

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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Editorial

Once again we have in the providence of God arrived at the season of harvest. Harvest is the crown of the year (Psalm 65:11) and springs from the unmerited goodness of God.

There is a lovely promise relating to harvest — “while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat and summer and winter shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22). Long centuries have passed since it was given but it has never failed. There have been times when the harvest has not been so abundant but there has always been sufficient. If there has been a deficiency in one part of the world there has been an abundance in another part.

How dependent we are on God’s promises! If God failed to send either spring or summer we cannot with all our skills create either of them. We cannot of ourselves order or change the seasons. The seasons are a great wonder in themselves. A world of wonder bursts forth every springtime; each blade of grass and ear of corn is a display of God’s handiwork. “O Lord, how manifold are thy works” cried the psalmist, “in wisdom hast thou made them all”.

If God fulfills His promise concerning the seasons why doubt Him concerning other things? Why not reckon upon every promise being fulfilled and act upon them.

The seasons are like a perpetual procession; cold flies before heat and then summer is chased away by winter. We live in a world of change. Nothing is stable, it is not always seedtime nor is it always harvest time. We have to reckon on changes in our lives and in our circumstances. How very reassuring it is to know that all things work together for good to them that love God (Romans 8:28).

The Saviour's Question

A Sermon by the Editor

"Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." John 6:67/69.

These words of our text occur at the end of a very wonderful chapter, a chapter which records the feeding of the five thousand with the five loaves and two fishes. This, incidentally, is the only miracle that occurs in all four Gospels — a miracle exhibiting the creative power of Christ, as well as showing forth His compassion to those in need. Then the chapter goes on to speak of the rough crossing of the Sea of Galilee on the part of the disciples and how our Lord went to them walking on the waves. The greater part of the chapter is taken up with the discourse in the Synagogue at Capernaum centring around the thought of Christ the true bread, and so we get that lovely verse 35, "I am the Bread of life; he that cometh unto Me shall never hunger and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." The chapter goes on to its climax with this great question. "Will ye also go away?" And the answer "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

THE PREVAILING CIRCUMSTANCES

What made the impulsive Peter cry out, "Lord to whom shall we go?" The preceding verses supply the answer. Look at v. 66. "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him." They retreated, they deserted, they forsook the position they once occupied. They went back and walked no more with Him, and what a contrast that is with what occurred, at the beginning of the day. They had crossed the Sea of Galilee, they had sought the Lord out, they had fairly hung upon His words, and now they turn their backs on Him, so unreliable, and so fickle is human nature. They drifted away because He had disappointed the hopes they had entertained of Him. Now the disciples too felt bound to reconsider their position. There must have been days when they felt they were the remnant of a failing cause. At times perhaps they were disturbed by thoughts of home, they thought of quiet domestic joys and of safety, and the Lord knew what was going on in their minds in this dark day when many went back and left Him, He fairly broke in upon their thoughts and said "Will ye also go away?" and perhaps that very question helped to clarify their minds and they saw that He was without a rival, that He stood alone, that He occupied a category by Himself. There was no-one else to whom they could go — they were shut up to Christ.

That is the background of this great word, "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Yes, many went back and walked no more with Him. What a solemn and instructive fact that is! You see, even Christ who spoke as man never spoke and did works of matchless power as no-one that ever lived before or since has done, even from Him many went back and walked no more with Him. With the miracles as evidence of Christ's Person and work, they went back to their former way of living. They went back to Judea and to the world, and many, doubtless, went back to their sins. And if men could forsake Christ in the days of His earthly ministry we must not be surprised if some go

back today, but we need to ask the question, "Why did they go back?" Some, probably, because they had not counted the cost involved, and isn't that something that is ever with us? There are those who make a profession of saving faith but they have never counted the cost and they go back. Others, and probably most, went back because they could not receive the deep doctrine that our Lord had just proclaimed. Look at v.53, "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." That was something they just could not accept. They disliked a theology that spoke of blood. They did not like anything that had to do with a vicarious sacrifice, just as many don't want anything to do with it today. It was an unacceptable truth. Others dreamed only of temporal advantages and rewards. Why only the previous day it had been proposed by some enthusiastic followers that they should take Christ and make Him King against His will. They had yet to learn that His kingdom was not of this world. We do need to remember that there is such a thing as counterfeit grace and unreal christianity. We need to remember that the Lord Himself spoke about the stony ground hearers who have no root in themselves and in the time of temptation they fall away. We need to remember too that not all blossoms come to fruit and that not all are Israel which are of Israel. We need not be surprised that many went back. We need not be surprised that some go back today and some go back, undoubtedly, because the Gospel is offensive to them. It is humbling to their pride, and some retreat because of the influence of friends or because they are afraid of the taunts of men.

THE INADEQUATE ALTERNATIVE

Peter said, 'Lord to whom shall we go?' It is like the saying of the Psalmist in Psalm 73, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none on earth that I desire beside Thee." To whom shall we go? You see, despite all the learning that abounded in the ancient world Paul had to say that "the world by wisdom knew not God". Egypt, Assyria, Greece and Rome were the very nations that obtained the very highest excellence in secular things, yet, spiritually, they were sunk in gross darkness. The ablest philosophers of Greece and Rome groped after truth like blind men, and the wisest of men could only acknowledge their need of light. Where would Peter have turned for peace of heart and mind, for satisfaction of conscience, for hope, in a world to come if he had left Christ and gone with the deserters? Would he have found what he wanted amongst the formal Pharisees or sceptical Sadducees or the worldly Herodians? Not at all. Would they have quenched his spiritual thirst? Would they have fed his soul? Indeed not. They were all broken cisterns that could hold no water, and he that drank of these waters still needed to drink again. "To whom shall we go?" If we are ever tempted to forsake Christ let us ask ourselves "To whom shall we go?" Who of all created beings can satisfy our every need? Who can give help and strength and comfort to us if we turn our backs on Christ? We live in a world of trouble, whether we acknowledge the fact or not, and nothing but an Almighty personal Friend will meet the needs of our soul, and Peter said there is One and only One who satisfies the yearning of the human heart, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

THE NOBLE CONFESSION

Notice the noble confession that Peter made. "Thou hast the words of eternal life," Isn't it striking how the wondrous miracles attracted the crowds but they were repelled by our Lord's teaching, and it was the very opposite with the Apostles for whom Peter was the spokesman. It was not so much the supernatural works but the Divine words of

Jesus that held them. Peter, had what those who departed had not, he had a hearing ear. He knew that the words of Christ were not just empty sounds, nor just mere words. They were vital; they were dynamic; they were means of grace; they were the vehicle of salvation. Look at our Lord's own words in v.63, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." Peter believed and was assured of them, "Thou has the words of eternal life." The words of Christ had sunk deep into his soul and he felt their power. He was conscious of the blessings they had imparted to him. "Thou hast the words of eternal life." Doesn't that bring us afresh to appreciate Christ's mission in coming into the world? Why did He come? He came that we might have eternal life, a life begun in the soul by faith while we live, and perfected in glory hereafter. To give eternal life, and the Lord Jesus still speaks down the long corridors of time and His words come to us today with undiminished power and beauty, and what gracious words they are! You remember the crowds in the Synagogue at Nazareth acknowledged that He spoke with gracious words. "They wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth" and as He preached that day they listened in breathless silence. But not only are they gracious words, they are authentic words and so the crowds declared as the Sermon on the Mount came to a close that "He taught with authority as not as the Scribes". Gracious, authoritative, but they are life-giving. They give life to those who receive them and Charles Wesley has that thought in his Hymn,

"He speaks, and listening to His voice,
New life the dead receive."

What a noble confession! "Thou hast the words of eternal life". And for Peter to say this of Christ when the Pharisees and the Sadducees were agreed in rejecting Him was surely a mighty act of faith.

Notice, he goes on "And we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ." "We have come to realise" says Peter, "that you are the Holy One of God, that you have come from God, that you belong to God, that you are appointed by God." What a meaningful and glorious confession! "Thou hast the words of eternal life," and many have found the words and the promises of Christ, not merely words but solid realities. They have been persuaded of them and embraced them and found them both meat and drink to their souls. You remember how the writer to the Hebrews said, "We are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses" yes, witnesses who in the faith of Christ have lived useful lives, and also who have died in faith resting on the word of the Lord.

Now such faith enabled Peter to stand up boldly before the Sanhedrim, before the Jewish council and stand and confess his Master and say "Neither is there salvation in any other for there is no other Name given under heaven whereby we may be saved," and such faith enabled Paul to go out of Judea and to spend his life preaching the Gospel and to say on the very brink of eternity, "I know Whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day."

Said our Lord, "Will ye also go away?" and you know that same testing question is still put to those who profess to be followers of Christ. He says "Will ye also go away?" or to put it in another way He said, "Do you still firmly cling to Me?" Remember this, friends, there is no substitute for Christ. He is not an adjunct to life, He is a very vital necessity. He has outlived all other rivals and outlived them because they were not really rivals at all. He stands supreme. "Thou hast the words of eternal life. To whom shall we go?"

So, permit me to put a question to you. Has Christ His rightful place in your heart and life? Can you say with Peter, "Lord to whom shall we go? We are shut up to you. There is none other we can resort to. Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God."

Don't be content with a mere formal christianity which, in effect, is nothing more than a respectability. Seek to have a living faith in the Christ of God, and let me ask one final question, Is He over the threshold of our lives? Is He on the Throne?

Here, then, is Peter's great word, "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" and may God write His Word upon our hearts, for His Name's sake, Amen.

M.H.

For Younger Readers

CARINE MACKENZIE

CITIES OF REFUGE

In a little back street in the town of Ripon in Yorkshire there is a very interesting stone monument. It is all that remains of a stone cross known as the Sharow Cross. In centuries gone by the Church of St. Winifred (now known as Ripon Cathedral) was a sanctuary for fugitives. Anyone within one mile of this church was safe from his pursuers. Stone crosses were placed all round the church at a distance of one mile — within this boundary was the place of refuge. The Sharow Cross is the only one that is still in existence in Ripon.

The provision of a place of refuge like this goes back to Bible times. In Numbers chapter 35 we read about the cities of refuge that God provided for people who had killed someone accidentally. If a man managed to find his way to one of these six cities, strategically placed, then he would be safe from the relative seeking revenge.

The Lord Jesus is a refuge for all who trust him. We are all guilty of sin and if we are outside of Christ our state is very dangerous. But if we take advantage of the safety only to be found in Jesus then we are safe for all eternity.

The names of the different cities are very interesting.

Kadesh means 'consecrated' or 'holy'. Our refuge the Lord Jesus is the truly holy one.

Shechem means a shoulder. This reminds us of power. The prophet Isaiah when he speaks about Jesus Christ told us that "the government is upon his shoulder". He has all power.

Kirjath-arba or *Hebron* signifies fellowship. We can have no greater fellowship than with Jesus the one who really knows and loves us.

Bezer is a fortification or a strong place. The Lord is a refuge and strength to all who trust in him.

Ramoth stands for 'high' or 'exalted'. There is no name higher than that of the Lord Jesus. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.

Golan means 'joy'. The Lord Jesus is the joy and rejoicing of the Christian's heart.

So the names of each of the cities of refuge remind us in some way of the nature and work of Jesus the Saviour of his people — the only safe refuge.

Puzzle

Find the missing words. The initial letters of the answer spell out the word REFUGE.

1. The Lord is my defence; and my God is the _____ of my refuge. Psalm 94.
2. The _____ God is thy refuge. Deuteronomy 33.
3. O Lord, my strength and my _____ and my refuge in the day of affliction. Jeremiah 16.
4. . . . God is thy refuge and _____ are the everlasting arms. Deuteronomy 33.
5. In God is my salvation and my _____; the rock of my strength and my refuge is in God. Psalm 62.
6. How shall we _____ if we neglect so great salvation. Hebrew 2.

Light at Last

DAVID A. DOUDNEY

"And they feared as they entered into the cloud." Luke 9:34.

There was no real ground for the disciples' fear. They were not only delivered from wrath; they were not only interested in all the rich blessings of a covenant salvation; of them it might not only truly be said, that "having Christ, they had all things," but they had, at the very time of these their fears, the immediate presence of Jesus. But, ah, so it is. Those who in reality have least cause for fear are mostly the subjects of fear. They fear where there is no real ground for fear. Still, the Lord overrules their very fears for their very profit.

How singular was it that on those two most eventful occasions — the transfiguration of Jesus and at the time of His intense agony in the garden, His disciples slept. It was the night-season, probably, on both occasions, and this may, in some measure, account for their sleeping. But there were other reasons, and out of those reasons we may cull most important lessons for our instruction and edification.

We read that Jesus, "as He prayed", was transfigured. His was prayer — His importunity — worship indeed, but how different was it with the disciples. How soon was their little strength exhausted — how soon was their worship closed — what a small measure of wrestling and importunity theirs. Though their Master was there, and in prayer too, they were "heavy with sleep." So much for mere will-worship or creature-piety. Yet possibly the Lord, in His mercy and condescension, over-ruled that very sleep of His disciples