairus had more to give up. He had to humble himself and come and ask the blessing that he needed. Jairus, too, was one of the chief men in the town, if not the chief. Then, Jairus' friends and colleagues, the scribes and the pharisees, why, they had already taken up an attitude of hostility to Christ and, therefore, for Jairus to seek His help was to invite their hatred and contempt. Do you not see the battle that was going on in his heart and in his mind? But sorrow and need made short work of prejudice for, another look at his child's face with the pallor of death spreading over it and the thought of what his home would be like if she was taken, *that settled it*. He would bury his pride; he would go and ask the great Preacher from Galilee to come and heal his child. Oh! yes, sorrow softens a proud heart and brings the soul humbled into the very presence of Christ. Jairus forgot his dignity. He flung himself at the feet of Jesus – his agony was sore, his anguish of soul was intense, and his need was great – and, says Matthew in his account, he not only came to Jesus, but "he worshipped him" and he sobbed out his requests that the

Lord would come and lay His hand on the little girl. Here is Jairus. He is in an extremity and he comes to Jesus. Affliction quickens reverence and decision; sickness brought him to his knees and, under pressure and great anxiety, he came because Jesus was, literally, his last hope. Do you see how rank does not place a man beyond the reach of sorrow? Jairus was not lacking in wealth, he had got the best medical help that was available in that day – all that money could command – and yet sickness and death came to his house. There are those who still think that riches are a great antidote to sorrow, but riches and wealth cannot secure anyone against sickness and against death, and so Jairus in his extremity turned to Christ, and, happy are they who, in the midst of earth's sorrows, have learned to do likewise. It was certainly a desperate condition.

2. It was an expectant petition

Now it is interesting that some of the great prayers of the Bible are very short indeed – they are remarkable for their brevity. This prayer is only the length of one sentence, but it was an agonised appeal, and desperation made him bold. "Come and lay thy hands on her." But I believe that Jairus was not only driven by despair, but he was also moved by trust. He was sure that Jesus could restore. There is no suggestion of doubt or hesitancy in his prayer. He believed that all that Jesus had to do was to come down, lay His hands on the girl, and she would live. So, do you not see how love throbbed in his prayer? "My little daughter." It is a diminutive that he uses, a term of endearment, and what pathos there is in his appeal! Jesus loved to see faith like that and at once He responded to the cry of distress. He was not too busy or too preoccupied – He would come. How marvellous is the compassion in this promptitude of Christ! There is a phrase we often use in the Collects where we speak of the Lord as being more ready to hear than we are to pray. If ever it was illustrated it is here in the story of the Lord and Jairus.

3. A disturbing delay

The healing of the woman with the issue of blood certainly occasioned delay. As the proverb says, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick". It was desperate that the Lord came immediately, and, unless succour came at once, it would come too late. If ever there was a time when haste was required, it was now, if she was to be snatched from the jaws of death. But, alas, instead of haste, there was stoppage and delay and to Jairus the minutes must have seemed the length of days, and then the inevitable happened. There came a message from his house saying, "It's all over; trouble the Master no further". And how his heart must have sunk! "Oh," he would be saying to himself, "she might have been saved but for the hindrance of this woman." Did hard thoughts arise in the heart of Jairus concerning Jesus? Did he reproach Him for the delay? Well, the Lord's delays sometimes are quite puzzling, we have to admit that on a human level. We cry urgently to Him in some situation and, instead of hastening to our help, He tarries for His own wise

purpose. You see that wonderfully illustrated in the story of Lazarus at Bethany. You remember in John chapter 11 the two sisters, Martha and Mary, sent an urgent message – “He whom thou lovest is sick” – and they thought that all they needed to do was to acquaint the Lord of the situation but, when Jesus got the message, we read that He stayed there a further two days. Oh! what bitter thoughts must have filled the sisters’ hearts during those days of delay and it fairly bubbled up from them when He did eventually come, because they both said to Him: “If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” And, similarly, thoughts may have arisen in the heart of Jairus: “Oh, if the Lord had not stayed to heal this woman He might have been in time to save my child!” But Jesus knew his thoughts and turned to the broken-hearted father and said: “Be not afraid, only believe.” “Fear not.” Yes, when there seemed to be no longer any ground for hope or faith. And doesn’t the Lord, in our dark moments, come and say much the same thing to us: “Fear not, only believe.” He says that to us in our dark and troubled days when sorrow threatens to overwhelm us, “when sorrows like sea billows roll” He comes and speaks His own word: “Fear not, only believe.” He comes to us when all hope seems gone, when it is thwarted and crushed and broken beyond recognition. He comes to us and says, “Fear not, only believe”, in the day when our prayer seems to go unanswered. We have to admit that the discipline of delay is hard to bear, but Christ invites and encourages faith at the moment when it seems most hopeless. How preposterous it must have seemed when the storm had blown out the last flicker of light in his daughter to say, “Fear not, only believe”. And so, from a desperate situation and an expectant petition and a despairing delay we come to –

4. A triumphant outlook

What a triumphant one it was too! Jairus doubtless felt that hope ends when death enters. Life was extinct; hope was dead on a human level. But notice how the Lord takes this situation in hand and gives a reassuring word and says: “The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.” Here is a word of revelation which softens the grimness of death. Of course, they misunderstood Him because His view of death was so utterly different from theirs. You remember how He spoke in a similar way concerning Lazarus at Bethany. “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.” That is what death is for the Christian. It is but going to sleep, closing the eyes on this world and opening them in a better one. The Lord Jesus is the *only One* who really knows what death means for, as the writer to the Hebrews says, “He tasted death for every man”, and He tasted it in all its fulness, in all its bitterness. So the Christian, in a real sense, does not die but sleeps. This is the characteristic way of looking at death.

In the New Testament Stephen, when he made such a magnificent stand and gave such a wonderful testimony, what was the reward he got? He was stoned to death. But this is what it says in the Acts of the Apostles: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. . . . And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” The physical fact of death

remains, but the whole character of it is changed, because Christ is *Lord of death* and it obeys Him. Listen to those magnificent words: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25); "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Revelation 1:18). There are those today who speak of death by any other name but its own because they fear it so much. The Christian speaks of death as he does because he fears it so little. "*Sleep*" holds the promise of an awakening. That was the first word He said: "She is not dead, but sleepeth." Then notice verse 40: "They laughed him to scorn." This was the attitude of the professional mourner. They were hired to complete the picture, as it were. They came with their flutes, they came with their wailings and they laughed Him to scorn. Oh! they were of no use. They could not aid Jairus' faith; they couldn't comfort him in his loss, and they showed their entire lack of feeling by laughter and ridicule in the very presence of death. Their artificiality and hollowness and their unreality greatly offended the Saviour. He put them out; they were superfluous; they were not wanted; He put them out but, really, their foolishness robbed them of an inestimable privilege. They might have been permitted to see the Lord raise this little child to life again, but "they laughed him to scorn".

I venture to say to you that that day has not entirely passed, because we live in a day when the Christian faith is very much open to ridicule and scorn. You can hear it on the media day after day. Men talk about the law against blasphemy but they certainly do laugh the Lord to scorn in our own day.

5. "He took her by the hand" (verse 41)

How wonderful! That is exactly what Jairus had said to Him: "Come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live." But, to the great Physician no case was hopeless. She had been certified as dead and, of course, no man could do anything for her now, *but He could*. Christ was not only perfect *Man* – He was perfect *God*. He only uses two words – we have it preserved for us there in the very original – "Talitha cumi." Dr. Griffith Thomas says it could adequately be rendered, "My pet lamb"! Oh! what a revelation that is of the heart of Christ. "Talitha cumi." "My little lamb." "*Get up*" – the life-giving word went forth, "*Arise*". There was no effort, no excitement, no display and *she was restored*.

6. We are to see in this a pledge of the resurrection

Here is One, the Lord Jesus Christ, who made even death unclutch its bony fingers, for He is stronger than the strong, and He takes captivity captive. He is, as I have already said, *Lord of life and death* and the things that happened in Jairus' house that day are a type and a picture of good things yet to come, because, at the very last day, He will gather together His own elect from north, south, east and west, and He will raise up His own – they will meet to part no more and to die no more, and He that raised up Jairus' daughter *still lives*.

So we come to the end of a very moving and a beautiful incident in the Gospel, and we see how Jairus' faith was rewarded. It was worthwhile to believe. Faith is often tried to the utmost, but we are urged to hold on in days of darkness and if in our darkest day we do hold on we shall ultimately be rewarded, *This, then, was the testimony of the Psalmist* in Psalm 40: "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry." That was not only the testimony of the Psalmist, but the testimony of Jairus. May it be our testimony too! Meantime, let us wait patiently for the Lord, and He will ultimately hear our cry.

May God add His blessing to our study and meditation in His Word and may we have faith that triumphs over all difficulties and over all obstacles. Amen.

M.H.

For Younger Readers

CARINE MACKENZIE

THE RIGHT CHOICE

YOU ARE PROBABLY not old enough to vote for a Member of Parliament or a Counsellor, but your Mum and Dad, and everyone over eighteen years of age, is entitled to cast their vote for the person of their choice.

For weeks before the election, the candidates will do their best to win votes. They will make promises about what they will do for schools or hospitals or wages or taxes. Many claims are made; many promises are given. Each candidate hopes that the decision will be made to make him or her the new Member of Parliament. The candidate and his agents spend a lot of time and energy in putting forward their case. The Lord Jesus Christ wants us to make a choice. He wants us to choose Him as our Lord and Saviour.

This is not a decision that we can make alone, but God the Holy Spirit works on the heart and the will and enables a sinner to turn from sin and to embrace Jesus Christ who is freely promised in the Gospel.

The Lord Jesus makes many claims too. He is the eternal Son of God; He was born of the Virgin Mary; He lived a perfect sinless life; He was crucified but rose from the dead on the third day; He was seen by many people before He ascended up into heaven. Even now He is making continual intercession for His people.

All Jesus' claims are true. There are no exaggerations or misleading statements from Him.

Jesus gives many promises too. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

"My peace I give unto you."

"My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

The Bible is full of precious promises made to believers; i.e., people who have made the right choice of believing in Christ.

The Lord Jesus does not make a promises that He cannot keep. There are no broken promises or forgotten pledges with Him.

Many of the election candidates will disappoint us – even the ones who win on the day. They make mistakes; they may be unable to do what they intended; they may even not intend to do what they said they would in order to win the vote.

The Lord Jesus will never disappoint those who follow Him. He is wise, powerful, holy, just, good and true in all He does and says.

PUZZLE

Now it is puzzle time. Look up the following verses and fill in the missing word. The first letters of each of the missing words will spell out another word – "PROMISES".

1. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the _____ of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).
2. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you _____ (Matthew 11:28).
3. Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall _____ them (Psalm 119:165).
4. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, _____ shall compass him about (Psalm 32:10).
5. For I will forgive their _____, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:34).
6. Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will _____ thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness (Isaiah 41:10).
7. For the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your _____, to save you (Deuteronomy 20:4).
8. Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall _____ thee (Psalm 55:22).