

CHRISTIAN WATCH

Issue No. 31

A Protestant Biblical Witness

Jan/Feb 2021



'And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.'

Mark 13:37

**Christian Watch Annual Subscription (2021),
including UK postage - £12**

The Wisdom and Knowledge of God

Psalm 139

God's ways are just, His counsels wise;
No darkness can prevent His eyes;
No thought can fly, nor thing can move,
Unknown to Him that sits above.

He in the thickest darkness dwells;
Performs His works, the cause conceals;
But though His methods are unknown,
Judgment and truth support His throne.

In Heaven, and earth, and air, and seas,
He executes His firm decrees;
And by His saints it stands confessed,
That what He does is ever best.

Wait, then, my soul, submissive wait,
Prostrate before His awful seat;
And, 'midst the terrors of His rod,
Trust in a wise and gracious God.

B. Beddome

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(Some articles may not necessarily reflect the opinions and beliefs of Christian Watch but are included for information only and not as an endorsement.)

Dear Friends,

“In the beginning God...” what an amazing statement as we commence this New Year, 2021. *“Behold, all things are become new”* (2 Cor.5:17). The old year’s joys and sorrows are no more – and many people are expressing their delight that 2020 – with all its problems – has gone into history; but will 2021 be any different?

We must – in 2021 – prayerfully consider our Christian faith and practice. We must count our many blessings – even in the midst of trial – and, if we do, we shall arrive at the end of this year praising God for His great goodness and grace. He blesses us *“from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year”* (Deut. 11:12).

So at the beginning of 2021, as we look back on a tumultuous year – a year like no other – in which a global pandemic spread across our planet, may I take this opportunity to encourage you to take your Bible seriously – and throughout the year give your best effort to study it. There are plenty of Bible reading schemes available – and I can think of no better commendation than to quote to you from a Canadian publication of many years ago which was entitled *“What the Bible is.”* It reads as follows:

“This Book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy; its precepts are binding; its histories are true; its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise; believe it to be safe and practise it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveller’s map, the pilgrim’s staff, the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s sword and the Christian’s charter. Here is paradise restored, Heaven opened, and the gates of Hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good is its design and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory and a river of pleasure. It is given in life, will be opened at the judgment and be remembered for ever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labour and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.”

Hate Crime Laws

One of our CW Committee members, Pastor Peter Simpson, writes as follows concerning the grave threat the proposed laws are to Christian preachers:

“24th December, 2020 was the closing date for the Government’s consultation process on the Law Commission’s proposals to amend hate crime laws. Dr. Joanna Williams, Director of the Freedom, Democracy and Victimhood Project at the Civitas think-tank argues that the proposed amendments ‘would hand to the State frightening new powers to police speech.’

The Law Commission’s proposals include, for example, expanding the protected characteristic of transgender to incorporate cross-dressers and those who identify as non-binary. If a Christian Minister, endeavouring to give pastoral guidance, asserts that there are only two genders, will he then be deemed guilty of prejudice, bigotry and hatred?

The hate crime legislation is based on the premise of protected characteristics. Even though religion is listed as such a characteristic, it seems that conservative Bible-believing Christians will, in practice, end up being the victims rather than the protected ones.”

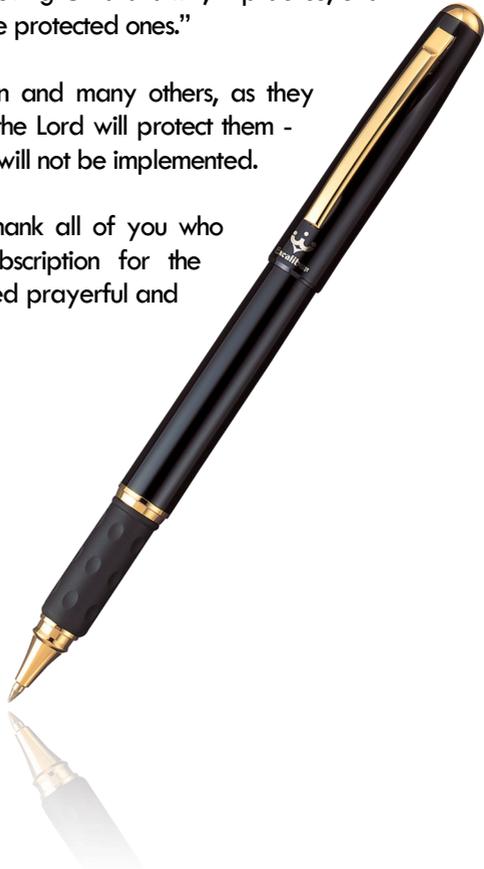
Please remember Pastor Simpson and many others, as they engage in street preaching, that the Lord will protect them - also that the proposed legislation will not be implemented.

May I take this opportunity to thank all of you who have renewed your annual subscription for the current year and for your continued prayerful and financial support.

Yours in His service,

Ian Henderson

Ian R. Henderson,
Chairman



DESIRING GOD'S FAVOUR IN THE NEW YEAR

By: W.C. Lamain

Previously published in 'The Gospel Standard' January 2013

As a wonder of God's sustaining and supporting goodness and a proof of His forbearance, we were privileged to finish the old year together. In the whole world, numberless people, even before the transition from the old to the new year, were without a doubt cut off from the land of the living and summoned to appear before the great Judge of the quick and the dead. God has extended our life up to this time and has favoured us so that we may live to see this first morning of the newly begun year.

Together we face an unknown future. We do not know what will happen to us personally or to our families. What will take place in the church, or befall human society, is concealed from us, but known to God. We have again begun a journey of twelve months, but the question for us is whether or not we shall finish it. This year may be the year of our death. The angel of death may enter our homes and cut off our earthly life. Death may strike us personally or one of our dear ones. In eternity, God set a limit for each of us which we shall not exceed.

The future may conceal so many things within its bosom. In His sojourn upon earth Christ alone knew what would befall Him, but we do not know. What we do know, according to the Word of God, is that we have no continuing city here and that "*man is born to trouble.*"

The future is indeed ominous if we consider what God's Word tells us and if we observe man's continued perseverance in wickedness and sin. Our hearts may well be filled with fear when we consider the multitude and greatness of our sins and iniquities. Let each of us just begin with himself – and then, what else can we expect but that God will pour out the vials of His wrath?

In our deep fall in Adam, we have forfeited life and merited death. Accordingly, we have no right or claim to the least blessing, either temporal or spiritual. Moreover, consider the guilt we incur daily before the face of God by our thoughts, words and deeds. It becomes more evident as time goes on that we are transgressors from the womb and that we can

do nothing but corrupt our way before God. Be mindful of the fact that when God favours us - and whenever He may surround us and follow us with His lovingkindness in this new year, this is only because Christ has merited all blessings for His people. If His precious blood had not fallen upon this cursed earth, nothing would have grown but thorns and thistles.

May the God of all grace be mindful of us and our children together this year. May God grant us health, desire, courage and strength to do that which we are called upon to do. May it please Him in His great wrath to remember mercy towards us and our nation and people. May He take reasons out of Himself, so that He will not abandon us to death and destruction but will crown us with tokens of His favour. May we and our families be protected from particular calamities and disasters and receive food sufficient for our daily needs. May God cause peace and prosperity to dwell within our walls. May the rulers and the people together bow the knee before the King of kings and the Lord of lords. May there be a return to the law and the testimony, else no light shall rise upon us.

Above all, may this year be a year of His Divine good pleasure. May it please God to work effectually

this year with His Spirit in young people, as well as in adults, the great and the small. May God show us tokens of good around about us, for us and in us. May many be plucked as a firebrand out of the fire of Hell and find grace in the sight of God, obtaining peace with God in the blood of the Lamb. May God visit His people and confirm His heritage, so that the praises of God would be exalted and spread abroad. May the truth be established in spite of all the attacks of the powers of Hell. May Satan's might be broken and the power of sin destroyed, so that the glory of free grace may become manifest in us and through us.

With God in our heart, we can fearlessly enter upon life's pathway; with Him we can go through life and, with Him, we can one day depart this life without fear. No matter, then, what we may encounter this year - in fact, even though this year would be the year of our death, we should still have nothing to fear. May God be mindful of us in Christ Jesus. May we also lift up our eyes to Him by His grace and look expectantly to Him alone for that which we need for both time and eternity.

COVID-19 : A SECULAR NATION'S INABILITY TO COPE

Pastor Peter Simpson,
Penn Free Methodist Church and CW Committee Member

(This article is written in the knowledge that there is a broad range of opinion amongst evangelical Christians on the coronavirus and on how society should react to it. It is therefore offered for consideration in a humble and deferential manner - and in a spirit of brotherly love).

Britain is in desperate need of spiritual direction. Liberal secularism has fashioned the national mindset in such a way that responses to national crises are now totally different in character to, say, those which prevailed during World War Two.

Let us examine the current response to the coronavirus in the light of how the nation once dealt with the affliction of war. Covid-19 has, in fact, exposed the deep spiritual void in our contemporary national life; whereas during the Second World War, although the nation's spiritual condition was far from thriving, there was still a general acceptance of the concept of God's providence overruling in the affairs of men.

So, faced with a powerful enemy in the form of Nazi Germany, society understood that military might and strategy were not the only answers, but that there was also a need to seek the aid of the Almighty, He who determined the outcome of wars. Even the politicians publicly acknowledged this. As a result, the war witnessed no less than 12 national days of prayer, all widely supported throughout the land - and this revealed that society still broadly appreciated the words of Psalm 20:7 - *"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the Name of the Lord our God"*.

Britain today is doing the equivalent of trusting in horses and chariots in respect of dealing with Covid-19. We, of course, do not deny the seriousness of the coronavirus, nor of the need for sensible and at times difficult measures to combat it. What we must challenge, however, as Bible-believing Christians, is the refusal to consider the providence of God in any appraisal of the situation.

Yes, we need some necessary practical precautions in respect of virus containment, but not as the nation's total and absolute trust. It is wrong for the majority of the population to regard scientific research and vaccinations as the only possible means of national deliverance to the exclusion of turning to the Lord. Nor, as Christians, do we deny the importance of scientific research, but what is so disturbing is the general refusal to acknowledge that it is God who is calling out to the nation through this pandemic. He is seeking that a rebellious people humble themselves before Him. What we are observing

instead, however, is no such humbling, but rather an idolising of science and a trust in the precautions to solve all our problems.

The virus has also witnessed our God-ignoring nation resorting to an unwholesome trust in the State and its institutions - and the rainbow has been used as a powerful symbol to facilitate this. The rainbow, however, is meant to depict God's covenant promise to be merciful to undeserving men; it is therefore deeply regrettable to see it being used to foster the idea that the State and its medical agencies are the nation's only Saviour.

To say this does not, of course, in any way diminish our appreciation of hard-working and dedicated medical professionals who minister to the sick. Nevertheless, our God-rejecting society is putting all its trust in human endeavour and is using the rainbow to venerate - to the exclusion of God - the State-sponsored agencies. Likewise, a whole generation of young schoolchildren has been encouraged to draw pictures of rainbows, but not in remembrance of the works of God in judgment and then mercy, but rather to honour the works of man in dealing with human problems without any reference to God at all.

Secularism lacks the mental and philosophical faculties to deal with a pandemic. Its abandonment of the reality of the providence of God makes it react disproportionately to the need of the moment. When society loses an understanding of the sovereignty of the God who is over creation, it resorts to excessive fear and a misplaced trust in human ingenuity.

We have seen this with climate change alarmism, leading many, overcome with anxiety, to argue that our whole mode of economic existence must be radically changed, if ever WE are to save the planet. However, the very notion of man saving the planet or controlling the climate is in God's sight a usurping of authority which man simply does not possess.

Similarly, with the virus, it is not unreasonable to question the levels of fear and anxiety to which a society which rejects God's providence is sadly prone. Again, we emphasise that we take this virus seriously, but care must also be taken about building up excessive fear in order to enforce a lockdown policy, the scientific basis of which is subject to much debate.

One of the major regulations being enforced in order to contain the coronavirus is that of mandatory mask-wearing. Back in April, 2020 the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Professor Jonathan van Tam, stated - "There is no evidence that general wearing of face-masks by the public who are well affects the spread of the disease in our society".¹ Yet in June, 2020, when for seasonal reasons the virus was at a low point in terms of its virulence, mask-wearing was introduced by the Government. Had the science suddenly changed? Then in November, 2020 the results of a major Danish study into the use of

face-masks was published, following on from a large ‘randomised controlled trial’ of Danish mask-wearers .² The results of the trial were that “masks do little or nothing to lower the infection rate” .³

These facts are mentioned, not in order to claim that there is a Christian position on face-masks, but simply to emphasise the more general point that the science behind the Government’s precautions and lockdown measures may not be as clear-cut as is claimed. Christians seek to be good citizens and to obey the authorities, but such obligations do not require an abandonment of God-given discernment, nor of the need to “*gird up the loins of our minds*” (1 Peter 1:13) and “*walk circumspectly*” (Ephesians 5:15). It is a Biblical obligation laid upon each believer to think through his actions, using the mental faculties which are a glorious aspect of having been made in the image of God.

Regarding the scientific validity of lockdowns, how open has the Government been to the scientific viewpoint as represented by the Great Barrington Declaration (GBD)? In this document, three eminent public health specialists and epidemiologists from Oxford, Harvard and Stanford Universities argue against the suitability of existing lockdown measures. There are 44 co-signatories to their statement, all of whom are also medical and public health scientists or medical practitioners. These then are the original authors of the statement, but in addition to these, many other experts have endorsed the statement. At the time of writing 13,290 ‘medical and public health scientists’ and 40,199 ‘medical practitioners’⁴ from all around the world have given their support to the GBD.

The GBD points out the “devastating effects on short and long-term public health” which lockdowns create, leading to higher than normal mortality rates in the years to come. The negative consequences of lockdown policies include “worsening cardio-vascular disease outcomes, fewer cancer screenings and deteriorating mental health ... with the working class and younger members of society carrying the heaviest burden” .⁵ The GBD advocates as an alternative to lockdowns what it calls ‘Focused Protection’ policies. Such policies will “allow those who are at minimal risk of death to live their lives normally to build up immunity to the virus through natural infection, while better protecting those who are at highest risk” .⁶

Again, this writer is not in any way saying that the GBD position must represent the Christian viewpoint; but merely that there must be more openness in Government circles and in society generally to the whole range of scientific opinion. Furthermore, it is surely within the realms of Christian moral concern to question the principle that treatment of Covid-19 patients must needs be prioritised over, say, the treatment of cancer sufferers. For example, at the time of writing it has been reported that “two-thirds of cancer operations face cancellation in London and chemotherapy is being postponed”. Professor Pat Price of the ‘Catch Up with Cancer’ organisation has stated that the situation is “the biggest cancer crisis I have seen in my 30-year career” .⁷

The lockdowns are also creating economic mayhem - and Christians have a duty of care towards those who are losing their livelihoods, as well as to those who are sick or medically vulnerable. It is further relevant to point out that the Biblical principle for containing disease, as laid down in Leviticus 13, is to quarantine the sick, not the healthy and economically active. This Biblical pattern establishes the necessity of specific symptoms being present before any quarantining process begins (e.g Leviticus 13:24-25). In contrast, the modern lockdown asserts the principle of universal quarantining, regardless of symptoms.

Ever since man's first rebellion against God in the Garden of Eden, all subsequent generations have lived in a fallen world which is no longer a paradise, a world always characterised by on-going anti-God rebellion. This fallen condition includes sickness and disease, and always will do. It is impossible for modern man to create a world where there is no risk and no viruses. This is what secularism fails to understand. Yes, we do all that we can to diminish sickness and suffering, but disease is never going to be completely eradicated this side of glory.

So let us repeat our primary thesis. Covid-19 is God's call to the nation to humble itself before Him and to come in repentance and faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. However, instead of crying out, 'Lord, have mercy upon us', the nation has been proclaiming instead - 'We shall beat this virus by working together and stopping normal living, until the quickly developed vaccines rescue us all'.

There is an alternative to this utterly secular response, namely learning from the willingness of the wartime generation to swallow their pride and to confess in time of adversity their utter need of the help of the one true Trinitarian God. Let us again recall the words of the Psalmist - *"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the Name of the Lord our God"*. How Britain today needs to abandon its total trust in human agencies - and to cry out to the Lord of all creation for mercy, approaching Him through faith in the only Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-52153145>

² <https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M20-6817>

³ Will Jones, www.conservativewoman.co.uk/mask-study-released-at-last-what-do-you-think-it-says/

⁴ <https://gbdeclaration.org/view-signatures/>

⁵ <https://gbdeclaration.org/>

⁶ <https://gbdeclaration.org/>

⁷ Inderdeep Bains, The Daily Mail, Jan 12, 2021, p9



ON CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD

Extract from a letter by **John Newton**
From: The Works of John Newton – Volume 1, Letter XX

We must not conform to the spirit of the world. As members of society, we have a part to act in it, in common with others; but if our business is the same, our principles and ends are to be entirely different. Diligence in our respective callings is commendable and our duty; but not with the same views which stimulate the activity of the men of the world. If they rise early - and take rest late – their endeavours spring from and terminate in self, to establish and increase their own importance, to add house to house and field to field, that, like the builders of Babel, they may get themselves a name, or provide means for the gratification of their sinful passions. If they succeed, they sacrifice to their own net; if they are crossed in their designs, they are filled with anxiety and impatience; they either murmur or despond, but a Christian is to pursue his lawful calling with an eye to the providence of God and with submission to His wisdom.

Thus, so far as he acts in the exercise of faith, he cannot be disappointed. He casts his care upon his Heavenly Father, who has promised to take care of him. What He gives, he receives with thankfulness and is careful as a faithful steward to improve it for the furtherance of the cause of God – and the good of mankind: and if he meets with losses and crosses, he is not disconcerted, knowing that all his concerns are under Divine direction; that the Lord whom he serves, chooses for him better than he could choose for himself; and that his best treasure is safe, out of the reach of the various changes to which all things in the present state are liable.

We must not conform to the maxims of the world. The world in various instances calls evil good and good evil; but we are to have recourse to the law and to the testimony and to judge of things by the unerring Word of God, uninfluenced by the determination of the great, or the many. We are to obey God rather than man, though upon this account we may expect to be despised or reviled, to be made a gazing-stock or a laughing-stock to those who set His authority at defiance. We must bear our testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus, avow the cause of His despised people and walk in the practice of universal obedience,

patiently endure reproaches and labour to overcome evil with good. Thus, we shall show that we are not ashamed of HIM; and there is an hour coming when He will not be ashamed of us, who have followed Him and borne His cross in the midst of a perverse generation but will own our worthless names before the assembled world.

We must not conform to the world in their amusements and diversions. We are to mix with the world so far as our necessary and providential connections engage us, so far as we have a reasonable expectation of doing or getting good – and no farther. *“What fellowship hath light with darkness, or what concord hath Christ with Belial?”* What call can a believer have into those places and companies, where everything tends to promote a spirit of dissipation; where the fear of God has no place; where things are purposely disposed to inflame or indulge corrupt and sinful appetites and passions and to banish all serious thoughts of God and ourselves? If it is our duty to redeem time, to walk with God, to do all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to follow the example which He set us when he was upon earth and to work out our salvation with fear and trembling; it must of course be our duty to avoid a conformity with the world in those vain and sensual diversions, which stand in as direct contradiction to a spiritual frame of mind as darkness to light.

The leading desires of every person under the influence of Gospel principles will be to maintain an habitual communion with God in his own soul and to manifest the power of His grace in the sight of men. So far as a Christian is infected by a conformity to the spirit, maxims and sinful customs of the world, these desires will be disappointed.

LESSONS FROM TEMPORAL TRIALS

By: **Brian Garrard**

(Article taken from **Bible League Quarterly**, January – March, 2021)

Luke 13: 1-9

The above passage of Scripture concerns two incidents: the first is the cruelty of Pilate when he mingled the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices (verse 1); and the second is the collapse of the tower at Siloam that killed 18 people (verse 4). What are the lessons from these two episodes that we can apply to ourselves? They speak to us at any time of trial but particularly at the present time.

Beware of making false assumptions about people

In verse 2 the Lord asked, *“Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?”* And then in verse 4 - *“Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that these were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?”* From His words it is clear that temporal calamities and trials do not necessarily indicate that people are great sinners. This was the problem in the thinking of Job’s friends, who mistakenly thought that Job was a great sinner because of his terrible sufferings. They had to learn that this is not always the case. At times, of course, it can be, as in the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah and the rebellion of Korah and those who sided with him. Like Job’s friends, we have to learn to rightly distinguish and not make wrong assumptions.

What of those who perish during times of terrible trial (for example earthquakes, wars and pandemics)? Again verses 2 and 4 teach us: it is not necessarily evidence that those who suffer such things are exceptional sinners. Only the Lord God knows the true state of their hearts. Even so, they are taken into eternity where they will have to answer for their sins and render an account to Almighty God.

What of the Lord’s people who die at such times? Surely Romans 8:28 is pertinent here: *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”* Perhaps, too, Isaiah 57:1,2 is apposite: *“The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.”* Their course is finished and their work is done. This may seem mysterious to us and even tragic, yet God’s will is being fulfilled.

Do not forget an important truth

It is one that the Lord draws out in the passage that we are considering and more shall be said of it later. The Apostle Paul states it like this in Romans 3:23 - *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* The effect of our fall in Adam means we are sinners: guilty, corrupt, polluted and exposed to the wrath of God. This wrath is *"revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness"* (Romans 1:18). This truth ought to humble every heart and keep each one of us from making false assumptions about others.

Times of great trial can remind us of the condition of our own hearts and also that of the whole church of Christ. The world is in a state of rebellion against God, but what of the professing church? Ought she not to be repenting of her sins and praying the prayer of Asaph in Psalm 79:9 - *"Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy Name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for Thy Name's sake."* This leads on to another lesson:

There is the matter of God's decree

He is absolute Lord and Sovereign. This can be demonstrated in Romans 11:4 where He says, *"I have reserved to Myself seven thousand men..."* God has done this! See also verse 5 - *"at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."* It is a remnant according to God's election and His gracious and determining purposes. Further, verse 8 says - *"God hath given them the spirit of slumber."* Again, we see that God has done this in His sovereign decree and throughout Romans 9, 10 and 11 the same truth is taught. So, He holds all of us in His mighty hands and does with us as He pleases. He is no helpless spectator and, in the matter of Pilate's cruelty and the falling tower, He decreed these happenings, although Pilate as the means of the first was responsible and guilty for his cruelty.

The same can be said of Covid-19. Consider Revelation 6:8 - *"And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth."* All in the world are subject to these whether unbelievers or the saints of God. "Death" could be pestilence and plague, and one thinks of the "Black Death" (Bubonic plague). Yet all of this is as God is pleased to permit, for note what the verse in Revelation says, *"power was given"* (emphasis added). For the world of unbelievers: they are carried off into eternal judgment. For believers: such trials sanctify them and, in a remarkable way unknown to us, God's Kingdom is extended. For those who die as the Lord's saints: they are taken to glory and Christ's presence. There should be no mistaking it, that temporal calamities and trials are forewarnings of judgment from God. They, in turn, should cause all to repent and prepare themselves to meet God in the future.

We ought to be wise and use temporal trials for the good of our souls

In Luke 13:3 the Lord says - *"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise*

perish” - and verse 5 is the same. So the Lord states this twice in this passage; therefore we ought to take special heed to what He is saying and use temporal trials and calamities for our own good. Christ’s hearers should have applied His words directly to their own hearts and watched against any self-righteousness. In addition, they ought to have asked themselves why God had spared them and not caused them to have perished in some way or other. Those of us who are Christians in the modern day should also take Christ’s words to our own hearts. We hear of deaths as a result of pandemics, or disasters, earthquakes, wars etc. but do we consider our own lives and recognise an opportunity to repent? Do you hear of (or maybe experience) some temporal trial? Then humble yourself and examine your own heart, seeking the Lord earnestly and endeavouring to be more holy and zealous for the Lord. The pandemic through which the world is passing underlines the moral and spiritual disease that afflicts the human heart. This is sin and can only be dealt with through the blood of Christ.

The present suffering must be treated as an occasion by Christians to be more spiritually fruitful for the Lord. See again Luke 13 and this time the parable of the fig tree in verses 6-9. In it, the fig tree is ordered to be cut down because it was unfruitful. The owner had sought fruit for three years (which, interestingly, could correspond to the Lord’s 3-year ministry in Israel). Another year is given the tree and the ground around it is dug and well fertilised in the hope that it will bear fruit. If not, it will finally be cut down.

Now we ought to learn from this parable to bring forth the fruits of faith and repentance to God plus a holy life, obedience, love for the Lord and faithfulness to Him (Philippians 1:11). In the providence of God, we are given time, therefore use it wisely, perhaps to read our Bible more and to prayerfully meditate upon it. Time is given to do the Lord’s will. Is any reader unconverted? Then see the present distress as Christ drawing near so that you can be saved. Christians should view it as a marvellous and remarkable opportunity to draw nearer to the Lord and have closer communion with Him. Eternity - and the things of God - are laid before us more clearly. Come into the presence of the Lord and use this period to pray for the church, for Christians, our nation and all the nations of the earth. Be good stewards of Christ and become intercessors. Many are needed, so do not complain or say you are bored because you are not able to go out and do the things that you would like. This is a unique occasion, perhaps once in a generation; therefore let us, by grace, bear fruit for God’s glory.



STEADFASTNESS

Stand fast in the Lord (Philippians 4:1)

It is a remarkable fact that at several crucial junctures in Paul's letters, the practical outcome of the Christian's warfare against the world and Satan is defined as a matter of "standing". In the final chapter of Ephesians, for instance, Paul exhorts the Christian soldier not so much to advance into battle, but to "stand". He writes, "*Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand* (Ephesians 6:13).

If we were writing the passage and using Paul's military imagery, we would most likely speak of invasion, marching, or conquest; but Paul does not do that. Instead, he correctly speaks of standing. The implication of the command is that the Captain of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ, has already done or is now doing the conquering. We have to hold the ground He has conquered for us. It is on the basis of the great conquests of Christ on behalf of His people when He died and rose again that the Christian warrior must stand.

Christians everywhere are called to steadfastness. The world around is changing its fashions of thought and conduct, but the child of God must stand fast. The enemy is constantly changing his methods of attack upon us, but clothed with the whole armour of God, we are to remain standing. Our heart may melt with fear, but we can say with the Psalmist - "*What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee*" (Ps. 56:3).

We began our Christian life by trusting the Saviour's finished work; so, come what may, we must not and will not draw back. We intend by God's grace to remain steadfast, proving that we are indeed true disciples. The Lord Himself who stands fast and does not forsake His saints has promised to preserve us and at last to clothe us in white raiment as victors who have overcome.

By Rev. David Creane, Lurgan, N.I.

*From: **Eagles' Wings Daily Devotional Meditations***

***Religion is not a matter of fits,
starts and stops, but an everyday affair.***

David Livingstone

News and Current Affairs



War on Truth

Voice for Justice UK – Newsletter, 12 January, 2021 newsletter@vfjuk.org.uk

In the U.S., the Democrats seek once again to impeach President Trump (CW note: this has now happened) – conveniently ignoring their own scandalous behaviour throughout his term of office – while at the same time Amazon, Apple and Google have combined to shut down Parler, the social media network noted for upholding pro-life and conservative views (<http://alturl.com/j2uju>).

Sad to say, whatever your views on American politics and President Trump, this appears an overt declaration of war on views deemed unacceptable by the Secularist elite because, at heart, it is a manifestation of a spirit that wants to silence and suppress any views that conflict with its own 'Woke' ideas. An object lesson, in fact, in conditioned totalitarianism, with the general public, like Pavlov's dog, trained to respond mindlessly to stimuli approved by an increasingly powerful plutocracy...Which is why this battle goes way beyond a mere conflict of political opinion – and is instead a battle of religions. The unpalatable truth is that Christianity is under threat and, unless we recognise that fact and speak up – unless we fight to defend our faith – we shall be immured in the rubbish dump of outmoded antiquated superstition, our every protest silenced by ridicule and vilification.

So how do we resist evil, when a partisan media suppresses and actively distorts the truth?

This was a question faced by the Lutheran Pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer in World War 2 when confronted by the evils of Nazism. From the first he opposed the cult of the Fuhrer and spoke out against the genocidal persecution of the Jews and Hitler's campaign for ethnic cleansing, at the same time unreservedly and unequivocally condemning Hitler's broader programme of euthanasia of the 'disabled'. For Bonhoeffer, obedience to Christ was all and, as a result, he was himself sent to a concentration camp, before being



executed on 9 April, 1945. The position he took from the first was that silence in the face of evil was to make one complicit.

Sadly, we live in an age where evil seems once again on the ascendant and – just as back in the 1930s when Nazism was gaining a stranglehold on power – it is not enough to opt for a quiet life, in hope the storm will pass us by. It will not. On the contrary, if we fail now to speak out and uphold the values enjoined by our faith, we shall ourselves be systematically silenced and ‘cleansed’.

In the garden of Eden, the snake tempted Eve with a lie, holding out the lure of knowledge and power. Unfortunately, the couple listened and the result was separation from God and death; but Christ, by His death and resurrection, broke the power of Satan and restored us to life and that relationship with God for which we had been created. So like Bonhoeffer, faced with the evils of Nazism, it behoves us now to speak up for and defend that hard won freedom – to claim our right to speak and defend those who cannot defend themselves. Silence in the face of evil is not an option.

The truth is, social media platforms and the Press are increasingly ‘policing’ what is allowed into the public domain, actively suppressing anything that runs counter to the preferred ‘Woke’ narrative with the weasel and duplicitous justification that they are promoting tolerance and inclusivity – branding contrary opinions and unwelcome facts (even where scientifically validated) as *fake*. This is not in the public interest – it is a resurgence of the same spirit of Nazism evident in the 1930s. We urge people to complain – directly - to the media and network outlets involved and to Ofcom, the Government media regulator. Make the point that while we welcome protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse, the right to freedom of speech and belief must be upheld and, in that regard, it does not lie with social media platforms or the Press to decide what is, or is not, acceptable.



Pope's intentions revealed in his Christmas homily...

British Church Newspaper, 15 January, 2021

Pope Francis's plans for the coming year were revealed in his Christmas message...

His Christmas message included these words:

"Today, in this time of darkness and uncertainty of the pandemic, different lights of hope appear, such as the discovery of vaccines; but in order for these lights to illuminate and bring hope to all, they have to be available to all. We cannot permit that closed nationalisms block us from living like the true human family that we are - and we need international organisations to promote co-operation – not competition – to find a solution for everyone: vaccines for all, especially for the most vulnerable and needy in all areas of the planet. The most vulnerable and needy must be first."

The Pope has effectively aligned himself to the agenda of Bill Gates and others in the World Economic Forum (WEF) who are proposing 'The Great Re-Set' for us later this year. The powerful WEF members suggest that the Covid-19 pandemic is so severe that compulsory vaccination for all the world's estimated 7.9 billion people is the only way forward – together with a fundamental 're-set' of the way in which the world is run.

This, they say, can only be achieved by supranational institutions which will be able to over-ride the wishes of national Governments. The Pope's reference to 'closed nationalisms' is tantamount both to a rejection of Brexit and an endorsement of the globalist intentions of the world's most powerful individuals and big business and political interests.

Abbreviated

A further article in *British Churchman Newspaper* discloses further disturbing proposals into how a new world religion could be introduced and accepted under the above 'Great Re-set'.



Avowed atheist explains how a new world religion will be created

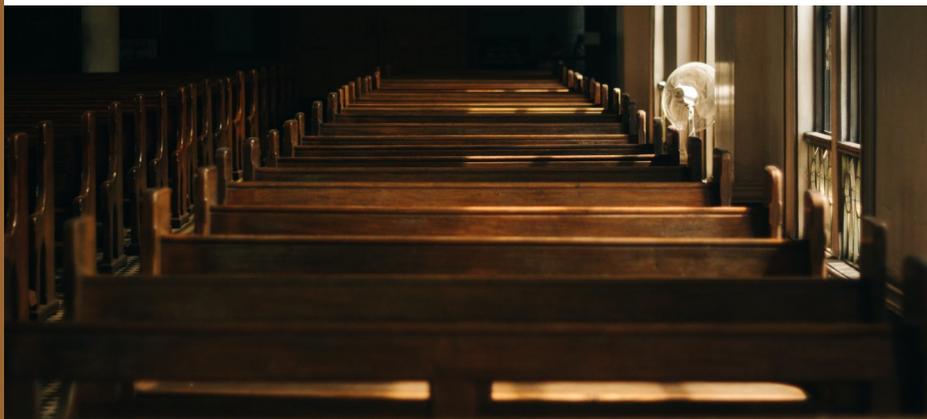
British Church Newspaper, 15 January, 2021 edition

The following speech was made at a recent informal meeting, by invitation only, amongst those working towards the 'Great Re-set'. It was reported to the Christian website 'Stranger than Fiction' (STF). The name of the speaker has not been given, but he is described on the STF website as 'an avowed atheist'. Here is the report of his speech:

The speaker said: "Religion is not necessarily bad. A lot of people seem to need religion, with its mysteries and rituals. So, they will have religion. But the major religions of today have to be changed – because they are not compatible with the changes to come – to make it easier for people to accept it and feel at home in it. Most people won't be too concerned with religion, they will realise that they don't need it.

"In order to do this, the Bible will be changed. It will be re-written to fit the new religion – gradually. Key words will be replaced with new words, having various changes of meaning. Then the meaning attached to the new word can be close to the old word – and as times goes on, other shades of that meaning can be emphasised – and then gradually, that word be replaced with another word ...I don't know if I'm making that clear, but the idea is that everything in the Scriptures might not need to be re-written, just key words replaced by other words – and the meaning and variability attached to any word can be used as a tool to change the entire meaning of Scripture – and therefore make it acceptable to this new religion. Most people won't know the difference."

The reporter commented that this was one of a number of times where he said that the few who do know the difference won't be enough to matter. Then followed one of the most surprising statements of the whole presentation. He said: "You probably think that the churches will not stand for this." But he predicted: "The churches will help us." There was no elaboration on this; it was unclear what he meant when he said: "The churches will help us."



Huge jump in worldwide Christian persecution exacerbated by Covid-19, World Watch List 2021 reveals – by Kelly Valencia, Premier Christian News, 13 January 2021

The persecution of Christians worldwide has continued to rise, with the coronavirus pandemic intensifying the levels of persecution.

Open Doors has released its yearly list, which records levels of persecution and discrimination around the world. This year more than 340 million Christians face persecution for their faith – that is up from 260 million in 2020. An average of one in eight Christians in the world suffers persecution.

The pandemic has made it easier for authoritarian Governments such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to increase repression. The Asian giant has re-entered the top 20 for the first time in a decade. Reports say Christians in the Henan and Jiangxi provinces have facial recognition systems in all State-approved churches and virtual church services are monitored.

It is all part of the so-called ‘Chinafication’ of the nation’s churches, which seeks to ‘rectify’ Bible stories in official publications. The CCP is involved in choosing new church leaders and teaching ministers how to interpret the Bible through Communist core values. Crosses and other Christian imagery are replaced with pictures of President Xi Jinping and national flags.

The same technology, used to monitor and control Xinjiang’s Uighur population, is reported to be exported to security systems across the world through companies like Huawei.

Many believers have also been denied coronavirus aid. Countries such as India, Myanmar, Nepal, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, Yemen and Sudan are among those affected, often by Governments, but more frequently by village Heads and committees.



The pandemic has also allowed militant Islamists to take advantage of the Covid restrictions to gain ground in their war against Christians in sub-Saharan Africa, with violence increasing by 30%.

Several hundred Nigerian, mostly Christian, villages were either occupied or ransacked by armed Fulani herdsmen. The country now ranks ninth in the WWL – partly due to the growth in violence.

Other countries impacted by militant Islamists include Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Cameroon, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Ethiopia.

There were, however, some signs of hope. Sudan has abolished the death penalty for renouncing Islam. In Iraq, after surviving the occupation of Mosul by Islamic State Militants, a group of young Muslim volunteers have, since 2017, been consistently cleaning up destroyed churches and homes.

Henrietta Blyth, CEO of Open Doors UK and Ireland, commented on the latest list: *“It has been a tough year for billions of people. However, for many of the 340 million Christians worldwide, who face persecution and discrimination, things are becoming worse still.*

My heart breaks when I hear of believers in India and Vietnam being refused food aid and told ‘let your God feed you’; or when I hear of women like a Christian mother-of-three from Egypt who was kidnapped by the Muslim Brotherhood and forced to declare she had ‘converted’ in a video.

However, I don’t despair; I have seen face-to-face the inspiring strength and bravery of Christians around the world who deal with this persecution. At Open Doors, we work to support, encourage and advocate for these remarkable men, women and children who stand firm in their faith, in spite of everything,” she concluded.



“Be not faithless but believing”

John 20:27

Unbelief is a damning sin, where it reigns; but not a damning sin, where it exists and is opposed. In other words, it is the *dominion*, not the *existence*, of unbelief in the heart, that excludes from the Kingdom of Heaven. The reprobate are an instance of the *former*; for they live and die under the power of unbelief; as the Lord said: “*If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.*” (See John 8:24). “*He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*” (See Mark 16:16). And the quickened elect are an instance of the *latter*.

We can scarcely find recorded two more striking instances of the existence of unbelief in the hearts of God’s people, than that of Thomas and of Zacharias. Yet, the very unbelief of Thomas, in whose heart the spirit of infidelity worked so powerfully that he would not believe that the Lord had risen from the dead, except he should see in His hands the print of the nails, and put his finger into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into His side, was, doubtless, over-ruled, not only for the good of the Church in all time, but for the good, also, of the unbelieving disciple, when his infidelity was effectually overcome by the power of the Lord communicating faith to his soul through the words, “*be not faithless, but believing.*” His belief became all the stronger for having been so powerfully assailed.

And so, doubtless, it was with Zacharias, who, as the penalty of his unbelief, was shut up for nine months in mute silence. For, when the Lord loosed his tongue, he “*was filled,*” we read, “*with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied,*” in that blessed hymn of praise which we have recorded, at the end of the first chapter of Luke’s Gospel.

The question, then, is not whether we have unbelief in our heart, but whether this unbelief is resisted. If we have nothing there but unbelief, woe be to us! But if this indwelling unbelief is, by a principle of grace, opposed, resisted and struggled against, the conflict will eventually end in victory.

From: Sidelights on Bible Characters – J. C. Philpot

Edited by: G.D. Buss

GOD HIS PEOPLE'S SHIELD

By: **B. A. Ramsbottom**

From: 'Saturday Evening Meditations'

Psalm 3

1. Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me.
 2. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah.
 3. But Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.
 4. I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and He heard me out of His holy hill. Selah.
 5. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me.
 6. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about.
 7. Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God: for Thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.
 8. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord: Thy blessing is upon Thy people. Selah.
-

I want to say a few things about the Lord as His people's Shield. You have this expression continually in the Word of God. We have it for the first time right at the beginning when the Lord made Himself known to Abraham: "*Fear not, Abram: I am thy Shield, and thy exceeding great Reward.*" Then you can follow it throughout Scripture. Moses had a view of it when he was dying. His last words embraced it, how he saw the happiness of the Israel of God and how that the Lord was the Shield of their help. Then we find it continually in the Psalms.

It is a very significant word – a shield. In our day it is somewhat hard to realise the preciousness of a shield in battle. Abraham, Moses, David and the other Old Testament saints, when they spoke of the Lord as their Shield, they well knew what it meant and they well knew the preciousness of a shield in battle. A shield is a matter of life and death. If a person had a a shield, then he came out of the battle unscathed, if it was skilfully wielded. If he lost his shield, it was certain death.

This is a vast subject. I just want to say a few things concerning it in a gospel sense. First of all, this: the Lord is His people's Shield from the wrath of God against sin. The wrath of Divine wrath must be poured out upon the ungodly. No hope, no salvation for those who have no shield.

One great point in a shield was this: it was something which was interposed, something which came between the blow and the warrior. Here was some falling

arrow - and a shield was interposed and the arrow falls on the shield – it does not reach its mark. Here is another warrior smiting with his spear. It does not reach its mark; there is a shield in between; it falls on the shield; the warrior who shelters behind it is safe. Now that is just what the dear Redeemer is to His people. In the atonement, He appeared as His people's shield. He stood between, came between that awful blow of the wrath of God which must have fallen upon the sinner, but instead, as Christ interposed, it falls on Him. This is substitution. The hymnwriter so sweetly sings of it:

“He, to save my soul from danger,
Interposed His precious blood.”

There is something very sacred in this Divine interposition. The wrath of God falls on Christ that it may not fall on the sinner. Now by Divine teaching you will realise the preciousness of this Shield – and there is no other. You will want to hide behind it. Do you pray this in the spirit of it?

“Be Thou my Shield and Hiding Place,
That, sheltered near Thy side,
I may my fierce accuser face,
And tell him Thou hast died.”

Now there is safety for the people of God behind this precious Shield.

Another thing is this: a shield must be strong, or it is useless. Some of these ancient shields were made of wood and there were layers of metal embossed on them. Others were made of leather. Sometimes this was strengthened with metal and these shields were so strong. If there was no strength in them, they were useless; they did not serve their purpose. Do you ever consider the dear Redeemer in His Divine strength?

By nature we devise a few shields of our own and they are useless; they do not defend us; they bring us death instead of life. But O to shelter behind this Shield, to see the strength of His finished work and a perfect hiding place behind it! David, in one of his Psalms (Psalm 5), speaks about being compassed about with this Shield, completely covered and surrounded by it. Do not think of these shields as just little shields they carried upon their arm. Some of these shields were so large, much higher than the warrior who carried them, almost surrounding the warrior. They were strong and they compassed him about.

One thing is this: you have your temptations. There may be times with you, especially when indwelling sin rises up, or when Satan assails, or the world

opposes, either with its opposition or with its allurements. It is a mercy then if you can shelter behind this Shield! The hymnwriter sings sweetly about these fiery darts when they are met by this Shield:

“There shall lose their force in patience,
Sheathed in love, and quenched in blood.”

Do you believe it? Those fiery temptations lose all their force here, “Sheathed in love, and quenched in blood.”

There is also a time of trouble. You have your troubles, different troubles in various ways. O but to flee to this precious Shield and find a refuge, finding a hiding place there! There is the day of your death. All other shields will be swept away in the swellings of Jordan. It will be a great mercy then if you are sheltering behind this Shield!

“In that dread moment, O to hide,
Beneath His sheltering blood!”

Well, this is the Shield – a precious subject, a precious Shield. Now may your concern be this: that you might be hiding behind it, sheltering behind it. In prayer there is a sinner approaching a holy, heart-searching God. What hope has he, what assurance that his prayers will be heard, that his person will be accepted? Only this: as in his prayers he pleads the name of a precious Jesus and then he hides behind this Shield. “Behold, O God our Shield, and look upon the face of Thine anointed.” And, as the Father looks down on His dear Son, as you are sheltered by Him, this is the ground of your acceptance, of your person and your prayers.



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