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Editor: T. T. SHIELDS
Editor S.S. Lesson: WILLIAM J. JONES

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

Address Correspondence: THE GOSPEL WITNESS, 130 Gerrard Street East, Toronto 2, Canada.
Registered Cable Address: Jarwitsem, Canada.

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

GRACE ABOUNDING TO THE CHIEF OF SINNERS

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

Preached in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, October 18th, 1936

(Stenographically Reported)

"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

"But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?

"And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

"And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

"And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."—Luke 23:39-43.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." It is declared that that was the purpose of His coming, that He came to minister to the individual, to save men who needed saving—even the very worst of them, even such as might be described as "the chief of sinners".

In the chapter that was read to you this evening there occurs this great verse, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The abounding grace of God is equal to abounding sin. There is no sinner so great, so far gone in iniquity, that Jesus Christ cannot save him. I fear we do not hear very much about such a salvation in our day. It seems to be assumed that we are all the victims of misfortune, that we are all doing the best we can; and that as a matter of fact men have a just grievance against the established order of things. One might suppose, to hear the voice of religious leaders today, that we are troubled mainly by imperfect governments, and subject to inadequate and unjust social systems; that if only we had a chance we are rather good fellows.

The question I ask this evening, however, is, Has the gospel of Jesus Christ any message of cheer and hope for the man whose life is behind him, for the man who reaches the eveningtime, and really has no opportunity, even if he had the disposition and ability, to rebuild, reshape, the character which sin has destroyed? What is the function of the Christian religion? It is to save sinners. For that Jesus Christ came. In the text I have read to you, we see Him at work, the Saviour

engaged in saving a lost soul, saving someone who is at the brink of the precipice, saving someone, not at the eleventh hour, but in life's last hour; when but a few moments remain, snatching him by sovereign grace as a brand plucked out of the fire.

I.

Let us look first simply at THE RECORD OF THE SINNER in the case. What sort of man was he? The Bible says we are all sinners. That, of course, is true. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." But there are degrees of guilt. While all are guilty, some are guilty of greater offences than others. The Bible says that we are, by nature, "dead in trespasses and in sins". But even where death holds sway, there are degrees in the exercise of His sovereignty.

The ruler's daughter, lying dead but apparently asleep, in her father's house, was really dead, and beyond all possibility of human recovery. But she was still in her father's house. The son of the widow of Nain was dead, and friends were carrying him out to bury him. He had been longer dead than the little maid. Lazarus was dead, and was buried. He had been dead four days, and decomposition had done its dreadful work, making the once-loved form repulsive even to those who had loved him. But Lazarus was no more dead than the daughter of Jairus. His death was of longer duration, and was more apparent and more repulsive.

All men are dead in trespasses and sins, but the sins of some do not appear without, as they do in others.

They are of a different order, but the same in nature and in their ultimate effect. The man of the text was not only a sinner in his heart: he had lived an openly, flagrantly, sinful life. He was before all his fellows a malefactor. He had not only sinned against himself, and against a few individuals, but he had sinned against society in general by the violation of its laws. Can we preach a gospel of hope to the moral Lazarus, as well as to the little girl of twelve years of age? Is there any hope for the malefactor whose sins are open, and that cry out for punishment?

This man is described as a thief. He had been dishonest. He had appropriated other people's property. He had made himself a menace to the welfare of his fellows, so that the law had laid its hand upon him. There are a great many people who have so sinned, whom human law has not yet discovered! There are many men who pass for honest men who are at heart thieves. There are men in business to-day who are horribly dishonest. If you doubt it, read the newspapers. Sometimes I say to myself, I have a little more respect for the daring bandit who proposes to take the consequences of his misdeeds should he get caught, than I have for those who employ clever lawyers to manipulate their contracts, and even frame legislation, so they may steal from their fellows at a wholesale rate—and yet pass as respectable members of society.

Before God, it is not what a man appears to be outwardly: it is what he is at heart, that will determine his destiny. It is the intention quite as much as the act which determines the judgment of God. If it be true that, "Good but wished, with God is done", as Whittier somewhere says, so also evil contemplated and purposed is just as black in the sight of God as that which is actually committed. Who, I wonder, can avoid a plea of "guilty" by such standards?

This man had come under the condemnation of the law, and justly so. That is true of all of us. We have come under the curse, not of man's law, which also may be the case in some instances, but under the curse of the law of God. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This man's sin had been adjudged worthy of death, and he was brought to the cross, to the most painful of all deaths; and even he himself at last admitted the justice of his sentence.

Is there any hope for a world that "lieth in the wicked one"? Is there any hope for men whose natures are sinful, and whose outward misdemeanors, irregularities—call them what you will—the external symptoms of an inward malady that is part of the man's nature, are many and great? Sin is not only an outward thing. There are outward indications of it, but in its nature it is a thing of the blood. Medical science does not know, has never been able to discover, the cause of cancer. It seems to have some relation to the blood, but the difficulty is that so often it begins its deadly work within, and too frequently is beyond remedy before its presence is suspected. Then we hear of an operation, and those who are on the inner circle are told that it was an exploratory operation, designed for a more perfect diagnosis. If the surgeon discovers that the tentacles of the malignant thing have wrapped themselves around every vital organ of the body, the incision is sewn up, and he tells the relatives that he will not operate. It is too late, utterly beyond human skill to take the malignant thing away that the patient might live.

The experts say that a man or a woman is just a little "light fingered". The man or woman is not a thief, but a kleptomaniac, has formed the habit of taking what does not belong to him or her. What will you do for him? Or for the man who has a bad temper, who has formed the habit of untruthfulness, who is addicted to drink, or to some other form of sin? Will you put him to school? put him under restraint? try to correct this or that defect? The Divine Physician, Who never makes a mistake in diagnosis, Who does not need an X-ray, to Whose eyes all things are "naked and open", from "whom no secrets are hid", says that sin is a moral cancer; that it has gripped the heart, the conscience, the memory, the judgment, the will—every faculty and function of the mind; that the cancer within the man has hell at its heart. It is too late for human help. Your educationalists and philanthropists, your economists—theorists of every order—may experiment—but it is too late for anybody and everybody but One. The man of the text had come legitimately, inevitably, by the operation of the law of the nature of things, to the place of a skull, to the end of a life of sin. He was about to receive his wages: "The wages of sin is death."

II.

Look for a moment at THIS MAN'S REPENTANCE. It was a *very late repentance*. Hear me carefully, will you. Matthew says that "the thieves"—in the plural—"which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." When the mockers looked at the cross and said, "If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him", Matthew says that both thieves joined with the multitude before and about the cross, in casting "the same in his teeth". Mark says, "And they that were crucified with him reviled him." After the man had been fastened to the cross, and he knew that he was in his last hour, even facing death itself, he mocked at the Son of God; and joined with others in reviling the Saviour of men.

That was rather late! Yet somehow even he was led to repentance, for afterward when one of the thieves said, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us", the penitent thief rebuked him—he had had a change of heart. While the sun was about to dip below the horizon, and the sinner was almost gone, he got a glimpse of Jesus Christ, he saw Him as He really was. In a moment the scales fell from his eyes, and his whole outward—and inward—attitude was changed.

Where did it begin? Perhaps there is some man here this evening who has long been a sinner, who was persuaded to come to church to-night. It may be he said, "Well, I do not believe in it; you know I have no interest in religion; you know that I do not believe the Bible, nor in this Christ you talk about. But if you want to go to church, I will go with you." Is it possible for a man to have come in that door mocking at the Son of God, without the slightest thought of salvation, or desire for it, and to go out a child of God, and an heir of glory? Yes, it is blessedly possible. Such a Saviour have we, such a glorious gospel are we commissioned to proclaim, that such an one can be instantly saved.

Where did it begin? *The first word this thief said in his new state was to refer to the fear of God.* He said to his companion, dying as he was dying, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" It was about time they were beginning to fear God. When a man feels that he is abounding in health, and

still has many days to live, he may persuade himself that he can get along without God; but surely when one comes to the very edge of the grave—"But I am not at the edge of the grave." How do you know? You may not reach home—surely when one gets to the very edge of the world, he cannot, if he is a wise man, exclude all thought of God. What is there beyond? Something! Who is there beyond? God! *God, I tell you!*

It is said of the wicked, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Last Sunday evening I spoke of the strange reports submitted to the United Church assembly at Ottawa; it was a sharp criticism. Somebody sent me an anonymous communication through the mail, announcing that the Federation for Community Service were going to hold a Sunday concert to-day. The ex-Chief Justice of Ontario was to be there, the Mayor of Toronto, the Moderator of the United Church, and the President of Toronto University. God's day! To have some kind of concert in the name of charity! I do not know when I have been more thankful than when, in the papers of yesterday, the newly appointed Moderator of the United Church announced that he had misunderstood, that he supposed it was to be a public meeting, but that he would have nothing to do with the introduction of Sunday concerts, and said, "I shall not be there." All hail to him. We need men like that, who will dare to say, No, to this secularizing godlessness of to-day. I do not know whether the concert was held or not, but in the face of that noble testimony I should suppose the former Chief Justice and the Mayor of Toronto and the President of Toronto University would feel a little uncomfortable. Had I been one of them, even though late, I should have said, "Please excuse me too." Let us give honour where honour is due.

Why do I speak of that? Because whether it be God's day, or God's house, or God's Book, or anything related to God, people are trying to crowd God out of their lives, even secularizing their charities. This man who laughed at the fear of God, said to his companion, "Wake up, man! It is only a few minutes until you must meet God. Do you not fear God?" That is repentance, when a man comes to recognize that there is a supreme Authority in this universe, that there is Someone to Whom we are responsible.

"Seeing thou art in the same condemnation." Jesus of Nazareth was dying at his side, and he dying with Him. "The condemnation that is upon Him is upon me", the thief acknowledged, and to the other he said, "And upon you too. But we are different from Him. We suffer justly, we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss." He made no excuse at all. When you Christian workers meet with a man who tries to justify himself, leave him to God. He is not ready yet. No man is really penitent so long as he tries to excuse himself.

How do you plead before Heaven, and before men? Guilty! Nothing to say! Justly condemned! No excuse!

What produced this repentance? It was not the nails through his hands or feet. It was not the excruciating agony of crucifixion that did it. Men are not brought to repentance by pain and suffering. I have seen men suffer as one could scarcely believe human nature could suffer—and curse God in the midst of their pain. Suffering seldom leads to true repentance. He had been led to distinguish between the Man on the central cross, and the other two crosses. *He had got a new view of Jesus*

Christ. He knew that He "had done nothing amiss". I will challenge anybody to disprove that statement. I will challenge the sharpest and keenest critic to take the record of the life of Jesus Christ, and to discover in it one solitary flaw. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens". Pilate had said it—"I find in him no fault at all." Pilate's wife had said it—"Have thou nothing to do with that just man." One of the thieves now says it, "He hath done nothing amiss." Yet He died! One cannot possibly logically believe in the moral government of the universe and account for the death of Christ on any other principle than its vicariousness. He did not deserve to die—but He died. The thief knew He did not deserve to die, yet knew He was dying.

I wonder was it given to the thief in any measure to understand why Jesus was dying? I know this: *He called Him by His proper name.* I am sure that a light that never was on sea or land was flashed into his consciousness by the Spirit of God, and he learned who this Man on the central cross was; for "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost". It is one thing to wear a robe in church, to go through a form of religious service, and officially to call Jesus, Lord, without any understanding of its significance; but to be nailed to a cross by the side of the suffering Son of God, the blood dripping from all their wounds, and in the presence of the jeering multitude to take sides with the Crucified against the world and say, "My Lord", is an evidence that he had really seen the Christ.

Nothing will break a man's heart like seeing Jesus. Nothing will change a man like knowing who Jesus is. Who is He to you? Is it true that He came down from heaven, that He left the Father and came into the world? Is it true that of His own sovereign will He took on Him, "not the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham"? Is it true that He Who knew no beginning of days or end of life, Who from everlasting to everlasting is God—that, in a parenthesis in His eternal existence, He stooped to earth and wrapped Himself with our human flesh, and looked upon this sinful world through baby eyes and grew up among men, being subject to the law, working out a righteousness perfect in the Father's sight, having infinite value because His humanity was joined with Deity? And is it true that when they took Him to the cross, they nailed Incarnate Deity upon the tree? Is that Who and what Jesus is to you?

If that be so, you cannot go on without Him. He is not merely a man. "Lord", said the thief, "remember me." That is all he asked: "Remember me." It is a sad thing to be forgotten of our friends; it is very disappointing when you expect a cordial welcome from someone and he looks vacantly at you and says, "Please introduce yourself."

I remember crossing the sea some years ago when, among the passengers, was a perfect giant of a man, about six feet six, straight as a ramrod and proportionately built. I walked the-deck with him—he walked like a young man. He said to me, "I am going back to Scotland. I have not been there for sixty years." I looked at him and said, "I should not have supposed you were any older than that, sir." "Eighty-five", he said proudly, "I have been in this country sixty years, and have never been back to renew acquaintances. I am not expecting much, but want to see the place of my birth before I die." I was half-minded to tell him that it would be

wise to take the first ship back, and never see the old haunts. Nobody would know him, and he would have to introduce himself—only to discover that he was talking with the grandchildren of his former friends.

I have sometimes been rather disappointed myself. I spent a holiday when I was a lad at a country place in England, in a beautiful thatched cottage where my father had once been entertained. The woman had no boys, and had said to my father, "I wish I could have two boys to mother for a month. Could you not send me two of yours?" My father sent my brother and myself out to the place. It stands out in my memory as a wonderful experience.

Years later when I was in England I got a car and drove out to that home. I found the cottage, and knocked at the door. A woman, an old woman, opened the door slightly, and said "What do you want? I cannot see you now for the doctor is here"—and shut the door. I had seen a car in the drive and turned away, saying to myself; It is the same woman—but she has grown old; and does not want to mother me now. She has forgotten me. I got in my car and drove away, thinking that was a closed chapter. But one day, when I was visiting in California, six thousand miles or more away from that cottage, I received a letter forwarded to me from my office here. I opened it, and found a letter written in a trembling hand, saying, "I have read your sermons in *The Christian Herald*, and feel sure you are one of the little boys that I entertained for a month years ago." Then she told me how I used to ride her donkey, and all sorts of things, concluding, "I would give anything in the world to see you." I replied, and told her I had gone to see her, and related the circumstances. She replied saying she remembered the day distinctly, that she was in great suffering, for her husband had just died. The doctor was there. She said, "I remember the stranger, but never dreamed it was you. Since your letter I have recalled my impression, and I now remember there was a resemblance. If you are ever in England again, be sure to come and see me." The next time I was in England I went again—but she had gone to her heavenly home.

Some day there will be hosts of people, church members, religious people, who will want to be remembered: "Remember me"—only to hear Him say, "Depart from me, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." This man anticipated that day, and said, "Lord, remember me; just remember me; remember what I said to-day. Remember that I sought Thy mercy. Do not blot me out of the book of Thy remembrance. Write my name down. Remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."

There was nothing to be gained by repentance so far as this life was concerned. There was no escape from the cross. The thief was willing to be saved on the cross. The other man wanted salvation without the cross. He said, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." The people said, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." But the penitent thief said, "I will believe in Thee on the cross. I will not even ask to escape the cross. I have some understanding of the significance of the cross. Only remember me. I do not know anything of the programme of the future, I do not know what to pray for: all I ask is that this poor lost sinner may be remembered." That is enough!

"When thou comest into thy kingdom." He knew who Jesus Christ was. He knew that His kingdom was

coming. He knew that the crown of thorns would not always rest upon His brow. He knew that the reed that was put into His hand in mockery was not the only sceptre He would wield: "Thou art coming into Thy kingdom—remember me."

Do you believe that? There will be a day when all agnosticism will be at an end. There will be a day when there will be no Modernism. Everybody will be a Fundamentalist—but many Fundamentalists will be unsaved Fundamentalists, because they will acknowledge the truth of the fundamentals of the gospel too late—for even the devils believe in God. What a day that will be when Christ come into His kingdom! Oh, when He comes into His kingdom! When the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father, and all His holy angels with Him, that will be the day of days.

I heard of a man who was introduced to Her Majesty, Queen Mary, years ago. She asked him some questions, and he answered. He told her one story which made her laugh quite heartily. Years passed, and he was again presented at court. He was not a titled man, but a plain "Mr." As he was introduced to Her Majesty, she said, "Oh, Mr. So-and-So, I remember you very well. I remember that story you told me. I have often turned it over in my mind." I think that man felt a little taller! Remembered by the Queen after the passage of years!

But what will it be when Jesus comes, and before an assembled universe remembers us, and acknowledges us? You say you do not know how to pray? I will tell you: just say, "Remember me." You do not know what to ask for? Just say, "Remember me." His remembrance is salvation! He will remember us, but blessed be His holy name for ever, our sins and our iniquities will He "remember no more for ever".

III.

Shall I detain you to tell of THE LORD'S REPLY? That is the best of all. The thief said, "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Or, in effect, "I do not ask for any present blessing. But sometime, in the dim and distant future, I should like to have a place in Thy remembrance." How our gracious Lord surprises us! He never speaks like anybody else. "When thou comest into thy kingdom"—but He said: "To-day"! We have not to wait until to-morrow: it is done to-day. I beg you believe that you may be saved to-day! *To-day!* Here and now. The dying thief could do nothing. He could not move. But that sovereign pronouncement, "To-day", blotted out the past, and insured his eternal salvation. You can have it "to-day", where you are sitting. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." Not, "Shall have"; not, "May have"; not, "Ought to have"; but "he that believeth on the Son HATH everlasting life."

Do you believe on Him? As I have spoken, has some man been saying, "I do not know what has happened, but I have seen Jesus as the preacher has been preaching. I believe on Him"? Do you? Then you have everlasting life. *TO-DAY!*

So far as the thief was concerned, *it had to be to-day or never; now or never.* Whatever was done for him, had to be done at once. To-morrow would be too late. It may be too late for you. It may be "now or never" for you. Someone told me of hearing Mr. Spurgeon preach once on this subject. On the face of the gallery in the Tabernacle they have a clock. No one can

see it but the preacher—perhaps it is for his benefit. But Spurgeon was pleading with sinners to receive Christ. He paused, and there was a profound silence for about a minute; and in the silence the tick of the clock could be heard: tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick. "Do you hear it", said Spurgeon, "ticking your life away: 'Now or never; now or never; now or never.'" It may be so with you. Hear His word, to-day.

What was the salvation the thief received? *To be with Christ*: "To-day shalt thou be with me." That is enough. I do not know how you felt when the choir sang just now: I was greatly moved. I thought of the Shepherd going over the thorns and thistles, and finding the sheep, as it says in the Scripture: "He laid it on his shoulder." "To-day shalt thou be with me."

If you are saved, you ought to be in the church. If you are saved, you ought to be doing a great many things in the name of the Lord. But the only thing that will insure your salvation is to be "with Christ". "To-day shalt thou be with me." Sometimes we sing,

"Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens: Lord, with me abide:
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me."

That is salvation, to be with Christ, nothing between.

"In paradise." That word is used only three times in Scripture. First in this instance; Paul used it also in the second epistle to the Corinthians: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in body, I cannot tell; or, whether out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth); such an one caught up to the third heaven. I knew such a man, how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Paul in effect says, "I have been to paradise myself. No human tongue can describe the glory of it." Then in Revelation, the second chapter, it is promised, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." A beautiful place, a beautiful state, an ideal condition, in itself; but to be "with Christ", and in paradise, at the same time, that is indescribably glorious. That is what Paul said when he talked about going away: "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." "Do not ask me any more than that", said he, "I cannot tell you. It is indescribably, utterly glorious. I have seen it myself by special revelation. I was caught up into paradise; but I can tell you only that it is far better."

Jesus Christ said to this man, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." He guaranteed to this penitent the utmost of grace immediately.

It is another subject upon which I shall not enter, but I name it for your thought. Those who depart to be "with Christ" are not in a state of unconsciousness. Paul was not unconscious when he was caught up into paradise, he was not asleep. He said, "It is so wonderful I could not tell you; but I saw it; I heard it—and entered momentarily into the enjoyment of it; then came back again."

But to be with Christ in paradise to-day—what a promise! Saved, not at the eleventh hour, but at the last hour—almost the last minute, snatched from hell, and taken to paradise—"to-day". That is grace abounding to the chief of sinners, is it not? That is salvation!

IV.

ONE OR TWO REFLECTIONS and I have done. The dying thief *had no opportunity to do good works*. If this man's salvation had depended upon works of righteousness done by himself, he never could have been saved, because he was beyond all possibility of doing any. Yet he was saved. Though you may not be nailed to a cross, you are beyond all possibility of doing anything that can be acceptable to a holy God. Salvation is not of works. It is all of grace. The terms are the same for everybody: "Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." As I thought of the service this afternoon, I could not help marvelling at this man's faith. I said to myself, What did he know about Jesus? He saw Him die, and called Him Lord. But the story that lies beyond that, of His resurrection from the dead, and His ascension to the right hand of God, and the descent of the Holy Ghost, and the long centuries of miraculous testimony succeeding all that, which is an open page to you and me, this man knew nothing about. And yet but a glimpse of the dying Saviour was enough for him to believe in Him. I thought I heard Someone say, "The penitent thief shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and shall condemn them, for he repented in face of a dying Saviour, knowing nothing about the resurrection, or the power of His resurrection; but, behold, a living Saviour is here."

And then observe, this man had nothing but the "verily I say unto you" of the dying Saviour for his assurance as he passed beyond the bounds of time and sense. Only the word of God! Is not that enough? What more could anyone ask? What more could even God supply? And you may have that—indeed you have that: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

My friends, ought not we to believe? Will you believe? Will you let everything go, cast yourself upon Christ, and say it over again,

"The dying thief rejoiced to see
The Fountain in his day,
And there will I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away?"

Let us pray:

We are in Thy presence, O Lord, the living Christ. Thou hast come with hands full of blessing; Thou hast come into this assembly to-night that someone who never knew Thee may know Thee; someone who, until this hour, has been unsaved, may this very hour pass from death unto life. O Spirit of the living God, do for such an one what Thou didst do for the penitent thief. Break our hearts. Help us all to cry to Thee, God be merciful to me, a sinner. For His name's sake, Amen.

WHO WILL PAY THE FARE?

We read in the Scripture of a certain preacher who paid his fare. After he had received his commission to go to a certain great city, and "cry against it" because its wickedness had come up before the Lord, he rose up to flee from the presence of the Lord. He went down to the dock, "and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord."

Our observation is that whenever a man wants to run away from duty, "from the presence of the Lord", shirk his responsibility to preach the gospel, the devil is always ready to find a ship, and pay his fare. But when a man

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Whole Bible Course Lesson Leaf

REV. WILLIAM J. JONES, EDITOR

Vol. 11. 4th Quarter Lesson 44 November 1st, 1936

PREDICTION OF ISRAEL'S RETURN

Lesson Text: Jeremiah, Chapter 30, 31.

Golden Text: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."—Jeremiah 31:3.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS: Monday—Is. 40:1-11; Tuesday—Is. 52:1-10; Wednesday—Is. 58:1-12; Thursday—Is. 60:15-22; Friday—Is. 65:15-24; Saturday—Lk. 22:14-23; Heb. 8:1-13.

EXPOSITION

In Chapter 30 to 33 bright, joyous hope breaks the biographical narrative (Ch. 26-44) fulfilling the hint of light given in 29:32 "the good". To-day's chapters were probably composed after the final destruction of Jerusalem, but not after the exile.

Promise of Restoration (1-4). A short written (not oral) prophecy like 51:60 is this, wisely held over perhaps until the exiles repent. The Covenant God (cf. 23:2) pledge their return, the restoration of their fortunes (29:14), and of their land.

Israel Restored through Suffering (5-11). Jehovah quoted the people (5) who see fear. He sees all men suffering keenly (Is. 13:8) in a time of great trouble (6), in "that day" (7). The expression gives the key to understanding the phrase "time on Jacob's trouble" (considered by dispensationalists as the time of the "Great Tribulation" [Matt. 24:21] in the "end time"). Here it is equated with "that day", an expression which in the Old Testament uniformly implies dark and foreboding aspects of the "Day of the Lord" (a synonymous phrase for "that day"). [See Zeph. 1:14 f.; Am. 5:18; Joel 1:15]. However, "that day" sometimes portrays a brighter picture of future things (e.g. Is. 4:2; 11:10). The idea of punishment and blessing with respect to Israel is carried over into the New Testament with respect to the whole world, unbeliever and believer respectively (II. Thess. 1:10; Rom. 2:5, f.; I. Thess. 5:4; II. Tim. 4:8). Jacob (Israel) is to be saved from the trouble, his yoke broken (8), no more to be used as a bondman of others (note 25:14). Israel will serve God and the Messiah (9) son of David (Hos. 3:5). Indeed she will be saved from "afar", from distant exile; and will be at rest (10). And although her enemies were to be utterly and finally punished, not so she, for she will be chastised (10:24).

The Nature of the Suffering (12-17). Israel's sin is incurable (12), literally she is ill at heart (15:18). No medicines or plaster can be found for her wound; no one to plead her cause (13), said the Prophet. Even her lovers (false gods, or nations [4:30]) had forsaken her (14). For her own sins she was to blame, still it was God who punished her (15). And yet He would avenge the devourers (cf. note 2:3) her enemies, who were simply His instrument (cf. note Is. 51:22) with fratricidal destruction. His ultimate design was her correction and healing with new flesh (8:22) would be, hers (17). The occasion of His concern was the jibe "outcast" hurled at Zion by her adversaries who sneered that no one cared for her.

The Nature of the Restoration (18-22). The restoration (cf. 3) was to include Jerusalem's Tel (hill), and palace which would be inhabited after its own manner or ordinance (18). Vs. 19 describes the joy and felicity at that time when Israel would not be small or contemptible. Then the recollection of regal splendor in Davidic times would accompany the congregation (religiously considered) under His care (20). But their ruler would be a Prince of their own number whose relationship with God was most intimate (21). The language is mediatorial, priestly, strongly suggestive of the Messiah Prince (cf. note Is. 61:1). None other could have such boldness as alone procured the right and secured the boldness of believers to approach God (Heb. 10:19). So, after due chastisement and repentance, Israel was to become in truth the people of God (22).

Vengeance on the Wicked (23, 24). Like a rushing storm will be the bursting wrath of God until it perform His will (24). Israel will understand it in the "latter days" (an expression appearing in 23:20; 48:47; 49:39). It has several equivalents. In Old Testament times the phrase referred exclusively to the future. In the Old Testament proper it was

entirely "eschatological", not applying to history; whereas in later Jewish writings it applied to the times this side of eternity, and referred them to a temporal, naturalistic, less spiritual epoch than such "times" in heaven. Then the Messiah was to appear, not in the world to come, hence the contrast with New Testament teaching. It referred such "times" to the period of history between the Ascension and the Return to Christ; to the last section of world history; and even the age *immediately* preceding His Advent (I. Pet. 1:5). Thus to the Christian, the Messiah is both present and future in His work.

In Chapter 31 we see the Restoration of the Northern Kingdom (1-22). Its Goal—Samaria (1-9). Vs. 1 is like 30:22, and really belongs to that chapter. All Israel is to be restored (cf. Ch. 3). The survivors of exile were to find favor of the Lord in rest (2), for His everlasting love from Babylon "afar" was great (3). He was to build (prosper) Israel so that former social joys (4) and rural prosperity (5) were to be restored. The call to the return to Zion showing that the kingdom schism had ended (6).

Its Means—Pilgrimage (7-9). Vs. 7 is a song for Israel, head of the nations, and her prayer. Jehovah replied (8) in beautiful promises similar to several of Isaiah (e.g., 35:5, f.; 40:11; 42:16). All classes were included in the great weeping throng led by God past rivers of water (Is. 41:18; 43:19 f.; 48:21; 49:10).

Its Announcement (10-14). The gathering is announced to the nations and isles (cf. note Is. 49:1) by Jehovah the Shepherd (Ezek. 34:1-16). His redemption (11) is climaxed in worship at Zion which would lead (12) to material prosperity. No room for pining when all ages (13) rejoice, when sorrow would be turned into joy (Jn. 16:20), and priests satisfied with their due portions (Lev. 7:31-34).

Its Causes (15-22). First: Rachel's allegorical weeping for Israel (15). She is comforted by Jehovah with hopes of her children's restoration (16, 17) as a reward for her sufferings in bearing them. Second: Ephraim's repentance. He had been like a foolish, stubborn calf (18) in his youth (19). Third: God's yearning (4:19), fatherly love to him which urged the pilgrimage (21) by means of advance guides. Israel must not delay, for God gave a sign: the nation will no longer hesitate about affection for her Maker, she will encompass Him, not He her.

Restoration of Southern Kingdom (23-26). The promise pertained to Jerusalem and Judah (23) both city and rural toilers (24), since the whole vision of the Prophet was glorious (25, 26).

Restoration and Reunion of Both Kingdoms (27-40)—In Great Blessings (27-30). All offspring will multiply quickly, as from the ground (Ezek. 36:9, ff.); Jehovah will rouse Himself to watch over Israel for good (build—plant, cf. note 1:10) in those days (28). The people had rebelled against punishment for sins in previous reigns (e.g. Manasseh). But no longer will they adhere only to the principle (still true) that sin is hereditary, but they will know the equally valid, yet old and neglected truth (Deut. 24:16) of individual responsibility (amplified in Ezek. 18:2).

By Heart Regeneration (31-34)—see application. By His Omnipotence (35-40). The phenomena of nature arrayed to show the stability of His Covenant (35-37); and the restoration of Jerusalem (38-40) likewise arrayed.

APPLICATION

How precise, permanent, perennial, publishable is the written Word of God (30:2)! It ought to be scattered as seed (31:10), so that sorrow, confession, repentance will turn men to God (31:17-19), so that no one will say he is not reached (Ps. 142:4) as was Zion (30:17). God must save—"turn thou me" (31:18)! What "grace in the wilderness" He then gives the believer (31:2) using trials to lead him higher spiritually, even in midst of wilderness, as He did Joseph and Moses.

The New Covenant (31:31-34) is made by God Himself, carrying on the thread of the older, broken Covenant (Is. 50:1; 54:4). Two characteristics stand out: It is inward, motivated by the heart ("whole man")—a new principle. It insures complete forgiveness of sin (34), and is thus final, eternal. It leads to fellowship, oneness with God, making us His people truly (33). Regeneration is implied, the new birth resulting from atonement (Lk. 22:20; Heb. 8:13; 9:15; I. Cor. 11:25). The teaching was old (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 2:47; 4:4; 9:26; Joel 2:13) the driving force new (Rom. 2:29). The New Covenant provides simple, immediate approach to God on the basis of true Law.

Whole Bible Course Lesson Leaf

REV. WILLIAM J. JONES, EDITOR

Vol. 11 4th Quarter Lesson 45 November 8th, 1936

JEREMIAH'S PRISON PROPHECIES

Lesson Text: Jeremiah, Chapters 32, 33.

Golden Text: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."—Jeremiah 33:3.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS: Monday—Daniel 4:24-27; Tuesday—Is. 40:18-30; Wednesday—Neh. 9:5-38; Thursday—Is. 11:11-16; Friday—Gen. 8:8-17; Saturday—Rom. 11:1-24.

EXPOSITION

The Occasion of the Prophecy (32:1-5). The date of this Chapter and also 33:1-11 is a little later than the events narrated in succeeding chapters. Instead of repentance, pleading with God, or surrender to Babylon as He, through Jeremiah, had suggested, Israel made an useless (34:2) alliance with Egypt (37:5). The Babylonian siege had begun in the ninth year of Zedekiah (29:1), but hearing of the coming of Pharaoh (Hophra), the Chaldeans departed for a season (37:5). It was then that the Prophet, in attempting a visit to Anathoth (37:12), was arrested as a traitor and cast into a dungeon (37:16) by the leaders whom he had denounced for breaking the Law. (34:9). They, thinking all danger from Babylon past, re-enslaved their brethren (34:11) and renewed their attacks on Jeremiah. He pleaded for and secured relaxation of imprisonment, and was confined to the "court of the guard" (37:30 f.), but not for long, for his enemies also appealed to Zedekiah and succeeded in putting him back into a dungeon (38:6). Once again the Prophet was delivered and returned to the "court of the guard" (a portion of the Palace court (Neh. 3:25) arranged for prisoners not desired in the common dungeon) [38:13, 28] where he is reported in the opening of this Chapter. The date assigned, therefore, is a period following the incidents just narrated, for this prophecy concerning Zedekiah conforms to an earlier one (37:17; 34:3 ff.). The words concerning the monarch's fate, and God's ultimate visitation (taking notice—for evil or good, 23:2) occasioned his imprisonment (3).

The Prophet's Purchase (6-15). While the enemy was at the city gates and Jeremiah was in the court, Jehovah commanded him to purchase a field in Anathoth from his visiting cousin (showing he had some liberty, e.g., 38:14) Hanamel (6, 7). Although the Prophet had prophesied return to the Land (12:15; 16:15) earlier than the reign of Jehoiakim (3:14), he exhibited faith like that of Abraham who purchased property in a land not yet his (Gen. 23:7-16). He complied with the Jewish law of inheritance (Lev. 25:24 f.; Ruth 4:6) and making the purchase for a small sum (\$11.22) secured the transaction in true Oriental fashion (9-14). Probably the sealed (closed) contract and its open duplicate were made of clay (rather than papyrus or vellum), the latter serving as an envelope whose surface contained an exact copy of the inside contract with its "terms and conditions" (11, R. V. mg.). Baruch, the secretary of the Prophet, received the deed for safekeeping in the presence of the witnesses and numerous spectators (12-14). The event was therefore public, and betokened the return of economic prosperity in the Restoration of the land (15).

The Prophet's Prayer (16-27). While Jeremiah prayed, the Chaldeans stormed the city (24) with mounds ("mounds"—i.e., earth carried up in baskets until it was level with the city walls, when the attack was made—6:6). Having obeyed the Divine will, no matter how absurd his purchase had seemed; and being in that revealed will, the Prophet prayed. He invoked the omnipotent, just, and omnipresent Jehovah of Creation (17) ["arm"—cf. 27:5 referring to creative power, whereas v. 21 and Ex. 6:6, to delivery power]; and of Providence (18) as evidenced in historic experience (20 ff.), particularly the redemption of Egypt: (21). He confessed sin (23), and thus on the basis of a correct view of God and of his adoration and contemplation of Him, prepared the way for the implied petition and prayer occasioned by the impending siege (24). Though his faith wavered for the moment, his prayer paved the way for the

answer of God. Neh. 9:5-38 serves well as a commentary on this section.

The Lord's Answer (26-44). Using the very words of the Prophet's prayer (17), the Almighty One replied to him saying that He was about to give Jerusalem to the Chaldeans (28) who would burn the very houses, scene of idolatries (29). He was incensed at the continual sin (3:24 and 22:21 note) of both Kingdoms (30) and of Jerusalem since its foundation as a city of Israel (31). All classes (32, 33) were included in His charge (cf. note 2:26 f.) which is but a repetition of earlier indictments (7:13, 25 f.; 25:3 f.) relative to the sins of Baal worship (34, 35). These last verses, however, are like 7:30, 31, which deal with the iniquitous rites of Hinnom (cf. note 2:23, and 19:4, 5) a valley running West and South of Jerusalem. That valley (the Greek Gehenna) became a symbol of eternal punishment to later Jews, because of the characteristic child sacrifices to Molech (here identified as an aspect of Baal) an Ammonite deity (I. Kings 11:7) of varying titles (Milcom, Malmam). Solomon worshipped him, and Ahaz (II. Chron. 28:3), and Manasseh (II. Kings 21:6) were guilty of burning their children in Hinnom, a practise prohibited by the Law (Lev. 18:21).

With a different motif, God contrasts the later prospects of glory for Israel (36-44). Jehovah is still speaking to Jeremiah ("thou" instead of "ye" v. 36) reminding him of his request (24). It is His purpose to gather Israel (37) and to make them His people with one heart (38, 39)—promises in accordance with a covenant (40) which can be none other than the New Covenant of 31:31. Unity (39) is ever a characteristic of the Messianic (cf. note 30:24) times (Zeph. 3:9; Zech. 14:9). God Himself will joy over Israel (41) and in the Restoration, prosperity will again abound (42-44) in fulfilment of the earlier typical transaction of the Prophet.

In Ch. 33 (1-3) Jehovah called upon Jeremiah to enquire of Him regarding difficult or hidden (Is. 48:6) things.

Promises Referring to People and Land (4-13). This section is an expansion of Ch. 32. Although the Chaldeans were besieging the city with mounts and engines of war, filling houses with the dead (4, 5), still Jehovah would cure with healing (cf. 31:17 note) and give peace (5). In the Restoration, there would be cleansing from sin (31:34) and joy in Jerusalem as a testimony to the nations (7-9). The desolate land (10) would resound with domestic joy in terms of Temple worship (I. Chron. 16:34; Ezra 3:11; Ps. 106:1); and pastoral bliss (12, 13).

Promises Referring to Kings and Priests (14-26). The promise of the Messiah (15, 16) reminds one of 23:5 f. and 31:35 f. In Christ alone the promise (17) is completely fulfilled as to His royalty and as to His priesthood (cf. note 30:21) typified by the priests who were of the tribe of Levi (18) and had been for some time (Deut. 33:8-10). The uniformity of nature (19-22) is adduced as a proof of the immutability of the promise just given. The scoffings of ungodly Israelites or Chaldeans (24) could not frustrate its fulfilment. Similarly, the promise concerning the two kingdoms will stand (23-26). Note in v. 21, the reference to the key of Messianic passages, II. Sam. 7:12-16.

APPLICATION

He whose "Name" is great (Neh. 9:10 and note Is. 63:14) and mighty (32:20) is able to do the hard ("wonderful" mg.) things for us men (32:17). By that title He was made known to Manah (Judges 13:18, R. V.), and by that promise (17) He made Himself known as the Angel of Jehovah to Abraham (Gen. 18:14). What gratitude ought to be ours for One who, though His eyes are upon all the ways of all of us (19) is yet wondrous in His doings for us (20, cf. Deut. 4:34; 26:8) and thus a terror to the ungodly. What pause ought to be ours that He rejoices in us (32:41)! Let us take heed, however, that the penalties of sin in just retribution do not overtake us, as grain tossed into the pocket folds of an Oriental garment (32:18). Let not our bosom be a treasury or storehouse pocket for the wrath of God (Rom. 2:5).

We may wonder well at His longsuffering (32:33). What does it avail? It encourages and strengthens the faith, courage, and hope of His servants as it did Jeremiah; it encourages others to trust in God; and it silences scoffers, converting gainsayers. What if doubt come (cf. note and app. on 12:1, ff.) to us (32:25)?

WHO WILL PAY THE FARE?*(Continued from page 5)*

is commissioned to go and preach the gospel, he often finds himself without any fare. But if he is really commissioned of the Lord, we have a conviction that the Lord usually finds someone to send him on his way.

One of our students, Mr. John Boyd, last summer went to Sudbury. He had nothing to go to but a family of Jarvis Street saints—that is, they had come to Jarvis Street from Timmins; and went from Jarvis Street to Sudbury. But they were of a missionary spirit, and they promised Mr. Boyd shelter and sustenance if he would go. He went, beginning with nothing. Faithfully he prosecuted his labours throughout the summer, with the result that by the time the Fall came such a work had been started as could not be left. Yet Brother Boyd felt he must continue his work at the Seminary, and he is doing so; going back and forth between Sudbury and Toronto.

How he has managed to find the fare thus far, we are not sure. But we are wondering if there are not some saints somewhere who will be prepared to send him as

their missionary week by week to Sudbury. One person giving \$8.00 per week could do it, or two people giving \$4.00 a week, or 4 people giving \$2.00 a week, or eight people giving \$1.00 a week, or even 16 people giving 50c a week. We appeal to our readers to come to our help in this matter.

Those who do will have the satisfaction of knowing that when Friday night comes, Brother Boyd gets on the train and hurries away to Sudbury. They will be able to think of him as busily visiting from place to place on Saturday, preaching and teaching on Sunday, and then returning to the Seminary for another week's work.

After you read this, consider whether you can be one of those who will help to make this long journey of hundreds of miles each way possible. And, having decided that you will have some part in it, begin at the top if you can—but get into the procession somewhere. If not \$8.00, then \$4.00; if not \$4.00, then \$2.00, or \$1.00, or 50c per week; but as much as you can, so that this matter may be secure from now until next May, when Mr. Boyd will return for the summer. We have not the slightest doubt this will develop into a regular Baptist cause, and thus Mr. Boyd's passage is a real Home Mission cause.

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