

January - March 2026

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

NOW THEREFORE ARISE

A New Year Sermon

The following article is taken from a sermon originally preached at North Road Chapel on Thursday, 30th December 1999

“Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses My servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” (Joshua 1:7-9)

This evening, a few of us are gathered in this place for the last public meeting of the millennium which is so soon to end. One thousand years with all its happenings: spiritual, religious, political, social, national and international; tragedies and disasters, as well as achievements, pleasures and joys. History records many great mistakes and blunders both in the world and in the church – opportunities which have been missed, wrong actions taken – in contrast to that which has been noble and right. All this is now in the past, be it for good or for ill. We stand now at the opening not only of a new year, but the beginning of another millennium. Another lap commences in the course of this world’s history. How long it will run, or what the future holds, no mortal knows or is able to predict.

However, I am not going to proceed along that line, not even to suggest what might happen, knowing just a little of that which is spoken of in Holy Scripture and which we see coming to pass right now in our day. I

want to narrow down our thinking this evening to this local church – rather to us, the individual believers who comprise the church. It is our charge to maintain a faithful witness and testimony: “*Occupy till I come*” (Luke 19:13).

That predictions have been made, we all know. Such cults as the Jehovah’s Witnesses have been notorious for setting dates for spectacular happenings pertaining to their teachings on what they term ‘the coming kingdom’. Neither are they alone. There is a man in mid-Devon who has been holding occasional meetings on prophecy, and according to his preaching the Lord would return in September ’99. Well, that month is now past and gone. Despite his wild predictions, that man has quite a following and preaches in places that would claim to be most sound.

Those who have followed a ‘Dispensational’ line have made much of a seven-day theory, labouring that verse which says that ‘a thousand years with God is but as a day’. They go back to Creation week, which was six days’ activity then one day rest. So in God’s eternal plan, they claim, there will be six days, or a duration of six thousand years. Then will come the end, and the ushering in of God’s day of rest – one thousand years of peace on earth, when Christ will reign over all the earth from His throne which He will establish in Jerusalem. Then will ‘peace cover the earth as the waters cover the seas’; even the brute creation will dwell in harmony as the wolf and the lamb, the lion and the ox, will all lie down together. Most thrilling sermons and lectures have been given over the years along these lines, as this millennial theory has been sounded forth. Now earth’s week has run its course: four thousand years Old Testament history, two thousand years New Testament history – six days. This is supposed to be followed by the millennial sabbath which so many have enthusiastically propounded. But prior to this, there must be seven years’ tribulation, the judgement of nations, the battle of Armageddon, etc. Whether or not these so-called prophetic students are quite as excited now that the seventh millennium is about to dawn, I cannot say, not now being in such circles.

“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons” (Acts 1:7) are the words of our Lord to us. *“Be thou faithful unto death”* (Revelation 2:10), ‘enduring unto the end’ (cf Matthew 10:22). So we are to labour, pressing toward the mark, prayerfully persevering in the paths of righteousness, sowing beside all waters, looking in faith to the great Husbandman to give the harvest according to His will and eternal purpose. We have this assurance that our labour in the Lord is not in vain. We have also an awareness of the evil days in which we live, when the powers of darkness appear to be let loose on this earth. There can be at times a secret inner whisper of fear, anxiety, even doubt. Are we going to end up as unprofitable servants?

This is as it was with Joshua here in this chapter. Moses had climbed to the top of Pisgah, and from there the Lord had showed him the Promised Land. Having viewed it all, Moses died in the land of Moab according to the word of the Lord (cf Deuteronomy 34:5). Now Joshua is commissioned to take up the leadership. Ahead was Jordan, Jericho, Ai. He needed instruction. He needed encouragement. This he received from God as he stood at the threshold of this new situation. Let us examine it very briefly, and may it be used of God to strengthen and encourage us.

“Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses” (Joshua 1:3).

Canaan was a free and sovereign gift of God to Israel, yet as they entered into it to possess it, they would be at war. The Canaanites had to be dispossessed. A wonderful lesson is here: our salvation is the gift of a sovereign God, yet having received it, we are immediately at war. The world, the flesh, and the Devil are ever against us. As individuals and as a church these have to be dispossessed. This is the exercise of ‘making our calling and election sure’. It is the perseverance of the saints. This is no light thing, and God knows it. Oh, that **we** realised it more! Ever has the Lord encouraged His own people. To Moses: *“And I will be with*

thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say” (Exodus 4:12); to Jeremiah: *“And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee”* (Jeremiah 1:19); to the disciples: *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you **always**, even unto the end of the world. Amen”* (Matthew 28:19–20).

The fact that God had given Canaan to Israel did not exempt them from their responsibility. True, in our day God is sovereign, and all that the Father hath given to Christ will come to Him, but this is not a couch upon which the church reclines; rather is it the girdle with which we gird up our loins. Joshua knew that God’s decrees would all come to pass, so he was on duty and into battle.

The decrees of God are immutable. His purpose is infallible. But in no way does this nullify human responsibility. We enter another year. We know that all God’s counsel for coming days will stand. Nevertheless, we have the solemn charge laid upon us to be faithful unto God, to be loyal to His cause, to uphold His truth, to fight the good fight of faith. The Christian life is not a walk-over; the cause of Christ is not maintained by some automatic process; the faith has to be contended for, because many enemies are abroad, and they have to be engaged, just as in Joshua’s day. So encouragement is given: *“There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.”* (Joshua 1:5-6). Here are words to inspire and animate us – exhortation and assurance of final victory.

But then in the next verse we come to something a little more specific; more definite. *“Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded*

thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest". Verse six is a general exhortation to be courageous. But verse seven calls for the courage of **obedience**. Joshua was to be completely obedient to divine legislation. So are we, and this takes courage. For Christians and for a church to cleave to the path of obedience, to scorn novelties, to disdain partial truth, to declare the whole counsel of God, is to be labelled 'separatist', 'puritanical', 'pharisaical'. This we must be prepared for. It is no child's play to "*follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth*" (Revelation 14:4). Joshua was not to be regulated by his own inclinations – but in all things be actuated by 'thus saith the Lord'.

Because of his obedience, Joshua made many enemies. This will also apply to us. It is the desire of none of us to create enemies, but it invariably becomes the case when a Christian or a church takes a four-square stand upon the Word of God. Old friends turn away; the cold shoulder is felt; one is aware of ridicule; even within one's own family we can be looked upon as odd or extreme; and by many is the scripture proved that 'a man's foes are those of his own household' (cf Matthew 10:36). We must be prepared for this, says the Spirit of God, and be courageous in this matter of obedience.

"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (v.8). "This book of the law" – Joshua was the first man to be given the words of Almighty God in book form. We know that the book was being written by Moses before his death (cf Exodus 17:14). Here and in many other places the first five books of the Bible are referred to, often called the books of Moses, or the Pentateuch. This volume now completed was given to Joshua, and although it was only the first five books, yet it is styled 'the Book of the Law'; complete for that juncture in history, as much as it pleased Almighty God to reveal

of His eternal plan at that point. It was sufficient to recognise, unmistakable in its direction, and perfect in its content. It must not be added to or taken from by mortal man. Note: it is singular – not ‘the books of the law’, neither ‘the book of the laws’. No: ‘the book of the law’; one truth.

Joshua was to be regulated by the entire content of that book, and his prosperity and success, as far as God was concerned, would be assessed by his adherence to that book, and that alone. Later, there was added to this book the prophets and the Psalms (or poetical books), referred to by the Lord after his resurrection (cf Luke 24:44). Later still came the apostles’ doctrine, then the final revelation to John. But no part has ever cancelled out the other. It is progressive – an unfolding revelation – and must always be held as a unit; the embodiment of truth, singular.

This book of God’s Law is now complete. We have it all, and to all its precepts we are to be obedient. We turn not from it to the right hand or to the left. The closing word to the New Testament people of God is found in the book of the Revelation: “*Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand*” (Revelation 1:3). “This prophecy”, singular. We are to keep those things which are written; it is one doctrine, a unit of truth.

This will take courage – God-given courage – in our day to do it. But as it was with Moses, and with Joshua, so will it be with thee. ‘I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee’, saith our God. But let us remember that we shall not have the God of Truth with us, if we set aside the Truth of God. Look again at verse eight: “*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for **then** thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and **then** thou shalt have good success.*”

So as we embark upon another year, both as individuals and as a church, may it be with this resolve: that this book of the law shall not depart out of our mouths, that we might meditate upon it day and night, resolving to do all that is written in this book, taking to ourselves the words of Isaac Watts:

“Lord, I have made Thy Word my choice,
My lasting heritage;
There shall my noblest powers rejoice,
My warmest thoughts engage.

I’ll read the histories of Thy love,
And keep Thy laws in sight;
While through the promises I rove
With ever fresh delight.

’Tis a broad land of wealth unknown,
Where springs of life arise;
Seeds of immortal bliss are sown,
And hidden glory lies.

The best relief that mourners have,
It makes our sorrows blest;
Our fairest hope beyond the grave,
And our eternal rest.”

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

“No consciousness of inferiority, insufficiency, or even unworthiness, should induce us to decline the services allotted to us; for the same fulness, whence prophets and apostles received all their sufficiency, is open for us also; and in our more limited spheres, and for the duties incumbent upon us, we have a warrant to expect that ‘the Lord will be with us’, even as He was with Moses...”

Thomas Scott (1747 – 1821)

LONG SHADOWS

5. Forms of Worship (continued)

There are many other aspects of Christian worship and religious service that demand close examination, to determine whether the pattern of the New Testament is truly being followed, or if the damaging influence of Judaism still persists.

Location

From the very inception of the New Testament church, the practice of corporate assembly, or public gathering, is manifest. In those crucial moments, after Calvary, and after the Ascension, when the threatened, persecuted disciples might all (like Thomas) have been tempted to disperse singly, Christ's own instruction constrained them: "*tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem*"; He, "*being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem*" (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4) – no mean task, as their lives were sought by the Jewish authorities. But in dutiful obedience they remained, and others with them, such that, in Acts 1:13 and Acts 2:1-2, they may be observed, assembling together – and still after much hardship and persecution, having a venue in which they met in Jerusalem, in Acts 15:4.

Similarly, as the church began to spread, the gathering of believers into appointed places is consistently seen – despite constant opposition from Jews, Romans, and proponents of false religious systems. Sometimes, an outdoor venue was the only safe option (cf Acts 16:13); elsewhere, private homes had to suffice (as in Acts 12:12, Romans 16:15, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, Philemon 1:2, etc.) In other cities, Christians were able to secure the use of public buildings, capable of holding more people, such as the School of Tyrannus at Ephesus (cf Acts 19:9), or an upper chamber in Troas (cf Acts 20:8). And wherever the Corinthian church met, it was evidently not their own houses, as the reproof in 1 Corinthians 11:18-22 makes clear.

The exhortation that assembling together be not forsaken (cf Hebrews 10:25), and the many activities of the church that require believers to meet (cf Matthew 18:20, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Ephesians 4:11-13, James 5:16; Galatians 6:2), show the necessity of a defined location. However, **nowhere** in the whole of the New Testament, is there any suggestion that Christians' places of assembly are a continuation of the Old Testament Temple, or Tabernacle. Indeed – the contrast could hardly be greater: the gilding, ornamentation, colour, statuary and ritualism of the one, and the humble simplicity of the other. Attempting to force a connection here, is to wrest the Word of God. And yet, this is precisely what has been done, as history demonstrates.

Beginning from the Third Century, and continuing thereafter – and frequently citing those Old Testament structures as their inspiration, or in their defence – ecclesiastical buildings grew in size, ambition and cost, producing some of the most monumental edifices the world has known, and spawning a whole vocabulary of architectural terms, and rules of proportion, shape and orientation. Throughout much of Europe, the grandest building in most towns and villages was always the 'church'. Space fails to list the abbeys, basilicas, cathedrals, minsters, monasteries and kirks that have been reared up over the centuries, right through to the sprawling mega-church campuses of the modern day – all designed as a feast for the senses, all vying with the Temple for richness and grandeur – and all utterly at odds with the New Testament pattern.

While the ancient buildings of the Jews, with their appurtenances, might hold a fascination for materialistic, earthly-minded man, God's divine assessment is very different. Approximately five centuries after its first construction, God judicially caused the Tabernacle to be overrun by the Philistines, and its component parts dispersed (cf 1 Samuel 4, Psalm 78:56-61). Through the instrumentality of David and Solomon, the ark of the covenant, and then the Temple, were installed in Jerusalem; but within five centuries more, these too, were despoiled: "*go ye now unto My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what*

I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel ... Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by My name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh" (Jeremiah 7:12,14). After the Babylonian Exile, a measure of restoration was granted, and another temple would stand in Jerusalem for a further five centuries, until at the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, the veil shrouding the Holy of Holies was rent in twain (cf Matthew 27:51), revealing to all the 'hollow centre' and emptiness at its heart, from which both the ark, and God's Divine presence, were equally removed. Within a few decades, the whole building would be destroyed, and not one stone be left upon another (cf Luke 21:5-6). For as Christ Himself had said, the Temple at Jerusalem, and the temples of idols, were alike unfit for the true, spiritual worship of God (cf John 4:20-24).

What Christian, having read Hebrews chapter 9, would ever wish for a 'church building' that consciously emulated aspects of the Tabernacle, or Temple – or even borrowed their names? So long as those figurative structures stood, the great reality they foreshadowed was not yet made manifest. But now it is; and they are gone. The 'pattern of things' has given way to 'the things themselves'; the priesthood of men has yielded to the intercession of Christ; the blood of beasts has been superseded by the blood of His cross; the holy places made with hands by Heaven itself. And what of the Temple? This too, was merely typical, and has its fulfilment – but not in any building or structure: "*for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people*" (2 Corinthians 6:16; cf Ephesians 2:19-22). Where the New Testament people of God assemble themselves together, however lowly or poor their meeting places may be, it may truly be stated: 'the temple of the Lord are these'.

Participation

Some might argue that, whilst the ancient buildings of the Jews, and the venues where Christians now gather, are rightfully very different and

distinct, yet in the activities performed there, and the religious exercises conducted, there is surely much more similarity. The Word of God is read, prayers are made, praises are sung – are not all these practices common to both Old and New Testaments; to Jews and Christians alike? To conflate these things together shows a failure to comprehend the ritualistic and formulaic nature of Jewish worship.

There was only one location to which the Jews might resort for official ‘worship’, and this they did, at strictly defined seasons throughout the year. They were compelled by the Law, and prescribed what, and how to do, by the same Law. It was legally, socially, and culturally incumbent upon them to do so. Once at the temple, personal involvement and engagement was minimal. Whilst gifts of various kinds were brought for sacrifice, the offering of those things was performed by the priests only, at a distance, or out of sight. The mass of the people was obliged to wait without, ignorant of what was done within (cf Luke 1:10, 21). As for the sung parts of worship, this too was restricted to a Levitical caste, namely the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun (cf 1 Chronicles 25:1, 2 Chronicles 35:15, Nehemiah 12:44-47), the latter sometimes identified as *“the chief musician”* (Psalm 39, 62, 77 title). Just as the Temple building with its boundaries, courts, gates and veils emphasised discrimination and exclusion, so did its ordinances and functions – which were confined and limited to specific persons within the Law.

It is difficult to imagine just how different the practices of the New Testament church would have seemed, to those who had also experienced the previous epoch, being characterised now by union and communion, where, *“they were all with one accord in one place”* (Acts 2:1). This is the consistent description of the early church (cf Acts 1:14, 2:46, 5:12, 15:25), and applied equally to their prayer and praise: *“And ... they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is ... And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and*

they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:24, 31-32). Something of this had begun to be known at the institution of the Lord's Supper, after which, "**when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives**" (Matthew 26:30), and continued to be a predominant feature. Sung worship was to be engaged in corporately and by all, for personal blessing (cf Ephesians 5:19), mutual edification (cf Colossians 3:16), and every instance, "*to the Lord*". This, not as demanded by the Law, but arising from a ready heart and mind (cf James 5:13, 1 Corinthians 14:15).

Present-day Christian religion exhibits a range of so-called 'worship styles'. At one extreme, in 'high church', Anglo-Catholic cathedrals, there are professional choirs in their vestments, singing medieval chants or later liturgical choral works, directed by a Master of Choristers or a Cantor. At another extreme, in modern charismatic centres, are stages covered in audio-visual equipment and electronic instruments, where 'worship groups' with their 'worship leaders' blare out a noisy cacophony, in unashamed mimicry of carnal popular music. Between these seeming opposites, lie all manner of ensembles, bands, orchestras musicians and singers. Yet they are not so different as they superficially appear. All these have the same questionable pedigree, and belong to the same class of error – and all are contrary to the New Testament pattern. For in all the cases described, 'worship' is made the particular responsibility of a party or faction within a congregation, and henceforth a distinction and division exists. Some are an immediate part of it, others are not; some are 'in', others are 'out'; some will perform, while others are performed to. Wherever this situation applies, to whatever extent, the Scriptural mandate for the church is being transgressed, and the redundant forms of Judaism are being revived. The moment that any members of a congregation cease to be equal participants in the corporate praise of God – it is no longer united worship; it at once becomes mere ritual, ceremony, performance, entertainment, noise.

This fundamental principle can help to establish the right place and form that singing or music should take in the true, New Testament church. Let enquiry be made: is the whole assembly involved? Is anyone simply a passive recipient of that which is done, and obliged to listen to others? Is any individual relegated to a lesser class of ‘worshipper’ by this format? The answers to these questions will reveal whether Biblical order is being followed, or not. The only place instrumental music can legitimately hold in the New Testament church is as a modest aid or accompaniment to the gathered body. As soon as it exceeds these bounds, it becomes performative, for the gratification or glorification of man.

The first and last occurrences of ‘song’ in the Scriptures are highly instructive, and are vitally connected, for it is the same song: “*Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation*” (Exodus 15:1); “*And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints*” (Revelation 15:3). In both scenes, every person present is engaged – it is all the children of Israel; it is all those who had gotten the victory, without exception. No Law or commandment was necessary to enjoin them to sing, no musicians appointed to lead; they spontaneously worshipped, in response to the works of God for their souls.

The testimony of the ascended Christ, and aspiration of His believing people is the same: “*For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are **all of one** ... saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, **in the midst of the church** will I sing praise unto thee*” (Hebrews 2:11-12). When the glories of eternity ultimately dawn upon the sight of God’s ransomed people, there will not be one mute tongue, not a single silent voice, among them. Then let us begin to rehearse ourselves here on earth, for what we shall hereafter do in Heaven!

R. J. Steward

HOW TO SING

1. Socially, and with united voices; so Moses and the children of Israel sang at the Red Sea; so Christ and His disciples sang after the Lord's Supper; so the watchmen will sing in the latter day, even with their voice together; so did Paul and Silas in prison; and thus the churches are directed.

2. With the heart along with the mouth, as heartily as well as vocally, which is 'making melody in the heart' (cf Ephesians 5:19), or performing the duty in sincerity and truth; and not as the Israelites, who flattered God with their lips, sang the praises of God, but soon forgot His works.

3. With grace in the heart (cf Colossians 3:16), with several graces; not one note, but a mixture of notes makes melody; many voices, yet one sound makes a chorus; so singing must be with various graces: with faith in God (without which it is impossible to please Him); and with strong love and affection for Him; and also with reverence and godly fear; for God is 'fearful in praises', reverend in them, to be praised with great fear and reverence for His majesty.

4. With the Spirit, as the apostle Paul determined to do (cf 1 Corinthians 14:15); with the Spirit of God, whose assistance is necessary in this, as in prayer; and with our spirits, sincerely, fervently, and affectionately, and in a spiritual manner, suitable to the nature of God, who is a Spirit.

5. With the understanding also; with the understanding of what is sung; and in such a manner, and in such language, as may be understood by others; for one end of the duty is, not only to speak to ourselves in it, but to teach and admonish others; and perhaps the apostle may have some regard to one of the titles of David's psalms, 'Maschil', which signifies 'a psalm giving instruction, or causing to understand'. In a word, besides our mutual edification...

6. We should have in view the glory of God; for we are to sing unto the Lord; not to ourselves, merely to raise our natural affections, to gain applause from others by the fineness of our voice, and by observing an exact conformity to the tune; but to the glory of Father, Son and Spirit, the one God, who condescends to inhabit the praises of Israel (cf Psalm 22:3).

John Gill (1697 – 1771)

“The Levites, who were appointed to the office of singers [are called upon] to employ their instruments of music – not as if this were in itself necessary, only it was useful as an elementary aid to the people of God in these ancient times. We are not to conceive that God enjoined the harp as feeling a delight like ourselves in mere melody of sounds; but the Jews, who were yet under age, were astricted to the use of such childish elements. The intention of them was to stimulate the worshippers, and stir them up more actively to the celebration of the praise of God with the heart. We are to remember that the worship of God was never understood to consist in such outward services, which were only necessary to help forward a people, as yet weak and rude in knowledge, in the spiritual worship of God.

A difference is to be observed in this respect between his people under the Old and under the New Testament; for now that Christ has appeared, and the Church has reached full age, it were only to bury the light of the Gospel, should we introduce the shadows of a departed dispensation. From this, it appears that the Papists, as I shall have occasion to show elsewhere, in employing instrumental music, cannot be said so much to imitate the practice of God’s ancient people, as to ape it in a senseless and absurd manner, exhibiting a silly delight in that worship of the Old Testament which was figurative, and terminated with the Gospel.”

John Calvin (1509 – 1564)

THE NATURE OF TRUE WORSHIP

“*God is Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24). To worship “*in spirit*” stands contrasted from the fleshly rites and imposing ceremonies of Judaism. To worship “*in truth*” stands opposed to the superstitions and idolatrous delusions of the heathen. To worship God “*in spirit and in truth*” means in a manner suited to the full and final revelation which God has now made of Himself in Christ. It means to worship spiritually and truly. It means giving to Him the homage of an enlightened understanding, and the love of a regenerated heart.

To worship “*in spirit and in truth*” stands opposed to a carnal worship which is external and spectacular. It bars out all worshipping of God with the senses. We cannot worship Him who is “*Spirit*” by gazing on ornate architecture and stained-glass windows, by listening to the peals of a costly organ, by smelling sweet incense or ‘telling’ of beads. We cannot worship God with our eyes and ears, or nose and hands, for they are ‘flesh’, not ‘spirit’. ‘Must worship in spirit and in truth’ excludes everything that is of the natural man.

To worship “*in spirit and in truth*” bars out all soulical* worship. The soul is the seat of the emotions, and very much of the so-called worship of present-day Christendom is only soulical. Touching anecdotes, stirring appeals, thrilling oratory of a religious character, are all calculated to produce this very thing. Beautiful anthems by a well trained choir, rendered in such a way as to move to tears or to ecstasies of joy may stir the soul, but will not and cannot affect the inner man.

True worship is the adoration of a redeemed people, occupied with God Himself. The unregenerate look upon ‘worship’ as an obeisance which

* An obsolete word, defined as: “of or relating to the soul” – can be understood in this context as meaning “emotional”, or “sentimental”.

God exacts from them, and which gives them no joy as they seek to proffer it. Far different is it with those who have been born from above and redeemed with precious blood. The first time the word ‘redeemed’ occurs in Scripture is in Exodus 15, and it is there also, for the first time, we behold a people ‘singing’; worshipping, adoring God Himself. There, on the far shores of the Red Sea, that Nation which had been brought out from the house of bondage and delivered from all their enemies united in praising Jehovah.

‘Worship’ is the new nature in the believer stirred into activity, turning to its Divine and heavenly Source. It is that which is ‘spirit’ (cf John 3:6) turning to Him who is “Spirit”. It is that which is the workmanship of Christ (cf Ephesians 2:10) turning to Him who recreated us. It is the children spontaneously and gratefully turning in love to their Father. It is the new heart crying out, “*Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift*” (2 Corinthians 9:15). It is sinners, cleansed by blood, exclaiming “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ*” (Ephesians 1:3). That is worship; assured of our acceptance in the Beloved, adoring God for what He has made Christ to be unto us, and what He has made us to be in Christ.

It is worthy of our closest attention to observe that the only time the Lord Jesus ever spoke on the subject of worship was in John 4. Both Matthew 4:9 and Mark 7:6-7 were quotations from the Old Testament. It should indeed stir our hearts to discover that the sole occasion when Christ made any direct and personal observations on worship was when He was speaking, not to a religious man like Nicodemus, nor even to His apostles, but to a woman, an adulteress, a Samaritan – a semi-heathen! Truly God’s ways are different from ours.

To that poor woman our blessed Lord declared: “*The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him*” (John 4:23). And how

did the Father ‘seek’ worshippers? Does not the whole of the context supply the answer? At the beginning of the chapter the Son of God is seen taking a journey (vs. 3-4). His object was to seek out one of His lost sheep, to reveal Himself to a soul that knew Him not, to wean her from the lusts of the flesh, and fill her heart with His satisfying grace; and this, in order that she might meet the longings of Divine love and give in return that praise and adoration which only a saved sinner can give.

Who can fail to see in the journey which He took to Sychar’s well in order to meet that desolate soul and win her to Himself, that we have a most blessed adumbration of that still greater journey which God’s Son took – leaving heaven’s peace and bliss and light, coming down to this world of strife and darkness and wretchedness? He came here seeking sinners, not only to save them from sin and death, but to give them to drink in and enjoy the love of God as no angel can enjoy it; that from hearts overflowing with the consciousness of their indebtedness to the Saviour, and thankfulness to the Father for having given His dear Son for them, they, realizing and accepting His superlative excellency, might pour forth unto Him the sweet incense of praise. That is worship, and the remembrance of God’s seeking love and Christ’s redeeming blood are the springs of it.

One of the most blessed and beautiful examples recorded in the New Testament of what worship is, is found in John 12:2-3: “*There they made Him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.*” As another has said: “She came not to hear a sermon, though the Prince of Preachers was there. To sit at His feet and hear His word was not now her object, blessed as that was in its proper place. She came not to meet the saints, though precious saints were there; but fellowship with them, though blessed, was not now her object. She came not, after a week’s toil, for refreshment;

though none knew better the blessed springs of refreshment which are in Him. No, she came to pour out upon Him that which she had long treasured up, which was the most valuable of all her earthly possessions. She thought not of Simon the leper, sitting there a cleansed man; she passed by the apostles; so, too, Martha and Lazarus, her sister and brother in the flesh and in Christ. The Lord Jesus filled her thoughts: He had won her heart and now absorbed all her affections. She had eyes for no one but Him. Adoration and homage were now her one thought: to pour out her heart's devotion before Him" [adapted from D. T. Grimston, 1832-1872]. That is worship...

The object of worship is God; and the inspirer of worship is God. Only that can satisfy God which He has Himself produced: "*Lord ... Thou also hast wrought all our works in us*" (Isaiah 26:12). It is only as the Lamb is exalted in the power of the Spirit that saints are made to cry, "*My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour*" (Luke 1:46-47). The general and conspicuous absence of that worship which is "*in spirit and in truth*" is due to an order of things over which the Spirit of God does not preside; where the world, the flesh and the devil have free play. But even in circles where worldliness, in its grosser forms at least, is not tolerated, and where outward orthodoxy is tolerated, and where outward orthodoxy is still preserved, there is, almost always, a noticeable absence of that unction, that freedom, that joyousness, which are inseparable from the spirit of true worship. Why is this? Why is it that in numbers of churches, meeting houses, Brethren assemblies, where the letter of God's Word is ministered, that we now so rarely find those overflowings of heart, those spontaneous outbursts of adoration, that 'sacrifice of praise' which should ever be found among God's people? Ah, is the answer hard to find? It is because there is a grieved Spirit in the midst. This, my brethren, is the reason why there is so little living, refreshing, worship-producing ministry of Christ today.

A. W. Pink (1886 – 1952)

EDITORIAL

In the midst of all the changes and impermanence of this present life, it is a source of great comfort to dwell upon the unalterability of God, and the consequences that flow from this divine attribute. He gives clearest testimony to it in the words of the prophet: “*For I am the LORD, I change not*” (Malachi 3:6). So it must be, as His very name declares, for He uses ‘Jehovah’ – by definition, the great and constant “I AM”. The second part of the statement is equally instructive: “...*therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*” By contrast, the choice of name here (Jacob – ‘deceiver’, as opposed to ‘Israel’) recalls the duplicity and inconstancy of fallen man, and his worthiness for judgment. But the immutability of God is the guarantee of His forbearance. Psalm 103:10 will continue to be true, because God does not change.

“It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23). ‘Faithfulness’ conveys the sense of steadfastness on the part of God – in consequence of which, the tokens we receive of His compassion are as constant as the day. This truth is enlarged upon by the apostle, who wrote: “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*” (James 1:17). The gifts of God are good and perfect because they are reliable, and He who is the source of them is eternally unvarying.

“God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it” (Numbers 23:19-20). The changelessness of God extends to everything that He has said – each prophecy, each promise, each pronouncement of blessing. Not all the devices and malice of our foes can thwart it, as this case proves. For God ‘will not

suffer His faithfulness to fail'; "*My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips*" (Psalm 89:34). Thus in both His nature and His Word, "*two immutable things, in which it [is] impossible for God to lie, we . . . have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us*" (Hebrews 6:18).

My love is oft-times low,
My joy still ebbs and flows,
But peace with Him remains
the same,
No change Jehovah knows.

I change, He changes not,
The Christ can never die;
His love, not mine, the
resting-place,
His truth, not mine, the tie.

(Bonar)



The evangelistic booklet "**Spiritual Insolvency**" by W. H. Molland has returned to print in a new edition, and is available free of charge from the Chapel, at the usual contact addresses. It forms a useful complement to the others in this series: "*Christ the Great Divider*", "*In Search of What?*" and "*A Message from God to You*". Please enquire for details.

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Preliminary Announcement

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION
Saturday 6th & Lord's Day 7th June 2026 D.V.