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MEDITATION

Rev. J. Greendyk

Rejoicing in Christ's Ascension

"O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph."

— Psalm 47:1

What really was Jesus Christ's ascension into heaven? Was it not His reception into the very courts of eternal bliss? Didn't it give evidence of the Father's eternal love for His Son?

Didn't it reveal the Father's purpose to convey to His church that His Son's work is accepted and therefore will have success in every age?

With examination of Christ's ascension in the New Testament, many proofs have been given to strengthen the believer's faith. (See Eph. 4:8-16; Heb. 4:14-16.) Proofs have been given to stir up spiritual joy as believers anticipate entrance into glory in the future. (See Luke 24:51-53; Acts 1:9-11.) However, a review of Old Testament doctrine regarding Christ's ascension also presents many encouraging and comforting truths for the church today. Let us look at several rich truths found in Psalm 47.

First, Christ's redeemed must rejoice and clap their hands because His kingdom provides deliverance from sin, Satan, and misery; it guarantees mercy, righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost, and eternal life to as many as He has purchased with His own blood. What encouragement and comfort! Every single child of the Lord shall be saved. Christ's work as ascended Lord shall be successful. Redemption is certain because Christ is Victor. Let us shout with the voice of triumph!

Second, believers may rejoice and shout with the voice of triumph because Christ as Victor possesses sovereign right and rule over all the world. Christ possesses power to gather a church to Himself from around the world. He has said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). How encouraging and comforting that Christ also exercises His loving rule and reigns in our hearts and lives, dear believers. This makes certain our salvation and growth in grace. This assures us of the overthrow of all our enemies within and without. The Lord assures us of this in Isaiah 54:17: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD." The exercise of His sovereign right and rule guarantees our keeping in this world and our entrance into glory. Jesus Christ as our forerunner entered before us, but shall come again so that where He is we shall be also. What a glorious day awaits us! We shall have full possession of Jesus Christ, the object of our love. Let us shout unto God with the voice of triumph!

Third, believers may rejoice and shout with the voice of triumph because Christ as Head over His people assures them of His constant care. Christ will exercise His power to provide for His church's welfare. This care flows from the very love Christ has for His church. Since He has loved us so much, do you think He will allow His church to live on the short side of the riches of His grace? Has He not said, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:9)? Let us clap our hands, dear children of God, let us "shout unto God with the voice of triumph." All our springs are in Him (Ps. 87:7).

Finally, believers, let us meditate on how intimate, enduring and eternal is Christ's union with us. Let us consider what Christ did to establish that union with us. Christ chose and loved us from eternity. He humbled Himself by assuming our human nature. He did this in order to pay the ransom price for all our sins with His own precious blood. He confronted, fought against, and overcame all His and our enemies in life and death. With His ascension into heaven as Victor for our sakes, He dwells in glory with our human nature. Christ is ever at the right hand of His Father keeping the covenant bond of love and intimacy lively, healthy, and strong as we travel through this waste-howling wilderness. We are, and shall ever be, "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5).

Let us clap our hands, dear children of God, and, "shout unto God with the voice of triumph." Our faith is settled on Christ. Our hope is anchored securely in Him. We may rest in Him. We may, in all our tribulations with uplifted heads expect our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, where He will make our mortal bodies like unto His glorious body, and take us unto Himself in eternity. ❖

Rev. J. Greendyk is pastor of the Heritage Reformed Church of Fort Macleod, Alberta.

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A.R. Cousins

Immanuel's Land

The Last Words of Samuel Rutherford

The sands of time are sinking,
The dawn of heaven breaks,
The summer morn I've sighed for,
The fair, sweet morn awakes:
Dark, dark hath been the midnight,
But dayspring is at hand,
  And glory, glory dwelleth
  In Immanuel's land.

Oh! well it is for ever,
Oh! well for evermore,
My nest hung in no forest
Of all this death-doomed shore:
Yea, let the vain world vanish,
As from the ship the strand,
  While glory, glory dwelleth
  In Immanuel's land.

There the Red Rose of Sharon
Unfolds its heartmost bloom,
And fills the air of Heaven
With ravishing perfume:
Oh! to behold its blossom,
While by its fragrance fann'd,
  Where glory, glory dwelleth
  In Immanuel's land.

The King there, in His beauty,
Without a veil, is seen:
It were a well-spent journey,
Though seven deaths lay between:
The Lamb, with His fair army,
Doth on Mount Zion stand,
  And glory, glory dwelleth
  In Immanuel's land.

Oh! Christ He is the fountain,
The deep sweet well of love!
The streams on earth I've tasted,
More deep I'll drink above:
There to an ocean fulness
His mercy doth expand,
  And glory, glory dwelleth
  In Immanuel's land.

Oft in my sea-beat prison
My Lord and I held tryst;
For Anwoth was not Heaven,
E'en preaching was not Christ:
But aye my murkiest storm-cloud
Was by a rainbow spann'd,
  Caught from the glory dwelling
  In Immanuel's land.

But that He built a Heaven
Of His surpassing love,
A little new Jerusalem,
Like to the one above:
"Lord take me o'er the water,"
Has been my loud demand;
  "Take me to love's own country,
  Unto Immanuel's land."

But flow'rs need night's cool darkness
The moonlight and the dew;
So Christ from one who loved Him
His shining oft withdrew:
And then for cause of absence
My troubled soul I scann'd,
  But glory, shadeless, shineth
  In Immanuel's land.

The little birds of Anwoth,
I used to count them blest;
Now beside happier altars
I go to build my nest:
O'er these there broods no silence,
No graves around them stand;
  For glory, deathless dwelleth
  In Immanuel's land.

Fair Anwoth, by the Solway,
To me thou still art dear!
E'en from the verge of Heaven,
I drop for thee a tear.
Oh! if one soul from Anwoth
Meet me at God's right hand,
  My Heaven will be two Heavens,
  In Immanuel's land.

I've wrestled on towards Heaven,
'Gainst storm, and wind, and tide.
Now, like a weary traveller
That leaneth on his guide,
Amid the shades of evening,
While sinks life's ling'ring sand,
  I hail the glory dawning
  From Immanuel's land.

Deep waters cross'd life's pathway,
The hedge of thorns was sharp;
Now these all lie behind me—
Oh for a well-tuned harp!
Oh! to join Hallelujah!
With yon triumphant band,
  Who sing, where glory dwelleth,
  In Immanuel's land.

With mercy and with judgment
My web of time He wove,
And aye the dews of sorrow
Were lustred with his love;
I'll bless the hand that guided,
I'll bless the heart that plann'd,
  When throned where glory dwelleth,
  In Immanuel's land.

Soon shall the cup of glory
Wash down earth's bitt'rest woes,
Soon shall the desert's briar
Break into Eden's rose;
The curse shall change to blessing—
The name on earth that's bann'd
  Be graven on the white stone
  In Immanuel's land.

Oh! I am my Beloved's,
And my Beloved is mine!
He brings a poor vile sinner
Into His "house of wine!"
I stand upon His merit,
I know no other stand,
  Not e'en where glory dwelleth,
  In Immanuel's land.

I shall sleep sound in Jesus,
Fill'd with His likeness rise,
To love and to adore Him,
To see Him with these eyes:
'Tween me and resurrection
But Paradise doth stand
  Then, then for glory dwelling
  In Immanuel's land.

The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear bridegroom's face,
I will not gaze at glory,
But on my King of Grace—
Not at the crown He gifteth,
But on His pierced hand;
  The lamb is all the glory
  Of Immanuel's land.

I've borne scorn and hatred,
I've borne wrong and shame,
Earth's proud ones have reproach'd me
For Christ's thrice-blessed name;
Where God's seals set the fairest,
They've stampt their foulest brand;
  But judgment shines like noon-day
  In Immanuel's land.

They've summoned me before them
But there I may not come,
My Lord says "Come up hither,"
My Lord says "Welcome home!"
My kingly King, at His white throne,
My presence doth command,
  Where glory, glory dwelleth
  In Immanuel's land.

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Rev. J. Sin

Guidance

We live in a world where many seek help and worldly counsel from consultants and "experts" (including geomancers) concerning business, employment, and financial planning.

Ancient cultures had "spiritual consultants" in bomohs, witch doctors, spiritists, and mediums. Some cultures still have them and, ironically, we now have a new generation of professionals called "church consultants."

But Christians have an omniscient heavenly Father who is ever ready to help and advise us when we call upon Him.

Understanding

In Psalm 25:4, the Psalmist expressed a universal sentiment of all sincere Christians: "Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths."

We are in need of divine guidance and direction every day. Life presents us with so many problems, options, and influences that Christians are often at a loss to know what to do.

A young sister once asked me if it was God's will for her to go to a particular country for studies. Many seek counsel concerning education, career options, boy-girl relationships, switching jobs, migration, moving house, or choosing a school for their children.

Others experience distress after doing something that is not God's will. I knew someone who emigrated, only to return six months later acknowledging that it was not the will of God for his family.

Another dropped out of an educational course for the sake of his family. These can be disturbing events in the life of a confused believer.

Paul said: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:15-17).

But how can we discover the will of God for our lives?

Motives

Before we go into details, we must understand that if we are His children, God is ever with us, directing and leading our every step (Ps. 32:8). The Holy Spirit is our Guide and Comforter. He will show us all things concerning Christ (John 16:14).

However, there is a vast difference between sincerely seeking heavenly advice and pushing for heaven's endorsement when we have already made up our own mind. We must not deceive ourselves, for God is not mocked (Gal. 6:7-9).

There is a vast difference between sincerely seeking heavenly advice and pushing for heaven's endorsement when we have already made up our own mind.

A sincere and fervent seeker will find God's wonderful guidance in his life and be blessed. But this does not apply to the casual, insincere seeker.

So, first check your motives before the Lord! Are you really prepared to submit to the will of God when He shows it to you?

Daily Communion

Certain things are needful if we are to know God's will. The first is a close personal relationship with God. Are you in daily close communion with God, constantly reading the Word and praying?

If you are, there is a sense in which you will know God's will, as a child knows the desires of his father. Should I go to a pub or disco; watch this movie or video; or join in this unedifying conversation?

The answers will be obvious if we are walking with our God.

When I was staying in Jalan Bahagia in the 1970s, I used to buy breakfast for my parents every morning. I could surmise correctly what they wanted even before asking them. Why? Because we were very close.

When you are close to God, you will be sensitive to His will for your life.

Don't Ask

Secondly, there are certain things you do not need to ask because God has already revealed His will in His Word. You need to read the Scriptures carefully and follow what they say.

For example, two things are definitely God's will for our lives. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication."

Again, 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says: "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Any action or decision that is consistent with scriptural injunctions is God's will.

For example, questions like: "Is it God's will for me to go to the

church prayer meeting?" or "Should I attend worship on the Lord's Day?" are questions one does not ask at all!

Why? Because they are among God's appointed means for our sanctification. To worship, give thanks, and pray are enjoined in Scripture.

There was an Old Testament prophet whom the Lord told not to eat with anyone during his mission. But when an old prophet urged him to eat, he did so. He was later killed by a lion (1 Kings 13:11-24).

He had been shown the expressed will of God but rebelled against it. Obedience is the key here, not incessant questioning of God.

Similarly, there is no point in asking: "Is it God's will for me to marry this non-believer?" We already have the answer in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

The matters that exercise us are often questions of obedience, not questions of guidance at all.

Fervent Prayer

Thirdly, when seeking guidance we should make it a matter of fervent prayer. Have you been praying importunately to the Lord in seeking His will (John 14:14)? Do you cry out to Him daily in persevering prayer?

If so, the Lord will surely answer and guide you. Read John 16:24: "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." And again Jeremiah 33:3: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

God rewards those who seek Him diligently with a sincere and faithful heart (Heb. 11:6).

When Abraham's servant was seeking a spouse for his master's son, he prayed. God answered his prayer and guided him to Rebekah (Gen. 24:14). Our Lord says: "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

No one will be turned away in the matter of guidance and counsel who seeks God's face patiently in private intercession.

Remember, however, that the answer may be direct (God gives us what we request); different (He answers our need in some other way); delayed (He makes us wait for the answer); or even denied (He says "no").

Fellowship

Fourthly, have you consulted or spoken to someone who is a servant of God, who fears Him, and who knows you fairly well? Have you discussed the matter with your pastor or elder or a God-fearing friend?

Did you get the opinion of your parents, especially if they are believers who love the Lord? God uses godly people to help others along the way.

Jehoshaphat asked Micaiah, God's servant (2 Chron. 18:7-17); Samuel asked Eli when he was called by the Lord (1 Sam. 3:9). Do not be afraid to ask for spiritual counsel and words of advice.

Man's words are not infallible. For example, Nathan's initial advice to David on building a temple was wrong and had to be countermanded by God (1 Chron. 17:2-4). But on balance, the advice of others is useful especially when it is confirmed by other factors mentioned here.

Providence

Fifthly, we need to consider the prevailing circumstances. God often uses events in our lives, providentially, to reveal His will. You plan to serve the Lord in a certain way but family or financial circumstances hinder you. What do you do?

Wait on the Lord for the right timing. If the circumstances persist, recognize the sovereignty of God in the providence He sends. If one door closes, another will open.

However, we must be careful not to give circumstances undue emphasis. Favorable circumstances do not always signify God's will, nor unfavorable circumstances God's prohibition.

When Jonah ran away from God he found a ship conveniently awaiting him at Joppa (Jonah 1:3). But that did not mean he was doing God's will in defying His clear and definite command!

Other considerations are equally important and we should look for a concurrence of several such factors as indicative of God's will.

Conviction

Finally, what about the inner conviction and condition of your heart? Do you experience peace and serenity when you have made a particular decision? God frequently ministers grace and comfort to our hearts directly.

Some years ago, a brother called me concerning a job offer he had received, with attractive salary and prospects. He passed the interview and was about to make the career change involved, but he had no peace in his heart.

The circumstances were favorable, but there was one complication—he had no peace or conviction about the matter. That settled it finally for him.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). A heart of peace, joy, and contentment in the Lord, and time to serve God, are more valuable than a quantum jump in salary and perks.

Put God first, and He will surely bless you (Matt. 6:33; Col. 3:2). Remember Matthew 6:21: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Whoever honors God, God will honor him (1 Sam. 2:30). ❖

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BOOK TALK

Dr. J.R. Beeke/R. Pederson

Zeal

The following titles are recently published or reprinted. The first price is retail, and the second, the discounted price. p = paperback.

The Zealous Christian

by Christopher Love

Christopher Love was born in Cardiff, Wales, in 1618. He was admitted at New Inn Hall, Oxford, in 1635, and later earned his Bachelor's Degree, after which he was forced to leave Oxford for refusing to subscribe to the canons of Archbishop Laud, a fierce persecutor of the Puritans. Love moved to London, became the domestic chaplain to the sheriff, and took a bold stand against the errors of the Book of Common Prayer and the religious tyranny of the times. He was cast into prison on account of an aggressive sermon at Newcastle, and persecuted in various ways. At the outbreak of the Civil War he was made preacher to the garrison of Windsor Castle, where he gave great offense to the prelatical party by his pointed sermons. He was one of the first to receive presbyterial ordination under the new organization in 1644, at Aldermanbury, London. He became pastor of St. Laurence Jewry in London, where he was esteemed for the eloquence and vigor of his preaching.

Love was a strong Presbyterian and a leader of the younger men of that party. In this way he (supposedly) became involved in a plot with the Presbyterians of Scotland to restore the monarchy under Charles II, but in order to break the opposition, the government imprisoned him on May 7, 1651. After a rigorous trial, he was condemned and beheaded on Tower Hill on August 22, 1651. The Presbyterian party was incensed at this travesty, having interceded for his life in vain; and considered Love as a hero and martyr. Thomas Manton, a fellow Presbyterian and Love's good friend, preached Love's funeral sermon to an immense and grieving audience. He passed from this world in his thirty-third year, leaving behind a wife and three children (the last of which was born two weeks after Love's execution). His works were published by the leading Presbyterians of London in the 1650s. For a further account of Love's life, see Don Kistler's *A Spectacle Unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love* ($23.95/13.75); the title "A Spectacle Unto God," is taken from Love's trial in which he responded to the charges of the clerk: "I am this day made a spectacle to God, Angels, and men, and singled out from among my brethren to be the object of some men's indignation and insultation."

Many works of Christopher Love have been recently reprinted and are available from Reformation Heritage Books; they have all been re-typeset in modern English. The first volume reprinted was *The Works of Christopher Love, Volume 1* ($40.00/23.50), in 1995, and contains "The Combat Between the Flesh and the Spirit," "Heaven's Glory," and "Hell's Terror." The second volume reprinted, in 1997, was *Grace: The Truth, Growth, and Different Degrees* ($22.95/14.00), comprising 15 sermons on grace, taken from 1 Kings 14:13, "Because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel." The third volume, in 1998, *The Mortified Christian* ($16.95/10.00), contains two scarce works of Love: "A Treatise on the Mortification of Sin," and "The Right Hearing of Sermons." The fourth volume, in 1998, was *A Treatise of Effectual Calling and Election* ($25.00/15.00), which carefully handles the doctrine of the saint's assurance. In 2000, Soli Deo Gloria Publications printed *Preacher of God's Word* ($19.95/12.00), which contains ten sermons on various subjects. *The Dejected Soul's Cure* ($27.95/17.00) appeared in 2001, and deals primarily with the believer's melancholy, or depression, in this life. *A Treatise of Angels*, on Hebrews 1:14, was also bound with this title.

Most recently reprinted is *The Zealous Christian*, first published in 1653. It contains thirteen sermons on how the Christian must deal with sin and fight in prayer. The work is divided into two parts: "Taking Heaven by Holy Violence in Wrestling," an exposition of Matthew 11:12 ("And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force") and "Holding Communion with God in Importunate Prayer," which considers the implications of Luke 11:8 ("I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will give unto him as many as he needeth") for the zealous Christian.

In this work, Love contends that "violence," that is, persistence, is needed in dealing with sin and that zealous, fervent prayer is the best weapon for this holy violence. Love wrote, "The longer you continue in sin, the longer will God keep you under suspension; and it will be long before He vouchsafes the comforts of His Spirit. He will fill you with indignation and horror. Though great sins cannot lay waste the grace of God, yet they may lay waste the peace of conscience. Though they will not put you into a state of ejection, they will bring you into a state of dejection. If you are not cast off, yet you shall be cast down. Therefore, take heed you do not abuse this precious doctrine." $21.95/15.00

King, David T., and **William Webster**, editors. *Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith. Vol. III.* $20.00/18.00p

The principle of *sola Scriptura* (the teaching that Scripture is materially and formally sufficient and the ultimate authority for the church) was the formal principle of the Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that this principle is illegitimate because it claims that it is unhistorical. By this the Roman Church means that *sola Scriptura* is a theological novelty in that it supposedly has no support in the teaching of the early church. Roman apologists charge that the teaching on Scripture promoted by the Reformers introduced a false dichotomy between the church and Scripture which elevated Scripture to a place of authority unheard of in the early church. Roman Catholicism insists that the early church fathers, while endorsing the full inspiration of the Old and New Testaments, did not believe in *sola Scriptura.*

This volume is a compilation of the teaching of the church fathers on the primacy, sufficiency, and ultimate authority of Scripture. It contains the most extensive documentation of the patristic understanding of Scripture in the English language in one volume. The documentation provided reveals the church fathers' belief in the material and formal sufficiency of Scripture. By material sufficiency is meant that all that is necessary to be believed for faith and morals is revealed in Scripture. Formal sufficiency means that all that is necessary for faith and morals is clearly revealed in Scripture, so that an individual, by the enablement of the Holy Spirit, can understand the essentials of salvation and the Christian life. Page after page gives eloquent testimony to the supreme authority that Scripture held in the life of the early church and serves as a needed corrective to Rome's misrepresentation of the church fathers and her denigration of the sufficiency and final authority of Scripture.

Ryle, J. C. *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century.* $29.95/17.50

First published in 1868, Ryle chronicles the lives of 17th century preachers with great acumen. After two chapters on the moral and religious climate of England, Ryle writes the histories of George Whitefield, John Wesley, William Grimshaw, William Romaine, Daniel Rowlands, John Berridge, Henry Venn, Walker of Truro, James Hervey, Augustus Toplady, and John Fletcher. This volume was a classic in the 19th century, when first written.

Ryle, J. C. *The Christian Race and Other Sermons.* $29.95/17.50

Shortly after Ryle resigned his bishopric, and just three months before his death, Archdeacon Madden gathered twenty-four sermons and published them under the title *The Christian Race*, as a tribute to Ryle's sixty-year ministry. The current reprint is (to our knowledge) the book's second printing since it appeared in 1900. The sermons embody Ryle's maxim, "If you want to heat a church, put a stove in the pulpit."

Ryle elsewhere wrote, "I see in my mind's eye the business of that awful day—the great white throne, the assembled millions, the open books, the heavens departing as a scroll, the earth and the works that are therein melting with fervent heat; I hear the archangel's trump summoning the dead from north and south and east and west, and I tremble to think how those will fare who have received the grace of God in vain."

Shenton, Tim. *Christmas Evans: The Life and Times of the One-Eyed Preacher of Wales.* $29.95/22.00

Christmas Evans (1766-1838), was a famous Welsh Baptist preacher, presumably named "Christmas" because he was born on December 25. He has been acknowledged as one of the greatest preachers of his century. D. M. Lloyd-Jones called him "the great Christmas Evans, who, some would say, was the greatest preacher that the Baptists have ever had in Great Britain—certainly he and Spurgeon would be the two greatest." Yet little is known about the one-eyed preacher of Wales, and his works have been scarce on the used book market. To counteract this imbalance, Tim Shenton has written one of the most comprehensive biographies of Evans ever printed. Shenton provides fragments and excerpts from Evans's writings, and chronicles the latter's life and times in an extensively researched and inspiring biography.

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FROM OUR INHERITANCE

Rev. J. Willison

Sanctifying the Lord's Day (2)

The following excerpts are taken from Willison's book, *A Treatise Concerning the Sanctification of the Lord's Day* (1722).

Direction 2

Concerning the holy Duties requisite upon the Lord's Day

The duties necessary upon this day are either public, private, or secret.

I shall not meddle with the duties of public persons as such on the Sabbath, or what is specially incumbent upon magistrates or ministers upon this day, in their public stations, but shall insist only upon those duties required of all Christians in common.

Question 1. What are those public duties required of us upon the Lord's Day?

Answer. They are those which we are bound to perform in the public assemblies of God's people; and, indeed, the Sabbath is instituted chiefly for the solemn performance of the duties of God's worship, in the public meetings of His people; for the Lord hath a special delight therein: "He loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob"; and wherever two or three are gathered in His name, He will be in the midst of them. Why? It is in the assemblies of God's people for public worship that God receiveth the highest praises from us; and hence the Psalmist saith, "I will give thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise thee among much people. And in his temple doth every one speak of his glory" (Ps. 35:18; Ps. 29:9).

As in public worship God receiveth the highest praises, so there it is that He bestoweth the richest mercies: "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts; we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house" (Ps. 65:4). O what good things are contained in that word, the "goodness of thy house!" There is pardon, peace, love, grace, life, light, strength, comfort, etc. Now, the public duties of the Sabbath, recorded in Scripture, for which God's people ought to meet and assemble that day, are various; and particularly, they are to meet together for reading and expounding the Word of God; for preaching, hearing, praying, praising, partaking of the sacraments, collecting for the poor, etc., for all of which we may see (Lev. 23:3, Ps. 92; Isa. 66:23; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14, 15, 27, 44; 15:21; 16:13; 1 Cor. 16:12). But particularly,

1. Hearing the Word publicly read and preached with reverence and attention, is a principal duty on the Sabbath; nay, our life depends upon it (Deut. 32:46–47). It is the great means God hath appointed for the conversion of souls (Rom. 10:14, 17). Whatever men think of it, it is the powerful instrument of our salvation (Rom. 1:16). The waters of the sanctuary run only through the channels of the Word; the mines of grace are found only in those climates where the gospel-sun shines.

The Lord, if He pleased, could immediately, by His Spirit, break open sinners' hearts; but He hath determined to honor His Word in His work, as is plain in Lydia's case (Acts 16:9, 10, 14). Reading the Word and sermons at home is good, but hearing the Word preached is the ordinary means God hath appointed and promised to bless for conversion. And if this be slighted, or prove ineffectual, no other way can be contrived for it, as we are told in Luke 16:29, 31. So that though a glorified saint or angel should come down from heaven, and preach upon the beauty of Christ, and glory of heaven, in the most lively and demonstrative manner; yet, if a preached gospel do not persuade sinners, neither would that. Or, though a damned soul should come up from hell, and preach the evil of sin, and torments of hell, in the most moving manner; yet neither would that persuade, if the Word do it not. Why? The one is God's instituted means, the other not.

Let us then have a high esteem of God's ordinance, and embrace all occasions for attending it. "Be swift to hear" (James 1:19). Let none dare to count that mean, weak, or despicable, which the wise God hath instituted to save souls, "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). And how comes believing but by hearing? Reading good sermons (as one says) is like milk cold out of the dish, but preaching is like milk warm from the breast, which is far more nourishing to the child. Let us always, then, as "new-born babes, desire this milk, that we may both live and grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). ❖

John Willison (1680–1750), born near Stirling in Scotland, was converted at an early age and was educated for the ministry. In 1703, he was called to the parish at Brechin, north of Dundee. In 1718, he was called to fill the vacancy at South Church Dundee, where he labored for the rest of his life. After 47 years of ministry, Willison died on May 3, 1750. He is remembered as one of Scotland's brightest lights.

Corner *for* TEENS

The Prayer of Jabez or Evangelical Mantra (2)

Last time we have looked at an overview of the little book, *The Prayer of Jabez*. In this article I want to look at the conclusion of this book and in future articles examine various parts of the book. Wilkinson bases the conclusion of this book upon the words that follow Jabez' prayer in 1 Chronicles 4, "And God granted him that which he requested." He says, "I challenge you to make the Jabez prayer for blessing part of the daily fabric of your life." Then, he tells us just how to do that: Implement the following plan, begin the morning with this prayer, use a calendar to keep yourself on course, write out the Jabez prayer and tape it somewhere where you will be reminded of it constantly, reread the book once every week for the next month, seek out an accountability partner who will insure that you do the plan, keep a record of the changes you see in your life and those encounters you have with others which are directly related to praying this prayer, and start praying this prayer for your family, friends, and church. Immediately following this Wilkinson writes, "You can hang the Jabez prayer on the wall of every room in your house and nothing will happen. It's only what you believe will happen and therefore do next that will release God's power for you and bring about a life change." Then he concludes by giving impressive statistics about how his ministry has grown since he began to pray this prayer.

These few sentences show us the man-centered nature of this book. Jesus himself, who is our great prophet and teacher, never mentions this prayer. If, as Wilkinson asserts, this little prayer is of such power and value, why did Jesus allow Wilkinson to discover it some 2000 years after He was upon earth when He himself was asked the question by His disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray." He could have answered, "There in the Old Testament you will find this prayer; pray ye therefore after that manner." But no, the answer He gave His disciples certainly qualifies as the primary emphases we ought to maintain in prayer. Furthermore, did not Jesus warn His disciples to refrain from constant repetitions of prayer and multiplying of words? "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matt. 6:7-8). Yet this is just what Wilkinson teaches in this little book, which many have undiscerningly begun to follow.

Secondly, in the above quotations you can discern the thought that answered prayer is conditional and dependent upon our faith and action. Wilkinson implies that it will not be until we believe what we pray that it actually comes to pass and not until we begin to do these things will God release His power. It is as if God has all this power stored up for each of us, but it is not released until we do something, until we ask for it, until we pray this prayer of Jabez. I believe that the word of God teaches that, rather than relying upon our faith and actions, we could pray more expectantly if we would take up our cross and follow Him, praying, "Lord, not my will but Thine be done." At one point Wilkinson gives a personal anecdote about how he was going to miss his plane because of traffic congestion. He prayed, "Lord, please make my flight late so I can catch it," then found that when he got to the gate people were milling around waiting. The plane had been delayed. But what if another Jabez warrior was praying that this very flight would leave on time because that fit his desires, yet it was delayed. Does that mean that he didn't believe enough and do enough? I cannot believe that this coincides with the Scripture's teaching concerning the Spirit of prayer and supplication. Paul says, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26). I remind you what Wilkinson said in the first sentence of the book's preface, "I want to teach you how to pray a daring prayer that God always answers." I think it far better to learn of the meek and lowly One, who, when asked to teach us to pray, said, "After this manner therefore pray ye, Our Father which art in heaven... Thy will be done." Let our prayer be, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Rev. M. Kelderman is pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Burgessville, Ontario.