

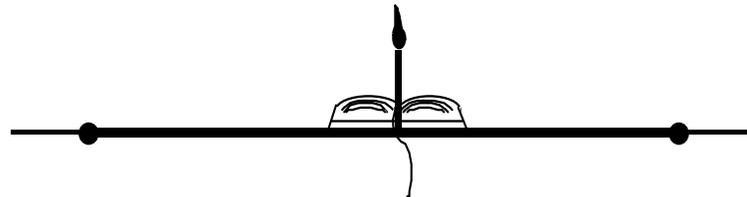
SCRIPTURE STUDIES

VOL. XII, No. 4

MAY
2005

"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord..." Isaiah 1:18

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Scripture Studies (ISSN: 1520-4308) is edited by Scott Sperling and published ten times a year by Scripture Studies, Inc., a non-profit organization. It is distributed all over the world by postal mail and via the internet free of charge. If you would like to financially support the publication and distribution of *Scripture Studies*, send contributions to:

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Old Testament Study: Exodus 12

The Passover, pt. 3 by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

¹And the LORD spoke unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, ²“This month [shall be] unto you the beginning of months: it [shall be] the first month of the year to you. ³Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘In the tenth [day] of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of [their] fathers, a lamb for an house: ⁴And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take [it] according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take [it] out from the sheep, or from the goats: ⁶And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. ⁷And they shall take of the blood, and strike [it] on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. ⁸And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; [and] with bitter [herbs] they shall eat it. ⁹Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast [with] fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. ¹⁰And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. ¹¹And thus shall ye eat it; [with] your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it [is] the LORD’S passover.

¹²“For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I [am] the LORD. ¹³And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye [are]: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy [you], when I smite the land of Egypt.

The institution and ritual of the Passover supply us with one of the most striking and blessed foreshadowments of the cross-work of Christ to be found anywhere in the Old Testament. Its importance may be gathered from the frequency with which the title of “Lamb” is afterwards applied to

the Savior, a title which looks back to what is before us in Exodus 12. Messianic prediction contemplated the suffering Messiah **“brought as a Lamb to the slaughter”** (Isaiah 53:6). John the Baptist hailed Him as **“Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29). The apostle speaks of Him as **“a Lamb without blemish and without spot”** (1 Peter 1:19). While the one who leaned on the Master’s bosom employs this title no less than twenty-eight times in the closing book of Scripture. Thus, an Old Testament prophet, the Lord’s forerunner, an apostle, and the Apocalyptic seer unite in employing this term of the Redeemer.

There are many typical pictures of the sacrificial work of Christ scattered throughout the Old Testament, yet it is to be doubted if any single one of them supplies so complete, so many-sided a portrayal of the person and work of the Savior as does the one before us. The Passover sets forth both the Godward and the manward aspects of the Atonement. It prefigures Christ satisfying the demands of Deity, and it views Him as a substitute for elect sinners. Hardly a single vital phase of the Cross, either in its nature or its blessed results, but what is typified here. That which is central and basic we contemplated in our last paper; here we shall confine our attention to details.

1. Following the order of the contents of Exodus 12, the first thing to be noted is that the institution of the Passover changed Israel’s calendar: **“This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you”** (12:2). Deeply significant is this. Passover-month was to *begin* Israel’s year; only from this point was their national existence to be counted. The type is accurate down to the minutest detail. The new year did not begin exactly with the Passover-night itself, for that fell between the fourteenth and fifteenth of Nisan. Now the paschal lamb was a type of the Lord Jesus, and the chronology of the civilized world is dated back to the birth of Christ. Anno Mundi (the year of the world) has given place to Anno Domini (the year of our Lord). The coming of Christ to this earth changed the calendar, and the striking thing is that the calendar is now dated not from His death, but from His birth. By common consent men on three Continents reckon time from the Babe of Bethlehem; thus, the Lord of Time has written His signature upon time itself!

But there is another application of what has just been before us. The Passover speaks not only of Christ offering Himself as a sacrifice, a sin offering to God, but it also views the believing sinner’s appropriation of this unto himself. The slaying of the “lamb” looks at the Godward side of the Cross; the sprinkling of the blood tells of faith’s application. And it is *this* which changes our relationship to God. But *our* appropriation of Christ’s atoning sacrifice is not the first thing. Preceding this is a Divine work of grace *within* us. While we remain dead in trespasses and sins, there is no turning to Christ; nay, there is no discernment, and no capacity to discern, our *need* of Him. Except a man be born again he **“cannot see the kingdom (things) of God”** (John 3:3). Regeneration is the cause, faith’s application of the sacrifice of Christ, the effect. The new birth is the beginning of the new life. Hence, Israel’s new calendar dated not from the Passover itself, but from the *beginning* of the month in which it oc-

curred. The truth here typified is both blessed and solemn. All the years we lived before we became new creatures in Christ are not reckoned to our account. The past is blotted out. Our unregenerate days were so much lost time. Our past lives in the service of sin and Satan, were *wasted*. But when we became new creatures in Christ *“old things passed away”* and all things became *new*.

2. **“Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house’”** (v. 3). This is the first thing in connection with the **“lamb”**: it was singled out from the flock, separated, appointed unto death four days before it was actually slain. We believe that two things were here foreshadowed. In the antitype, Christ was marked out for death *before* He was actually slain: **“Redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world”** (1 Peter 1:19, 20). It is to this that the singling out of the lamb *four* days before its slaying points, for four is the number of *the world*.

The second application of this detail, which has also been pointed out by others before us, has reference to the fact that *four years* before His crucifixion the Lord Jesus was singled out for death. At the beginning of His public ministry (which lasted between three and four years — cf. Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6, a year for a day) John the Baptist cried, **“Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”** It was then that the Lamb was singled out from the flock — **“the lost sheep of the House of Israel”!**

3. **“Your lamb shall be without blemish”** (v. 5). With this should be compared Leviticus 22:21, 22. **“And whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the Lord to accomplish his vow, or a freewill offering in beeves or sheep, it shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein. Blind, or broken or maimed, or having a wen or scurvy, or scabbed, ye shall not offer these unto the Lord”**. The moral significance of this is obvious. Nothing but a *perfect* sacrifice could satisfy the requirements of God, who Himself is perfect. One who had sin in himself could not make an atonement for sinners. One who did not himself keep the Law in thought and word and deed, could not magnify and make it honorable. God could only be *satisfied* with that which *glorified* Him. And where was such a sacrifice to be found? Certainly not among the sons of men. None but the Son of God incarnate, **“made under the law”** (Galatians 4:4) could offer an acceptable sacrifice. And before He presented Himself as an offering to God, the Father testified, **“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”**. He was the antitype of the “perfect” lamb. As Peter tells us, Christ was **“a lamb without blemish and without spot”** (1:19).

4. **“Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year”** (v. 5). “The age of the sacrifice is prescribed. It is to be a male of the first year. The Hebrew phrase is ‘a male, the son of a year’; that is, it is to be one year old. The lamb was not to be too young or too old. It was to die in *the fullness* of its strength. If we ask how that might apply to Christ,

we note that this particular may be fully sustained as a description of Him. For He died for us, not in old age, nor in childhood, or boyhood, or in youth, but in the fullness of His opening manhood" (Urquhart). In the language of Messianic prediction, Christ was cut off **"in the midst"** of His days (Psalm 102:24). Before passing on to the next verse we would call attention to a striking gradation here. In verse 3 it is **"a lamb"**; in verse 4, **"the lamb"**; in verse 5, **"your lamb"**. This order is most instructive, corresponding to the enlarged apprehension of faith. While in our unregenerate state, Christ appeared to us as nothing more than *a* Lamb; we saw in Him no beauty that we should desire Him. But when the Holy Spirit awakened us from the sleep of death, when He made us see our sinful and lost condition, and turned our gaze toward Christ, then we behold Him as *the* Lamb. We perceived His uniqueness, His unrivaled perfections. We learned that **"neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other Name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved,"** (Acts 4:12). Finally, when God in His sovereign grace gave us faith whereby to receive Christ as our own personal Savior, then could He be said to be *your* Lamb, *our* Lamb. Each elect and believing sinner can say with the apostle Paul, **"Who loved me and gave Himself for me"** (Galatians 2:20).

5. **"And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening"** (v. 6). This is very solemn. The *whole* congregation of Israel was to slay the **"lamb"**. Not that every particular individual, man, woman and child, shared in the act itself, but they did so *representatively*. The head of the household stood for and acted on the behalf of each member of his family. It was not simply Moses and Aaron or the Levites who slew the Lamb, but the entire people, as represented by the heads of each household. The fulfillment of this aspect of our type is plainly brought out in the Gospels. It was not simply the chief priests and elders, nor the scribes and Pharisees only, who put the Lord Jesus to death. When Pilate decided the issue as to whether Barabbas or Christ should be released, he did so by the popular vote of the common people, who *all* cried **"crucify Him"** (see Mark 15:6-15). In like manner it is equally true that it was the sins of each individual believer which caused our Savior to be put to death: He bore *our* sins in His own body on the tree.

6. **"And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening"** (v. 6). Here we have defined the exact time at which the paschal lamb was to die. It was to be **"kept up"** or tethered until the fourteenth day of Nisan, and then killed in the evening, or more literally, **"between the evenings"**, that is between the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month. To point out precisely the antitypical fulfillment of this would necessitate an examination of quite a number of N. T. passages. Only by a most minute comparison of the statements in each of the four Gospels can we discover the fact that the Lord Jesus died **"between the evenings"** of the fourteenth and fifteenth of Nisan. Others before us have performed this task, the best of which, perhaps, is to be found in volume 5 of the Companion Bible [Bullinger]. But if the reader will prayerfully study the closing chapters of each of the Gospels it will be seen

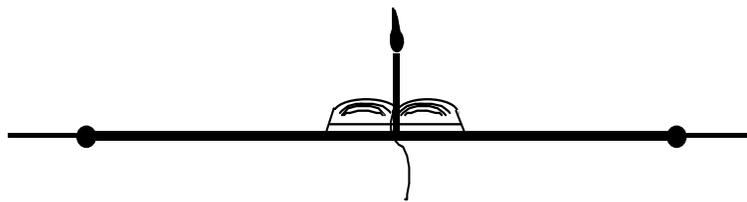
that the Lamb of God died at the very time that the paschal lambs were being slain in the temple.

7. **“And the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening”** (v. 6). Here the type passes to the Antitype. This point is very striking indeed. Many thousands of lambs were to be slain on that memorable night in Egypt, yet the Lord here designedly used the singular number when giving these instructions to Moses — Israel shall kill *it*, not “them” It is indeed remarkable that never once is the plural “lambs” used throughout the 12th chapter of Exodus. “There was only one before God’s mind — The Lamb of Calvary” (Urquhart).

8. **“And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it”** (v. 8). Not only was the lamb to be killed, but its flesh was to be eaten. This was God’s provision for those *inside* the house, as the blood secured protection from the judgment *outside*. A journey lay before Israel, and food was needed to strengthen them first. “Eating” signifies two things in Scripture: appropriation and fellowship. The “lamb” spoke of the *person* of Christ, and *He* is God’s *food* for His people — The *Bread* of Life. Christ is to be the object before our hearts. As we feed upon Him our souls are sustained and He is honored. “It is *death* here which God ordains as the food of life. We are so familiar with this we are apt by the very fact to miss its significance. How we see nature thus everywhere instructing us, if we have but learned to read her lessons in the deepest lesson of God’s wisdom! The laying down of life becomes the sustenance of life. For men this did not begin until after the Deluge; at least it is only after this we read of Divine permission for it. And when we see in that Deluge with its central figure, the ark of salvation, bearing within it the nucleus of the new world, the pregnant figure of how God has saved us and brought us in Christ into a new creation. How its similitude in what we have here bursts upon us! It is only as sheltered and saved from death — from what is alone truly such — that we can feed upon death; that Samson’s riddle is fulfilled, and ‘out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness!’ Death is not merely vanquished and set aside; it is in the Cross the sweet and wonderful display of Divine love and power in our behalf accomplished in the mystery of human weakness. Death is become the food of life — yea, of a life which is eternal.” (F. W. Grant). But mark carefully the lamb is to be eaten with **“unleavened bread and bitter herbs”**. In Scripture **“leaven”** uniformly symbolizes *evil*. The lesson taught here is of vital importance. It is only as we are *separated* from what is repugnant to Divine holiness that we can really feed upon Christ. While we are indulging known sin there can be no communion with Him. It is only as we **“walk in the light as He is in the light”** that the blood of God’s Son cleanseth us from all sin and **“we have fellowship one with another”** (1 John 1:7). The **“bitter herbs”** speak of the remorse of conscience in the Christian. We cannot have **“fellowship with His sufferings”** (Philippians 3:10) without remembering *what* it was that made those sufferings needful, namely, *our sins*, and the remembrance of these cannot but produce a chastened spirit.

9. **“Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire”** (v. 9). How very explicit — rather, how carefully God preserved the

accuracy of the type! In the previous verse we read, “**eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire**”, here, “**eat not of it raw**”. The Israelites were to feed not only upon that where *death* had done its work, but upon that which had been subjected to the *fire*. Solemn indeed is this. “**It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment**” (Hebrews 9:27). These are two separate things. For the lost, *death* is not all, nor even the worst that awaits them. *After death* is “**judgment,**” the judgment of a sin-hating God. Therefore if Christ was to take the place of His sinful people and suffer what was righteously due them, He must not only die, but pass under and through the *judgment* of God. “**Fire**” here, as ever, speaks of the *wrath* of a holy God. It tells of Christ being “**made sin for us**” (2 Corinthians 5:21), and consequently being “**made a curse for us**” (Galatians 3:13) and as such, enduring the judgment of God. Speaking anticipatively by the Spirit, through the prophet Jeremiah, the Savior said, “**Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger. From above hath He sent fire into My bones**”. It was this which caused Him to also say through the Psalmist, “**My moisture is turned into the drought of summer**” (Psalm 32:4). And this it is which, in its deepest meaning, explains His cry from the Cross — “**I thirst**” (John 19:28). His “**thirst**” was *the effect* of the agony of His soul in the fierce heat of God’s wrath. It told of the *drought* of the land where the living God is not. “Not sodden (boiled) at all with water”, because water would have *hindered* the direct action of the fire. “**His head with his legs, and with the purtenance (inwards) thereof**” (v. 9). “The head, no doubt, expresses the thoughts and counsels with which the walk (the legs) keep perfect company. The inwards are those affections of His heart which were the motive-power impelling Him upon the path He trod. In all, the fire brought forth nothing but sweet savor; for men, it prepared the food of their true life; all is absolutely perfect; and all is ours to appropriate. Occupation with the person of Christ is thus impressed upon us; we need this. Not the knowledge of salvation alone will suffice us; it is the One who saves whom we need. Christ for our hearts alone keeps and sanctifies them (Mr. Grant).





A Classic Study: The Danger of Prosperity

A Classic Study by William Bates (1635–1699)

[Here we begin a study by the eminent English Puritan William Bates, concerning the danger of prosperity.]—*Ed.*

The Danger of Prosperity, pt. 1

PREFACE

The experience of all Ages has verified, that none are exposed to more dangerous trials than the prosperous in this world. The great tempter has found the temptations of prosperity so insinuating and prevailing with men, that he attempted to tempt our blessed Savior with them; expecting by the pleasant prospect of the kingdoms of the world, and their glory, to have fastened an impression upon His spirit, and tainted His inviolable purity. But he found nothing in our Savior, not the least irregular inclination to his allurements; and could work nothing upon him. 'Tis otherwise with men born of the flesh, in whom there is a carnal heart (the center of apostasy and corruption) that is easily enticed and overcome by charming complacencies. Prosperity is a dignified poison, pleasant to the unwary sense, but deadly in the operation; and the more pernicious in the effects, because less dangerous in the opinions of men. The temptations of prosperity are so frequent and favored by us, that they give vigor to the inward enemy, the sensual affections, and boldness to the malicious tempter. They foment the carnal appetites that defile and debase the soul; and are more rebellious and exorbitant the more they are gratified.

Prosperity is the strongest obstacle against the conversion and reformation of sinners. While they are plying their various pleasures, they have neither will nor leisure to advert to the voice of conscience, so reproachful and clinging to them. And many times prosperity stupefies conscience, that men are fearless of divine judgment, involved in sensual security. They will not reverence and obey God's authority, till they feel His power; they abuse His blessings to pride and vanity, idleness, and luxury, and are hardened in their impenitence, dyed with the deepest tincture of ingratitude: they drive on through a course of sin, till death puts a period to their lusts. How destructive, how penal is prosperity to such graceless souls! When God rains snares upon the wicked; when the affluence of this world is abused to satisfy their vicious desires, 'tis a sad forerunner of the shower of fire and brimstone, and the horrible tempest that shall over-

whelm them at last.

Others in prosperity are not openly profane or boldly vicious, yet are corrupted and insensibly destroyed by it. They over-value and over-delight in the good things of this world, and please themselves in an opinionative felicity in their present state. They enjoy the world with more appearance of reason, and less sensuality than the riotous and luxurious; but their conversation with so many charming objects, alienates them from God. They do not sanctify Him in their hearts, placing their highest esteem upon His most amiable excellencies, and their dearest delight in communion with Him. They look upon religion as a sour severity and count nothing delightful, but what is suitable to fleshly affections. A deceit like that of a sick person who, feeling no pleasure, but in the easy intervals between his fits and the remission of his distemper, should imagine that if he were freed from his disease, he should lose all pleasure, though the delights of health are more full and durable. The angels are incapable of sensual pleasures; their happiness arises from the perfection of good, not the allays of evil. The beasts are only capable of sensual pleasures, the remedies of natural evils, hunger, thirst, weariness, or accidental evils, diseases, and pains: and many are so sottishly deceived, as to prefer brutish pleasures that affect the senses, before angelical joys that arise from the fruition of God's favor and obedience to His laws. This is a sad symptom of an unrenewed heart, and a heavy presage of future misery; for God will not be our everlasting joy in heaven, if He be not our exceeding joy upon the earth.

Others surrounded with riches and honors are neither thankful to their divine benefactor, nor careful to employ their prosperity and power for His glory. The law of mercy requires a solemn affectionate recognition of God's benefits, but the current of prosperity drowns their sense of divine goodness. And incogitant practical atheism is as destructive as absolute and speculative. How many by the deceitfulness of riches are apt to imagine that they possess with dominion what they receive in trust: they could be rich in good works and, if their hearts were according to their ability, be fruitful as paradise, but are as barren as the sands of Africa. They are in a mighty debt for so many received blessings, for which their account will be heavy and undoing with the highest Lord. These, and many other considerations, make it evident how dangerous prosperity is to the most that enjoy it here.

'Tis therefore a point of high and holy wisdom how to manage prosperity so as to avoid the impendent evils that usually follow it, and to improve it for our eternal advantage. This is the design of the present treatise.

THE DANGER OF PROSPERITY

The prosperity of fools shall destroy them. (Prov. 1:32, AV).

In the verses that precede this one in Proverbs, the divine wisdom is introduced in a very elegant and pathetic manner, reclaiming men from their miserable errors, to partake of light and felicity. The address is directed to them with upbraidings and indignation at their folly, and with

tender compassion for their ruin. **“How long you simple fools will you love simplicity... and fools hate knowledge?”** (Prov. 1:22). 'Tis said of our Savior, the incarnate wisdom of God, that He looked on the Pharisees with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts. He did also express an earnest desire of their conversion. So also, divine wisdom says: **“Turn ye at my reproof”** (Prov. 1:23). And that is seconded by a gracious promise: **“I will pour out my Spirit to you, to illuminate and conduct you in the way of Life”** (Prov. 1:23). But for their stupid obstinacy in despising the counsel, and rejecting the reproofs of wisdom, they are surprised with utter destruction. This is described with that train of killing circumstances, that are the most forcible excitations timely to prevent that evil, which neglected, will be remediless: **“Because I have called, and you refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no Man regarded; I will also laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear comes: When your fear comes as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish comes to you, then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and despised the fear of the Lord”** (Prov. 1:24-29). In their distress they supplicate for mercy; but as they were unchanged, notwithstanding all the gracious calls of God to repentance, so He is not moved by all their mournful entreaties and takes pleasure in His righteous judgments upon them. Their final ruin is resolved into its proper cause; the willful hardness of sinners, and the abuse of those mercies that should have melted them into a compliance with the divine giver of them. **“For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the lord. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them; and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them”** (Prov. 1:29, 32).

The title of fool is the usual character of the sinner in the language of wisdom; and 'tis with great reason and congruity attributed to him, in opposition to the universal virtue and supreme director of human life. For as by prudence a man so governs himself, and regulates his actions as to avoid impendent evils, and to obtain that good that is suitable to his necessities: so 'tis the effect of folly, not to foresee the evils to prevent them, and to neglect the season of obtaining what is good. And by how much the good is more valuable and desirable, and the evil is more pernicious and threatening? In proportion, the folly is more unpardonable and woeful, that loses the one, and exposes the other. And this is justly charged upon every impenitent sinner.

Prosperity comprehends all things in the order of nature that are so much admired and desired by worldly men: riches, honors, pleasures, health, strength, peace, plenty, and the abundant variety of what is grateful to the carnal mind and appetites. These blessings of God, abused and perverted by the folly of men, are turned into weapons of unrighteousness, to offend God, and wound their souls to everlasting death. The point I shall insist on, is this: *Prosperity abused, is fatal and destructive to foolish sinners.* In the treating on this argument, I will, 1. Show how prosperity is destructive to the wicked. 2. That 'tis folly and madness above all wonder, when sinners abuse the blessings of God to their destruction. 3. How just, and certain, and heavy their destruction will be.

(We will continue this study, D.V., in the next issue.)

New Testament Study: Matthew 21:18-27



In Jerusalem

¹⁸Early in the morning, as [Jesus] was on His way back to the city, He was hungry. ¹⁹Seeing a fig tree by the road, He went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then He said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered.

²⁰When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked.

²¹Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. ²²If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

²³Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while He was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him. “By what authority are You doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

²⁴Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

²⁷So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Then He said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

In His last week on earth, Jesus spent much time in Jerusalem teaching the crowds that were gathered for the Passover. Jesus had spent the night in Bethany (see Matt. 21:17) and woke up early to return to Jerusalem: “Early in the morning, as He was on His way back to the city, He was hungry” (vs. 18). Apparently, in His zeal for service, He had not

eaten breakfast, for **“He was hungry.”**

“Seeing a fig tree by the road, He went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then He said to it, ‘May you never bear fruit again!’ Immediately the tree withered” (vs. 19). There is more to this episode than a display of anger by Jesus against a tree that could not provide His breakfast. Jesus, we believe, was teaching a lesson by His cursing of the fig tree. “Our Lord sought illustration of religious truth from all sources; from food and water, patching clothes and bottling wine, sowing and reaping, and changes of weather, birds and flowers, plants and trees, as well as the doings and sayings of men around Him—all were made to teach lessons” [Broadus, 435]. “We should understand this story as an acted parable: the fig tree in leaf gave promise of fruit but produced none. The result was that it was accursed. Those who profess to be God’s people but live unfruitful lives are warned” [Morris, 530]. “Its leaves advertised that it was bearing, but the advertisement was false. Jesus, unable to satisfy His hunger, saw the opportunity of teaching a memorable object lesson and cursed the tree, not because it was not bearing fruit, whether in season or out, but because it made a show of life that promised fruit yet was bearing none” [Carson, 445].

Note that the punishment given the fig tree was appropriate to the transgression. The tree made a show of having fruit, yet had none. The punishment was that it continue and remain fruitless, as Jesus said: **“May you never bear fruit again.”** So, those who make a show of godliness, and yet bear not the fruits of godliness in their lives, are in danger of the same punishment. They are in danger of living “fruitless” lives forever: lives devoid of the sense of fulfillment; lacking success in all endeavors.

Now, some have said that the cursing of the fig tree was the only destructive miracle that Jesus performed. Yet, though the fig tree was destroyed, the miracle was actually a constructive one, in that it has taught us a valuable lesson. The fruitless fig tree became something of value by participating in the live parable. “To fell a whole forest has never been considered cruel, and to use a single barren tree as an object lesson can only seem unkind to those who are sentimental and idiotic. It was kindness to the ages to use a worthless tree to teach a salutary lesson” [Spurgeon, 295].

The disciples were surprised at the miracle: **“When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. ‘How did the fig tree wither so quickly?’ they asked”** (vs. 20). Jesus used the occasion of their surprise to teach about faith: **“Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive what-**

ever you ask for in prayer” (vss. 21–22). As Jesus teaches, the power of faith is unlimited. Anything is possible. And so, we may ask, why don’t we see mountains being moved by faith? I can’t even lift this pencil, by faith, and throw it across the room (let alone into the sea). Why not? There are two reasons: my faith is weak; and I’m not given the faith to do such things. There are two aspects to faith: God’s side, and my side. Faith is **“a gift of God”** (see Eph 2:8). Faith comes from God, and God (spiritually practical as He is) sees no spiritual reason to give me the faith to hurl this pencil across the room. And then there is my side. Even if God gives me the faith to do something magnificent, I must take hold of that faith, make it my faith, and **“not doubt”**.

Jesus gave the example of hurling a mountain into the sea, “not as a thing likely or proper to be actually done, but as an extreme case of a conceivable miracle, to illustrate more vividly the miraculous possibilities presented to unwavering faith” [Broadus, 435]. “There is no record of any disciple ever moving a literal, physical mountain; for that matter, Jesus Himself is not said ever to have done such a pointless thing. But throughout the history of the Christian church mountainous difficulties have often been removed when people have prayed in faith” [Morris, 532]. “Before a living faith, barren systems of religion will wither away; and by the power of undoubting confidence in God, mountains of difficulty shall be removed, and cast into the sea” [Spurgeon, 296].

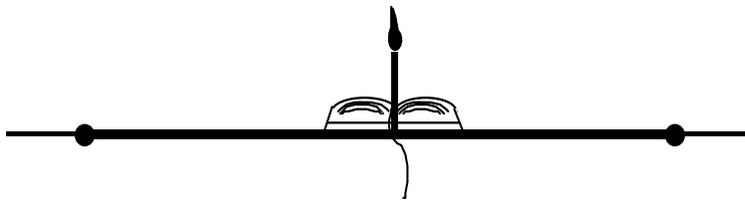
When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He went to the temple to serve by teaching: **“Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while He was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him. ‘By what authority are You doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave You this authority?’”** (vs. 23). These questions are reasonable for the religious leaders to ask. However, as we shall see in what follows, they did not ask the questions to get a true answer; rather, they asked them to trip up Jesus. If Jesus had given them a straight answer, they would likely have charged Him with blasphemy, and sought to turn the crowd against Him.

“Jesus replied, ‘I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?’ They discussed it among themselves and said, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.’ So they answered Jesus, ‘We don’t know.’ Then He said, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.’” (vss. 24–27). Jesus answered by asking them the question, **“John’s baptism—where did it come from?”** This may, at first glance, seem like Jesus was avoiding their question. But on the con-

trary, Jesus was trying to get them to answer their own question. If they would have acknowledged that John's baptism was from God, then they would have to acknowledge that Jesus' authority came from God, for this is what John preached. In order to answer their own question, Jesus wanted them to look at the evidence, and conclude themselves by what authority Jesus came. Similarly, when we speak to others about Jesus, we can let the evidence laid out in the Bible answer questions about Jesus' authority and Lordship.

The chief priests and elders were not interested in the truth, as can be seen by their discussion among themselves. When seeking to give Jesus an answer, they were concerned with how Jesus and the crowd would respond. They weren't seeking to answer truthfully, but were seeking to answer in a way that was (for them) politically correct. "Men-pleasers are obliged to be politicians, and see which way the land lies... The question our Lord put to the chief priests and elders was simple enough had they been honest men; but as they had a game to play, they could not reply without great difficulty" [Spurgeon, 298].

Note especially that they did not even discuss what the true answer to Jesus' question was, and so, when they did not respond to Jesus' question, it was proper that He not respond to theirs. "Their equivocation gave Jesus a reason for refusing to answer their question. Rejection of revelation already given is indeed a slender basis on which to ask for more" [Carson, 448]. "Note, those that imprison the truths they know, in unrighteousness (either by not professing them, or by not practicing according to them), are justly denied the further truths they enquire after" [Henry].



A Topical Study: On Prayer



[Here we continue a series on Prayer. This is the last section of a study that is self-described as, "A declaration what true prayer is, how we should pray, and for what we should pray, set forth by John Knox, Preacher of God's Holy Word."—Ed.]

The True Nature of Prayer, pt. 5, by John Knox

Where, for whom, and at what time we ought to pray, is not to be passed over with silence:

Private Prayer. - Private prayer such as men secretly offer unto God by themselves, requires no special place; although Jesus Christ commands that when we pray, to enter into our chamber and to close the door, and so to pray secretly unto our Father. Whereby He urges that we should choose to pray in such places as might offer least occasion to call us back from prayer; and also, that we should expel forth of our minds in time of our prayer, all vain cogitations. For otherwise Jesus Himself does observe no special place of prayer; for we find Him sometime praying in Mount Olive, sometime in the desert, sometime in the temple, and in the garden. And Peter coveted to pray on top of the house. Paul prayed in prison, and was heard of God. Paul also commands men to pray in all places, lifting up to God pure and clean hands, as we find that the prophets and most Holy men did, whensoever danger or necessity requires.

Appointed places to pray in, may not be neglected. - But public and common prayers should be used in place appointed for the Assembly, from whence whosoever negligently extracts themselves is in no ways excusable. I mean not that to absent from that place is sin, because that is more holy than another; for the whole earth created by God is equally holy. But the promise made, that "**Wheresoever two or three gather in my name, there shall I be in the midst of them**" (Matt. 18:20), chastises all such as show contempt for the congregation gathered in His name. Mark well the word "**gathered**"

What it is to be gathered in the name of Christ. - This congregation which I mean, should be gathered in the name of Jesus Christ, that is to laud and magnify God the Father, for the infinite benefits they had received by His only Son our Lord. In this congregation should be distributed the mystical and last supper of Jesus Christ without superstition, or any more ceremonies than He Himself used, and His Apostles after Him. And in distribution thereof, in this congregation should inquisition be made of the poor among them, and support provided, while the time of

their next convention and it should be distributed among them. Also, in this congregation should be made common prayers, such as all hearing might understand; that the hearts of all, subscribing to the voice of one, might with unseen and fervent mind say, Amen.

For who and at what time we should pray. – Now there remains, for whom, and at what time, we should pray. For all men, and at all times, does Paul command that we should pray. And principally for such of the household of faith as suffer persecution; and for commonwealths tyrannously oppressed, incessantly should we call, that God, of His mercy and power will withstand the violence of such tyrants.

God's sentence may be changed. – And when we see the plague of God, as hunger or pestilence, then should we, with lamentable voices and repenting hearts, call unto God, that it would please His infinite mercy to withdraw His hand; which thing, if we do unfeignedly, He will without doubt revoke His wrath, and in the midst of His fury think upon mercy; as we are taught in the Scripture by His infallible and eternal truths. As in Exodus 32, God says, **“I shall destroy this nation from the face of the Earth”**, and when Moses addressed himself to pray for them the Lord proceeded saying, **“Suffer me that I may utterly destroy them.”** And then Moses fell down upon his face, and forty days continued in prayer for the safety of the people; for whom at the last he obtained forgiveness. David, in the vehement plague, lamentably calls unto God. And the King of Ninevah says, **“Who can tell? God may turn and repent, and cease from His fierce wrath, that we perish not”** (Jonah 3:9). These examples in scriptures are not written in vain, but to certify to us, that God of His own native goodness will mitigate His plagues, by our prayers offered by Jesus Christ, although He hath threatened to punish, or presently does punish: which He does testify by His own words saying, **“If I have prophesied against any nation or people, that they shall be destroyed, if they repent of their iniquity, it shall repent me of the evil which I have spoken against them”** (Jer. 18:7-8).

This I write, lamenting the great coldness of men, which under so long scourges of God, is nothing kindled to pray by repentance, but carelessly sleeps in a wicked life; even as though the continual wars, urgent famine, and plagues of pestilence, and other contagious and strange maladies, were not the present signs of God's wrath, provoked be our iniquities. O Lord! Infinite in mercy, if you shall punish, make not consummation, but cut away the proud and luxuriant branches which bear no fruit: and preserve the commonwealth of such as give succor and harbor to thy messengers which long have suffered exile in the desert. And let thy kingdom come that sin may be ended, death devoured, thy enemies confounded; that we thy people be thy majesty delivered, may obtain everlasting joy and felicity, through Jesus Christ our Savior, to whom be all honor, praise, and glory forever Amen.

A Study in Psalms: Psalm 71:1-13



Psalm 71:1-13 - An Aged Saint in Peril

- ¹In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
- ²Rescue me and deliver me in Your righteousness;
turn Your ear to me and save me.
- ³Be my rock of refuge,
to which I can always go;
Give the command to save me,
for You are my rock and my fortress.
- ⁴Deliver me, O my God,
from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of evil and cruel men.
- ⁵For You have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD,
my confidence since my youth.
- ⁶From birth I have relied on You;
You brought me forth from my mother's womb
I will ever praise You.
- ⁷I have become like a portent to many,
but You are my strong refuge.
- ⁸My mouth is filled with Your praise,
declaring Your splendor all day long.
- ⁹Do not cast me away when I am old;
do not forsake me when my strength is gone.
- ¹⁰For my enemies speak against me;
those who wait to kill me conspire together.
- ¹¹They say, "God has forsaken him;
pursue him and seize him,
for no one will rescue him."
- ¹²Be not far from me, O God;
come quickly, O my God, to help me.
- ¹³May my accusers perish in shame;

**may those who want to harm me
be covered with scorn and disgrace.**

There is no inscription for this psalm, so we cannot be certain who wrote it (though many think that David was the author). We know from the text that it was written by a man in his old age, as he faced affliction. “We have here the prayer of the aged believer, who, in holy confidence of faith, strengthened by a long and remarkable experience, pleads against his enemies, and asks further blessings for himself” [Spurgeon]. “It is a psalm of great value as describing the feelings of a good man when he is growing old” [Barnes].

The Psalmist begins: **“In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame”** (vs. 1). The best way to face affliction in this world is to put oneself in the Lord’s care, to **“take refuge”** in Him. “Jehovah deserves our confidence; let Him have it all. Every day must we guard against every form of reliance upon an arm of flesh, and hourly hang our faith upon the ever faithful God” [Spurgeon].

“Rescue me and deliver me in Your righteousness; turn Your ear to me and save me” (vs. 2). It is quite important that we be on the side of right in our confrontations with others. If so, then we can appeal to God’s **“righteousness”** as we seek help from Him. “The righteousness of God is a pledge to the godly that their lawful petitions shall be granted, and especially when they seek delivery from their ungodly adversaries” [Dickson, 429].

“Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for You are my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of evil and cruel men” (vss. 3–4). God, as a **“rock”**, is a valuable trait for believers. We know He is not fickle. We know He cannot be moved by the opinions of people. We know where He stands, because we have His Word. He stands for righteousness and justice. Then also, God is a **“fortress”**, and a **“rock of refuge to which I can always go.”**

Note how the Psalmist appropriates God as his own. “Happy is he who can use the personal pronoun ‘my’—not only once, but as many times as the many aspects of the Lord may render desirable. Is He a strong habitation? I will call Him **‘my rock of refuge’**, and He shall be *my* rock, *my* fortress, *my* God (vs.4), *my* hope, *my* confidence (vs. 5). All mine shall be His, all His shall be mine” [Spurgeon].

“For You have been my hope, O Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth. From birth I have relied on You; You brought me forth from my mother’s womb. I will ever praise You” (vss. 5–6). The Psalmist now looks back on his life, and how he had trust in God **“since**

his youth. “It is a great thing to be habituated from early life to trust in the Lord, and hope in His mercy. Happy are they who seek the savior early” [Plumer, 697]. “The remembering and acknowledging of God in youth will be great satisfaction in old age” [Spurgeon].

The Psalmist acknowledges that God has protected him even **“from birth.”** Those who believe in God and follow Him can look back on their lives and remember when God specially protected them even before they were believers. “We do well to reflect upon divine goodness to us in childhood, for it is full of food for gratitude” [Spurgeon]. Then also, the Psalmist acknowledges God’s sustaining and protecting role even from the first moments of life: **“You brought me forth from my mother’s womb. I will ever praise You.”** “Before he was able to understand the power which preserved him, he was sustained by it. God knows us before we know anything” [Spurgeon]. Who doesn’t see a miracle in childbirth? Any father who has been present at the birth of his children cannot help but weep and praise God.

The Psalmist continues: **“I have become like a portent to many, but You are my strong refuge”** (vs. 7). As one who trusts in the True and Living God, the Psalmist is a **“portent”** to the unbelievers. The non-believers had seen God’s work in the Psalmist’s past, and so, it would only be a matter of time before God’s power would be displayed through him again. To the ungodly, the work of God is something to be dreaded, but to the godly man, God is a **“strong refuge”**.

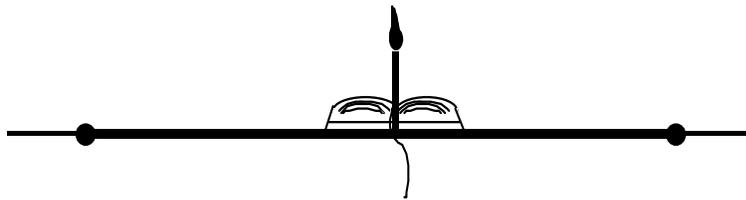
“My mouth is filled with Your praise, declaring Your splendor all day long” (vs. 8). May the praises of God never be far from our lips! “God’s bread is always in our mouths, so should His praise be. He fills us with good; let us also be filled with gratitude” [Spurgeon].

The Psalmist prays a special petition: **“Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone”** (vs. 9). Old age is a time of dread and special fear, as the body weakens, and aches and pains set in. “It is not unnatural or improper for a man who sees old age coming upon him to pray for special grace, and special strength, to enable him to meet what he cannot ward off, and what he cannot but dread; for who can look upon the infirmities of old age, as coming upon himself, but with sad and pensive feelings?” [Barnes]. The Psalmist here seems to fear that God will treat him in his old age, as he has seen those of the world treat the elderly, so he prays, **“Do not cast me away when I am old.”** But God’s ways are not man’s ways, and God, as seen in the actions of His Son Jesus on earth, gives special grace to the weak. “He here prays that the grace which he experienced in youth, and which he has already acknowledged in the foregoing context, may be continued and extended to his old age” [Alexander, 307]. “Such as have been the Lord’s servants in

their youth, may be sure to find God a good and kind master to them in their old age” [Dickson, 431]. “Old age robs us of personal beauty, and deprives us of strength for active service; but it does not lower us in the love and favour of God. An ungrateful country leaves its worn out defenders to starve upon a scanty pittance, but the pensioners of heaven are satisfied with good things” [Spurgeon]. “As old age approaches, our strength in many respects will fail us: but God will not cast off His gray-headed servants, when they are no longer capable of laboring as they have done. And His people should imitate His example, in their kindness towards such as have spent their health and strength in their service” [Plumer, 698].

God’s grace in old age is a good reason to seek Him while we are young. As Solomon wisely advises: **“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come”** (Eccl. 12:1). “It is a sad thing to be looking for religion in old age, when we ought to be enjoying the comforts of it—to be sowing when we ought to be reaping” [Slade, in Plumer, 698]. “A man can lay up nothing better for the infirmities of old age than the favor of God sought, by earnest prayer, in the days of his youth and his maturer years” [Barnes].

The Psalmist’s enemies seem to think that he will be deserted by God in his old age: **“For my enemies speak against me; those who wait to kill me conspire together. They say, ‘God has forsaken him; pursue him and seize him, for no one will rescue him’”** (vss. 10–11). It is especially evil to prey on the weak, to take advantage of those less able to defend themselves. Those who do so should be ashamed of themselves. The Psalmist prays that a feeling of shame should come upon his enemies: **“Be not far from me, O God; come quickly, O my God, to help me. May my accusers perish in shame; may those who want to harm me be covered with scorn and disgrace”** (vss. 12–13).



A Meditation: The Spiritual Chemist



A Meditation Upon Spiritual and Bodily Sickneses by William Spurstowe (ca. 1666)

The soul has its maladies, as well as the body, and yet how wide is the difference between the patients of the one and of the other, in regard of those qualities which may dispose them for a cure and recovery out of them? In the diseases of the body it matters not whether the patient knows the name of his disease, or understands the virtue of the medicines which are prescribed, or be able to judge of the increase, height, and declination of his distempers by the beatings of his pulse. The whole business is managed by the care and wisdom of the physician, who oft times conceals the danger on purpose lest fear and fancy should work more than his physic, and hinder the benefit of what he applies. But in the maladies of the soul it is far otherwise. The first step unto spiritual health is a distinct and clear insight of sin, such which makes men to understand the plague of their own hearts. Christ heals by light, as well as by influence. He first convinces them of sin, and then gives the pardon, He discovers the disease to them, and then administers the medicine. Ignorance is a bar to the welfare of the soul, though not of the body, and makes the divine remedies to have as little effect upon it, as purges or cordials have upon the glasses into which they are put. It is Solomon's peremptory conclusion that a soul without knowledge is not good, nor indeed can be, because it wants a principle, which is as necessary to goodness as a visive power to the eye to enable it to discern its object. How can he ever value holiness who understands not what sin is? Or desire a Savior who hath no sense of his need?

O therefore, blessed Lord, do Thou daily more open my eyes, that I may see myself to be among the sinners, and not among the righteous; among the sick, and not among the whole; that so I may be healed by Thee, who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; not to save the whole, but the sick. Be thou my Physician, and let me be Thy patient, until Thou makes me to say, "I am not sick, because Thou hast forgiven me all mine iniquities."

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The Christian Life

"I know that all are wishing to fly up to heaven even now; but it is necessary to show forth the wish by works. The merchant too wishes to get rich; but he doth not allow his wish to stop with the thought of it; no, he fits out a ship, and gets together sailors, and engages a pilot, and furnishes the vessel with all other stores, and borrows money, and crosses the sea, and goes away into a strange land, and endures many dangers, and all the rest which they know who sail the sea. So too must we show our will; for we also sail a voyage, not from land to land, but from earth to heaven. Let us then so order our reason, that it be serviceable to steer our upward course, and our sailors that they be obedient to it, and let our vessel be stout, that it be not swamped amidst the reverses and dependencies of this life, nor be lifted up by the blasts of vainglory, but be a fast and easy vessel. If so we order our ship, and so our pilot and our crew, we shall sail with a fair wind, and we shall draw down to ourselves the Son of God, the true Pilot, who will not leave our bark to be engulfed, but though ten thousand winds may blow, will rebuke the winds and the sea, and instead of raging waves, make a great calm."

-- Chrysostom

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