

# THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

*Editor*

MAURICE HANDFORD

9 Birtlespool Road, Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire SK8 5JZ

*Incorporating the Protestant Beacon and The British Protestant*

---

---

New Series  
No. 1585

NOVEMBER — DECEMBER 1995

Old Series  
No. 2585

---

---

## *Editorial*

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY might well be called a book of remembrance; it was written to bring the people to remembrance at a difficult time of the nation's history. It shows what great things the Lord had done for them in days past and to stir them to gratitude.

God is constantly calling His people to recollection, to think of the past and to realise what He has done, and out of the past to gather lessons of inspiration and hope for the future. Memory is a gift of God and a gift to be cherished. What a mighty effect the memory can have upon us and yet how easily we forget. The Israelites were plagued with short memories, they had forgotten God almost the moment Moses had turned his back.

Moses' purpose was to hearten the people for the future by an appeal to the past. He says that the wilderness experience was designed to teach them self distrust and reliance on God for all the necessities of life. They were to remember all the way that God had led them (8:2). No way explains itself at every step. We cannot always discern God's purpose at the time, often it is only in retrospect and remembrance. All may have seemed wrong to the Israelites when God led them the long way round, but there was a purpose in it.

John Newton, the one-time slave trader, had over his study mantlepice these words: "Thou shalt remember thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 15:15). At the end of his life he said: "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things — I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Saviour."

May we never lose the sense of our immeasurable debt to what God has done for us; may we keep it in our constant remembrance.

# “The Face of Jesus Christ”

A Sermon by the Editor

*“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6)*

IT IS THE LAST PHRASE we want to think about — “the face of Jesus Christ”. So we ask, how did He look; What was He like? Well, we live in the greatest picture age that the world has ever seen and yet the authentic picture of Christ, as such, is missing. His face is not to be seen in any art gallery or on any screen, for this reason — He never sat for His portrait. The imagination of artists has given us a form, but the world has no genuine likeness. Those most familiar with His features made no effort whatsoever to preserve some record of His appearance so that we might know His look and figure. A sure impulse made them write and give us a picture of words four times over in the Gospels of the New Testament but a restraint kept them from drawing a picture of the Saviour and the absence of any likeness of our Lord drives us back to the Scriptures. The absence of any picture by pen or pencil or brush sends us back to our only material, the New Testament, and the more absorbed you become in the New Testament the clearer becomes the picture of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There has been a great interest in the supposed shroud of Christ in Turin. I do not think that it is genuine at all, for this simple reason — on the shroud is supposed to be printed the likeness of Christ, but if you compare carefully with what it says in the New Testament about the grave clothes of our Lord, the napkin was a separate entity and it was in a place by itself. This supposed shroud seems to be all in one piece. Come to the New Testament and you have the authentic picture of Christ presented to us very clearly, and it is this that we want to look at, the face of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament and the Bible as a whole speaks a lot about the face of Christ.

For instance, it was a TRANSFIGURED FACE on one occasion. You remember after the great confession of faith, when Peter speaking for the rest said of our Lord, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”. Our Lord took Peter, James and John up into a mountain and He was transfigured before them and His face shone with heavenly glory. This was not a reflected glory as in the case of Moses and Stephen. This was the intrinsic glory of Christ shining out of His face. It was a transfigured face.

The New Testament says consistently also that it was a RESOLUTE FACE. This is what Luke says: “He stedfastly set his face to go up to Jerusalem”. The light of steady purpose was in His eye, and there was a firm set of His mouth.

**He** stedfastly set His face to go up to Jerusalem to do the great work for which He had come into the world, to make reconciliation for the sins of His people.

We read also in the New Testament that it was a DISHONOURED FACE. In Pilate's judgment hall the soldiers and the others spat in His face and buffeted Him, and, when we think of that, we have to say in the time-honoured words of the Creed, "It was for us men and for our salvation" that that face which shone with glory was also for a time a dishonoured face.

Now on a different line, it was an ATTRACTIVE FACE. When we read the New Testament we find that those great writers could never forget it. There was John the apostle and when he is writing in the Book of the Revelation this is the great hope that he holds out to the people at the last Great Day, "They shall see his face". John had seen it and loved it and lived in the light of His presence and he seems to have in a sense a great pity for those who down the subsequent centuries would never see the face of Christ, but he says, in effect, "Never mind, the day is coming when every believer will see the face of Christ". You remember how in his first Letter he speaks of the coming of Christ and he says, "We shall be like him" — there is a wonderful transformation coming — "we shall be like Him, for we shall see him as he is". Remember how the apostle Paul frequently refers to the fact of the coming again of Christ, how that the dead shall be raised with the trump of God and Christ shall appear in glory and he says, "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then, face to face. Now we know in part, but then shall we know even as also we are known," and all Paul's longing is explained in the fact that he has seen "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". Or take Peter. Peter also looked ahead to that final event of all time and this is what he says to the people to whom he writes of Christ. "Whom, having not seen, ye love," but there is a day coming when we shall see Him. Yes, it was an attractive face.

But there is another side to it, because the New Testament takes up the Old Testament teaching and says it was also a DISHONOURED FACE. You remember how Isaiah the evangelical prophet of the Old Testament in that matchless 53rd chapter of his says of Christ, "He hath no form nor comeliness that we should desire him. His visage was more marred than any man," referring, of course, to the day of His humiliation and agony. But listen to Psalm 45, which sets the complementary truth, "Thou art fairer than the sons of men. Grace is poured into thy lips." And when you get to the Song of Solomon we find there He is described as "the fairest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely". Yes, it is an attractive face. Think again of our Lord amongst the children with His arms around them as Mark tells us and, you know, children judge us almost entirely by our faces. The children ran to Him and He put His arms around them and blessed them and we may be sure that He had a happy face. There was kindness and friendliness in it.

Or see the Lord among other people, learned men and good men alike — the rich young ruler and Nicodemus who came to ask those tremendous questions

concerning the possession of eternal life. They came to Him. They were not repelled in any way whatsoever. Anxious fathers and weeping mothers, sick and dying folks, all sought the light that came from His countenance.

I suggest again it was an **APPEALING FACE**. There was something in His face that appealed to the crowds, but it is the way in which He drew the outcasts which tells most about His face. Take Matthew. You remember he is sitting at the receipt of custom and one day a shadow fell across his desk and he cast his eyes and there he is confronted with Jesus of Nazareth and, when the Lord says to him, "Follow me", Matthew arises at once and follows Him. It was the face of Jesus that drew him. He could love Him for ever and follow Him to the end of the world.

What about Zacchaeus, a little man, who climbed up the sycamore tree? A man of some ingenuity, he climbs up to see the Saviour as He passes by and He stopped at that tree and said to him: "Zacchaeus, come down, for this day I must abide at your house," and you can imagine how Zacchaeus climbed down the sycamore tree in the presence of the jeering crowds at Jericho. The Lord said to the bystanders, "This day is salvation come to this house, for the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost". What about Mary Magdalene? Even she found courage to come to Jesus; there was no one else to whom she could go. Perhaps she had looked wistfully into many a face wondering if she could trust them with her secret, but as she looked into the face of Jesus, Mary knew she could let Him see the worst in her.

But there is another thing to notice. It was an **ARRESTING FACE**. It was a face before whom men stopped dead in their tracks. You remember how our Lord read the Scriptures in the synagogue in Luke chapter 4, how the minister gave Him the Book and He read from the prophet Isaiah about the Spirit of the Lord being upon Him and ended by saying, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears". And then He went on to expound the text and pointed to them certain home truths which they greatly resented; so much so, they led Him out of the synagogue to the brow of a hill intending to cast Him down headlong. There is that noisy rabble intent on stoning Him. What did He do? Suddenly He lifts His head, He looks on at them and passes calmly through their midst unharmed. It was that fearless majesty of His face that daunted them.

You recall the day when our Lord entered the temple in Jerusalem and was astonished at the change of use to which that sacred place had been put, how that the money lenders were in big business in the very courts of God's house and there our Lord dealt severely with them. He made a whip of cords and He turned them out. Why did they flee? Well, I don't think they fled because of the whip that He made, they were fleeing from the burning cheeks and the blazing eyes of the indignant Christ. You know, the world has got it all wrong. They have never got any further than the children's hymn,

"Jesus, meek and lowly".

**Well, thank God, He is — but that is only one side of the truth. There is the complementary truth that this same Jesus, who is so meek and so gracious and so loving, is also a Man and a God who can rise up in anger.**

In the last book of the Bible, the Revelation, it speaks of the “wrath of the Lamb” and the two terms seem to be incongruous, a lamb being wrathful, but there you see it in the temple, and the Lord said to those mercenary minded people, “Get you hence, this house is a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves”. Yes, it was an arresting face.

There was a day when the Scribes and Pharisees thought they had got our Lord on the horns of a dilemma. They had actually taken a woman in the act of adultery and now this was their supreme chance to get Him into a very difficult corner and they came to Him with the question that “Moses in the Law commanded such a person to be stoned, but what sayest Thou?”. And you remember what our Lord did. He stooped and He wrote on the ground and then He looked up and looked at them and said, “Let him that is without sin cast the first stone”, and He stooped down and wrote again. We would love to know exactly what He wrote, but it wasn't just His writing, it was the look on His face, and we read that silently one by one those accusing Scribes and Pharisees gathered up their ecclesiastical robes and fled. They could not stand His piercing glance. You remember how the Saviour turned to the woman and said, “Go thy way and sin no more”. Yes, it was an arresting face.

Let me remind you of that last and solemn night that our Lord spent in the days of His flesh on this earth of ours, there in the Garden of Gethsemane when He poured out His soul in earnest prayer and prayed, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will but thine be done”. And when the prayer was over and the disciples had been found asleep for the third time the soldiery entered the Garden. They came seeking Him and our Lord said to them, “Whom seek ye?”, and they said, “Jesus of Nazareth”. He then said, “I am He” — or as it is in the original, “I AM”, taking the great title of God in the Old Testament, and we read that the soldiers fell backwards. They were amazed, they trembled before the quiet dignity of the Man whom they had been sent to arrest. It was an arresting face.

You remember the Centurion in charge of the soldiers who had presided over the grim details of the crucifixion. When it was all over, in the grim afternoon of that first Good Friday, there was that Centurion deep in thought, lost to everything and saying, as he weighed it all up — all that his eyes had seen and his ears had heard — “Truly this was the Son of God”. It was a common day's work with him, but he could never afterwards forget that face. It was an arresting face. It was a face which both enthralled men and haunted them.

Come back again to John in the Revelation. John says that the world at large is not finished with the sight of Christ. John says there is a day of reckoning coming, the Day of Judgment, and this is what he says about that great day: “I saw a great white throne and him that sat upon it, before whose face the

earth and the heavens fled away." This is a facet of truth that has dropped out of circulation. The Day of Judgment is hardly ever mentioned, but here it is pictured in all its solemnity in the last book of the Bible, when men will cry to the hills and to the rocks to cover them from the face of the Lamb of God. But at the beginning of the Revelation John speaks for the comfort of believers: "I turned to see a voice that spake to me and he was as one whose face shone as the sun shining in his strength." There is the Saviour, the arresting face. The Psalmist had seen the glory of God in the starry heavens, but Paul saw it more clearly in the face of Jesus Christ, the human face transfigured by divine love. Perhaps we envy the opportunity of those who saw Christ in the days of His flesh. To them was given a great privilege; they had an experience superior to others.

Now our Lord reminded them that prophets and kings and wise men had desired to see the things they had seen and had not seen them, and yet the fact remains that many saw Christ with their physical eyes and were none the better for the sight. We must see Him in a spiritual fashion. Many saw Him die and derived no benefit whatsoever. We need to see Him with the eye of faith. In many a pulpit you will find the words on the desk, "Sir, we would see Jesus". Surely that is the desire of God's people when they come to God's house on the Lord's Day, to see Jesus set before them.

Oh, what a MATCHLESS FACE was His. Those who live close to the Master will surely in some degree or other reflect something of the Master's likeness. The Lord deals with us by His Spirit in grace and refines our nature and we therefore should reflect something of His likeness and His beauty. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told with regard to the early Christians that the heathen round about them took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. Oh what a commentary those Christians were! But on earth at our best we shall be but dim reflections of Christ, but in heaven at last we shall see Him, that is, the believers will see Him in all His beauty, and as John says, "His servants shall serve Him and they shall see his face". They will see Him no longer veiled, but resplendent in power and great glory. Oh what a moment of rapture that will be when faith gives place to sight and we behold the glory of the Saviour! John could say of Christ in the days of His incarnation, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth". Oh, but what an unveiling that will be!

"The Bride eyes not her garment,  
 But her dear Bridegroom's face.  
 I will not gaze at glory,  
 But on my King of Grace —  
 Not at the crown He giveth,  
 But on His pierced hand.  
 The Lamb is all the glory  
 In Immanuel's land."