

# *new covenant* Voice

## *ONLY GOD*

*Only God can take out of your heart the bad temper, pride, malice, revenge, love of the world, and all other evil things that have taken possession of it; and fill it with holy love and peace.*

*To God you must look, to God you must go. This is the work of the Holy Spirit: He is the Purifying Fire; He is the cleansing flame.*

*WILLIAM BOOTH*

**But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to GOD the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect and to JESUS the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel See that ye refuse not him that speaketh**

**HEBREWS 12:22-25**

# SHIPWRECK

GEORGE W. NORTH

## A STORY OF THE SEA ...

**The whole of Acts 27 should be read before reading this.**

This chapter contains one of the most famous stories of the sea. It is an incident in Paul's life, full of drama and spiritual truth, giving an insight into the psychological background of salvation. It reveals the conflicts within a man's soul as he reacts to the pressures and strains and stresses of outward circumstances leading up to deliverance when spiritual forces over which he has no control are at work. It has been said that man is the master of his own destiny, the captain of his own fate, but this is not true, as we shall see. On the other hand neither is it true that any normal man is a victim of his circumstances - the truth lies somewhere between the extremes of these two false hypotheses. Man is unquestionably sometimes radically affected and influenced by things of which he knows nothing, and for which he cannot be blamed. God does not hold him responsible for these. Invisible powers and forces beat upon him for which he has no explanation, hence his conflicts. God knows this and makes due allowances for them, but none of these things, however great and powerful they are, take away man's responsibility for his own life in the sight of God. In this sense he chooses and decides his end. He cannot make final decisions or choose ultimate destinies, that prerogative belongs to God and God alone. A man is able either by the power of satan or the grace of God to 'make himself', and to 'fashion himself', as Peter says. This chapter makes these things very plain, as Luke, Paul's travelling companion, puts on record in this factual, human account. Mankind's history is a record of the interplay or action and counteraction of divine and satanic forces and the response of human beings to these. This particular event is a focus by God on all these three as they combine, or co-operate, or conflict and clash for the possession of man's soul - the purpose being its eternal destruction or its eternal salvation.

### ...THREE COMPANIES

Three groups of persons are plainly discernible in the chapter:

1. Paul and his fellow prisoners and companions (Luke and Aristarchus were among these latter persons)
2. Julius and his band of soldiers
3. The nameless owner and master of the ship with his band of seamen.

These three, especially the leaders, represent respectively the presence and persons of: 1 - God; 2 - man; 3 - satan. There is also the ship in which these three companies had to live together for the journey, and its purposes. Two ships are involved in the episode, as though to set before us two distinct parts or periods of life, the first pleasant enough, the second tragic. At the beginning Julius was very kind and deferential to Paul, he liked him. Julius was a courteous man as well as a

powerful one, overall his word was law and his wishes had to be fulfilled. The first day after they had set sail they called in at Sidon, and Julius suggested to Paul that he should visit his friends there, which he did. They ministered to him and he thoroughly enjoyed himself among them. It was most unexpected, and with certain reservations, Paul might have said he was having quite a good time under the circumstances. After all it was quite unusual that a man in his position should have such freedom. Obviously Julius trusted him and took his word that he would return.

The intention of the captain of the ship was to stay close to the shores of the mainland, but it soon became obvious that he could not - the winds were contrary and the ship was blown off course. It wasn't serious though, this kind of thing was always happening, there was no need for anxiety, they would simply call in at a convenient port and take things from there. Julius was a little bit put out though, things were not quite going according to plan, but he never saw any evil portents in what was happening, it happened to everybody. His destination was Rome, so when the ship found a suitable harbour, he went about the waterfront searching for a ship that would take him and his charges further on his journey. Finding a ship bound for Italy, he transferred Paul and his company, along with the other prisoners, from one ship to the other, and they set sail. This ship was the ship of destiny, they not only changed ships, they changed owners and masters too - that was ominous. Julius made a big mistake. But he could do no other, he had to change ships, his journey demanded it; he was only his own master to a certain extent, he was not a free man. In his office he was free and powerful enough, he could commandeer a ship if he wanted and force the master of it to sail where he ordered. Julius had authority to do this and no shipman could disobey him. Whatever ship it was, he could use it if it suited his purpose, the ship didn't matter, what mattered was that Julius was shown to be right in the end, he belonged to Augustine's band, he was one of the elite. But in this case it did matter, God had other purposes than Julius for that journey and that ship.

### ...TWO SHIPS

The ship in both cases represents the outward manifestation, the external appearance to the world of the person. As the story indicates, this is possible of change, even exchange, as in this case. How the ship may be rigged, or dressed, or in whatever colours it may be painted and whichever flag it may bear, or whatever its home port may be, it is owned and mastered by someone, and the crew he hires are his servants to do his will. The personnel of the ship, that is the crew that commands and mans the ship, may change, but it remains basically the same. In the first ship all seemed well enough, the commander and crew appear to have been amenable to the other two companies in the ship. All the time the wind and the weather were agreeable the owner of the ship never intruded,

indeed he isn't even mentioned. Nevertheless, it would have been he who made the decision to alter course when conditions weren't favourable to him, which decision resulted ultimately in Julius choosing the ship for Italy that he found waiting in the port. When under sail the owner and master of the ship considers himself to be in sole charge of it, and insists on having it his way. This then was the situation when they set out on their journey.

### ...A CONTRARY WIND

For many days things went slowly and smoothly, and then a contrary wind sprang up and wouldn't allow them to make their port of call. It was as if a pattern was being set for their journey, but they managed to get to Crete alright, indeed they were almost blown onto it at a place called Salmone, but stayed out of trouble till at last they managed to get into safety at the Fair Havens. There they hung around a long time, hoping that things would improve, but they didn't, instead they worsened, getting so bad that it was dangerous to attempt to sail. Julius did not know what to do. The master and owner of the ship took no notice of the conditions, he insisted that things were not too bad - they must sail - and was impatient to be off. On the other hand, Paul's admonition was to do no such thing. 'This voyage will be with hurt and much damage', he said, 'not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives'. It was a straight warning from God, but Julius did not believe it, he rejected God's word, preferring to believe the master and owner of the ship more than what Paul said. It was his second big mistake. The Fair Havens was not to his own liking anyway, and the master saying the place wasn't big enough for him even to think of lying up there all winter, it was decided they should find somewhere else - where was never mentioned! So God's word was ignored; Julius agreed with the owner, and his advice prevailed.

### ...EUROCLYDON!

Soon afterwards there was a change of wind, it switched to the South and blew softly: what a good omen. The sailors' and soldiers' fears receded, doubts faded, they supposed they had obtained their purpose. The owner loosed the ship from its moorings, put out to sea and started to sail for the unnamed destination, but no-one who knew felt too sure, why was he hugging the shore so closely? The voice of God fell silent, His word had been disbelieved and ignored, Julius had chosen not to listen to Him. This could only have one result, but at present he was ignorant of it. Folly has to learn that no-one can live to please God or even live at all, on the basis of natural observation; common sense and supposition may seem like certainties to some, but only the word of God is certainty. Like Julius, many people believe satan's word against God's without even knowing it. Deep down in every heart lies strong purpose, determination to obtain its own way at all costs. The will of unregenerate man demands self-determination, it wants to achieve self-fulfilment and get out of life what it wants. Pride rules the will, things seem set fair, all appears to be right, a false sense of security lulls the mind and the feeling that perhaps all may not be so well as it seems to be are ignored. Not everything within a man is in total agreement with satan, in order to go his way something has to be ignored, other voices have to be quelled, perhaps killed. Uncertainty is not easy to live with. Hopes and fears filled the ship and when a tempestuous wind arose, they increased - they recognized it immediately; Euroclydon. Everybody in those parts knew it and were afraid,

its power was terrible, many a ship had been torn apart by it and destroyed, it was a killer. It was the time of year for it, whatever had made them think they would escape it? What would happen now? They should have known better than to start, but self-will and pride become easy preys to vanity, many a man thinks he can make it through, though all the evidence contradicts him.

This is the story of all drug addicts, alcoholics and slaves of nicotine, it is the way of all sex perverts. At first all seems set fair, they all think they can control themselves, but before they are aware of it, their indulgence becomes an undeniable habit, they have to have it, they cannot exist without it; they are caught. It seemed such a lovely soft wind, so warm and gentle when it blew from the south, the ship just glided along - so satisfying - you thought it would carry you along all the way to fulfilment. It always feels so good to obtain your own way - at the beginning. But that is not the end of the story - soon 'they could not bear up' - it was desperately hard to keep the boat together and steer it straight, on some semblance of a course, they just couldn't do it, it was too hard, they just had to let it drive. Where was the master and owner now? Who was he? Where were they, what were they? At last questions have to be asked, reality had to be faced, admissions have to be made, you can no longer assert your own will, you are losing your grip, you are only just managing to hold on and let the ship drive. It's terrible to feel driven, what an awful admission to have to make. 'But there are certain things you can do to help yourself', they say, suggestions, all the usual ones, pour in: try this, try that, pull yourself together man, doesn't anyone know about Euroclydon? Do something, get a grip, under-gird yourself, make yourself strong, there are quicksands around. Quicksands? 'Help!, help!'; but the wind whips everything away. Can you imagine it? Sucked down and down - it's fatal, they've been the grave of many a vessel, the end of many a man. Fear, stark fear, now, strike sail, stop the ship, anything - but the wind, this dreadful storm, seas like mountains and the mad rush and the dark. Stop!: 'But I can't, I've lost control', this time you've gone too far.

### YOUR SHIP IS A PRISON SHIP ...

If only you could turn back, or start again, if only you'd listened, taken a different course and stayed safe, but there's no turning back, no way to return, you are committed. Way back you made a decision not to listen to God, you listened to the devil instead, he seemed to know the way for you. Rebellious men think that God will speak to them whenever they want - there was never a greater mistake. God speaks when He chooses, through whomsoever He wants, and always at the right time, you cannot treat Him as though He is a man or at man's beck and call when He speaks, it is sheer grace and high time. He must be obeyed - But the quicksands. Relief, somehow you've been driven ahead of them. What luck; but it wasn't luck. You've been tossed over them, yes, it was God, but you didn't know. If only you had, but the ship was in terrible straits, exceedingly tossed with a tempest, deadly fear hung over the whole. 'Throw everything overboard, everything, whatever it is, throw it out. We've missed the quicksands, we're still alive, we'll save her yet. But throw out what you will, get rid of everything you think you should, save the vessel, survive, whatever be your motive, it can't be done. Do you not yet see? It's all being done under wrong orders from the wrong master, your ship is a prison ship owned by the wrong owner. Men cry out, 'Oh God, what is happening, where are You, why don't You

do something for me?', but it's all in the wrong spirit, self-justification calls on God in that spirit, wanting to blame God instead of humbling self before Him. Man, you'll be saved but not because you deserve it, only because He loves you. Do you understand? Yet? Unoffended and in great love, at the right moment, He speaks, but not till sun moon and stars cease to shine and all traditional sources of light and guidance have failed, and all hope of salvation taken away. Only after long abstinence God speaks, and when He does it is right in the midst.

### ... THE SHIP MUST FOUNDER

It is always that way. 'You should have listened to Me when I spoke to you earlier, all you have gained for turning a deaf ear to Me is harm and loss', God says. It was a word of reproof, but not a word of condemnation. It was also a word of hope. Julius needed it, a man will not co-operate with God if he is in a state of hopelessness, hope is the inspiration of effort, it generates response. It was also a word of preservation and of destruction. Your life will be saved, but not the manner of it, the ship must founder. What the owner of the ship thought is not revealed, and is best left to the imagination - 'But this is my ship, lose my ship? No, No!' - but Paul continued, 'God has given me all them that sail with me, be of good cheer'. Don't be downhearted when God makes promises to you, respond to Him, accept His conditions, and agree to His terms; you will not be saved if you do not. He speaks further, 'We must be cast upon a certain island.' Which island? Where? Where is it? He doesn't say, 'Where are we?'. He has chosen it. For you it will be the island of salvation. You cannot have salvation your way, but only His. Look at yourself, man, your life is in ruins. What have you achieved? Nothing. Nothing but desolation. No light, day or night: total eclipse. You can see nothing, there's nothing to go by, there's nothing left to try. You have no control, no will, no power, you cannot direct or guide your life anywhere. Fear is your world, it's all darkness and total depression. Why argue with God? Trust Him. It is of His mercy you haven't already sunk without a trace or word from Him, gone without a hand stretched out to save you. He has spoken to you again. Listen to Him, or perish, this is your last chance.

Your situation is not new, God has had to bring many men the hard way. Every man has to discover that his own way is wrong, to continue in it is fatal. You can't save yourself, self-effort is vain as the froth on the waves. Salvation is of the Lord. Other people's advice may have been well-intentioned and perhaps may have helped at times, a little, but with no lasting effect. All the time the life is under self's hand it is under satan's control, the devil's words and works are wrong. The only way for you is Jesus. You must take His word for it, or be lost, and you must discard all else for it. When a man's life has been a nightmare of fear, he is a fool if he will not submit to Christ. If it's not been gales it's been storms, if it's not wrecks, it's quicksands, if not quicksands it's mountainous waves and voices of a thousand fiends and the drive of satan and the sense that all is in vain. The devil has planned to smash you. You've served him, played into his hands and he's going to bring you down to hell. But not if God has His way. Listen to Him.

### HIS VOICE ASCENDS ABOVE THE STORM ...

When God speaks you need not fear that you will not hear Him, His voice ascends above the storm - listen to it. Do not

think He must immediately quell the storm, do not try to dictate your terms, He does not propose to do as you think, but what you need; the devil is not the only one who has plans for your life, God has some too. The devil wants to smash you. God plans to smash the ship. He is determined that the way you've been living (if you can call it that) must go. God can save you, but not without destroying your former life. 'Look at the cross and learn' means that God takes extreme measures whenever necessary. Listen carefully to what He said, 'This journey is going to be harmful and hurtful to the ship, it's load, and your life, but listen to Me and you'll not lose it. Every sensible person sees this, he understands that he cannot keep his old life and have a new one at the same time - something has to go, and go completely. If in process of ridding us of sin and the sinful life the Lord hurts us a bit, He doesn't mind; what He will not do is harm us permanently. He also knows that the joys of salvation will compensate us eternally for all life's losses.

### ...'BE OF GOOD CHEER'

'Be of good cheer', He says: He loves you, you are precious to Him. It is wonderful to be loved and so faithfully dealt with. One day, years ago, one of my daughters came to me (she was not very old then) and lifted a finger to me. 'Daddy', she said, 'my finger's hurting me'. I looked at it, and was not surprised. The top of it was yellow with pus, it must have been hurting her terribly. There was a nasty black thorn in her finger. 'Oh dear', I said, 'you've got a thorn in your finger, let Daddy get it out. It will hurt you dear, but I promise you I won't hurt you much. I'll get a needle and just stick it in there (indicating the spot) and it will soon be out.' 'No, no', she said. 'But it must come out dear, it won't take a minute. I'll hold your finger tight so you won't feel it much, it will come out ever so easily. Do you see that nasty yellow stuff in there? It's all going bad in there, it must come out'. 'No! No!', she said, with tears. 'Alright', I said, and let her go. I know she was not in any real danger and that she would soon be back. She was! 'Daddy, take it out please, it's hurting me'. I did, and just as I said, it was all over so quickly she hardly felt it. I left her till she came to her senses. There would be no loss of life. She's alive and well and has all her fingers, but I hurt her, I loved her.

God will not hurt you needlessly and He will not hurt you nearly so much as you've been hurting Him, and others too. Have you ever thought how many people you've hurt, perhaps destroyed because you would have your own way, forcing it on others? You've been utterly selfish. Know this, though, you cannot twist God round your little finger. But cheer up, God loves you still, He made us and knows how to deal with us. 'No loss of life', He says, if we place ourselves in His hands, but your ship will have to be smashed - that, or you will never be saved. At times we get God's work and the devil's work mixed up, we are so confused. Like that ship in the Adriatic, we don't know what's happening to us and we do not know where we are or what it's all about; listen to God, 'You must be cast upon a certain island'. Some of Whittier's lines seem to have just the right message for us now. 'I know not where Thy islands lift their fronded palms in air, I only know I cannot drift beyond Thy love and care'; read that and be comforted. The one certain island, steadfast and sure in the raging seas of life is Jesus Christ, salvation is with Him. You have to be shipwrecked on Him, so shipwrecked that you cannot go sailing away from Him any more.

Do not be surprised if after God has spoken you seem to go into deeper gloom than before. Many a person has said to me, 'Since you've spoken to me', or 'Since I've come to the meetings' 'things have got worse'. Do not despair, the ship was still plunging at midnight, worse than ever. Do not be afraid of the midnight hour, midnight is the dividing time when though still dark, yesterday was yesterday, and today is today. This midnight is though a time of hope for you. You may have felt like it, but you have not been completely forsaken by God - not at any time. He has been there all the time and He is still with you. He has broken the silence now pay attention to Him, obey Him, and all will work together for your good; believe God, keep going now, don't stop. But the shipmen did just that, they stopped, they didn't trust anybody or anything, they were too afraid. They sounded the bottom, everything out, found the waters getting shallower, fear gripped them again. Wishing above everything that they could see; where were they? Stop! Stop! They cast four anchors out of the stern, halted the ship - waiting for the day, or so they said. Instead, under cover of trying to save everybody they pretended to cast out anchors from the bows and keep her secure and straight on course, pointing in the right direction. It was all a great pretence, a lie. Be very careful, there's treachery within. Be true, there is that in man which often appears to believe God, when all the time he does not. Will a man seek to escape God? Does he think He is his enemy? Seek another way and all will be lost.

### ...COME OUT IN YOUR TRUE COLOURS

You must come out in your true colours. Reveal yourself to God, He knows all anyway. Face yourself, have everything out. He has revealed Himself and He insists that you reveal yourself. No man can sail into His kingdom under false colours. This is a critical moment, make your decision - true or false? Your life has been run and managed by a treacherous owner, you are already, and always have been, satan's. It is a wonderful moment when you realize that God will take you and save you. 'Except those abide in the ship ye cannot be saved', said Paul to Julius. You must be saved in toto, you and all your powers. The response to God's word must be immediate and without argument. At once Julius gave the command, delay would have been fatal: the soldiers cut the ropes, the boat fell into the sea and either sank or was washed away, or smashed. God always shuts a man up to Himself, He leaves no way of escape or of quitting - no alternatives. To be saved you must not try and sneak away, you must be known for what you are, it is all or nothing. Those men had stopped the boat with the intention of quitting at the last moment. No! - it won't do: where you have dropped anchor is still short of salvation. Why? Be sure God knows. Never try to practise deception on God, and if you value your health and salvation do nothing except what He tells you.

### ...'TAKE MEAT'

The next thing God said was 'take meat'. This is the first positive step of faith. Eat what God says, He not only wants to save you whole He wants you to be able to do your part. Salvation means that not one hair of your head is going to be lost. When God says all, He means all, down to the minutest detail, there were 276 souls in that ship, and God regarded them as one. By this time daylight had come and in the light of the new day, things seemed different. With new found strength, they set about doing God's will in earnest, they had to show they

meant it. At last determined, they cast themselves entirely on God's providence and with all their heart, threw the rest of the food into the sea; it was now or never. In the light they saw salvation ahead and decided to go for it with all their heart, and ceased trying to deceive themselves and God any more. Every man has to come to the realization that salvation is unto a completely new life, he must finish with his old life for ever. There is no salvation for anyone who does not see this. Salvation is not just from the panic and fear of a dissolute, devil driven life only, it is for ever to belong to God, and do His will. Men often cry out to Him in pain because of fear of immediate circumstances, but He comes with eternal purpose in mind.

How God gets us to the point of salvation is beyond the comprehension of man. When they sensed they were near to some shore and dropped anchors in the darkness that night, they did not know that God had brought them there, but He had. This was the 'certain island' of which He spoke. He had brought them to it. No-one in the ship outside the little group of faith believed that they were at the isle of salvation, but they were, they had been driven there by the power of the Lord. It really is amazing how God over-rules and engineers everything in a man's life for his salvation: the ship facing the island ready poised for the final run to safety. As the light strengthened they discovered a certain creek with a shore 'into which they were minded to thrust in the ship.' Everything is now certainty, the uncertainty was gone, so was division of opinion; they didn't know what to call the island, they didn't even know it was an island. All they saw was an inlet with a shore, hardly anything else, but they saw safety there - it was enough. As one, they made up their minds and went for it. Now there was some thrust in them, they set their hearts to go God's way, even though they did not know it. They cut the tiller loose, freed the ship from its anchorage, hoisted up the mainsail and abandoned to the waves; hope of salvation had returned. They saw their opportunity and took it wholeheartedly, doing all they could do believing they could have what they hoped for: faith had come because they had listened to God's word. With deliberation they ran the ship aground on the shore so hard that the bows of the ship stuck tight on the bottom.

The vessel began to break up, there was no hope of saving that, as God said, it surely had to go. All their means and manner of life fell to pieces around them. God was not saving that, He was saving them. The load of cargo had gone, the ships tackle had gone, food and water had gone, but no man had gone overboard, all were there, just as God said they would be - but He was smashing the ship.

### THE TIDE IS TURNED ... ABANDON TO IT!

When God gets hold of a man He makes sure he does not get away, He must be secure in a man. As well as making man secure in Him, God has to make him secure in himself, and He who is secure in Himself has to make Himself secure in man. That is the Gospel Christ preached, 'Abide in Me, and I in you', He said, he has to make sure of us so that he can be sure of abiding in us for ever - that is salvation, and nothing else is. There is nothing else for it - the ship must be smashed up, and He made certain that it was. 'Kill the prisoners', said the soldiers: still the devil wanted to frustrate the purpose of God. There is always that in man that wants to soldier against Him, but by this time Julius had set his will for salvation. Salvation must

be complete, it must be full salvation of the soul, only the shell must go. Julius, rid of indecision, fully aware of his duties, took complete control; 'Get to land', he ordered those that could swim, 'Cast yourselves into the sea, the rest of you, follow - on boards - broken pieces of the ship - anything - get to the shore.' Now is the moment to act, do as you are told now, believe: the

tide is turned, it is for you, abandon to it, it will carry you in. 'Abandon', everyone did and got safely to the shore. What an escape! From foundering altogether - from the storm - from death by the soldiers - from drowning - from that old ship, and from that master and owner - They were safe and free.

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## SOME LESSONS IN THE POTTER'S HOUSE

**BERNARD HULL**

**Jeremiah prophesied for at least forty years. He loved God and he loved the people. His life, though, was filled with sadness, for he had to speak in the knowledge that he would not be heard and that he would behold the tragic decline of the nation of Israel.**

Through the reigns of five of the kings of Judah, Jeremiah spoke from God. During those reigns, three of which were quite long and two very short, he witnessed the see-saw of the fickle attitudes of the people towards God. Their affections ebbed and flowed in spiritual things, they employed subtle political manoeuvres in successive governments, 'hewing out cisterns for themselves which could hold no water'. They made political alliances which were doomed to fail and all because the religious revival in King Josiah's day was skin deep and hearts were unaffected in their depths. Jeremiah's task was unenviable, his life tinged with much sorrow.

### WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE WAY

Through the book of Jeremiah, there are records of God's speaking to the prophet himself words of encouragement, sometimes cloaked in metaphor and figure. There is the obvious word in chapter one concerning his commission and ministry. Then there is that unusual word in chapter twelve verse five - 'If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?'. It could be summed up as meaning - you have faithfully ministered for me when things were relatively easy, though you became tired and sad, now things will get worse, and I believe in you to fulfil faithfully your calling in spite of increasing hardship; and so it proved that hardship increased and the prophet faithfully discharged his ministry under those wearying circumstances.

Another word given by God to the prophet for his own benefit came at the house of the potter. Chapter eighteen contains the story. At this time, Jeremiah was taught the secrets of Divine government, of God's sovereignty, of His principles and purpose in the affairs of nations and of individuals. Earlier (chapter 17:12) Jeremiah exclaimed the great fact that 'A glorious and high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary'. Truly a wonderful fact to rest safely in - God's sovereignty in all things from the beginning. However, Jeremiah had to go down to the humble potter's house to be

taught the operation of that throne of government. He watched the work on the wheel and was instructed in his own soul, encouraged and sustained for the difficult ministry which lay ahead of him.

### TWO DIFFERENT VIEWS

It is instructive to note that when, in chapter nineteen, the prophet demonstrated the government of God to the disobedient, careless people, he dashed the vessel that the potter had made into fragments. Through that act, God was showing forth the fact that Judah would shortly be dashed to pieces as a potter would cast away a vessel which had fundamental flaws in it. This happened to the nation; they were judged by God at the hands of other nations and scattered far and wide, like the broken pieces of a vessel discarded in the potter's field.

At that time the hearts of the people were impenitent - they only saw the judgement. God did have His prophet though. He was of another spirit, being tender towards God. To him, God was pleased to cast further light upon that judgement. To Jeremiah, God showed His secret plan, that this judgement was not final; rather, it was a marring of the vessel, so that it should be remade by the Potter. How we need this perspective on things! Even when tragedy, judgement and troubles come, we need to see them in the context of God moulding and then refashioning after the original was marred beyond apparent restoration. God's word to Jeremiah was fulfilled. Later the nation was gathered again and remoulded, and from it Jesus came. Salvation was of the Jews - the true vessel unto honour did come forth from her.

### THREE VITAL INGREDIENTS

Looking carefully into that which Jeremiah saw, we can find three main elements. Firstly, there is the Potter. There can be no pottery-making without this skilled artisan. Pottery is an ancient art, which even modern technology has altered but little. Still the skilful potter is required. The personal touch is vital - robots have not taken his place!

Secondly, we observe the clay. It is basic, earthy material, ideal for the use to which it is to be put. It is chosen with care, prepared and purged of lumps and air pockets so that it be a fit medium for the potter's use. Doubtless, through the centuries, there has been little change in the type of clay used by potters. Time has not changed this either.

Finally, the third vital component in the potter's house was the wheel. Whereas the process of pottery-making has remained virtually unchanged, certainly the wheels have altered, at least in certain ways. Some are now powered by electricity, even shaped somewhat differently, or are more refined. Perhaps this is a parable of the change of circumstances which has taken place over the centuries, but the principle remains the same, namely, there can be no forming of the vessel save upon the moving wheel of circumstance. Perhaps today's wheel is far more sophisticated than that of ancient times, but the object of all remains unchanged. This twentieth century wheel of circumstance has its place, but the potter and the clay abide the same. The wheel is necessary for its work. Its part has to be fulfilled, and then it can fade away whilst the potter remains, with the transformed clay, moulded for function and beauty.

## THE PORTRAIT OF GOD

Standing with Jeremiah and contemplating the Potter at work, we can first gather some secrets of the Potter Himself. Looking on the surface of things, at His eye and concentration, we see that He is masterful in His handling of the clay and intent upon His purpose, not casual or careless. There is an obvious sympathy evident in the Potter's handling of the clay. It is the perfect medium for His skills in the expressing of what He has in mind. Assorted pieces of iron would not serve His purpose. Pliable clay is the perfect stuff for His intent.

We see his delicate pressure at times and at others a more forceful, almost severe, crushing of the clay, especially when it became marred in his hand. Without further ado, he pressed it terribly into a mass and started afresh. He was working HIS work. There is a joy light in his eye as he works with the clay. He is skilful, capable and intelligent in his work.

To the thoughtful heart comes something of a portrait of the invisible God in all this. His feet upon the wheel of our circumstances, slowing down and speeding up according to His will and power. Robert Browning captures some of this in that verse of Rabbi Ben Ezra:-

He fixed thee mid this dance  
Of plastic circumstance  
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest  
Machinery just meant  
To give thy soul its bent  
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed

What though the earlier grooves  
Which ran the laughing loves  
Around thy base, no longer pause and press  
What though, about thy rim  
Skull-things in order grim  
Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress

Look not thou down but up  
To uses of a cup  
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal  
The new wine's foaming flow  
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what need'st thou  
With earth's wheel?

Nothing comes into our lives save by His deliberate intentions or His permission, and if our hearts are yielded, all shall be useful to the end that He express His beauty and purpose in us. God has wonderful affinity with us, His clay. At times, watching those hands upon the clay we see the delicate marriage of fingers and thumb and palm with the clay itself. God's eye does not leave the object of His work - His is no slovenly attitude. He skillfully works according to the prearranged thought of His mind. It is written (and we sense it so true) that 'He (The Head) was made flesh'. Wesley said that 'He clothed Him in our clay'. Diffident, callous disinterest is wholly absent. Any sense of distance between potter and clay disappears, and the two seem as one. Here is a wonderful secret to learn, that God, the Great Potter, handles these lives of ours, and the nations in this way. No wonder His glorious high throne is our sanctuary, our safe place to run to and take refuge in. He is not a despot, callously handling the mere clay of His people, but the loving, deliberate God, ceaselessly at work to perfect His beauty and image, expressing His mind in us, and indeed in all history.

## THE PRINCIPLES OF HIS WORK

Continuing to glean lessons from our time in the potter's house, we find at least two principles revealed. Firstly, the mastery of the potter over the clay. He has power over the clay. Paul takes up this very principle in the book of Romans, chapter nine, exclaiming on behalf of God 'Hath not the potter power over the clay ...?'. The potter is supreme - He is Master. He does not ask permission of the clay for what He is doing. His hands are all-encompassing of the clay, His feet control the spin of the wheel, His fingers dictate the shaping of all. So we discover the supremacy of the potter in all things, He has absolute right and there is no limit to His power over the clay.

The second principle we observe is simply that the clay is malleable, yielded, plastic under the potter's hand. It is the ideal material for his use, but must be soft and of the right consistency for his purposes. In this, the metaphor falls down, for we as God's clay, have some power of our own, we have a mind of our own and at least some limited power of choice. In fact, the single power of choice we have is whether we will yield and stay yielded in the potter's hand. We, in our will, are only free to choose what person and principle we will allow to master our lives, it is as simple as that. Usually, there are one or two occasions of crisis when that choice is made in the life of an individual, and numerous minor occasions where the choice made is deliberately sustained in the face of temptations to do otherwise.

We are more than clay. We have an intellect and many powers which give us the possibility of willing co-operation with God. We must be yielded to the absolute power of the Potter. As we are, the great inherent potential of the clay cannot be realized. When we examine the clay at the first, it is shapeless; it has no beauty, no sheen and is but a dull mass. Of itself, it has no power to develop into something of lasting value and beauty. Only in the potter's hand can its fulfilment come.

The potter shapes the clay using the interplay of the pressure of his hands and the pedalling of his feet, which forces the wheel into motion. Our circumstances are God's revolving wheel, which presses us nearer and nearer into His hands. It is most certain that His moulding work is done far more in the

context of the circumstances of life from day to day than in the Sunday services which we attend, though we know they, too, have their place.

## THE PURPOSE OF HIS HEART

God is the absolute sovereign in human life and expects that the clay of individual souls will wisely surrender to Him without reserve. However, if we were to conclude our thoughts at this point, we could be overwhelmed with a sense of being a pawn in His hand, of being overcome by superior power for its own pleasure alone. A certain severity could deter and frighten the sensitive and thoughtful heart and possibly lead it to rebel. It is true that He is the absolute power doing with me as He will, but what is the reason? To what end does He work? If I must be pressured and shaped, maybe even marred and remade, why does He do it? It will help me to know His end in view.

Interestingly enough, the teaching of the potter's house does not show me the end in view itself, but does make plain to me that there is definite purpose in what the potter does. 'He wrought a work on the wheels.' It is possible to translate that as 'HIS work on the wheels'. Exactly what he wanted, as it pleased Him. Note the use of the plural in 'wheels'. He does His purposeful work in the context of the spinning interplay of changing times, seasons, pressures and the ebbs and flows of history - personal, local and universal. God is really doing something purposeful and is not playing with us as a child fools with plasticine. There is great comfort here

As we watch the potter's work, we cannot tell what his purpose is, neither does the clay know His end in view, but He knows! However, as the work progresses, the interested observer begins to see that thought of the potter's mind wrought out in the clay, and, thinking of ourselves as the clay, we too

become increasingly conscious of the Lord's intent as He shapes us further. This fact is consolation to our hearts in personal affairs and also in the affairs of nations, for the truth is as real in the universal sense. The rise and fall of governments, the clash of armies, the wringing agony which cries out all over the earth. Yes, in all, He (our loving God), works a work 'as seemed good to Him to make it'.

There will be a time when the work is complete, when the whole thought and intent of the Potter is transferred to and fulfilled in the clay. Jeremiah saw the finished vessel removed from the wheel. It is true that it would be hardened and baked in the kiln and possibly ornamented with beautiful design, but these latter thoughts are not essential to the lessons conveyed to Jeremiah that day. The fact is that the potter completed the work. No matter that the vessel was marred midway in the process, and the potter started anew. It is amazing how in pottery, art and function seem to blend. Most articles made by the potter are to fulfil a useful function, but the Great Potter is also an artist expressing the richness of His thought through the vessel He creates.

Only when a man yields his life to God can he become that which it was intended a man should truly be. If he retains control for himself, he will remain a shapeless mess, fit for nothing, simply clay. If he yields to God, then the infinite potential inherent in him will be brought to light, but only in the hand of God! God also is enriched by possessing yielded clay in His hands. He finds in that clay the possibility of His self-expression. He is able to reveal His hidden mind so that onlookers (angels and devils) may perceive more clearly 'the invisible things of Him'. God's kindness, His compassion, His wisdom, the riches of His glory, are being revealed to principalities and powers through His work in the yielded lives of those in His church. **Copyright © B.Hull 1990**

## A - Z

## SMALL BIBLE WORDS

### EDITOR

This issue's small Bible words, due to limited space, is taken from Dr. W.E. Vines Dictionary of New Testament Words.

### L = LET (alone, go)

1. **APHIĒMI** (ἀφίημι), frequently denotes to let, suffer, permit, e.g. Matt. 5:40 (translated 'let ... have'); 7:4; 13:30; 15:14; 27:49 and Mark 15:36, R.V., 'let be', probably short for 'let us see' (Moulton and Milligan, Vocab); Mark 7:27; 11:6 ('let ... go'); 14:6 ('let ... alone') so Luke 13:8; John 11:48; in Acts 5:38 (where some mss. have *eao*, to permit, let suffer); in John 11:44 and 18:8 ('let'); 1 Cor. 7:11,12, R.V., 'let ... leave', A.V. 'let ... put away'; 7:13 ('let ... leave').

2. **EPITREPŌ** (ἐπιτρέπω), is translated 'let (me)' in Luke 9:61, A.V., R.V. 'suffer (me)'

3. **APOLUŌ** (ἀπολύω) signifies to set free, release, loose (*apo*, from, *luo*, to loose) e.g. Luke 13:12; John 19:10; forgive, Luke 6:37; to release, dismiss, send away, translated to let go, e.g., in Luke 14:4; in some mss. 22:68; in Luke 23:22, John 19:12 and Acts 3:13, A.V., 'let ... go' (R.V., 'release'); in Acts 4:21, 'they let ... go'; in ver.23 (Passive Voice), 'being let go'; 5:40; in 15:33, A.V., 'let go' (R.V. 'dismissed'); 16:35,36; 17:9; in 23:22, R.V., 'let ... go' (A.V., 'let ... depart'); in 28:18, A.V. 'let ... go', (R.V., 'set ... at liberty').

4. **EAŌ** (ἐάω), to let, occurs in Acts 27:32, translated suffer in Matt. 24:43; Acts 4:41; 14:16; 16:7; 19:30; 22:51; 28:4; 1 Cor. 10:13.

*Note:* In Acts 2:29, the impersonal verb *exesi*, it is permitted, it is lawful, is rendered 'let me', A.V. (R.V. and A.V. marg., 'I may')

# REASONS NOT TO GO

GEORGE W. NORTH

The following article is the edited substance of the message preached at Warrington Fellowship on the Sunday evening following the wedding of my daughter Sarah - hence the personal references kept within the text. There was a reference made in the first Ameva Farm Update magazine of how the Lord's word required a response to the listener's heart. Ed.

## GOD NEEDS PEOPLE IN ZIMBABWE

Reading the New Testament recently, I discovered something I had not noticed before, namely that Paul only gave his testimony when he was on trial before a civil court; the thought was as new to me as it was revelatory. It may be counted strange that Paul never went round the churches giving his testimony, for in these days it is a popular thing to do. Indeed it is unusual for an evangelistic campaign to be mounted anywhere except several people are called upon to give their testimonies. Nevertheless, having earlier made a promise that I would tell some stories, I am going to keep my word to you. Some of you will have heard some of the stories before, and maybe that is the reason I refrain from telling stories very often. Also, there are so many tapes going around in so many places, and I think, 'they have listened to tapes and know the stories as well as I do, why repeat them?'. Another reason (and this is very real to me) was the discovery, made many years ago, that Paul called his testimonies concerning himself, 'foolish boasting', and added 'ye compelled me'. Testimonies are necessarily full of I, I, I, me, me, me: they draw attention to self, even if they are intended otherwise.

Notwithstanding, being recently returned from Zimbabwe, I determined before the Lord that I would tell you something about that country. If at the commencement I appear to be giving a report, and being merely informative about the work of which most of you will have heard before, perhaps you will forgive me. God needs people in Zimbabwe, and when our brother was talking about going off into the wilderness and finding the one lost sheep, I wondered how many or few hearts were really excited about doing just that. I wondered too whether the nice sentiments expressed in hymns we sing really are giving voice to our hearts, or whether we are just sounding out those same nice ideas, only expressing the 'ought' of the church - what we 'ought' to be doing.

For various reasons, this has been a most thoroughly enjoyable weekend for me, but I must say that most of all - if I may just make a brief reference to it - I am grateful for having had the privilege of joining those two precious young people together in marriage. Perhaps most of you do not know that to Mrs. North and I, Sarah was as our own child. We knew her before she was born - though we didn't know it was going to be her. When she was finally born, and, following medical adjustments, was able to move around by herself, she was often brought down to the Lodge in which we lived, where she would

pull herself around the floor, under the watchful eye of my wife. Since then her lovely little face has grown bigger and lovelier, and as the years have gone by at no time has she ever let her handicap make her bitter, but rather the sweeter. If some of us had suffered her handicap we might have been miserable and full of grumblings, so many people find every little reason to make much excuse to retain bitterness in their hearts becoming sour of spirit and face, but that little girl remained sweet and lovely through it all. What a privilege it was for me then, to marry as it were my own daughter to that fine young man. I was so thrilled - I seem to come to Warrington almost as much as I'm in my own fellowship in Scotland these days, but I reckon things will even themselves out in the future. Well, praise the Lord for yesterday - but now for tonight and Zimbabwe.

God is needing men and women in Zimbabwe. I'm so thrilled that I WENT, for most of you will have HEARD about the farm and the vicissitudes through which it has passed. It is true, it HAS had a lot of ups and downs, but I am happy to assure you that the work is now established, they are really on their feet and going steadily ahead. I am determined wherever I go, to talk about this. I thank God I went to Zimbabwe, but in case you think I am on a spiritual 'high', wanting everyone I meet to go there, I want to present you with all the reasons why you should not go.

## WHY YOU SHOULD NOT GO

You should not go to Zimbabwe because it's a communist country. Think about that - think about living in a communist country. You shouldn't go there. It would be far better to live under a conservative or labour government in England. Think if you go there and take or have children there, what about their education? You must think about your children as well as, if not more than, yourself and the call of Christ. Of course: you MUST consider your children, you could not possibly put them on the line. You have a duty to them, you daren't put their lives at risk - so don't go to Zimbabwe! The country's bankrupt - that's another reason why you should not go. How are you going to live? If you're a person who must have things straight and ordered and controlled, if you think in little squares (I know some people who do!), don't go to Zimbabwe, it's impossible to live to a plan out there. If your brother or sister tell you that they're going to the neighbouring town 40 or 50 miles away, at 8.00 am, you MIGHT start out at lunchtime! So if you're a person that has to live to a plan, that bites your nails, and gets all het up and can't stand chaos, don't go to Zimbabwe. If you have justifiable complaints - 'How about me?', 'This isn't the Lord's will, I've planned my day and you're not taking a bit of notice about that' ... thinking, 'I'm a good Christian; I'm born again'. Dear brother and sister, don't you go, stay away from that place, for it will kill you. If you don't like snakes, don't go to Zimbabwe. I have a photograph of my son-in-law, who accompanied me, holding a five foot long egg-eating Egyptian Cobra by its tail. They caught it eating

eggs. It won't eat you but it will kill you if it bites you. If it is a spitting cobra that attacks you and it spits in your eyes it will blind you. These creatures always go for your eyes; they hit them with remarkable accuracy too and there's no known cure for their venom. When I tell you that little boys go out and catch their young, and bring them round in plastic bags to ... but you're more chicken-hearted than little black boys, aren't you? This is just information - you'd better be blind in England than in Zimbabwe, there is no National Health Service out there. What has national help and pampering and education and easy living done for you? This is the tragedy of the Church - for comfort, safety and ease, it has ignored God's command and done it very reasonably too.

If you get absolutely exasperated (especially if you're a school teacher) with trying to teach people, don't go to Zimbabwe. Yet, mind you, they're crying out for teachers. Any qualified person can get in out there, even if they only have 'O' levels, if they have some ability, they can become a teacher out there. Did you know that? You can probably become a headmaster or a headmistress if you have just got O levels, as for 'A's'! ... Another reason why you shouldn't go to Zimbabwe is, it's ever so hot there. In what they would call mid-winter, the thermometers drop to better levels than our best summer temperatures. A few days ago I left there - it was 90 degrees - I landed here - it was 30 degrees, only a drop of 60 degrees in temperature. I shouldn't go there if I were you, you'll have to take malarial pills every day of your life, or at least every week of your life. It has to be done; but there are so many things you can die of beside Malaria. You can't drink any water unless it's boiled - you mustn't, or it will kill you. You mustn't go swimming in the rivers or dams, because you'll get Bilhartzia. If you don't know what that is, it's a disease you get from a little microbe, that you can't see. If you go swimming in untreated water, they get in through your skin (especially if you have a little open crack). You start to feel weak, you'll wonder what's happening, then (horrible thought) you'll notice blood coming from certain parts of your body, you have the disease, deadly Bilhartzia.

I shouldn't go, if I were you. I think I can give you all a lot more reasons why you should not go. Settle down, get well-educated, settle into a nice fellowship, earn big money, get comfortable in England, after all there's plenty to do here. Do you want me to go on? I haven't told you about ants, spiders, flies, mosquitoes, bats, rats, scorpions, oh and flies that lay eggs in washing, which hatch out into little worms which burrow into your body. There are many more things beside this of course, but now if you will, I can give you some reasons why you should think that perhaps you should go to Zimbabwe.

## WHY YOU SHOULD GO

Zimbabwe is wide open to the gospel. While you are wasting your time running round little groups of white people in England, perhaps thinking (and it's a very popular thought) you have a mission field at your door because people are coming in from abroad. Of course! I know what it is, you can do that and still have a nice comfortable home in England. You needn't go, need you? There's another reason why you should go - all teaching and preaching is in English. Though it is a native communist government, schools are being taught in the English medium, they want to retain the English language because it is still the lingua franca throughout the world. And they're crying

out for people to help. They need you. They need your money. I'm not begging for money, I never have done that, I am just telling you what I know by observation. Ameva Farm and Bible School is one of the most wonderfully productive works I have visited in the world, it is an investment for God.

I preached to congregations of hundreds, and saw men and women change under the power of the blessed Holy Spirit ... you can see it happen right in front of your eyes, they are completely receptive to the truth. Congregations come nightly from the compound (all the farms have compounds for their black workers) to hear the gospel, they love to come. They have no idea of time, of course. If you announce a meeting for 7 o'clock, they might turn up at 8.30, but they come, whole families, and they bring their babies. You should see them when they start to worship, it's great, they're so natural. They sway, they clap, they jingle bottle tops on wire, they sing, you don't have to tell them to do it, they're IN it. Zimbabweans are not a bit like these stiff-bodied, set-faced white people thumping around trying to copy them, we don't have to copy them, and I hope they never learn to copy us. God is moving in a great a glorious way out there. For instance, they have built a school, and the owner of a big farm up the road told them, 'If that school were twice as big, we could fill it. I'd love to send the children of all my farm workers to it'. One person told me, 'we've had people come out here before who've told us that God had called them to do a work here, and after 18 months or 2 years when the going got a bit tough God 'called them to go somewhere else'. We've been watching these people of yours' (they think I'm the 'king-pin' of it all, you know that it is not true - but most everybody seems to take it that way), and we're sorry now that we approached it this way, but we were provoked in our attitude. We admire these people, they've come, they've stuck it out, they haven't run home to Mummy, or thought that their time was up, or received a 'call' to leave.' The workers out there never went to try it for 6 months, just to see - they went out there to fall into the ground and die. And do you know what these precious people told me? (I won't mention any particular names), 'We've been here 5 years, and if we want to stay, we have to become Zimbabwean citizens'. 'What will you do?'. 'That's what we'll do'. Would you do that? Most people keep open a back door so that they can come back home. These days very few go through doors and slam them after them, they most often always leave the way clear to go back. Some people go out and say, 'We believe God would have us come out for 12 months'. You'll never become a servant of God that way.

## ...THE SCHOOL CHILDREN

I went to a place called Bradford. I didn't go there for one year, or two years, I went there to stay, it lasted nearly thirteen years, then God moved me on. If someone says he or she is only going for twelve months, you know very well that they have not got a call or any great urge from God to go. When God calls and sends a man he goes almost as if to marriage - 'till death us do part'. Jesus Christ came to this earth, and until death parted Him from it, He stayed here. We are touching on one of the great maladies of the Church, the whole body is sick. I hope you see what God requires of people - 'who shall I send, who will go for us?'. Is the cry in vain? Tragically people of whom you think much and expect great things are often the people who let you down! But though needy the work is wonderful. That new school building they've built, which if they doubled it in size now they could fill, would they get the teachers? Every

morning the children stand for three quarters of an hour while Kasbert - that is the present headmaster (who hasn't got 'O' levels) - teaches them about Jesus. They don't have trouble with delinquency, there is no vandalism. Teachers, you won't have disorder out there, it is nothing like that to which you've committed yourselves in this land (and it's going to get worse) you teachers. Here is the truth beloved, if you go, you'll get your food. There's a garden there, in which they grow all they want in the vegetable line. There are oranges and lemons in plenty, there are peaches, there are mangoes, there are guavas (I love guava juice, I had a glass of it 2 or 3 times a day), there are avocados, there are paw-paws, just about all the tropical fruit you would desire. Black workers work in the gardens and tend all these things. You can get up with the sun in the morning, some rise even before that, to enjoy the Lord in a new and marvellous way in the silence. It's all wonderful. They have nice houses and electricity on the farm. They have fridges and toasters, all that sort of thing, my son-in-law started mending them almost as soon as he arrived. This is what is needed: they want men who will go out there and get on with the work, men and women who will get up with the dawn and stay up all day long. Workers who get involved in the work of God because He is working them. I arrived at the farm just as they finished the Bible School building, and I was graciously invited to open it, dedicate it and preach in it. Before that they'd been meeting infra-dig almost ad hoc, here, there and everywhere in converted tobacco kilns. Some of these young men who have come to know the Lord Jesus are so eager to invest their lives for God in their own country that they don't care how they live. Some have been through the Bible School and are now out working for Christ. They don't know half as much as you men do about the great glory of the New Covenant in Christ, but they know how to cast out devils and communicate the gospel. You think you've made progress when you've filled your head up with more knowledge, but surprisingly enough it could be a great disadvantage, for you've only given yourself a greater responsibility - not to do nothing, I hope.

### ...THE BIBLE STUDENTS

The great and joyful thing is that these young men come. They've no idea of time of course, term starts on a certain date - they might turn up halfway through, and turn the curriculum upside down. But communications are so fragile and some of these 'boys' are so poor they've had to walk nearly all the way from the other side of the country - they get there though. Some can understand English - a condition for coming to the School is that they can understand English (because we're so stupid that we don't understand Shona), just wanting to know about the Bible. Some of them aren't saved, but they get saved, you can see them coming up out of darkness and rejoicing in the light. Hallelujah! a transformation in three days. Shame on us. Shame on us. God has to work for years on some of us before we show any signs of anything happening. We do the stupidest thing - marry the wrong people, lend a deaf ear to and turn our backs on God, all the while saying, 'I'm a believer'. Don't you see? You can go out there and in 12 months have more souls for Christ than you'll get in 12 years if you stay here. Did you know that? I do not pretend to know what God is going to do with you, I'm only talking about the status quo, but the Lord knows. These boys they come in, learn of the Lord and go out to their people. I had some great times in the Bible School, I really did, and if I'd had my way, I'd have stayed there a lot longer.

The theme during the greater part of the 'lectures' I gave, was the Holy Spirit. I spoke about Him, His work, His gifts, His fruit, you know all these sorts of things, they just received it all and were transformed. On the weekend that we opened the Bible School, the Bishop came, with his wonderful team of tambourine players, led by his wife. He stayed on after the weekend for (I think it was) 2 or 3 days in order to attend the lectures. Before he left, he rose up and said 'I cannot tell you what God has done for me in these 3 days, wherever I go in Zimbabwe this is what I'm going to preach'. So just consider the opportunity you may be missing, they're simply crying out for people to go. I took my son-in-law with me, hoping that, under God, he would feel that he should go and he does. Almost immediately after his return he and his wife made application to go (by the Lord's over-ruling grace they have now gone).

### ... THE FARM WORKERS

This is all very wonderful. I could keep on about it a long time, but I want to tell you something about the natives. An incident told me by Sue Lathom comes to mind: 'One day soon after we came here, I noticed some of the Shona women picking the leaves off those hibiscus bushes over there (pointing them out). I couldn't understand why they were doing it and I told one of the Shona men to go and tell them to stop it - they were destroying the bushes. He did so and rather reluctantly they went away'. Some time later Sue saw them there again, and picking the leaves. She said, 'I told you to stop picking the leaves. Why are they still doing it?' The Shona man said, 'They eat them. It's their food!' We just don't understand, do we? They dig deep down into the ground for roots to eat, they catch and eat snails as big as that ... they ate big cockroaches. Some still do. Now, though, instead of bare feet, the workers on that farm have shoes. They come and get bread, they come and get milk, because the farm has its own cattle and milk. The workers, dear John and others, go and buy dozens of loaves every day, so the workers and families come and get bread. If any are sick, they come for advice and help, if they have problems, they go to ask 'Daddy John' - and he helps them, everything is told. Those who run Ameva Farm are the only white people that I know in Zimbabwe (I've only been to one spot, but I did move round quite a bit) who work one hundred percent among the natives. I went to churches in neighbouring villages around, and preached to all white people. I'm telling you what I saw. I loved these Shona people, and after about 3 or 4 days, when they saw that I loved them, they loved me. They can be won as easily as that. They respond to love, just like lots of you have done when you've been loved. When you know you're loved, your defences go down. Who doesn't want to be loved? You tell me.

### A LITTLE OLD LADY - A GUARDIAN ANGEL?

You can't bring money out of Zimbabwe, you have to leave everything there. You may not like it, but as you look at the thing in perspective, it's about right. I consider it to be right. I hope you do. If you lose your love of money and cease to worship it, these things do not trouble you.

But let me tell you a story I'm going to tell everywhere I go. I nearly told it this morning, because it ties up with something John said in his speech yesterday ... for which congratulations John. Do you recall it? He spoke of the time when he said to that young man seeking his daughter's hand in

marriage, 'Until the time I hand her over to you, she is mine'. Did you hear that? I hope young ladies all over England are hearing it. What a tremendous thing. I was invited up to a farm owned by Christian people (of course when you talk about farms out there, you're not talking about 50 or 500 acres, but about 5000 acres, or 15000 acres and more. John was going to take me across Aमेва farm, but he said 'There's parts of the farm that I've not been on'. I think the farm is 3000 plus acres), and at their invitation I went. It is a very prosperous farm, and the owners are very sure that it is because God has prospered them (we will see how and why in a moment or two). The farmer, a Christian man, showed me round the farm, it is beautifully kept, employing plenty of workers, who are paid good money for their labours. These really Christian people look after their workers, going above what the Government demands as wages. In one particular place there sat an old lady under a tree. He stopped and had a little word with her, and she nodded and without looking up at me got on with her job. Passing on from her some twenty yards or so, he said 'I'd like to tell you a story about this old lady'. First he set the background. 'This farm backs onto the Umfulu river and has river rights' - they are allowed to draw water from the river for irrigation systems so they never have any trouble with droughts, because this is a really big river. This story goes back to when the country was Rhodesia, during the time when the so-called 'rebellion' was going on. 'We knew that when the so-called 'rebels' went out on their sorties, they used to come down the river courses and we knew that they went through our farm. All around farmers built barricades round their houses, great fences with search-lights, early warning systems, guns, all that kind of thing, some of them still exist. They were in terror of their lives'. I said, 'You didn't do that?' He said, 'No, we felt that if God had called us here, then He would look after us'. All around people were being killed, wives were being raped (you know what happens when there is a Communist-inspired rebellion, it's going on in various parts of the world now) life is cheap when there's no God. 'Defenseless as we were we couldn't work out why they left us alone', he said, 'but let me tell you about this old lady. The war had hardly got started when this old lady turned up. I came out of my house one day, and there she was. 'I've come to live here', she said. 'I beg your pardon?', I said, 'who are you?'. 'I've come to live here, and I'm going to work here'. 'But, excuse me', he said, 'we've got enough workers, we don't really need any more, we've got quite enough'. She said, 'I'm coming here to live, and I'm going to work here'. 'But don't you understand (they were conversing in her own language) that I don't need any workers?' 'Yes, but I'm coming to live here. You see, I come from this place, I was born here. My husband came here and took me away from this place to his village, where we married and raised our family. Now my husband is dead, and my children have left home, and I'm left all alone, so I've come back home; this is where I'm going to live'. He said, 'Well, really I don't want you, we don't need you'. Deadlock: but she was still persistent. It was all very strange, but in the end he gave in and said to her 'Alright, but what can you do?'. 'I can make pots', she said, and finding some mud, sat down and made some clay pots. 'They were no good', he said, 'they fell to pieces', but he thought, 'never mind, dear old soul, I'll let her stay'. And so she sat there every day under the tree making useless clay pots - that was her home and her pitch; and the war went on. 'We never had anything happen to us during the whole of the conflict', he said, 'and we couldn't understand why. All around us murders, vandalism, terrorism, but on our place nothing, not a wire down, hardly a blade out

of place. We could give no explanation, and still the war went on. When it was all over, one day two big Shona men came to the farm asking for me. 'You never had any trouble during the war did you?', they said. 'No', I replied, 'nothing, not a wire out of place'. They said 'You let an old lady come and live here didn't you?'. 'Yes', he said, and without another word they walked away. That farm and its workers was never touched. God had sent a little old black lady to protect them. Wonderful! But how close he had come to rejecting that protection.

I just want to tell you that if you GO in God's will to DO the will of God, even in the midst of murder, rape, bloodshed and devastation, He will protect you. Who would have thought that little old lady could have been, as it were, a guardian angel? Who would have thought that? I said to that farmer, 'I'm going to tell that story wherever I go! What does she do now'. He said, 'She just sits under that tree and punches holes in the ends of tabs, which have the names of the various citrus trees on them, then she threads wire through the holes. They are then tied on the appropriate plants before they go out to the various clients. That man now practically has the monopoly of these trees in that part of the country; that is how God has prospered him. Pretty well the whole of Zimbabwe go to him for young citrus trees - orange trees, lemon trees, lychee trees - the lot; so great has his business become. It was a joy to go and visit that farm.

## NOT CALLED ... COMMANDED!

I could tell you more of those kinds of stories, but they're probably not what you want to hear. You would prefer to hear something that will stir your heart and save you from getting lazy bones. You want to hear something in which you can go and invest your life, don't you - something that will count in that day? Go to Zimbabwe; the doors may not be open long.

I told this story over the wedding breakfast tables, with Norman sitting opposite me. Turning to him I asked if he knew what was the trouble with the churches, he didn't commit himself. I said, 'the trouble with everybody is that they think they're very important. If you talk to them about the mission field, they say, 'Well I haven't got the call'. How many people do you know in the Bible that got a call? Go on, start reeling them off; I don't think that you will be able to count 20, certainly not more than fifty. Go on, I'll challenge you, write a list to me. When you do (if you do) compile the list you will find they were the very important people. Without saying so, or without thinking about it you are saying, 'I'm very important'. Proof of this is that you think and believe you must have a call like Paul, or like Elisha, or Hudson Taylor, or some other great man. You must think you're very important. You may say, 'Oh, no, I never thought about that, the Lord knows I didn't'. But that's how you're acting. Leaning toward Norman across the table, I asked, 'Did you ever get a call to go abroad, Norman?'. He said, 'No, I didn't get a call'. Isn't it good to have an honest man as a friend and brother? Why in the world did he go? Don't you have to wait for a call? Let me ask another question - this time of you, 'Did you wait for a call to stay in England?' God doesn't accept excuses. You and I are under command: he said, 'Go', He did not say 'Wait for a call'. Perhaps I may be upsetting all your ideas of missionary meetings, but at least I'm scriptural. What about Hudson Taylor? You are not going to found a work in China, are you? He was special - you and I are not. You see, He calls the important ones. Do you understand? Will you

come off this 'Cloud Nine' position? You can excuse yourself until you're 90 on that one. Get up and go (I'm going to be very, very, blunt and vulgar) if you have the guts. Here then is where the trouble lies; men and women are fishing around for excuses when they say 'I haven't got a call'. Well, I never got a call. 'What? You never had a call? Not when you started in the ministry, or when you went abroad?'. No, not one. I will tell you the exact words I got from God in the beginning: 'Go, and the Lord be with thee'. Nobody CALLED me; I got a Command, I was, and still am, under command. But you WILL not be under command you see, you are wanting to be free and independent and make your choice when or if a call comes. What God wants from everyone of us is immediate response and total obedience, not choice. You NEED not say, 'I want to pray about this', because there is nothing you that will make you go - and die if necessary.

When I was in Cyprus, in a place called Limmasol, I met a young man who had gone out from England, and started a Fellowship there. He asked if I would go along and preach. There were about 80 people there, and he introduced me to them in these words, 'I first heard this man preach in America. It was in 1964 at a conference in Minnesota, and I can tell you what he preached on'. God had hammered it into him. Twenty-four years ago, God got him. Let me tell you how it came about. I was first invited to go to America by the Bethany Bible School of Minnesota. They sent me a letter, it wasn't a very long one, just a short letter: 'Dear Brother ... we feel you should come out and preach at our conference ... will you pray about it ...?'. I held the letter in my hand, and thought I'd go and pray about it as they requested. Going to the chair at which I usually knelt, I paused as though being held back, I couldn't kneel, and didn't get down to pray - I KNEW I should go. Many voices urge us to pray about everything (and how right they are), but it's also true that there's a time when you pray and there's a time when you don't. When you're under orders, when you know in your own heart, it is humbug to say 'I'm going to pray about it', you should obey. If I'd prayed about that, God might have said to me, 'Shut up; you know already what you're going to do'. This is the kind of relationship to have with God - you know - I've moved on that inward knowledge all my life, and that's what life is all about.

## **ALL YOU HAVE TO BE IS WILLING AND OBEDIENT**

This is what comes with new birth. If this 'knowing' faculty is not within you, you are not a child of God; or maybe you are, yet by religious training you have been taught to ignore it this inward knowing; if you do so it dies away and that is the tragedy. If you keep ignoring what deep inside you you know you should do, that certainty of knowledge will vanish away and if that happens to you you will have lost the safety factor of daily living. The result is that you will be calling or waiting for extraordinary things to happen; whereas you should just go. Jesus said, 'My Father sent Me'. He didn't say 'My Father has called Me'. He was not across the other side of heaven somewhere so that the Father had to send out a call for Him - 'Jesus, I'm calling you'. He said, 'My Father sent Me'. He humbled Himself and obeyed, He was not puffed up. Do you want to puff up? Above Jesus even? It seems so. To say 'I must pray about it ...' sounds so humble, but oft-times it's a lot of nonsense. You say, '...Well I felt ...'. That's fine, so long as it's

the real feelings, and not your mere emotions. Do you FEEL you should go and witness, do you FEEL you should go and do that? Go and do it. That's what it's all about. That's living in the mind and in the will and in the feelings of God. Did you know you should? It's not a very great adjustment really, for you to become true sons of God. Not really - not since Calvary, not since the Resurrection. Not since the coming of the Holy Ghost. All you have to be is willing and obedient. You're already a human being, it is only the deadened parts of you in spirit that God has to deal with. And God is able to clean it all out and make you the normal human being that He wants you to be.

When Samuel anointed Saul (I'm quoting from 1 Samuel 10), he said, 'When these signs come unto thee, do what thy heart tells thee'. How about that? Have you missed that last phrase? When God gives you a new heart, and you're a new man, you're in touch with God. My purpose is not to dwell on missionary calling at the moment, but show the way in which you should walk, and go with God. You must understand that everything in your life is not going to be cataclysmic and dramatic, it's not going to be like a big explosion from heaven. It's not going to be a blinding light falling on you: that's only for the Sauls of Tarsus. You're going to be normalized to walk every day of your life in the light with God. Did you know that? There's never a more carefree person and never a more light-hearted person than that. Never; and the Lord wants us to see this very clearly. You do things because you're you - because this has happened to you, but you've got to be born again, a son of God first.

## **SOME STORIES**

### **...WHEN MY WIFE AND I FIRST WENT TO INDIA**

Now for some stories, I'll tell you some of the things that make me look a fool. Let me start with India. You want me to go back, don't you? Well, it's within the last 24 years, that's not too bad - some of you aren't as old as that. I remember the time when my wife and I first went to India. An itinerary was proposed which took me round a little locally at first, and then was followed by a long journey North, couched in these words, 'I've booked you two places on the plane and from then on you'll be on your own'. Here we were at our time of life (I suppose we weren't so very old, but we certainly weren't spring chickens), going out into this vast, mysterious sub-continent on our own. We couldn't speak the language, nor did we know the customs, we'd had no missionary training, all we knew was that we had seats booked, to fly from Bombay to J & K State, one of the Northernmost states in the land. Well, the seats had been booked, we checked in, and walked across the apology for a tarmac to board the plane. As we did so, a gentleman joined himself to us, he was Indian, but he spoke lovely English. 'Hello', he said, and we returned the greeting. After exchanging one or two pleasantries, he said, 'Where are you going?', so we told him, and explained what it was all about. Boarding the plane and setting off, we were told before long that we couldn't go beyond Amritsar and that we had to get off there. 'But we have booked seats to J & K State, Sininagar', I answered - we had much to learn! In those days (I do not know what it is like there now) you could book a seat, pay your fare, and think all was well, but if somebody came along and offered to pay 50 rupees or more for your seat it went to the highest bidder - perhaps somebody has picked up 100 rupees or so. Something like that had happened - I've been through it twice - I'm sorry

to say it, so I know. The gentleman of short acquaintance, being on the plane, wanted to know what was our trouble, so I told him. 'All right', he said, 'leave it to me'. So we got out and stretched our legs for a few minutes, at a short stop, Jammu, I think, and then boarded the plane once more. At Jammu, another man had got on the plane, and he and our new-found friend were evidently acquainted, for they were saluting one another across the seats. Our friend said, 'He's the owner of the airline, I'll have a word with him'. He did just that, and returning to us, said, 'It's OK, you can keep your seats'. Thanking him, we said 'Praise the Lord'. How heartfelt that was. We were thinking with dread of two or three nights, or a week (who knows?) in Amritsar - we couldn't speak the language, we couldn't make ourselves known or understood, money was tight, we were like babes. God knew that, our Father understood and undertook for us in a very, very wonderful way. We never saw our friend again. He alighted at Amritsar and we kept on our journey, finally settling in Sirinajan, in the missionary's home there.

Constantly, while in India, people would discreetly ask, 'How's your tummy?'. They seemed very interested, it appeared to be common talk among the missionaries. You arrive, and before long they say 'how's your tummy?', you sit down to have a meal, (it is the 'done' thing) 'How's your tummy?'. The night before we went to India, sitting up in bed reading before sleep, as was our custom - the portion for the day in Timothy included, 'For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer'. We looked at each other and said, 'We'll take that as a promise from God', and we told Him so. It worked out truly, we never had one bit of trouble - and God didn't call either of us to go either! We did not specially choose to read that portion, nor were we looking for a promise from God - it was all in the normal course of events - as it should be.

I am pointing out that when you do not strain and strain for something, and are only reluctant to go because you don't think you are able (not because you think you've got the message for the Asians, swelled heads will never get through the narrow gate) these are the kind of things that happen. God only requires humble obedience, that is all - that is faith. I'm telling you the truth before God. If we'd only be humble - if we'd only get down there and say 'I'm nothing' because we think we're nothing - if only! You sing, 'You are my everything, You are my Lord': you sing it - I wonder if God believes it. As long as you see that you're nothing, and really believe that if you don't go it wouldn't matter much except to you, you go. God says, 'It doesn't matter what you think, you go', and God undertakes. Those kind of stories could be multiplied. The important thing here is, you just go to be nothing. You just go to know the Cross. You just go to know that it's resurrection life or nothing. You just go because you're under orders. I like the original ways of the Salvation Army for that reason. The old General would go round the barracks (a true description of a church) and say to one of the soldiers 'Pack your trunk, you're going to India tomorrow.' At that time the Salvation Army was a living adventurous force for the Kingdom of God in the earth, advancing everywhere. I wonder if it is now? The Lord is concerned lest you just sit down and get comfortable - if that is your mentality you might finish up a freemason, unless you're very careful - look at the guarantees they give. But will God be able to look after your soul if you do that, or if you hand it over

to satan in some other way? By the great call of the Lord you are being challenged to become AS His Son, Jesus Christ, in the world. Not equal to Him, but AS Him, that is, of the same kind of species as He, to live for ever everywhere, under all circumstances, as He. Humanism is creeping into the fellowships. Humanism will get in anywhere if not guarded against. It has many faces, one of which is worldliness, using worldly wisdom when reasoning against God and obedience to Him. Where obedience to God ceases, humanism commences - later it is systemised, in the best circles, into a philosophy couched in scriptural language, all of which is an excuse for self-centred disobedience. The Lord does not want us to be merely human or to become humanists, He wants us to be superhuman, He wants us to live by His grace, His power, and His love.

### ...IN AUSTRALIA

In Australia I went to some lovely places, places of real fellowship - places where they wanted to hear the truth. But I went to one particular place, and from the moment I got there, I thought, 'This is a lovely place, I'd like to live here'. The sun was shining, the skies were azure, the flowers were exotic, the beaches were marvellous, the sea warm. People never get cold, they can lie about half (or completely) naked all day, crowds of them, homosexuals, lesbians - (Sodomites really, but you have to call them by a nice name now), filled with drugs. They can lie around and do as they want. It is spoken of as an 'alternative way of life'. Alternative to what? Alternative to God and truth and righteousness and holiness and true love. I went there for a particular weekend, how I wished I could have stayed there a week or a month, or longer, for I found a great response to that pure Gospel that we know. I went thinking about 'meetings, morning and evening', but not a bit of it. The precious brother there gathered people in, so that at mealtimes I was eating and talking, drinking and talking, or walking and talking, as well as preaching, all the time - so we went through the weekend, meetings in the home, meetings in the Church. That young man went from probably the biggest Church (shall we call it Charismatic?) in Sydney and he was up there crying out for help, by his own confession feeling his own personal need. 'Not one of the leaders of the Church will come', he said, 'nobody will come and help me. I stand up and say to these people, 'I'm not fit to preach to you ... I need help myself ...' There you have it, nobody had anything to give them. I know there may be individuals that you know of, please, I'm not writing anybody off. I'm telling you what I found, what I saw, what I heard. On Sunday morning that young man had gathered together a company of people, all from this background, and they pretty well filled a much bigger place than this. Some of them in their 50's and 60's; they'd been involved with drugs and each other since their youth. They sat in the meetings, some of them with their minds blown through dope, most of them not fully recovered from what they'd been doing the night before. They sat there because a man, who at least had got love in his heart if he hadn't got full clearance before God, had a care for them. I love the boy, I loved his spirit. At least he's willing, at least he wanted to give what he knew. Has anyone gone to help, I wonder? Are Christians waiting for a call? What do they want? I said to him, 'My brother, don't go away, stay here and give your life.' He was an entrepreneur, he'd started a business and it had all fallen through for lots of reasons, which I'm not discussing. But he'd got something in him, there was something

in him to make him go. I don't know many men and women who've got this go-through spirit, do you? Men and women who'll go and go and go. How many do you know? Are you one yourself?

When I was out in Zimbabwe, I wrote to my nephew-in-law, who's been so good to me, who says, 'Come over Uncle, I need what you've got, we all need it'. (And if it was only to go to that place again I want to go and try to reach these people whose lives have been grabbed and ruined by satan). He didn't need me to point out much to him, he was wanting to know what to do. I said, 'You jump on a plane and come and see for yourself'. He did. If I had my youth all over again, I'd pour out my life into it right now. When a bishop stands up and says 'I'm going to preach this all over Zimbabwe', and he'd only had three days listening to the truth, think of what it could be! Three days, three weeks, three months, three years. Hallelujah! When Jesus first sent out His apostles, they knew nothing about the precious blood. They knew nothing about the Holy Ghost, they knew nothing about Calvary, He hadn't died. He hadn't shed His blood. They knew nothing about salvation by grace, and He sent them out, their little was more than all the people around them had if all had been put together. If only I could make people understand that. I look back in my own life and realize how little I know. I guess my knowledge is about as nothing, and you'll learn less than nothing till you go out and work. Nothing. Your head may be full of it, but you'll learn nothing until you go and put into practice what you say you already know. Did you know that once you believe, from then on it is living that counts. If only people could see this. Jesus virtually says, 'I must come and live among you - give you My life, I've failed if I don't give you My life'. And so have you - that's the tragedy. Now I know there are some of you who can't get up and book a plane to Harare in the morning. I don't want anybody to do it, either. I know that there are some in such situations that it is impossible for them to do anything of the sort - but it's surprising what God can do with impossibilities. Me for instance - impossible. God wants you to go, unless you want to be a bystander, an onlooker, an observer of the power of God. Except that you'll be able to see it when it operates, you'll know nothing of it - just as you see lightning flash and hear thunder roll. What God can do with you if you'll just let Him.

When the suggestion about story-telling was made, of course the story of the cleansing of the leper came up. I don't know how many times some of you may have heard it, but there are those who never seem to tire of it. Others have told it, but I find it has not always been told correctly. That does not matter very much though, it's not done deliberately, I'm beginning to falter in memory a bit in these days myself, my power of recall isn't quite what it was.

### ...THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPER

I went to a place called Pokhara, up in Nepal. Kathmandu, the capital, is nearer India, but you can fly from there up to Pokhara, in a little plane of the Royal Nepalese Airlines. They're rather more basic than a super-jet. Well, we went up to Pokhara, to a little place called the Shining Hospital, it is built of aluminium which reflects the sun, hence its name. It stands pretty well at the base of the sacred mountain where the spirits live and is forbidden to climbers for that reason. Somebody did climb it once, and some great misfortune befell

the country, so the King said nobody was allowed to climb it again, the spirits must not be disturbed. Further down from the Shining Hospital there is another one called Green Pastures, this is a Leprosarium. In those days as soon as a person had leprosy, he knew nothing but his leprosy, nothing. Even if he were the king or the elder of his village, by common consent his wife turned him out, no-one would go near him, his own children wouldn't look at him. From the moment leprosy is discovered in a person, he or she loses everything and becomes an outcast, a penniless beggar, having nothing in this world, nothing to go back to, nothing to look forward to, cast out as dead. So when you preach to a leper, you are preaching to somebody who is ready for the gospel. I would rather preach to lepers than to any other group of people in the world.

The trouble with almost all white people is this - they've always got alternatives. Lepers have nothing, nothing but death, slow certain death. Ears fall off, noses fall off, fingers burn in the fire, toes drop off, they don't even feel it because the nerves are dead. The particular man of the story arrived at Green Pastures on Sunday morning during the morning service, which was to be my last meeting there. My interpreter and I were to leave immediately after lunch to fly down to Bahirawa on another of those planes. I was expecting to take a quick lunch, and get down to the airport as soon as possible. Well, they called it an airport, it was really a grass field, and when the plane was due to land they blew a hooter, and out go the herdsmen and others, to shoo the cattle off the field. I suppose they've changed it now. It was fascinating to see this little speck of a plane coming in, scarcely visible against the black mountains, circling lower and lower, and then landing in a cloud of dust, near to all the waiting passengers. Well, I was to catch this plane - Debhu Singh and I had seats booked on it.

What a day that was, and what a meeting. (I think it was at that meeting that Debhu Singh, my interpreter, dropped to his knees and begged God to meet his need. It's something when the interpreter is so moved by God, isn't it?) As the meeting closed I gave the company an invitation to respond and oh, how they did. I shall never forget it. One poor disfigured man raised himself up, dragged himself to the front weeping, and as best he could knelt there. He opened his heart to the Lord, found peace and immediately became an evangelist. Turning round to his fellows he said, 'Come on, come on'. I couldn't understand him, but his own people did, they came. He'd only been saved about a minute or so. How many souls have you ever invited? How many minutes have you been saved? One minute! I'd rather preach to them than you; you have got so many alternatives, so many other delights, they have none. None. That's why God has to deal with people until they come to rock bottom, and their whole world falls apart. It's because of the alternative ways they have of spending their lives. These people have none, except dropping to pieces and dying almost like a dog. Eventually the matron of the hospital came up to me and said, 'Will you come and pray with a man who has just come in?'. I looked at my watch (stupid me, I guess), and said, 'Alright sister, yes'. She said, 'He's going to die unless the Lord heals him. He's too far gone - we can do nothing for him.' Deep concern was in her voice. 'He has come from a village right up in the mountains, he's only just managed to drag himself here, he has come a long way and has found us at last, but it's too late, we can't do anything for him. If the Lord doesn't heal him, he'll die. Will you come and pray for him?'. 'Yes', I said, 'I'll come'.

I looked round for Debhu, but he had already gone off to see about the plane journey. I went to the hospital - I called it a hospital! The houses they live in (here's another reason why you shouldn't go) have gaps 10" to 1 ft between the walls and the thatched roof, because they don't have any windows. And on the top of the wall all night you can hear the rats running to and fro, just above your head. You shouldn't go. You should always stay away from rats, you know that, they spread disease. We want all the chickens to stay in the little hen roost. I walked into the hospital, it was a long white-washed room divided into little cubicles by some pieces of material. The missionaries had done as much as they could with the meagre resources they had been sent, while people were buying and furnishing big houses in England. The man was in a cubicle just near the entrance. It was very small, there was no bed, you wouldn't have kept your dog in it; you love your dog, don't you?

The poor man sat back on His haunches, isolated, immune from everything and everyone except himself and his disease. I was looking at a man dead on his feet. He was a terrible sight, his dark skin and the suppurating sores (he had the nodulous kind of leprosy) were flowing with pus and gentian violet (they had nothing better to give or do - at that time they were beginning to use an oil to combat the spread of the disease, they now use far more scientific treatments). I'd never seen such a sight, but the man sat there without a whimper, his body was dying fast. Not knowing what else to do I said to the Matron, 'Tell him I'm a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ'. She looked at me and said, 'Before you start Mr. North, I want to tell you that this man has never heard the name of Jesus. He won't know who you're talking about if you do mention the name of Jesus Christ. It's no use telling him that, because he won't understand'. I said, 'Never mind sister, it doesn't matter whether he understands or not, I want you to tell him that I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, and that I come to him as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ'. She looked at me, and then said, 'Alright', and told him. She is a dear soul, that woman. 'Now I want you to tell him that if he will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus will heal him'. She said, 'You did understand didn't you, that he's never heard of the Lord Jesus Christ? How can you expect him to believe in a person of whom he's never heard?'. 'It doesn't matter whether he's heard about Jesus before, he's hearing about Him now, just tell him sister', I said. So, lovely soul that she is (how she cared for those lepers), she told him. There was no sign of recognition on the poor man's face, he sat there imperturbable - lost somewhere beyond the pain barrier I suppose. I said, 'Will you now tell him this? He must believe in Jesus Christ alone if he wants to be healed'. She said, 'But you don't see - he's been taught to believe in hundreds of gods (about three thousand I think). These Hindus don't know any different. From a child he has worshipped his gods, you can't expect him to believe now. He has never heard the name, never heard the gospel, knows nothing of the cross and the blood'. I said, 'Never mind, you tell him that'. 'But how can you expect him to believe these things?'. I said, 'He knows that his gods have done nothing for him.' I looked at him, an outcast, even his own wife, his own flesh and blood wouldn't look at him. He's lost everything, he's got nothing, he knows that. You must tell him that he must believe on Jesus Christ and on Jesus Christ alone. I can't pray for him if he's believing on all the rest plus Jesus Christ.' In simple obedience she told him what I had said. For the first time he made a response, nodding his head, he understood. I turned my thoughts to the Lord. 'Lord', I said, 'Lord, I'm leaving here.

I want them to be able to pray for the lepers after I've gone. It's not just me praying'. So I said, 'We'll use the James 5 method. Will someone go and get some oil?'. Away went the matron and came back with some oil. I anointed him and said, 'Now you put your hand on him with me sister'. (That will shock some of you brethren perhaps.) We put our hands on him together and prayed just one short softly spoken prayer, that's all. The Lord cleansed him. I never saw the completion of the miracle, I only saw the beginnings of it. Thankful for what I HAD witnessed I left and dashed off to lunch and the airport. It turned out that I needn't have gone, the plane came three days later - but I wasn't to know that. Debhu recovered our money without trouble at the 'airport' and together with him I then undertook the most hazardous journey of my life, to his home.

I never went back to the Leprosarium for a year, but my thoughts often went back to that wonderful occasion. As I travelled on, unknown to me a letter was following me round India, but never reaching me till I got back to England. It told me that the man was utterly cleansed. Following its arrival, somebody living at Exmouth, not so far away from where we used to live, received a letter, and came to me. 'Did you ever pray for a leper out in Nepal?', he said, and so on went the story. In due course I went out to Pokhara again. I wanted to see this man. I'd never seen a leper cleansed before. I'd read about it in the Bible, but had never witnessed the miracle. Arriving there, looking for him, I said, 'Where's that man, Matron?'. And she said, 'He's gone'. 'Oh', I thought, my hopes were dashed. 'It's not like that', she said, 'I'll tell you his story. He was cleansed and healed - (he didn't know the Gospel) - but he went round the camp telling everybody what Jesus had done for him; he just said what he knew. We taught him to read, and he became a great witness for the Lord Jesus, among his own people. Just a few weeks ago, he collected as many New Testaments in his own language as he could, and he's gone back to his village to preach Jesus to them'. Amen.

## I WANT YOU TO SEE JESUS

Could you do that? Better to die in honour of Christ than to linger around dying in Warrington. I'm not saying you'll see lepers cleansed, that's not my hope. I want you to see Jesus, that's all; that should be enough. And if you see Him tonight, woman, man, whoever you are, He'll meet your need. See Him now with the clarity that has come to your heart tonight. Will you look through everything else and see Him, and call on Him in truth, that is with all there is of you, refusing to linger about on this, that, or the other thing. 'Lord I see You, I see You'. How about it? I'm not going to make a big appeal to get you on your feet, I have appealed to you. It's all been done. You've already made up your mind, but you're going home to pray about it! You don't respond to God when He speaks to you! You're going to pray it over, mull it through your mind! On the other hand, the Lord doesn't want mere, spasmodic emotion, He wants a flame that burns steadily, a spirit that's true, a heart that's alive and alight, an ear that's anointed and pierced. That's what He wants; He'll do the rest. He is God, He will fill you; that's the God I know, I was talking to you about Him this morning. If you're not careful you'll only get the kind of God that men know, and it may be far from right. If you will, you can come into clear open knowledge of God and His ways and will for your life; not to do so is death worse than leprosy.

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### Chapter 3:6 - 6:3 Difficult Lessons

In the foregoing studies we have seen some of the ways in which the relationship between the Lord and the Christian becomes deepened as He blends love and discipline, freeing the heart from selfishness. In the present study we shall see more of these lessons applied to the heart, all designed to bring us into closer relationship and deeper fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### 1. The Day of Espousals - ch.3:6-11

(These verses constitute a conversation between a number of onlookers as they describe what they see)

**v.6** Compare ch. 8:5. Here, though, the emphasis is upon Solomon rather than the bride. One is reminded of the pillar of fire in the wilderness during the wanderings. The smoke is the smoke of incense, not dust - see Exodus 30:34-38.

**v.7** The 'bed' is really a litter carried upon the shoulders of men. So the Lord Jesus is seen as borne on the shoulders of His people as He goes through the earth. He has committed His cause to us. The bride is there too in the litter, brought forth in the evening as was customary (Gen.29:23). See also Rom. 13:11,12. This is the Day of Espousals - see v.11.

**vv.9,10** 'Chariot' is really a palanquin as seen in v.7. Silver signifies redemption, gold, the divine nature. The covering of the seat is of purple cloth similar to that which covered the altar during its wanderings (Num.4:1). Thus we see that the place of fellowship and communion is the place of the altar. See Rev.3:21. No Cross, no place on the throne. Read 'paved with the love by the daughters of Jerusalem'.

**v.11** In 1 Kings chapters 1 and 2 we see that it was Solomon's mother Bathsheba who secured the succession for him. Thus in a sense she crowned him. Here though it is the nuptial crown that is in view; it was often conferred by one of the parents. Israel, the mother referred to in Rev. 12, gave her Son only a crown of thorns. But see Heb.2:9. 'Espousals' refer to betrothal rather than marriage itself, in the same way that Mary and Joseph were betrothed but not yet married. See Jer.2:2.

#### 2. The Description of Excellence - ch.4:1-11

Now that betrothal has taken place, the Lord acts towards and speaks to the maiden far more intimately than beforehand. Compare ch. 1:9-11. In the following verses we read of His amazing appreciation of her and His delight in the virtues - His virtues - that He sees in her.

So shall the King delight to see  
His virtues copied out in thee. (Wesley)

The beauty that He describes is the sevenfold beauty worked in her by sheerest grace. See also ch. 6:4-9. There is much in the typology here, and space forbids an exhaustive treatment of it. The reader is encouraged to take a concordance and seek these things out.

**v.1** She has spiritual vision; yet her eyes are veiled (margin) so that she does not parade her insight to all who observe her. She is learning discretion as well as perception. Hair is peculiarly a woman's glory (1 Cor. 11:15) which it is her privilege to veil in the presence of God. It also signifies consecration as in the case of the Nazarites (Num. ch.6). Goats were used primarily as sin-offerings (Num. 7:16). Gilead is a rocky region with lush pasture (Jer. 50:19). Hence her glory consists in her ability to feed upon the Lord and to lay down her life for Him.

**v.2** She is able to feed on spiritual food; not like a baby which has to have milk (Heb. 5:12-14 - what mysteries would have been explained to us if the Hebrews had only gone on as they should!). The comparison with sheep suggests cleanliness. 'Even shorn' suggests that she has learned to give away what she has in order to receive from Him.

**v.3** See Psalm 45:2; Col. 4:6. Speech betrays people, for better or worse. The temples are the cheeks, which contribute such a vital part to feminine beauty. Here they are tinged with red like a cut pomegranate - nevertheless veiled so that her beauty is known only to her beloved.

**v.4** The neck signifies strength of will (see Isa. 3:16). She is upright, strong, alert, not bowed down. The will is seen as an armoury, for it is the will that is the guardian of the soul. How we need to remember this, and to understand that the Lord wants us not to surrender our wills, but rather to align them with His. Passivity is dangerous, and opens the door to satan.

**v.5** The breast is the seat of the emotions, represented here as two delicate young roes, easily disturbed. Faith and love are the twin virtues suggested here, each held in balance with the other and growing at the same pace. For lilies see ch. 2:1; 7:3.

**v.6** The maiden speaks in humility (compare ch. 2:17). Her words are few now, and she expresses her need of continued communion with her Lord. Far from speaking confidently about her spiritual experiences, valid as they are, she recognises that the maintenance of this communion is dependent upon her often resorting to prayer, and a sense of her complete dependence upon Him. See later on chapter 5.

**v.7** The bridegroom sums up His appreciation of her: 'Thou art ALL fair'. This is the sum of all the various details mentioned in vv. 1-6 (compare v.1).

**v.8** His previous call to her (ch. 2:10-13) is now repeated. 'Come with me ... with me'. Lebanon denotes lofty strength -

it is a call to warfare. Amana means 'fixed' - a warfare based upon the things that are fixed in the view of God. Shenir means 'a coat of armour' (see Eph.6:11-18). Hermon means 'lofty' (see Eph. 1:3). Though she failed to heed His call before, yet He does not lower His requirements. From these heights she is to view the lairs of her enemies - see 1 Peter 5:8.

**vv.9,10** See Proverbs 1:9. How our obedience delights the Master! Note the repeated appellation 'sister ... spouse' which keeps a beautifully balanced view of the relationship between Christ and His church, lest we err towards sentimentality on the one hand, or distance on the other. Compare v.10 with ch.1:2,4.

**v.11** Honey is not only sweet, it is also the distillation of hours of work and patient gathering. It does not flow but drips slowly. Her conversation is not showy, it is concentrated; few words, but real significance. See ch.2:14 and Eccl.5:1-3.

### 3. The Garden of the Soul - ch. 4:12 - 5:1

Many significant things in Scripture are associated with gardens; after all, a garden was first God's thought. The Lord now compares His bride with a garden - see Jer. 31:12.

**vv.12-15** This garden is exclusively for the Lord (ch.5:1). See Psalm 4:3. The spring and the fountain speak of the Holy Ghost in the heart (John 4:14; 7:38). There are 'shoots' (v.13) and all manner of fragrant bushes and fruits. Calamus and cinnamon were used in equal amounts in the holy anointing oil of Exodus 30:23. These things speak to us of the various anointings that the Lord bestows from time to time (see v.10).

**v.16** The Lord calls for the north wind of adversity and the south wind of pleasantness. He knows that both will equally well evoke fragrance (see Heb. 12:11). The maid responds in the second half of the verse.

**Ch.5:1** What joyous fellowship ensues! It is evident that the Lord has not always dwelt there; He says, 'I am come'. Myrrh indicates fellowship in His sufferings (Phil. 3:10). Note the use of 'my', indicating that the virtues described are of His own making. The result of this fellowship is not only joy for the maiden or her Lord, but also for many other souls, His other beloved friends who partake of the blessing bestowed upon her.

### 4. The Surprise of Lassitude - ch. 5:2-16

Still there are lessons to be learned and pitfalls to be avoided. It is possible to be greatly blessed and yet to fall (Heb. 12:15). One of the chief dangers is complacency; this surprising passage should act as a warning to us all. Compare ch. 3:1-5 and the letter to the Ephesians in Rev. 2:1-4. We are here presented with a surprising picture of the Lord; He is outside seeking a lodging, a living heart wherein to rest (see John 7:53; 8:1).

**vv.2,3** Her heart is awake, and she knows His voice, but she has become passive and begins to take Him for granted. Her response seems shocking, yet it is only what so many say to the Lord, yea, even after much fellowship with Him over many years. 'It is inconvenient; I do not want to make moral choices'.

**vv.4,5** The Lord persists at least to the point where she begins to respond actively to Him. He is intent upon letting her see that

her chief joy is not in blessings but in HIMSELF. What a shock awaited her! Her (so far) superficial repentance is not enough for Him; He intends to seal her heart up unto Himself.

**v.6** One wonders what He said to her that caused her heart to fail. It is reminiscent of the single look that Jesus cast upon Peter after he had denied His Lord.

**vv.7,8** This time the elders and counsellors are positively harmful to her. It is a sobering lesson for these people. 'They took away my veil' - how often dear, wounded souls are laid bare by well-meaning counsellors who practise their psychological cures on them, only to find that there is no balm with which to heal. We need to learn to leave people to God! In sorrow she turns to other believers. There is real pathos in her words, 'Tell Him, if you find Him, that I am lovesick'.

### 5 - The Altogether Lovely - ch. 5:9-16

**v.9** Some things are a mystery to earthly minds. Common sense says, 'Why take it so seriously?' It may go further and say, 'Well, of course, you must expect things to wear off after a time'. Yet how shall we describe our glorious Christ to those who know Him not? As well try to describe the glory of a sunset to a blind man!

**v.10** One can almost imagine the light returning to her eye, and the smile to her lips, as she remembers the fine features of her beloved. We are witnessing the revival of a soul; she is on the way to rediscovering Him. It is good and beneficial for us to dwell upon the matchless beauty of the Lord Jesus; it will raise our eyes from self and the world, and raise our hopes to expect great things from Him. She speaks first of His moral perfection and purity, and His intense vigour. See 1 Sam. 16:12; 17:42. For 'chiefest' read 'standard-bearer'.

**v.11** Gold represents divinity. See Col. 1:18. The black hair signifies vitality and eternal youthfulness; He does not age, He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever! His eyes are portrayed as full of tender love (compare Rev. 1:14), clear, not reddened with tiredness. His cheeks were abused (Isa.50:6); His sufferings became the soil from whence sprang the fragrant plants of grace. His lips are full of grace (Psalm 45:2 - note the title, which means 'lilies'). One need only recall the short sayings of Jesus to those needy people to whom He ministered: Go in peace; Be loosed; Thy faith hath saved thee.

**v.14** See Daniel 10:6. The golden hands denote His power to keep those that are committed to Him. The belly (same word as used in 'bowels' in v.4) refers to the inward emotions. Ivory, unlike gemstones, is obtained through death and suffering. Sapphire is associated with the throne (Ezek.1:26; 10:1). Thus the throne is a throne of compassion (Heb. 4:16), wrought out in His sufferings.

**v.15** The legs signify stability; marble, durability. Sockets of fine gold speak of the basic integrity of God upon which we depend. Lebanon means 'white'. The 'goodly mountain' (Deut.3:25) is grand and majestic, reflecting the sun on its limestone heights.

**v.16** 'His palate is sweetnesses'. This refers to His speech as well as to the fact that He has tasted suffering and temptation for

all of us (Heb.2:9). Note the plural - there are multitudes of sweetnesses in Him! Overcome by the catalogue of His perfections, the maiden cannot help but cry out, 'He is altogether lovely!'. Literally translated, 'His wholeness is delights!'. It is beautifully expressive of the relationship between her and her beloved that she refers to Him as 'my Beloved, and my Friend'. See Prov.17:17; John 11:11; 15:13-15.

## 6. The Hidden Life - ch.6:1-3

The maid's description of her beloved has had two effects. First, it has produced in the daughters of Jerusalem the desire to find Him for themselves. Secondly, it has brought the maiden herself to rediscover Him by faith. Of course He was never far away; and yet He has to be discovered by faith, and the

soul has to be brought even beyond dependence upon the conscious awareness of His presence. One of the chief means of bringing her into this rediscovery was simply remembrance - hence one of the benefits inherent in the Lord's Supper.

She has discovered Him, not far away, but in her own soul. Compare ch.4:12 - 5:1, and Romans 10:8. His withdrawal was only from her consciousness; her life has now been deepened, she understands the inwardness of life in Christ. Thus we trace the steps in her recovery. She was roused to activity and repentance; she came to faith; and she came to understand that her life was HID with Christ in God.

May the Lord teach us all.

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