



# COUNSEL

*SUMMER 2013*

*Justification  
It's Good to Know  
A Song of Compassion  
Blessed in Christ  
and more...*

W. E. Vine tells us the word 'reckon' is 'properly used of numerical calculation.' Here is one instance where Paul used the word, *'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.'* (Rom. 8:18).

In Romans chapter 8 Paul was assuring suffering believers that their sufferings in no way were evidence that the security of their salvation was in question. The thrilling chapter that begins with 'no condemnation' concludes with 'no separation.' What an encouragement to know we are secure in Christ. My security is dependent on Him, not me.

But in so comforting the believers Paul states an unchangeable fact. Present suffering is *'not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.'* This encouragement from Paul was not based on mere sentiment or emotion. It was a statement of fact. Like a numerical calculation which will always yield the same results Paul says, 'I reckon.' I've calculated this and it will always be the same, no matter how many times I go over it. *'...the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.'*

The prospect of future glory was ever before Paul. And it was a shared glory. We notice the previous verse, *'if so be that*

*we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.'* (Rom. 8:17) Glorified together! With Him! What a prospect for us!

But we also notice that the suffering is 'with Him' too. We never suffer alone in this life. It may seem that way, but it is not. The Lord is with us and is *'touched with feeling of our infirmities'* (Heb. 4:15). In our times of suffering it is a privilege to know fellowship with Him alone. We can pour out our heart to him and He will hear, understand, share and minister to us. In fact as we follow this chapter of Romans 8, we notice the Holy Spirit too is active in our trials. *'Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.'* (Rom. 8:26) Even when we do not understand how to pray, the Holy Spirit 'helpeth us'.

Paul's calculation tells us more. Present trials, as deep as they may be, are disproportionate to the coming glory in us. The corresponding and compensating glory far exceed the present trial. So much so Paul says in another place, (without minimizing the severity of suffering, something Paul knew intimately), *'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal*

*weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.'* (2 Cor. 4:17, 18) An exceeding and eternal weight of glory is coming to you who are passing through times of trial.

Such trials Paul says, remind us that the temporal are just that. It is the eternal that is our goal. What matter is it then if the temporal has sorrow, the eternal never will.

The apostle Peter heartily agreed with Paul's calculations and he took the truth even further. He links our present trials to a direct counterpart at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Here are Peter's words, *'Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.'* 1 Peter 1:6, 7. Peter's statement indicates we will bear a glory that was forged in time of trial. The pain of the trial will be gone forever, but it will leave in us a glory that will appear in the final revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We can count on this to always be true. 2+2=4.



# COUNSEL

Timely Truths For The People Of God

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*"Be still and know that I am God,  
That I who made and gave thee life  
Will lead thy faltering steps aright;  
That I who see each sparrow's fall  
Will hear and heed thy earnest call.  
I am God.*

*"Be still and know that I am God,  
When aching burdens crush thy heart,  
Then know I form thee for thy part  
And purpose in the plan I hold.  
Thou art the clay that I would mold.  
Trust in God.*

*Quietness*

*"Be still and know that I am God,"  
Who made the atom's tiny span  
And set it moving to my plan,  
That I who guide the stars above  
Will guide and keep thee in my love.  
Be thou still.*

*-Author Unknown*

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# RECOGNIZE LEADERSHIP

*“And He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry...” (Eph. 4:11,12 NKJ).*

*“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the flock of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).*

The early churches were very opposed to a clergy distinction between believers. Had not their Lord told them to avoid titles and that they were all brethren?(Matt. 23) But they came to realize that God had gifted them differently and that they needed to recognize these differences. All should work together for the growth and blessing of God’s people. And some were gifted to be leaders.

Barnabas was older than Saul and had been a believer longer. It was he who became convinced that Saul was genuinely converted and brought him to the apostles

in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27). Later it was he who brought Saul to Antioch to help with the work there. When Barnabas and Saul went on their first missionary journey, it was “Barnabas and Saul.” But in time as Paul’s leadership became very evident, it was “Paul and his party” (Acts 13:13). From that time Paul was definitely the leader of the group. Barnabas was a very gracious, humble man and accepted his role gladly. Even though on their second journey they differed about Mark, Paul always spoke warmly about Barnabas.

In the assembly of God’s people we need grace to recognize God’s leadership of elders as raised up by God. They must give account one day of their shepherd care of God’s people. It is His flock purchased with His blood.

I knew a man in an assembly who had a prosperous business. He employed a number of men and one was an elder from the assembly. In the business he was the boss. But in the assembly

his employee was his elder and he recognized this. Both men accepted their roles cheerfully and the assembly was blessed. This takes grace.

Do not resent God-given leadership but be thankful and supportive. I like the humility of Peter in his old age, a great leader among the apostles. *“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly, not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:1-3).* It is the humble spirit of a great leader who views leadership as an opportunity to serve the people of God. May God give us more leaders like him.

And may we as the Lord’s people be grateful for them and accept their leadership.

DONALD NORBIE | Greeley, Colorado



# It's Good To Know

☞ Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth. *Hosea 6:3*

☞ This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. *John 21:24*

☞ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. *Romans 3:19*

☞ For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. *Romans 8:22*

☞ And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. *Romans 8:28*

☞ For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. *2 Corinthians 5:1*

☞ And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. *1 John 2:3*

☞ Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. *1 John 2:18*

☞ Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see him as He is. *1 John 3:2*

☞ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. *1 John 3:14*

☞ And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. *1 John 3:19*

☞ And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us. *1 John 3:24*

☞ By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments. *1 John 5:2*

☞ And if we know that He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him. *1 John 5:15*

☞ We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. *1 John 5:18*

☞ And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. *1 John 5:19*

☞ And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. *1 John 5:20*

# JUSTIFICATION



**M**artin Luther was trained as a lawyer but due to a vow made to God he entered a monastery. As a monk he tried to live a righteous life, sometimes spending as much as six hours out of a day in confession of sins. In spite of this he still struggled with the impossibility of being made righteous. Here is the account, in his words, of his conversion experience.

*“At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, in it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’*

*Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scripture from memory. I also found*

*in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God. And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word ‘righteousness of God.’ Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise. Later I read Augustine’s *The Spirit and the Letter*, where contrary to hope I found that he, too, interpreted God’s righteousness in a similar way, as the righteousness with which God clothes us when he justifies us. Although this was heretofore said imperfectly and he did not explain all things concerning imputation clearly, it nevertheless was pleasing that God’s righteousness with which we are justified was taught.”*

Luther later wrote these words, *“now the article of justification, which is our sole defense, not only against all the force and craft of man, but also against the gates of hell is this: that by faith only in Christ, and without works, we are pronounced righteous and saved.”*

Martin Luther’s grasp of justification by faith and the imputation of the righteousness of God propelled the

Protestant Reformation along. This doctrine became the fundamental tenet of the evangelical movement.

## ***Explanation***

Justification is a declaration by God that a guilty sinner is right in God’s sight and guilt is removed. This judicial act is based on three facts, the grace of God through the sacrifice of Christ; the sinner’s acceptance of Christ by faith; and the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are three willing parties to the act of justification. The Lord Jesus voluntarily went to the cross to pay the price for sin and bear its penalty. A sinner by his own volition places faith in the Lord Jesus and on the basis of both these acts the Father declares that person to be innocent of all charges and thus guilt free.

As with all the major doctrines of the scripture there is both progressive revelation and a fuller development from Genesis through to how the epistles use the words and express the concepts. The New Testament gives theological import to words that were common in the language of the day but limited in meaning. As an example words like grace,

love, hope, peace, and humility took on a different meaning in the Epistles as opposed to how they were used on the street.

The word “justification” is not found in the Hebrew Old Testament and only occurs in Romans 4 & 5. The first time any part of the word is used in the English translation is in Ex. 23:7 where God says of lawbreakers that “I will not justify the wicked.” The NIV renders this “I will not acquit the guilty.”

Job asked the question in 9:2, “How can a man be righteous before God?” In response to Job’s speech Zophar says in 11:2 “and should a man full of talk be vindicated?” The KJV renders the word as “justified” while most other translations use the word “vindicated.” In this context the meaning is “to be declared right.” Bildad adds a question to respond to Job in 25:4 “how then can a man be righteous before God?”

The gospels use the word “justify” in much the same way as the Old Testament concept. To vindicate or to declare right such as when the Lord Jesus said in Luke 7:35 “But wisdom is justified by all her children.” That is, that those who respond prove by their choice and life that the teaching of John and the Lord Jesus was right.

A notable use of the word “justified” is found in Luke 18:14 as applied to the tax collector who with the Pharisee was praying in the temple. The tax collector in humility pleaded for God’s mercy and thus expressed some understanding of propitiation and the mercy seat. The Lord Jesus that said of the two it was the tax collector that went to his house justified or vindicated.

Paul’s sermon in Acts 13 introduces a new idea to the concept of being justified in the sight of God. This would be radical news to the Jewish audience. Acts 13:38, 39 “Therefore let it be known to you brethren, that through this Man is preached to you

*the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.”*

In order to more fully appreciate what is involved in justification it is important to understand the purpose of the law. Gal. 2:16 states that “a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” He goes on to say in 2:21 “if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

This leads Paul to ask the question in Gal. 3:19, “what purpose then does the law serve?”

This may be a question an objector would raise after hearing Paul’s discourse on the law up to this point in the chapter. Paul said the law could not supply the Holy Spirit to them, the law could not justify them, it could not promote faith and it brought a curse with it.

No wonder someone may ask a question about the purpose of the law in light of all it could not do.

Paul goes on to explain some of the purposes of the law. The law revealed the sinfulness of sin and supplied a check on behavior by showing the wrath of God. The law acted like a guardian or disciplinarian until Christ came and people could move from law to grace and salvation by faith. In Rom. 3:20 Paul says, “By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

There was nothing wrong with the law as Paul states in Gal. 3:21, “for if there had been a law given which could give life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.” The law exposed sin, gave a righteous standard but could not declare a person righteous or justified.

## **Exposition**

It is clear from the three references (Rom. 4:25; 5:16, 18) that use the word “justification” as a noun that doctrinally and practically it is tied to the person and work of Christ. Without His death on the cross there would be no grounds for a guilty sinner to be justified.

### **Romans 4:22-25**

The climax of Paul’s argument in chapter 4 is found in verse 21 and 22, the fact that Abraham had faith and righteousness was imputed to him. Paul wants all to see that this righteousness is not tied to being a Jew or as a result of keeping the law. This righteousness came by faith and is available today on the same basis.

A person, who by faith, believes in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead at that moment the same righteousness is imputed to them. The divine basis for this act of imputation is that Christ was delivered up for our offenses. The resurrection was the Father’s seal of approval on the finished work of Christ so that justification can take place.

### **Romans 5:12-21**

In the previous verses Paul has been dealing with sins, offenses, and transgressions. The sinful acts that are committed while here Paul turns to the root cause, the fact that mankind are sinners because of the disobedience of Adam.

One man introduced sin into the world and one Man’s righteous act brought in the possibility of justification. Adam’s disobedience caused all men to be sinners while through Christ’s obedience many will be made righteous. It is not the life of Christ but His death and resurrection that allow mankind to be declared right before God. This action results in life.

Justify and justifier as a verb appears a number of times in Romans and

# A Song of Compassion

*With a soul blood bought and a heart aglow,  
Redeemed of the Lord and free,  
I ask as I pass down the busy street,  
Is it only a crowd I see;  
Do I lift my eyes with a careless gaze,  
That pieces no deep down woe,  
Have I naught to give to the teeming throng  
Of the wealth of the love I know?*

*As I read in the gospel story oft  
Of the Christ who this earth once trod,  
I fancy I see His look on the crowd,  
That look of the Son of God;  
He saw not a number in might and strength,  
But a shepherdless flock distressed,  
And the sight of those weary fainting sheep,  
Brought grief to His loving breast.*

*Dear Lord I ask for the eyes that see  
Deep down to the world's sore need,  
I ask for the love that holds not back,  
But pours out itself indeed;  
I want that passionate power of prayer;  
That yearns for the great crowd's soul,  
I want to go 'mong the fainting sheep,  
And tell them my Lord makes whole.*

*Chorus:  
Let me look at the crowd as my Saviour did,  
Till my eyes with tears grow dim,  
Let me look till I pity the wandering sheep  
And love them for love of Him.*

*Words by R. A. Jarvie*

*Music: Duet by W. Gardiner-Hunter*

gives added dimension to what justification means.

## **Romans 3:21-31**

Up to this point in the epistle Paul has concluded all men as guilty under the law. Now he moves from the law to God's righteousness which is attested by the law and the prophets. The word "righteousness" and the word "justify" are from the same root in Greek.

All have sinned refers to all of mankind, whereas the "all" in verse 22 speaks of those placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For those, without any cost, freely, by grace they are declared right in God's sight.

The reason this action is possible is found in verse 25, it is due to the propitiation accomplished by the shed blood of Christ. God's law demands a punishment for sin and Christ on the cross satisfied those demands. This allows God to maintain His righteousness and still be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

## **Romans 5:1**

This verse introduces the results of being justified. The tense of the verb "being" suggests that it is a past act looking back to a point in time when this peace was entered into. This is a wonderful declaration of what has happened to a believer on the basis of faith. Having been declared right in God's sight our standing has been radically altered. The hostility is removed, the enmity is ended, and we are reconciled to God. The guilt associated with our lawlessness is also removed and we have peace of conscience, of soul, and of mind. In Rom. 8:1 the result is "no condemnation."

Further to this peace a believer has access by faith into the grace in which we stand. Justification throws open the door to all the riches of God's grace. Beyond saving grace there is grace to serve,

to be strong, to be sustained, and to be supplied. Attached to these things is hope in the very area we once fell short, the glory of God.

## **Galatians 2:16; 3:8**

Paul asserts to these believers that the act of justification is not on the basis of the law and self-effort. In fact he says no one can possibly be justified by the law. Even prior to the giving of the law this principle was established in Abraham and through him all nations were to be blessed.

The danger for these Galatians was that they were being enticed to desert grace and go back under the law. The implications were that the death of Christ is minimized and the believer would put themselves back under bondage. These truths are presented to make the Galatians realize that justification has changed their status with regard to the law.

## **James 2:14-26**

Martin Luther initially had great difficulty with this passage as it seemed to contradict Paul's teaching of justification by faith. John Calvin recognized that "*we are saved by faith alone, but faith that saves is never alone.*" There is no conflict between Paul and James as in all scripture there is harmony.

James is addressing the visible expression of faith as he says, "*show me your faith without your works.*" In verse 21 James takes a different incident in Abraham's life than Paul did. Paul drew from Gen. 15 whereas James draws his proof from Gen. 22. James is showing how the demonstration of faith justified Abraham in the sight of man. He had previously been declared right by God and righteous was imputed to him on the basis of his faith as seen in Gen.15.



## Examples

The act of God justifying a sinner is judicial or as theologians would say, forensic. Justification is one aspect of salvation, it does not involve pardon or sanctification or even forgiveness. These involve a change inside the sinner with regard to sin. Justification does not deal with the inside but rather the outside, the legal standing of a sinner before God. When God declares a sinner justified that person is then right with God as to status.

Perhaps a few illustrations from life will help to understand the

formerly the accused now stands before the judge as a free man. Nothing changed on the inside but as to the standing before the law and in sight of the judge the person is free of all charges. They are justified or declared right regardless of their character and other lawless acts.

There are several Old Testament stories that illustrate the doctrine of justification. In 2 Sam. 9 the account of Mephibosheth is one such account. Mephibosheth had no right to sit at the king's table but David looked beyond Mephibosheth's heritage and

a once for all declaration by God concerning the status of a sinner. There is no indication in scripture that this act can be undone or happen twice to the same person. Some believers teach that eternal life is tied to the believer's performance while others insist it is maintained by perseverance. The truth is our life is preserved in Christ based on this declaration of God and His power to keep us in that standing before Him. The question is asked in Romans 8:33 "who shall bring a charge against God's elect?" The response is "it is God that justifies."

## Aspiration

There should be a sense of what the act of justification has accomplished in a believer's life. When this is true a Christian will desire to act as one who has been justified. The past is wiped out and there is a new start in Christ. Like Abraham our desire should be justification in the sight of those watching our lives. This happens when saints show their faith by their works.

## Appreciation

Justification is a work of God performed on us in spite of the fact that we are hell-deserving sinners. Guilty, vile and helpless we, but God by an act of the divine will declares us just in His sight as a response to our faith in Christ Jesus. This should draw a response from us of praise and worship to Him. This should also be seen in our desire to live for Him.

*Just as I was I came to thee, an heir of wrath and misery,*

*Just as Thou art before the throne, I stand in righteousness Thine own.*

- J. Denham Smith

# JUSTIFICATION IS A DECLARATION BY GOD THAT A GUILTY SINNER IS RIGHT IN GOD'S SIGHT AND GUILT IS REMOVED.

distinctiveness of the act. Consider a marriage ceremony, when the declaration is made that the couple are now man and wife no inner change took place. Those words changed their status before friends and family and in the eyes of the law. Both went in a moment of time from being single to being married. Their life would change from that time onward but that is the result of the declaration.

Think of a courtroom. The person convicted of a crime stands before the judge waiting for the judge's decision. The accused will either be declared guilty or innocent depending on the judge's determination. If the verdict is one of innocence, the one who was

declared that he would be considered as one of the king's sons. This act opened the door to the further blessing of eating continually at the king's table.

The account of Joseph's brothers coming back to meet Joseph also demonstrates the truth of justification apart from works. These men were guilty of several crimes toward Joseph yet Joseph absolved them of all guilt and then went on to provide for them.

## Application:

### Assurance

The result of being justified and understanding what is involved gives the believer the assurance of salvation. The act of justification is



# MARY

## “At His Feet”

### A DEVOTIONAL STUDY

The study of the ‘Marys’ of the New Testament is a delightful one. According to Robert Young’s *Analytical Concordance* there were seven of them. Probably, all were believers devoted to our Lord Jesus. Much more is written about some of them than others: notably, Mary the mother of the Lord; Mary Magdalene; and Mary of Bethany, who is the subject of this article. The latter is in many ways the loveliest character of them all. In all three chapters which mention her, Mary of Bethany is found low at Jesus’ feet in an attitude of quiet humility, and in only one chapter does she speak to Him. In the other two chapters her attitude and actions speak both to Him and to us far louder than any words ever could. Let us, then, study her relationship with her Lord in the chapters which mention her in their chronological order with a view to learning from her precious and important lessons concerning our own relationship with the Lord Jesus.

#### ***1. Learning in the School of Christ***

In Luke chapter 10 verses 38 to 42 we find the first vignette of the family at Bethany, who were one of the few households who really welcomed the Lord Jesus into their midst and gave Him His rightful place amongst them. This family is an example and fore-view of all the families down the age of grace since then who have owned Jesus as Lord and given Him first place in their daily lives. They, like us, had occasional frictions and problems, but they brought these to Him, and He resolved them all. In Luke 10 Jesus quietly and graciously defused an atmosphere of tension and potential friction between Martha, the owner of the house, and Mary, her probably younger and quieter sister. Martha was acting as an over-busy and flustered hostess at the meal she was preparing for the Lord, while Mary was taking greater delight in sitting at Jesus’ feet and drinking

in all He was saying to her. Clearly, the two sisters had different temperaments and ways of expressing their appreciation of the Lord Jesus. Martha was a diligent servant of the Lord, while Mary was a humble disciple of Christ who listened before she acted in service for Him. Notice that the verses do not say that Mary never engaged in service with Martha, but that she ‘also’ sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His Word. She was not unpractical in her expression of discipleship, but simply had her priorities right, putting worship and communion with the Lord before service for Him. As Christian disciples, we too need times of regular private and quiet communion with our Lord in prayer and Bible study before, and as well as, times of diligent and enthusiastic service for Him. The former periods of quiet learning at His feet will the better fit us for busy service on His behalf. Otherwise, we shall probably make mistakes in service through ignorance of His Word and will.

Furthermore, it was undoubtedly at the feet of Jesus that Mary learned the truths of His coming death, burial, and resurrection which decisively guided her later actions towards Him. Yes, learning quietly in the school of Christ is essential preparation for living for Him in this world. Then the strain and stress which leads to friction in both the Christian home and assembly will be relieved and replaced by a quietly ordered life which confesses 'the beauty of Thy peace', as the hymn writer once put it.

## **2. *Lamenting the Sorrows of Life***

The second vignette of the family at Bethany is found in John chapter 11. There the scene is a more troubled one, as Mary and Martha have called for Jesus to come to heal their brother Lazarus of his terminal illness. The Lord delayed setting out for Bethany for two further days; in fact, until He knew Lazarus was dead. Now He had a wonderful design of love for the whole family in this delay; for it gave Him the opportunity to reveal Himself, not simply as the healer of the sick, but rather as the Resurrection and the Life by raising Lazarus from the dead. In that way He fulfilled His statement at the beginning of the chapter that, *'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God.'* Yet the Lord was not in any way unsympathetic or unfeeling towards Mary when she came and fell at His feet, and then wistfully told Him that, if He had been there earlier, her brother would not have died. Jesus did not reply to her directly, but groaned in the spirit at the sight of Mary's very evident grief, and openly wept with her as He empathised with them all in the deep sadness caused by the death of a loved one. He had the final answer to the situation

in the resurrection power of His Word, and used it immediately after He had wept; but He still showed priestly sympathy for the suffering family, thus proving that He really loved them all. When we, like Mary, are lamenting the sorrows of life at the graveside of a loved one, let us remember that the Lord Jesus is both the final answer to the problems that sin has brought into the world, and the perfect sympathiser with our resultant sufferings. Through a most traumatic experience Mary learned to trust her Lord more fully, and to find in Him all her needs met. So too can we.

## **3. *Loving her Lord Sacrificially***

John chapter 12 is the lovely sequel to the raising of Lazarus from the dead in chapter 11. Here we have the third and final vignette of the family at Bethany six days before the Passover, when Jesus became the sacrificial Lamb of God for sin. Both the Jewish leaders and also most of the people had rejected the Incarnate Son of God and only sought His death. He had no settled home in this world; but here we see that He was always a most welcome and honoured Guest at Bethany, whence He visited Jerusalem every day during the last week of His earthly ministry. The scene of the supper which the family made Him at Bethany is very beautiful, and so reminiscent of many similar Christian family and local assembly gatherings, when believers all through the present age of grace have made much of their Lord in a world which still rejects Him. Here Mary assumes a leading role in expressing her love and appreciation for her Lord by breaking her most treasured box of very costly ointment, pouring it all out over both His feet and also His head, according

to Matthew and Mark, and then carefully wiping His feet with her long hair, thus denoting the abasement of her natural glory in His Presence. The traitor did not appreciate what he thought to be a complete waste of money, but the Lord certainly did appreciate her devoted and sacrificial worship, and her motive in expressing it at that particular time. For He understood that Mary had realised that He was soon to die, be buried, and then rise from the dead. Her earlier close communion with Him, when she had listened to His Word, had taught her more than probably anyone else concerning the events which were shortly to take place at Calvary. So, while she could, she acted out of love to her Lord, and gave perhaps all she had for Him to appreciate; for soon the opportunity would be gone forever. Her action was spiritually intelligent, loving, and sacrificial. As a result, as the Lord Himself said, the fame of her deed that day has never ceased to be spoken about during subsequent Christian history. The name of Mary of Bethany has always since that day been closely associated with the subject of Christian worship. She did not say a word then, but the whole house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment which she had sacrificed for Him. What an encouragement for Christian sisters!

We must ask, therefore, how deep is our own appreciation of our Lord Jesus Christ today? How spiritually intelligent and timely is it? How devoted and costly to our natural pride and possessions? Let Mary of Bethany be an enduring example to all of us, not only of humble discipleship, but also of sacrificial worship of the Saviour who gave Himself up for us. In short, how often are we, too, 'at His feet'?



ISAIAH 52:13-15

# God's Servant Will Be Exalted

PART 1 OF 5

In this first stanza, God speaks about how His servant will be exalted and, in doing so, He makes three predictions concerning the Lord Jesus.

## 1. He will deal prudently: 52:13

*“Behold, My servant will deal prudently.”* Four times in 1 Samuel 18 the NKJV translates “deal prudently” as “behave wisely”. After his victory over Goliath, *“David behaved wisely.”* Saul promoted him over all the men of war but then became jealous of him, removed him from his position and made him a captain, but *“David behaved wisely in all his ways... when Saul saw that he behaved very wisely, he was afraid of him.”* Saul continued to provoke David and again sought to kill him but *“David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name became highly esteemed”* (1 Samuel 18:5, 14-15, 30). Whatever the circumstances in which he found himself, David did the right thing: he behaved wisely.

But the ESV translates these statements about David as follows: *“David went out and was successful”;*

*“David had success... Saul saw that he had great success”;* *“David had more success than all the servants of Saul”.* The idea is that he knew what to do in each situation (he acted wisely) and as a result he accomplished what was desired (he was successful). So it was that the Lord Jesus always did and said the right thing at the right time in the right way. There never was any need for apology or regret on His part for something He had done or not done. Nothing could have been improved and, as a result, He successfully accomplished what He came into the world to do: *“Father, I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You gave Me to do”* (John 17:4).

To be truly successful is to walk wisely in harmony with the will of God as the Lord Jesus did. That's why Joshua was twice told to *“observe to do all according to all the law”*, the outcome being *“that you may prosper wherever you go”* (Joshua 1:7-8). The Lord Jesus likened the person who hears and obeys His sayings to a wise man who builds his house on a rock and when the storm comes the house stands still. Obedience to the word

of God results in prosperity and success.

## 2. He will be very high: 52:13

*“He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”* On the day of Pentecost Peter reminded the people of Israel that they had rejected the Lord Jesus, had taken Him, and with wicked hands had crucified Him. Then he quickly pointed out that this One has been *“exalted to the right hand of God”* and *“God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (Acts 2:36). Later, he wrote that God *“raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory”* (1 Peter 1:21). Paul expressed the same truth, *“God has highly exalted Him...”* (Philippians 2:9-11); *“He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all...”* (Ephesians 1:20-23). The resurrection, ascension and present position at God's right hand of the Lord Jesus represent God's vindication of the person of His Son and God's affirmation of the sufficiency of His sacrifice. They announce that sin has been atoned for, Satan has been defeated, death

has been conquered, God has been satisfied, and the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, now vindicated and exalted.

The story of Joseph illustrates the point. His father loved him and honoured him and sent him on a mission. His brothers hated him and, when they saw him coming, they plotted against him and got rid of him as a slave into Egypt. The Egyptians accused him of a crime he had not committed and put him in prison. Then finally Pharaoh brought him out of prison and raised him up. He is exalted to the highest position in the land, given items that speak of authority and status: a royal signet ring, garments suitable for a king, a golden chain, royal robes, a new name, a bride and a royal carriage in which he could go through the land. Joseph was lord *“over all the land of Egypt”* (Genesis 41:41, 43, 45, 46). Joseph himself expressed it in these terms, *“God has made me lord of all Egypt”* (Genesis 45:9).

This exaltation of the Lord Jesus includes His assuming the position and glory which He previously had. In Isaiah 6:1, Isaiah tells us of his vision of the Lord “high” (translated “exalted” in Isaiah 52:13) and “lifted up” (translated “extolled” in Isaiah 52:13). There he sees the Lord in glory prior to the incarnation, the transcendent Lord of the universe, the object of angelic worship, high and lifted up. In Isaiah 52 God speaks about Him after His experience here on earth and points to the fact that He Who had been high and lifted up before the incarnation has been restored to the place that He once had. Indeed He has been made “very high”. This is what the Lord Jesus prayed for, *“Glorify Me together with Yourself with the glory which I had with You before the world was”* (John 17:5). Just before He uttered these words, He rose from the table, laid aside His garments, wrapped Himself with a towel, washed the feet of

the disciples and then He took His garments again and resumed His place at the table. It is a picture of how He voluntarily laid aside His divine majesty, wrapped Himself in human flesh and took the place of a servant among men. But when His work was done, He was glorified with the glory He previously had and sat down at the right hand of God.

### **3. He will sprinkle: 52:14-15**

*“So shall He sprinkle many nations”* is a pivotal statement, coming between two expressions of astonishment.

At His first coming, *“many were astonished at you”* because *“His visage was marred more than any man”* and *“His form more than the sons of men.”*

Subsequent to His suffering, *“kings shall shut their mouths at Him”* because *“what had not been told them they shall see”* and *“what they had not heard they shall consider.”*

This has an application to this present age. The Levitical ritual involved sprinkling, sometimes with oil or water and oftentimes with blood which signified cleansing and consecration. For example, blood was sprinkled when the covenant was ratified (Exodus 24:3-8), during the consecration of the priests (Exodus 29:20-21), at the cleansing of a leper (Leviticus 14:7), and on the day of atonement (Leviticus 16:14). It is no surprise then that the New Testament should speak about *“having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience”* (Hebrews 10:22) and about *“obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus”* (1 Peter 1:2). One of the effects of the sufferings of Christ is that He is sprinkling and cleansing many people with His blood. That’s why Paul applies this text to Gentiles who had not previously heard but to whom the good news had been brought: *“To*

*whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand”* (Romans 15:21). When they hear the message of the gospel they are amazed. This one had suffered to such an extent that His appearance was disfigured beyond recognition and His form in general was barely recognizable as human. How astonishing that, out of such cruel treatment and suffering, cleansing has been made available!

In this prophecy there is also an anticipation of the second coming of the Lord Jesus. Some translations suggest the word “startle” as a possible translation, rather than “sprinkle”. Just as many were amazed and appalled at His physical appearance when He was brutally crucified, so in a coming day many will be startled at the sight of Him. They had not heard the prophetic word, but they will hear and will be amazed when He is manifested in glory. What an eye-opener it was for Joseph’s brothers when they came down to Egypt! They hadn’t heard about Joseph for more than twenty years but they were amazed as they stood in His presence. Years before, Joseph had two dreams which anticipated his brothers bowing the knee to him, but they would have none of it: they hated him, envied him and eventually sold him into slavery. But Joseph was now exalted over all the land of Egypt and four times we are told that his brothers bowed the knee to him or fell before him (Genesis 42:6; 43:26; 44:14; 50:18), thus acknowledging that Joseph was lord and that they were his servants. So in a coming day, the Lord Jesus will startle many nations. The despised man of Nazareth will emerge from Heaven in power and glory, subdue His enemies, establish His kingdom and reign in righteousness and peace, and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11).

# Blessed *in* Christ



In a previous article *“Two Men and You”* we saw that we are either represented by Adam and what he did in Eden (sin) and what he in consequence became (a sinner), or by Christ and what He passed through in His death and resurrection. The multiple benefits of the Saviour’s work on behalf of those who have faith in Him are the subject of large sections of the New Testament. Believers are taught there to see themselves as “in Christ” for He fully represents what they now are before God. They should never consider themselves apart from that fact, it is one that puts them --

## ***Beyond Condemnation***

*“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Rom. 8:1). You may feel condemned as you consider your past, how stubbornly you resisted the gospel, ridiculed Christians or revelled in your sin etc. The Apostle Paul permitted himself to recall his past when occasion called for it, but note how he used it to magnify the grace of God in 1 Tim. 1:13-17, moving immediately from what he had

been in Adam to what he was now in Christ.

On the other hand it may be that you feel condemned because you are discovering that though you came to the Saviour some time ago, your most earnest efforts at self improvement have met with no success. Instead there are ongoing disclosures of the weakness of your flesh; a situation so graphically described in Romans 7. That chapter ends in utter despair. Again Paul counters with what is true for all those “in Christ”-- They are not under law (what man should do and be) but under grace (what God in Christ has done for us). Any self-condemnation that is experienced arises from either ignorance or unbelief as to all that the gospel provides.

## ***Appreciating the Cross***

The nature you inherited from Adam will not change, you cannot improve it, and to think that you may some day personally gain victory over it is to entertain a false hope. But on the Cross and by His death Christ delivered believers from all condemnation associated

with it! So the gospel does not reach its climax in Rom. 5 with us being justified by faith from our sins, but continues on to chapter 8. That chapter begins with us being freed from the condemnation due to us because of our sinfulness. Our condition as well as our conduct had to be dealt with to the satisfaction of God. Jesus bore our sins in His body on the tree and God at the same time by sending His own Son *“in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh”*. It was for sin in our flesh, but borne by Him in His holy flesh! Any condemnation I still feel results from a failure on my part to appreciate the Cross, it is unbelief.

Another thing: For Samuel to continue mourning for Saul after God *“had rejected him from reigning over Israel”* displeased the Lord (1 Sam. 16:1); the prophet needed to anoint his successor. When we still hope or want to improve anything which God has condemned we likewise hinder His work in and through us. His judgment of the flesh is clear. Let us bow to it and move on! As Paul says, *“the life which I now live in the flesh I live by*

faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

## **Appreciating the Resurrection**

Christ's death, burial, and resurrection were three days apart. Forty days later He ascended and was seated at the Father's right hand, having completed the work He was sent to do (John 17:4).

Each of those events had its own significance for Him and for us. They may be viewed separately as they sometimes are in the Scriptures, but each is incomplete without the others. Ignore or overlook one and there is no good news to tell.

When we receive Christ we enter into benefits that He obtained for us by His work "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him..." (Rom. 6:3,4). So the first half of the action in a

believer's baptism pictures that the life we inherited in Adam was brought to an end at the Cross according to God's reckoning. The second action declares similarly that we were raised with Him. (Col. 2:12). How these two truths should affect our present conduct has to be worked out, but the Holy Spirit declares them as being things already accomplished and thus to be believed.

## **A Shared Inheritance**

We are now seen as being "in Christ" and joint heirs with Him (Rom. 8:17). No wonder Paul prayed that "the eyes of your understanding might be enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power... which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places..." (Eph. 1:18,19). Earlier he had referred to the inheritance we

have in Him. (v. 11). I think that in these two phrases (emphasized in italics) we may be looking at two aspects of the same inheritance. Israel's possessing of their earthly heritage under Joshua's leadership might illustrate that.

After settlement in Canaan it would have been foolish for any Israelite to boast of his estate as being a sample of what the army had conquered, if he failed to give credit to the essential role Joshua played in the conquest. Without him there would have been no army and no military strategy and no victory. On his part, Joshua knew that it was God's purpose that possession of the land be realized through the nation he had led into it. His own portion and theirs thus forming a mutually enjoyed inheritance.

*He and we, in coming glory  
One deep joy shall share  
Ours to be forever with Him,  
His that we are there!*

- Gerhard Tersteegen. Adapted

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## The Blessed Secret

*Philippians 4:11*

*I have learned the blessed secret  
Of the soul that's satisfied,  
Since the Saviour dwells within me,  
And in Him I now abide.*

*I have learned the joy of trusting  
In the sureness of His Word,  
Knowing that each promise spoken,  
Will be honoured by my Lord.*

*In the silence I have heard Him:  
(O, the music of His voice!)  
"Peace I give thee, be not troubled,  
Let thy heart and soul rejoice."  
Yes, I've found my Lord sufficient,  
For He meets my ev'ry need;  
Satisfies my soul's deep longings  
Guards and guides each thought and deed.*

*Peace that passeth understanding  
Is His gift of grace so free.  
And the power of His presence  
Is His promise unto me.  
Blessed peace, divine contentment  
From the heart of God above!  
All the shadows turn to sunshine,  
Walking with the Lord of love.*

*- Albert Simpson Reitz*