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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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PEACE BE UNTO YOU

We have recently read in John's record of the Lord Jesus' resurrection and subsequent contact with His followers. The first contact after He had risen was with Mary Magdalene:

“The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.”
John 29:1

Seeing the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty, she feared His body had been taken away and so ran to tell His disciples:

“Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.
Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.”
John 20:2-3

Entering the empty tomb, they saw the linen cloths that had been wrapped around His body laying by themselves - and it was then recorded that they “saw and believed”. But the record yet goes to say:

“For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.
then the disciples went away again unto their own home.”
John 20:9-10

Even though Jesus work had been to preach of his death as the Lamb of God and His subsequent resurrection, His own disciples did not fully grasp this knowledge. Many who believed on Him as the Messiah sent, thought He would deliver Israel at that time from the Romans and establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

At the tomb, Mary lingered behind weeping and saw a man in the garden, not knowing it was Jesus and supposing him to be the gardener. He asked her:

“Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him,
Rabboni; which is to say, Master.”
John 20:15-16

Through the power of the Spirit she was allowed to see that it was Jesus, and in joy ran to tell the other disciples that she had seen the Lord alive, yet some did not believe.

This first event was the beginning of Jesus' appearances among His followers. They did not fully comprehend the fact that Jesus would rise again from the grave, so His appearing must have been one of great joy yet coupled with fear, therefore, with love and compassion, He approached them gradually lest they be frightened or alarmed.

After appearing to Mary Magdalene, He next appeared to two who were walking from Jerusalem to a nearby village, - yet His appearance through the power of the Spirit was changed, so that they did not recognize Him:

“their eyes were holden that they should not know him.”

Luke 24:16

He asked them what they were talking about and why they were so sad? Not realizing it was Jesus in their midst, the one called Cleopas thinking Him a stranger, went on to tell him about the recent crucifixion of the Lord Jesus who they believed to be the Messiah and explaining about the discovery of His empty tomb on the third day. They were puzzled and doubting why all this had happened - not fully understanding that Jesus as the Lamb offered without blemish, would die but be raised from the grave on the third day. This He had preached to not only His followers but to all Israel - as also had been taught through the Law and the prophets. In rebuke, the Lord Jesus replied to them:

“O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

and beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”

Luke 24: 25-27

As they reached their destination, they asked in kindness and courtesy that He stay on - to rest and share a meal. As they sat together, Jesus took bread and blessed it and as He gave it to them their eyes were opened and they realized who it was among them.

“And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us,

while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. and they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.” Luke 24:31-35

As they were no doubt excitedly telling the others that Jesus had appeared to them, He did so again to all gathered in the room:

“And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.” Luke 24:36-37

The Lord Jesus knew they did not fully understand He would rise again from the grave, and that out of superstition they might think Him a spirit, therefore, in compassion for their weakness of faith and fear He said:

“Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet.”

Luke 24:38-39

His appearance was provided to give them peace - peace in knowing He had indeed conquered the curse of death by rising from the grave and that He was now before them in bodily form and to impart to them the peace of God with an increased understanding of His Word that they now go forth and continue His work of preaching the gospel to all men:

“Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit:

Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” John 20:21-23

This word “peace” means unity or to be at one. God’s promise of a Messiah given through His Word from the beginning, assured that He would come to establish peace again between God and man. Jesus did this by obeying God’s word perfectly without sin, thus becoming the Lamb without blemish, as taught through the Law and prophets. His blood offered in death, would bring atonement for those that believed in Him.

To the world the word “peace” means only the absence of war or strife. It is so much more when true peace is perceived as a unity with one accord in love through Christ.

One disciple, Thomas was not present with the others when Jesus appeared to all. When they joyfully told him of the Lord’s appearance among them, he replied:

“...Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.”
Luke 20:25

After another eight days had passed, Thomas was with the other disciples when Jesus miraculously appeared in their midst “the doors being shut”. Another proof to them of His ability to do all things because of His new spirit nature. Again He said at His arrival - “Peace be unto you”. Knowing all things, He said to Thomas:

“Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.
And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.”
John 20:27-28

Thomas NOW believed because he saw Jesus before him and witnessed the print of the nails still in his hands and feet. He had visible proof now of His resurrection to life, yet because he doubted, Jesus rebuked him saying:

“Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”
John 20:29

This record is why throughout the ages since, Thomas Didymus has been termed as “doubting Thomas” to all who read this record. His lack of faith and belief, although a disciple of the Lord with close contact to Him, is an admonishment to all who endeavor likewise to follow after the Lord and be part of his spiritual household, to have faith and doubt not.

To those who believe on God’s word through the Lord Jesus - who believe in His resurrection to life as their only means of salvation and the peace it can afford, both now and eternally, Paul writes:

“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.
Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.
Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and

supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:4-7

The Lord Jesus has provided the means whereby we too may overcome our flesh natures through the example of His life as a guide to follow, and through the mediation He can provide with God, when we do fail and need forgiveness for our sins. Only through Him can we find peace with God now as we endeavor to follow after Him while looking forward in faith to His return, when the gift of peace and immortality will be given to those found acceptable in His mercy.

M.C.S.

A LIVELY HOPE

In a recent reading in I Peter chapter 1, Peter speaks of a “lively hope”:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”

I Peter 1:3

The word “lively” means to live, and the “hope” is the hope of the gospel; the good news of the kingdom of God through the provision of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Peter’s words tell us, we are born again into that lively hope through baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptism into Jesus represents our understanding that it is only through His victory that we can participate in this lively hope.

Peter spells out the details of our lively hope:

“To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”

I Peter 1:4-9

Our hope is a living hope, because as long as we are alive, we can still seek God and attain to that lively hope. After we die, there is no longer an opportunity to secure that lively hope, if it has not already been found. It is also a lively hope because the door to that hope now lives eternally at the right hand of God as our mediator. Jesus is that mediator and the Word of God made flesh. Jesus informs us that God is the God of the living, which gives us further incentive to live this life in complete subjection to God:

“He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living...”

Mark 12:27

Peter goes on to briefly tell us how we should live our lives to keep our hope lively:

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

I Peter 1:13-16

Paul’s words to his Roman brethren reveal the source of our lively hope, and reminds us not to be carnally minded, but rather walk after the Spirit:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh; but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Romans 8: 1-8

Peter’s words likewise show how we have been redeemed so that we might attain unto the lively hope:

“And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers:

But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

Peter 1:17-23

Again, Paul’s words continue by imploring us to live not after the flesh, but to allow the Spirit of God to work within us to put down the flesh, so that we might be heirs with Jesus to the Lord’s eternal hope:

“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

Therefore brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of

God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of

God:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Romans 8:9-18

Peter tells us how that the hope has been unchanged from the time of the prophets until his time, when the apostles taught the gospel to the Gentiles by the Spirit that was in them:

“Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:

Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.”

I Peter 1:10-12

The grace of God has provided us with a lively hope that is attainable as long as we have breath within us. Once we die, we no longer can change our standing in the eyes of the Lord. It is God’s love toward mankind that He has provided this living hope to all who seek Him in spirit and truth.

E.J.M.

THE BRANCH

Jeremiah the prophet, taught of God's Word and the fulfilment of His hope extended to Israel. These words have been preserved as an encouragement to us today, as we also look for that Kingdom of God to come and the King who shall reign over it in perfect peace:

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”
Jeremiah 23:5-6

These words speak of the return of the Lord Jesus, described here as the Righteous Branch - the Son of David and heir to his throne. He will prosper in righteous rule unlike any other of the world's sovereigns, for He will not judge with a fleshly mind and heart, but through the Spirit.

It is difficult for us to comprehend a reign of perfect righteousness because throughout the history of mankind, this has never happened. Kings are men of flesh, governing with a carnal nature which takes pride in self-glory, not humility or peace. Yet there will come a day when Israel will live safely under their King, the Branch - whose reign will extend from Jerusalem unto the ends of the earth. He will be called, “The Lord our Righteousness” for He is the embodiment of righteousness because His life and work fulfilled God's word.

Jeremiah goes on to describe this kingdom of hope that awaits those who will be called into that glorious rest. To believing Israel and Judah, and those adopted into spiritual Israel as Gentiles, he extends God's promise:

“Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place... The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.”
Jeremiah 33:10-11,14

Those found approved at Christ's judgment seat will be as His Bride - called out to dwell with him for eternity. They will be joined to Him as a Bride cherished by a loving husband, because of their endeavor through -

patience and humility to walk after His example throughout their life of probation.

Zechariah the prophet also speaks of The Branch and His reign during the Kingdom age - showing us the similar thread of Truth that weaves throughout God's Word, teaching all throughout the ages:

“...Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD; Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall between them both.”
Zechariah 6:12-13

The Lord Jesus as the Prince of Peace, is the only One worthy to receive this honor as God's king and priest over His kingdom of Israel on earth. Those now alive, endeavoring to walk after His example, must prove their faith, patience & humility now in this life, if they hope to be joined to Him in that great day.

To those of Zechariah's day, who looked in hope to the coming of The Branch, the prophet gives further help:

“And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God.”
Zechariah 6:15

To those of his day, Paul writes of this same hope, possible only through a belief in Christ as God's Son - sent to be the means of righteousness for those who believe in the gospel message:

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

II Corinthians 5:19-21

The word “righteousness” means to be right, or as the prime root states, “to be clean”, and it is that cleansing, saving grace that God has provided for our salvation - that we who are now unclean flesh, may be

cleansed through His righteousness. This was Paul's fervent desire for himself and for his brethren when he wrote to the Philippians saying:

“... 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; that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;
If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”
Philippians 3:8-11

When the Lord Jesus - that Branch returns, He will raise to life those that sleep in the grave, like Jeremiah, Zechariah and Paul - gathering them with those then alive, to His judgment seat. There He will in mercy and justice, separate those designated as His Bride from those not found approved. His Bride, now changed from flesh to spirit and immortality, will go forth as teachers to instruct and spread the joy of the gospel message to the whole world. By bringing the light of knowledge and understanding to every dark corner of the world, all men will have the opportunity to understand God's Truth in its purity and what is required to be blessed as His people.

It will be a different world - for the first time, righteousness and mercy will rule -unlike the worldwide corruption seen today and so evident all throughout the history of man, when the hand of the flesh ruled, governing with cruelty and injustice.

What a wondrous hope God has provided through the provision of His Son - the Branch of Righteousness, and how we yearn to conquer that untoward nature within the flesh and be called forth on that day when He will say to those found approved in mercy:

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:”
Matthew 25:34

M.C.S.

THE HEARING EAR

How often in the book of Revelation we find the repetitive theme, “he that hath an ear, let him hear”, and how vitally important is this message from God to those who indeed have an ear to hear. These letters to the seven ecclesias are messages which help us today to understand what God looks for in the application of His Truth in our living

In our recent study of the message to the Laodiceans, in Revelation 3:15-16 John has recorded:

“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

The works of those in Laodicea were lacking in enthusiasm and feeling - merely lukewarm, suggesting there was apathy or indifference there. When one seeks refreshment, cold or hot are the two extremes sought after to slake the thirst - lukewarm is unacceptable because it does not satisfy. Those in Laodicea were complacent and did not recognize their situation for what it was as verse 17 illustrates:

“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:”

The message the Spirit was striving to impart to them was the danger of their situation. Their works were not reflecting God’s word and therefore not pleasing to him. God’s desire for man is that he hear the word of Truth, obey it and move in applying these principles in his living.

In Zephaniah we see a similar message brought to those in his day saying in essence, “he that hath an ear hear” - for this prophecy concerned the great punishment that would be brought upon the land because of their idolatry and refusal to adhere to God’s statutes.

“I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham; And them that are turned back from the LORD, and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.”

Zephaniah 1:4.6.

They had strayed from the ways of God and were like the Laodiceans, neither hot nor cold - but lukewarm in their love for His Truth. This is confirmed by verse 12:

“And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil.”

Here we see the same complacency as they “settled on their lees”. Those that are familiar with the of wine will recognize the word “lees”. It is the sludge or sediment that sinks to the bottom of the bottle - the impurities that settle out before the clear wine above is drawn off to be finally preserved in a clean container.

Jeremiah spoke of Moab in the same context in chapter 48:11:

“Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.”

The thought then of settling on one’s lees is to stagnate and do nothing not seeking improvement or refining to be made pure, but instead satisfied with the way things are. What did Zephaniah prophesy would happen because of their indifference? Chapter 1:13 tells us:

“Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyard a, but not drink the wine thereof.”

Everything to them seemed fine because they were looking with the eyes of man and not with the eyes of the Spirit. Zephaniah came to stir them up, to turn them from their lethargy, preaching to them to become meek and seek righteousness if they were to have a hope of being hid in the day of the Lord’s anger. Zephaniah’s name which means, “whom Jehovah hid”, would emphasize this to those who “had an ear to hear”.

The work of Zephaniah was contemporary with Jeremiah and we know from chapter 1 verse 1 that he witnessed during the days of Josiah, one of the few righteous kings of Judah, who moved with the counsel of Zephaniah to purge idolatry from the house of God.

We know Josiah’s reign was blessed as we read in 11 Kings 22:1-2:

“Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem...And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.”

He was only eight years old when he became king, so while yet tender of age, must have had wise counselors to guide him in the right direction. He was not complacent, but walked the strait and narrow path in order that the Spirit of God could work and be heard in the land.

When we think of others who endeavoured to walk in favor with God, we think of Job. Here was a man who might easily have been complacent for he had many riches and a comfortable life as Job 1:3 tells us:

“...this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.”

How easy it would have been for Job to settle on his lees and say as they did in Laodicea, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing”. We know he was tested in this regard for his possessions and children were taken away. He was tried by his friends and his own wife, who having been overtaken by complacency responded to his trial and said, “Curse God and die” - the flesh’s reaction. In Job’s answer however, we see the words of the Spirit:

“...What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.”

In all of this Job maintained his integrity with God so that even today the world knows of the patience of Job. Did he have a hearing ear? Yes, for when his testing was complete, he could value and appreciate God more intensely and could say in chapter 42:5-6:

“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

As we are allowed to hear what the Spirit said to the seven ecclesias, to those in the days of Job, and Zephaniah, let us value more fully the counsel given, to follow that word more closely in our living and to respond in a way that is pleasing to Him, truly hearing ear.

THE LESSON OF THE FIG TREE

Our portion in Mark recently has revealed the continued witness and help provided through the life of the Lord Jesus. As a fulfilment of prophecy, He entered into Jerusalem in the prescribed manner, riding on a colt to the shouts of praise from onlookers who said:

“... Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.” Mark 11:9-10

It was undoubtedly a stirring emotional time for Him, yet one in which He sorrowed, for the people thought He would establish God’s kingdom then, not perceiving that this could not be accomplished until He had overcome His own flesh, and died, thus becoming the perfect sacrifice.

Because of a lack of perception also among His disciples, Jesus used these times to teach as He thought of HIS impending death. One such instance involves a fig tree where we are told in Mark 11:12-14

“And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry:
And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet.
And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.”

It was the time of year when fig trees were in leaf and usually then there were small unripe figs which could be eaten, just as olives are used either green or ripe. He would have anticipated this, yet said these words for His disciples instruction.

Soon after this incident, Jesus went into the temple and cast out those who had made it a den of thieves as verses 15-17 tells us:

“And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves;
And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple
And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.”

Who had allowed this to happen? The scribes, pharisees and priests

those teachers of the law who should have been preparing the people for the coming of the Messiah. There could be no true prayer affected there for this was no longer the dwelling place of the Spirit of God.

The morning after this stirring event, Jesus and His disciples left the city and passed by the same fig tree that He had earlier cursed.

“And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.”

Mark 11:20-21.

The sight of the fig tree reminded Peter of Jesus’ words. His reply to Peter and the other disciples gives the answer to His earlier actions:

“And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.

For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass he shall have whatsoever he saith.

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

Mark 11:22-26.

What an important lesson is contained in Jesus’s answer to His disciples - that in order for prayers to be effective, there must first be a searching of our hearts to see if there is any fleshly hindrance barring a communion with God. Is there resentment or ill feeling against another which we have been harboring? If so Jesus says, “.if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father...forgive your trespasses”. We know that looking into the heart of Judas, Jesus could see a lack of belief, so much so that he withstood the work of the Spirit and lost his hope of eternal life. He decreased in faith while the other eleven increased.

How much we too are within the midst of a faithless and perverse generation, and need to spiritually restrain our flesh - deny it, just as in the disciples’ day they did so by prayer and fasting in order to bolster their faith. Jesus’ parable of the two men who came to the temple to pray, one a pharisee and the other a publican is such an example of the need to examine our hearts. The publican looked within and was ashamed of his lacks and

in humility asked God for mercy. The pharisee meanwhile saw nothing within himself worthy of repentance. The publican was able to remove the fleshly hindrance through humility and his prayer was heard by God.

As the Lord Jesus rebuked the fig tree for its unfruitfulness, He left a lesson to all His followers of the need to produce good works or fruit, and the example of the power of prayer when done in a spirit acceptable to God. How often the disciples would later think upon His words, perhaps every time they came upon a fig tree. We too must value this lesson to show forth more faith and believe without doubting, looking to the end of His purpose, longing for a complete communication with Him in the day that His house is established forever.

AN EARRING OF GOLD

As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprove upon an obedient ear. Proverbs 25:12.

So often we see in the Proverbs, the contrast between the understanding of the Spirit versus the ways of the flesh, or God's wisdom versus the foolishness of man as in the above verse.

The verse under consideration seems to be linked with the preceding one in regard to the reception of the word of God as verse 11 says:

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”

The Truth is something to be valued as are the precious metals of silver and gold, and the 12th verse continues this thought. An earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold would be of great value, beyond any ordinary adornment; therefore the Spirit which comes as a wise reprove to him should be valued by one in need of correction.

There are several references regarding the thought of gold. Proverbs 11:22 speaks of it in a different context but one is able to see how it applies to the verse under consideration:

“As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.”

How inappropriate it would be to find a jewel or costly ornament in

a swine's snout and so too is a beautiful women who is rash and lacks discernment. In Job 42:10-11 there is also help given as the value placed upon an ornament of gold as equated with the giving of a gift or reward:

“And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. The came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold.”

Job had an obedient or hearing ear, and through his trial and testing he came to think differently and value the grace of God to an even greater extent and was blessed because of it.

The word “reprover” in the verse under consideration comes from a prime root meaning to make right or correct. In the eyes of the Spirit a reprover is one who comes to rebuke or chasten, to help one be right in the ways of God. In Hebrews 12:11 help is given to see why God's chastening is so essential:

“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

Those who are “exercised” are those who have an obedient ear - a hearing ear, and receive the reproof in a right spirit. The important aspect seems to be as an earring of gold a wise reprover is something precious and to be valued for his desire to help save the spiritual life of a brother or sister, and what could be more cherished than eternal life? Proverbs 20:12 offers additional help:

“The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them.”

It would seem that those with a hearing ear and a seeing eye are those who can hear and recognize the reproof of the Spirit and can yield to the hand of God upon them through the offices of a wise reprover.

“The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.” Proverbs 15:31-32.

A reprover comes to help and build up, not to tear down in a critical manner. As one hears the advice of a reprover he is wise and grateful as a consequence, both are drawn closer together as there is a meeting of two minds, both yielding to the ways of God, striving with that common goal in mind - the hope of being accepted into the Kingdom of God.

“Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.” Proverbs 13:18

Poverty and shame which shall come to the one who refuses instruction can not be compared with something of value as is the golden ornament. Those found approved at the judgment seat will be there not because of their own worth, but because they listened with an hearing ear to correction during their time of probation.

“The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.” Isaiah 50:4.

The two aspects of hearing are brought out in these words of Isaiah. God’s word does make one learned and with it comes an hearing ear that is obedience. How valuable to have the tongue of the learned, to be able to be a wise reprover and to also hear when reproof is given by another. A wise reprover is one sent from God as His messenger bringing words of wisdom to help one in need. A wise reprover is as the shepherd spoken of by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 18:12-14 who rejoices in the return of one who is lost:

“How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.
Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

The one who had gone astray was of such great importance to this shepherd that he left the ninety-nine which were secure to search out the one lost. A wise reprover too diligently seeks and works for the one he sees going off the path of life, and if there is an obedient ear what joy there is when he is safe again and back in the fold.

NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS FOR MAY 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

Our work of witnessing to the general public regarding the perplexity in the world and God's plan, continues. Although response is small, we do not know if the seeds we plant at this time, might bring forth fruit in the future.

Our shared counsel with our brethren in the work of His house, gives us encouragement in these last days.

M.C.S.

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

www.remnantofchristsecclesia.com