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"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans 1:16.

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## The Jarvis Street Pulpit

### THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BAPTISM OF THE BELIEVER

A Sermon by the Pastor, Dr. T. T. Shields

Preached in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, January 27th, 1935

(Stenographically Reported)

"Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."—Colossians 2:12.

I must begin by setting this text in its proper place in relation to the massive Scripture which forms the context: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us; which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

What wonder that after that great announcement of the heart of the gospel, that setting forth of the great principles of redemption, he should have added, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days—do not allow men to judge you in respect to these external, superficial things—which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

We are living in a day when in nearly every sphere of human activity men are displaying their genius by

the production of substitutes; they can imitate anything. Certain people used to wear silk, but we do without the silk-worms now: they use—what do you call it, celenese? We used to pack our things in wood: now we pack them in cardboard. There was a day when people used their own teeth; now they get better ones made for them! Once of a day women depended upon good health to give them a healthy complexion—what are you smiling at? Now they have learned how chemically to dispense with that necessity! Adolf Hitler says Germany will make herself entirely independent of the rest of the world, that her chemists will synthetically produce every kind of food necessary to national health and vigour, and make Germany independent of all exporting countries of the earth.

It is not surprising that this passion for substitutes should invade the religious realm. By way of illustration: last week I happened to refer to the Oxford Group Movement, and to one or two other religious movements, as counterfeits of Evangelical Christianity. Of course the daily press put that in headlines. How many letters and newspapers I have had this past week I cannot tell you. Some country papers reached me with editorials on the subject. I am grateful for all those who would thus enlighten me, but I can frankly tell you I had thought through the whole subject long before the papers arrived, and, of course, before I spoke. I still think the Oxford Group Movement is a substitute for genuine Christianity, as is Christian Science, and many other cults which bear the Christian name.

Long ago men perverted the Scriptures, and took baptism out of its proper setting, and made it a means of salvation, applying it to infants who did not even know their own names, and put the name of Christian upon millions of people who were unregenerate. If

you would know to what extent this truth of baptism may be perverted, read a Roman Catholic treatise on the subject, and see how that church teaches that there is no possibility of salvation without baptism. When you have read their terrible treatise—I have never read anything more horrible in my life than the teaching of Rome on the necessity of baptism—when you have read it, you will see how important it is to abide by the simplicity of the Word of God.

In the thought of a great many people, baptism is only a ceremony, whether it be sprinkling or immersion; whether applied to an infant of days, or to one who is able to believe. It is regarded as a simple external ceremony required by certain churches as a term of admission to membership.

I fear there are many among the people called Baptists who have been immersed with only the vaguest idea of what baptism means. Let us look at this text, that we may view the ordinance of baptism in relation to that great body of truth which it represents; and which it is designed to illustrate and to conserve.

#### I.

Look for a moment at the significance of the burial itself. Have you noticed what care is taken in the Word of God to make that matter, the fact of the burial of Jesus Christ, perfectly clear? Paul, when he summarized the gospel in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, said, "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." What significance is there in the burial of Jesus Christ? He was the second Adam, our Representative, the One Who, though knowing no sin Himself, was "made sin for us . . . that we might be made the righteousness of God in him".

What did the burial of Jesus Christ signify? It was the seal and the final proof of death. Therefore it was *significant of the fact that death inevitably is the ultimate issue of sin*: "Sin, when it is finished; bringeth forth death." It is not without significance that the Lord Jesus was brought to the place called Calvary, which in the Hebrew is called Golgotha, and which, being interpreted, means "the place of a skull". That was the end of the road, that was the vindication of the divine promise, "The wages of sin is death." When Jesus Christ, as your Representative and mine, died at the place called Calvary—or when He had died, they took Him from the cross and buried Him—and to such burial our sin, your sin and my sin, leads inevitably. There is no escape from it. There is a grave at the end of the road.

That is what sin is—not pleasure, not the way of promotion and preferment, not profit, not a path that leads to glory: essentially, inherently, in its very nature, sin has death at the heart of it; and always, without any exception, it leads to death and the grave. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." He took our place; He "died for our sins according to the scriptures—and was buried".

But, further, it suggests *the certainty of the payment of the utmost penalty of sin*. You will remember that the Jews had some religious objection to the bodies of the three victims that had been crucified at Golgotha

remaining on the cross over the Sabbath. They went to Pilate, asking that measures be taken to accelerate their death; they petitioned him that the legs of the crucified victims might be broken. Orders were given to that effect, and the soldiers came to the thieves and brake their legs, but "when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead already, they brake not his legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced." Mark's gospel is a little more explicit at one point, for it says that when Joseph of Arimathaea, and Nicodemus, associated with him, went to Pilate to beg the body of Jesus, "Pilate marvelled if he were already dead, and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph." In effect he enquired of the centurion, "Can you issue a certificate that this Jesus is dead? Is he actually dead? Has the law taken its course? Have we done all that we can do? Have we killed the body? Are you sure of it?" The centurion said, "Yes; he is dead." "Very well, then; if he is dead, they may have the body."

There was therefore no doubt about it: the penalty had been executed to the utmost; for Jesus Christ had actually died. One cannot explain away the resurrection by saying that Jesus was in a swoon, a trance, that He did not actually die. The soldiers examined the body. They said, "We need not break His legs." A Hand was laid upon them, for it had been written, "He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken." But one of the soldiers, not knowing what he did, but perhaps only to place His death beyond doubt, drove a spear into His side, that the scripture might be fulfilled, "They shall look on him whom they pierced." But my insistence at this point is that He was dead, really dead. And such as are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, who in the likeness of His death are buried, thereby confess, "My sins issued in death. The penalty for my sins was paid to the utmost farthing by my great and glorious Substitute. He died: I died with and in Him. I am buried with Christ."

But there is another meaning. The burial of Jesus *was significant of the nature of sin itself and of its inherent corruptibility*. There is a terrible word in the book of the prophet Nahum where the Lord describes the greatest of all world powers of that time, the power of Assyria, the head of which was the vain-glorious Sennacherib who boasted that not any of the gods of the nations had been able to deliver at all his land out of the hand of the great king, the king of Assyria. The Holy One looked upon him and said in effect, "Sennacherib, thou art so corrupt, so vile, thou hast so completely forfeited all right even to live, that I will dig a grave for thee. The Lord hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown . . . I will make thy grave; for thou art vile." And God did make a grave! And He not only buried Sennacherib, but He buried the Assyrian power. He made a grave that was big enough to hide from view the world's greatest empire. He buried it out of sight so that for centuries nobody could find it. Many centuries

passed before the spade of the archæologist discovered the site of ancient Nineveh. It was too vile to be permitted to continue, and God said, "I will make thy grave; for thou art vile."

You remember the terrible yet beautiful story of Lazarus? The sisters shrank from the very thought of looking upon his loved form, because he had been dead four days. "Oh no! No! No! Do not take away the stone. He is dead." The place for that which is dead is in the grave, out of sight.

"He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Made sin for us! I quote that text often, but I do not know what it means. I have never read any exposition of it that satisfies my own mind. Did I say I do not know what it means? That was wrong: I know what it means, but I cannot explain how our Lord Jesus Christ made Himself the sinner's scavenger, how He took upon himself the sum-total, the aggregate of the world's sin, how He identified Himself with the world's sin so really and intimately as to become Himself "sin for us", sin in its inherent abominableness and totality so that the Holy One perforce turned His face away from Him. Therefore He died! Therefore He was buried!

"Buried with him in baptism." Is there not in it, by implication, an acknowledgment that my sin is such an abominable thing; that it works such indescribable and unimaginable corruption, there can be no alternative but to bury it out of sight? "Buried with him in baptism." Do you see the spiritual implications of that act of obedience? How it ought to teach us to abhor the thing called sin! How it ought to beget within us an antipathy for everything that belongs to it! Can you imagine anybody's playing with the germs of diphtheria? Can you imagine anyone's deliberately using the bacilli of typhus fever, or cholera, or bubonic plague—or any other disease that has death at the heart of it, to flavour candy or other sweets for little children? Every consideration of human interest would dictate that such potentialities of death should somehow be buried in the deepest pit, or sunk to the lowest depth of the sea.

Such wisdom the Lord wanted us to learn when He instituted the ordinance of baptism. He said, "In a figure, I shall show you that you have so sinned, and have become so corrupt, so abominable, that my holiness demands that your sin shall be buried so deeply as for ever to hide it from the omnivident gaze of the Holy One."

## II.

WHAT, THEN, IS THE CONTENT OF THAT FAITH WHICH PROPERLY IS A PREREQUISITE TO BAPTISM? "Wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." We are raised. By baptism? No. If you are not a believer, if this miracle of spiritual resurrection has not taken place in you, the outward form of baptism can mean nothing at all. If it could, if by immersing a person we could guarantee his passage to heaven, I think we should become rather enthusiastic in pressing upon all the act of baptism. But we must keep it in its proper place. Baptism is representative of a miracle which only God can perform. You cannot provide a substitute for it. Having been buried with Him, we are raised again through faith. It is as we believe we are raised. *Therefore baptism is for believers only*; nobody else has any right to be baptized. The sprinkling of children, or the

immersion of children, the application of any ceremony called baptism at any time to anybody, who is not first of all a believer in Christ, and has been made a new creature in Him, is without significance. Nay: rather it is sacrilege; it is the prostitution of a divine ordinance to ends other than those divinely ordained.

The faith of which baptism is a confession is a faith "in the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." When the law had had its way, when the law's penalty had been exacted of the sinner in the Person of His Substitute, when He lay cold in death, and the law could do no more to Him, then God raised Him from the dead. What does that mean? Merely that He was raised from the dead? No. You must not separate the text from its context. You must see what was involved in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Let us believe the fact of it, however, and recognize the fact of it, that He Who was crucified and buried did actually rise again from the dead; that He was raised by the power of God; and that all who are in Him are similarly raised, even now sharing in the power of His resurrection.

But what is the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as taught in this particular scripture? There is far more than a mere dynamic in the resurrection of Christ; far more is implied than that the mere power of divine energy lifted Him out of the death of sin. Our faith is in the power of God; but it is a power that is exemplified especially in the resurrection of Christ. What occurred when Jesus Christ was raised from the dead? Was it nothing more than a manifestation of divine energy? I know that that is in the word. I know that again and again we are told that the gospel is the "power" of God unto salvation. Here we are told of the "operation" or *energy* of God. We read of the power, the dynamic, of the resurrection. But I am sure there is more than mere power, or than energy conceived of as power, implied here. It is power directed by divine grace. Our context tells us that when Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, believers were "quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses, blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." It is as though He had taken your bill, the indictment against you, the long catalogue of your sins, and by divine warrant, stamped it, "Paid", and put it on file by "nailing it to his cross". It is as though He had said, "That man's sin is paid. His obligation to the law has been fulfilled. His sentence has been served. There is no longer any reason for keeping him in prison. Set him free." Hence our faith in the operation of God which raised Jesus from the dead enables us to believe that He has with Him brought our souls out of prison that they may praise His name.

We do not come out as a paroled prisoner, to report to the police every week or so. We are raised from the dead as those whose sentence has been served to the utmost, of whom nothing more can legally be required. We are free men "through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

There is more in the resurrection which baptism symbolizes than that. The "blotting out of the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us", was a great mercy: an act of sovereign grace. Our text is a passage into the riches of which I wish I had the skill to lead you. Oh for ability to describe the

glory of it: "Through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

What was involved in that? *It was taking the prey from the mighty.* When Jesús was buried, the Pharisees went to Pilate—I think I can see them now! They came to Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first." If I were an artist I should like to try to portray Pilate in that interview. The enemies of Jesus of Nazareth had forced his hand. "He knew that for envy they had delivered him up"; and now that they have killed Him, they say, "Please seal the sepulchre so that He will not rise again." Can you imagine the expression of his countenance as he looked into the very souls of these enemies of God? With fine scorn and contempt he said, "Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can."

They went their way and sealed the stone—and set a watch! I suppose most of us, as we have pictured that scene, have seen the rocky sepulchre, we have seen the Roman soldiers, we have examined the seal, and we have heard the women as they later said, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the sepulchre?" Thus do men talk. Thus do we belittle divine omnipotence. "Who shall roll us away the stone from the sepulchre?" That is our task, rolling the stone away from the sepulchre!

Oh the infinite meaning of that word! Can you see nothing more than its bare letter? Roundabout that sepulchre there gathered principalities and powers, all the hosts of darkness—I have no doubt, under the personal command of the prince of darkness himself. This was the time when that battle scene in the First Book of Samuel, at once historic and prophetic, found its fulfilment: when a mightier than the Goliath of Gath came to do battle with One Who had answered his challenge, "Send me a man to fight with me." All hell was assembled at the sepulchre of the Lord Jesus. Do not forget that. About the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea there was the mightiest concentration of evil powers of which the devil and all his angels, all principalities and powers, were capable—all the reserves of hell itself were assembled at that sepulchre to prevent Jesus Christ from rising from the dead.

But men found no need to roll away the stone from the sepulchre. Something occurred there that mortal eye did not see, and it remained for the Spirit of God to reveal it to the apostolic mind at a later time. Jesus Himself laid aside His grave clothes, robed Himself, and stepped forth in all the majesty of His power. In the garden they came with lances and with torches as though to arrest an armed man, and when the lonely Prophet, with but a few followers, saw them, He said, "Whom seek ye?" They said, "Jesus of Nazareth." "Well then," said He, "I am he." "As soon then as he said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." But when He came forth from the grave that Easter morning, and girded His sword upon His thigh, and in His majesty rode prosperously

because of truth and meekness and righteousness, His right hand taught Him terrible things. All the powers of hell fell back from before Him; and He "spoiled principalities and powers". Single-handed, the Lord of life and of glory discomfited, defeated, routed, all the powers of darkness in the universe—and in that last effort of Hell to destroy Heaven, He "triumphed over them in it."

He was my Representative, and yours; and when at His leisure, and at His pleasure, he had "shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of (men) forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God", He ascended on high, and led captivity captive, and the disciples saw the clouds receive Him out of their sight. The Psalmist prophetically describes the subsequent glorious entrance into heaven: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory." Our glorious Christ returned to His Father, having executed His Father's will, and having "spoiled principalities and powers", before all Heaven; He "made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." He sovereignly converted man's sin, really, into an occasion, *the occasion*, for God's greatest glory.

But is all that in baptism? Yes; it is all in baptism. "Risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Poor, weak, sinners we are! Poor bankrupt souls! The wonder is that God could forgive us. But He has, and in the person of our glorious Lord He has effected a salvation for us which ensures our ultimate triumph over all the powers of evil. "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

Have you received that salvation? Have you looked to the Crucified? Do you believe that He died for you, that He was buried for you, that He rose again for you? I said this morning, to these friends who were baptized to-night, as we talked together of our common hope in Christ, "Keep it clearly in mind that your act of obedience in baptism means that you make confession to the world of your identification with Christ on the cross, in the grave, and in resurrection power and glory. When He died, you died; when He was buried, you were buried; when He rose again, the gates of the prison-house swung wide for you, and you came out to walk in newness of life."

Is that a salvation worth having? How many will receive Christ this evening? Salvation is all in Him. Let us pray, and as we pray, if you have never done it before, if you have not given yourself to Him, tell Him to-night that you do come to the cross and leave the burden of sin there, to rejoice in His salvation.

Let us pray:

O Lord, once again we thank Thee for the gospel of Thy grace, and for the truth that salvation has, by that grace, been purchased for us; and that now the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. We are poor sinners, O Lord; we are beggars before the mercy-seat. Our hands are empty: we have nothing with which to pay.

We have no works of righteousness to plead. We stand before Thee condemned already. We can but plead guilty, and cast ourselves upon Thy mercy, and ask Thee for the sake of Him Who died and rose again, to forgive our sins, and to wash us in the precious blood of Christ. Lord, help us this evening that we may not only trust Thee, but that we may openly confess Thee before men. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

## THE SIN OF NUMBERING

A Bible Lecture by Dr. T. T. Shields

Delivered in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto,  
Thursday Evening, January 24th, 1935.

*Sixth in the 1934-35 Series of Thursday Evening  
Lectures on Biblical Theology, which Subject  
is Included in the Curriculum of Toronto  
Baptist Seminary*

(Stenographically Reported)

Lesson Text: II. Samuel, chapter twenty-four.

It would appear that the events here recorded are not in their chronological order, and that they may perhaps belong immediately following the twenty-first chapter. It reminds one a little of the last chapter of John's Gospel, which is in the nature of a postscript. Its meaning is equally clear no matter where it is found chronologically.

We are told in the twenty-third chapter the last words of David: then this chapter from his own personal history is added. I would remind you that the First Book of Chronicles is, broadly speaking, parallel to the First and Second Books of Samuel; and the Second Book of Chronicles, parallel to the First and Second Books of Kings. Just as you have certain events recorded in the three Gospels, but viewed differently, in some cases the narrative a little more elaborate than in others; so the First and Second of Chronicles sometimes supplement the First and Second of Samuel, and the First and Second of Kings respectively.

The chapter parallel to this twenty-fourth chapter of the Second of Samuel is the twenty-first of the First Book of Chronicles. It differs at some points; but is not, of course, contradictory. The twenty-first chapter of First Chronicles begins by telling us that "Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel". The first verse of this chapter reads, "And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah."

### I.

First of all, let us remind ourselves that it is possible for God's own people to incur the anger of the Lord. We saw in our study of the twenty-first chapter, a few weeks ago, how wrath was upon the people of God from the Lord because of the violation of the covenant which Joshua had made with the Gibeonites, through Saul and his bloody house. Perhaps chronologically this chapter follows upon that: again we have the anger of the Lord, another occasion for divine displeasure. Be that as it may, it would be profitable for us to face the simple fact involved here, that it is possible for God's people to incur the anger of the Lord. I mean, His covenant people, His people who are, by His abounding grace, saved with an everlasting salvation.

We are admonished in the New Testament to be "angry, and sin not". There are occasions wherein even a Christian may be angry—and ought to be angry. To face certain things without anger involves a reflection upon our own moral nature. Our reaction against certain evils ought to be one of extreme displeasure, extending to the point of real anger. It is said of the Lord Jesus, when the Pharisees rebuked Him for healing the man with the withered hand, that "he looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts". It was not often the compassionate Saviour was angry, but He was on that occasion; and again when He saw how they had profaned the temple, He "made a scourge of small cords, and drove them all out of the temple".

There is a distinction, however, between the anger which God's people may incur, and that with which the wicked, if they turn not, must inevitably be visited. "God is angry with the wicked every day." But the anger here said to have been kindled is not the anger of a judge, it is not the anger of one who comes to visit with vengeance; but the anger of a benevolent Father Who is greatly displeased and grieved with His own children.

The person who was chiefly responsible for incurring this anger was David, who elsewhere is described as "a man after God's own heart". So good a man as David, who consistently walked in the will of God, had enough of the old man in him to make it possible for even such an one as "the sweet psalmist of Israel" to displease the Lord very greatly.

We must remember that it is because His compassions fail not that we are not consumed. If God is not angry with us, as a judge, it is not because there is not enough in every one of us to call forth that anger; but in the infinitude of His mercy, He has looked upon us in Christ, and our sins are forgiven for His name's sake. Yet we may grieve the Holy Spirit, and thus we may grieve the very best of friends. We may get out of fellowship with the One to whom we owe our life and breath. It is a sad thing when there comes upon the redeemed spirit a consciousness of divine displeasure, and of distance between our souls and that of the Beloved. We do well to enquire as to its reason, and immediately to seek that grace which will put it away, and bring us back into fellowship and happy communion with God again.

Let us at least learn from David's experience to heed the divine admonition, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." We should "rejoice with trembling". We should work out our own salvation "with fear and trembling". "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." A father may say to his son, "I want to be proud of you. I want you to do your best, to exert yourself to the utmost." When examination time comes, and the son through indolence has failed to reach the high standing that his father desired for him, it is rather sad when a kind father has to say, "I am terribly disappointed; I thought you would have done better than that." So is it possible for us to fall short of what ought to be our attainments in grace. Happy the man who is able to say, like the Apostle Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain."

Here is a man who is by no means young. Though this chapter be out of its exact chronological position, the events here recorded belong to the later years of David's life. It was when it was getting toward the eventime with him that Satan tempted him. My dear friends, we may any of us be tempted, to the end of the chapter, and we shall do well to pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

## II.

Look now at what, from some points of view, might seem to be a discrepancy, and even a contradiction. Our chapter tells us that "again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." The margin has it, "Satan". That is there really as an explanation in view of what is written in Chronicles, that "Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel".

How can it be said that David was moved of God to do this thing, and, at the same time, that he was moved of Satan? Can the two be reconciled? It is such paradoxes as this which constitute the favourite hunting ground for unbelieving critics. They say, "There is a plain, positive, unmistakable, contradiction." Samuel said "he", that is, the Lord, did it: Chronicles says "Satan" did it. How can you reconcile the two?

Let me give you one or two other scriptures: "And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil." Going back to the Old Testament, "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham." He tried Abraham, subjected him to a further test, when He told him to offer up his son. You will recall too the prayer which our Lord Himself taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Another scripture will immediately occur to you, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

You who have attended the Sunday School the last few months have had occasion to know something of the Book of Job, for we have been studying it a good while. You may have grown weary of it, but in years to come I think you will have a very vivid recollection of spending a good while with Job. In the opening of that book you have this word, "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" You remember the sequel to that, how Satan was permitted to try Job almost beyond endurance. When again Satan came before the Lord, the Lord said to him, "From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause."

That is a strange statement, is it not, for God to say to Satan, "Thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause"? Sometimes we speak of the sovereignty

of God—often, indeed, in this place; and we delight to believe in the operation of sovereign grace. But sovereignty is sometimes exerted in restraint as well as in compulsion. For example, I believe the Lord Jesus Himself never gave a mightier manifestation of His absolute sovereignty than when He sovereignly yielded the hands of Almightyness to the nails of the Roman executioner. He could have done otherwise, but He did not. You never heard of an engineer's proposing to dam back Niagara. It takes Almightyness to hold Almightyness in check. Only One Whose sovereignty was absolute could exercise that power over Himself, and restrain the output of that power in the presence of His enemies, as did the Lord Jesus.

So in the sovereign dispensations of grace, we must look not alone for the compelling will of God, but for His permissive will, the things that He permits under His sovereign jurisdiction, in order that in His own good time He may effect His purposes of grace. So it is in keeping with His general dealing with His children that, when the diamond is almost fashioned, almost ready for its golden setting, almost polished enough to be transferred to the palace, that the divine Lapidary permits a few extra touches here and there to finish the polishing of His jewel.

There is a sense in which the records of Samuel and Chronicles are both true. And mark you—and you students will have discovered this—that the translation of one language into another can never be done mechanically: it always involves an interpretation, because you can seldom find an exact equivalent for one word of one language in one word of another language. You might find two or three words, with various shades of meaning, either of which might be a fairly accurate translation. But you would have to consider the exact sense in which the word you would translate was used in order to determine which of the possible choices in the other language could most accurately be employed. Hence, the understanding of what seems to be a discrepancy is a matter of interpretation and spiritual insight; and it is only as one has a clear conception of our sovereign God and of His universal domain, and conceives of Him as being enthroned above all principalities and powers, and might and dominion, that he can understand how God could permit David to be tempted—and, by the ordering of events, even be said to "move David" to do a certain thing, while Satan, ready always to take advantage of such a combination of circumstances, steps in and converts that providential ordering of events into a veritable temptation, and see how God providentially brings out of it what He had determined should be accomplished.

One had better be very cautious in speaking of inconsistencies in the Bible: the apparent contradiction may be in your own incapacity to understand the true spiritual import of the matter in hand. We come to this, that God's people may be tempted in certain ways. Into that I shall not go, but remind you that none of us are exempt; that no age, no state of maturity, can guarantee immunity. When one has long years of experience behind him, he may still be subject to severe trial. Let us always be on guard. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation", is an exhortation which applies not alone to young people, but to people of mature years. It will never be unnecessary while we are in this tabernacle.

## III.

Now, specifically, David apparently was tempted in the region of his own self-importance, tempted to become proud. We may all be tempted in that direction. I have in my travels here and there seen some people changing their complexions in public; and, by so doing, attracting attention to themselves. I have often said to myself, If that person could see herself as others see her, she would make every effort to make herself as inconspicuous as possible, instead of attracting attention. What in the world she had to be proud of, no one could imagine.

Some of you may have read the letters of *Junius*. If you have not, I hope you will, particularly you students. There is nothing like them in English literature that I know of. If you want to know how to use the English tongue, study *Junius*. I do not advise you always to follow his example, for there is too much vitriol in his speech. But he made and unmade governments, shook the throne, did as he liked—and the kingdom trembled in anticipation of his next letter. He wrote his letters with his own hand, before the days of typewriters; and yet said, "My secret shall die with me." And it did. Nobody ever found out who the author of the letters was. There were a good many guesses. Somebody nominated a certain knight. And one wit, rather cynically, but cleverly, said the only thing about this man's whole character and career which seemed to lend probability to the assumption that he was the author of the letters of *Junius* was that the fellow seemed always to be so confoundedly conceited, and nobody had ever been able to find out what it was about!

What was said of him could be said of many of us, that although we do find a good deal of satisfaction in ourselves, no one else is able to discern the ground of it. Mr. Spurgeon said of certain men, that they boast of being self-made—and beyond all question they most devotedly worship their maker!

This for you preachers in the making. I have heard the story of a young preacher who, on one occasion, preached apparently with almost complete satisfaction to himself, with the air of one who had all but reached perfection. When the service was over a very dejected man approached him and thanked him for the message, and told him that that morning's message had been a benediction to his soul. Said the young preacher, "I am very glad to hear that, sir. What part of the sermon was it that especially helped you?" "The whole service from beginning to end. Your delivery of the sermon, your general deportment, your conduct of the service—everything was a blessing to my soul." "I am very happy to know that; but if you would not mind, I should be glad if you would tell me what it was about the sermon and the service that helped you so much." "Only this, sir. I once was a preacher myself, but I became so discouraged that I resigned and gave up the work of preaching. I came in this morning very down-hearted. I listened to you, and you went through the whole service with such assurance and satisfaction to yourself that, as you concluded, I said to myself, Thank God; I can do better than that anyhow. I will try again."

David had many things to be proud of, but I am merely pointing out to you that any of us may be proud, and be tempted to sin at that point. Ruskin said, "In

general, pride is at the bottom of all great mistakes"; and Pope, you remember, wrote:

"In pride, in reas'ning pride, our error lies;  
All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies.  
Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes,  
Men would be angels, angels would be gods  
Aspiring to be gods, if angels fell,  
Aspiring to be angels, men rebel;  
And who but wishes to invert the laws  
Of Order, sins against the Eternal Cause."

David was tempted to number Israel, to see how many people he had. It will be an interesting study for you at your leisure to go back through the Old Testament, and forward into the New, to see what place that principle of census-taking has in the plan and purpose of God. Sometimes God's people were numbered by His express direction. Sometimes they were numbered in order that the price of their redemption might be ascertained. Sometimes they were reminded that they were a very small people. Israel was likened to a little flock, while the enemy was as grasshoppers for number. In comparison God's people were small, and the enemy great. But this man was tempted to count to find out how great they were.

Joab was not always right, but on this occasion he remonstrated with the king, saying, "The Lord thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?" It is permissible for us to count in order to see how small we are!—but never to see how big we are. I am talking to preachers, and this will go into the printed record. I want to say this very deliberately, for your profit, and for the profit of a great many of my ministerial brethren.

I do not know any point at which ministers are more grievously tempted than at this point, counting the people. I knew a minister once whose record was known to many. If a church wanted a building twice its capacity, all they had to do was to call that preacher: the building would become twice its size over night. I sometimes wonder whether some ministerial brethren ever think of the ethical side of their exaggerated estimates. I have sometimes put it boldly enough, and baldly enough, to say that I have known ministers who seemed to think that they had an unlimited license to prevaricate—or, if you like it better, to lie—to lie about their congregations. I see it in the papers. It used to be advertised that this building along Gerrard Street had fifteen hundred seats! Now the public are told the building used in its place seats eighteen hundred people! If that be so this auditorium would seat at least three thousand.

Years ago, when I had two assistants, and a janitor who was a good deal broader than Brother Agnew, I said, "I am going to find out once and for all what is the capacity of this auditorium." With the seats arranged as they are, it is somewhat difficult to count; but the four of us secured an accurate estimate by actually sitting side by side in the pews. If you take an architect's estimate of the seating capacity of a church, it is generally far in excess of the actual facts; because you cannot seat people in eighteen inches each. We counted this place, and we found that seating it that way, with four full-grown men—I ought to say in the

interests of accuracy that I did not take up quite so much room then as I do now, but still we were four full-grown men,—I found that this church's seating capacity, allowing room for shoulders and arms; is exactly fourteen hundred and ninety-six—in round figures, fifteen hundred. But I know buildings in this city that are not anything like as large as this, that seat twenty-three and twenty-five hundred people—it depends on who reports their capacity.

Years ago when supplying for my friend, Dr. A. C. Dixon in Spurgeon's Tabernacle, London, I attended an afternoon service in Westminster Chapel, of which Dr. Campbell Morgan is the famous Pastor. The person sitting beside me told me Dr. Morgan usually had three thousand people at his Friday evening Bible Lecture. I asked where it was held, and he said, there in Westminster Chapel. I replied, "Then this place has a capacity equal to Spurgeon's Tabernacle, has it?" "Oh no," said my informant, "Spurgeon's seats six thousand." The fact is the present Spurgeon's Tabernacle seats 2,750.

That is all a pleasantry, but ministers of truth ought to speak the truth. We ought to be as careful in matters of that sort as we are in other matters. I can promise you ministerial students in advance, that if you cultivate the habit of counting your congregation instead of estimating it, it will have a most beneficial effect—it will work in you a spirit of humility! You will find your congregations are not nearly as large as your estimate.

The Baptist World Alliance held its meeting in Toronto a few years ago, in what was then the Transportation Building at the Exhibition Grounds,—the building in which we hold our Sunday School picnic because we can find no other big enough. I preached in that building during the war, to a brigade including the General Staff. The late Judge Logie, then General Logie, was then in command of this military district. All arms were there, and, standing, the Transportation Building was filled from end to end—not part of it, but from end to end. General Logie said to me afterward, there were a little over five thousand men present. When the Baptist World Alliance met in the same building, with stalls and book-stands all over the place, and certainly not more than half of it seated, several thousand people were reported present. The whole building, standing rank by rank, accommodated five thousand: but a part of it held about as much as the whole!

I cite these instances only as a further example of numerical congregational exaggeration.

But let me direct your attention to another great evil in this connection. We are fortunately here delivered from the necessity of presenting a printed report of our membership at the end of the year. If you examine the handbooks of certain denominations, you will find the membership of the churches reported on paper. In many cases, to my certain knowledge, the roll of some of those churches has not been revised for many years; and in not a few cases some of the people have died, and their names have never been removed from the church roll. When I became Pastor of this church it reported a membership of a little over one thousand, but on investigation I discovered about three hundred and fifty of the names were only names. The Lord must have known where they were, but I could not find them. Then people who are troubled by others' opinions say, "Do not take the names off or we shall report a decrease at the end

of the year." The Lord knows whether there is a decrease or not. Why print a misrepresentation of fact?

What I suggest to you is this, that in all your labour for the Lord, pray for grace to be delivered from that bondage to your own pride which will lead you to want to appear to be very much bigger than you really are. There is no profit in such counting.

And how foolish it is! God's promise is not given to the big battalions. When men grow big, they think they do not need God. We imagine we can do things ourselves. Read the story here, and you will find that inevitably it was when God's people felt themselves to be very, very small, so small in comparison to their enemy that they were as nothing, and they fell on their faces and cried to God—it was then God gave deliverance.

When Jesus Christ promised His presence in the midst of the assemblies of His people, He did not say, "If you organize a great body of people, numbering thousands, and invite Me, I will be in the midst." On the contrary, He said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Two! He could not have said less than two, and more than one. He could not say one and a half! If there were to be a gathering of any sort it could not be less than two. The Book abounds with promises to the individual, but giving a promise to a group, He said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them."

But His gracious promise to the few puts no premium on our indolence. We must not be content with small numbers if we can have many. God is to be praised if He blesses us with large congregations; if He gives a large hearing to the gospel, we should praise Him. But let Him do it, let us not magnify ourselves.

But I would remind you of this great text: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." "I called him alone." Just one man! In the New Testament it says, speaking of Abraham's faith, "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable." What God said to His people was, "If you really trust Me, I will give you such a blessing that you cannot count it: Your seed shall be as innumerable as the sand by the seashore."

The twenty-seventh chapter of First Chronicles records that when the census was taken those who were twenty-one and over were not counted "because the Lord had said he would increase Israel like to the stars of the heavens." The blessing of God cannot be weighed in balances; it cannot be determined by arithmetical measure: it belongs to the infinite. Let us look to God for the greatest blessing He can give us, and ask Him to forgive us if we have ever depended on our own strength. Let us multiply our opportunities as we can, but let us not count our achievements, nor number the people that are with us.

In the ninth verse we find this, "And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men." In Chronicles, it is said, that



the men who drew sword were numbered; "of Israel a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah was four hundred three score and ten thousand men that drew sword." There may seem to be another discrepancy here. But put these scriptures together: "Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king's word was abominable to Joab." And again: "Joab the son of Zeruiah began to number, but he finished not, because there fell wrath for it against Israel; neither was the number put in the account of the chronicles of king David." We are told therefore that the census was not completed and that the incomplete record was not put in the account of the chronicles of king David. It is quite easy therefore to understand how these accounts could differ when neither was complete or official. Study these chapters and work out a satisfactory reconciliation: the twenty-fourth chapter of the Second of Samuel, and chapters twenty-one to twenty-seven of the First of Chronicles.

#### IV.

Now more hastily, although we might well linger upon each verse, "David's heart smote him." One might assume for the moment that he had come to himself without any special admonition from the Lord, but the explanation of his heart's smiting him is found in the eleventh verse, "When David was up in the morning, the word of the Lord came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, Go, and say unto David"—That is why his heart "smote" him, because in the morning God sent a prophet to tell him that he had done wrong. We have no prophets, but we have the word of the prophets; we have the Word of the Lord. If, as David's action was now brought into the light of God's Word at the mouth of Gad the seer, our actions are brought into the light of God's Word as contained in this Holy Book, we too shall sometimes discover that we have done wrong; and as David did, we shall have to repent. Let us see to it that we bring our public, as well as our private, service to the only standard of judgment that is reliable, namely, the judgment of the Word of the Lord. When that condemns us, and we find our course is not according to that which is written, let us, as David did, pray and repent.

Once more, a simple observation, in passing, and that is, that prayer and the testimony of God's Word are mutually related. The man who prays will hear what God says; and the man who lives much with God's Word, will pray much. Similarly, if you neglect your Bible, you will not pray; but if you study your Bible, it will drive you to your knees. The two go hand in hand, and will exercise a corrective influence on the life as you go on from day to day.

David was given his choice of chastisement: "Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land?" David said, "Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man"—and "the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men".

It should be observed that Israel did not suffer exclusively because of David's wrong-doing, for there is no doubt that there was that in the life of Israel as a nation which rendered them susceptible to this tempta-

tion. No visitation of God is ever unjust. While David's numbering of Israel was the occasion of the judgment, the real cause was jointly in David and Israel.

Then the angel of the Lord came to David and told him there was one way out of the difficulty—and it is always the same way—an altar and a sacrifice. David must erect the altar as a symbol of that which is to come, for all these sacrifices point forward to the great Sacrifice. We have an Altar, we have a Sacrifice; and we must draw upon them. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." As David built the altar, so must we when convicted of sins, flee to the mercy-seat, and there seek forgiveness and cleansing.

There is a beautiful story here of Araunah, as he is called in Samuel, or, Ornan in Chronicles, but the same man is named, a man of some standing; apparently. When David came to the threshing-floor and asked for ground on which to erect an altar, Araunah said, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good to him: behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood. All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king." It is a lovely way to give, a proper way to worship God. David's response was equally beautiful. He said in effect, "Thank you, Araunah. It is creditable to you that you would thus devote everything to God. But were you to do it I should be offering a sacrifice of that which cost me nothing. If you please, therefore, let me pay for it. Thus we will both give."

After all, we are to offer sacrifices that cost us something. If one should say, "Did not Jesus pay it all?" We answer, yes; but remember it is written, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but, be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." A recognition of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ always begets a sacrificial spirit in us; a recognition of the fact that God has forgiven us everything, will make us forgiving toward each other. Then we shall understand the saying, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." If we are forgiven, really forgiven, it will always make us forgiving. Araunah and David will meet at the place of sacrifice, and each will render to the Lord that which is His due.

Thus the Second Book of Samuel closes with David's having put everything where the blood was shed. Having settled all accounts there, he is still the man in whom God is well pleased. So may His grace enable us to do.

#### "FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS"

By universal consent conditions of life in our day are so difficult as to be almost without precedent. Certainly we need to study something more than the commonplaces of history if we are to learn how to meet the exigencies of to-day. Ordinary standards of appraisal utterly fail us. Methods of doing things which successful experience once proclaimed to be wise,

have proved themselves useless in this day of extraordinary difficulty.

Look where you will, human wisdom acknowledges its inability to cope with the situation. Old forms of government have crumbled. New and untried experiments seem to be the order of the day in all state affairs the world around. Political, economic, commercial, and industrial, life is in a state that is all but chaotic.

This being so, religion in general, and Evangelical Christianity in particular, must feel the effect of this universal upheaval. Moreover, evangelicals, ministers in general, and students in particular, will be sure to feel the pinch. One cannot escape the necessity of asking, Has the gospel of the grace of God any particular message for a day like ours? In this unparalleled storm, can the Christian's anchor hold? Is there anything in the Christian religion sufficient to make a man independent of—when it does not make him superior to—his circumstances? Can the plants which the Heavenly Father hath planted, survive the frosts of such a winter?

The answer to all these questions must be in the affirmative. The Christian religion is for every age, for every day, for every situation, for every conceivable exigency of life. Our religion consists in a vital, personal, relationship to One Who is enthroned above all storms, and Whose resources are undiminished,—and, indeed, unaffected in any way by terrestrial depressions.

When famine obtained everywhere else, there was corn in Egypt because Joseph had filled the storehouses by divine direction, for just such an emergency. It is for us, students and everybody, to prove that we have access to these inexhaustible stores. When famine everywhere prevailed in Elijah's day, the ravens and the widow of Zarephath were the channels through which the wealth of the divine storehouses flowed to His needy servant. And when the captive Jews, scattered throughout the dominions of the Persian king, through the machinations of Haman found themselves condemned to death, it transpired that God had put in the king's palace an intercessor "for such a time as this". When the ship upon which the Apostle Paul was a passenger in chains was being broken in pieces by the fury of the storm, Paul was able to say, "I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve."

So, by divine grace, it may become possible for the believer to rise above the difficulties of the day, and, like his Master, overcome the world by learning how to be independent of it.

### DR. OLIVER W. VANOSDEL

Dr. Oliver W. VanOsdel, for many years Pastor of Wealthy Street Baptist Church, Grand Rapids, recently was called home to be with Christ. It was our privilege to know Dr. VanOsdel quite intimately for more than ten years. He was a true saint who, under all circumstances, always appeared as an holy man of God. He was a man of broad learning, and a Baptist of profound conviction. He was a man of extraordinary discernment, and was endowed in rich abundance with that

rarest of all virtues, practical common sense. This made him a counsellor of almost Solomonic wisdom.

People of colourless religion, compromisers actuated by selfish motives, Modernists who denied the authority of Scripture, ever regarded Dr. VanOsdel as an enemy—and he was the uncompromising foe of all these things. But to those who enjoyed the privilege of intimacy with him, and who were admitted to the inner sanctuary of his mind, he was as simple as a little child, gentle and kind as the most gracious-spirited woman could be. He was a great soul who will be greatly missed by a large number of people.

Dr. VanOsdel led in the building of the magnificent Wealthy Street Church at Grand Rapids after, as we believe, he had passed the sixty-year mile-stone. Until the close of his great ministry, his natural strength was unabated.

THE GOSPEL WITNESS lays this simple tribute on his tomb.

The following article, giving somewhat of the details of Dr. VanOsdel's long ministry appeared in *The Watchman-Examiner* of January 17th, 1935:

#### Dr. Oliver VanOsdel

Dr. VanOsdel, who recently passed away, at Grand Rapids, Michigan, was born near Poughkeepsie, New York, October 30, 1846. His family moved to Illinois, and he enlisted in the Union Army in 1864. After the war he entered the old Chicago University and later began his studies in the Seminary connected with it. In 1871 he was married to Harriet Adelaide Wood, who filled the difficult place of a minister's wife for fifty-one years. He began his ministry at Warrenville, Illinois, and served in turn Aledo, Rock Island and South Chicago, Illinois. In 1882 he returned to the Seminary, then at Morgan Park, Illinois, and was graduated in 1884. His next pastorate was at Ottawa, Kansas, followed by service in El Paso, Texas, and Gelesburg, Illinois. In 1896 he accepted the pastorate of the Wealthy street church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, but remained only one year, going to Spokane, Washington, where he remained for eleven years. For a few months in 1908 he served as field secretary for McMinnville (now Linfield) College, but in 1909 returned to the Wealthy street church, Grand Rapids, which he served for twenty-five and a half years.

Although his great passion was for reaching people with the gospel message, his ministry was marked by the raising of funds and building church houses in many places. In Aledo, Illinois; Ottawa, Kansas; Galesburg, Illinois; Spokane, Washington, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, such edifices were erected in whole or in part. In three of these places—Ottawa, Spokane and Grand Rapids—the task seemed impossible but by expenditure of tremendous energy, under a never failing consciousness of the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the Sunday school plants of the first two were completed and the commodious plant of the latter was finished. While pastor at Spokane he was asked to come to Oakland, California, and advise in the construction of the First church there.

With all these many duties he took time in 1890-91 to begin the formation of the young people's organization, which later became the Baptist Young People's Union and to join with Mr. Coon in the editing and publishing of the first young people's paper under the name of the *Loyalist*.

In later years Dr. VanOsdel was active in the organization and promotion of the Baptist Bible Union and the Association of Regular Baptists. With lengthening years and declining strength his zeal increased for the defence of the "faith once for all delivered to the saints."

After relinquishing the work at Wealthy street he planned to leave for California and retire from active service, but the heart which had carried him on through the more than sixty years of service gradually weakened.

## Whole Bible Course Lesson Leaf

Vol. 10

No. 1

REV. ALEX. THOMSON, EDITOR

Lesson 6

First Quarter

February 10th, 1935

### AN APPEAL FOR DIVINE AID

Lesson Text: Psalms 12 to 18.

Golden Text: "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." Psalm 18:2.

Bible School Reading: Psalms 15 and 16.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS: Monday—Prov. 29:18-27; Tuesday—Jer. 10:1-8; Wednesday—Dan. 12:1-4; Thursday—Acts 2:22-28; Friday—Acts 13:26-37; Saturday—I. Cor. 15:1-11.

### INTRODUCTION

In the group of psalms assigned for this lesson there is some diversity of subject matter, yet similarity of background. In most of the psalms we are reminded of the sin and trouble of the times, and the effect of the same on the psalmist. And there is recorded the latter's cry to God for help, and the divine response. Encouragement is derived from the study, in the knowledge that God hears His own when they call, and grants them deliverance in their time of need. In Psalm twelve such an appeal for help is recorded, arising from the prevalence of wickedness, and the scarcity of good men. In Psalm thirteen complaint and prayer are made, due to seeming delay in the deliverance of the psalmist from his trouble. In Psalm fourteen there is a remarkably plain description of the wicked, then and now. In Psalm sixteen a personal testimony respecting God's goodness to the psalmist is given. In Psalm seventeen a prayer for deliverance from enemies is recorded; and in Psalm eighteen we have praise for victory over enemies. In teaching these, while a brief explanation may be made concerning each one, the chief lessons may be derived from the group as such.

### PSALM TWELVE

In this Psalm the content divides naturally into four sections. In the first of these, the cry of the psalmist is recorded, and the reason for it. Note here the concern of the psalmist because of conditions existing in his day. Also the serious nature of these conditions, and their application to present-day political, economic, and social, aspects of life. Our Lord wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41); and even Lot was grieved by the iniquity of the people among whom he dwelt (2 Pet. 2:7, 8); so therefore should we be affected by the sins of the present crooked generation (Acts 2:40). Note also, as in a previous lesson, the necessity for guarding the tongue (Jas. 1:26), knowing that for every word we shall be brought into judgment (Matt. 12:36, 37). In the second section, the judgment of the Lord is intimated (vs. 3, 4). In the third, the divine declaration is made respecting intervention on behalf of the oppressed and needy; and the nature of God's word is stated (vs. 5, 6). And in the last section the reply of the psalmist is given, expressive of faith in the power and care of God, and stating the result of the exaltation of vile men. Observe the confidence which may be placed in the Word of God, despite the wickedness of men around us.

### PSALM THIRTEEN

In the opening part of this Psalm, the psalmist makes complaint respecting the time he is made to wait for the deliverance of God. Evidently the time seemed long, and led him to wonder if God had forgotten him. Sometimes we are placed in a like situation, and we are apt to become impatient in our desire for immediate release. Under such circumstances let us remember God never forgets us (Heb. 13:5), and that "all things work together for good to those that love God". The petition for grace follows the complaint, and the prayer closes with the confident assurance of faith in the Lord's bounty. It is worthy of note that trust in the Lord brings a song to the lips, even in the most trying experiences of life.

### PSALM FOURTEEN

In this Psalm the general corruption, or total depravity, of the people is intimated. One manifestation of this is seen

in the denial of the existence of God (v. 1). This reminds us of the aggressive Atheism of the present day; but it also has an application to those who, while not verbally denying the divine existence, yet act as if there was no God. In both cases the attitude is that of fools. The Lord is described as looking down upon men to see if there were any that did understand and seek after Him (v. 2). We need to be reminded of the fact that God is paying attention to the deeds of earth. He sees that all have gone aside, and "that none doeth good". This is further emphasized in the New Testament (Rom. 3:10-12), and is corroborated in every-day experience. The question of the Lord, expressive of surprise, is then stated (v. 4). Why are men so foolish as to do evil, rather than good? Men feel the effect of the divine intervention; the power of God on behalf of His own is stated; and the devout desire of the psalmist for the carrying out of the divine will is expressed (vs. 5-7). Observe the heinous nature of sin, in its relationship to God, and its effect on man; also the necessity for being cleansed from its guilt and power.

### PSALM FIFTEEN

This psalm consists of question and answer: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" The Lord is particular as to the character of the guests whom He admits into His house. Note the privilege of being admitted, and the right of God to state the conditions of admittance. The psalm may also be said to describe the characteristics of a true worshipper of God. These are an upright walk, righteous work, and truthful speech (v. 2). Such a person will not slander his neighbour; he will condemn the vile person, while honouring those who fear God; and will be true to his pledged word (v. 4). And he will not take advantage of the poor in the matter of money. Note the simplicity and the far-reaching effect of these statements.

### PSALM SIXTEEN

This Psalm opens with a statement of personal trust in the Lord, and of fellowship with those of a kindred spirit (vs. 1-4). And this in the midst of idolatry. Note the blessedness of such fellowship. This is followed by a testimony respecting the blessing of God (vs. 5-8). The Lord was the portion of the psalmist, as He should be of all children of God. He is our goodly heritage, and with Him before us we shall not be moved. The last section states the joy and eternal consequences of placing God first in the life (vs. 9-11). Note the application of these verses to our Lord (Acts 2:25-28), and their teaching respecting resurrection and life everlasting (I. Cor. 15).

### PSALM SEVENTEEN

In this Psalm which records a prayer for deliverance from enemies, the psalmist, after calling upon God to hear his cry (vs. 1, 2), declares his innocence of transgression, and presents his petition for deliverance (vs. 3-15). Observe the psalmist's purpose (v. 3), desire (v. 5), salvation (v. 7), protection (vs. 8, 9; Deut. 22:10), and hope (v. 15; I. John 3:2). It is interesting further to note the psalmist's praise of God's word (v. 4), his confidence that the Lord would answer his prayer (v. 6), and his description of the enemies who opposed him (vs. 10-14).

### PSALM EIGHTEEN

In this psalm which records praise to God for victory over enemies, there is first a declaration of the psalmist's love for the Lord, and of his safety in the keeping of God (vs. 1-3). This is followed by an account of the divine deliverance on his behalf (vs. 4-24), and a general statement of the attitude of God towards men (vs. 25-31); then a second account of the psalmist's deliverance (vs. 32-50). Many things are worthy of note in the psalm. Among these, observe the psalmist's declaration of love (v. 1). This should be the attitude of all saints toward the One Who created and redeemed us (I. John 4:19). Note also the designations of the Lord: Rock, fortress, deliverer, strength, buckler, horn, and high tower (v. 2), and the significance of each; also the psalmist's desperate condition (vs. 4, 5). The fact of answered prayer, the manner of the divine intervention (vs. 6-24), the perfection of the way of God, and the psalmist's gratitude to God for helping him in his time of need. Personal testimony to the work of God is not only a duty, but a privilege.

## Whole Bible Course Lesson Leaf

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### MAGNIFYING GOD'S GLORY

Lesson Text: Psalms 19-21.

Golden Text: "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."—Psalm 19:8.

Bible School Reading: Psalm 19:1-14.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS: Monday—I Sam. 17:41-47; Tuesday—2 Sam. 7:18-29; Wednesday—Prov. 6:20-26; Thursday—Is. 40:21-31; Friday—Rom. 10:8-17; Saturday—2 Tim. 2:15-21.

### PSALM NINETEEN

The theme of this psalm is the glory of God as revealed in the heavens (vs. 1-6), and the law (vs. 7-11); to which the psalmist adds a petition for cleansing from sin, and acceptance before God (vs. 12-14). The subject is introduced with the statement that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handywork". This testimony is given with inaudible voice, yet it is universal in extent. Note the beauty, strength, and wonder, of the heavens; also the figures of speech used to describe the sun, as "bridegroom", and "strong man", intimating brightness, joy and power. The greatness of God is marvellously manifest in nature; likewise His sublime wisdom and beneficent purpose. One may profitably meditate on the creative works of God from the devotional standpoint. They may also be studied from the evidential viewpoint, in the light of present-day Atheism, in proof of the existence and design of God. The heavens truly bear witness to Him, a face which only fools deny (Ps. 53:1).

The revelation of God in nature, while wonderful, is yet incomplete; and we must come to the Word of God, spoken and revealed in Christ, for a full revelation of Him. In this psalm several things are mentioned concerning this word, denoting the psalmist's familiarity with, and love for, it. It is blessed indeed when, from personal experience, we can state the qualities of the revealed will of God. Observe the arrangement of synonym, attribute, and effect, in describing these qualities, as "law", "perfect", "converting the soul". The synonyms are interesting, describing as they do such aspects of the Word of God as: teaching, or doctrine; witnessing; precepts; commandments; fear of the Lord—in this, putting the effect for the cause—and judgments, or divine decisions (vs. 7-9). Note the various phases of teaching found in the Bible, affecting history, doctrine, prophecy, and personal devotion.

The attributes speak of the previous nature of the law. Its teaching is "perfect", or without flaw. It is "sure", or reliable. It is "right", "pure", "clean", and "true". Of no other teaching can these things be said without qualification. The Bible is truly God's book: its content gives evidence of His authorship and the superiority of its teaching over that of all other books, or systems, is without question. In addition, it exerts a beneficent effect over the life submitted to its instruction. It converts, or restores, the soul; gives wisdom to the simple; rejoices the heart; and enlightens the eyes. And, being divine in origin, it endures for ever (I Peter 1:25). Such teaching, to the willing heart, is more precious than gold, and sweeter than honey; and contains both warning and reward (vs. 10, 11).

Contemplation of the revelation of God leads to a realization of one's own condition, as in the case of Isaiah (Is. 61:8); and this constrains one to confess the same to God. The psalmist was led in this manner. He was conscious of his errors, and prays to be cleansed from his secret faults, and kept from presumptuous sins. Then he would be upright, and "innocent from the great transgression". Note the

gradation of evil, in secret faults, those hidden from the man himself; presumptuous sins, those deliberately committed; and the great transgression, intimating possibly apostasy, or turning away from God. If care is exercised respecting daily cleansing from the lesser sins (I John 1:6-10), we shall be guarded against committing the greater sins, as open flaunting of the law of God is not reached until the downward path has been trod step by step for some time. Observe the necessity for a keen sense of sin, and a humble spirit ready to confess the same. Note also the closing petition of the psalmist (v. 14).

### PSALM TWENTY

This is another psalm with trouble as a background, but with victory over it assured. The experience depicted therein evidently points to some time in the history of David the warrior-king; when he was face to face with enemies. The psalm partakes somewhat of the nature of a song of victory, and opens with a petition wherein the psalmist expresses the prayers of his people on his behalf (vs. 1-5). The various parts of the same are worthy of consideration, and are of permanent value for all those desirous of obtaining divine help. The people prayed that God would hear him in the day of trouble. The Lord has invited His own to call upon Him at such a time (50:15, Heb. 4:16), and no one who does so goes away unheard, or unblest. The next request relates to defence, or setting on high from danger; implying deliverance from enemies. This is followed by other expressed desires relating to the sending of help from the sanctuary; the remembrance of offerings; the granting of the heart's desires; and the fulfilling of the king's petitions. The significance of these petitions may quite profitably be emphasized, pointing out particularly the source of all help in God; the basis for all blessing in the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3); the conditions necessary to the granting of the heart's desires (Ps. 37:4-6); the joy of salvation (Is. 12:1-4, John 15:11); and the setting up of banners in the name of the Lord.

The second part of the psalm expresses confidence in God, and strikes the triumphant note. There is certain knowledge that the Lord saveth His anointed, and "will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand". We may also have certain knowledge respecting salvation. Our Lord's teaching implied this (John 3:16; 5:24; 10:27-30). Paul bore witness to it (2 Tim. 1:12); and John wrote his first epistle concerning it (I John 5:13). Note the practical nature of the divine hearing of prayer. If we obey God we should expect, and look for, the answer to prayer. Moses did this (Ex. 14:13); Elijah did likewise (I Kings 18:41-46); and we are enjoined to manifest the same spirit (Mark 11:24). Observe further the anticipated triumph over enemies because of trust in the Lord. Israel gained her victories in this way (I Chron. 29:11); David overcame Goliath in a like manner (I Samuel 17:45); and God is still the source of victory to His own (Rom. 8:31).

### PSALM TWENTY-ONE

This is a psalm of thanksgiving for victory given (vs. 1-7), and anticipated (vs. 8-13). There is joy in the strength and salvation of the Lord. God receives the glory for the victory. He doesn't always receive this from His own people, although it is His due; and He desires it. Testimony is then given respecting answered prayer (v. 2). God had granted the request of the king. Prayer is a wonderful privilege, and is granted to all God's children. Note conditions for answered prayer (I John 3:22; Matt. 21:22). This is followed by a reference to the divine blessings vouchsafed the king, reminding us of the believer's blessings (Eph. 1:3). The coronation blessing is mentioned (v. 3); then long life (v. 4); honour and majesty (v. 5); gladness (v. 6); stability (v. 7). David was the Lord's anointed, a member of the Messianic line; and as such was highly favoured and blessed. He was also a means of blessing to others, not only in himself, but through his great Descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 22:41-46). In the second part of the psalm the king is informed confidently of future victory over his enemies. His hand would find them out, and he would be the agent of God in judging them (v. 9). He would destroy their seed from the earth, and they would flee from him in battle. For such a great victory God receives the glory (v. 13). Note the history of David for the fulfilment of the prophetic statement.