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The Sermons of Dr. T. T. Shields

"Behold, I Make All Things New"

(Stenographically Reported)

"And he that sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful." Rev. 21:5.

AT THIS season of the year, I suppose, as usual, many people are busy making new resolutions. At all events we have already, I dare say, expressed the wish, quite sincerely, that our friends might have a Happy New Year. But wishing people a Happy New Year will not give it to them.

At Cooke's Church last night I met with two men who were intoxicated. They were worse than that: they were thoroughly drunk. They both wished me a Happy New Year. I really did not mock them by returning the compliment, for as I looked upon them I knew that no human wish for a Happy New Year could improve their condition. They were going into the New Year the same men they had been during the old year. And in lesser measure, I hope, that is true of all of us. Merely saying, "A Happy New Year!" will not improve the situation of anyone. There is only One Who can really wish us A Happy New Year, and implement the wish. There is only One Who can really make the New Year in any true sense really happy. And that One, blessed be His Name, sits upon the throne, and declares His purpose to make all things new. And having said that He will do so, He bids John write, for the reason that His words "are true and faithful".

The words of God respecting His human creatures are of far greater importance than all the good wishes of our friends: "He that sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

This verse has its place in a chapter which promises a new heaven and a new earth; promises a condition of life in which all things shall be new. But it is but an announcement of the culmination of the divine purpose and progress. God is even now, though men see it not, in many directions making things new. And He will come to us and effect His purpose of grace in our lives.

I.

What are the things that God will make new? He has said, "I will make A NEW COVENANT with you," and

you and I need something better than any covenant that we can make, though it be a covenant with ourselves. New Year's resolutions are usually elements in a covenant which a man makes with himself. He promises himself that he will begin again, and he will do certain things in the New Year. But it is a promise he makes to himself very often, a covenant with himself. He may extend it and make promises to his wife, to his children, or to his friends. But whether or not, it is a human covenant, subject to all human frailties. And it is easily broken, for the reason that the human will is weak, the human purpose is seldom constant. While we may be perfectly sincere in our promise, we have no moral reserve sufficient to give it effect. But what a blessing it is that there is One Who will make resolutions for us, Who makes a new covenant! And the new covenant is one which God makes with Himself, for the reason that it is of no use to make a covenant with us. It would be broken from the human side. But God has covenanted with Himself to do certain things, and upon that, dear friends, the salvation of every one of us depends. We must have something more dependable than our own resolution, than the power of our own will if we are to write a new record in the New Year. God undertakes to save men by His own sovereign will and grace. And if you read the terms of that new covenant you will find Him saying, "I will" — "I will" — "I will". It is what God wills to do that ensures the future of all believers.

It were folly for me to ask you to put your trust in anything which had in it any human element, for you to commit yourself to anything that depends for its ultimate success upon the human will. The best of men will fail us. One who had had a long and large experience exclaimed: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." To trust in ourselves or in others is to pave the way for disappointment and disaster. But He Who sits upon the throne covenants with Himself to do certain things for His elect people, and upon the terms of that covenant we must rely.

Would you not like to know something of what God has willed for you? something of what He has planned for you, something of what He is able to accomplish in you, and for you, of His own good pleasure? Well, one of the things He promises in the new covenant is to give to men a *new heart*. Is not that what we need? It is not only to have new circumstances. Oh, it does seem to me that the church which bears the name of Christ is largely occupied with consideration of human progress of what men may do, of what men promise to do. Is it not our special, our peculiar, mission to tell men what God will undertake to do for them?

What does He do? What if the men of whom I spoke a moment ago could be given a new job! They would not hold it a day. If they were given a new house it would not improve their condition. If all their circumstances were made new, and they were given a new account at the bank, if all the externals of life were improved, within a short time they would be just as bad as ever.

I remember having in the membership of a church of which I was Pastor, a very peculiar man, a man who was very sensitive, very touchy. He was always stubbing his toe against something, or hurting his elbows against somebody's corners. Always getting out of sorts, and complaining about this one, and the other one! His wife was just about as agreeable as he was disagreeable. I often wondered how two such characters came together. Perhaps it is a providential ordering of events so as to maintain a balance; it would be too much to have two of a kind in one house. You often find that when one member of the partnership is particularly talkative, the other one is reticent and quiet. If Mr. Somebody is a great talker, Mrs. Somebody must be a great listener. She must have cultivated patience.

In this case this ugly-dispositioned man had a wife who was of an unusually composed, placid sort of disposition. One day I talked with her about her difficulties. Somebody else had hurt this man; or at least he imagined he had been hurt. I said, "Well, Mrs. So-and-So, perhaps if you were both to go somewhere else, your husband might be happier." She shook her head and said, "I should have no hope of improvement in that way, Pastor. We should just take our miserable selves with us." I suppose it would not be very long before he would find the misery in his head again. Most of our troubles are within; not in our circumstances, but in what we are, ourselves.

But the grace of God promises us a new interior, a new heart, a new engine house, a new chamber where affections and desires originate, a new spring for life itself. That is what we need: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."

Have you seen an untidy housewife, a woman who has the faculty of getting things topsy turvy everywhere. She may be a very excellent woman, but she has not an orderly mind. She has a way of having things out of place, upside down. Suppose a man were to furnish a model home for such a wife, and a place for everything, and everything in its place! How long would it remain a model home? Within a week it would be just as disorderly as the old one, unless you could give her an orderly mind, and systematize her life. You would have to begin the reformation, not without, but within. And it is ever so.

And He Who sits upon the throne, who has power to effect His purposes of grace, promises to all who will receive it, a new heart. He promises also a new spirit, a new motive power. Did anybody give you a new motor car for Christmas, or New Year's? I do not suppose they did.

The Gospel Witness and Protestant Advocate

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Would you not like to have one? Suppose someone were to offer you one, what then? Suppose someone were to offer you a new house — Casa Loma, for instance! Would you be very proud of it? You would say, "What in the world can I do with it? I have nothing to put into it. I could not afford to keep it up." What is the use of a new car if you cannot buy gasoline to run it. And the Lord has promised us power, the power of the Holy Ghost resident within us. He has promised us the very power which created worlds.

He Who makes all things new, promises us, not only a new heart, but a *new Spirit* to dwell within us. He promises to make us new creations. You cannot have a really Happy New Year unless you are a new creature in Christ Jesus. To one who is born again old things are passed away, he is made a new creature entirely, everything is changed. And because he is changed within, you soon discover a change without.

And then He puts a *new song* in our mouths. We are called out of darkness into light that we may show forth the praises of Him Who hath so called us. Our lips ought to be filled with the praise of God. Every act, every word, the whole aspect of life ought to reflect the divine glory: "Behold, I make all things new." We ought to have a new song. We are going to have a new heaven, and some day there will be a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

II.

God has infinite resources, and He will make all things new. We are going to have a new church if all is well, before this time next year; everything will be new except the outside walls. There will be new seats, a new organ, new floor covering, new lights, new everything. But what we need more than that is that **WE SHOULD BE NEW**, that we should renew our consecration, yield ourselves afresh to God.

I am sorry for many boys and girls in our day. I often wish we could put old heads on young shoulders. I wish

boys and girls could look on life through the eyes of people who are more experienced.

I remember my father's counselling me. Many times I thought he was a bit old-fashioned, when he was very much younger than I am now. He always seemed older to me, of course. Often after I became a minister I went to him for advice. But I thought I belonged to a new generation, and that I was a little wiser than he. I have lived to find that the things he told me were true, and that he was speaking out of his own experience. To this day there is never a day, I think, that passes during the course of which I do not think of some element of his counsel, and I often wish I could go to him and say, "What you told me was true. You were wiser than I. You had been along the road before me, and you saw the pitfalls, the dangers which I did not see."

How empty after all are the pleasures of this life! How easily young people are led astray by the wrong sort of company. I have grieved over it again and again when I have seen a young girl, just in her teens, and for the first time in her life some young fellow begins to pay her attention. He may not be worth five cents a carload. But it is the first time anyone has ever been particularly attentive to her, and she loses her head, and suddenly she thinks Prince Charming has come to her. But oh, what endless trouble her father and mother have, and when they try to advise her, they know nothing at all! Silly girl that she is! You had better listen to what father and mother have to say. And you boys, too. I have seen little boys who thought they became men by smoking cigarettes. I knew of a great business man who, when young fellows came seeking employment, said to them: "First of all, let me see your hand." And when he discovered stains he said, "I have no place for you in my organization." "But I come with a good recommendation, sir." "Your recommendation is in your hand. You are laying the foundation for a nervous wreck; I would not touch you." He would not have any man in his employ who was addicted to that habit.

I say these things because you young people who are Christians are the special objects of the devil's attention. He would seek to lead you astray, not by putting before you some open, flagrant, wrong, but just by leading you off into worldly ways, spoiling your spiritual life, breaking your fellowship with God until by and by you become just a giddy thing. I read the other day of a certain important man giving a dance to his employees. Someone says, "You are very narrow. Do you think there is any harm in that?" If you have had any experience you will know that there is a world of harm in it. I happen to know that that particular man was a church official, prominent in religious affairs. But what a poor example he was setting to young people!

In this New Year, let us be altogether new. Let us give ourselves with a new devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us be peculiar, let us be odd. Your Pastor is very odd — an unusual sort of man. I saw a list of services in our neighbourhood, a universal week of prayer, five services, at which Brother So-and-So, and Brother So-and-So will preside. Once a year a few churches get together to have a week of prayer, and then spend all their time in preaching instead of praying, talking about praying, instead of praying. I never get an invitation to them. I did one year — by telephone. His call was mislaid somehow, and I did not get it for some time. I was supposed to call him, but I did not do so. And when I found his number and called him a week or so after, he said, "We wondered if you would

join us in a week of prayer." I said, "How many days do you have?" He said, "Five." "Well," I said, "We have three regular prayer meetings every week in the year. Will you join us?" He said, "I wish I could get my people to pray."

We are peculiar, I suppose. It is peculiar for anyone to believe. But the Lord Jesus says, "Behold, I make all things new." And if you profess to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus, you ought to be so new that you will be peculiar — new in your outlook, in your habits, in your speech, your conduct, different in every way because you are a citizen of the new Jerusalem, and you are getting ready for the new heaven and new earth. Let us be new men in this New Year. Let it be our endeavour, as God helps us to do it, to put off the old man, and to put on the new. Only thus can we have a Happy New Year. May it be the portion of every one of us! Let us ask God that it may be so.

O Lord, we come to One Who has said, Behold, I do a new thing in the earth. We want Thee to do a new thing in our lives. We ask for grace that those of us who are Thy children may be enabled every day we live, to show that we are new men and new women, new boys and new girls. And we ask for those who are not yet Thine, that their hearts may be opened to the reception of Jesus Christ, that so they may become new creatures in Him. We ask it for His name's sake, Amen.

January 1, 1939.

THE EARLY CHURCH

With no power except the "irresistible might of weakness"; with no wealth except the riches of glory inherited through her heavenly citizenship; refusing all compromise with the world, declining all patronage of kings and emperors, she nevertheless went forth conquering and to conquer, till in a few years she had undermined the whole colossal fabric of paganism. And might not the church of Christ do the same to-day if she were to return to this primitive ideal? and if renouncing her dependence on human resources — wealth and power and social prestige, she were to inscribe upon her banner that ancient motto: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."

—A. J. GORDON

A Weekly Messenger for 1958

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Jarvis Street Baptist Church Faces a New Year

The letter which follows was sent to the membership of Jarvis Street Baptist Church. We feel certain that our Gospel Witness family within reach of Toronto will desire to join in the prayer, praise and testimony of the New Year's Morning Service. There may also be those whom God would have join in the annual Christmas Thankoffering. The world-wide ministry of "The Gospel Witness" is made possible by the missionary interests of Jarvis Street. Could we also show our gratitude to God for this weekly messenger in this tangible way?

December 17th, 1957

Dear Fellow Member:

First of all I write to remind you of our great New Year's Morning Service which will be held in Greenway Chapel at 10:30. The blessing of last year's service, together with the motto text, "Go Forward", remained with us, we felt, throughout the entire year. The service in itself is unique. On that date we stand as a church, as families, and as individuals, on the threshold of a new year. It is an occasion of reflection which calls for loudest and heartiest praise to God for His abounding mercy throughout the year just past. No people have more cause to rejoice and thank God for His abundant goodness than we who form the membership of Jarvis St. Baptist Church.

In facing another year we are made extremely conscious of our need for divine guidance and help. The prayers, as well as the praises which characterize all our New Year's services, are usually in humility and fervency of a very special kind. It is a time when, as before our God we bow, His presence is made very real. Without fail as we come before Him with seeking hearts, we experience in a very definite sense the fulfilment of His promise, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you."

We are hoping to see every member present, who is physically able to attend. Also we look forward to seeing the faces, and hearing the voices of many old friends.

The other matter is about our Annual Special Christmas Thankoffering which will be received next Lord's Day, December 22nd, or as soon thereafter as possible. The thought of our heavenly Father's unspeakable gift of grace in His Son, and our eternal salvation in Him, incites in us, as we may feel led, to express in this tangible way our sincere gratitude to Him. Enclosed you will find an envelope for your offering.

With warmest Christian regards, and looking forward to seeing you next Lord's Day, and very specially on New Year's Morning, I am,

Affectionately, your Pastor



THE ONE AT BETHLEHEM

*What men had dreamed, the wise men saw that night,
The glory of a million stars in one,
The moon became a dark-drenched candle light,
The Milky Way outsplendoured and outdone.*

*What men had yearned to hear, the shepherds heard,
One song that held the music of the sky,
All other singings as a muted bird,
All harmonies grown quiet until they die.*

*What prophets longed to see, dear Mary saw,
The Everlasting God, a Child appear,
How pale the brightest colours of the Law,
How incomplete the visions of the seer!*

*One Star, one Song, one Light across the sheep,
One God, one Saviour for our wayward race,
One Book, one Cross, one Hope our souls to keep,
Till one Day we shall see Him face to face.*

—ROBERT BARR

The Bible Doctrine of Salvation

By Dr. C. D. Cole

Dean Emeritus of Toronto Baptist Seminary

V. THE EFFECTUAL CALL

WE ARE about to write upon one of the most neglected truths of the Bible. There was much said about it during the Puritan period, and later by Spurgeon and others, but today there is only a voice here and there dealing with this Bible doctrine. We dare say that nine out of ten church members would not even hazard a guess or opinion concerning this blessed truth.

The word "call" is sometimes used to express the act of naming, as, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus" (Matt. 1:21). At other times the word is employed to denote the act of inviting or summoning, as in Luke 14:13: "When thou makest a feast, call the poor . . ." In the Greek New Testament different words are used for naming and inviting, but in our English Bible the word "call" is used for both.

When the word "call" is used for inviting, we must distinguish between a call that is not heeded and one that is successful or effectual — one that is responded to. The chief aim of the gospel is to call men to salvation through faith in Christ. Now it is obvious that many such calls go unheeded, and men remain lost, notwithstanding plain preaching and urgent appeals. On the other hand, we see the preaching of the gospel effective in many cases — we see lives transformed by it. We may see a lost man ignore and reject the gospel at one time, and then the next time or at some later time, he is saved by it. What makes the difference? The preacher? No, for it may be the same preacher in both instances. Is the difference in the gospel? No, for it is the very same gospel in each case. The difference in the gospel? No, for it is the very same gospel in each case. The difference is made by the Holy Spirit in His light-giving and life-giving power. When the gospel is preached "in word only", that is, without the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, the sinner remains spiritually dead, and will be either indifferent or antagonistic to the gospel call.

The effectual call is just about equivalent to regeneration. In Rom. 8:30 we are given the chain of Divine acts in salvation: "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." It is to be noted that "called" is used rather than "regenerated". Christians are often denominated "the called", as well as "the born again".

I.

Scriptures That Distinguish the Two Calls

There are two calls from God to men. One is the general call and goes to all who hear the gospel with the physical organ of hearing; the other is special and effects the salvation of those to whom it is given. Men come into a saved state by this Divine call. Men are saints by calling. Paul addresses the saints at Rome and Corinth as those "called to be saints". Paul preached the gospel indiscriminately to Jews and Greeks at Corinth. To the natural Jew it was a scandal, and to the natural Greek it was foolishness, "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." It was only the called among both groups

who saw the power and wisdom of God in the plan of salvation through the crucified Christ.

Let us look at some Scriptures that speak of a general call. In Prov. 1:24 God says: "I have called and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded." This call was externally made by God through the prophets, and was universally ignored — no man regarded. In Matt. 22:14 we read, "For many are called, but few are chosen." Here is a call that came to a greater number than was chosen and saved. In the parable of the great supper, recorded in Luke 14, none of those who had been invited came — they all with one consent began to make excuse.

Now let us consider some Scriptures that speak of a special and effectual call. In Rom. 8:28 we are told that all things work together for good "to them who are the called according to his purpose". Here "the called" means more than "the invited", for many are invited to come to Christ who never come and hence are not saved, and to whom all things do not work together for good. In Rom. 8:30 we read that the called are also justified. But many are called by the preaching of the gospel who are not justified. Paul is writing about a call that is effectual in salvation when he says to the Corinthians, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." In 2 Peter 1:10 we are exhorted to make our calling and election sure. In all these passages, calling is more than a mere outward invitation to believe the gospel.

II.

The Nature of the Effectual Call

1. *It is subjective or internal.* There is an outward or objective call in which the gospel is presented or offered to the sinner. The subjective or internal call is made *within* the sinner. In this call grace operates on the mind and heart. In this call the Spirit compels them to come in; not by forcing the will, but by changing the mind and heart — by changing the governing disposition of the soul — so that they become willing. Bancroft defines the effectual call in these words: "By the effectual invitation or call is meant that exercise of Divine power upon the soul, immediate, spiritual, and supernatural, which communicates a new spiritual life, and thus makes a new mode of spiritual activity possible. Repentance, faith, trust, hope, and love, are purely and simply the sinner's own acts; but as such are possible to him only in virtue of the change wrought in the moral condition of his faculties by the re-creative power of God."

2. *It is a special call.* There is a general call whenever and wherever the gospel is preached. God is sincere in this call, and the sinner is responsible to heed it, but the fact is he never does. The special call is something over and beyond the preaching of the gospel. The special call is made to those who are denominated sheep, elect, predestinated, and is always effective. Christ said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish" (Jno. 10:27, 28). And speaking of the lost sheep among

the Gentiles, He said, "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice" (Jno. 10:16). Paul recognized the elect when the Gospel came not unto them in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost (1 Thess. 1:5).

Bunyan illustrates the difference between the general and the special call by the barnyard hen. She has a general cluck to which little attention is given, and she has a special cluck for her biddies when the hawk is about to swoop down upon them — the cluck that brings them flying to find protection under her wings. So God has a special call that brings His lost sheep to find shelter and safety beneath the spreading wings of Calvary.

Spurgeon finds an illustration of this special call in the physical resurrection of Lazarus. He says that if our Lord had not addressed Lazarus personally, saying, "Lazarus, come forth," all the dead would have lived at His command.

Our Lord makes a distinction between the spiritual and physical resurrections in Jno. 5:25, 28. He is speaking of the spiritual resurrection when He says: "The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." He is speaking of the bodily resurrection when He says: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth. . ."

3. *It is a miraculous and invincible call.* Peter says it is a call out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9). Christ says that it is a call that makes the dead to live. This call has the power of God behind it. It is the mighty Spirit of God working in grace to make the sinner see his helpless state and the value of the blood of Christ. To successfully resist this call would mean that the sinner is mightier than God. There was death and corruption in Lazarus to keep him from responding to Christ's command to come forth. But there was power from God that overcame all natural obstacles. There is likewise much in the sinner to resist the Gospel call, but in the effectual call of the Spirit this resistance is overcome. The effectual call is a Divine call that startles the careless sinner into concern; a call that enlightens the sin-darkened understanding; a call that opens the sin-closed heart to receive Christ as Lord and Saviour. Apart from the *work* of the Spirit the *word* of the Spirit will be rejected. Unless the Holy Spirit creates light within the *soul*, the light within the *Book* will not be seen. The power of conversion is not in the inspiration or perspiration of the preacher, but in the illumination and regeneration of the Spirit.

The outward call of the gospel by the preacher may be likened to the law indicting the criminal and calling him to trial; the special call is the sheriff coming in contact with the criminal, arresting him and bringing him into court. The criminal's refusal to submit to arrest is no proof that he is superior to the law; but if the law is unable to bring him into court, that would be proof that he is stronger than the law. Now when the preacher calls upon sinners to repent and believe the gospel and they refuse, this does not indicate that the sinner is stronger than God. But if the Holy Spirit calls him — comes to grip with his darkened mind to give light — comes to work repentance and faith in him — comes to give him a new birth — and does not succeed, then that would be proof that the sinner was stronger than God, the Holy Spirit. Human depravity is too much for the preacher, but not too much for the Holy Spirit. This is why we pray for God to convert the sinner when we have preached to him.

The general call is like the father calling Johnny to get up early in the morning. He says "okay doke", turns over and goes back to sleep. The call did not bring him out; it had no effect on him. The special call is the father coming in thirty minutes later. He pulls off the cover and puts on the cowhide. This is effectual and brings Johnny out.

B. H. Carroll likens the general call to sheet lightning which is beautiful and grand, but strikes nothing; the special call is like forked lightning, it strikes somewhere.

III.

The Necessity of the Effectual Call

1. Human depravity — the condition of fallen human nature — makes a special and supernatural call necessary for the conversion of the sinner. Man by nature has his understanding darkened by sin, his heart is hard, and his mind is enmity against God. If the sinner loved God and understood the gospel, he would at once, on hearing the gospel, lovingly and gladly respond to the good news about Christ as the Saviour. But he must undergo a change of mind and heart before he will receive Christ as Lord and Saviour. And this change is not self-wrought, but God-wrought. Paul told Timothy to preach in the hope that "God peradventure will give them repentance (change of mind) to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

2. This special call of the Holy Spirit is necessary because the gospel call — the word only — is not sufficient for the conversion of the lost man. "Knowing, brethren, beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost . . ." (1 Thess. 1:5). Bunyan says, "I believe that, to effectual calling, the Holy Ghost must accompany the word of the gospel, and that with mighty power." The gospel is suitable and sufficient as the means of conversion, but there must also be an agent with power to effect it. There must be the Divine workman as well as Divine equipment. The word is a good sword, but there must also be an agent to wield it. And the word is said to be the sword of the Spirit. In the call that goes unheeded we have the gospel and the preacher; in the effectual call we have the gospel, the preacher, and the Holy Spirit. And it is the Holy Spirit who makes the gospel effective in the conversion of the sinner.

IV.

The Reason for the Effectual Call

The effectual call — the call of the Holy Spirit — the call that secures salvation — in every case is made in pursuance of God's eternal purpose. In Rom. 8:28 this call is said to be "according to his purpose". And 2 Tim. 1:9 is to the same effect: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given

Plan to attend . . .

NEW YEAR'S MORNING SERVICE

10.30 a.m.

A unique service of praise, prayer
and testimony.

us in Christ Jesus before the world began." Salvation is not an accident — it is not a chance happening — but the coming to pass of God's eternal purpose in Christ. The effectual call is the divine act by which the foreknown are brought into a saved state. It is the inaugural of the elect; the induction into saintship. Salvation is of the Lord, and every Christian should ascribe his conversion to the work of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian is a God-made man, and therefore, a grace-made man, since he has not merited salvation. It is God who has made us to differ from the

lost, therefore, we can humbly and gratefully say with Isaac Watts:

"Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter while there's room;
When others make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?
'Twas the same love that spread the feast,
That sweetly forced us in;
Else we had still refused to taste
And perished in our sins."

"WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?"

CHARLES H. SPURGEON

"For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."—James 4:14.

WITH an intense desire for your spiritual profiting I shall speak upon our text in two ways; first, let us consider the truth in the text, and secondly, the lessons in that truth.

I.

We commence with THE TRUTH IN THE TEXT. The text begins by reminding us that we have no foresight: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow." God has given us memory that we may look backward, and it were well if we used our memories better for remembrance, reflection and repentance, but God has given us no eyes wherewith to pry into the future. He unveils the past to our penitence; but he veils the future from our curiosity. Dark days may be near at hand for some of us, but we do not perceive them. Let us be thankful that we do not, for we might multiply our afflictions by the foresight of them, and the prospect of evil to come might cast a gloom over pleasure near at hand. As we may feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, so may we faint under a thousand lashes in dreading a single stroke. It is good also that our God conceals from us our earthly joys until the time of their arrival. Great prosperity may await you, and a considerable enlargement of your temporal comfort, but you do not know it; and it is as well that you should not, for you might be none the better for the prospect. Earth's goods are like bird-lime, and are fearfully apt to glue us down to things below, and prevent our soaring towards heaven. If then we could know all the pleasurable events that may happen to us, we might become more worldly and more earth-bound than we are. None of us could desire that this present evil world should have an increased influence over us: we are glad that it should have less, and therefore we rejoice that its future has such slight power over us because of its being unknown.

No, we cannot see far, and those who act as if they could see into coming days behave most foolishly. Hear these people whom James describes; they boast most wretchedly: they will go into the city, they are sure they will, what is to hinder them? "To-day or to-morrow, we will go into such a city," — they have plenty of time, and can make a selection according to their pleasure: they can go where they like, and when they like. They see themselves with prophetic glance entering in at the city gate, and they are fully assured that they shall "continue there a year". Of course, a year, that is a small matter: if they please they will stay longer. They allot themselves a lease of three, seven, fourteen or twenty-one years, at discretion; at least they talk as if they could do so. They are going into the

city to "buy and sell": they are sure of that too. Of course, they will not be laid up with sickness; they do not fear that accident or disease will keep them away from market, or hinder the active transacting of their business. No, they are going to buy and sell, and such is their confidence in their own superior abilities that they are sure to make a profit of it: the markets cannot fall below the price which they have fixed in their own minds, neither will they make bad debts, nor incur other losses, for they have decided that they will "get gain". Hitherto they have been self-made men, and they mean to go on making themselves, until they put the finishing stroke by adding a few more thousands. They have visions of going on to fortune. Ah, ye prophets, ye are going to your graves! This is a sure oracle. The tomb will be your only patrimony, and the shroud your sole possession. Let none of us talk of what we resolve to do at some future date. Look well to the present, for that is all the time we can be sure of, and there may be little enough of that. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest." Thus said the wise man; let wise men take heed of his counsel.

The apostle emphasizes the folly of this supposed foresight by telling us that we cannot even reckon upon another day. You have come close up to the end of March, but if you reckon upon what you will do upon the first of April, you may find by the event that you are a fool. You may get to the last day of the year; but if you reckon on a new year, you may be giving new proof of your unwisdom. Even in the morning we cannot make sure of the eventide, nor in the evening can we reckon upon the morning. James put the matter strongly when he asks: "What is your life?" You do not know what is going to happen on the morrow, for you do not know your own life. What is it?

The text divides itself into an emphatic question, "What is your life?" and an instructive answer: "It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

First, we have an emphatic question: "What is your life?" For solidity, for stability; what is it? What is there in it? Is it not composed of such stuff as dreams are made of? The breath of your nostrils is not more unsubstantial than your life. There, breathe it out! On such a morning as this you see your breath; but it is only in your sight for a moment, and then it vanishes away. Your own breath is a fair picture of the flimsy, airy thing which men call life. What is your life? What is it for continuance? Some things

last awhile, and run adown the centuries; but what is your life? Even garments bear some little wear and tear; but what is your life? A delicate texture; no cobweb is a tithe as frail. It will fall before a touch, a breath. Justinian, an emperor of Rome, died by going into a room which had been newly painted; Adrian, a pope, was strangled by a fly; a consul struck his foot against his own threshold, and his foot mortified so that he died thereby. There are a thousand gates to death; and though some seem to be narrow wickets, many souls have passed through them. Men have been choked by a grape stone, killed by a tile falling from the roof of a house, poisoned by a drop, carried off by a whiff of foul air. I know not what there is that is too little to slay the greatest king. It is a marvel that man lives at all. So unstable is our life that the apostle says, "What is it?" So frail, so fragile is it, that he does not call it a flower of the field, or the snuff of a candle, but asks, "What is our life?" It is as if he had said—Is it anything? Is it not a near approach to nothing?

Have you ever noticed how David answers this question in the thirty-ninth Psalm? He says in the fiftieth verse of that psalm that *man is vanity*. What is vanity? It is nothing in reality, it is merely the pretence of something; it is an idle dream, an empty conceit, a delusion, a make-believe. Such is man. But he says more than that: he declares that *every man is vanity*. Princes, kings, philosophers, the strongest, the healthiest, the ablest, the most virtuous — every man is vanity: among the millions of mankind none rises above this dreary state of nothingness. He says more than that: he writes — *every man at his best state is vanity*: when he is in the prime and glory of his life, when he is most healthy and vigorous, when his eye is clearest, and his muscles are firmest, he is still no better than sheer vanity. David goes even further, for thus he speaks — "*Every man at his best state is altogether vanity*," that is, he is nothing but vanity, there is nothing more enduring about him. He is gone with a puff; he spends his years as a tale that is told. Do not overlook one more emphatic word which David sets in the forefront of the sentence, "Verily," as if he was quite sure of it, and could not tolerate a question upon the subject — "Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity."

Have you ever observed how Job, when he speaks of our life, sets us a sign in each of the three elements whereon we dwell? See his ninth chapter, at the twenty-fifth verse. He says, "My days are swifter than a post:" here is an emblem upon the land. Oriental kings employed swift-footed runners and horses and dromedaries, and these to the Oriental imagination were the very *beau ideal* of speed: even we, before the days of electricity, knew of nothing faster than the royal mail. Job therefore well says, "My days are swifter than a post." Then he bids us look to sea, for he says, "They are passed away as the swift ships;" ships which are built for speed seem to fly as on wings when they spread their sails to a favouring wind. We ought not to view ships at seas without remembering the brevity of our days. But lest we should still forget, the patriarch further likens his days to "the eagle that hasteth to the prey." As the vulture spies from a distance that carcase of a camel, and descends upon it with hasty sweep, so our life hastes to descend. Thus earth, sea, and air all remind us of the speed at which life flies towards its end.

St. Augustine used to say he did not know whether to call it a dying life or a living death, and I leave you the choice between those two expressions. This is certainly a

dying life; its march is marked by graves. Nothing but a continuous miracle keeps any one of us from the sepulchre. Were omnipotence to stay its power but for a moment, earth would return to earth, and ashes to ashes. It is a dying life: and equally true is it that it is a living death. We are always dying. Every beating pulse we tell leaves but the number less: the more years we count in our life, the fewer remain in which we shall behold the light of day. While we are sitting still in this house, the earth is revolving round the sun, and bearing us all through space at an amazing rate. We are all moving, and yet we do not perceive it; even so while you are listening to this sermon you are all being borne onward towards eternity at lightning speed. As though we were laid in the bosom of some mighty angel, and he with outstretched wings darted along like a flame of fire, we are ever urging our onward way. Though we dream that we are at a stay, yet we never rest for an instant. The stream is bearing us onward: we are nearing the cataract. Ever must we obey the mandate — "Onward, onward, onward." From childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to grey old age we march onward in serried ranks from which no man can retire. We tarry not even when we sleep; we are continually moving forward like the waters of yonder river, on whose banks we find a habitation. What, then, is our life? That is a question which remains to a large degree unanswered and unanswerable.

Yet our text affords us what is in some respects *an instructive answer*. It does not so much tell us what life actually is as what it is like. "*It is even a vapour*." James compares our life, you see, to a very subtle, unsubstantial, flimsy thing — a vapour. If you live upon an eminence, from which you can look down upon a stretch of country, you see in the early morning a mist covering all the valleys. It is singular to mark the tops of the great elms appearing above it, like islands in a sea of cloud, with perhaps here and there a church spire rising like a sharp pyramid from the waste of mist. In a little time you look from the same window, and the vapour has all vanished. It was so thin, so fine, so much like gossamer, that a breath of wind has scattered it, or peradventure the sun has drawn it aloft; at any rate, not a trace of that all-encompassing vapour remains. Such is your life. Or you have marked a cloud in the western sky, illuminated with those marvellous lights which flowed during those extraordinary sunsets, the like of which none of our fathers had seen. You looked at the jewelled mass; it shone in the perfection of beauty, and all the colours of the rainbow were blended in its hues: in another instant, lo, it was not; it was gone past all recall. Such is your life. This morning, as we came hither, we saw our breath: it was before our eye for an instant, and anon it had gone. Such is the picture which James presents to us. "What is your life? It is even a vapour."

He proceeds to explain his own symbol in a sentence which is full of meaning: "It is even a vapour, *that appeareth*." Notice that. He does not speak of it as a substance, having a true existence, but says that it "*appeareth*". Vapour is so ethereal, phantom-like, and unreal, that it may rather be said to appear than to scarcely know that you had entered it, for it would possibly appear to be the thinnest of mist. The vapour which steams from your mouth, how light, how airy, it is next door to nothing; it only "*appeareth*". And such is this life — a dream, a vain show, an apparition of the night. Half our joys and sorrows are but the pretence of joy and the shadow of sorrow; and the most of things through which we travel are not what they

seem. We ought to know this in a practical way, and set less store by the things which are seen, which are temporal. This life "appeareth" — that is all.

Further the apostle says, "It appeareth for a little time." It is only a very little while that a man lives at the longest. Compare a man's life with that of a tree. There is so striking a contrast between our present short life and that of a cedar, or an oak, that to set forth the longer life of saints in the millennial age the Lord says, "As the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." In that happy age men shall flourish long as the trees of the forest; but now a man standing beneath an oak is a mere infant compared with the boughs which overshadow him. A hundred years ago that oak seemed every way as venerable as it does to-day, whereas the man was then unthought of by his grandsire. Compare our life with the existence of this world; I mean not the present state of the earth as fitted up for man, but I allude to those unknown ages which intervened between the present arrangement and that beginning wherein God created the heavens and the earth. The long eras of fire and water, the reigns of fishes and reptiles, the periods of tropical heat and polar ice, make one think of man as a thing of yesterday. Then contrast our life with the being of the eternal Lord: and what is man — man when most venerable with years? A Methuselah, what is he? He is but an insect born in the morning's sunbeam, sporting in the noontide ray, and dead when the dews begin to fall. He appeareth for a little while.

The parallel is further consummated by the apostle's adding, "And then vanisheth away." The cloud is gone from the mountain. Where is it? It has vanished away. No trace of it is left: neither can you recall it. We too shall soon be gone: gone as a dream when one awaketh. With the most of us our remembrance will be short. Many leave us concerning whom it would be a pity that they should be remembered; while many fail to live for others, and therefore their fellows speedily forget them. Amid the crowded cemetery a single grave is lost; amid ten thousand deaths no one departure can long abide in human memory. As far as this world is concerned we all shall by-and-by vanish away. Then shall our near companion say of us,

"One morn I missed him on the accustomed hill,
Along the heath, and near his favourite tree;
Another came, nor yet beside the rill,
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he."

The air has felt the passing-bell, and now the stars look down upon a stone writ large with "HERE HE LIES!" Or the dews shall wet a grass-grown mound, girt about with brambles, on which a few wild flowers have sprung up spontaneously to show how life shall yet triumph over death. Children may bear our name, and yet a fourth generation shall quite forget that we ever sojourned in this region. Such is our life — "a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." This is the truth; you know it, but I cannot impress it upon your hearts as it ought to be impressed; hence I invite you to join me in the prayer, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

II.

Secondly, let us now learn THE LESSONS WHICH LIE WITHIN THIS TRUTH. May we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the same.

First, If this life be unsubstantial as a vapour, — and nobody can deny the fact, — let us regard it as such, and let us seek for something substantial elsewhere.

"This world's a dream, an empty show;
But the great world to which I go
Hath joys substantial and sincere:
When shall I wake and find me there?"

It may be well to make the best of both worlds; but of this poor world nothing can be made unless it be viewed in the light of another. This is a poor withering life at the best, for we all do fade as a leaf. Unless we purposely live with a view to the next world, we cannot make much out of our present existence. Such cast cloths and rotten rags as this poor present world of time and sense, can never be made up into an array in which a man would care to robe himself. At the same time, do not be frightened at the unhandsome form in which this life at times appears: it is after all but a vapour; and who will be alarmed at it? Do not be overjoyed as he was who hoped to embrace a goddess, and was deceived by a cloud: it is after all but a semblance; its sorrows are scarcely worth a tear, nor do its joys deserve a smile; vanity and vapour are things which wise men set small store by. Children may be pleased with the bubbles which they blow by the aid of an old pipe and a piece of soap; but as for men who have put away childish things, they ought not to be greatly moved by the things of this life, for they are but bubbles of less brilliance and less substance than those which delight the boy. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity." Let the lower lights burn dimly before your eye; they are mere sparks, they are quenched full soon. Let us grip the eternal, and sit loose by the temporal. The jewels of eternity will glitter in our crowns when all things pass away; but the trifles of this life are as the flowers which children pluck in the meadows, which wither in their hands before they can carry them home.

In this place I suggest as your prayer that stanza of the poet, in which he addresses the Well-beloved thus—

"Show me thy face—
My faith and love
Shall henceforth fixed be,
And nothing here have power to move
My soul's serenity.
My life shall seem a trance, a dream,
And all I feel and see
Illusive, visionary, — Thou
The one reality."

Next, Is life most uncertain? We know it is: no one attempts to deny it. It is certain that life will come to an end; but it is most uncertain when it will come to that end. Is it so uncertain? Then let us not delay. I would to God I could whisper this wisdom into every procrastinator's ear. Why dost thou halt and hesitate? If thou art desirous to be saved from the wrath to come, why dost thou put it off till a to-morrow which may never come? Wilt thou delay repenting, and die impenitent? Wilt thou delay faith, and perish as an unbeliever? Wilt thou keep back from mercy and pardon, and refuse the free grace of God? I pray thee do not so; for if thou delay another day, it may be thou wilt be in the land where hope can never come to thee. Think of your peril, O ye ungodly men! Within an hour you may be at the judgment-seat of God, or in the pit of hell. Nothing keeps you where there is hope except a thread so fine as to be invisible, and so easily broken that

none but a madman would trust his soul's destiny upon it. Awake, I pray thee! Since death is hastening, haste thou thyself until thou hast found a refuge in the cleft of the Rock of Ages, and art safe in the arms of Jesus. Since life is so uncertain, oh, haste thee, Christian to serve thy God while the opportunity is given thee; be diligent to-day to do those works which perfect saints above and holy angels cannot do. Thou wilt soon be where thou canst no more give alms to the poor, nor instruct the ignorant, nor visit the fatherless and the widow. Thou shalt have no opportunities for speaking to men about their souls, or winning them for Christ, when once this shadowy life has vanished away. How earnest every worker ought to do his work well while he has the opportunity! I have charged myself again and again — I would to God the charge had been more effectual — to preach

"As though I ne'er might preach again,
A dying man to dying men."

I am persuaded that if we were in possession of all the wisdom that grace will give us, we should do everything for the good of men most speedily, with deep prayerfulness, with true spiritual life, and with an entire dependence upon the Spirit of God for the blessing of it. Come, my brother, what thou doest do quickly. If thou wishest to honour thy Lord whilst thou art here, and win jewels for his crown; up and at it, for the day is far spent. Thou canst not afford to waste a moment, for thou hast much to do, and very little time to do it in. Help us, O Spirit of the Lord!

Is life so short? Does it only appear for a little time, and then vanish away? Then let us put all we can into it. If life be short, it is wisdom to have no fallows, but to sow every foot of ground while we can. It will be prudent to pack our little space as full as possible. Somebody said the other day of our dear friend Mr. Moody; that he was the only man who could pronounce "Jerusalem" in two syllables. It shows the activity of the man that he can speak as much in two syllables as other people can say in four; he is always at it, working for his Master double tides, rowing with both hands. Some speakers are long in delivering short sense; instead of saying much in little, they say little in much. Oh, for some one to teach them to say "Jerusalem" in two syllables!

Let us put plenty of life into our existence, plenty of work into our life, plenty of heart into our work, and plenty of warmth into our heart. Oh, may God give us to live while we live! May we not only live but be all alive.

Is life so short? Then do not let us make any very great provision for it. I have heard of certain people who are so imprudent that they never lay by anything for a rainy day, to whom I would say, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." It would be a poverty-stricken world if all followed the example of improvidence which is set by certain spiritual blunderers. There is a thriftiness which we all ought to exercise; but there is no justification for laying up treasure which will never be used. Ants do not store up grain for storing's sake: they do but divide over the whole year the harvest of a month. To hoard up endless gold is a species of insanity. If I were going a day's voyage, I should not wish to take with me enough biscuit and salt beef to last for three years; it would only cumber the boat. One walking-stick is an admirable help, as I often find; but to carry a bundle of them when going

on a journey would be a superfluity of absurdity. Alas, how many load themselves as if life's journey would last a thousand years, at the least! Some men have amassed hundreds of thousands of pounds; when are they going to enjoy their wealth? They are getting more and more, and this occupies all their time; they are so busy cooking that they never have time to dine; they are so taken up with filling the wardrobe that they are all in rags. We do not want a ton weight of candles if we are only going to sit up for a few minutes. Let us be wise enough to suit the supply to the need.

Is time so short? Then do not let us fret about its troubles and discomforts. A man is on a journey, and puts up at an inn, and when he is fairly in the hostelry, he perceives that it is a poor place, with scant food, and a hard bed. "Well, well," says he, "I am off the first thing to-morrow morning, and so it does not matter." This world is an inn, and if there are certain discomforts in it, let us remember that we are not tenants for years, but only guests for a day. Let us make the best we can of the temporary accommodation which this poor shanty of a world affords. Our life is removed as a shepherd's tent, which was a hovel in which the shepherds watched their sheep. A shepherd who has to watch the sheep for a short time does not set to work to build a granite palace, or a brick house: he is satisfied with a reed hut, and does not complain of its scant space and slender strength. So let it be with us. Let us sing together —

"The way may be rough, but it cannot be long;
So let's smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."

Must life vanish away? We know it must. What then? That vanishing is the end of one life and the beginning of another. Dear friends, may I recommend you to remember that death is the end of this life? Do not leave this life to be travelled out at the end. I would like to have a well-hemmed life, with a finish about it. I would like to have my life enclosed with a ring-fence of completeness. Too many leave life's business in such a way that they leave endless trouble for their families: lawyers devour their substance, and their children are impoverished. See that your will is made, your debts paid, your charities distributed, and all your affairs are arranged. Set your house in order: it is your duty as a citizen; it is your higher duty as a Christian. Do all that you would like to have done if you knew you would die to-morrow. I like Mr. Whitefield's order; for he could not go to bed comfortably if his gloves were not in his hat ready for the morning. He felt that he could not tell when he would be called away; but he wished to have everything in its place whenever the summons should come.

Must this life vanish away? Then recollect it is the beginning of another. The life present melts into the life to come. What kind of life will that other be? Do you not think that if it is to be a glorious life it ought to commence here? Who would like to enter heaven, could it be possible, and feel compelled to say, "I cannot join in the music, for I do not know the tune; I cannot take up the hymn, for I know nothing of the song; I cannot glorify God, for I never did so while below. I cannot adore the Lamb, for I never trusted in him while I was on earth"? You must learn the music here, or you will never sing in the choirs of heaven. Oh, that this might arouse some of you! By the memory that this life must vanish away may you be led to seek that eternal life which will abide in its excellency world without end.

And is death quite sure to come to me? Then, as I cannot avoid it, let me face it. If there were a way of avoiding it, I might postpone all consideration of it; but since I must meet it, let me know what I am at; let me get ready for the inevitable, may be it will become desirable. The thought of death will be one of two things to us: it will be a ghost to haunt us if we remain out of Christ, unreconciled to God, and unrenewed in heart. To Godless and Christless persons death will be the king of terrors in prospect and in reality. Ungodly men cannot bear to think of being called away. This morning they feel very uncomfortable while I am treating upon this troublesome subject. I hope they will not soon recover their composure, but will remain uncomfortable till they yield to divine love, and trust in the living Saviour. Death is an awful thing to those who have their all in this world. If they could but live here for ever, they would be at peace; but it cannot be so. God will not give men an immortality in this life to spend in disregarding him. They must die. They may put Christ far from them, but they cannot put death far from them; they may avoid the Cross, but they cannot avoid the grave. The ungodly man frowns upon death because death frowns upon him. Death is the skeleton in his closet; it is the spectre at the foot of his bed; it is the canker of his fairest joy. I would not like to be in such a position. Count me down all the red gold that could buy this round world, yet would I not accept it if I must live in fear of death.

But death will become another thing to you if you are renewed in heart. To the Christian it is an angel beckoning him onward and upward. It were not worth while to live on earth if this life were not to be crowned by death: I mean by leaving this world to go unto the Father. It is the supreme delight of the man who runs the race that is set before him that that course concludes with the winning-post, and so comes to an end. We are not of those who voyage the sea of this life for the sake of it: we ask not for ever to sail over this rough ocean, we long for land. It is our delight to think of the port ahead, our joy to see the snow-white cliffs of our heavenly Albion. We do not desire to live here always. Why should we? Banished from our God, liable to sin, subject to temptation, vexed with infirmities, struggling with corruptions, O Lord, what wait we for?

"Welcome, sweet hour of full discharge
That sets my longing soul at large,
Takes off my chains, breaks up my cell,
And gives me with my God to dwell!"

Believers have everything to gain by dying. "To die is gain." We shall lose nothing which will be a loss to us. If one should take from us a jewel, but should give us another a thousand times its value, we should not regret the exchange. We lose this life, let it be such a jewel as you like, but we win the life to come, which is infinitely more precious. Beloved, instead of fearing death, we would be willing rather to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Why should we be unwilling to be glorified? Our departing day is our marriage-day. Oh, that the bells would ring it in! It is our home-coming from the school where we have been in training here below. Why are the minutes so slow, the years so long? Let the holidays, the holy days, come soon, when we shall be at home in the Father's house! "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," but it very soon will appear, and it will be no mere appearing — it will be real joy and lasting pleasure, solid, substantial, eternal, like the God who has prepared it for us from of old. It is a blessed thing to be able to go through the world thanking God for

this life, but blessing him yet more that it will land us at his right hand. Death is thus stripped of all dread; the curse is turned into a blessing. At the thought of it I feel ready to join in that rough but sweet verse —

"Since Jesus is mine, I'll not fear undressing,
But gladly put off those garments of clay;
To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing,
Since Jesus to glory through death led the way."

God grant us so to live and die that we may live to die no more, for Christ's sake. Amen.

A SAVIOUR BORN . . .

*Christians, awake! Salute the happy morn
Whereon the Saviour of the world was born;
Rise to adore the mystery of love,
Which hosts of angels chanted from above;
With them the joyful tidings first begun
Of God incarnate and the Virgin's Son.*

*Then to the watchful shepherds it was told,
Who heard the angelic herald's voice, "Behold,
I bring good tidings of a Saviour's birth
To you and all the nations upon earth;
This day hath God fulfilled His promised word;
This day is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord."*

*He spake; and straightway the celestial choir
In hymns of joy, unknown before, conspire;
The praises of redeeming love they sang,
And heaven's whole orb with hallelujahs rang;
God's highest glory was their anthem still,
Peace upon earth, and unto men good will.*

*To Bethlehem straight the enlightened shepherds ran,
To see the wonder God had wrought for man,
And found, with Joseph and the blessed Maid,
Her Son, the Saviour, in a manger laid;
They to their flocks, still praising God, return
And their glad hearts within their bosoms burn.*

*Like Mary, let us ponder in our mind
God's wondrous love in saving lost mankind;
Trace we the Babe, Who has retrieved our loss,
From His poor manger to His bitter cross;
Tread in His steps, assisted by His grace,
Till man's first heavenly state again takes place.*

*Then may we hope, the angelic hosts among,
To sing, redeemed, a glad triumphal song;
He that was born upon this joyful day
Around us all His glory shall display;
Saved by His love incessant we shall sing,
Eternal praise to heaven's Almighty King.*

—J. BYROM.

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By Rev. Dinsdale T. Young, D.D.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

(Here is a Christmas sermon by one of the great preachers of London, England, who died a few years ago. Dr. Young exercised a ministry that was much blessed of God as he unfolded the riches of Divine love and Grace at the Central Hall, Westminster.)

"BORN THIS DAY!" Is there anything remarkable in that? Every day someone is born. But if these words are true, then it is one of the most remarkable things that ever happened; and about the truth of these words, thank God, there is no doubt. "Born this day." Who? Listen. "A Saviour!" If that is true, and there are a thousand experimental reasons for believing it, then it is the grandest news the universe ever heard proclaimed, and it is of inexhaustible interest to us all. Yes, a Saviour was born this day. The world needs a Saviour, and you and I need a Saviour; and that great necessity has been met in Christ.

It was a *marvellous* birth. Wonders cluster about it. Not all the novels that have ever been written contain such surprising marvels as are contained in this old, old story. Remember, too, it was a *prophesied* birth. Christ was "the Saviour promised long," and He was not only promised, but vividly predicted. Was there ever a birth that was promised so long, and predicted so vividly? We should study prophecy more than we do. And, mark you, this prophecy is one of the greatest arguments for the inspiration of the Bible.

It was a *miraculous* birth. I say that emphatically. There are some people who maintain that they cannot accept the Bible story of the Virgin Birth. But the more I study it, the more I feel it to be philosophically justifiable. Can you think of God being born into the world apart from a miraculous birth? I accept the Virgin Birth, and its miraculous element, wholeheartedly. Furthermore, I submit this—that no one has a right to reject it if it is in the Bible. Who am I that I should be selective in reading the Word of God? It is *all* God's Book, and those who choose to reject certain portions of it do so at their peril. Let me point out to you, further, that this miraculous birth was declared from heaven. The angel hosts burst the mystic barriers of heaven, and came forth to declare it. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men." What a sentence that is! My dear old friend, Peter Mackenzie used to say: "The Lord never had such a work to keep the angels in heaven as He had when Jesus was born." I can well believe that if ever the angels got beyond control, it was then. They all wanted to come down to earth to see the wonderful sight of the Incarnation. Yes, heaven proclaimed Christ's birth.

One would have thought that when heaven itself displayed such an interest in His birth, that He would have been born amid corresponding earthly splendours. But was there ever a greater contrast! "There was no room for Him in the inn!" The Saviour Who was "born this day" was born in great humility. I wonder what the inn-keeper thought afterwards when he discovered Who the Babe was? I would give a good deal to know how he felt. He was laid in a manger. Think of it! The Lord of glory had His lowly cradle among the beasts. Oh, the wonder of His birth! But I will tell you something that is more wonderful still.

It is more wonderful still that He should have been born at all. There must have been some reason for it. What was the reason? That He might be our Saviour. That He might be the Saviour of the world.

I want to point out, further, that it was a *beneficent* birth. Who was it who was born this day? A *Saviour*. Mark the word. It is the first time we find it in the New Testament. Oh, how greatly men needed a Saviour! You say, How can I know that He was so greatly needed? Here is the answer—look into your own heart, and I will look into mine. We are sinners; and there is, for each one of us, death to be faced, and the Judgment Seat. Oh, how greatly we need a Saviour! And if He was so greatly needed, was not Christ also greatly qualified to be our Saviour? I should think He was. John Bunyan says: "He is such a suitable Saviour," and I am sure we can all say "Amen" to that. What pardon, and peace, and joy, and renewal, He brings to the penitent soul! And what power from on high He brings, enabling the redeemed ones to achieve all that is good, and true, and beautiful! What a Saviour it was Who was "born this day."

But read on. It describes Him as "a Saviour which is Christ the Lord." It is a magnificent description. He is the anointed One, anointed to be a Saviour, anointed by God the Father, and by the Holy Spirit. He is "Christ the Lord." I venture to say that that word "Lord" has the same meaning as the word "Jehovah" in the Old Testament. It was the most wonderful miracle of history that Jehovah should be born into this world as a little Babe. "Unto you is born this day a Saviour which is Christ the Lord." That little phrase, "unto you" is very sweet. It was said, first of all, to the shepherds, and then to the Jews, and then to all people everywhere. For notice what it says in the 10th verse: "Fear not," said the angel to the shepherds "for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to *all* people." Mark that word "*all*". There is nothing narrow about the Christian religion. He is a Saviour for all. Let that thought ring like a merry bell in your soul. Oh, it is sweet reading! It was, indeed, a beneficent birth. Never did anything so wonderful happen to the human race. Never was there such blessedness made available for man as this.

It was also a *gladdening* birth. We want something to gladden us in these days. Life is trying for us all, and even the young people have their dark hours. I venture to say that the most glorious fountain of gladness that ever gushed forth was opened when Christ our Saviour was born. You remember that the angels bade the shepherds not to fear. You need not fear anything that comes to you if you have this Saviour. He is Christ the Lord; He is Jehovah. Is there anything too hard for Him? Is the Lord's arm shortened? Never! You have the grandest guarantee against fear in Him Who was born this day. Notice, further, that there is "great joy" in this good news. Matthew Henry translates it: "I evangelize you with great joy." Yes, you are an heir of great joy; and how great it is! It is a joy that comes

to all people; it is a universal joy. The One Who was born this day brings joy wherever He comes. I love to think of the multitudes all over the world who find great joy in Him, people of different races, and temperaments, and living in all kinds of environments. No wonder that, with such a Saviour, we should "feel like singing all the time", yes, and singing, even when there are tears in our eyes because of sorrow and anxiety.

Is not this also an *instructive* birth? How it glorified God! God was never so glorified as He was in the birth of Christ. "Glory be to God on high" sang the angels, "and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." Oh, how the Father must have rejoiced in that wonderful birth! And it rejoiced all heaven. We have already seen how jubilant the heavenly hosts were on the Lord's birthday. What a solid joy it gave to men! This birth of Christ imparts salva-

tion to all who will accept it; and there we find the origin of true joy. Take that joy out of life, and for many of us life would not be worth living. Heaven met our deep necessity in the birth of Jesus. In that birth is to be found our only hope; for that birth foreshadowed His atoning death, and those resources that made that atoning death for ever avail. Tennyson says: "When Jesus was born, hope was born" — and he was right. What hope in Him we have of pardon, of conquered death, and of being "openly acquitted at the Judgment Seat" as one has put it. What hope we have of life that will go on through all the glories of eternity! Yes. He was "born to give us second birth;" He was born "that man no more may die". He was born that we might carry the brightness of that hope everywhere. Blessed birth! Thanks be unto God for evermore.

—*The Evangelical Christian*, 1949

Miracle Upon Miracle

By Rev. W. J. Grier, B.A.

AFTER the feeding of the five thousand with the five bread-cakes and the two little fishes, the Lord immediately sent the disciples away. He hurried them on board ship to cross the sea. He did not wish them to be infected with the carnal notions of the multitude who would have taken Him by force to make Him a king. Then when He had dismissed the crowd; He went up into the mountains to pray.

At His bidding the disciples were out in the sea. A strong wind sprang up, beating down upon them — probably from the North or North-West. They had perhaps intended to keep close to the shore on the five-mile stretch (or thereabouts) from Bethsaida Julias, in the vicinity of which the multitude was fed, to Bethsaida of Galilee near Capernaum. They were harassed and distressed by the boisterous wind, and though they toiled for hours they covered only three or four miles. Moreover, as they were driven out into the midst of the sea, they were still far from their destination.

From His place of prayer on the mount Jesus saw them in their distress, and came to them walking on the waves of the raging sea. He drew near to the ship. They could see Him as they sat at the oars with their backs to their destination and facing in the direction from which they came. He would have passed by them. But as the two men on the Emmaus road found later, He was willing to come and abide with them. It seemed to them that it was an apparition which thus trod the waves, and they shrieked with fear. Immediately He called: "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Then Peter said: "Lord if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the waters." And He said, "Come." And Peter walked upon the waters. But when he saw the fierceness of the storm, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried, "Lord, save me." Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, saying, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" When they had gone up into the boat, the wind ceased, and immediately the ship was at the land whither they were going. The disciples worshipped Him, saying, "Of a truth Thou art the Son of God" (Matt. 14:33). A little later Peter made a similar confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). While men were saying that He was John the Baptist or one of the prophets, Peter had come to share Christ's own estimate of Himself — that He was a divine person come down to earth. When

Peter made this great confession, Jesus attributed it to a special revelation from God ("flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father"). We are not to think that this special revelation had come to Peter just then; it was rather a revelation given in the entire ministry of Jesus.

They had been afraid when Jesus came walking upon the sea. Why did they not immediately realize that He who had just fed thousands was coming to their aid? Mark tells us that it was because their hearts were hardened — they had not understood the lesson of the multiplication of the loaves. Now there is a fuller realization of His glory — "Thou art the Son of God." There is often an "ebb and flow" of faith with His disciples still.

Christ here appears as

I. *The Son of God Who comes to relieve and cheer His distressed disciples.*

Seeing them toiling, He came to them upon the waves. When they cried out in terror, He immediately spoke to reassure them: "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." When one of these same disciples was imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos, the exalted Christ gave him a cheering vision of Himself in the midst of His church, and when he was almost overwhelmed by the sight, laid His right hand upon him, and said, "Fear not; I am the first and the last." The risen Saviour at God's right hand is the same gracious Saviour as when He was here on earth. He has given us the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway." He is with us, as John Trapp put it, "to protect us, to direct us, to comfort us, to carry on the work of grace in us, and in the end to crown us with immortality and glory."

II. *The Son of God who comes to succour His weak disciples.*

He caused Peter to walk on the waves — this was a second miracle. But Peter's eyes were on the violence of the tempest. His faith failed and he was beginning to sink. The Lord immediately stretched forth His hand to him. He is very gracious to weak disciples. When their faith falters, He does not fail.

One of the many striking portraits in the "Pilgrim's Progress" is that of Mr. Fearing. Old Honest described him as "a man who had the root of the matter in him, but one of

the most troublesome pilgrims I met with in all my days." Greatheart the guide said of him that "he was dejected at every difficulty and stumbled at every straw that anybody cast in his way." He lay long at the wicket gate and at the door of Interpreter's house, not daring to go in. At the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Greatheart said, "I thought I should have lost my man." At the river of death he was "in a heavy case," for, said he, "I shall be drowned for ever, and never see that face with comfort I have come so many miles to see." But "the water of that river," said Greatheart, "was lower at this time than ever I saw it in all my life; so that he went over not much above wet-shod" and was triumphant at last. The Lord "carried it wonderful lovingly to him." It is the Lord's blessed "use and wont" with His own to "look upon them and be merciful to them" (Ps. 119:132).

III. *The Son of God who comes to calm the raging storm.*

When they were going up into the boat, the wind ceased and the sea became calm. This was a third miracle. As the Psalmist said:

The storm is changed into a calm
At His command and will;
So that the waves which raged before
Now quiet are and still.

He does not always intervene at once. He suffered them to toil in rowing from the time when darkness fell till the fourth watch of the night — that is, till after three o'clock in the morning. He laid upon Abraham one of the hardest trials ever laid upon mortal man — the sacrifice of Isaac. Yet it was not till the last moment — when the knife was uplifted to slay his son — that God intervened. It is often in our extremity that He comes to us; but He does come.

He comes to storm-tossed souls and gives peace. Luther was troubled day and night, till it was given him to see that in the gospel there is revealed the righteousness which avails with God, even the righteousness of the Redeemer. Immediately he felt as if he were born anew, and it was as if the door of Paradise was thrown wide open to him. The storm was changed into a calm.

As a soldier of Christ, Luther had still to face storms. When he appeared at the Diet of Worms and first stood in that august assembly, his voice seemed to fail him and men thought his spirit was broken at last. He was asked whether he stood by what he had written or whether he would recant, and he begged for time to consider his answer. That evening and night was a time of conflict and prayer. But when the morning broke, he was in a great calm. That day at the close of a long address he declared: "I can do nothing else; here I stand; so help me God! Amen." His Lord had given him perfect calm in the crucial hour.

IV. *The Son of God who comes to bring His disciples to the desired haven.*

He wrought a fourth miracle. "Immediately the ship was at the land whither they were going" (John 6:21). The Saviour had triumphed over the waves and the winds. He now triumphs over space also, for the boat which had been in the midst of the sea is at the land all at once. This is wonderful, but it is only what we might expect from the presence of the Son of God. And He promised "greater works than these". Among such greater works was the transformation wrought in three thousand on the Day of Pentecost. The "new creation" in a single soul at the new birth is such a greater work. And among the greater works is there not also the transformation wrought in the soul

of the child of God at death, when it is made perfect in holiness and enters immediately into Glory? The Roman Church interposes a Purgatory or place of preparation after death. In his "Dream of Gerontius", Cardinal Newman pictures the soul as shrinking back at death from the presence of the Lord, and saying:

"Take me away, and in the lowest deep
There let me be,
And there in hope the lone night-watchers keep,
Told out for me.
There motionless and happy in my pain,
Lone, not forlorn,—
There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
Until the morn."

At the end of the hymn the soul is left on its "bed of sorrow," with "Masses on the earth, and prayers in heaven" to aid it "at the Throne of the Most Highest." The hope of the Christian is very far better than this. Christ who brought the little boat to the land "all at once" is able to bring the soul of the departing saint to heaven *all at once*. Charles Hodge when dying said to his weeping daughter: "Why should you grieve, daughter? To be absent from the body is to be with the Lord, to be with the Lord is to see the Lord, to see the Lord is to be like Him." So He brings them to their desired haven.

—The Irish Evangelical

For Younger Readers

CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

By Mrs. J. Perry Carter

"Mother, are you and Daddy going to keep your promise?" was Kenny's outburst as he and his twin sister entered the house. Kenny's voice dropped into a tone of defeat and dejection as he went on, "I think you have forgotten that you promised Genny and me a wheel after the war when things were plentiful again."

"We saw two wheels at Blake's as we came by from school," put in Genny. "They are just what we want."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mother, "Parents should never make such promises."

"Mother!" exclaimed Kenny, "do you mean that you would break your promise?"

"No, of course not," answered Mother, "but we thought you and Genny might change your minds since there are so many calls to help the hungry, starving people of the world."

A look of grave despair crept over the children's faces. "But Mother, your promise," they reminded.

Mother's face was serious now, "Daddy and I have been thinking of giving the price of all that we would spend on our gifts this Christmas, to the Relief Fund our pastor has been telling us about."

"Well, er, — we will have a dull Christmas this year," said Kenny sadly. "After all it is not our fault that people are starving and hungry."

Mother's face turned pale. "Think of the dull Christmas some of those people will have!" Mother was silent for a moment then she went on, "Yes, I am glad it is not our fault that people are cold and hungry, but now, since we know of their plight, it will be our fault if they die of starvation."

The children looked at each other with eyes of utter dis-

appointment. "Well, if it has to be," wearily answered Kenny.

"Tell you what!" Genny looked up with a new light in her eyes. "We can work for Uncle Harvey and Aunt Virginia, and buy our own wheels. I heard Uncle Harvey say that he needed a delivery boy badly during December, and Aunt Virginia said she couldn't keep help long enough to do her Christmas shopping. Why can't we help?"

"You have such bright ideas," said Kenny in disgust. "Don't you know that you have to have a wheel to deliver packages?" "Well, then maybe he needs a boy at the soda fountain, we can go see," answered Genny hotly. "Mother, may we?"

With that the children were off to see Uncle Harvey, the druggist, and Aunt Virginia. Uncle Harvey was sorely in need of a delivery boy, and there was a wheel ready outside, Aunt Virginia was delighted that Genny would be willing to keep the children while she was about her shopping.

Genny had fun helping the children play house, and Kenny was overjoyed at the chance of riding a wheel every day. Uncle Harvey paid him as well as an experienced delivery boy, and he was also pleased with his services.

One day something happened that made Kenny think. He had to deliver a package of medicine in Shanty Town. The houses there were mere shells. As he knocked at a tiny hovel a lean dark-eyed woman came to the door. She spoke in a foreign accent and asked Kenny to step inside while she went for the money to pay for the medicine. Kenny noticed her searching here and there for quite some time, and when she came with the money it was not enough to pay for the package. "I weel give ye the rest ob de mune later," she said. "Tony is so seek," she sobbed in broken tones.

Kenny felt a strange lump rise in his throat. He couldn't say a word. In his confusion he forgot to take the money she had in her hands. As he rode along he began to think of the cold, dingy little hovel where Tony, a boy about his age, was so ill. "I don't see how they live," he thought to himself. "If the people Mother is talking about are like that, — well, they need help."

Kenny told Uncle Harvey about Tony, and that night he told his mother about him too. "Mother, can't we help Tony and his family?" He was silent for a moment, "I have been thinking, and I want to give what I make to the Relief Fund too." Then he went on, "You and Daddy won't need to worry about the wheel either."

"Mother," added Genny, "Kenny is right. We can do without the wheels this year."

Mother's face lit up with a radiant smile. "That will make it easier for us, children. Your father and I have been upset over the whole matter."

Sunday morning before Christmas four happy people put their offering into the collection plate. It seemed as if the hymns were more joyful that morning and the sermon was not as long as usual. Every one they met was smiling and pleasant. What had happened? Oh, yes, Kenny knew and he said, "When you give to help others it makes you happy too."

"I think you're right," put in Genny.

"I know you are right," added Father.

Christmas morning arrived at last. The children were usually up early to see their gifts, but this morning the sting of their disappointment was so great that they were reluctant about getting up.

As they came slowly down the stairs they heard a noise

on the porch. "What is that noise?" shouted Genny as she ran and peeped out of the window.

Kenny hurried to the door. He opened it just in time to see Uncle Harvey and Aunt Virginia drive away. "Merry Christmas!" they shouted as they hurried away.

"What's this?" exclaimed Kenny as his eyes fell on two bright, new wheels on the porch.

"Oh!" Genny clasped her hands in glee, "Whose can they be?" she cried, she was so excited that she almost fell over the wheels. "Mother, Daddy, — come quick!"

"Look!" they shouted. "It says here on the tag 'To—Kenny and Genny.'"

A little envelope was tied to the tag. Kenny opened it. "Read it, Mother," he said, holding the envelope with trembling hands.

Mother began to read: "For two lovely children, who thought it more blessed to give than to receive. From Uncle Harvey and Aunt Virginia."

"Boy, oh boy!" shouted Kenny. "Aren't they beauties?"

"Just what we wanted," said Genny.

It was hard to get Kenny and Genny to the dinner table for a bountiful turkey dinner. When they were finally seated at the table Father spoke. "Instead of reading from the Bible today, let us quote from it."

When it came time for Kenny to recite his verse he said in a calm, serious voice; "There is a verse that I learned in Sunday school a long time ago that I really never believed until today."

"What is it son?" questioned father.

"Give and it shall be given unto you," he quickly responded.

"And you learned it in a way that you will never forget," added mother.

Outside soft lights were beginning to come on. Merry Christmas trees were sparkling from many windows. The snow was falling lazily to the ground, covering the earth with a soft, white mantle. All was peaceful and quiet when suddenly out of the silent night came a sound of angelic voices:

"Joy to the world; the Lord is come;

Let earth receive her King.—"

As the music died away in the distance, four happy faces were beaming with joy because they had helped the "earth to receive her King."

—The Western Recorder

Bible School Lesson Outline

Volume 22 First Quarter Lesson 1 January 5, 1958

OLIVE L. CLARK, Ph.D. (Tor.)

THE WORD OF GOD

Lesson Text: John 1:1-18.

Golden Text: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."
—John 1:14.

Introduction to the Gospel of John:

For the next six months the lessons will be taken from the Gospel of John. The fourth Gospel was written by "the beloved disciple" John, the son of Zebedee and Salome. Salome seems to have been the sister of Mary, the mother of our Lord (John 19:25), and if so, John would be related to the Saviour by the ties of flesh. At any rate, we know that John, together with his brother James, and Peter, was admitted into close fellowship with our Lord.

The Gospel according to John supplements the Gospels of

Matthew, Mark and Luke, being written with a definite object in view: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name" (John 20:30, 31).

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit this record was written, not primarily as a biography, but as a Gospel. Among the miracles of our Lord some were selected which would set forth His Deity in a unique way. They were signs, performed in the presence of His disciples, demonstrating that Jesus, the Man who lived a perfect human life before the people, was indeed Jehovah's Anointed, the Messiah; and that He was the Son of God. The testimony of the words and works herein described would bring conviction to the hearts of the readers.

Conviction concerning the Person of Christ should be accompanied by new life. The Gospel was written that men might believe, and that they might have everlasting life through faith in Christ. These two central truths should be kept in mind at all times. Luke sets forth the facts concerning the life of Christ, while John gives the interpretation of these facts.

I. Christ the Word of God: verses 1-9.

It is fitting that the opening verse of this Gospel, the aim of which is to portray Christ as the Son of God, should contain a strong affirmation of the truth of His essential Deity, and that the titles ascribed to Him should refer specifically to His Person and Work as the Son of God. He is called the Word of God (verses 1, 14), the Same (the self-existent, unchangeable, eternal One (v. 2; Psa. 102:27; Heb. 1:12; 13:8), the Light (v. 7; John 8:12), the only begotten Son (the unique One; v. 14, 18; John 3:16; Heb. 1:5, 6), Jesus Christ (v. 17; Matt. 1:1), the Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One; vv. 20, 41; John 4:25), the Lamb of God (vv. 29, 36; 1 Pet. 1:18-20), the Son of God (vv. 34, 49; John 5:19, 20), Jesus (Saviour; v. 37; Matt. 1:21), Rabbi (Teacher, Master; v. 38; John 20:16), Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (v. 45; Deut. 18:15; Luke 24:27), the King of Israel (v. 49; Matt. 27:11, 37) and the Son of man (v. 51; Matt. 26:2, 24).

Christ was and is the eternal Word of God. There never was a time when He was not with God, for He is God. As a word is the expression of a person's mind, and is the means by which his character, thoughts and will are made known, so Christ is the expression of His Father's mind, and through Christ we know the character, thoughts and will of God (John 14:9; Heb. 1:1).

God the Son was the Creator and is the Sustainer of the universe of men and things (Gen. 1:1; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2); God said, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26). Christ has life in Himself (John 5:26), and He also has the power to bestow life (John 4:10, 14; 17:2). Life may be symbolized by light, just as death is associated with darkness (John 8:12). Christ came as a light to those who were dwelling in darkness and the shadow of death (Isa. 9:2). The darkness was great, but the darkness could not overcome the light (possible rendering of the Greek word for "comprehended"; compare John 12:35, "lest darkness overtake you").

Christ sent His messenger, John the Baptist, to herald Christ's coming to the earth (Mal. 3:1; 4:5, 6). John, although a burning and shining light, a glowing testimony, yet he was a temporary, transitory light (John 3:23-30; 5:35); but Christ, the true Light of God, is eternal and perfect, shining upon every man who comes into the world (John 9:5; 12:46). All may find life by believing in Him (1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; 1 John 5:11-13). Light reveals (Psa. 36:9; John 3:19-21; Eph. 5:13), cheers (Esther 8:16), and glorifies (Acts 22:11; 2 Cor. 4:6); as for example, notice how the scenery is changed when the sun bursts forth. Sunlight is necessary to life and growth. Light is associated with power, as illustrated by electricity. Christ is the Light of the world.

II. Christ the Son of God: verses 10-18.

Christ came to earth as the Light of the world, but many preferred the darkness (John 3:21). He came to that which was His own, yet His own people received Him not. There was no room in the inn for the Son of God, when He came to earth as a little child. The world as a whole failed to recognize and acknowledge its Creator.

People are divided into two classes, according to their

attitude to Christ. It was the same when He was here upon the earth. Many rejected Him, but many welcomed Him. To those who believe upon Him and receive Him, He gives the right or the authority to become the children of God (Rom. 8:16; Gal. 3:16). They are "bairns" or "born ones" who have come into the family of God through spiritual birth (John 3:5).

The only begotten Son of God, the unique Son of God, died that He might open the way for sinful men to become the children of God. In order that He might become subject to death, it was necessary that He take upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh and enter by birth into the human race (Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:14). Christ was King, but He was born to die.

As the Word of God Incarnate, Christ tabernacled among men, living a perfect life, the characteristics of which were grace and truth. As Christ dwelt among us, He was full of grace and truth. Grace and truth, elsewhere described as mercy and righteousness, are the two great attributes of God which are most conspicuous in His redemptive work (Psa. 85:10; 89:2, 24). John marvelled at the manifestation upon earth of the glory of God (Luke 9:32; 2 Pet. 1:16; 1 John 1:1).

The Scriptures do not speak at length of the childhood of Christ, and as far as it is recorded, He was thirty years of age before He was publicly proclaimed as the Son of God. To John the Baptist was given the high honour of officially announcing the presence of Christ, and of giving testimony concerning Him.

He whose life was characterized by grace and truth bestowed grace upon His own. The Old Covenant rested upon the basis of obedience to the law, but the New Covenant availed for those who would believe in Christ (Rom. 4:16). The righteousness of God was revealed in the law, but His righteousness and also His love were revealed in Christ; Christ was God's complete and final revelation to man (Heb. 1:1, 2). In verse 18 some early manuscripts read, "the one who is God, only-begotten."

For Younger Scholars:

Emphasize the fact that the Lord Jesus was the son of Mary, but that His Father was God. But God was in heaven, and while the Lord Jesus was on earth, He needed some one to care for Him. Joseph of Nazareth was the one chosen to act as His earthly father, although Joseph was not really the father of Christ.

Describe Christ coming as the Light of the world. Illustrate the glory, the power, the life-giving qualities of light; for example, leaves covered over so that no light reaches them will become pale, and plants will die, if kept from the light. Turn off the electric light and comment on the change in the appearance of the room when the light comes on. Procure a copy of Holman Hunt's great picture, "The Light of the World," which represents Christ the Saviour, standing on the outside of our lives, knocking, seeking admission. But the handle of the door is on the inside, and the person inside who hears the Saviour calling him must open the door and ask the Saviour to come into his life (Rev. 3:20).

Daily Bible Readings

Dec. 30—The Word Acting in Creation	Gen. 1:1-27
Dec. 31—The Word Upholding the Universe	Col. 1:1-19
Jan. 1—The Word Revealing the Father	Heb. 1
Jan. 2—The Word—Fulness of the Godhead	Col. 2:1-13
Jan. 3—The Word—Redeeming Man	Gal. 4:1-7
Jan. 4—The Word Delivering Man	Heb. 2:9-18
Jan. 5—The Word Manifesting the Father	1 John 1

Suggested Hymns

Join all the glorious names.
Oh, could I speak!
Jesus, wondrous Saviour.
Jesus, the very thought of Thee.
All hail the power of Jesus' name!
I love to tell the story.

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THE SEMINARIAN

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