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A WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

and a warning against the deception in the last days
foretold by Christ

"Take heed that ye be not deceived"

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DELIVERANCE FROM THE LAW

In Paul's ministry we find him giving special attention to the fact that the law given to Moses was no longer to be kept after the death of Christ. To the Hebrews Paul taught of the new covenant through Christ saying:

“But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:” Hebrews 8:6-8

Paul is quoting the prophecy of Jeremiah in his words to the Hebrews, for he spake the same message to Israel, foretelling of the coming of Christ and the new covenant to be established through His death:

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will wake a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Jeremiah 31:31-33

In the coming of the Lord Jesus, these words were partially fulfilled and will be totally complete at His second coming when all the world will be taught of Him as the gospel goes forth among all the nations.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians with the same thought:

“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broke down the middle wall of partition between us;

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;" Ephesians 2:11-15

Paul was reminding that the Law of Moses ended with the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He also reminded Peter of this fact when a conflict arose between the brethren of Christ who were combined of both Jews and Gentiles:

"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision

And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Galatians 2:11-16

Under the law of Moses, it was unlawful for a Jew to eat or associate with Gentiles. Yet after Christ's death, Jews who believed on Him were no longer compelled to keep any aspects of the law. However, some would find it difficult to let go entirely and Peter was obviously trying to please both Jews and Gentiles (now his brethren in Christ) by waiving between the keeping of the old law and the spirit of the law under Christ.

The Jews had belonged to God under the covenant of the Law of Moses and the act of circumcision. It must have been a difficult transition to grasp that all precepts of the law, including the rite of circumcision was now of no effect - all had been fulfilled by the death of Christ and they were now free from the burdens it imposed.

This is what Paul sought to remind them, for even Peter faltered in totally applying the new covenant at times. Paul therefore took it upon himself to teach very plainly that the old covenant had been done away with and that they should now apply the spirit of Christ - a change from the letter to the spirit if they hoped to please God and His Son.

Looking at Paul's background, he was once very steeped in the letter of the law of Moses, but was transformed on the road to Damascus, as he explained to the Philippians:

“Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee:

Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:” Philippians 3:5-9

We know his zeal for the law as a Pharisee, for he held the garments of those who stoned Stephen - before his conversion he acquiesced to the death of one of Christ's apostles. Yet he was converted from the law's stringent thinking to the spirit of love and faith in Christ.

Of the law Paul also wrote to the Galatians:

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

And the law is not of faith: but The man that doeth them shall live in them.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree;

That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Galatians 3:10-14

That law was to be a teacher of the coming of Christ and as He came He would do away with the rudiments of the law with the Spirit of love and the hope of salvation.

Paul also reminded the Romans:

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth 2’
Romans 10:4

The old covenant taught the faithful to look forward to the coming of the Messiah - the One who would deliver them from the curse of the law - setting them free from sin and death. It was now the duty of the apostles to teach all who believed on Christ as the Son of God, both Jew and Gentile, to live by the new covenant created by His blood shed, and cast aside the precepts of the Law of Moses.

“Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,
Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.
But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?
Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,
This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.
But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”
Matthew 15:1-3, 7-9

Here the Lord Jesus laid the groundwork of focus for His disciples, from the letter of the Law to the Spirit of love, which He taught.

Jesus was known for healing on the Sabbath day, that according to the letter of the Law was forbidden. He allowed the spirit of the Law to permeate His living, releasing the misery of many by doing good on the Sabbath day, thus offending the scribes and Pharisees who kept the Sabbath in the letter, without love or compassion for others:

“And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.
When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?
Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.
And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed,

and walked: and on the same day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.” John 5:5-6,8-10

The law’s commandments acted as a deterrent - for harm was meted out against one who wronged another. Yet Christ brought to their understanding the deeper message of the law - that they should ALWAYS act with love and mercy to their neighbours - not because they feared retribution for not doing so. This is how God wanted His people to live and sent His Son as a perfect example that they could follow - His word made flesh. He fulfilled the whole law through His life of perfect obedience, done because of His love for the Father and His brethren - those who would believe on Him.

Christ through His sacrifice has given liberty from the curse of the law and how abhorrent we should be in God’s eyes if we still cling to keeping any aspects of the law in our living today. To do so is to refuse to acknowledge Christ’s great love and sacrifice made on our behalf.

M.C.S.

A WITNESS

In a recent reading from II Kings 5, we learn of Naaman, a captain of the host of the king of Syria, and his leprosy. Naaman’s wife had a servant girl who was a captive from the land of Israel, and she said that if Naaman could go to the prophet in Samaria, then his leprosy could be cured. The king of Syria sent Naaman to the king of Israel with a letter requesting that Naaman be cured of his leprosy. The king of Israel was upset by the request, thinking that the king of Syria sought a quarrel with him. However Elisha heard of the king’s predicament and asked that Naaman be brought to him so that he could be cured of the leprosy.

Elisha sent out a servant to inform Naaman to go wash himself seven times of the river Jordan and the leprosy would be cured. Naaman was upset that the man of God had not come out and prayed over him to be cured, but was convinced by his servants to do as Elisha had told him. After washing seven times, Naaman was cured and returned to Elisha to praise God and to offer a gift; but Elisha refused any gift and said: “Go in peace.”

Gehazi, Elisha's servant, followed after Naaman in hopes of receiving some of the gift that Naaman had offered to Elisha. When Gehazi caught up with Naaman, he told him that his master had sent him to ask for silver and two changes of garment for two Sons of the prophets. When Gehazi returned, Elisha asked where he had gone, and Gahazi indicated he had been nowhere. Elisha knew where he had gone, and told Gehazi that he would receive Naaman's leprosy as a punishment.

There were many examples, within Naaman's circumstances, of people being a witness:

Elisha witnessed to his faith in God and His power; Naaman exhibited his belief in God after being healed; Gehazi showed his lack of understanding of what God expects from us; and one that possibly is easily overlooked — the trust of the servant girl who told Naaman's wife about how Elisha could heal Naaman's leprosy. If not for the servant girl's recollection of and witness to Elisha's power, it is likely that none of the circumstances would have occurred. This demonstrates to us that we must be circumspect in our lives, because we never know what we do or say, might influence another in the future. We do not have the power that was given to the prophets or the disciples, but nonetheless, we can still witness to others through the way we act and live our daily lives.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples that they would witness of Him as they taught with power throughout the world:

“... It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.
But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea.”
Acts 1:7-8

But as the apostles witnessed of Jesus, He in turn witnessed of His Father:

“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:
But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.
The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)
That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout of Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power:

who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”

Acts 10:34-43

When our witness is good, it is often because we are witnessing of God within us; but when we witness of ourselves, it can turn out like Gehazi's, as our flesh can lead us away from what God wishes us to do. Jesus' words remind us that we can tell how a man lives by the fruits he displays:

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

Matthew 7:15-20

In the first chapter of Romans, Paul tells his brethren that he wishes to come to them again, to continue his witness to them, so that they may be strengthened in their witness to others:

“First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established:

That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.”

Romans 1:8-13

Another example of a strong witness was that of Ruth, who was a Moabitess. Ruth had married a son of Naomi, who was an Israelite. Naomi had come to Moab with her husband and sons because of a famine. Naomi's husband died, and years later so did her sons, leaving her to live with her two daughters in law. Naomi was leaving to return to Judah, but asked that her two daughters in law - Orpah and Ruth - stay behind in their own land:

“And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also if ought but death part thee and me.

When she (Naomi) saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.”

Ruth 1:14-18

We know that Ruth did stay with Naomi, as she had promised; eventually she married Boaz who was a kinsman of Naomi. Because of her faithfulness to Naomi and her dedication to God, Ruth was rewarded:

“So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife; and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.

And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became a nurse unto it.

And the women her neighbors gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi, and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.”
Ruth 4:13-17

Through her witness, Ruth was greatly blessed, and became an ancestor of the Lord Jesus, proving that we cannot comprehend how our actions might affect the future of ourselves and others. Our witnessing of today may not be with the power that the prophets and apostles were given, but we cannot foresee how God may choose to use it. Our witness might only be to God, but that too can bring drastic changes in our lives, for good or bad. It is a reminder to try to reflect the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, so that we might give a good witness to whoever may be watching.

E.J.M.

PSALM 32

We are given help through God’s word in a variety of ways, making us mindful of His purpose and the means to attain unto it. Such guidance is given as we consider Psalm 32 entitled, “A Psalm of David, Maschil”.

This particular psalm is the first of thirteen which includes the word maschil in its title, a word coming from a prime root meaning, to be or make circumspect, to give instruction - hence to become intelligent to godly ways. Circumspection we know implies an overview, an ability to see the whole picture so to speak, as is seen in this psalm, penned by David as he was moved by the Spirit of God. For us, the overall lesson of circumspection is to apply the instruction of God to our living in hope of a place in the Kingdom age promised. We must remember that it is one thing to have knowledge, but quite another to apply it correctly.

Here then can be seen the help provided in this 32nd psalm, for the word selah, meaning value it considering the end, is used three times, directing us to look at the whole picture, thereby providing assistance to apply His Word toward that end:

“I will instruct (Maschil) thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.” verse 8.

If we recognize that the eye of God is constantly upon us, there will surely be a receiving of the instruction, as we endeavor to apply His way in our living. David emphasized this thought:

“Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.:” verse 9.

The mule and horse are beasts of burden, with no great amount of intelligence or understanding, being ruled by instinct alone. Yet with a bit and bridleman can use their strength, instructing them for his own ends. Man was made in the image of the Creator that he might give glory and honor to Him, and unlike the horse and the mule, was granted the gift of intelligence and given dominion over all that God had created. Although granted the ability to reason, the flesh has a strong tendency to be unbridled, unwilling at times to be guided, yet God instructs His people to do exactly that.

The thought of maschil in this psalm is to remind us to be circumspect and use that intelligence and instruction given, to control our fleshly tendencies - not once or twice, but constantly throughout our life. This was David’s understanding as he drew upon his own experiences as verses 3-4 relate:

“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long
For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.”

There must be constant and painful warfare to overcome the flesh and the natural tendencies that roar within us; these must be brought into submission to keep the promised hope alive.

How important this hope was to David is shown in his humble recognition:

“I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.” verse 5

Here is seen the instruction contained in the Word of God. From the

beginning man's flesh has reared up in defiance, yet God in His mercy has provided a means of covering and forgiveness when true remorse is shown. Is this not what David is referring to here? As sin is acknowledged, there can be no silence kept. Instead the man of spirit will want to beseech God continually with fervent prayer and supplication in an earnest desire for forgiveness. The selah attached to this verse reminds us that without forgiveness, there can be no hope of sharing in the end that God has promised. The 6th verse continues this thought telling us:

“For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.”

Here is how a mind striving to be right might pray, looking for guidance when failure is recognized and forgiveness sought. David recognised an urgency lest the time come when God cannot be found. Yet we must not forget that God will hear in the time of trouble for He has promised as verse 7 reminds:

“Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.”

Again the instruction of selah is given here, indeed a valuing of the knowledge given, considering the end.

The readiness to yield to God's hand is emphasized similarly by Paul to the Ephesians in chapter 5:15-17:

“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.”

Here Paul brings to mind the overall picture of what is encompassed in the will of God - the attainment of what His word has spoken of. If we apply with intelligence the instruction God has given us to our living, there will be a growth in true understanding and a humble appreciation of His mercy in providing a covering for sin through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

This blessing David saw in spirit:

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no guile.” verses 1,2.

God hates a lying spirit, just as He hated the serpent’s guile which enticed Adam and Eve and led to their disobedience and the curse of death. The Lord Jesus was the only man who had no guile as confirmed in I Peter 2:21-22:

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:
Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:”

Here is One who was perfectly circumspect - always looking toward the end of God’s purpose and His part in it. He was perfect in every way - no guile or deceit was found within Him, simply a complete submission to the word of His Father. His was the perfect obedience the Creator had looked for in the beginning with Adam and Eve, yet only fulfilled in the coming of His Son.

Must not the example of the Lord Jesus prompt us to look within ourselves, beyond the flesh’s thinking, fostering the mind of the Spirit and true understanding of the mercy and blessing held out for those He instructs? The 10th verse reminds us of this:

“Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.”

These mercies are extended to those who constantly try to compare themselves with the Lord Jesus’ perfect example and realize that although falling short, there is hope in turning to Him for forgiveness. Such thoughts can elevate our understanding as Paul exhorts:

“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord
Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in
the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;
Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”
Eph. 5:18.

This fear of God is learned; it is a fear of doing anything that might hinder the fellowship extended and thereby nullify the end promised. What a help to us then is the instruction of this 32nd psalm, that we may learn to value the instruction of the Spirit as we look circumspectly toward the end of His purpose.

WHOSO BREAKETH AN HEDGE
Ecclesiastes 10:8

The Book of Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon, the Son of David who was renowned for his wisdom. The first part of this tenth chapter is an exhortation in caution to the spiritual man - that he be wise and not play the fool in action or speech:

“Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour; so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.”
Eccl. 10:1

In this verse, caution was not taken when preparing costly ointments - that it be sealed that flies not have access and ruin it. Likewise, only one foolish action can destroy the reputation of an upright man.

“Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.”
Eccl. 10:3

Walking in man's way - which is not God's way, labels one as a fool, therefore his walk or actions show what he is really like, whether foolish or righteous.

“He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.”
Eccl. 10:8

Digging a pit and removing a hedge would be actions very familiar to those who labored in the fields, as did many in Israel during Solomon's reign. Both of these actions may be acceptable depending upon the work to be accomplished. To remove a hedge may be necessary to increase the size of a field and expand the grazing to one's animals.

However, what might be considered wrong in God's eyes is the motive of one digging a pit or removing a hedge under evil intent if done to lay in wait to do harm, to trap another's livestock, or break a hedge so his animals could wander and cause havoc to another's gardens or even wander away and be lost to their owner. Harm planned against another is obviously wrong and will come back to harm the perpetrator, as the latter part of the verse states, that he shall fall into his own pit and from that hedge may come a serpent to bite him. Several references support this thought of judgment to come upon malicious action against another:

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.
For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption;
but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”
Galatians 6:7-8

Paul in these words written to the Galatians, brings forth the thought that there will be a reward from God for righteous actions as well as punishment against maliciousness, which will bring death.

David often wrote of God’s judgment to come against the wicked:

“God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.
If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready.
He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors.
Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood.
He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made.
His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate.” Psalm 7:11-16

“The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.” Psalm 10:2

Here David speaks of the wicked’s motive, while the “poor” are those in need of help and any preying upon those in need of help will reap God’s justice:

“But the LORD is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge.
And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yea, the LORD our God shall cut them off.”
Psalm 94:22-23

David looked for God’s deliverance from those that persecuted him and this confidence was shared by the prophet Amos:

“Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light.
As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into

the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.
Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? even
very dark, and no brightness in it?" Amos 5:18-20

These references speak of applying the flesh's impulses instead of restraining it - a direction which is repugnant to God for He will judge each one accordingly and return their evil upon their own heads.

Haman was an example of one who plotted evil against a righteous man and it ricocheted back upon his own head. We remember that as described in the Book of Esther, Haman's pride was offended because Mordecai the Jew would not bow down to him. He built a gallows and planned to hang Mordecai, as well as give license to all his countrymen, to kill any Jews living amongst them. His plans were thwarted through Esther's influence with King Ahasuerus because God's eyes were for good upon His people:

"So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. then was the king's wrath pacified." Esther 7:10

God knows the heart and if we walk in faith and care, endeavoring to restrain our natural fleshly impulses, we will be rewarded. Our flesh is subtle and attempts to take revenge whenever it feels slighted - even in the most indirect manner. Only by humbling ourselves and living according to Christ's command of love can we hope to receive His mercy in the day of His coming:

"...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." Luke 10:27

M.C.S.

JOEL'S MESSAGE

We have read recently the prophecy of Joel. Like other prophets, these words were not his own, but were spoken at the direction of God in order to instruct His people. The essence of the words of make known to God's people that if they repent and changed their ways, He would be pitiful and show mercy and grace.

The word of the Lord that came to Joel foretold of desolation by a nation which would be "strong and without number". Judah had strayed from God, taken for granted the blessedness of being separated unto Him and had become polluted in His eyes. Because of this they were to be brought down, God's judgments leaving nothing untouched until there was left only desolation upon desolation as depicted in the words of Joel 1:4.

"That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten."

This was a prophecy to help, if God's word could be taken into their hearts and minds. Joel provided that help, a man whose name means "to whom Jehovah is God", emphasizing to the people then and to us today, the paramount importance of God's place in our living.

Joel was a messenger appointed to sound an alarm in Judah as we read in chapter 2:1.

"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand;"

He went on to warn of a great people who would come down upon them in verse 2:

"...a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations."

This spoke of a vast destroying force likened to a great fire bringing in its wake much sorrow upon the inhabitants of Judah. There would be no escape from this destruction for it was to be brought about by the hand of God as verse 11 says:

"And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for

the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?

This destruction of God was to come as a judgment upon those who had turned away from His paths, those who profaned their place as His people. The force behind this destructive power is the same as that which would render mercy to those who sought the safe haven of his care as Joel 2:12&13 relates:

“Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.’

In these words is seen the solution of their dilemma: “rend your heart, and not your garments”. There must have been merely a surface honoring of God, a lip service which had no depth of conviction. Yet Joel offered comfort for any who could repent and change their ways, for to them would the grace and mercy of God be extended.

The words of Joel sent at that time to persuade the people of Judah, seem to have more than one meaning for they also refer to the ultimate “day of the Lord” as in chapter 2:28-31:

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:
And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.
And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.
The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.”

God’s word offers hope to those who struggle to be children of Yahweh, to whom “Jehovah is God”, for to them only is deliverance promised.

At a later time the Lord Jesus spoke of this same Comforter to come upon those left to do the work of ministering. When that power of the Spirit came upon the apostles enabling them to speak in various languages,

they were accused of being drunken, but Peter used the words of Joel to explain in Acts 2:15-17:

“For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.
But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;
And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”

Peter used these words of Joel to preach to those learning of the Lord Jesus, that He was the Messiah, having been crucified and then risen from the dead to become the redeemer of all who would call upon His name. What was the response to his appeal? Verse 37 explains:

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

The answer given by Peter was in the same spirit as given by Joel during his day - repent, change your ways and if your heart is toward Him help will be given.

There is however a trait to which all human nature falls is prone, for the word of God may be received at first with joy and wonder yet the mind can become dulled and after a time take for granted the wonderful hope extended. It is in mercy then that this word of God through Joel comes to remind and say, “turn ye even to me with all your heart”. One who can cry for help reveals a pliant spirit, a heart that can change from error and be turned to Him.

This message of Joel then is a timely message of hope for all. Many have desired such help in times of despair - perhaps none more eloquently than David, who in dire straits rent his heart as he cried out for deliverance in Psalm 61:14:

“Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer.
From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.
For thou has been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.
I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah”.

It is at hard times like these that God looks to see if we will rend our hearts and cry unto Him for help. David knew the help and deliverance of God on many occasions and spoke in reverence of his hope in verse 5 of this same psalm:

“For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name.”

An heritage is something precious handed down throughout the years. God’s heritage is the hope of eternal life, which He has graciously extended Throughout the generations of mankind - the hope that Peter offered to those who would listen and that Joel offered to those at his time to those who would rend their hearts and turn from their wickedness.

This message of Joel brings hope to us today as he says in chapter 2 verse 32:

“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.”

Outside of that call there is no hope of eternal life. Let us then be mindful of Joel’s message and determine to, “turn ye even to me with all your heart”.

NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS FOR MARCH 2014

HAMBURG, NEW YORK

Sunday: Breaking of Bread 11:30 am

Thursday: Bible Class 3:30 pm; Forestville, Hamburg and
Fredonia

Every Third Week: Revelation Study

After such an early and hard winter, our minds turn to the anticipation of spring and the rebirth of God's handiwork. Such newness of life reminds us of God's ultimate promise of a new heaven and a new earth in His kingdom to come.

May we continue to view each day what God gives us as a blessing and opportunity to be encouraged in the work of His house.

Our fellowship one with another strengthens us in the promise of such newness of life in our struggle to overcome.

M.C.S.

For more information or to read our literature, log onto:

www.remnantofchristsecclesia.com