

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

*Pleading for a complete return to Christianity
as it was in the beginning*

Vol. 63 No. 9

SEPTEMBER, 1995

HOW FIT ARE WE?

In a discussion amongst some brethren, recently, it was suggested that all Christians ought to be supremely confident of going to heaven, and that, if they have any doubt about it, there must be something wrong with them. Any doubts they have, it is suggested, must be due to a lack of faith in God. I know that this is a commonly held view but how valid is it? Perhaps the view of some of those who lack the certainty that, on death, they will go straight to heaven, is based not on a lack of faith in God, but a lack of confidence in themselves and a doubt that, at the Judgement, they will be counted worthy of everlasting life. I suppose we have to admire the confidence of those who emphatically assert that, at death, they will be ushered immediately into the presence of the Lord, but is there a danger of being over confident? Should he that stands beware lest he falls?

Certainly there are extremes in both directions. I was reading the other day about a preacher whose sermons, on most occasions, create a distinct impression that *nobody* will ever be worthy of heaven. That extreme, however, must be offset by the other extreme, (created by most of the clergy officiating at funerals) i.e. that *everybody* will be going to heaven. I refer to this over-confidence because, obviously, *nearly everybody*, deep down in their heart-of-hearts, solemnly believe that, when the time comes, they will 'just make it' through the "Pearly Gates". "After all" they say, "God is a God of love" and He will forgive us when the time comes. And it's not just Christians who claim to have this confidence of going to heaven: *a large percentage of the entire population* believe this: based on the perception (quite often a true one) that they are nice people who have never done anyone any harm, and have, in fact, done some people a lot of good, some having been engaged in charitable work all their lives. Their confidence is just as real as that of anybody else. Is it justified? The *general perception* in the world, on this subject, is, I suppose, that nearly everybody will go to heaven. My neighbour used to say that the Bible only mentions hell to scare us and make us behave (much the same as parents scare their children that "the bogey man" will come if they don't eat their vegetables, or go to sleep, etc) but that God doesn't really mean it.

Coming back to the religious world; I suppose it must be true to say that nearly *all the major religions* of the world teach their devotees that they will go to some form of 'paradise' and they all sincerely believe it. Muslim soldiers go on "suicide missions" in the firm belief that if they kill large numbers of the enemy they will be rewarded by going straight to "paradise", and surely nobody could claim to be more confident than they are. Then, coming back to Christendom, I suppose it must be true to say that 99 percent of all members of all the various *denominational bodies* are confident of going to heaven. Nothing would convince them otherwise. I'm sure the Archbishop of Canterbury and most of the C. of E. (including all the homosexual clergymen) are certain of going to heaven. Likewise I'm sure

that the Pope and all the members of the R.C. Church are equally sure of heaven.

The common denominator in all this is, of course, the "confidence" of all concerned, but clearly that confidence may not always be justified. Those who have this confidence may have every right to entertain it, but perhaps we should treat it with some caution. Confidence, like conscience, is not always a safe guide.

NOMINAL CHRISTIANITY

In the first place, a great deal of what is known as "Christianity" is purely nominal.

At school we used to be told that Britain was a 'Christian' country. Very few teachers would try and tell pupils that sort of thing today; it would cause too much hilarity in the classroom. Using even a very loose definition of 'Christian' Britain could never be described by that term although I suppose it is *nominally* 'Christian' in contrast to the U.S.S.R. being described as a land of atheists.

The word 'nominal' is from the Latin *nominalis* which means "belonging to a name; or, existing in name only; verbal but not actual". Thus Britain is nominally 'Christian' i.e. in name only. To *nominate* (the verb) means *to name a person* (usually to some office). Thus we read in the local press that the lads on the factory floor have nominated Joe Bloggs to be Shop Steward. To nominate means, therefore, to recommend a name towards some appointment. The lads on the shop floor did not give Joe Bloggs his name, they merely "named the name" as suitable candidate for Shop Steward. It was God who gave Jesus His name. The angels decreed "Thou shalt call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins". Christians, however, *name the name* of Jesus in the sense that they *nominate* Him as their Lord and Master. To *de-nominate* means 'to name down' and so denominalisationism is a breaking down of the church into factions or denominations.

Paul mentions those "who have *named the name of Jesus*" (in II Timothy 2:19) when he says "and let everyone who nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity". Those who have "named the name of Christ" have become His servants and have nominated Him to be their leader and king. Thus they may be termed 'Christians'. It is possible however to take His name but not to take His *nature*; to nominate Him with our *lips* but not sublimate Him in our *lives* - in short to be Christians only in a nominal sense i.e. in name only. I suppose that what can be true of a *country* can equally be true of an *individual*. If Britain can be 'Christian' only nominally so can individuals.

'NAMING THE NAME' OF JESUS

In this 2nd Chapter of II Timothy Paul says some striking things about what is expected of those who have named the name of Christ. He likens Christians to soldiers (of all things) and says that followers of Jesus must *endure hardships* as 'good soldiers' of Jesus Christ. (v.3). Enduring hardship may not appeal to many of us and so we shall, perhaps, take steps to avoid it. During the First World War young men used to stand in long queues to join the army but after a few weeks in the trenches, lying unwashed in the mud, hungry and covered in lice, deafened by bursting shells and shrieks of the wounded, they would have given anything to get home. In our centrally heated meeting-houses, with the wall-to-wall carpeting, it is difficult to realise that there is a war going on and that Christ is depending on us in the heat of the battle. We might snipe away at one-another but the nearest we shall come to actual danger is the possibility of a long sermon making us late for lunch.

Then (v.4) Paul points out that "no man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life. That he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier". Thus, when we become soldiers for Christ we resign a lot of personal freedom and become subject to Army Law.

Then in v.15 Paul provides those words, now so well known, advocating Christians to "Study (or to agonise) to show themselves approved unto God, as workmen that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth". We must handle aright God's word but (next verse) "shun profane and vain babblings which lead unto more

ungodliness, and which eat as doth a canker of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus". It has been most helpful of Paul to give us an example of what he means by 'profane and vain babblings' and by citing the case of these two church members. Hymenaeus and Philetus taught that 'the resurrection was past already' and thus erred from the truth and overthrew the faith of some. This surely shows how we must strive to be correct doctrinally and how careful we must be in what we teach. These two Christians are on the eternal record as those who 'erred from the truth' and 'overthrew the faith of some', because of their mistaken understanding of the Resurrection (a fairly harmless misconception as some might think).

And so according to Paul, those who have nominated Christ are expected to be SOLDIERS and to endure hardship, engaged in a bitter war, refusing "to entangle themselves in the affairs of this life". Paul also stipulates that IF we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him: our hope of reigning seeming to be contingent upon that small word "IF". Paul also sees Christians as WORKMEN who agonise themselves to receive the approval of God, rightly handling the words of truth. How do we rate as soldiers and workmen?

FRUIT-BEARERS

Quite often we refer to the fact that the Kingdom of God is likened unto a vineyard without really appreciating the full implications. A vineyard is a place where work is expected to be done. It is no place for the work-shy. The only one who is allowed to sit there with his feet up is the owner. In the spiritual reality Jesus owns the vineyard and we are but the labourers. The function of the labourer is to gather and glean the fruit and bring it back to the owner. We are, in short, intended by the Lord to be fruit-bearers, Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen Me but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit". This was true of His immediate followers but is also true of us today. In similar vein the apostle Paul declared, "Wherefore my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 7:4). We have been released from the law so that we can marry another to what end? "that should bring forth fruit unto God". The world is God's vineyard. We are in it as His labourers. Our single purpose is to bring forth fruit unto God. Indeed Jesus went just a bit farther and said of those who would bear much fruit; "Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples". How shall we glorify God? How shall we prove ourselves to be Christ's disciples? By bearing much fruit" (John 15:8).

The apostle Paul prayed and greatly desired that the disciples at Colosse might be "filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"; that they "might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing"; that they might be "strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with all joyfulness" and that they might "be fruitful in every good work". Paul didn't limit our activities very much did He? or the choice of our good works when he said, "Be fruitful in every good work". For the disciples at Philippi Paul prayed similarly, i.e. that "their love would abound yet more and more in knowledge and judgement"; that "they would approve things that are excellent"; that "they would be without offence until the day of Christ and that they would "be filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God". (Phil. 1:10-11). Are we filled with the fruits of righteousness?

Thus according to Jesus, we should see the K. of G as a workplace, with a divine expectancy that we should bear much fruit. How do we measure up to this expectancy? If our hopes of heaven depend upon our output in the vineyard, how would we fare?

PAUL'S EXPECTANCY

"But", someone says, "all this sounds like salvation by works, whereas we know that we

are not saved by works, but by grace". It is true that we are saved by grace, and indeed, by faith, but James says that faith (be it ever so strong) without works is dead, being alone. It is also claimed that Paul, himself, is a very good example of one who had supreme confidence that he would go straight to heaven. Did he not say, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day . . ." This is true but it should be remembered that Paul also said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" and this is not, perhaps, something we can all claim. Paul's confidence probably had something to do with his unique record. He could say that he was " . . . in labours more abundant (than others), in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received. I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (11 Cor. 11:23). And so Paul could be a bit more justified in his confidence that we might be.

CONCLUSION

Although we must avoid the extremes (i.e. that nobody will be fit for heaven, or that everybody will get to heaven), there are, to my simple mind, a number of pointers in the N.T. which should make us treat the matter with discretion and some caution. For instance, most of the parables suggest that there may be many a slip between cup and lip, as far as reaching heaven is concerned. One parable says that many are called but few are chosen, while another, in describing the sower, mentions that "the good ground" is in very short supply: while another describes the banishment of the servant who, lacking any initiative, hid his talent below ground. And there are numerous similar parables.

Jesus, in His many dissertations on the K. of G. seemed to expect certain standards from those wanting to enter. He once said that those having put their hand to the plough and looking back would be regarded as "unfit" for the K. of G. Obviously Jesus had a certain measure of "fitness" or worthiness in mind for entry into His kingdom. He also said, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall IN NO WISE enter into the K. of G". Yes, Jesus forgives men their sins, but He also seems to expect a certain "fitness" for entry into the kingdom. The Lord also said "strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life and FEW there be that find it". "STRIVE to enter in, at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able! (Luke 13:24).

Then there is the question of Judgement Day. "It is appointed unto man once to die and then the Judgement"; and we "shall all stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ". If all Christians are going straight to heaven why should there be a Judgement Day? Matt. 25 gives a brief preview of some aspects of the Great assize and records the disappointments of some at that time, mentioning some sins of omission: i.e. failing in giving succour to the needy and remiss in visiting the sick. Many of us, like Belshazzar, may be weighed in the balances and found wanting. Jesus, himself, said, "Many will say to Me on that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name: and in Thy name cast out devils: and in Thy name done many wonderful works. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from Me" (Matt. 7:22)

If space permitted we could also consider the fact that Christians are not only soldiers, workers and fruit-bearers but also seed-bearers, light-bearers, standard-bearers, cross-bearers, disciples, watchmen and stewards walking the narrow way and running the

Christian race. We must strive, it seems, to reach an acceptable level of "fitness" in each and every role. As mentioned at the beginning, we can but admire the confidence of all those who are sure that they will go straight to heaven. All I'm saying is that we shouldn't overlook some of those other aspects of the matter.

The apostle Peter confirms all the above and says, "Wherefore the rather, brethren give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for **IF YE DO THESE THINGS** (see previous verses), **ye shall never fall. For so AN ENTRANCE shall be ministered unto you abundantly INTO THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ**". (2 Peter 1:10).

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

"Let her glean even among the sheaves" (Ruth 2:15)

FRIENDSHIP

"A man that hath friends must show himself friendly : and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother".

Proverbs 18:24

THE BIBLE SPEAKS

A FRIEND LOVETH AT ALL TIMES

Proverbs 17:17

IRON SHARPENETH IRON

Proverbs 27:17

THIS IS MY BELOVED AND THIS IS MY FRIEND

Song of Solomon 5:16

A FRIEND OF PUBLICANS AND SINNERS

Matthew 11:19

YE ARE MY FRIENDS, IF

John 15:14-15

I CALL YOU NOT SERVANTS

John 15:14-15

SOMEONE HAS SAID

"Friendship is the perfection of love".

"Friendships multiply joys, and divide grief".

"Friendships are better than battleships".

"He does good to himself who does good to his friend".

"Go oft to the home of thy friends for weeds choke up the unused path".

"New friends are like autumn leaves, found everywhere; old friends are like diamonds, precious and rare".

"If you would keep your friend, approach him with a telescope never with a microscope".

"A grip of the hand, a friendly look, a word of praise and trust - these are small things, but they are enough to warm the heart and stir the emotions". - W. Riley.

Asked how she succeeded in always making her guests feel welcome - Elsa Maxwell replied: "Three words suffice". When they arrive, I say, "At last" and when are ready to depart, I say, "Already?" - Shaw's.

"A little word in kindness spoken,

A motion or a tear

Has often healed the heart that's broken,

And made a friend sincere".

- Whittier

"THERE IS A FRIEND WHO STICKETH CLOSER THAN A BROTHER"

"The weary may find a resting-place upon His breast, and the friendless may reckon Him their Friend. He never varies, He never fails, He never dies, His sympathy is ever fresh, His love is ever free".

- D.L.M.

"As Tennyson declared when he lost his most intimate friend, Arthur Hallam I must lose myself in action, lest I wither in despair". - Dale Carnegie

AM I WEALTHY

"I am; and my riches consist in the friendships I have made, and they are innumerable. My books have brought me no great wealth in money - indeed, they have provided only a modest livelihood; but I count myself a rich man all the same, for they have brought me a multitude of friends. These kindly folk, all down the years, have written me letters that have not only pleased and encouraged me, but have warmed my heart and filled me with gratitude".

- W. Riley.

WE QUOTE - SUNSHINE MAGAZINE

"Speak well of your friends or do not speak at all. Be so generous in extolling their virtues that there is no time to mention their faults. Remember all the traits that make them likeable; forget the few times they displease you. When you speak highly of your friends, you speak highly of yourself; for a man is proud of his friends and is worthy of them".

CAN YOU SAY THIS

"I've found a Friend; O such a Friend,
He bled, He died to save me;
And not alone the gift of life,
But His own love He gave me.
Nought that I have mine own I'll call,
I'll hold it for the Giver;
My heart, my strength, my life, my all,
Are His, and His for ever".

Selected by Leonard Morgan

MOUNT OLIVE SPLIT (Part 2)

(A STUDY IN ZECHARIAH)

THE DECLINE

Chapter 11:vv. 1-9 Zechariah predicts decline in spiritual leadership, culminating the Golden Years and precipitating "the day of the LORD".

The following words are addressed to the nation's hierarchy:-
Zechariah 11:4-5

"Thus saith the LORD my GOD; Feed the flock of the slaughter; Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty; and they that sell them say, Blessed (be) the LORD; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not".

The rich made themselves richer at the expense of the poor and the religious leaders were involved in it up to the hilt. They exploited the poor and thanked God for the riches they thus acquired.

Whilst they were still in the process of re-building the temple, God warned them of the deterioration that would set in toward the end of the promised golden years.

BC 180 God withdrew His wall of protection from around them. There began Seleucid misrule under Antiochus Epiphanes. Helenisation flooded in with a vengeance. This precipitated the successful Maccabean revolt of BC 167. In BC 161 the Maccabees established an independent state obtaining a mutual assistance treaty from the Roman senate. Even so things were never the same as in the golden years. The era of tranquillity had gone for ever. Though they never returned to the pre-captivity type of idolatry, the priests dabbled in liberal sophistry whilst rigidly maintaining temple ritual.

In BC 66, Pompey entered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple, killing the priests as they were doggedly carrying out their temple duties whilst the walls collapsed upon them.

Even so the Jewish hierarchy did not read the signs of the times. Corruption and hypocrisy escalated giving rise to the severe rebukes meted out by the Lord Jesus.

"THE DAY OF THE LORD"

Chapters 11 to 14 predict it all culminating in a once for all horrendous conflict.

NOTE THE KEY PHRASE - "IN THAT DAY"

WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN "IN THAT DAY?"

The covenant God had made with the Hebrew nation was everlasting in essence but they had violated the terms of the covenant.

11:10-11 So God was going to break His covenant with them "in that day". Note this was to be the end of the covenant with the Jewish nation. It was never to be reinstated.

This is linked directly with the Messiah's passion. From here on all the predictions are Messianic:-

11:12-13 God is going to break the covenant with the Hebrew nation the same "day" as when He!, YHVH!, the Almighty God!, is priced by the religious leaders to be worth merely the price of a slave, THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER which they regarded as a goodly price.

"And I said unto them, if ye think good, give (Me) my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty (pieces) of silver. And the LORD said unto me. Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was priced at of them. And I took the thirty (pieces) of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD".

In these chapters, all passages falsely relegated to a yet future carnal, supposedly Armageddon type warfare, are stated to be occurring "IN THAT DAY".

12:2 "IN THAT DAY" 12:3 "IN THAT DAY" 12:4 "IN THAT DAY" 12:6 "IN THAT DAY" 12:8 "IN THAT DAY" 12:9 "IN THAT DAY".

12:10 The same "day" as when many are smitten with affliction of the heart through "looking on Him whom they have pierced".

"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem. the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for (His) only (Son), and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for (His) first-born".

12:11 The mourning would be as intense as when Josiah, the last king to follow the LORD with all his heart, was slain in the valley of Megiddo. This occurred three years previous to the Judean captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

"In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimon in the valley of Megiddon".

This is "the day" of the battle of the valley of Megiddon.

12:12-14 The grief over the Lord being pierced was not collective grief as a nation or as families but individual grief. This is evident from the use of the word "apart".

13:1 In that day a fountain is opened that "those plunged beneath its flood should lose all their guilty stains".

"IN THAT DAY there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness".

13:4-7 "In that day":- He receives wounds in His hands, in house of His friends (beloved companions). The shepherd is smitten and the sheep are scattered.

Matt. 26:31 "Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of Me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad"

13:8-9 In this warfare the lost exceed the rescued and the refiner's fire refines the rescued.

"THE DAY OF THE LORD" - THE SPLITTING OF OLIVET

Zechariah 14:1. **"Behold, THE DAY OF THE LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee".**

One marvels at how the Jewish hierarchy inadvertently brought about the fulfilment of these prophecies, but those who implicitly trusted the LORD, understood.

(Ch. 11, v.:11 **"And it (the covenant) was broken IN THAT DAY: and SO THE POOR OF THE FLOCK THAT WAITED UPON ME KNEW that it (was) the word of the LORD".**)

14:2-3 This is the decisive battle of all time, more critical and more crucial than any other conflict from the creation to the consummation of the world. It is Satan's climatic confrontation with the LORD:-

(Ge. 3:15 **"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"**)

14:4-5 **"IN THAT DAY"**, on Olivet, in Gethsemane the tension reached and passed crisis point, forging a decisive rift, a haven to which one can flee, available to all mankind. . . (Luke 22:42-44).

"HE SHED NO TEARS FOR HIS OWN GRIEFS BUT SWEAT DROPS OF BLOOD FOR MINE".

The beauty and wonder of this most traumatic of events smites one to the heart with overpowering awe. How puerile by comparison is the doctrine that the prophecy refers to God needing to vindicate Himself in a yet future world-wide physical war.

"Not by night nor by power but by My Spirit saith the LORD".

In that day; the covenant with the Jews was irrevocably broken, and a fountain was opened for sinners.

14:6-7 All happening "in that day", a "day" of Satanic obscurity in the minds of the religious leaders, where there should have been light. Yet in that darkest hour of despair, from that ghastly gibbet on Calvary shone superlative clarity pervading all the ages.

"ONE DAY", perpetual in its influence, all pervading down to the end of time.

14:8 **"In that day"** living waters sprang continuously in every direction from Jerusalem.

14:9 **"In that day"** the YHVH becomes ruler over all the earth.

14:16-21 The annual observance of the feast of the tabernacles is figuratively fulfilled in spiritual Israel. v. 20 "in that day" v.21 "in that day".

This is a perpetual feast of thanksgiving for spiritual harvest out of all the nations. For whom every aspect of their existence is "holiness to the LORD".

Sadly the Jews are confused by prophecies such as these and will be until individually they see the Lord Jesus in them. The Old Testament makes sense, only when seen fulfilled in the lowly Messiah.

"Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit saith the LORD"

BY WHAT SPIRIT IS THE CONFLICT WON?

THE SPIRIT OF EXTREME HUMILITY OF ONE WHO WAS VALUED TO BE WORTH ONLY THE PRICE OF A SLAVE.

THE SPIRIT OF THE ONE WHO "SHED NO TEARS FOR HIS OWN GRIEFS BUT SWEAT DROPS OF BLOOD FOR MINE".

JESUS' WORK WAS NOT A PARTIAL FAILURE, IT WAS A TOTAL SUCCESS!

With a loud voice He made His triumphant cry, **"IT IS FINISHED/ACCOMPLISHED!"**

**"THIS (IS) THE DAY
WHICH THE LORD HATH MADE ; WE
WILL REJOICE AND BE GLAD IN IT!"
PSALM 118:24**

I am greatly indebted to the excellent analysis of the book of Zechariah by the Hebrew scholar Brother Fred P. Millar in his book *"Zechariah & Jewish Renewal"*. This book is an invaluable reference work for those who want to study the book of Zechariah in detail. For copies write to him via PO Box 383, Rutland, Vermont, USA 05701 . 10

Matthew 23:39 is erroneously used as a proof text to teach that the whole Jewish nation will come to believe in the Lord Jesus anteceding a physical return of the Lord Jesus to the Mount of Olives from whence he will rule over all the earth.

Brother Fred Millar (p. 222 ff.) points out that the verse has no future verbs in the original. The Lord Jesus was not referring to His yet future appearing and the verse should not have been translated so as to give that impression.

It is a difficult verse to translate. There is no simple way of rendering it in English, as will be seen from the following literal word for word translation:-

Matthew 23:39 "because, I tell you, by no means (ye might perceive) me from now and until ve. might say (having been blessed) (the one) coming in (the name of the Lord)"

Words in brackets represent one Greek word.

The expression "the one coming" was used by the Jews of the anticipated Messiah (Matthew 11:3).

The Lord Jesus was telling them that in no way would they recognise the significance of His person until they could acknowledge in their hearts that He was the one who was to come in the name of the Lord, having appreciated that everything about Him had been so evidently praiseworthy. This is the same prerequisite for anyone becoming a Christian. There is no difference whether Jew or Gentile.

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BREAKING THE ALABASTER BOX

When a woman broke an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on the Lord's head, Jesus said, "She hath wrought a good work upon me" (Matt. 26:10)

What kind of good work was this? No one was fed, clothed or housed. No one was converted. No false doctrine was overturned or truth vindicated. No evil was overcome. Nothing that is considered utilitarian was done. Judas observed that no tangible accomplishment was made, and he complained. Then Jesus said, "She hath wrought a good work".

The Greek word here means, according to Thayer, "praiseworthy, noble." Such a work is commendable, excellent, suitable. One of the general meanings of this word is beautiful or pleasing. Some people think only in terms of practical value, but Jesus appreciates also the intangible good or the beautiful thought. In this case, the precious ointment was a token of a *sympathetic* concern and a *kind thought*.

Flowers, for the most part are not utilitarian. The centrepiece on the table cannot be eaten. A painting hanging in a room cannot insulate the wall. Perfume does not protect the body from the elements. There are many things which are not strictly necessary, but they still may be very desirable.

A DRAB WORLD

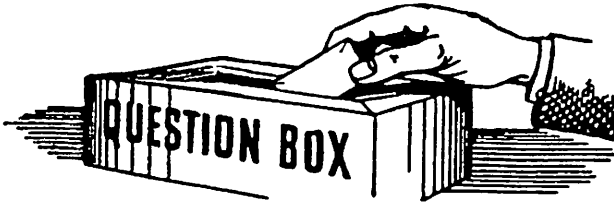
This would be a drab world indeed if no one regarded beauty. And do we really want to banish the tokens of our thoughts as represented by the precious ointment? An expression of sympathy when a friend has lost a loved one cannot change the fact of death. Shall we

omit going to funerals and the like because we see no practical results of it? Judas would say so, but not Jesus.

Breaking the alabaster box is a good work. It is indicative of tender compassion, care and love. It betokens an entering into and sharing the sufferings, joys, burdens and triumphs of others. In a way, the alabaster box represents the greatest of all alms. One can give to the poor without really sympathising with them. One could preach to sinners and argue for truth and right without any real concern. The missing ingredient so often is that deep heartfelt care about others that Jesus commended and saw in the alabaster box.

Sometimes there are emotions too deep to be articulated. When speech is inadequate to express what we want to communicate, we can often say all that needs to be said by a look, a touch, or by just being present. But this is a good work not as widely recognised for its importance as it ought to be. Maybe one reason why it is neglected is the fact that it requires involvement with others. It is easier to give money, or stand on ceremony, or to do some moralising than it is to enter into another's sorrows. Breaking the alabaster box is a good work, if behind it is a tender heart.

R. W. Dye.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"What is meant when we ask people if they believe that Jesus is the Son of God? This is before we baptise them, of course. Also do converts have to believe in the deity of Jesus before their sins can be forgiven?"

The questioner asks this question because he/she (unsigned letter) knows of a major religious sect (Christian) who believe Jesus was a 'created being' and not a Jehovah God. A passage of scripture John 8:24 is quoted. It seems to me that we need to clarify one or two points inherent in this question.

BEING

I consider the phrase 'a created being' to be a contradiction in terms. The verb 'to be' means to exist, therefore 'being' means 'existing'. If we refer to a 'created being', then we refer to someone who was created by someone else who must Himself have been uncreated. In the Bible, as I understand it, the 'Uncreated' we refer to as God. The implication inherent in the question is that Jesus was 'created' by God. If we can show that 'being' is 'uncreated existence', then we shall be in a position to advance our thinking a little further. As I have pointed out on a number of occasions, metaphysics as a philosophy is not easily understood at human level.

We must now look at a statement made by the apostle Paul in Philippians 2:6. This is referring to the Christ of God, Jesus, **"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery (a thing to be grasped at) to be equal with God"**. The word 'being' here is the Greek word HUPARCHON which means 'existing', and is the present active participle of HUPARCHO (without getting too 'bogged down' in grammar, a participle is a verbal adjective; part verb, part adjective). This construction "always involves a pre-existent state, prior to the fact referred to, and a continuance of the state after the fact" (W. E. Vine, Ex. Dic. N.T. Words). In explanation, this means that Jesus possessed all the essential attributes

of God in His pre-incarnate state, and also in His incarnate state in the flesh on earth (EN MORPHE THEOU, 'in the form of God').

"Ah", someone will say, "But doesn't v7 say that 'he emptied himself'? Surely that means He became just a man. If I empty a cup there will be nothing in it of what was previously in it". The word 'empty' is rendered in the Greek by the word KINOO, which is an old verb from the word KENOS. There is a so-called theory of KENOSIS, which says that when Jesus became a man, he became like any other first-century Jew. It is true that He left His glory and took 'the form of a servant'; it is also true that He became; in the likeness of men'. I would not deny that He had the limitation of space when He came to earth. But it was impossible for Him to become something other than that which He essentially was; "being in the form of God", He was a Person of the Godhead and as such He had Godhood. He was still 'Son of God' when He came to earth to be 'Son of Man'. His deity was intact: He did not empty Himself of that. Therefore we can say that if anyone believes in Jesus, that person also must believe in His deity

BELIEVING

I now turn to the passage of scripture quoted by the questioner, John 8:24. I believe that J. B. Phillips gives the best rendition of this, "That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that *I am who I am*, you will die in your sins". This brings to mind the instruction which God gave to Moses when He sent him back into Egypt, "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you". Ex. 3:14. Now if anyone can say 'I AM', then what is being said is, "He was, He is, He always will be", in fact, eternal, as God is. It seems to me that Jesus, according to John's Gospel, is claiming the same eternal nature as God.

We now need to look at what those in the 1st century believed, and how they responded to the Gospel. I cite the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch, Acts 8:29-40. This man was reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip, the Evangelist, who had joined himself to this man's chariot said, "Do you understand what you are reading". The answer was, "How can I unless someone explains it to me". So Philip explained by preaching unto him Jesus. This illustrates a fundamental point; our belief and consequent faith must be based on **understanding**. As they continued on their journey they came to a certain water. The eunuch said, "Here is water; what hinders me from being baptised". Philip said, "If thou believest with all thy heart thou mayest". The eunuch replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God". So there we have it: Belief in Jesus as the Son of God; confession of faith out of a truly repentant heart; immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins; rejoicing in the fruits of obedience. There is one other thing we should mention here. Philip said to the eunuch, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest". The belief in Christ must be **from the heart** and not just the mind. In Jer. 31:33 we read, "After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people". The stony heart which just responds to the letter of the law is no longer acceptable.

COMMITMENT

When I say, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God", I am, in fact, making a commitment to Him, and undertaking a responsibility. That responsibility is a Divine imperative. It involves complete obedience to the deity I have named. I have understood that obedience to Him will absolve me from sin. I have also understood that no mere human could offer me forgiveness of sin. My responsibility includes not only the Saviour, but extends to all others who have been obedient to Him and are consequently members of His Body, the Church.

It is true that in the 1st century A.D. there was a sect called the Docetic Gnostics. They believed that Jesus was a 'phantom' Christ. They argued that Deity could not dwell in a body

of sinful flesh. Paul, however, says, "For He hath made Him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" 2 Cor. 5:21. This means that Jesus could be our **sin-bearer** only because He Himself was **sinless**. The Hebrew Writer also makes it clear that Jesus had the full approbation of God, His Father, "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows". Heb. 1:8,9. Yes, Jesus the Son of God, certainly came in the likeness of sinful flesh, but Satan could do nothing with Him; the 'wilderness temptation' proves that. His brow was pierced with the thorns which they pushed down on to His head. and it was **real blood** which flowed. Doesn't it make our salvation all the more breath-taking when we realise that God Himself stepped down from heaven in the Person of Jesus, His Christ? When we, in faith and obedience, accept Christ as Saviour, we accept Someone, who, yes, changed His environment, but who could not change His **essential nature** from that which He was in Heaven. Is that too much to believe? Would we rather place our eternal destiny in the hands of some fallible man? I'm sure we all know the answer to **that**.

In conclusion, let me remind you of Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost, "**Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**". This means God's presence with us by the other Person of the Godhead. So we have the determinate counsel of God arranging our salvation; Christ Jesus procuring it; and the Holy Spirit confirming it by in-dwelling us. How can anyone exclude Deity in every step of our salvation?

(All questions, please to Alf Marsden, 20 Costessy Way,
Winstanley, Wigan. WN3 6ES)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Oct 1	Ruth 1	John 11:1-16
Oct 8	Daniel 12	John 11:17-44
Oct 15	Numbers 9:1-14	John 11:45-57
Oct 22	Psalms 118:8-29	John 12:1-19
Oct 29	Genesis 3:1-15	John 12:20-36

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

The record reveals that, during His ministry, Jesus raised from the dead the widow's son (Luke 7), Jairus' daughter (Matthew 9, Mark 5, Luke 8), and Lazarus (John 11). The case of Lazarus is, of course, limited to John's gospel.

Lazarus was the brother of Martha and Mary, who were all specially loved by Jesus. Their home town was Bethany, which was not far from Jerusalem. I like to think that Jesus frequently rested at the home of this beloved family whenever He could - a haven of peace in a troublesome world.

Death eventually overtook Lazarus. His passing was much mourned, especially by his sisters. But here was Jesus' opportunity to show His power over death. It is one of the outstanding miracles of the Bible and proof-positive that the man from Nazareth was the promised Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Tragically not all who witnessed the events came to believe this of Jesus. How could they be so blind?

It is important to point out here that it was never God's intention to have death in the world. Death is a result of man's fall. Alexander Campbell has written: "Thus 'by one man sin entered into the world, and death by that one sin; and so death, the wages of sin, has fallen upon all the offspring of Adam', because in him they have all sinned, or been made mortal, and consequently are born under condemnation to that death which fell upon our common progenitor because of his transgression". I hear sceptics say: "Surely this situation is so unfair!" I would reply: "Yes, it would be if there had been no second Adam to put

things right". But a second Adam has come in the person of Christ Jesus, "who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel". (2 Timothy 1:10). Praise the Lord.

Personally, I take great comfort from the fact that, at this time, Jesus has power over sin, death and the grave. He showed that power during His ministry and that power has never waned. I like the passage in Revelation which says: "I am He that lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen: and have the keys of Hades and of death" (1:18). Fear of death is removed because Jesus has complete control of the situation.

Lazarus, dead for four days, heard the voice of the Master crying: "Lazarus, come forth!" (11:43). If I die before he returns, then I believe that I too will hear His voice. So will everyone else. We read: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29).

There are some unanswered questions about Lazarus after his resurrection. For example, for how long did he live until he died again? What if anything, did he reveal about the state of the dead? Only a meeting with him in heaven will provide the answers. I look forward to it.

PLOT TO KILL JESUS

People reacted two ways to the resurrection of Lazarus. We read: "Then many of the Jews, who came to Mary and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on Him" (11:45). "From that day forth they (the Sanhedrin) took counsel together to put Him to death" (11:53). The latter were a clear example of fallen humanity. Satan was using them as his instruments, while all the time they thought they were fulfilling God's will. Imagine plotting against the Son of God all because He brought Lazarus back from the dead! But their testimony is worth noting: "Here is the man performing

many miraculous signs. If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him and then the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation" (11:47-48, N.I.V.)

I like the fact that God can use even a wicked high priest to utter a true prophecy concerning His Son (11:49-52). What he said about Jesus has been described by some commentators as dramatic irony. Dramatic irony occurs in a play when a character says something whose full significance he does not realise. Certainly, this was the case with Caiaphas. But it was no play he was in - it was for real!

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

The final days were now upon Jesus. Jerusalem beckoned and He was about to make His triumphal entry. What were His thoughts at the time? We can only imagine. I have visited Jerusalem. It is a fascinating city with a unique history. When there, I tried to imagine Jesus' entry into the city among the great crowd. I must admit that I found it rather difficult because things have changed so much in two thousand years. Nevertheless, Jerusalem was where it happened - and what a happening! "The next day the great body of pilgrims who had come to the festival hearing that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem, took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting, Hosanna! Blessings on Him who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the king of Israel! Jesus found a donkey and mounted it, in accordance with the text of Scripture: 'Fear no more, daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, mounted on an ass's colt'" (12:12-15, N.E.B.). Remember, to come in that day on an ass was to come in peace. This was a dramatic enactment of the words of the prophet Zechariah (9:9), which he had delivered some five hundred years before.

The desperation of Jesus' enemies can be seen in the words: "Look how the whole world has gone after Him!" (12:19, N.I.V.). However His popularity among the common people could not prevent His eventual arrest and crucifixion. These men were ruthless and nothing was going to stop them in the

execution of their diabolical plot against the Saviour.

JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH

Jesus knew that the time of His arrest, trial, and crucifixion were now very near. His heart was troubled (12:27). He said: "Father save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying I have both glorified it and will glorify it again" (12:27-28) The way of the cross was the path to glory. The wisdom of man knew nothing of this. Paul later wrote to the Corinthians: "No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of our rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:7-8, N.I.V.).

Jesus declared: "Now is the judgement of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (12:31). Dear reader, think carefully about this. There have been many momentous events in history, but nothing compares with these events surrounding Jesus of Nazareth. Albert Barnes has written: "Now is approaching the decisive scene, the eventful period - the crisis - when it shall be determined who shall rule the world. There has been a long conflict between the powers of light and darkness - between God and the devil. Satan has so effectively ruled that he may be said to be the prince of this world; but my approaching death will destroy his kingdom, will break down his power, and will be the means of setting up the kingdom of God over man".

The sun has been shining brightly in Britain over July and August. Without the sun there could be no life on earth. Without the Son of righteousness there could be no spiritual life on earth. Christ Jesus is the Light of the World. He Himself said: "Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light" (12:36, N.I.V.). Jesus spells LIGHT and LIFE. God be praised.

Ian M. Davidson,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. How was Matthias chosen to replace Judas?
2. Where did Peter receive a vision?
3. In which city did Paul find an altar to an unknown God?
4. Which disciple was also called Didymus?
5. What does "Bethel" mean?
6. Who was the son of Hachaliah?
7. How many elders assisted Moses?
8. How old was Adam at the time of Seth's birth?
9. Who was Moses' father?
10. Who is the most mentioned woman in the Bible?

A GOOD CHRISTIAN

I spent some time today with a fellow I admire very much. He doesn't drink alcoholic beverages, nor use tobacco in any form. I never heard him gossip or tell a lie. He doesn't patronise the road houses, or theatres or dance halls. I can't recall him ever resorting to cursing or blasphemy, profanity or obscenity. I never heard him cheating another in a business deal. By some folks standards we could call him a "good Christian". But I think you ought to know that I have been describing my dog. Which is all to say that being a "good Christian" involves infinitely more than having a list of things one does not do. "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14) is the scriptural admonition.

J. Douthitt.

OBITUARY

TRANENT: The church has been saddened by the loss of another member in the space of a few weeks. Sister Jean Brown died on Sunday, 30th July just five weeks after her daughter Eileen whose death was recorded in the August issue.

Sister Jean was a faithful member of the Tranent congregation all her adult life and a regular attender until hospitalised a few weeks ago. We thank God for her long life and pray that the God of peace will be a comfort to all those who mourn her

passing.

Bro. Mark Plain conducted the funeral service.

John Colgan, Church Secretary.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Kentish Town: London. The church here rejoices over the addition of Eunice Santos to the Church of our Lord. Eunice was baptised into Christ on May 28th, 1995. She has been studying with us for some time.

We greatly welcome her into our fellowship and pray that we shall all receive a blessing thereby.

Dorothy Proud, Secy.

Stretford, Manchester. Rejoice with us and give glory to God that Michael Raphael Ashurst, the eldest son of Stephen and Abigail Ashurst, was buried into Christ in baptism on Saturday the thirteenth of August at Longshoot Church of Christ meeting place, Wigan. We are thrilled with his decision to devote his young life to the Lord who loved him and gave Himself for him. Increasingly the young face a lot of evil pressures from every quarter. Please pray that he will be guarded from the evil one and that he will grow in faith, love and spiritual strength to serve the Master all the days of his life.

Allan Ashurst

COMING EVENTS

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

Kentish Town, London

Our 124th Anniversary Meeting
on 7th October, 1995 at 3 p.m. & 6 p.m.

Speaker is Brownlee Reeves

ANNUAL SOCIAL

Newtongrange

Saturday, 7th October, 1995 at 4 p.m.
Speakers: Graeme Pearson, Dunfermline.
Mark Plain, Tranent.

We look forward to a rich time of

fellowship with the various congregations.

Joe Currie, Sec/Treas.

EDITOR'S CHANGE OF ADDRESS

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Midlothian

to

26 Gavin Street, Motherwell,

Lanarkshire, ML1 2RJ

Tel. (01698) 252694

May I take this opportunity to apologise to all those who may have written to me and not had a reply. I regret that I cannot keep up with all the written matter that requires attention.

Ed.

GHANA REPORT/APPEAL

We have tried, ever since this appeal began, to leave a little in the Bank for emergencies and this has proven to be a good practice.

At the beginning of August, Bill Cook and I received a visit from Billy Orten and Joe Norton on their way home from a 3 week visit to Ghana.

For the benefit of those who may wonder about this, in 1983 the Dunfermline church was sending aid to Ghana (6 years before the appeal began) and around the same time a church in the USA were doing the same. It was not until 2 years after the Ghana Appeal had been launched that the extent of the work of the Springfield church was known to us. The Fairview church took over the work of Springfield a few years ago and while we do have a close contact with Fairview, we have a mutual agreement to ensure our efforts do not overlap. This is working well and on the strength of Billy and Joe's recent report we sent the entire Bank balance to Ghana to help in Medical Aid, to pay the rent of a church whose building has become unsafe as a result of the heavy rain and will be demolished. Also money was sent to pay for roofing materials to two churches whose building programme now have completed the walls of their

meeting places.

Two days after the Bank transfer we received a telegram requesting urgent financial aid for a hospital bill for someone called James who is seriously ill. We responded within the hour and redirected roofing funds of Odumasi to pay the bill and we hope from this report that we can replace this money to Odumasi.

As I write, I note with interest that news on the TV refers to the British public becoming hardened to Appeals. "Appeal Weary" was the phrase used. Apparently when the TV covers a story, the response is good.

The Ghana appeal highlights the difference between the children of God and the children of darkness. You have shown that you are not weary of well doing and you give very generously without TV coverage. I know that my appeals lack the skills of those who write in the "Scripture Standard" but nevertheless £54,365.66p has been collected to date and we have £4.06p at present in the Bank Account.

Whilst 85% of the Appeal has come from the British Isles, brethren in Australia, New Zealand, USA and Canada have also supported this work.

We have heard that there are 13 new congregations in the Volta Region formed in the last 18 months. The Accra congregation has grown to 127 and have divided into three with the hope of a fourth congregation shortly also to be formed.

The Fanti Bibles have arrived and they have been distributed. The £800 we sent to 4 churches has arrived and been distributed. The church secretaries have expressed their thanks on behalf of the congregations to those who made this possible.

This month I simply request that the present level of help continues, so that this work may continue. Ghana may be materially poor, but they are rich in Spirit and your donation greatly encourages the brethren.

Please make cheques payable to "Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal)" and send to Graeme Pearson, 13 Fairways Dunfermline, Fife. KY12 0DU. Tel. (01383) 728624.

-
- 10. Sarah
 - 9. Amram (Exodus 6:20)
 - 8. 130 (Genesis 5:3)
 - 7. 70 (Numbers 11:16)
 - 6. Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:1)
 - 5. House of God (Genesis 28:19)
 - 4. Thomas (John 20:24)
 - 3. Athens (Acts 17:16,23)
 - 2. Joppa (Acts 10:5)
 - 1. By Iots (Acts 1:26)

ANSWERS

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER YEAR — POST PAID BY SURFACE MAIL.

UNITED KINGDOM and COMMONWEALTH.....	£	7.50
CANADA & USA.....	\$	14.00

AIR MAIL, please add £2.00 or \$3.00 to above surface mail rates

PLEASE MAKE CHEQUES PAYABLE TO "SCRIPTURE STANDARD"

DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

JOHN K. KNELLER, 4 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry, East Lothian. EH32 0NY.
Telephone: Longniddry (01875) 853212 to whom change of address should be sent.

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Scotland. ML1 2RJ. Telephone: (01698) 252694

"The Scripture Standard" is printed for the publishers by
Lothian Printers, 109 High Street, Dunbar. East Lothian. EH42 1ES. Tel: (01368) 863785