

**The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter**  
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**Editorial**

Dear Friends, Brothers and Sisters, Loving Greeting in Jesus Name.

Today I wish to talk about temptations, or trials if you wish. We read quite a lot about them in the Bible so let us start by reading from James, chapter 1 and verses 2 to 4, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials," but why? "knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience, but let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing".

Do you know that some believe and say that because God made Adam and Eve so very good they could not be tempted to do anything bad, they then conclude that Adam and Eve's temptation must have come from outside of themselves, and go on to suppose that the Serpent in the Garden of Eden is proof that because Adam and Eve listened to the serpent they were led astray, and became corrupted and temptable, and were no longer 'very good.' They call this 'the fall of man' supposing that all their descendants have suffered temptations and trials ever since. Even Dr Thomas said at one time it was "our misfortune, not our fault, we inherit the consequences of Adam's sin, a defiled, sin stricken nature, and mortality."

But there are problems with such ideas, not least is that God does not tempt anyone to do evil or wrong; so why would He make a serpent especially for the purpose of tempting Adam and Eve? And if God did make the serpent then how could He say that all He made was very good? It just doesn't make sense. But we have the answer, as always, in the Bible and we have only to look up James chapter 1 and at verse 13 we read, "Let nobody say when he is being tempted, I am being tempted by God. For God is not tempted by evils, and He Himself does not tempt anybody." So we believe and teach what James says next at verse 14, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." I am pleased to say that Dr Thomas understood James' teaching and so changed his own teaching likewise a few years before he died.

And so we come back to our opening quote where we are told "count it all joy when you fall into various trials." But that sounds as though we should be enthusiastic about being tempted. What have we to enthuse about? Yet that is precisely what James means, - understanding of course, that you wish to do right.

Do you wish to please God and do what is right? Overcoming our temptations is the only way we have of pleasing God – and that is what God asks of us in order to develop good characters and for which He promises great reward.

But it's not that simple is it? If someone hurts you do you want to hurt them back? What does Jesus say? Luke 6:27 to 31, "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."

On one occasion the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:1-4.

Jesus also knew we would fail from time to time even though He offers us all the help we need. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, in order that everyone believing in Him might not suffer destruction, but might have eternal life."

Just consider for a moment that God made this earth set in the heavens and prepared it with all forms of life, providing their means of livelihood, especially for mankind. He has put us here to live and enjoy its beauty and grandeur; to live in harmony with all there is around us, taking good care of it and cultivating it carefully for our health and benefit. Above all things God is love and He wishes us to be like Him.

In providing all these things for us it is His desire that we acknowledge Him and seek His ways – which are right and good. To this end we need to experience temptations – to make right choices, and above all, to refuse wrong choices. In Micah 6:8 we read, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Yes, we continually have opportunities to build good characters. Let us do so with a joyful heart and enthusiasm!

With love in Jesus Christ to all our readers, Russell.

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**He That hath Received His Testimony  
Hath Set To His Seal That God Is True**

John 3:33.

When we study the word of God with minds eager for light and truth we oftentimes come upon some treasure which had evaded us before. I found this to be so when reading the words of the Master Teacher in John 4:32. The disciples had requested Him to eat and Jesus replied, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of . . . My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." We might ask, "When did God's work begin, and what stage of that work was Jesus referring to?" It could not be the time when He will have subdued the nations and given up the Kingdom to His Father, Jesus knew this, and retrospectively we know it, but the twelve disciples did not. Yet those disciples were immediately concerned with the Father's work which Jesus makes clear, in John 17, in declaring that He had given them the word of the true God and manifested His Name unto them and glorified it.

This was the work Jesus spoke of and which He had finished; yes, the Father's work from the beginning and up to that time; but there remained yet another work, that of Jesus Himself - to drink the cup God had given Him, without compulsion to drink it. It was not God's work to drink of this cup. He was not of human nature whereby life-blood could be shed as the equivalent for the life lost by Adamic sin, therefore this was the work of Jesus alone, for as He said before His crucifixion, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work thou gavest me to do." On the strength of such a statement by Jesus Himself can it even be suggested or accepted that a compulsory death on the Cross of Calvary was incorporated as a condition of righteousness, with failure to comply making Jesus a sinner? Could Jesus have made such a statement with such apparent injustice in mind? Could Jesus glorify and rightly declare the Name of the Father, the attributes of which were declared to Moses? How indeed could He be able to manifest such a Name to those who believed in Justice, Mercy and Truth, but above all, Love? Yet this is the work His Father had given Him to do and of which He said He had finished.

Now this does not mean that the redemption of mankind was not the work of God. It most definitely was, and the bringing into the world of His only begotten Son was an important part of that work, and if we

cannot grasp the reason for the virgin-birth we will never grasp the true reason for the redemption obtained by Christ's sacrificial death, for without the virgin-birth there could be no sacrificial death.

Thus, Jesus having maintained His integrity as the Son of God and having glorified and manifested His Father's Name and finished that particular assignment, as a co-worker with Him, as He willingly allowed Himself to be lifted up and crucified, with His last breath He could cry out concerning His own work in the vineyard of witness and suffering, "It is finished."

I have spoken of two stages, but a third stage is still in progress which is found in Isaiah 53:10, "He shall see of his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." (See also Romans 5:18).

Continuing Isaiah 53, verse 12, the prophet says and implies that though numbered with transgressors He was not a transgressor but made intercession for those who were, in the fact of causing His death by false accusation and through envy and ignorance. They killed the Prince of Life. This was His status by birth, but this status alone could not impart Life to others, but as Prince of Life He could say, "I am come that ye might have life and have it more abundantly."

He was free from Adamic alienation and bondage to "Sin" personified as a Master, having been begotten under the constitution of Righteousness, therefore free to give the equivalent natural life lost by Adam's disobedience, and yet retain His birthright as Son of God and Heir Apparent. The difficulty people have in understanding this is found in not following the words of the Great Preacher in John 4:35, where, if you would read to verse 38, He speaks of other men who have laboured and the disciples having entered into their labours. The obvious teaching of Jesus for the disciples and all who entered and laboured in God's vineyard was to be sure about the men whose labours you were entering into. Who, then, were these men who had laboured and to whom Jesus gave God's seal of approval? Peter gives the answer in Acts 10:42,43, "And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and the dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." That which the prophets had witnessed to was heard and believed by both Jew and Gentile while the degree of their faith and understanding was qualified and accepted by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the speaking with tongues and the glorifying of God being signs to the believing Jews of the circumcision that the Gentiles were also accepted under the new covenant in the blood of Christ. "To him give all the prophets witness." "To him give all the Apostles witness." For they entered into the labours of these other men of whom the writer to the Hebrews (Chapter 11) speaks in commendable words saying, in verse 32, that the time would fail him to tell of Gideon, of Barak, Samson, Jephtha; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets. "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold we count them happy which endure."

Jesus tells us through His disciples (John 4) that the field as far as we are concerned is already ripe for harvest, "And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true. One soweth and another reapeth." The Apostle Paul takes up this very theme and enlightens us on the meaning of the words of Jesus, "And he that reapeth receiveth wages." Here Paul speaks of a reward irrespective of eternal life, for this latter is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, and not something earned as wages. So, in 1 Corinthians 3:5, he exhorts those who had preference of one Apostle from another saying, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollus, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollus watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planted anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: i.e. the Apostles (See Ephesians 2:20) "Ye are God's husbandry (tillage), ye are God's building." Paul continues a declaration of fact and also a very grave warning, "I have laid the foundation (Jesus Christ) and another buildeth thereon, but let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon - for every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it; because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."

The writer to the Hebrews commences his discourse with a reference to the wise Master Builder whose plan and foundation was incorporated by His Spirit Word in the prophets and in His Son the chief cornerstone. "God who at sundry times and divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." Hebrews 1:1. God spoke to the prophets, not to us. God spoke to His Son, not to us. His Son spoke to the Apostles, not to us. The Apostles entered into the labours of the prophets and Jesus, and we have the written words of God through them all.

Our belief and faith must be based on God's words through them, and we cannot say, We are of this man's doctrine, or that man's doctrine; far too many professions of holding the Truth of God have been made and forced upon people through misunderstanding, misinterpretation and direction to out of context Bible references and no concrete proof of the truth professed, and no sound basis of truth – merely quicksand. Let us then beware that the other men who have laboured, built on the true foundation (Jesus Christ), otherwise entering into their labours will be of little use to us if it does not abide the fire. We can only test it by the written Spirit Word of God as workmen who need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth, for if we make the mistake of following men who have confused the physical with the legal, we fall into the ditch with them.

"I am the light of the world", says Jesus, "follow me, take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

May the Lord bless you all and direct your hearts into the patient waiting for Christ, and to know that our labours will not be in vain in the Lord.

Brother Phil Parry.

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## Meekness.

From the Scriptures we find that meekness was the chief characteristic of the great author of our religion. "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth." "Take my yoke upon you," said He, "and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." It is to the meek, the humble, and the poor in spirit, and to those alone, that divine illumination is promised . . . "The meek will He guide in judgment, the meek will He teach his way." "He that hateth his brother is in darkness even until now."

When the Apostles grew angry, and were ready either to strike with the sword, or to call down fire from heaven upon the adversaries of Christ, - "ye know not," said their meek and peaceable master, "what spirit ye are of; my kingdom is not of this world." And, if the person of Christ is not to be defended by violent means, neither was His Gospel to be propagated in a spirit of violence. "For the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men - apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves," etc. The Apostles were to "speak the truth in love." That regeneration, the necessity of which they were to affirm, consisted much in laying aside the fierceness of nature, and putting on "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." "Ye were sometimes (or once)," said the Apostle, "disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and passions, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." "But now ye put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, evil communication out of your mouth," "be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."

In perfect conformity with these passages, the works of the flesh are described to be not only adultery, etc., but likewise emulation, wrath, strife, envying, heresies, and such like; and with these the fruits of the spirit are contrasted, which are "love, joy, peace, long suffering, meekness, faith, patience, temperance;" terms clearly designating that subdued; state of the passions for which I am pleading . . . I am aware it will be said that the doctrines of religion are so important they must be contended for with zeal, and even also with warmth. I grant the truth of this observation, but in doing so I would most carefully guard the admission. The warmth which is to be used in this case is, in a great measure, the warmth of love. It ought chiefly to arise out of a tender and affectionate solicitude for the very person against whom we contend.

Now, if we feel that love, we shall be careful not so much to excite his prejudices, or to affront his pride, by exposing him; as to gain him by the very candour, as well as kindness, of our conduct, and thus to render him a brother. With what care did Paul accommodate himself to the prejudices of the Jews, “becoming all things to all men, that by all means he might save some.” When he was converted he laid aside the spirit of the persecutor; he was no longer the man of wrath and violence, he was “gentle even as a nurse cherisheth her children.” Zeal for doctrine is easily learnt. Some, it is to be feared, having been throughout their lives, violent and contentious, and having adopted new tenets . . . continue to exercise their old temper while contending for the new subjects. They were impatient, forward, conceited, or fiery, before they had learnt these doctrines; they are no less so afterwards. Their Gospel has merely furnished them with a new topic, in the discussion of which the same unhallowed passions may be habitually indulged . . . I value the doctrines of Christianity. They are, in my mind, of inestimable worth; when rightly received into the heart they form in a man the very temper which I have endeavoured to describe.

What can more effectually teach humility meekness, and patience, than the knowledge of our unworthiness, and of our redemption by Christ? What can have a greater tendency to calm the turbulence of our minds than the exercise of prayer . . and meditation on the glories of the celestial world

Extract from “The Christian Observer.”

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### **“The Land That Yet Remains”**

*The twelve tribes were commissioned to utterly destroy the nations in the land of Canaan and inherit the land as promised to Abraham. According to Joshua 13, these conquests were never fully completed. This article will explore the past and present “land that yet remains” and the people that occupy it. Will the latter day Joshua return to finish the job?*

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Toward the end of the wilderness wanderings, the children of Israel, under the leadership of Moses, conquered the land of the Amorites, east of the Jordan river. When Moses died, Joshua led Israel across the Jordan River into the land of Canaan. The author of Joshua records the conquering of the land of the Canaanites in 11:3 and 24:11:

“So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war” (Joshua 11:23).

Although the children of Israel controlled all the land of Canaan, there were still pockets of territory yet to be possessed.

“Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the LORD said unto him, Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.” (Joshua 13:1,2).

There were several major areas outlined in Joshua 13:2-13 that remained for Israel to conquer as darkened in the map <sup>1</sup> on the following page:

- The Philistines’ land in the south coastal area, now known as the Gaza strip (vs 2-3)
- Northeastern border area, around Mt. Hermon and Bashan, now known as the Golan (vs. 5,13)
- The hill country of Lebanon along the north border (v 4,6)

In addition to the shaded areas on the map, some of the Canaanites retained control of pockets of the Promised Land, like Jerusalem, (then called Jebus) which was occupied by the Jebusites. (Joshua 15:63).

When the twelve tribes divided the Promised Land according to their inheritance, they were to finish the work of conquering the nations that remained (Joshua 23:3-5). They were told to do all that is written in the Law of Moses, including purge the land of the people and their worship of strange gods.



But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them... as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee: That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 20:16-18)

Yahweh left the Canaanite nations in the land to *prove Israel...to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of Yahweh...* (Judges 3:4). However, our people Israel failed the test. Not only did they dwell among the Canaanites, but they took husbands and wives of those whom they were explicitly told to purge from the land (Judges 2:5,6). As a result, our ancestors began to serve the strange gods of the Canaanites and forgot Yahweh. God’s chosen people have been plagued from generation to generation because of this.

Even during David’s conquests and the peaceful reign of Solomon, the Canaanites were not destroyed, and Israel continued to mingle with them.

*(Canaanites) were left...in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy, upon those did Solomon levy a tribute of bond-service.* (1 Kings 9:20,21)

Even king Solomon, despite his gift of wisdom, was drawn away because of his intermarriage with these people.

“But king Solomon loved many strange women... of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, “Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon clave unto these in love... and... it came to pass... that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God.” *1 Kings 11:1*

When the children of Israel were re-gathered to the promised land after captivity in Babylon, the nations that remained were still in the land. Our ancestors again made the same mistakes by mingling themselves with the Canaanites, by taking husbands and wives, and being influenced thereby.

“...The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites... For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands...” (*Ezra 9:1,2*).

Since that time those “nations that remain” have plagued our people Israel. Even today, after the modern re-gathering, the Philistines and Canaanite peoples continue to occupy the same areas they did thousands of years ago.

- Gaza Strip, land of the Philistines
- Golan Heights - Mt. Hermon to Hamath
- The Security Zone in the hill country of southern Lebanon

West Bank - which Israel again controls, but tolerates pockets of various Arabs and Philistines. These areas are strikingly parallel to the “nations that yet remained” after the conquests of Joshua. They are still occupied by exactly the same peoples, causing many of the same problems for Israel.

These peoples are now multiplying at an incredible rate and gaining ever increasing political support worldwide. As long as the Philistines continue to grow in population, Israelis will continue to be troubled by the ever increasing hate taught to Philistine children.

In the Gaza Strip alone, the population as of July 2000 was 1,132,063 (in addition, there are some 6,500 Israeli settlers in this area). Of this Philistine population, 50% are ages 0-14, and 47% are ages 15-64. The fertility rate is 6.55 children born per woman (2000 estimate).<sup>2</sup>

In the West Bank, the population as of July 2000 was 2,020,298 (in addition, there are some 171,000 Israeli settlers and about 172,000 in East Jerusalem). The Philistine population enjoys 83% of the total population. Of the Philistines, 45% are ages 0-14, and 52% are ages 15-64. The fertility rate is 5.02 children born per woman.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the war of 1967, the Golan was home to approximately 100,000 Syrians. According to 1994 estimates, the Syrian population is significantly smaller, but still outnumbers the Jewish population there. The total population of 30,500 includes about 16,500 Arabs and 14,000 Israelis.<sup>3</sup>

The same nations that our Hebrew ancestors failed to conquer are still thorns in the side to our people today. And given the large percentage of Philistine children and their exponentially increasing birth rate, this will only continue and escalate. When will the land promised to our father Abraham be inherited and our people Israel dwell safely?

“If ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell. Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them.” (Numbers 33:55,56)

We look for the return of the latter day Yeshua (Joshua) “the savior” to deliver our people from the hands of the “nations that yet remain.” Let us continually watch the land promised to our fathers and pray for that day when all the land will dwell safely under the reign of our Messiah forever.

“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the land shall be full of the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea.” (Isa 11:9, quoted from Numbers 14:21, also cited Habakkuk 2:14)  
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Note: The following verses are sometimes misunderstood to mean that the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been fulfilled at the time of Joshua.

“And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.” (Josh 21:43-45)

While it is true that Israel possessed all the land promised, it is not true that the promises made unto the fathers were completely fulfilled. Recall that the promises were made TO and INCLUDED the fathers themselves, not to mention “forever.” Compare Genesis 13:15-17, 17:8, 26:3, 28:13 with Acts 7:5, Hebrews 11:13, 39. Thus the need for resurrection. Daniel 12:1, 1 Corinthians 15.

Bro. Alan Pursell

### **FootNotes:**

<sup>1</sup>*The MacMillan Bible Atlas*, by Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, map #69, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup>*The World Factbook 2000*. “West Bank” and “Gaza Strip.”

<sup>3</sup>Encarta Encyclopedia, “Golan Heights”.

## Veritas and Friends

“Now a national experience is necessarily a thing of slow growth, and covers a long period of time, and if the world nationally as well as individually is to be taught by experience, a sufficient time must be allowed it. No doubt, by-and-by, when the lesson has been well learned, and the necessary experience acquired, a short-cut will be found to both private and public happiness. Men, by the aid of the Spirit, will be able to ‘cancel’ the sum, and get the desired result more quickly than is possible at present.”

“You seem to me,” said Dubitas, “to be affirming God to be omnipotent with one breath, and then limiting His power with the next.”

“Do I?” said Veritas, “then let me try again. What is omnipotence? It is the power of doing all possible things. The word ‘possible’ here not being the measure of what we may be able to do, but what a perfect being can do. So when we say that certain things are outside possibility even with God, we only mean that being perfect He cannot do anything that would imply imperfection. In fact, it is the very fact of God’s omnipotence which makes certain things impossible to Him.”

“I don’t see it yet,” said Dubitas. “Well,” continued his friend, “we sometimes say of a man of high principle and honour, whose life for many years has been a humanly noble career, we say of this man, ‘It is impossible for him to do a mean or dirty act.’ What do we intend by this? Do we intend any real limitation of such a man’s power when thus using the word ‘impossible’? Do we not rather intend to exalt and magnify him by that expression? Does the word argue the perfection or the imperfection of such an one?”

“I grant,” said Dubitas, “that in this case it does not imply any limitation of power.”

“Then why should it imply limitation when similarly applied to God?”

“Ah, it is the ‘similar application’ that I am not convinced of.”

“But,” said Veritas, “the two cases are similar in this, that a moral result being contemplated, perfectness can do only that which will make for this result. Human perfection cannot tell a lie: divine perfection cannot treat moral beings as though they were blocks of stone; but the ‘cannot’ does not imply limitation in either case.” Dubitas shook his head.

“Not clear yet? Then let us turn round and study your notion of omnipotence, in which God can be limited by nothing, not even His own perfection. He must be capable of doing things contradictory, as well as things having connection and congruity; He must be capable of folly as well as wisdom; of sin as well as holiness. There can be no such thing as the LAW of his own nature, but omnipotence is an insane capacity of reeling round the universe, boxing the compass of all extravagant as well as of all wise action.”

Mentor and Pietas both laughed at this ludicrous picture of omnipotence, while Dubitas protested that it was not putting his case fairly at all.

“Then put your case yourself,” said his friend, smiling.

“Perhaps I can’t,” he apologised, “but it seems to me that God can’t be omnipotent, and yet be incapable of doing anything that is desirable, such as getting a holy and happy race of beings, without all this prolonged suffering and evil.”

“Ah, I see now where I failed in my putting of your case,” said Veritas; you have imported a new word into the discussion by talking of ‘what is desirable.’ You no longer contend for what is in the insane sense, abstractly possible, but your point is now, that which is desirable. Permit me to ask, how you know what is or is not desirable in arranging the terms of a world’s life and probation?”



“I know the long continuance of pain and evil is undesirable.”

You know nothing of the sort, for before you could know that you must know what the state of things would have been supposing evil had not existed.”

“Why, if evil had not existed,” he chuckled, “surely that would have been the condition of things most desirable?”

“How do you know but that a greater evil would have supervened in case the world had suffered through no such prolonged history? In other words, how do you know but that the highest good can only be reached by the permission of evil?”

“Of course I don’t know,” said Dubitas, “but if the present world is the best that could be made, I can’t help thinking its maker is not omnipotent.”

“But then,” replied Veritas, “you are falling back on what I have called the ‘insane’ notion of omnipotence. You are saying that this world is perhaps the best that could be made, and then you say there might have been a better if God had only possessed power enough.”

Dubitas was evidently foiled, but not satisfied, and Veritas concluded by saying: “You will have to revise your notions of omnipotence, and perhaps you will see that it is not limiting it to say that God cannot do a foolish thing; and for all we know it would be foolish to create a race of moral beings without putting them through a probationary experience.”

After this digression Veritas resumed his own account of himself, the attention of the listeners not flagging in the least.

“In reading the Scriptures,” he said, “I learned that DEATH in the literal sense of the word was the penalty attaching unto sin. To die, to be destroyed, to perish, are the constant terms used to describe the consequence of transgression. No reason can be assigned why these words should be taken in any other than a literal sense.”

“But,” said Pietas, “does not death sometimes take the meaning of depravity? is there no such thing as being morally and spiritually dead?”

“Yes,” said Veritas, “in a very few places, indeed, in the Scriptures this secondary and metonymical meaning is met with, but never in describing punishment; neither would it be common sense to substitute a very occasional and secondary meaning of a word for its constant and primary signification. I have learned that death, considered as the penalty of sin, means dissolution of being in the grave. To be destroyed and to perish mean the same thing, only that they are in the Scriptures frequently connected with those violent means which God will use when he exerts destructive power.”

“Then you do not accept the usual teaching concerning hell? inquired Pietas.

“I certainly do not,” replied Veritas; “and I am astonished that any careful reader of even the English version of the Scriptures can be satisfied with that teaching. There is not the least warrant for it in the book.”

“Well, you amaze me!” said Dubitas.

“Very likely,” was the answer; “I amazed myself when I made the discovery.”

(To be continued.)

## **Matthew 20 Verses 17 To 34.**

In Luke's Gospel we read "When the days were well nigh come that He should be received up. He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." Jesus had travelled north to the area around the Sea of Galilee for John's Gospel tells us "He walked no more openly among the Jews, but departed to the wilderness into the city called Ephraim because the Jews sought to kill Him and there He tarried with the disciples." "There is the possibility that He had moved to the north because news of the raising of Lazarus had come to the ears of the Pharisees causing some consternation (John 11:47) "And that Chief Priests therefore and the Pharisees gathered a council and said 'What shall we do? For this man doeth many signs. If we let Him alone men will believe in Him and the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation.'" Their fear basically was a very personal thing; they held power, and were terrified that they would be deposed by the Roman authorities for not keeping the peace. Continuing in verse 53 - "so from that day forth they took council that they might put Him to death." Caiaphas summing it up with these words "Ye know nothing at all nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people that the whole nation perish not."

The time of the Passover was drawing near, the commemoration of their release from bondage in Egypt, a time when their fervour was aroused and hopes raised that there might be a similar release from the oppression of the Roman rule. Knowing from the scriptures that a Redeemer would come their anticipation would be heightened, maybe now would be the time of His manifestation. Maybe they had listened to the words of the Gospel proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was at hand that this Jesus was the promised Messiah and would announce a resurgence of the nation and the casting aside of the Roman yoke. Indeed they had a Saviour in their midst but did not comprehend the full import of His mission. Namely, that of bringing redemption within the reach of all mankind. Even His disciples closely associated with Him during His ministry, and privy to a far fuller explanation of His message were still blind to God's all-embracing purpose. From the Gospel records we know that He had warned His disciples of His coming suffering and death, and that Peter had rather heatedly rebuked Him saying "Be it far from Thee, Lord, this shall never be unto Thee." A natural human reaction to one he loved dearly. The very idea that anyone could raise their hand against the Man they knew as the Son of the Most High God, a Man full of compassion, love and understanding for the Jewish people and especially those of lowly estate, and it aroused in them a defensive spirit. They had been chosen by Him and lived in close-association with Him for approximately three years, listening to and conversing with Him, and naturally a strong bond of love had developed within the group, and hearing Him preach to the multitude had aroused in them a new hope and a deeper understanding of the love of God.

Their return to Ephraim, away from the crowds and excitement that was building up in Jerusalem would afford Jesus another opportunity to prepare the disciples for the traumatic events that would take place a short time hence. But even here the crowds still gathered to hear His words and marvel at His miraculous healings, and it was necessary for Jesus to withdraw apart with the disciples, for His words at this time were to be for them alone. "Behold," said Jesus, "we go up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He shall be raised up."

We know that Jesus took many opportunities to withdraw from the people a time to commune with God the Father, and to renew His spiritual energy. We use a modern term "to recharge our batteries." We are all aware that there are times when peaceful reflection and deliberation away from the pressures of everyday life are very necessary, and we are certainly not under the same daily pressures that afflicted our Lord, physically and mentally. Apart with His disciples Jesus would undoubtedly explain more fully than the words in the two verses in our chapter would indicate. Earlier He had told His disciples He would suffer, be killed, and raised again on the third day. On a later occasion He revealed that He would be betrayed. This reference is in Matthew 17:22 "For the Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of men." Now here, at Ephraim, He was revealing a fuller picture - the betrayal the death sentence and delivery to the Gentiles - the mocking - the scourging - the cruelty of the death by crucifixion, and not only that, but also the Glory of the resurrection on the third day.

The disciples would know from their upbringing under the Mosaic Law that mankind was alienated from God through Adam's sin and because of this all mankind was under sentence of death. But through His

loving mercy God provided a way, through ceremonial sacrifice, entailing the shedding of blood, for the remission of sins confessed. This law was necessary, for Paul wrote to the Galatians “The law has been our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified through faith”, and in the epistle to the Hebrews “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.” The life of an animal was not the equivalent of the life of a man, and no offering of a lamb could provide deliverance from the indebtedness caused by Adam's disobedience. Through Jesus Christ God Almighty was providing a way to remove this condemnation. In John 3:16 we read “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” John the Baptist said of Jesus “Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”

These points Jesus would be making to His disciples and emphasising the law of Redemption as laid out in Leviticus 25, namely that a near kinsman not only had the right, but the duty, to redeem his poorer brother by the paying of a ransom.

“Behold” said Jesus, “we go to Jerusalem and all things that are written in the prophets shall be accomplished by the Son of Man.” I think it is fairly clear that Jesus must have spent time expounding the principles of redemption to the disciples and how necessary it was that He, of His own free will, must go up to Jerusalem, for He was fulfilling the obligation His Father had set upon Him. God had sent His Son into the world not to judge it but that the world should be saved by Him. Despite His explanation the disciples still did not fully comprehend, for a few verses later we read “and they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, and they perceived not the things that were said.” It is possible that their blindness was caused by holding fast to the idea that the Glory of the Kingdom of God was very close. Even the three disciples Peter, James and John, who were privileged to witness His transfiguration and behold His glory, when His face shone as the sun and His garments became as white as light, still did not comprehend despite Jesus ordering them to say nothing until He was risen from the dead.

This lack of understanding was necessary, for it required that at His crucifixion Christ be entirely on His own, and we know that near the end of His ordeal on the Cross even His Heavenly Father withdrew from Him. “And Jesus cried out with a loud voice 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’” He alone, had to bear the burden of our sins, and no one could be with Him to provide any moral or spiritual support or comfort. By allowing His Son to suffer in this way God was demonstrating that despite man's alienation through sin. He was still prepared to offer the way of redemption. Mankind was helpless and hopeless, and only His Creator could remove this stigma and give him a chance of salvation. In this way God was revealing Himself as a loving and merciful Father in a way that mere words could not express. In the offering of His beloved Son He must have suffered anguish, and that, far more deeply than we can comprehend, but in using this method to reconcile the world unto Himself the impact God made has reached down the centuries undimmed in its glory and promise.

There could be a second reason for the forth-coming death of Jesus to be hidden from the disciples. At His arrest they became a disorganised body, fearful for their lives. For we read in Matthew 26 “Then all the disciples left Him and fled.” The startling news of His resurrection would electrify them and when they beheld their Master, welded them into a body with new energy and purpose.

It is difficult to put ourselves in their position, for we are privileged to discern the whole picture through the Biblical record. No doubt, if we had been there listening to Christ preach the Gospel of the Kingdom with the lifting of the burden of sin and the prospect of eternal life, we also would anticipate that these great events would take place in the normal life span of the person expounding them. The possibility that the Son of the living God, with all His powers, would submit to a degrading trial, scourging and terrible death would be far from our thoughts.

With this in mind, I think we can understand the disciples projecting their thoughts forward to the Kingdom, especially listening to the words as recorded in Matthew 19 “Verily, I say unto you, that ye who have followed Me in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

During the journey down from Ephraim to Jericho Jesus and the disciples would be joined up with other parties moving towards Jerusalem. It appears that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, must have found

their mother in one of these groups. Their father either showed no interest in the new Gospel of the Kingdom, or had died, for we find no further mention of him after his sons left him mending their nets when they answered Jesus call, for we read "Straightway, they left their boat and their father and followed Him." Their mother, Mary, was a devout woman, and a follower of the Lord, for we find her at the foot of the Cross with Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses. As they travelled, her sons would bring her up to date with the latest news and how Jesus had spoken of the disciples sitting on thrones of authority, and this would focus their thoughts on the Kingdom and their position in it. Although the record in Mark reads that they put their request themselves, there is the possibility the disciples may have been rather diffident and connived with their mother to approach Jesus on their behalf. The request from either source would appear rather presumptuous. "Grant that these my two sons may sit on Thy right hand and the other on Thy left hand in Thy Kingdom." It could be that James and John had asked their mother to put the request remembering the rebuke that Jesus had given to Peter a little earlier. The appeal was ill-timed, their Lord would be mentally preparing Himself for the ordeal ahead, but their request was understandable, their desire was to be as close as possible to their Lord in the Kingdom, but their lack of understanding of forth-coming events made the request rather brash and unfeeling, but there was no rebuke in the reply and we note that it was to James and John and not their mother "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" Whilst the two disciples were considering the glory of the Kingdom, Jesus concentration was upon the events that would take place in a few days' time, namely His crucifixion, which would redeem man from the condemnation placed upon Adam. This was to be the moment of His glory. By drinking of the cup of suffering and obedience proffered by His Father, remission of sins by the offering of sacrifices would be abolished. By paying the purchase price of His perfect sacrifice redemption would become a fact and no longer would the offer of eternal life be limited to the children of Israel but opened up to all mankind.

John writes, in his first epistle, "Herein was the love of God manifest in us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we love God, but that He loves us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins." The principle of the Atonement is not punishment, but the redemption of sinners. Christ submitted Himself to the will of His Father because He was aware of what was at stake.

Although the answer to the question "Are ye able to drink the cup?" was "We are able" it was an answer made in ignorance of the events that would take place in the near future. It was an answer that they would remember and consider far more deeply after their Lord's crucifixion and resurrection, when their minds were opened and they would understand the glorious work of salvation wrought by the Lord Almighty through obedience of His beloved Son. The paying of the ransom price of a perfectly sinless and acceptable life, freely given, that removed the condemnation placed on Adam. They would recall His words "I am the Good Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep. No one taketh it from me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Only later, in the days when they received the power of the Holy Spirit could they confidently say "we are able", for they would be filled with the Power of the Spirit and the full understanding of their Lord's sacrifice and be prepared to lay down their lives in the service of their Lord. "My cup" said Jesus, "indeed ye shall drink."

Of the two, James we know suffered death by the sword. Acts 12: "Now about this time Herod put forth his hand to afflict certain of the church, and killed James, the brother of John, with the sword." He was one of many who suffered for their belief. There appears to be no record as to whether John suffered a violent death or not.

When the ten heard of James's and John's request they were filled with indignation concerning the two brethren. An understandable reaction for all wished to be close to their Lord, but they appear to have forgotten the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. Whether one laboured throughout the heat of the day or only for the last hour, in the cool of the evening, the payment was the same. Eternal life and a place in the Kingdom, the gift of God, and God is the arbiter of those who will receive it. A place in the Kingdom is the essential reward. There is no graduation of qualification. But the Kingdom, the Almighty God can allot positions to those whom He wishes. We have the parable of the Talents and the reward of the diligent servant, "Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." As Jesus told the two disciples "to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but it is for them it has been prepared of My Father."

On this occasion Jesus spoke to the twelve of the true nature of discipleship. His words clearly indicate that a desire for greatness was not a desirable trait in those seeking a place in the Kingdom. Verse 28 reads: "Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and give His life as a ransom for many." Jesus emphasised on a number of occasions that His disciples must learn a deep and constant humility, a humility that derives from our utter dependence on the love of God and the sacrifice which cleanses us from sin. He said "The disciple is not above his Master nor the servant above his Lord" and on another occasion "I am among you as one that serveth." "A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another even as I have loved you" "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." "For no longer do I call you servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but I have called you friends for all things that I heard from My Father, I have made known to you."

The time was short, Jerusalem drawing nearer each day, Jesus, despite the trials that He was to undergo, did not waver, and we are reminded of His words recorded in Luke: "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God." We usually consider His steadfast progress toward Calvary as starting with His ministry, but I think we can go back even further, to when as a twelve year old He said to His mother and Joseph "Whist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"

At this early age He would not necessarily understand fully what His Father required of Him, but He was already aware that He held a unique relationship with the Almighty. His single-mindedness in obeying His Father's will is an example to us all. His sacrifice could be of no benefit of itself to God for its only value is in the response it evokes in us.

Brother Jeff Hadley.

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Jesus said to the Samaritan woman "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

**John 4 Vs 23 & 24**