

The
Word of God
and the
Armies of
Heaven

MINISTRY SCHOOL 2011



New Creation Teaching Ministry

The Word of God and the Armies of Heaven

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STUDY 1

Jesus Is Lord

Andrew Klynsmith

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9–11).

JESUS, THE LORD NOW

The acclamation and proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord by the church is primarily a declaration of the living reality of Jesus in the present. It is the title for Jesus that tells us, as does no other so fully, that he, crucified and raised again, currently is exalted to the Father's right hand, glorified there, and is now ruling all things so that the plan of the Father will reach its glorious conclusion at the end of history. Jesus 'is not only a part of divine [*saving history*] in the past, nor just the object of future hope, but a living reality in the present—so alive that he can enter into fellowship with us now, so alive that the believer prays to him, and the Church appeals to him in worship'.¹

In contemporary evangelical (and wider Christian) culture, the ascension and exaltation of Jesus is overlooked and underplayed. For the church of the New Testament, Jesus was thought of *primarily* in terms of *presence*, not in terms of *memory*. A renewed appreciation of the exaltation of Christ Jesus is the fruit of the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have misapprehended the nature of the gift of the Spirit if we have not been attuned by him to the reality of the glory of Jesus Christ our ascended Lord, which gives rise to hearty praise and adoration; if we haven't taken confidence to proclaim the gospel of Christ in the face of the fierce antagonism that the proclamation of his Lordship precipitates; and if we haven't strengthened our resolve to live our lives in this world joyfully obedient to him who has been made, by virtue of his dying and rising, both Lord and Christ. Worship, proclamation and obedience are the appropriate attendant responses to faith that confesses, 'Jesus is Lord!'

¹ Oscar Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 2nd edn, trans. S. C. Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall, SCM, London, 1963, p. 195. (Cullmann uses the term *Heilsgeschichte* where I have place *saving history*.)

Jesus Is Lord

In the first chapter of his book, *Jesus Ascended*,² Gerrit Scott Dawson reflects on the difficulties facing him and his congregation and states that the overall verdict may be given, ‘The world is too much with us’. He quotes H. B. Swete, the author of *The Ascended Christ*:

Belief in the Ascended Christ inspires a deep sense of personal responsibility. Few things are more necessary at the present time. In a self-pleasing, self-asserting age responsibility is apt to sit very lightly on many, or to be wholly ignored. Men and women, nay, even children, claim the right to be arbiters of their own conduct . . . [I]n all classes of society the question which men put to themselves is not, ‘What is my duty?’ but, ‘How can I get the greatest enjoyment out of my life? How can I best succeed in evading its burdens?’

These comments, made by Swete in 1906, ring remarkably true into our own age. Dawson quotes George Barna:

When asked to describe the ends they live for, the top items most American Christians reported were good health, a successful career, a comfortable lifestyle and a functional family. The average Christian assumes that when we are happy, God is happy . . . a large majority of Christians contend that the true meaning of our earthly existence is simply to enjoy life and reap as much fulfilment as we can from our daily pursuits.

Recovering a proper and robust doctrine of the ascension, i.e. of the Lordship of Jesus, will reconnect us to a sense of our true identity for life in the world.

GOD MADE HIM LORD

In Revelation chapter 5, Jesus is portrayed as the Lion–Lamb who is uniquely qualified to take the scroll from the hand of the Father and to break open its seals. This vision opens up to us important elements of the Lordship of Jesus. Firstly, to take the scroll and open the seals is to be in the position of co-regent with the Father in the outworking of His plan for creation. Originally this is what humanity were created for (Gen. 1:26ff.); the great sadness of John that no one is able to be found in all of creation speaks deeply of the tragedy and evil of human and Satanic rebellion. That one is then found, miraculously and unexpectedly, hints at the action of God: this one is not merely *found*, but *provided*. The cry ‘Jesus is Lord!’ captures his status both as divine Son and as true Man.³

Secondly, he qualifies for this position through his death as an action of humble obedience; his ascension to Lordship is the crowning, not the reversing of his ‘descent’ as servant. Paul says, ‘What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe’ (Eph. 4:9–10). Philippians 2:6ff. speaks of this, telling us of Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not grip tightly to equality with God but rather emptied himself. This self-emptying (*kenosis*) was not humiliation for him, but the fullest expression of his glory. We beheld the glory of the Father as this One emptied himself (John 1:14).

² Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Jesus Ascended*, P&R Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, 2004.

³ Oscar Cullman (*The Christology of the New Testament*) and Werner Kramer (*Christ, Lord, Son of God: Studies in Biblical Theology, no. 50*) both show how the title ‘Lord’ (*kurios*), from its Jewish and Greek backgrounds, indicated both the idea of human co-regency with God, as well as divinity itself.

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Emptying himself expressed itself finally in death on the cross. His work there was to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), and even more—to destroy the devil himself (Heb. 2:14). The devil has set himself as the rival to God and His Christ, and ensnared humanity in this vain and wicked rebellion. To bring his destruction and to destroy his works (that is, to liberate men and women from their slavery to him), Jesus had to deal with the sins of the whole world. The lowest parts of the earth to which he descended was his identification with humanity (all of us) in the depth of evil and sin. God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us. He bore in himself the devastation of our hate, pride, lust, greed, anger, defilement—the dreadful burden which we could never take off ourselves and lay on another. Moreover, he took upon himself the relentless, sneering contempt of the demonic powers who torment the mind and heart of guilty and shameful humanity. In all this he bore the wrath of God on sin: sin is itself its worst judgement.⁴ Jesus' victory over the powers of hell and darkness came not by exertion of superior strength and violence against them, but by strength of another order, the undefeatable power of pure obedience and love to the Father, even to such a death.

Death could not hold him; the Father could not abandon him. In fact, the Father annulled all human verdicts on Christ by raising him from the dead, and exalting him to the highest place, glorifying him and giving him the name that is above every name (see Acts 3:13–15; Phil. 2:6–11). The stone that the builders had rejected has become the capstone. This lordship is not confined to the church: it extends over every area of creation. If there were a single area excluded from his rule, that rule would not be complete and Jesus would not be Lord. All powers and authorities—human, creational, angelic, demonic—are now in obligation to bow to him, to confess that he is Lord, glorifying God the Father by so doing. In Revelation 5 this is what is done in thunderous tones.

Now Jesus Christ is ruling all things, and bringing everything in subjection to himself: 'For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet' (1 Cor. 15:25). This he does through the proclamation of the Gospel in the world, i.e. by the power of the word. He, the King of kings and Lord of lords, leads an army of proclaimers, who follow him (Rev. 19:11–16). He is the only armed member of the army, and his one weapon is a sword which proceeds from his mouth: it is with this that he strikes down the nations, waging war and judging justly. The victory of Christ in the world is furthered only by proclamation, and that proclamation in weakness.

At the end, Jesus Christ will hand the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24); he will be made subject to the Father who put all things under him, that the Father may be all in all. The Lordship of Jesus has an end—that end is the full glorification of the Father. The Lordship of Jesus never escapes or surpasses the essential truth of submission and obedience to the Father: this is the heart of his lordship.

ACCLAIMING, PROCLAIMING, OBEYING

The true and proper response of the church, given by the Spirit, to the Lord Jesus is that we acclaim him in his glory, proclaim him confidently in his world, and obey him

⁴ See Geoffrey C Bingham, *Christ's Cross Over Man's Abyss*, 2nd ed. (NCPI, Blackwood, 1987). See especially chapter 13 (pp. 87–96), 'What Happened Up There, To Him, The Person?' for a most penetrating study of what it was for Jesus Christ to bear our sins in his body.

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reverently in our lives personally and together. It is the Holy Spirit who opens to us the presence and the glory of Jesus Christ: it is *only* as we are in the Spirit that we can know the dimensions of his Lordship (Rev. 1:9–18).

The prime note of all Christian living is that of adoration, of joy-filled acclamation of the glory of the Lord Jesus. The worship in the book of the Revelation is thunderous! Such adoration is only possible when the *present reality* of the Lord Jesus has broken upon us. Adoration is an I–Thou activity: it involves direct address. It is not an activity of theological reflection at a distance. Adoration is dulled when the prime way we think of Jesus is in terms of memory rather than presence. In worship of the Lord, the presence of the Lord is made clearer and his people are strengthened.

As the Lord Jesus is adored in joyful acclamation among us, there are more in the audience than just him! On the one hand, we are joining with angels, archangels, all the company of heaven, and the saints throughout the ages, as well as with all creatures in earth, sky and sea as we laud him. On the other hand, our acclamation of the Lord Jesus is heard and despised by the principalities and powers, the rebel forces, demonic and human that, though defeated, still resist his lordship. Worship, in all its weakness, is effective and deadly warfare against these powers (see Ps. 8:1–3; 149:6–9).

Linked closely to acclamation is proclamation. Our proclamation of Christ is as true and as powerful as our acclamation is marked by awe and wonder. Again, in proclamation, all the principalities and powers are engaged and enraged by the word we speak. We have no other weapon against them but the worship, proclamation and obedience that is faithful to the Lord Jesus. In Acts 4, when Peter and John were commanded to no longer preach or teach in the name of Jesus, they insisted on the necessity of obedience to God. And the church gathered in prayer, asking the Father to grant boldness to his servants to speak, and to attend that word with all the saving action that is in the name of Jesus.

The Lordship of Jesus is the source of enormous confidence for the church in its mission. Though opposed at every turn by powers and principalities that seek to subvert the proclamation of the gospel, and threatened by them with trouble and death, the present reality of Jesus the Lord, and the experience of love and forgiveness from him sustain the people of God in faithful endurance. In proclaiming Jesus as Lord, the church participates in his rule.

The Lordship of Jesus also demands of the people of God obedience to him. '[E]veryone must always be conscious that he is the slave, servant of the "Lord" Jesus (2 Cor. 4:5). Recognition of the lordship of Christ refers also to the absolute claim the Lord has on our whole existence.'⁵ In the epistles, we are called to live lives worthy of the Lord, to seek to please the Lord, to live in undivided devotion to the Lord. In an age affected deeply by Romanticism, the idea of demand is unattractive: we think only those actions which flow out of desire are honourable. We may by this become servants only of what we desire. But in naming Jesus as Lord, we acknowledge that *he* has desires, i.e. demands to make upon us. Our acclamation and proclamation of Jesus as Lord has the true note when our lives are lived in obedience to him.

⁵ Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament*, p. 231.

STUDY 2

The Lord and His Church

Martin Bleby

HEAD OVER ALL THINGS FOR THE CHURCH

From His Mouth Comes a Sharp Sword

Revelation 19:11–21 tells the vision of the rider on the white horse and ‘the armies of heaven . . . following him’. There is a salient feature that we may miss, which this alternative rendering of the vision makes clear:

As the white army drew near a great and terrible cry arose from the black prince . . . and he leapt out and trod the air of which he was a great and powerful ruler. Likewise others who had these powers leapt with him, and they ranged across the skies, becoming black and defiling objects in the rose-coloured clouds. Like hard, foreign bodies they plunged across the atmosphere . . .

Then they stopped in their tracks . . . and for a moment there was silence. In a trice the silence was broken by the coarse and hideous laughter of the dark army. They shook with horrible mirth for they had perceived a strange thing. They pointed at it and jeered and slapped their sides with unholy joy, for what they saw was true, and I must tell it though you believe me not. *There was not one weapon in the hands of the army of light.*¹

While it appears that ‘the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure’ are fully engaged in the battle and essential to it, victory is achieved ‘by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth’ (Rev. 19:14, 21). It is Christ himself who wields the one weapon: ‘what is heard comes through the word of Christ’ (Rom. 10:17), that is, the word that Christ himself speaks, and is—‘his name is called The Word of God’ (Rev. 19:13).

Substitute Weapons

What alternative weapons do we seek to wield, that we rely on to win the battle?

- Our theology
- Our own ordering and articulation of our theology
- Our computer
- Getting PowerPoint right

¹ Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Bright Bird and Shining Sails*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1981, p. 112 (emphasis added).

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- The force of our personality
- Having the right connections
- Leadership and management skills
- Community engagement
- Impressive good deeds

We may think of others. None of these things may be wrong, especially as gifts from God. But to what extent might our reliance on these be an avoidance of relationship with and submission to Christ our Commander?

The Rider on the Horse

Revelation 19:12–13, 15:

- ‘His eyes are like a flame of fire’—are we avoiding his gaze?
- ‘on his head are many diadems’—have we sought to wear some of them ourselves?
- ‘he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself’—are we keen to know him as he knows himself, or do we prefer some other notions of him?
- ‘He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood’—how central, or peripheral, or quarantined, is his death on the cross in our relationship with him?
- ‘From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron’—what is our expectation of the impact and effectiveness of the word of God in the life of a nation?
- ‘he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty’ — how squeamish are we about that?
- ‘On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, “King of kings and Lord of lords”’—what other lords have we paid homage to (see Isa. 26:13: ‘O LORD our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but we acknowledge your name alone’)?

The Fullness of Him Who Fills All in All

Ephesians 1:22–23 has been subject to a variety of translations and interpretations:

the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory . . . has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Eph. 1:17, 22–23).

Out of the Father, Christ, and the church, who or what is the fullness, who is doing the filling, who or what is being filled? Comparison with 1 Corinthians 15:28 (‘that God may be all in all’); Colossians 2:9 (‘in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily’; compare 1:19); Ephesians 4:10 (‘that he [Christ] might fill all things’); 3:19 (‘that you may be filled with [lit. *unto*] all the fullness of God’); and John 1:16 (‘from his fullness we have all received’); with an eye on Acts 17:25 (‘as though he needed anything’), may yield the following translation:

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the church, which is his body and as such holds within it the fullness of him who himself receives the entire fullness of God.²

F. F. Bruce is happy to see the church as the fullness of Christ in this way:

the sense may well be that Christ, who is transcendent over the church, his body, is also immanent within it and fills it . . . as it is being totally filled. The fullness of deity resides in him, and out of that fullness his church is being constantly supplied.³

YOU HAVE COME TO FULLNESS IN HIM

God's Means

Jens Christensen endorses the reality that the white-robed army has no weapons in its own hands:

you are alive to the fact that you have no means and can use no means, but that you are God's means . . . As God's means, you possess nothing; it is not your enterprise that is at stake; your educational and technical superiority mean nothing; every move you make is effective only when the Holy Spirit makes it so.⁴

Rather, we are the weapon in God's hands:

The Church is God's means, how then can we start talking and thinking of using means? Do you realise what is happening? We are moving from our rightful place as God's means to an usurped position of being the Subject, the Doer! This change is very subtle and extremely dangerous . . . *you* are God's means of approach. You are the shock trooper, who with the sword of the Spirit must throw *yourself* in. There are no means you can use; because you are God's means . . . you yourself are the point of contact; but *God's* point of contact.⁵

In Righteousness He Judges and Makes War

Bearing this in mind, we may still speak of having weapons, but they appertain to us being those who 'have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority' (Col. 2:10), and to the way that fullness has been attained.

For the armies of heaven, 'wearing fine linen, white and pure' (Rev. 19:14) would appear to be the flimsiest of battle garb. It comes from having 'washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Rev. 7:14). As the wedding dress of the Bride, it denotes purity and closeness in relationship, and the fruit that comes from such union:

'the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready;

² New English Bible. See Martin Bleby, 'Baptism as Incorporation into Christ', *Baptised into Christ Jesus*, Ministry School 2009, NCPI, pp. 6.5–6.6.

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1984, p. 277.

⁴ Jens Christensen, *Mission to Islam and Beyond: A Practical Theology of Mission*, NCPI, Blackwood, 2001, p. 23.

⁵ Christensen, *Mission to Islam*, pp. 15, 17–18.

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to her it has been granted to be clothed
with fine linen, bright and pure⁶—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev. 19:7–8).

All of this has to do with the great matter of justification, or ‘righteous-ification’, of those who have been crucified with Christ and made alive in him (see Gal. 2:19–20; Rom. 3:23–26; 6:4–14; Eph. 2:1–10; 2 Pet. 1:3–9; John 3:21). This alone is what now qualifies us to be an effective part of the heavenly army. It comes directly to us from our Head who ‘is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war’ (Rev. 19:11)—the righteousness, that is, of the one ‘who justifies the ungodly’ (Rom. 4:5), the one who, through the great atonement wrought on the cross, reckons righteousness, and not-reckons sin, to sinners who believe (see Rom. 4:3–8).

Weapons of Righteousness

In this alone we stand, and gain ground: ‘with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left’ (2 Cor. 6:7). With these go ‘purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God’—an armoury feeble in the world’s eyes, but with ‘divine power to destroy strongholds’ (2 Cor. 10:4)—along with ‘great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger’, as well as being ‘in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything’ (2 Cor. 6:4–10).

Geoffrey Bingham comments:

The world—the evil age—uses all kinds of methods to win the battle, but the new age is one of righteousness, goodness, holiness, love and truth. It must—and does—confine itself to such weapons. It cannot use the stratagems, techniques or weapons that the kingdom of darkness employs. For this reason the believer has to live in the tension of the two ages. His own flesh cries out to use similar weapons—to defeat evil by political might, by surpassing the power techniques of worldliness, but he may not. He must use the seemingly mediocre weapons and armoury of love, joy, peace, faith, hope and humility. Even so, this tension is most beneficial. On the one hand it teaches him the effectiveness of these spiritual elements and on the other continues to train him, and by such discipline to bring him into moral and spiritual maturity—the true maturity of character.⁶

Consistent with what has happened to us in what he has done on the cross, this is the quality of our effective participation in his battle and his victory:

the church has been equipped with gifts for this warfare. Mentioned as they are in Romans 13:12–14; I Corinthians 10:3; II Corinthians 6:7; Ephesians 6:10–18; and I Thessalonians 5:8, the weapons or armoury when examined seem almost trivial. They certainly are not ‘carnal’ or ‘worldly’ for they are simply truth, righteousness, faith, the Gospel of peace, and such things. How would they avail against the macho weapons of the world? The word of truth (the Gospel) is a sword which will smite the nations. In the ultimate no one can prevail against love with all its beauties of peace and joy, kindness and gentleness. Whilst it is true that demons will flee before the word of truth, that word is not itself harsh, and it delivers those who are ‘oppressed by the devil’.⁷

⁶ Geoffrey Bingham, *The Clash of the Kingdoms*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1989, p. 195.

⁷ Bingham, *The Clash of the Kingdoms*, pp. 187–8.

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Armed in this way by Christ, we need to be confident in the outcome:

It is essential to learn and to understand the principles by which evil can be defeated. That it can be defeated must never be doubted in our minds.⁸

⁸ Bingham, *The Clash of the Kingdoms*, p. 192.

STUDY 3

The Church Has Always Been Eschatological

Siew Kiong Tham

We may say that the church today is popularly viewed as an institution and it exists for the present, perhaps with a hope of something better in the after life. While we say that the church has always been eschatological, we may ask, ‘has the church always lived eschatologically?’ To put the proposition in a question form may imply that there is something that the church can do to position herself in an eschatological mode. Is that true? Perhaps to ask the question is to enquire whether the church has been gripped by the vision of the *eschaton* or living in the *eschaton*. In other words, is the church focused on the *eschaton* or is she focused on the institutional structures and existing for the present? In whatever ways we view the relevance or appropriateness of the question, it is a necessary question as the church lives in this period of the *eschaton*. To ask the question is to say that the church is aware of the tension that exists in the *eschaton*. The answer would also depend on our understanding of the terms ‘church’ and ‘eschatology’. We need to understand these terms in the biblical context.

Before we move on, we need to ask another question. Why is the topic relating to eschatology put at the early part of the school? The reason for the question is this: The Greek word, *eschatos*, means last or final. But the *eschaton* is not that which is yet to come. We are in it. It is the present. It is the substance of our hope and constitutes the basis of our faith and we had better know about it early rather than late.¹ Knowing this enables us to cope with the tension that is so much a part of this period. We have often thought of eschatology as that which deals with the closing of time, that is, God’s time. We think of the end time as a period that is to come. Furthermore in theological discussion, we talk of the things of God in linear time as in salvation history. In those discussions, as we move toward the end, then we consider eschatology. But should we be thinking of those issues in a linear time frame?

The term ‘church’ is simple enough as we all well know. It translates the Greek term, *ekklesia*, which means the called out assembly. The church is the called out people of God who are incorporated into the body of her Saviour, Jesus Christ. We are not using the term with reference to the hierarchical and denominational structures as is popularly understood today.

¹ Not only early in the program of this School, but also early in life.

The Church Has Always Been Eschatological

Eschatology is the study of the last things—heaven and hell and judgement. While we may understand these last things as yet to come, the scripture takes a different line. The last days began two thousand years ago with the incarnation of the Son of God as the writer to the Hebrews tells us, and we are still in it:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,² but in these last [*eschaton*] days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds (Heb. 1:1–2).²

The last days began two thousand years ago. The writer to the Hebrews was living in the last days. God has been speaking to His people throughout history. He did that by signs and wonders, and by the words spoken through the prophets. The writer to the Hebrews was well aware of the revelation of God through His word. However, the word now comes not just in speech but by a person, the Son of God. The *eschaton* was ushered in through a person. Thus the *eschaton* has already begun, from the incarnation of Jesus, and we are in this period of time, or rather, we are in this person of Christ. The *eschaton* and the person of Christ are inextricably linked.³ The writer to the Hebrews further added that the Son of God who ushered in the *eschaton* is also the Creator. By adding this last clause here, he is implying that the *eschaton* is indeed the plan of God from creation.

Revelation spoke of the eschatological word coming from the Son of Man:

Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest.¹⁴ His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire,¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters.¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force (Rev. 1:12–16).

PENTECOST—AN ESCHATOLOGICAL EVENT

When Peter got up to speak on the Day of Pentecost, he quoted from the prophet Joel (2:28–29) to explain what was happening. The Spirit had come upon His people as God declares that ‘in the last days I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh’ (Acts 2:17). Joel had prophesied that the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh in the last days, so the coming of the Spirit onto all people on the Day of Pentecost was declared by Peter to be an event belonging to the ‘last days’. This has to be the case since the last days began with the coming of the Son of God. The Spirit, being the other advocate (*paracletos*), has now come and is set loose (poured out) on the people of God on whom the process of restoration has begun. This means that the events of the book of Acts and indeed the whole of the New Testament need to be interpreted eschatologically.

² Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version.

³ The relation of Christ to the *eschaton* is well discussed in A. Konig, *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology* (NCTM, Blackwood, 1999), pp. 32–63.

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THE GOSPELS AND THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The New Testament begins with the incarnation of the Son of God, the Creator and the one who brings in the last period of God's history to its fulfillment. The era of relating in time-honoured and culturally accepted ways has come to a close with the ushering in of the Kingdom of God through the Son. He, who is also Creator, is the one who has control of the forces of nature and will restore humanity from its decadence. He will energise the human spirit from within in this new era. That is to view the works of Jesus eschatologically. The work of Jesus on earth is not a template on which we use to work out the turbulence in the present life. The signs and wonders wrought by Jesus need to be seen as the expression of the glory of God rather than works serving the needs of humanity. That is the way to understand these wonders in the light of the *eschaton*.

The Acts of the Apostles highlights the happenings of the eschatological church. Again the events are not examples to follow. They are the result of the dynamic indwelling of the Spirit of God. The present day church always has a nostalgic feeling about the early church and longs for a return to the kind of life in that state. Those events may or may not occur again, but the dynamic indwelling of the Spirit will work within the people of God resulting in new activities and new ways in this last era. That is the new dynamics of the *eschaton*.

THE CHANGING TIMES

Paul talks of the changing times in his epistles. One of these passages comes from Ephesians:

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called 'the uncircumcision' by those who are called 'the circumcision'—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:11–13).

The 'then' and 'now' are contrasted by Paul—'uncircumcision' with 'circumcision', 'without Christ' with 'in Christ', 'far off' with 'near', and 'no hope' with 'covenants of promise'. In this new era which has been ushered in by Christ, the Spirit energises the believers from within them and makes real the promise that is only found in Christ. The old cultural division between the Gentiles and the Jews has been broken down and there is now only one new people in Christ. We are in this new era.

Why has the church to be eschatological? It is because the *eschaton* begins with the Son of God and the church is the body of the Son of God. Barth commented:

If Christianity be not altogether thoroughgoing eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever with Christ.⁴

⁴ K Barth, tr. E. C. Hoskyns, *The Epistle to the Romans* (OUP, London, 1933), p. 314.

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THE 'ALREADY' AND THE 'NOT YET'

In this present period of the *eschaton*, the Kingdom of God is a present reality, but there is also a coming fulfillment. We live in the 'already' (this age into which the Kingdom has broken) and the 'not yet' (the age to come) as Jesus told Peter:

Peter began to say to him, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you.'²⁹ Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first' (Mark 10:28–31).

Elements of this 'already' and 'not yet' are also present in Paul's letters. He wrote to the Colossians (2:6) since they 'have received Christ Jesus the Lord [the 'already'], continue to live your lives in him [the 'not yet']'. This tension may also be seen as the indicative (of the 'already') and the imperative (of the 'not yet').⁵ Examples of this are seen in the verses below:

... for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God [*indicative*] ...⁵ Put to death [*imperative*], therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry) (Col. 3:3–5).

So if you have been raised with Christ [*indicative*], seek [*imperative*] the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1).

The categories of the indicative and the imperative above are put in a simplistic way. It does not reflect the true nature of things. However, this allows us to get a handle on the issues involved. The categories of the indicative and imperative or the 'already' and 'not yet' are not separate categories. They need to be viewed as one and the same thing. The 'not yet' is guaranteed by the 'already' and is 'marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit' (Eph. 1:13). The imperative does not precede the indicative, but is propelled by the indicative and dependent on it.⁶ The indicative without the imperative moves towards Gnosticism and the imperative without the indicative moves towards legalism.⁷ It is humanity trying to reach out to the heavens.

So has the church been eschatological? There is a present reality of the *eschaton*, but there is also a future fulfillment. In Revelation 7 and 21, we get a glimpse of what is to come. There is the Lamb on the throne and the people of all nations gathered around Him in perfect harmony. The dwelling of God is with His people (Rev. 21:3). There is also the imagery of the new Jerusalem prepared as a bride for her husband, Christ, the fulfillment of the 'not yet':

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:1–2).

⁵ H. Ridderbos, *Paul, An Outline of His Theology*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975, pp. 253ff.

⁶ Ridderbos. pp. 253ff.

⁷ F. W. Danker, *The Kingdom in Action*, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis, 1965, pp. 95–6.

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The redemption of humanity has this as the final outcome. This is the closest and the most intimate of human relationships that we know. This is the imagery of the oneness of humanity and her Creator, and the Father is moving the whole of creation towards this end.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION OR THE TRANSFORMATION IN THE *ESCHATON*

Having got a glimpse of the ‘not yet’, we live in the period between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’. There must be the process of moving us from the ‘already’ to the ‘not yet’. That is the transformation that we need. That is why Paul wrote, ‘As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him’ (Col. 2:6).

History needs to be interpreted through the lens of eschatology. Its meaning is only understood when we see history moving towards the *eschaton*. That is the real meaning of history because Christ, the true image of God, has ushered in the Kingdom of God and its fulfillment has already been accomplished in Him. We are ‘being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit’ (2 Cor. 3:18). Therefore to think that we can legislate to effect this transformation is an error for this transformation ‘comes from the Lord, the Spirit’. We often strive to fulfill the imperatives of the scriptures as if we are able to effect this transformation ourselves. We think that this transformation can come from within us as if it is possible for this to take place outside of Christ. As the *eschaton* has been fulfilled by Christ, the indicatives inform us that we are in the triune communion. We participate in the triune communion and this is to participate in the eventual reality. The reality of our participation in the triune communion is reflected in the present by our participation in one another, that is, in the community of faith, the body of Christ.

When we lose sight of the *eschaton* and the fulfillment that has already taken place in Christ, then we will be preoccupied with the present and all its concerns. We will then be focused on the immediate future and to ensure that it will be well for us. Our present day thinking deceives us into believing that we are able to control the future and the elements of nature. The world is talking of our preferred future in a deterministic way. It is really a ‘tower of Babel’ mentality. How much of the future can we really control—earthquake, tsunami, weather conditions, and so forth?

Many facets of Christian thinking are controlled by metaphysical, psychological and ethical considerations rather than by the *eschaton*. We can be easily deceived by the imperatives of the ethical when they do not proceed from the indicatives. Responses made by manipulation of the psychological do not constitute Kingdom responses because they are not from the Spirit of the *eschaton*. Worship of the god almighty (the metaphysical god) who is not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the everlasting Father, is not the worship of transformed humanity.

We are preoccupied with the present—the here and now. We seek the promise of perfection. The medical world wants to be able to heal without pain and to restore the body to perfection. We look to the future with more of the same of the present but only better. We have lost sight of the *eschaton*.

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PATER OF THE PAST, FATHER OF THE FUTURE

This sub-heading presents a false dichotomy. The *pater* of the past is the Father of the future. Even when we can hold to this, we still have a problem thinking beyond those two poles to the everlasting Father. God is Father and Creator and He directs history towards its fulfillment. The lesson from history is good, but it should not be the controlling factor. If we allow history to control, then we will only be producing a repeat of the past. We have ignored the Father of the future who directs the imperatives. The future directs the present and moves it towards its conclusion. A problem is our denial of the Creator. This denial fits into the human framework of going our own way—our rebellion. The *pater* of the past has established the indicatives through His Son. This denial is a denial of the indicatives and as a result we pursue the imperatives on our own accord and on our own terms. It is the Creator who brings us into being. It is the Creator who establishes the indicatives. It is the Creator who will restore our rebellion and bring us to the way we ought to be through the imperatives. This is the certainty of our hope in God and He has instilled into us the faith to trust in its fulfillment. ‘And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure’ (1 John 3:3).

Is eschatology relevant to our present? In what ways does it inform our present? Braaten relates an encounter with a pastor:

We are discovering that the American church is dying of its own success. It has tried hard to be relevant to its cultural setting, to foster a faith and worship practices that make people feel good. Churches that grow are the ones that seem to satisfy the search for self-fulfillment. They travel light. Churches that have traditionally defined themselves in terms of a core of biblical and confessional doctrines and practices, that retain the catholic substance of the church’s tradition, its dogmas, liturgies, hymnody and moral codes, carry so much baggage that they find it hard to compete with ‘Christianity Lite’. Pastors are pressured to get with it, to quit being hidebound to the traditional ways of being church. They are told to be more user-friendly. The pastor of one megachurch that successfully packs them in by the thousands was asked, ‘How do you do it?’ His answer: ‘When people come to our church, we want them to leave feeling like they have not even been in church.’⁸

The above encounter does not seem to show an awareness of the *pater* of the past nor the Father of the future. It exists only for the present. It illustrates the constructed reality of the human aspiration. We want a tower that reaches up to the heavens where we can then be in control of all that happens. We extract the human need and temperament as the substrate upon which with our expertise some kind of reality is constructed. The church has lost its sense of the *eschaton* in which the Kingdom of God is realised through the person of Christ. We need to come away from our constructed virtual reality to the reality of the *eschaton* in the Spirit.

THE EXPECTATION OF CHRIST’S RETURN

The return of Christ is the culmination of our eschatological hope. While Christians affirm the return of Christ, yet this has been thought of as something out of the

⁸ Carl E. Braaten, *The Recovery of Apocalyptic Imagination*, eds C. E. Braaten and R. W. Jensen (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 2002), p. 26.

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ordinary and unconnected to the whole thrust of history. The Son of God has ushered in the *eschaton* and Hebrews affirms that He is also the Creator. He is the beginning and the end, as is said in Revelation:

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev. 22:13).

The bodily return of Christ is a logical necessity. If Christ is the alpha and the omega, and if He is present in the beginning in creation, why should He not figure prominently in the end since the whole of creation finds its summation⁹ in Him? Why should His return be surprising? If He is the omega, then why shouldn't He be there when it all happens? During Jesus' bodily ascension into heaven, we were told that He 'will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven' (Acts 1:11).

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL CHURCH

The church is eschatological not because she has the expertise and know-how to bring about the *eschaton*¹⁰ but because she is in Christ who has brought about the fulfillment of the *eschaton*.

The church is eschatological not because she has incorporated born again believers into her membership but because the born again believers are incorporated into the body of Christ.

The church is eschatological not because she is perfect, but because she is being perfected in Christ.

The church is eschatological not because she is able to structure her community in conformity to the eschatological pattern of the early church but because the structures, which may be new and different, have arisen from the work of the indwelling Spirit within the community of the people of the Kingdom.

At a time when the scientific world is talking of the end of certainty,¹¹ the eschatological church lives in the certainty of the end.¹²

⁹ Eph. 1:10.

¹⁰ Some have thought that by going out to evangelise all the people groups on earth, this will hasten the return of Christ.

¹¹ Ilya Prigogine, *The End of Certainty* (Free Press, New York, 1997). It has been thought that the universe is controlled by fixed physical laws as taught in Newtonian physics. Prigogine argued that the more we know about the universe, the more difficult it becomes to believe in determinism.

¹² Since Christ is the fulfilment of the *eschaton*, to live in the certainty of the end is to live in Christ.

STUDY 4

The Word of God and the Purpose of God: ‘Edenising’ the World

Trevor Faggotter

INTRODUCTION

Edenising the world . . . that’s God’s plan!¹

So God created Man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.²⁸ And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’ (Gen. 1:27–28, RSV).²

This task of procreation and fruitful vocation was designed to commence in Eden:

And the LORD God planted a garden in *Eden*, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed (Gen. 2:8).

A river flows out of *Eden* to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches (Gen. 2:10).

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of *Eden* to till it and keep it (Gen. 2:15).

As we consider that the Lord God ‘put’ man in *Eden*, with the mandate to ‘fill the earth and subdue it’, we must keep in mind that fruitfulness pertains not only to having kids, and the shaping up of creation towards the purposive goal, but also to the expansion of Eden—from this pristine garden (in an arid land)—to move outwards to encompass God’s entire universe, filling all things with God’s Sabbath rest, his holiness (Gen. 2:3) and sheer delight.³ It seems a longing for Eden resonates in us all:

- Why does a garden evoke praise, wonder, peace and delight?
- Why can problematic students be transformed by work-time on a hobby farm?
- Planting a non-garden ministry, germinates hope: *World Vision Kid’s Hope*.
- Nanna’s Eden was cooking, teaching and raising nine children, in Jesus Christ.

¹ Genesis 1:28–30; Revelation 22:1–5; John 7:38.

² Most other Scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version.

³ Ephesians 1:23; 1 Corinthians 15:28; Job 38:4–7.

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- A New Zealand community was renewed in purpose by a ‘free range’ piggery.
- Why might a musty historic church, where worship has ceased, feel *creepy*?

WHAT OF EDEN NOW?

Then the LORD God said, ‘See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’—therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of *Eden*, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of *Eden* he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:22–24).

How are we to think of Eden, now? As a paradise, now lost, a painful lament?⁴ The scholars have gathered up the biblical data, to help us to hear God’s Word. Gordon Wenham suggests Eden is the name of the area ‘east of the Land of Israel’, locating it somewhere in Mesopotamia or Arabia.⁵ Homonyms for Eden are: ‘pleasure, delight’:

Whenever Eden is mentioned in Scripture it is pictured as a fertile area, a well-watered oasis with large trees growing (cf. Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 31:9; 16, 18; 36:35, etc.), a very attractive prospect in the arid East. (For confirmation of this interpretation, cf. the newly discovered old Aramaic root ‘*dn*, ‘enrich’ . . .). This lush fecundity was a sign of God’s presence in and blessing on Eden. E. Haag . . . suggests ‘in the east’ evokes the same ideas. For in the east the sun rises, and light is a favorite biblical metaphor for divine revelation (Isa. 2:2–4; Ps. 36:10). So it seems likely that this description of ‘the garden in Eden in the east’ is symbolic of a place where God dwells. Indeed, there are many other features of the garden that suggest it is seen as an archetypal sanctuary, prefiguring the later tabernacle and temples. But the mention of rivers and their location in vv 10–14 suggests that the final editor of Gen. 2 thought of Eden also as a real place, even if it is beyond the wit of modern writers to locate.⁶

W. J. Dumbrell says Eden is ‘a special sanctuary, quite unlike the rest of the world’:

The Garden of Eden is best seen as a special sanctuary, quite unlike the rest of the world. In the Old Testament Canaan, which is specifically identified as a divine sanctuary in Exodus 15:17 and Psalm 78:54, and Eden are paralleled (Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35), quite apart from the significance of the presence of God in the restricted space of Genesis 2–3. Moreover, Eden (itself necessarily evaluated as the source of the world river system) was clearly conceived of as a mountain sanctuary (Ezek. 28:13–14), which is important since such mountains in the ancient world were deemed basic points of contact between heaven and earth. Eden was the garden of God, the earth center where God was

⁴ Eden is a place—a place in which God, the gardener, plants a garden; it is a place with a river. It is also the place where the created man Adam, was subsequently ‘put’. It is located ‘in the east’. While the sanctified imagination of a redeemed person can now think in new and transformed biblical ways, the ongoing matter of indwelling sin in this age prevents us from ever fully recovering a perfect appreciation of the delights of God, of humanity and of creation. Job 38:4–7 hints at the sheer joy of it all, pre-fall. Life in the garden, prior to our tragic, irrational rebellion—sin—necessarily involved innocence and freedom (though untested), and a crystal clear conscience. For Adam and Eve, it most surely was a stunningly beautiful state of being, of communion and of life in God’s presence. All this was prior to sin making its dark intrusion into the world; prior to sin finding a place within Adam’s heart and in the heart of Eve, the woman; Man’s irrational acts of disobedience, sin and rebellion have far-reaching consequences. The man and woman were both expelled. The Lord God sent them from the Garden of Eden. Access to the garden and its river, and access to the tree of life within that garden was prevented, guarded, denied. But God’s mandate, and his plan for the Edenising of creation, remained. (Though evil grows: . . . Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of *Eden* [Genesis 4:16]). The Proto-evangel (Gen. 3:15) highlighted ‘the battle’ and prophesied ‘Christ’s crushing victory’.

⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, Word Books, Waco, 1987, p. 61.

⁶ Wenham, pp. 61–62.

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to be found (Isa. 51:3). (In Ezek. 36:33–36 the Garden of Eden is the symbol of fertility, a fitting analogy for the land of Palestine about to be restored. Also in Ezekiel, the divine garden is used in reference to Zion and the temple [47:1–12; Wallace 1985, 85–86].) In the garden of Genesis 2, the sanctuary of the divine, the man is cast in a priestly role. Consider the correspondence between the precious stones set in the breastplate of the high priest in Exodus 28:17–20 and the adornments of the king of Tyre, who is likened to the original inhabitant of the garden, in Ezekiel 28:13. By implication, the original inhabitant of the garden, Adam, is a decidedly priestly/kingly character. If Genesis 1 emphasizes humankind’s kingship, Genesis 2 presents Adam as God’s priest.⁷

Eden is certainly the place where God dwells, the divine sanctuary. From Israel, God required ‘a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them’ (Exod. 25:8; 29:45). Isaiah envisages the Edenising of Israel once again—and the Word going out beyond that to the nations of the world:

Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many. For the LORD will comfort Zion; **he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden**, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a **light to the peoples** (Isa. 51:2–4).

- The creational mandate given to Adam was never revoked (Noah failed too).
- Nations to be blessed in Abraham’s seed, Christ, wherever faith would arise.
- The blessings of Eden were to be extended to the world.
- The hallowed day Sabbath rest (Gen. 2:1–3; Matt. 11:28–30; Heb. 3:7–4:14).
- Seventh Day of rest is ‘the only thing—let alone day—which is sanctified throughout creation’.⁸ Sanctifying of things or persons coming into appropriate contact (Matt. 23:19; Exod. 29:37; cf. Uzzah, in 2 Sam. 6:7).

The role of Edenising the world was not fulfilled by Israel. Their sin and rebellion hindered them, and the promised Messiah, the Second Adam (Rom. 5:14), was the only way of that ever happening. Jesus Christ came according to the Word. He was given to and through Israel (Rom. 9:4–5)—as the fulfillment of all that had been promised. The following elements have been identified as the key features of Eden:⁹

- The Garden (John 15:1–11; 20:15; Rev. 22:2), the Tree of Life.
- The City—Holy (Rev. 21:2), a place of community (cf. Babylon—evil).
- The River of God¹⁰ (Jer. 2:13; Ps. 46:4–5; Ezek. 47:1–12; John 4; 7:37–39).
- The Sanctuary—now, church new temple (1 Cor. 3:16); later God and Lamb.
- The Place of the Throne—Man: Vice-Regent (Gen. 1:28); Psalm 2; Rev. 4–5.
- The Place of Marriage (Hosea 1; Ezek. 16; Isa. 54, Rev. 21:2). J. Edwards.¹¹
- The Place of Man—Adam and Eve: failure. Jesus Christ: the most fruitful life.

⁷ W. J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1994, p. 25.

⁸ Geoffrey Bingham, *Christ and The Triune Glory*, NCPI, Blackwood, 2001, p. 199.

⁹ Geoffrey Bingham, *Christ and The Triune Glory*, pp. 201–11.

¹⁰ See also Geoffrey Bingham, *The River of God*, NCPI, Blackwood, 2001.

¹¹ Paraphrased quote: ‘The reason God created the world was to obtain a Bride for His Son’.

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THE WORD OF GOD AT WORK

The mandate given to humanity to ‘fill the earth’ means, ‘*Fill it with all that is Eden. Expand Eden. Edenise all the creation presently outside of Eden.*’¹² Surprisingly few theological books say this.¹³ Nevertheless, this assertion can be made because the Word of God has come to us in Jesus Christ, confronting and transforming our minds, to know God and his plan. By the power of his Holy Spirit, God in Christ has revealed his plan and purpose to us.¹⁴ We gladly yield to this new, strange logic we find in Scripture: ‘For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him’ (Col. 1:16).

1. It is essential in ministry to continually rediscover the dynamic of the Word of God: God *spoke* creation into being (Gen. 1:3; Heb. 11:3).
2. God *spoke* his blessing upon the first man and woman, his mandate of fruitful activity and vast responsibility within the creation (Gen. 1:28).
3. God *spoke* great promises to Abraham concerning his role among the nations within the plan and purpose of God (Gen. 12:1–3; Acts 7:2).
4. God also *spoke* to Israel as a nation, concerning their ministry (Exod. 19:4–6), blessed them with fruitfulness (Exod. 1:7), brought them out of Egypt and gave them a *veritable Eden*¹⁵, a land flowing with milk and honey (Exod. 3:8; Deut. 27:3), and purposed to *speak* anew to the world through them (Isa. 42:6; 49:6).
5. God *spoke* through the prophets, to both Israel and to the nations (Jer. 12:14–17) concerning the plan of God, and the need for, and hope of nations to be participants in that plan (Isa. 2:3; Zech. 8:22–23; Micah 4:1–4).
6. Now, in the coming of the Messiah, *God has spoken* to us by a Son (Heb. 1:1), Jesus—the Eternal Son of God. This Word is of the definitive work God has accomplished, and is completing now through the Risen Christ Jesus.
7. The Apostles—who had seen and met the Risen Christ Jesus—*spoke* God’s Word firstly to Israel, beginning in Jerusalem, and then to the nations of the world (Acts 1:8; 2:1; 8:5; 10:45). It continues.
8. God’s Word to us today, in his Son Jesus Christ, confronts us with a whole new way of thinking and of understanding God’s plan for creation. We believe therefore *we speak* (2 Cor. 4:13), and so share in what God’s Word is doing with and within the world—namely Edenising it.

¹² Geoffrey Bingham, *Christ and The Triune Glory*, p. 198.

¹³ Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, vol. 1 (Banner of Truth [1834], 1990), pp. 533–619 gives detailed attention to many of the biblical themes mentioned, but never says: ‘Edenising the world’.

¹⁴ The Apostles were to make God’s plan fully known: ‘the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints’ (Col. 1:26; cf. Eph. 1:10; 3:9; Acts 2:23; 4:28).

¹⁵ Geoffrey Bingham, *Searching For God*, Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 2000, p. 110.

STUDY 5

The Foreknowledge of God and the Principle of Election —Like it or Not!

Randall Lawton

INTRODUCTION

This short study is not given to answer philosophical questions that may naturally (or rebelliously!) arise from the topic, nor is it, for that matter, to recount or respond to the many theological debates that have raged, particularly since the Reformation. What we can be sure of is that, rightly understood, election is an enormous truth of great comfort for us, and a power to worship God as he really is.

THE FATHER'S ELECTION IN CHRIST AND BY THE SPIRIT

- God's election, his *predestining* (*prostasso*)¹ or *foreknowing* (*prognosko*)², cannot be understood outside of Christ, 'the beloved' (or 'chosen servant') and the working of the Spirit. The Father 'chose us in him' (Eph. 1:4: cf. 1:9; 2 Tim 1:9; Matt. 12:18; cf. 2:1–23).³ The Spirit too is intimately involved: 'the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God' (see Rom. 8:26–30, esp. v. 27; cf. Eph. 1:5–14; Col. 1:19; Rev. 4:11). Election is the personal action of God, not a detached determinism. The 'purpose of his will' (see Eph. 1:8–9) in his goodness means that election is not ethereal arbitrariness. Faith says, God does know what he is doing, and how to do it.
- The 'will of God' should not be reduced to 'my journey': '*all things work together for good*' (Rom. 8:28) even if there are benefits for the elect. 'And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you *to preserve life . . . and God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors . . .* As for you, you meant it for evil against me, but God meant it

¹ Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5,11; Acts 26:5; Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:20.

² Acts 26:5; Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:20.

³ All Bible references in this paper are from the English Standard Version.

The Foreknowledge of God and the Principle of Election

for good, *to bring about that many people should be kept alive*, as they are today' (Gen. 45:5, 7; 50:20). The will of God precludes any notion of selfish utilitarianism.

- His will governs how we hear and respond and it establishes our free human response of trust, in the grace that issues from within himself (see James 1:16–21). Our freedom is given by, and in the greater freedom of, God's will in the giving of 'life in itself'. This is what we might call the 'giving, transference and distinctiveness' of life in the moral life of God (John 5:26; see also 3:8; 15:11). In Christ, God has chosen in love to bring us to—into—himself, that we too in that love be called to freely obey, to do, the will of God (Mark 3:35; Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 6:6; Heb. 10:36; 1 Pet. 4:2; 1 John 2:17; Col. 1:1–5; James 1:18–21). Love is given morally and calls for moral response in it.

ASSURANCE IN GOD'S MORAL LOVE

- Election is a source of great comfort to believers in an evil age under God's judgement with all of its suffering and pain: 'that you may stand fully mature and fully assured in all the will of God' (Col. 4:12). Eternal election means there is hope from eternity past: God 'foreknew' and 'predestined' and therefore 'called' and therefore 'justified' and therefore 'glorified' (Rom. 8:29–30). The eternal will of God is a present reality, a powerful ever-present truth involving the movement of everything towards 'the freedom of the glory of the sons of God' (Rom. 8:21), and more so, for the glorification of the Son (Phil. 2:10) but ultimately for the glory of the Father (Phil. 2:11) that everything, and everyone, including Christ, will be subject to him (1 Cor. 15:27–28). What Paul is saying is that God's love is known now in that he has eternally willed our redemption. This love has overcome the entrenched rebellious will of Man, his foolishness (Rom. 1:21; cf. Prov. 1:22, 24–25, esp. v. 29). We can have no confidence in our own unaided will but in Christ there is confidence that the Father will move all things to the goal.
- Biblically it is essentially because of God's will that we know him, that is, he initiates the relationship, makes proximity possible by blood, and maintains relationship by his constant refusal to renege on his promises of love (Exod. 19; 24; cf. Hosea 11:8). In the New Covenant in Christ, proximity gives way to full life within the Godhead, the promise of complete access to, and communion with, the Father, Son and Spirit (Col. 3:1–4; 1:8). The blood of Christ comes from the will of the Father, who 'sent' him to die (John's gospel), or as Paul says, who 'put him forward' to die as a propitiation (Rom. 3:25; Acts 2:24; 4:28).
- The Son responds to the Father in the obedience of dependent love: he 'lays down his life', 'gave himself' and 'made himself nothing' (John 10:11; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:7). This is the efficacious love of God the Father in the Son when he dies, that is, his eternal will of love seen in history. This surely means that God is 'for us' in the here and now (Rom. 8:31): he has eternally chosen to work historically for our good. If there was no will, no eternal will, no

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choosing outside of us, given our enslavement to foolishness (see ‘redemption’ in Rom. 3:24), we would have no surety and no mental stability nor direction (Rom. 12:1–2). The will of God in his law is not just ‘boundaries’ but our compass to his goal.

GOD’S WILL AND HIS GLORY

- The ultimate goal of election is the glory of God (Rom. 9–11):

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!
‘For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?’
‘Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?’

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Rom 11:33–36).
- The prophets and Psalmists proclaim that salvation is ultimately for God’s sake (e.g. Ps. 106:8; Ezek. 36:22; Dan. 9:17). God works out his plan, his purpose of election that he be glorified in his mercy, his moral glory, his freedom to choose (Rom. 9:19; Ps. 115:3; 2:4; 136:6; Isa. 46:10; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11). He will be merciful to whom he will be merciful, and harden whom he wills (Rom. 9:18; cf. Exod. 33:19). Pharaoh’s hardening is ‘that I might show my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth’ (Rom. 9:17): through Israel’s unbelief the Gentiles are included (Rom. 11:11–12, 15). God’s determination is ultimately to be merciful to his elect, even if through the hardening of others and even through ‘innocent’ suffering (Matt. 2:16–18; cf. 12:18; Exod. 1:15–16).
- What of those outside of God’s elect? As Paul has made very clear, ‘they are without excuse’ (Rom. 1:20). God is just and merciful and he will not be placed in the dock by a rebellious humanity (Rom. 9:20). The gospel reveals without a doubt his utter goodness in it all.
- Man’s issue is that he willfully refuses to worship God as God (Rom. 1:21), and instead chooses to worship the creation (Rom. 1:25). God’s election in the gospel is the gracious infusion again into the consciousness of believers, that just as the creation was made by his ‘will’ (Rev. 4:11), so the new creation is regenerated by his elective mercy (Titus 1:1; cf. 3:4–7). We come to maturity in our faith when we finally lay down our objections to his sovereign freedom and rule, bow the knee, and worship him as God, the God of creation who can do as he pleases whether it benefits me or not. This is where suffering plays an important function for it tests faith as to whether it will let everything go in this world, even our own lives, that God the Father may be all in all. That is, that we do not worship the creation. We are able to mature in this for the love of God has inseparably come to us in Christ. The hope that he promises is ‘his will’, which is the surety of his love, that is, himself (Rom. 8:31–39).

STUDY 6

The Promised Gospel

Deane Meatheringham

THE GOD OF PROMISE

God's promises are one with his covenant with creation which means he has created all things to bring them to a goal. God is 'a faithful creator'.

- God will not be diverted from his purpose by human sin or demonic attack upon his sovereign grace.
- The context for the Gospel we preach is the creation, which God has promised to redeem, unify and regenerate in Christ Jesus.

People who join classes on evangelism are often put out by hearing this, especially if they are looking for the latest 'how to' that they can use to produce commitments for Christ.

The Gospel flows as a stream of life from the Triune community of grace.

- It is God's very nature to give himself to us and his creation in the Word of the Gospel.
- It is God's to implement. Not ours.
- Our calling is in being saved into co-partners under Christ as head.

The first promise of the Gospel is implicit in the open-endedness of the Sabbath, pointing to the future Sabbath rest of the whole creation (Gen. 2:1-3; Heb. 4:9f.; Rev. 14:13).

The second comes after the bond between God and man and woman is individualised and we are turned into ourselves (Gen. 3:15).

- Humankind now lives in a state of great tension and is out of gear with God, self, others and creation.
- Babel is an attempt by humanity to unify all things, but this results in further disintegration (Gen. 11).
- Humankind is unable to re-socialise itself, or to heal its rupture and to bring peace between itself and God.

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THE PROMISE OF THE GOSPEL IS GIVEN TO ABRAHAM

The call and blessing of Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3 is the answer to the calamities in Genesis 1–11.

1. Abraham must leave his homeland.
2. He is promised a new land (a new Eden).
3. He will have many descendants.
4. He is promised divine protection.
5. He will be a source of blessing to many nations.

What was the Gospel in this for Abraham and the nations? Romans 4:13 says that he and his descendants would inherit the world.

This is amplified in Galatians 3:8–9, 15–18, 21. The promise of the Gospel includes:

1. The justification of the nations just as Abraham was justified by grace.
2. The nations will be heirs together with Abraham.
3. The promise of a son to Abraham is realised in Isaac but fulfilled in Christ.
4. The blessing of Abraham is the giving of the Holy Spirit to his heirs.

Abraham believed the Word of promise and was justified by God's pure grace (Gen. 15:6). The heirs of promise inherit the world by being put in the right by God. The history of the world is one that comes to its goal by grace alone. Grace subdues us in mercy making us to live by faith in Christ alone (Matt. 5:5; Gal. 3:18; Rom. 4:1–3, 16; 1 Pet. 1:3–5; 2 Pet. 3:13).

- The Gospel of God cannot be reduced to 'me and my salvation', nor can it be measured by church growth. God justifies his people so that they can continue his purposes in the creation when heaven and earth will be joined and regenerated by the Spirit (Isa. 44:1–5; **51:2–3**; 55:10–13; Joel 2; Ezek. 47:1–12; Acts 2:1ff.; Rom. 8:9–11, 18–24).
- Abraham and Isaac were men of the Spirit. In receiving God's Word of promise by faith we receive the 'promised Spirit'. By the Spirit believers live in the life and action of the risen Christ in the here and now. We participate in the life of this man who has given us the Spirit as a pledge of our future inheritance and the coming perfection of the world. By the Spirit Christ directs us to the goal.

THE PROMISE OF THE GOSPEL IS BOUND UP WITH THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

Thomas F. Torrance beautifully assists our understanding by calling Israel the 'actual matrix' (or womb) 'of relationships from which he (Christ) sprang as Son of David and Son of Mary, that is, in terms of his intimate bond with Israel in its covenant relationship with God throughout history'.¹

¹ T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, Paternoster, Exeter, 1983, p. 13.

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By elaborate religious ritual and carefully framed laws, by rivers of blood from millions of animal sacrifices, by the broken hearts of the psalmists and the profoundest agony of the prophets, by the tragic story of Israelite politics and the shattering of this people again and again, God taught the Jews, through centuries and centuries of existence yoked to his word and covenant, until the truth was imprinted upon their conscience and there was burned into their souls the meaning of holiness and righteousness, of sin and uncleanness, of love and mercy and grace, of faithfulness and forgiveness, of justification, atonement and salvation; the meaning of creation, the kingdom of God, of judgement, death and at last resurrection; the concept of the Messiah, the suffering servant, and yet prophet, priest and king, and so to the very brink of the gospel.²

Israel was the vehicle of the Gospel promises of God. In the fullness of time Jesus was born from the womb of Mary so that when at last God came into the world he came as a Jew (Gal. 4:4ff.; Luke 4:16–21).

- However, when the Son of God breaks into our time and space by his incarnation he critically re-orientates his pre-history.
- He turns upside down the expectation of the time, meeting with the wrong people, saving those who were outside the pale, in demonstrating the scandalous generosity of the Father, refusing political power, saving the world by the folly of his cross and directing his followers to bring the Gospel to the whole Gentile world.

PROMISE OR FREE WILL?

The promise of the Gospel is the Word of our covenant God that there is a future for humanity and for humanity's home. The promise is one of sovereign grace. Grace is our having been created, but created for God. Grace is God's free act and deed. It is never a quality inborn in us. The Gospel is God giving himself to us in his Word, redeeming those who are beyond it, and his bringing history to its ultimate perfection.

- In hostility to God's grace, Western humanity (like all humankind) has taken responsibility for itself.
- Theologically, we become Unitarian by saying grace helps us reach the goal.
- The future then has to do with our decision. God then becomes an accomplice to our decisions. Belief in human free will replaces belief in God, making God superfluous and the future of the world hopeless and frightening.

The Enlightenment has been described by some historians as 'Absolutism'. In general it means a system of life based upon the omnipotence of human powers.

- As this philosophy developed in the 17th and 18th centuries God was regarded as a projection of human self-knowledge.
- The French revolution in 1786 soon became the terror, as repeated in the National Socialism of Adolf Hitler.
- Our advances, good as many have been, continue to result in even greater disasters, e.g. the confusion and possibility of making even greater havoc in our saving the world from global warming.

² T. F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, Paternoster, Exeter, 2008, p. 42

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Many have lost hope. People may not be interested in a new religion or ideology but they may be looking for a new world.

- The promise of God for the future of humankind is the hope of grace that enables us to anticipate the future in doing the commands of God.
- In Christ every one of the promises of God is a 'Yes' (2 Cor. 1:20).
- This is the horizon and light of God's future.
- And the 'No' to every other way.
- The power of the future determines the present in anticipations and is the hope that enables us to stand with Paul in his ministry of the Gospel (Rom. 1:1–6).

STUDY 7

The Word as Active Revelation

Noel Due

This paper focuses on the active revelation of the Word of God. This necessitates some clarification as well as some distinction. We need to clarify what we mean by the Word of God, and distinguish that Word from other things. To do this, we'll take some material from historical theology, some from biblical theology, and then see how our comments comport with the testimony of John's gospel.

JESUS: GOD'S LIVING VOICE

In the speaker's notes for this school, Ian Pennicook relates the following exchange between Karl Barth and a student:

Student: 'Sir, don't you think that God has revealed himself in other religions and not only in Christianity?' Barth: 'No, God has not revealed himself in any religion, including Christianity. He has revealed himself in his Son' (Karl Barth [1886–1968], during his 1963 Princeton lectures).

We might have expected such a response from Barth, given his consistent and insistent Christocentrism, but his pithy reply shines an intense spotlight on the unique treasure that is the *Christian* doctrine of revelation.

Barth was nothing if not a faithful witness to God's Voice. In the theology of the Reformers, the Word always preceded the word (Scripture). The Word of God (i.e. God the Son) was always primary—not simply chronologically, but theologically. A mere chronological primacy would still allow for a form of dualism alien to the witness of Scripture. The eternal Word has no deistic relationship to the Bible, the Church or the world. In this regard Barth bore faithful testimony not only to the Reformation but to the living Word of God, in whom alone God speaks.

For the Reformers, Christ was the hermeneutical key to God's active revelation¹ and to the response of worship which that revelation created. God's revelation was inseparable from his saving deeds in Christ, in and through whom we have been firmly grasped by the grace of God. Both Lutheran and Reformed theology was essentially doxological—but doxology *from* grace, rather than towards it. Lutheran and Reformed worship retained a liturgical richness which preserved the best elements of earlier centuries, but which removed the *mediation* of *infused* grace via

¹ The term 'active revelation', should not imply an equal and opposite 'passive revelation', an oxymoron in the grammar of biblical theology.

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the sacramental/priestly conduit that had necessitated the reformation itself.² The Word was placed in the centre of the revised liturgies, with the sacraments taking their place only in connection with listening to the Word, as heard in the reading of Scripture and in the preaching of the gospel, all in the vernacular.

BUT WHAT OF SCRIPTURE?

We are justified in speaking of the Scriptures as God's word in written form, but only in such a way that exalts their testimony to Christ. While in one sense the written word reveals the things of God, the Scriptures themselves (along with the whole creation) have their origin and purpose in Christ. All things came into being through him, even biblical propositions about him. Without him *nothing* came into being that has come into being (John 1:3). The written word bears testimony to the eternal Creator–Word. Thus we live under his present and active Lordship, rather than under the regime of a book *per se*.³ He speaks, and listening to *his* voice 'new life the dead receive'.

JESUS PREACHES HIS GOSPEL

The Word of God speaks to the world through Scriptures, but especially as they are *preached*.⁴ The preached word, in the power of the Spirit, beats with the heart of the Word become flesh. Preaching is the prolongation of the Voice of the Father in the

² The later branches of Reformed theology often stripped public and private worship bare of all liturgical elements, lest even an inadvertent attachment to priesthood, ceremony and sacrament should arise which might presage a return to medieval sacramentalism, thereby leading to the transgression of the first two commandments. In the Puritan congregations in England and New England—and even more in the later form of Reformed theology and worship which made their way into the remoter parts of Scotland—public worship became a very plain event indeed. This was not all bad, but neither was it all good. Such bare public worship bears little resemblance to the worship of Calvin himself, or Knox in Scotland, for example, but it did maintain strict focus on the preaching event and the reading of Scripture.

³ While Islam historically recognised both Judaism and Christianity as religions of the Book, in reality the place of the Bible in Christian theology is vastly different from the place accorded to the Koran in Islam.

⁴ Luther (though the quote eludes me) referred to the importance of hearing the Word in the preaching of the gospel, even more than in reading the text of Scripture. Lutheran theology historically maintained a strong emphasis on the auricular nature of the gospel, captured powerfully in Bonhoeffer:

The death and the life of a Christian are not determined by his own resources; rather he finds both only in the Word that comes to him from the outside, in God's Word to him. The Reformers expressed it this way: Our righteousness is an 'alien righteousness,' a righteousness that comes from outside of us (*terra nos*). They were saying that the Christian is dependent on the Word of God spoken to him. He is pointed outward, to the Word that comes to him. The Christian lives wholly by the truth of God's word in Jesus Christ, which assures him salvation and righteousness. He is alert as possible to this Word. Because he daily hungers and thirsts for righteousness, he daily desires the redeeming Word. And it can come only from the outside, and it has come, and comes daily and anew in the Word of Jesus Christ, bringing redemption, righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

But God has put this Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of a man. Therefore the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without betraying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure.

And that also clarifies the goal of all Christian community: they meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation. As such, God permits them to meet together and gives them community. Their fellowship is founded solely upon Jesus Christ and this 'alien righteousness.' All we can say, therefore, is: the community of Christians springs solely from the Biblical and Reformation message of the justification of man through grace alone; this alone is the basis of the longing of Christians for one another. *Life Together* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1954), pp. 22–3.

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world, through the Church. But there is no revelation—in the pages of Scripture or in the preaching of the gospel—without Christ.⁵ Luther, and no less Calvin, were no bibliolaters. The true authority of the text lay in its witness to the saving work of God in Christ. While Luther especially was vilified for creating a ‘canon within the canon’,⁶ he would not admit of any authority other than the apostolic gospel itself. In this regard, he was one with Paul (e.g. Gal. 1:8–9).

BUT WHAT OF ‘NATURAL REVELATION’?

This is not a paper on apologetics, but broadly speaking apologetic approaches fall into two types: evidentialist and presuppositionist. For the first think Josh MacDowell; for the second, think Cornelius van Til. The one approach presents evidence for the reasonableness of faith; the other assumes an inherent knowledge of God, albeit opposed and suppressed by sinful humanity. Both have something to say. We do give ‘a defence’ (*apologia*) for the hope which lies within us (1 Pet. 3:15) but the hope is Christ. We also recognise that God speaks in and through the creation, and that all people have an innate knowledge of him (Rom. 1:18ff.)—but such revelation only confirms us in our need for Christ, since that revelation, like the Law and conscience, simply condemns us to death. Whichever way we pose the question, the answer is Jesus. Natural revelation is not saving revelation.

⁵ In terms of historical theology the doctrine of revelation has also been co-ordinated with the role of the Spirit. Scripture is *theopneustos*, for example (2 Tim. 3:16; cf. Matt. 22:43; Mark. 12:36; Acts 1:16), when understood as gift from God. On the other hand the reformers emphasised the need for the Spirit to illuminate the meaning of Scriptures (e.g. Calvin, *Institutes* II, 2, 20–21), on the basis of texts such as 1 Cor. 2:12–14; Eph. 1:17–18; 1 John. 2:20, 27; etc.—though it must be stressed that the doctrine of illumination has more to do with *hearing* (i.e. with faith) than with interpretation *per se*. The Spirit on the one hand worked within the personalities and circumstances of the authors of Scripture, and on the other he works in the hearts and minds of we who read and receive their testimony. Naturally, the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, so we draw no false divisions between the Persons in regard to their combined work. The formula (*omnia opera Trinitas ad extra indivisa sunt*)—meaning that (all) the external actions of God are the work of the entire Trinity—confirms the distinction of the Persons while maintaining the utter unity of their work. The distinction of the Persons lies in their origins (for want of a better term) and relations, but this distinctiveness is expressed in their works *ad extra*. God (in his entirety) speaks to us—revealing himself to us—but *actively* so, embracing us through a fully Trinitarian redemption brought to us in Christ. Thus, it is legitimate to focus on Jesus as *the* revelation of God since the Spirit bears witness to him, and the Father has sent him to proclaim his (i.e. the Father’s) name to the world. In so doing Jesus is the appointed Lord of all creation.

⁶ This is particularly so of Luther, whose German Bible broke entirely new ground. He separated out the Apocrypha; he dared to insert the word *allein* (alone) into Rom. 3:28; and he moved Hebrews and James to different positions within the New Testament. Though he voiced that some books were of different value (notably James, Jude, Hebrews and Revelation), he nonetheless translated them *all* and never ceased to revise and refine the translations of them all.

The process was fascinating:

In the progress of the work he founded a *Collegium Biblicum*, or Bible club, consisting of his colleagues Melancthon, Bugenhagen (Pommer), Cruciger, Justus Jonas, and Aurogallus. They met once a week in his house, several hours before supper. Deacon Georg Rörer (Rorarius), the first clergyman ordained by Luther, and his proof-reader, was also present; occasionally foreign scholars were admitted; and Jewish rabbis were freely consulted. Each member of the company contributed to the work from his special knowledge and preparation. Melancthon brought with him the Greek Bible, Cruciger the Hebrew and Chaldee, Bugenhagen the Vulgate, others the old commentators; Luther had always with him the Latin and the German versions besides the Hebrew. Sometimes they scarcely mastered three lines of the Book of Job in four days, and hunted two, three, and four weeks for a single word. No record exists of the discussions of this remarkable company, but Mathesius says that ‘wonderfully beautiful and instructive speeches were made’.

Philip Schaff, *The History of Luther’s Bible* at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/luther.html>. James Swan provides a balanced analysis of Luther’s approach to Scripture here: http://tquid.sharpens.org/Luther_%20canon.htm.

The Word of God as Active Revelation

THE EMMAUS ROAD IS ALWAYS OURS

Over recent decades many writers have helped to revive our vision of the inherently Christological nature of the Old Testament.⁷ Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we are learning again to see Christ in all the Scriptures. How? A few brief examples may help:

In terms of *typology*, tabernacle and temple; cultus and priesthood; exodus and Passover; land and kingdom; as well as the Lord's providential dealings with individuals such as Noah, Abraham (especially at Mt Moriah), Jacob, Joseph, Ruth, David, Solomon, etc. all point beyond themselves to Christ. He is the ark in whom we are saved; he is both Abraham's seed, and the ram in the thicket; he is the Israel of God who—as a countertype to Jacob—inherits the promises by faith while at the same time being the gate of God for the nations; he is the saviour of his brethren, sent ahead of us to prepare a place; he is the king after God's own heart; he is the Sage who rules the kingdom; and he enacts the redemption of which Ruth's story is but one example.

In like manner, *images of Israel* abound: Israel as the vine; as God's son; as the servant of the Lord; as his flock; as his *segullah*; as his wife; as the theatre of his glory; as the object of his covenantal *chen* and *chesed*; among many others. All are fulfilled in Christ. He is *the Vine*; Son; Servant; Shepherd (and Sheep); Treasured Possession; bearer of God's Glory; Covenant Faithfulness of God (as both covenant head and covenant partner); Bridegroom (and, in one sense, Bride . . . if we understand him as the True Israel); etc.

Moreover, the *descriptive names of God* (e.g. Rock, Provider, Righteousness, the One who Sees, Champion, Holy One, Lord of Hosts, Most High, etc.) are all met in Christ's person and work. In terms of *prophetic witness* (for the testimony of Jesus has always been the spirit of prophecy) the entire Old Testament corpus testifies to the coming Seed of Genesis 3:15. The many aspects of *Messianic expectation* which arose out of the conjunction of God's prophetic promises and Israel's experience of exile,⁸ though universally misunderstood by Israel, were none the less fulfilled in Christ. Likewise the whole *history of Israel* prepares us for the coming of Messiah, and he, in turn, acts as the key by which Israel's contemporary experience may be understood.⁹ The apostolic proclamation of Christ is but the exposition of all these things in the light of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension.

⁷ For example, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1980) and *The Christ of the Prophets* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2004); Alec Motyer, *Look the Rock: An Old Testament Background to Our Understanding of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996); Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1991); etc.

⁸ For example, the coming Messiah would vindicate God's holy Name; exalt God's chosen people; defeat God's enemies; rule over the nations and instruct them in *Torah*; establish an eternal Zion kingdom; redeem Israel from exile; gather the scattered flock; and settle them in the resting place of the land forever. With Messiah's appearance, Yahweh would return to the Temple; he would pour out the Spirit; establish his new covenant; bring justice to light; bestow forgiveness on his people; and regenerate the whole creation. Curiously enough, it is men with expectations such as these who crucified Jesus because he did not fulfil any of them—yet that very crucifixion was the means by which they were all secured. The risen Jesus then announced Peace to those who crucified him through the proclamation of his gospel. His word is still so: peace to those who are far off, and peace to those who are near.

⁹ See, for example, T. F. Torrance's profound exposition of this theme in *The Mediation of Christ* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), especially chapter 1, 'The mediation of revelation'.

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JOHN'S GOSPEL: THE LIVING WORD IN OUR FLESH

John's gospel founds all Christian revelation on the Incarnation. The Prologue (John 1:1–17) connects with the narrative (beginning with John's testimony in 1:19) by means of the hinge of John 1:18, 'No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father; he has explained him'. The remainder of John's gospel recounts how *God* has *revealed himself* in *Jesus*. The emphasis is important. Jesus is not just a perfect man, reflecting God; nor is he God only acting out the role of a man. Jesus is God in our nature. John's gospel, therefore, is essentially a treatise on the person of Christ, by which God reveals himself to the world.

Exegetically, John's account of this revelation is multifaceted. For example:

Firstly, John's gospel demonstrates that the work of Creation and the work of Redemption are inseparable. The creator of the Prologue is the Lamb of John's testimony (John 1:1–17; cf. 1:29, 36). The Light of the world shines (i.e. redemptively) in the darkness. The Shepherd who owns the flock dies for the flock. The Bread of heaven is broken for the life of the world. The Resurrection and the Life is crucified dead and buried.

These patterns reflect a consistent theme in Old Testament theology, whereby God the Creator is known in and through his acts of redemption. He creates Israel, not by divine fiat, but by the exodus. He is their Father–Redeemer—their heavenly progenitor and their true *go'el* at the one time. He is the Creator of the world, who at the same time seeks the lost Adam in the garden, and promises a Seed to destroy the works of the serpent. In Israel's cultus, he came with his own propitiation in his hands to meet his wayward son in a new Eden (which the tabernacle was understood to be).

This pattern of Old Testament theology is preserved in the very structure of John's gospel, where the Prologue informs our reading of every part. The Creator—the Word incarnate—comes to seek and save, to heal and restore, to gather and feed, to die and to rise, to intercede (so John 17:5) and to come again in the clouds of glory. Yes, 'tis mystery all, the immortal dies', but John's gospel will not let us hold to a mere Arian view of Jesus' passion. In Jesus, *God* atones, bearing our sins in his body on the tree. In Jesus *God* raises up a new Temple (note implication of 'I will raise it up' in John 2:19) as a dwelling place of his glory. When Jesus rose from the dead *God* arose that his enemies might be scattered. 'With the raising of Jesus, God himself has arisen, to fulfil his promises to all he has created.'¹⁰

Secondly, by means of the I AM sayings John co-ordinates God's *works* in and through Jesus with God's *nature* embodied in Jesus. The predicate I AM statements (e.g. John 6:35, 48, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25) exegete the absolute I AM statements (John 8:58; cf. 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28; 13:19; 18:5, 6). In other words, all that Jesus describes himself as (the Bread of heaven, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd), is so because of who he is, as I AM incarnate.

¹⁰ J. Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness Arise!: God's Future for Humanity and the Earth* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), p. 41. This sheds wonderful light on the many OT passages which cry for God to Arise (e.g. Ps. 3:7; 7:6–7; 10:12; 44:26; 68:1; 74:22; 82:8; 132:8–9; cf. Num. 10:35; 2 Chron. 6:41; Isa. 42:13–14; 51:9–10; etc.). He has arisen in Jesus, and so all of his promises are Yes in the resurrected Lord.

The Word of God as Active Revelation

Moreover, the predicate I AM statements are linked to the *actions* of Christ, not least in the seven signs. He is the Bread (who has fed the multitude in the wilderness); he is the Good Shepherd (who has come to seek and gather his flock and atone for their sins); he is the Light of the world (who has caused the blind to see); etc. In Jesus, God actively reveals himself by exeging his own nature through the humanity of the Son. The works reveal the person. At every point Jesus testifies that he has been *sent* into the world (e.g. John 3:34; 4:34; 5:23–24, 30, 36–38; 6:29, 38–39; etc.), and the I AM absolutes, together with the knowledge of his own eternal nature (e.g. John 17:5) make it clear that Jesus knew who he was and what he had come to do.

The revelation he brings is not passive (as though Jesus' humanity were merely the pattern for us to copy) but active, redeeming humanity to its proper state. In Jesus, the dwelling place of God is with men (John 1:14; cf. Rev. 21:3). Jesus, the God–man, is the *one* Mediator between God and man. He unites God to us and us to God in his person, only by virtue of which he can effectively accomplish his work. Being God he brings *God* to us. Being man he brings *us* to God. There is no passive revelation involved. His *being* as the Incarnate Son is God's revelation, and his *work* is God's salvation, but the latter is impossible without the former:

In him the revealing of God and the understanding of man fully coincided, the whole Word of God and the perfect response of man were indivisibly united in one Person, the Mediator, who was received, believed and worshipped together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit by the apostolic community which he creatively called forth and assimilated to his own mission in the Father. Thus as both the incarnate revelation of God and the embodied knowledge of God, Jesus Christ constitutes in himself the Way, the Truth and the Life through whom alone access to God the Father is freely opened to all the peoples of mankind. That is to say, as the incarnate Word and Truth of God Jesus Christ in his own personal Being is identical with the Revelation which he mediates.¹¹

Thirdly, John shows how Jesus fulfills every element of Old Testament Messianic expectation, albeit in complete contradiction to the widely held ways in which such expectations were viewed. The point of the whole gospel is to show that Jesus is the Christ, and that in believing we might have life in his name (John 20:31). Through the seven signs of chapters 1–11; into the direct teaching about the cross in chapter 12; via the good news of the coming Spirit in chapters 13–16; in and by the magnificent intercession of chapter 17; and through the account of the passion, resurrection and subsequent appearances in chapters 18–21; every element of legitimate messianic expectation is shown to have been fulfilled. Moreover, it is *God* who has done it. He has fulfilled every promise in his incarnate Son, on our behalf, while we were still sinners. And he has done so fully, freely and abundantly. In differing ways the seven signs correlate to elements of the Old Testament narrative, but adorned now with an overarching stress on super abundance and transformation. For example, the water of the old Jewish rites of purification is changed to wine in 'by the bucket load'; Jesus is the *living bread* from heaven, not manna simply to sustain biological life; Christ is *the* good shepherd (fulfilling Ezek. 34:23–24, i.e. '*I Myself* will be their shepherd'), not just a Davidic shepherd simply; Jesus raises the dead to *eternal* life, beyond even the reviving of dead Israel only to die again; etc.

¹¹ T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), p. 9.

The Word of God as Active Revelation

Fourthly, we hear from Jesus' lips his utter dependence upon the Father for all things (e.g. John 5:19, 30; 8:28; 12:19; 14:10; etc.). In his deeds we learn that *the Father* has been the active agent: 'the Father who dwells in me does his works' (John 14:10). In Christ we see the face of the Father (John 14:9; 12:45) not simply because of who Jesus is (as God incarnate), but because of *how* he does what he does. His oneness with the Father is relational, and thereby the Father is revealed for *who he is*, i.e. as the Father always in relationship. This revelation in time corresponds to the nature of God in eternity.¹² It means the Triune life of God is now opened up to us in Jesus (so John 17:3), and the eternal life the Mediator brings to us is *relationally* defined.

Fifthly, the mystery of God's redeeming work in Christ is expounded in a wide variety of Old Testament themes and concepts, all of which place the primacy on God and his work rather than on us and ours. Passover lamb, propitiatory sacrifice and scapegoat (coalescing in John's description of Jesus as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'); temple and priesthood; regeneration and redemption; new exodus terminology; sanctification and intercession; redeeming king and atoning shepherd; the justifying Judge; these and many other allusions to the Old Testament narrative and cultus mean that we are not mute when called to expound the work of God in Christ. But at best they only give *indications* of the nature of that work. We cannot know it in all its height and breadth and length and depth, for it is the work of God. Christ's work on behalf of the elect is but a *witness* to the saving work of God, and not its extent. The whole of the cosmos has been affected by his work, because the death and resurrection of the Son of God is the death and resurrection of the Creator. But the nature and extent of that work, like the work of the priesthood in the OT temple, remains out of sight of prying eyes. It is not secretive (there is nothing Gnostic about it), but it is undiscoverable,¹³ and unknowable apart from God's active revelation in Jesus.

THE ATHANASIAN NECESSITY

In all of this we have no paradigm. Jesus is not *like* anything or anyone (cf. Isa. 40:25; 46:5). Jesus is the embodiment of Israel as also Israel's Lord and God. He is the Priest as also the Lamb; the Temple as also the *laos*; the Great Prophet and Apostle as also the message he proclaims; the Beginning as also the End of all things; the Creator as also the creature; and the Sower as well as the Seed. He is God *as* man, God *for* man; and *man* for God, when all others were against Him.

The person of Christ is a singularity. The work is unique because of his person. How do we understand this one? What can we say of him, from him and in him to the world? Who do we say that he is?

¹² As the systematic theologians put it, the ontological Trinity is one with the economic Trinity.

¹³ The distinction between discoverability and revelation is absolute. The Enlightenment and the modern project which ultimately flowed from it proceeded on the assumption that all things were discoverable to human reason. The Flesh, especially in its religious garb, proceeds on the same basis. The Pharisees searched the Scriptures, but in their blindness stumbled over the stumbling stone. The noetic effects of sin are undiscoverable to human reason, because we believe that our logic is logical. However, it is never *theological* logic. The mind of man cannot subject itself to God any more than can any other part of fallen humanity. It must be brought into subjection by the mighty power of God. God must arise and his enemies be scattered, or belief remains impossible.

The Word of God as Active Revelation

What we must say is: *God* meets us in Jesus. In his book *The Four Great Heresies* (London: A. W. Mowbray, 1955) J. C. W. Wand provides a compact overview of the swings and roundabouts of the early Christological controversies. It is a disturbing book. When you read it you realise that at one time or other you have held each or all of the aberrant positions he describes. But the point is thereby well made. The Church needed to give full attention to the *person* of Christ in such a way that his *work* was not undermined. A Docetic Christ cannot save us any more than an Arian one can. Orthodox Christology (of the Athanasian and Chalcedonian types¹⁴) alone is adequate:

The sinner's reconciliation with a holy God could only be effected by God. And I press the *effectuation* of it . . . with God to will is to do; and the God who willed man's salvation must Himself effect it—not accept it, and not contrive it, but *effect* it. Only He who had lost us could find us, only He who was wronged could forgive, only the Holy One could satisfy His own holiness. To forgive He must redeem. Fully to forgive the guilt He must redeem from the curse. And only the Creator knew the creature so as to redeem. And to know mankind he must live in mankind. To offer for man He must be man.¹⁵

In Jesus, we meet *God as man*.

God in man, with man, or for man, are all true enough, and apply to all the saints of God. Man with God, for God, under God, representing God, or even as the son of God likewise all are true but not sufficient to describe the incarnate Word.

Only in Christ do we see God, and only in Christ, therefore do we hear the *saving* Word of his effective mediation. This is what constitutes God's active revelation in the Word. Therefore we preach nothing but Christ, and him crucified; and we worship the Triune God in, with and through Jesus our Lord.

¹⁴ Finally, the Chalcedonian definition but marks the boundaries of the mystery of the Incarnation; it does not explain it. It stands still as a faithful guardian of the ineffable truth that in Jesus we meet God as man, but we cannot venture beyond the borders without losing the mystery, and thereby falling into error which diminishes the uniqueness of Christ. The Triune relationships allow some parallel understanding (e.g. that the eternal Son can be fully one with the Father without *being* the Father), but again, our language falls short. But our *worship* does not, and this is the very point.

¹⁵ P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (London: Independent Press, 1948), p. 85, his italics.

STUDY 8

The Gospel Comes to Israel— Matthew to Luke

Trevor Faggotter

INTRODUCTION

Most Bible's have a few blank pages and some introductory notes between the Old Testament and the New Testament. If scholars revised this time honored approach, and in the next *New Revised Version* they included Matthew, Mark and Luke in the Old Testament, and began the New Testament with John, Acts and Romans, how—after the outrage settled—might that affect our reading of the Bible as a whole? It may indeed highlight one primary purpose being served by the synoptic Gospels.

THE GOSPEL TO ISRAEL

Most would agree that the synoptic gospels are a most unusual, unique genre of writing, in which all of the authors share a common conviction concerning a Jew, named Jesus of Nazareth. The authors or editors of Matthew, Mark and Luke were undoubtedly writing in the midst of local ecclesial communities. Of Matthew and Mark, C. F. D. Moule says, 'they are undoubtedly Church-books'.¹ However, was the prime focus of these Gospels upon the problems and interests of the early Christian Church? Many of the 20th century commentaries argued that way. It may seem obvious to some, but W. J. Dumbrell argues—against the tide of scholarship—claiming that the synoptic gospels are primarily telling us of the incarnation ministry. They are a record of:

- The ministry of Jesus to Israel
- The rejection of the nation as the chosen people of God
- The consequent destruction of Jerusalem, and
- The end of the age of the Mosaic covenant.²

The synoptic gospels are a narrative of the closing chapter of God's story with Israel. At the same time, they launch a new era of covenant grace flowing out to *all* nations.

¹ C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, Adam and Charles Black, London, 1962, p. 86.

² William J. Dumbrell, *The New Covenant*, The Bible Society of Singapore, Singapore, 1999, p. 13.

The Gospel Comes to Israel—Matthew to Luke

JESUS COMES TO ISRAEL

Jesus came to his own people preaching. He came overflowing with a merciful, yet urgent recall to re-embrace God's purposes as his covenant people:

He took His mission to Israel with entire seriousness. With all His heart He taught not only the lost sheep, but at first the national soul. But without the effect He sought. He failed with His public. And it was His failure as prophet that extorted His resources as Redeemer. The Kingdom, His great theme, could only be established in His Cross. It was His desertion as preacher that cast Him on His greatest work of becoming the preacher's Gospel. It was His ill-success with Israel that turned Him to a world commensurate with the super-national greatness of His soul. And the Cross, which seemed to His own at first but as a martyrdom, became His one grand work. Israel's martyr became the world's Saviour. When the Cross was forced upon Him (at whatever point this came home), it broke open as the world-Cross. It was and is the universal element in Christianity, as the conscience it saved is in Humanity. And when the agony seized Him, its immediate grief was the grief of the spiritual patriot at the loss and guilt of His land. It was His poignant insight into the doom which His very Grace had brought to His own through its refusal. If His deepest woe was His sympathy with the holy Grace of God in its wound, perhaps His nearest was the fearful judgement which seemed to Him the one result of His life to His own; whom yet He had not come to judge with wrath but to save with all the love of His divine heart.³

He was not consciously using an Israel hopeless from the first as a mere sounding-board to reach the world. Israel was not His mere audience for posterity. His conceptual world was that of Israel. It was God's old controversy with Israel that He entered, Israel's historic mission and problem. He did not speak the language nor seek the ideals of pagan culture. He did not make any overtures or concessions to it. His teaching took up the Jewish tradition.⁴

While agonisingly unsuccessful (Matt. 23:37–39; Isa. 6:9–10), Jesus's rejection, his death on a cross, and his resurrection as Lord over all, accomplished a final work of judgement and of grace, both for his people Israel, and for all the nations of the world. It would prove to be the final chapter for Israel, as uniquely God's people.

THE CLIMAX OF GOD'S STORY

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1, RSV).

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of *the events that have been fulfilled among us* . . . I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first . . . (Luke 1:1, 3).

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1).

Matthew 1 shows that Jesus is Israel's long awaited *righteous* Davidic King, the Messiah. Matthew deliberately arranges his genealogy with theological purpose (like Chronicles). With small significant comments, he points to Jesus as being supremely the focus of God's plan, all in the *fulfillment* of Scripture—a continual emphasis.⁵

³ P. T. Forsyth, *The Preaching of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ*, p. 5–6.

⁴ P. T. Forsyth, p. 6.

⁵ Matthew 1:22 'All this took place to **fulfill** what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet': See further use of prophecy and fulfillment in passages such as Matthew 2:15; 2:17; 2:23; 3:15; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54; 26:56; 27:9; 27:35.

The Gospel Comes to Israel—Matthew to Luke

The promises to Abraham concerning the blessing of the nations, had *now* reached their zenith—‘Now’, he says ‘the *genesis* of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way’ (Matt. 1:18). After fourteen generation from Abraham to King David (Matthew 1:6), Israel had *royal power*. Then after fourteen generations from David to the time of the deportation to Babylon (Matt. 1:11), Israel had a *loss of royal power*. Then after fourteen generations ‘Jesus was born’ (Matt. 1:16), and this marks the *revival of royal power* in a new and open-ended way—which is now flowing out across the nations (Matt. 28:19), following Jesus death and resurrection. Dumbrell says:

The death and resurrection of Jesus moved us from the history of Israel, which in some sense the death of Jesus brought to a close, into a new universalism that will finally issue into the complete triumph of God’s kingdom (Senior, 1991, 251–252).⁶

Mark uses a Christological title, ‘the Son of God’, which does not fit naturally with his focus upon the incarnation ministry that follows, immediately. Rather, it pertains to the final revelation that becomes clear only after the resurrection, namely, that this man Jesus is *the second person of the Trinity*.⁷ Mark’s gospel unfolds the Messianic secret, the mystery hidden for ages⁸ in the heart of the Story of God.

- Mark 4:41 reads: ‘And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”’
- Mark begins in Galilee (1:2—8:21) moves onwards (8:22–10:52), to the climax in Jerusalem (Mark 11:1—16:8). John *baptises* calling Israel—like their second exodus from exile in Babylon to a return to the land—to follow the lead messenger (cf. Exod. 23:20) John and Jesus to the sealing of the covenant (Exod. 24:1–8).
- Malachi 3:1, 4:5–6 highlight promises; and warnings of curse if rejected.
- Expectations of Isaiah 40–55 are fulfilled in a new exodus and new covenant.
- The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near (‘now’ that John is arrested).
- Mark 13 on *The Fall of Jerusalem* is jammed in between the Triumphal Entry and the Passion and functions here as Israel’s ‘last will and testament’.⁹
- The cross was the throne of the Messiah, the King of the Jews. This was Israel, the Servant of Yahweh (Isa. 53). The death of Jesus was to be the death of Israel. He was given up to death by Israel. He died the death that was rebellious Israel’s death and in Israel’s place as representative for the whole world. He fulfilled Israel’s role as a light to the Gentiles. He is every nation’s future. His powers were cosmic (Mark 4:41), his victory at the cross is cosmic, defeating the powers of evil.
- The Resurrection account is brief, but the new story has now just begun (Mark 1:1).

⁶ William J. Dumbrell, *The New Covenant*, The Bible Society of Singapore, Singapore, 1999, p. 86.

⁷ W. J. Dumbrell, p. 88.

⁸ Ephesians 3:9.

⁹ W. J. Dumbrell, p. 134.

The Gospel Comes to Israel—Matthew to Luke

Luke begins and ends his first volume of *the events that have been fulfilled* in the coming of Jesus, by setting his story in the temple (Luke 1:5—2:52, 24:53). It is a major concern of Luke's to show the continuity between the Judaism of his day, and the message Jesus preached of the kingdom of God, having arrived. This is a story of the continuity of Israel, not in the way that they had been functioning as God's people, but *in the new Jesus movement*.¹⁰ This is something that has not happened in a corner but they are events that have been *fulfilled among us* (Luke 1:1). Right from the beginning of his ministry, Jesus confronted the assumption of the Jews that they alone somehow had a special relationship with God (Luke 4:24–27).¹¹ Yes, they had a covenant purpose, in a covenant love, but the time had come, for the arrival of the One in whom salvation had come—righteous and devout Simeon guided by the Holy Spirit, came into the temple and recognised Jesus—'a light for revelation to the Gentiles *and* for glory to your people Israel' (Luke 2:32).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD—OF HEAVEN

Jesus the 'new Moses' (Matt. 5–7) calls Israel back to covenant relationship. The character of the kingdom of God, unfolds in surprising new ways—especially for those not doing so well—poor in spirit, mourners, those persecuted for righteousness sake. This Word of a gracious Kingdom bestowed blessing, forgave sins, evoked new hope:

- 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5:3).
- This is 'not the ethics of obedience, but the ethics of grace'.¹²
- Jesus comes not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them
- Jesus transcends the Torah, 'giving expression to its innermost spirit'.¹³

'DON'T HATCH IT!'

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them (Matt. 23:13).

By locking people out of the kingdom of heaven, and refusing to go in themselves Israel were hindering the flow of life—hatching God's gifts.¹⁴ The Word is creative, dynamic, fruitful, overcoming and fulfilling of God's plan. In the coming of Jesus Christ there came an end to Israel's hatching the gifts God gave them (Rom. 9:4–5). That story was over. It ended in the death of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰ W. J. Dumbrell, p. 214.

¹¹ In Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, he continues to trace the story of faith in Christ, as people of all nations, succeed the focus of Israel alone. Yet this story climaxed in Jerusalem, and its first heralds, and repentant converts, were Jews.

¹² William J. Dumbrell, *The New Covenant*, The Bible Society of Singapore, Singapore, 1999, p. 30.

¹³ William J. Dumbrell, p. 37.

¹⁴ As kids, we shouted: 'don't hatch it!' like an egg, to any kid who sat or lay on top of a public football (AFL rules), preventing others from playing. In real matches, any kid who hatched it soon drew the wrath of the umpire.

The Gospel Comes to Israel—Matthew to Luke

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom (Matt. 21:43).

‘Which of the two did the will of his father?’ They said, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you’ (Matt. 21:31).

If the synoptics have emphasised Jesus as concluding the Old Testament story, then John’s gospel, Paul, Peter and Acts, open up the powerful proclamation of Christ’s new story, going forth now—the Word of his cross. We who preach Christ, secure in the covenant relationship can, strangely enough, repeat some of Israel’s recalcitrant old patterns, repeating the chant: ‘The Temple of the Lord’ (Jer. 7:4).¹⁵

¹⁵ Of 75 million people in Turkey, there are only 3,500 Christians. In 1960 there were only 10 Christians.

STUDY 9

The Church and the Gospel: The Transformed People Must Speak

Ian Pennicook

Geoffrey Bingham wrote:

There has been much debate about whether what is called ‘the Great Commission’ is in the imperative or not. I think it can be successfully shown that in the four gospels, and especially in their endings, Jesus gives *direction* as to what they will do rather than commanding them to do it. For example, in Matthew 28:19, Jesus says, ‘Go [going] therefore and make disciples of all nations’. That is, Jesus is saying that they will have gone and so the command is to disciple the nations rather than a command to go. I think that this can be seen to be the spirit of Luke 24:46–49. If there is a command it is to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. In Mark 16:15 the ‘go’ is again a participle—going—which is presupposed. The command is to proclaim the gospel to all the Creation. In John 20:21 (cf. John 17:18) Jesus puts the sending on a high level, ‘As the Father has sent me, even so I send you’. Having said all this, I think that we should be careful not to put imperatives into the indicative lest we withdraw the power from the imperative. I have said elsewhere that the measure of a true human being is to love to be commanded, and so to be one with God’s will rather than to be induced to do it by the seduction of the will. This latter takes away the dignity of being one, voluntarily, with God in His plan and purpose for Creation. The disciples were one with Jesus in doing His Father’s grand will and purpose.¹

The significance of this quote, in part, lies in his refusal to function on the level of law as the motivation for mission. However, there can be little doubt that often the church is presented with the ‘command’ of Jesus, especially in Matthew 28:18–20, as the dominant reason for mission in the world today. In a later session we will examine that command and others, but for the present I want to work from a different angle.

As we examine the New Testament, a couple of significant features emerge. The first is that the ‘Great Commission’ has its primary place within the overall structure of Matthew’s gospel. A second feature is that its place within Matthew’s gospel is basically the place it stays. Nowhere in either the Acts of the Apostles or the Letters is there any place for a command based on the Great Commission. Yet what is also prominent is that the early church (and for our present purposes that means the church in Acts) was a proclaiming community.

¹ Geoffrey Bingham, *God and Man in the Mission of the Kingdom*, Redeemer Baptist Press, North Parramatta, 2003, pp. 216f.

The Church and the Gospel

Perhaps it is a little pedantic to observe that it is only in Matthew's gospel that there is a certain command to 'make disciples'. The evidence of Mark's gospel is difficult since there are at least three known endings: the 'shorter ending' which does not contain a command as such and which actually ascribes Jesus himself as the one working through those around Peter; the 'longer ending' (Mark 16:9–20) which, to my mind at least, though ancient is not part of the original gospel; and the truncated ending, i.e. Mark 16:8, which is the way many manuscripts end the gospel. But whatever conclusion we reach, I suggest that we should not dogmatically build on uncertainty. Luke's gospel, while clearly preparing the reader for what appears in Acts, does not contain a command to go; rather its only command is to 'stay in the city until . . .' John's gospel also contains no command. In all these, of course, there is the assumption that something tremendous is about to take place—and so it does!

The Acts of the Apostles has also been seen to be the Acts of the Holy Spirit. Both aspects are true² but it is the place of Pentecost in the life and witness of the church that demands our attention now.³ In Acts the witness of the church to the risen Jesus is nowhere linked to a command, but it is directly linked to the promise of the Holy Spirit with the consequent movement of the witnesses throughout the whole world. There was no 'Christian' proclamation until Pentecost. But after the Spirit was poured out there was a total change, not only in the people who had received the Spirit, but also in what they said. For instance, how much space was evidently given to 'the stories of Jesus' such as we read in the gospels? Admittedly we are told that Cornelius knew the accounts of Jesus' preaching, doing good and healing (Acts 10:36–38) and that King Agrippa knew the things of which Paul spoke for 'this⁴ was not done in a corner' (Acts 26:26), so that those in Palestine, especially in the early years, might be expected to have heard of, if not actually witnessed, Jesus' ministry. But still none of the stories are recounted and when Jesus was quoted in Acts 20:35 it was by a saying not found in the gospels and was used to validate Paul's example.

It was not the stories of Jesus' Palestinian ministry that gripped the preachers but the fact of his being raised from the dead. And they knew that, not because it was a doctrinal 'given' but because they had received the Holy Spirit. The implications of the resurrection was that they now had a gospel to preach but that was first a gospel which had come into them.

The church in Acts did not need a law or commandment in order to speak. From the day of Pentecost onwards they were compelled by the action of God upon them. So the initial proclamation was actually not that by Peter in Jerusalem but by those who had received the Spirit and who now spoke out 'the mighty works of God' (Acts 2:11).⁵ Whether it was them speaking to God or to the people who heard them is probably beside the point, but it is instructive that if it was praise that issued from the

² See Roland Allen, 'Pentecost and the World' in *The Ministry of the Spirit: Selected Writings of Roland Allen*, David M. Paton (ed.), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1960, pp. 3f. I want to stress the significance of Roland Allen's writings. Geoffrey Bingham was insistent to me that though he often referred to P. T. Forsyth and, less often, to James Denney, it was Allen who provided the real impetus for his thinking and ministry. I would urge us all not only to read Allen's works but to make the substance of them known to the people of God.

³ Also worth obtaining—and reading—is Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1961.

⁴ Possibly the singular is used to refer to Paul's preaching. It has been pointed out by some that Paul is using a Greek proverb.

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version or are my own translation or paraphrases.

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believers then it meant that official ‘preaching’ is not the issue, as is affirmed in 1 Peter 3:15.

Because of the transforming power of the Spirit in the believers, Peter then had his opportunity to explain how it was they were so changed. His point was that Jesus had been raised from the dead and that he, far from being a failed messianic claimant, was no less than Lord and Messiah and that he was the one who had received the Spirit as his to give to those whom God called. The climax of Israel’s hope had come in Jesus. What was more, the promise was that those who responded would also share in that same gift of the Spirit. The response of three thousand people that day was evidently so profound that they ‘devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers’ (Acts 2:42). They had all received the Spirit of God, which meant that they had received the forgiveness of sins, adoption as children of God and wondrous participation in the body of Christ. It is hardly surprising that with all that, and more, they went to the apostles for teaching as to what it all meant.

When persecution broke out in full in Jerusalem, although the apostles managed to remain in the city, many of these new believers had to escape into the Judean countryside or into Samaria. But it is well known that ‘those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word’ (Acts 8:4). In this they were no different to the apostles, Peter and John, who could not keep from speaking about what they had seen and heard (Acts 4:20). The pattern exemplified by Jeremiah (20:7–9) was worked out in the church, that the word given was ‘like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot’.

There were times of calm for the church and the growth of the church was not hindered by it at all; nor was it helped by suffering *per se* (Acts 9:31). It is not really true to say that ‘the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church’.⁶ Luke’s statement continued: ‘Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, [the church] increased in numbers’. So after proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead’ (Acts 4:2), Peter’s testimony was that of a man ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 4:8). The response of the gathered believers to the opposition of the Jewish leaders was to pray that the word be spoken with boldness, and the result was that ‘they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness’ (Acts 4:29–31).

The church was, or ought to have been, living in the awareness of the presence and power and holiness of the Holy Spirit. Thus Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). As the church lived in fear of offending the Holy Spirit, ‘none of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women’ (Acts 5:11, 13–14). Later, when the apostles were brought before the High Priest, the topic was still the resurrection of Jesus, but the witness given by the apostles was one with that given by the Holy Spirit:

But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him’ (Acts 5:29–32).

⁶ Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. 50: ‘The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed’.

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It was not just a verbal likeness but a witness given in total harmony with the Spirit. Where there is disobedience there is no holy power, indeed there is no desire for that sort of power at all. This is evidenced in Acts 6, where the whole community of the disciples was urged to select seven men ‘full of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 6:3). The result of the choice of these men was that ‘the word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith’ (Acts 6:7). The power of the word of God was the power of the Spirit by whom it was spoken (Acts 6:10; see also 7:55).

To receive the word of God was to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14, 17; 19:2). The word of God was nothing less than the prophetic witness of the church (Acts 2:17–18). The word given was received and so they must speak. But the word could never be something the church has as its own possession. The word first had them. It could never be seen as distinct from God himself. The word was always God or the risen Lord Jesus speaking. So when expounding the particular application of the gospel to the churches Paul could point out that ‘faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word [the utterance, *rhēma*] of Christ’ (Rom. 10:17). The church is to take ‘the sword of the Spirit, which is the *rhēma*, the utterance of God’ (Eph. 6:17) and that sword is never a book or a doctrine. It is a word (*logos*) given and received and so spoken (Eph. 6:19).

The church was never to be moved by the need of fallen humanity, though plainly to be without compassion for the world in its plight was to be quite different from God and Jesus. It was to be moved by the action and word of the Spirit of God. The need does not determine the call. There were needs in Antioch, but the Holy Spirit had his own purpose for Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1–4). Paul and Barnabas were ‘sent out by the Holy Spirit’ and the church could only rise up in faith and acknowledge that. There were distinct needs in Asia and Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, would not permit them to take those needs as direction. Surprisingly, too, I can think of no place where the church was told to pray for the conversion of the lost. But it was asked to pray for the preachers (Eph. 6:19; Matt. 9:37–38). The reason for that seems simple: God was—and is—already in action to save the lost: ‘as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers. Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region’ (Acts 13:48–49), ‘the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed’ (Acts 19:20). True, the message concerned Jesus, but the word of the Lord was first the word issuing as a sword from the mouth of the Lord Jesus.

Mission is not an option for the church, not because it is a legal obligation laid upon us but because it is of the essence of the redeemed community. The ‘Go’ of Matthew 28:19 may not be the command it appears.⁷ Certainly the Great Commission is never used in the New Testament letters to generate some movement by the church. In fact, there is, I think, no command in the letters addressed to believers to get them to proclaim. A possible exception might be 1 Corinthians 15:34, but the context seems to point to that being a reference to members of, or at least in, the church.

⁷ I will examine this in Session 12, ‘The Great Co–Mission and the Great Commission’.

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In Ephesians 4:7–10 Paul wrote:

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.' (When it says, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)

It can be shown that 'Christ's gift' probably is a reference to the gift (*dōrea*) of the Holy Spirit.⁸ We should notice too that the gifts distributed were with a view to Christ 'filling all things' (possibly a reference to Jesus 'the last Adam?') and that one of the gifts he has given, in order that *he* might accomplish this, is the gift of evangelist.

Given all this, it is plain that the drive for godly living is never law but rather it comes from a rich refreshment in the gospel which has come to the church and through which Christ has brought the church to himself and filled it with his Spirit. Hence the commands(!): 'Go on being filled with the Spirit' (Eph. 5:18), 'live by the Spirit' (Gal. 5:16, 25), 'be aglow with the Spirit' (Rom. 12:11, RSV), 'let the word of Christ dwell in you richly' (Col. 3:16), all within the context of the gospel's power.

Where there is a diminished drive for mission, the solution lies in the word continually being brought to us. This is equally true for a refreshment in godliness and for sweet fellowship in the church. It all flows from a new or renewed awareness of the great work of Christ for us, in us and then through us. Law may seem to work more quickly, but it is never the means by which God works. In the long run (and the not so long run) law works wrath, but the fruit of the gospel, the fruit of the Spirit, that is quite another matter!

⁸ See James D. G. Dunn, 'Δωρεά as the Gift of the Holy Spirit' in *The Christ and the Spirit: Volume 2—Pneumatology* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998), pp. 207–9.

STUDY 10

The Church and the Gospel in History

John Calvert

My brief: Missionary history post William Carey and the scope of Matthew 28 as a legalistic force in Australia.

The 1950s demonstrated highly emotive missionary interest from interdenominational 'faith' mission societies who publicised the 'foreign fields' by appeals for personal commitment at Keswick-type conventions and youth rallies. I am not criticising such gatherings for they must be seen in their 'euphoric' historic settings, and numerous young people and ex-servicemen and women responded. NSW Katoomba Conventions in my late teens; missionary emphasis with appeal. Eyes closed, hand up if you will go, stand, come forward. Stand if prepared to go if called; come forward. Took courage to remain seated!! SA Charismatic convention; two thirds of God's name is GO!!

It is important for historians not to be so enamoured with the reformers and missionary leaders of the past that they ignore the obvious failures and blind spots evident along the winding history of the Christian Church. It is also important not to be so critical of the past that we see nothing redeemable in the lives and methodology of those who have preceded us.¹

John Piper wrote:

it is possible to be distracted from God in trying to serve God. Martha-like we neglect the one thing needful and soon begin to present God as busy and fretful as we are. A. W. Tozer warned us about this: We commonly represent God as a busy, eager, somewhat frustrated father hurrying about seeking help to carry out His benevolent plan to bring peace and salvation to the world . . . Too many missionary appeals are based upon this fancied frustration of almighty God.²

What is History? History is a researcher's interpretation of data, it is not fact. While 'no historian can escape bias altogether . . . bias need not extinguish a historian's critical powers'.³

¹ E. W. Lutzer in *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions*, eds M. I. Klauber & S. M. Manetsch (B & H Publishing, Nashville, 2008), p. x.

² J. Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad* (Baker, Michigan, 2010), p. 37, quotes T. Wells, *A Vision for Missions* (Banner of Truth, Carlisle, 1985), p. 35.

³ D. Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Baker, Michigan, 1990), pp. 6–7. See also, H. Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (Fontana, 1960).

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1. THE CONTEXTS OF CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS IN AUSTRALIA⁴

Australia was discovered (invaded) and founded during the 18th century age of discovery and was to benefit from the missionary expansion of the 19th century; a result of subsequent European expansion; and mid-eighteenth century revivals. The industrial revolution in England began a not always beneficial effect on society. Thousands out of work: flooded burgeoning cities: crime: overcrowded gaols: Americans rebelled. The 18th century French Revolution and war with France also saw widespread revival in Britain, Europe and America; Wesley, Whitfield, Wilberforce, Newton and Edwards. S.P.C.K. 1698, L.M.S. 1795, C.M.S. 1799. Influenced by the Moravians, by the life and writings of John Eliot and David Brainerd and inspired by the journals of James Cook's voyages, the impoverished Baptist pastor/cobbler William Carey, born 250 years ago this year, penned an 87-page apologia for foreign missions, *An Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*. Carey believed he was 'called' but his wife did not. He left with his family for India in 1793 as the first B.M.S. missionary. Carey's sense of urgency influenced Hudson Taylor, affirmed the sovereignty of God and stressed God's plan to use means, emphasising we are the means. He took issue with hyper-Calvinism and the prevailing Reformation and Puritan view that the 'Great Commission' was restricted to the apostles, as also, *Lo, I am with you always . . . and not to us*.⁵

2. MATTHEW 28:16–20

Verse 18: '*All authority*', Jesus is making clear that the limitations that applied throughout the incarnation no longer apply to him. He has supreme authority throughout the universe. From *Therefore* onwards, the Greek text contains only one true imperative; *make disciples*, the main verb. Other verbals are participles and literally translate as 'having gone', 'baptizing', and 'teaching'. The first one, *poreuthentes*, an aorist participle, normally signifies time prior to the main verb, thus 'having gone' or 'when you have gone'. This assumes that the disciples of Jesus are already on the way based on his previous directions in Matthew's Gospel. Linguistically there is a big BUT, that is, it is not uncommon in Greek for the participles to absorb the thrust of the mood of the main verb, in which case 'having gone' would legitimately be 'Go'. That the great majority of published translations give 'Go' indicates that leading scholars in translation think that way. This could apply also to the other two supplementary participles, 'baptise' and 'teach'. Meaning these are not options, but mandatory. However, the continuous sense of the present participle is a good reason to leave those two as participles in English, emphasising that the baptising and teaching is a vital part of 'making disciples'. Returning to the 'Go', the same participle in its feminine form is found in Matthew 28; where it is apparent that it must agree with its main verb 'tell', as 'go quickly and tell'. Why

⁴ Rob Linn, NCTM, Australian history lectures, 1985 & 1991.

⁵ M. D. Sills, *The Missionary Call* (Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2008), p. 68; S. Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Penguin Books, London, 1987), pp. 222–8; H. R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1964), pp. 16–27; Taylor visited Melbourne and Adelaide in 1890.

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change to something different in verse 19? Both verses are telling someone to get on with it! In verse 7, it is the ladies to go and tell the twelve; in verse 19, the disciples to go and make more disciples.⁶ Verse 20: *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*. ‘Behold’, i.e. pay attention, take into consideration, the word is to arouse faith! Debates continue as to whether there is ‘a specific or general missionary call’. My understanding presumes a going, as the King is going! We are not doing something for God! He is doing something in and through us. The overall scriptural emphasis of ‘sent’ in John 20:21, perfect tense; linked with John 17:18 ties in with Genesis 12:3, Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1, Ezekiel 2 and 3. Jesus will ascend to the Father and remains the ‘sent one’, for his mission continues through the disciples and his church, so we continue his work not begin a new one. Matthew’s gospel closes in a blaze of glory.⁷

A survey of nineteenth and twentieth century missionary gatherings would reveal numerous appeals for service using the ‘Great Commission’ to invoke youthful response. The writings of John R. Mott in 1900 and John Stott in 1992 continued the Great Commission emphasis. The 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, chaired by U.S. Methodist layman Mott, was driven by the watchword; ‘The Evangelisation of the World in this Generation’. The first of its eight assigned commissions stated: ‘1. Carrying the gospel to all the non-Christian world’. Obligation and urgency were paramount; but the Great War interrupted all plans until 1921 and the Second War thwarted further work until 1948. My point is not to downgrade such scholars or Conferences but to question the method if emotionalism or guilt was the motivation. ‘Matthew 28:18–20 has to be interpreted *against the background of Matthew’s gospel as a whole* and unless we keep this in mind we shall fail to understand it. No exegesis of the “Great Commission” divorced from its moorings in this gospel can be valid’.⁸

3. WHY DID CHRISTIANITY COME TO AUSTRALIA?

Plans for a chaplain came through the Eclectic Society and correspondence between William Wilberforce and William Pitt the Younger, resulted in an official ‘evangelical’ chaplain, Richard Johnson, sailing with the First Fleet, directed at the colonisers, not to missionary endeavours among the indigenous population. NSW was to be a government colony with secular aims, which is not to deny a religious context, but Governor Phillip wanted moral sermons.⁹ Botany Bay was a mainly Irish Catholic convict colony, described by Johnson as ‘the most godless people he had ever seen . . . lost to all sense of virtue, and abandoned to every species of wickedness’. Although the European colonisation coincided with the rise of the modern Protestant

⁶ L. L. Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (IVP, Leicester, 1992), p. 746; Correspondence from Ray Laird, former Principal of BCSA; also C. Rogers, ‘The Great Commission’ (Biblica Sacra), July 1973; pp. 258–67.

⁷ B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St John* (John Murray, London, 1937), p. 294; see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (IVP, Leicester, 1991), p. 649; C. Wright, *The Mission of God* (IVP, London, 2006), pp. 125–6.

⁸ J. Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (IVP, Leicester, 1992), p. 329; D. J. Bosch, *The Transforming Mission* (Orbis, New York, 1991), p. 57.

⁹ K. J. Cable, *Religion in Colonial New South Wales* (Baptist Historical Society, Sydney, 1993), p. 3; K. J. Cable, *Richard Johnson (1753-1827)*, ADB, vol. 2, I–Z, gen. ed. D. Pike (MUP, 1967), pp. 17–19.

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missionary movement, ‘the missionary movement virtually ignored Australia’.¹⁰ Both the Johnsons and Marsdens showed concern to Indigenous people and but there was no established mission, although Marsden formed an Australian Auxiliary of CMS in 1825, ‘having as its chief object a ministry to aborigines’. Both the parent CMS founded in 1799 and the local Auxiliary regarded Matthew’s ‘Great Commission’ and John 20:21–23 as its Biblical basis.¹¹

4. INDIGENOUS MISSIONS

The British planners and ‘invaders’ gave little attention to the rights of Indigenous occupation apart from high-sounding rhetoric. Early penal settlement years were unbalanced with convicts being the majority and men outnumbering women, who were all convicts except for some officers’ wives. Attitudes that Christianity and God and were ‘English,’ an abuse of culture, rivalry for land and water, plus brutal exploitation of women, defied the missionary concern of Samuel Marsden and others. ‘The almost uniform reaction of observers of Aboriginal customs was one of disgust and contempt for such apparently wretched specimens of humanity—if they were human at all’.¹² The view of some clergy was: ‘Aborigines were degraded descendants of Ham, almost removed from the reach of the gospel’. By the time South Australia was settled in 1836 there were no discernible changes in attitudes to Aboriginal people. Rob Linn adds to the overall picture in his graphic portrayal of explorers, missionaries, conflict, disease and gospel opposition in describing the work of missionary George Taplin with the Ngarrindjeri in South Australia.¹³ Savagery and betrayal in Van Diemen’s Land, the silence of clergy regarding atrocities and the dumping of remaining indigenous people on desolate Flinders Island deafened the gospel. In general, efforts by LMS Congregational missionary Lancelot Threlkeld, and CMS work at Wellington were ‘killed’ by the personal failures of various workers and desecration of sacred places. ‘Most early Australian missionaries believed a nomadic life-style and Christianity to be incompatible.’¹⁴ By contrast, the 120 years from the 1850s revealed significant ministry by the Presbyterians in all mainland states and in Tasmania. In 1859, Presbyterians and the Church of England invited Moravian missionaries, who had a deep zeal to share the gospel with all people, to Victoria. The Moravians, linked to Jan Hus and Nicholas Von Zinzendorf, later established Ebenezer Mission by the Wimmera River. Conversions, baptisms, industry training in garden, orchard and sheep, plus a church building typified the mission work but a declining population led to closure in 1902. Some Indigenous missions

¹⁰ S. Piggin, *Spirit of a Nation: The Story of Australia’s Christian Heritage* (Strand Publ., Sydney, 2004), p. 11; J. Harris, *One Blood* (Albatross, Sydney, 1990), p. 40.

¹¹ A. D. Deane, ‘The Contribution of the New Evangelical Movements of the Late Nineteenth Century to Evangelical Enterprise in Australia, 1870-1920’ (MA Thesis, University of Sydney, 1983), p. 74; K. Cole, *A History of the Church Missionary Society of Australia* (CMS Historical Publications, 1971), p. 1; K. Cole, *From Mission to Church: The CMS Mission to the Aborigines of Arnhem Land 1908–1985* (c. 1985), pp. 10–11.

¹² I. Breward, *Australia: ‘The Most Godless Place Under Heaven?’* (LPH, Adelaide, 1991), p. 6.

¹³ R. Linn, *A Diverse Land: A History of the Lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong* (S.A. Meningie Historical Society Inc., 1988), pp. 41–63.

¹⁴ J. Harris, *One Blood*, pp. 44, 48 & 84–126; I. Breward, *A History of the Australian Churches* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993), p. 34; J. Harris, ‘L. E. Threlkeld,’ *The Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*, ed. B. Dickey (EHA, Sydney, 1994), pp. 371–2.

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have suffered from harmful white influence, isolation, communication issues, employment problems, cultural ignorance, criticism from their own people; whereas other Indigenous folk have embraced the gospel and are thankful for those who have been sent with the message of true freedom.¹⁵ Similar descriptions by Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans and interdenominational missions can be cited. The twentieth century also witnessed the emphasis of Australia as a sending country, particularly following the visit of Hudson Taylor in 1890. The commencement of Bible training institutes and the development of missions to the 'foreign' field gathered emphasis, with the 'Great Commission' as the essential emphasis to 'Go' while there is still time to reach the lost. Stuart Piggin quotes Rev. Silas Mead who was a significant Baptist missions enthusiast in South Australia:

Our young people must be drenched with missionary knowledge. Our Christian Endeavour members must be saturated with Missionary enthusiasm that they shall cease to ask—'Ought someone to go?' but rather—'Dare I stay at home and fail to listen to the Saviour's command to go into all the heathen lands and proclaim His salvation to the ends of the earth?'¹⁶

However, 'the Great Commission is an expanding and self-replicating task, not a ticking clock for the end times'.¹⁷ The 'Great Commission' must be in partnership with the 'Great Commandment' (John 13:34–35).

5. CONCLUSION

'Jesus did not command His church to go plant churches—even biblically sound ones. He commanded us to make disciples and teach them to observe all that He has commanded . . . Planting churches is part of the process, but the emphasis is on making disciples and teaching them'.¹⁸ 1956 Auca missionary martyr Jim Elliot stated when he encouraged young people to go to the mission fields: 'We don't need a call; we need a kick in the pants'.¹⁹ Some may regard Acts 1:8 as Luke's version of Matthew's conclusion, but the emphasis is not 'Go' but, *You will receive power . . . and you will be my witnesses*. 'Luke fixes our attention, not upon an external voice, but upon an internal Spirit . . . Luke speaks not of men who, being what they were, strove to obey the last orders of a beloved Master, but of men who, receiving a Spirit, were driven by that Spirit to act in accordance with the nature of that Spirit'.²⁰

¹⁵ W. (Bill) Edwards, 'Reflections on Presbyterian Aboriginal Mission in Australia,' ed. M. Hutchinson & G. Treloar, *This Gospel Shall Be Preached: Essays on the Australian Contribution to World Mission* (CSAC, Sydney, 1998), pp. 193–213.

¹⁶ S. Piggin 'Introduction: The Reflex Impact of Missions on Australian Christianity', eds M. Hutchinson & G. Treloar (1998), p. 9.

¹⁷ C. Wright (2006), p. 35.

¹⁸ M. D. Sills, *Reaching and Teaching* (Chicago, Moody, 2010), p. 149.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty* (Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1958), p. 54.

²⁰ R. Allen, *The Ministry of the Spirit; Selected Writings of Roland Allen*, ed. D. M. Paton (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1972), p. 5.

STUDY 11

An Eternal Gospel to Proclaim

Jonathan Button

INTRODUCTION

- Revelation 14:6—‘an eternal gospel to proclaim’; eternity strikes a deep chord in contemporary culture.
- Why is it an *eternal* gospel?—this is a vital question for us, as it has to do with:
 - 1) life that is eternal not only in quantity, but also in *quality*—i.e. ‘abundant life’ (John 10:10); the only true life that there is for men and women (which is *why* it is also eternal in *quantity*—i.e. everlasting); and
 - 2) it is *the* eternal gospel (as identical with Jesus Christ Himself, *the* Light—John 8:12); and so it is *the only* eternal gospel (among the many, many other ‘gospels’ within our world—Gal. 1:6–9; 2 Cor. 11:4), and so the only source of true life for men and women (John 6:68).
- This gospel then incisively (i.e. in its judgements) calls and commands all the earth to obedience to it—Revelation 14:7 (whether or not they hear and obey).
- Firstly: the Church (‘judgement starts with the household of God’—1 Pet. 4:7; Amos 3:2); through and by whom, all the earth is called and commanded.
- This end, obedience to the eternal gospel, is identical with ‘worshipping’ the true God (Rev. 14:7); full, holy communion; *bliss!*

THE ETERNAL GOSPEL

- What defines *eternal* in ‘eternal gospel’?
- This gospel is nothing other than ‘the gospel of the kingdom as pronounced by John the Baptist and Jesus, and later pronounced by the Church’.¹
- Yet the dynamic substance of this *kerygma* is the divine revelation itself—‘the *light*’ (John 1:1–9); which is identical with Jesus Christ Himself (John 8:12), actively revealing Himself, and the truth summed up in Himself (John 1:5–13, 18), in the *kerygma*, and in accordance with the Scriptures.

¹ G. C. Bingham, *Revelation of St John the Divine*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1993, p. 133.

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- ‘The light’ (revelation/gospel) is identical with ‘*the life*’—John 14:6 (the man, the person, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, in the fullness of His saving action toward the world).²
- Whatever the ‘eternal gospel’ is, it must be defined strictly by the person of Jesus Christ Himself; nothing more, nothing other, *nothing less*.
- The reason that it is the *eternal* gospel, is because Jesus Christ, with whom that gospel is identical, is the *Eternal One*.
- In the gospel we are not dealing with any abstract notion of ‘eternal truth’, we are dealing with a person; in the matter of eternity, we do not philosophise, we relate to our Lord, Redeemer and brother—truly, or falsely!

THE ETERNAL ONE (*THE LIFE*)

- The light of Jesus Christ is the light of His life—*so what is His life?*
- The life in which He is true Son of God, and as such also true Son of Man; and lived out His life within our human history and nature (John 1:14; Heb. 2:10–18).
- The life in which God, in omnipotent grace, has fulfilled His covenant relationship with humanity—both on His side, and ours (Rom. 5:6–21; 2 Cor. 5:14–21; Heb. 4:14–5:10).
- It is the life in which we have therefore been crucified (Gal. 2:19; 2 Cor. 5:14).
- Therefore the life in which we, as creatures, and from the abyss of our sin, guilt, remorse, unworthiness and longing, nonetheless look to God the Holy Father seeking to cling to Him and find our lost fellowship with Him restored (Heb. 4:14–16; Rom. 8:26–27, 34; Heb. 6:13–20; 7:23–25).
- The life in which we, as fallen, broken, lost human beings, are nonetheless fully included, and participate in, the life of the dearly beloved Son of the Father (Rom. 8:14–17; Col. 3:3; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 3:1; Matt. 6:9).
- The life in which we have therefore been raised from the dead and seated in heaven (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1).
- The life in which God wholly humbles Himself, and in which humanity—we—are wholly exalted by God in His humbling (the great, beautiful, atoning exchange!).
- The locus of the pronouncement of the eternal gospel—i.e. ‘midheaven’—is precisely that of the pronouncement of the woes of coming judgement! (Rev. 14:7; 8:13).
- It is the life which is the world’s—and our—established reconciliation with God.
- How truly immense is *this life!* . . . could it be contained within time and space?! . . . That which descends as such, in great, great love, must ascend ‘*above all the heavens, that it may fill all things*’ (Eph. 4:10).
- *How great a gospel, a light, is this life?!*

² See K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.3.1 (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1961), pp. 105f.

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THE GOSPEL (THE LIGHT)

- Now Jesus Christ Himself, the life, *is also the light* (John 14:6; 8:12; 1:4, 5); as the life, He is also Word, revelation and *kerygma*.
- So Jesus Christ is *Priest* (ministering the things of God to humanity; and the things of humanity to God); He is *King* (exalting humanity in Himself); and as such *He is also Prophet* (Word and revelation of the Gospel, which is identical with Himself).
- This is part and parcel of the inner necessity of the being of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the Triune God of other-person-centred love; their truth, as the truth of their love, ever spills over, flowing outward and outward in creation and redemption; pressing to be known, received, responded to and enjoyed by all.
- So, it is to be proclaimed ‘to those who live on the earth—to every nation and tribe and language and people’ (Rev. 14:6).
- This light, this gospel, tells us that ‘our new eternal life has begun . . . even glorification [is] accomplished . . . we are already dead and risen again, that we are already citizens of the future world (the new and true world to be revealed as the dominion of God in His Christ) . . . We are those who are eternally loved and elected by God in Jesus Christ, and called to the grateful realisation of their election in time’.³ Jesus Christ Himself, this life (and our life and the world’s in His), *is the eternal gospel*.
- Eternal life is a relationship (John 17:3).
- This life is *true life for men and women*; and so life that is good, rich, complete, full and overflowing—*welling up to eternal life!* (John 7:38; 4:14).
- To be brought by the gospel into this place is to come into abundant salvation, ‘abundant life’ (John 10:10); a life of other-person-centred love, that is self-giving, renewing, energising, joyous; life that is full-on, over-the-top, busting-out-everywhere; life that is *eternal in quality—eternal life starts now! . . . and overflows as eternal in quantity!*
- We don’t preach small fragments of truth—we ‘*preach the eternities!*’!⁴
- Humanity won’t settle for less!
- ‘It’s not that we don’t preach enough of the times, but that we neglect eternity; if we are truly preaching to eternity, we are truly preaching to the times’.⁵

THE ETERNAL GOSPEL

- While it is said to be ‘*an eternal gospel*’ (Rev. 14:6), we have seen that, being identical with Jesus Christ Himself—‘*the Light*’ (John 8:12)—it is in fact *the eternal gospel*.

³ K. Barth, *loc.cit.*, p. 107.

⁴ H. C. McKenzie, *Preaching The Eternities*, St Andrew’s Press, Edinburgh, 1963.

⁵ C. Macartney, ‘Suggestions to Students of Homiletics’, *The Ministry*, July, 1968, p. 9.

An Eternal Gospel to Proclaim

- Is the gospel of Jesus Christ *alone the eternal gospel*?
- Yes—we have heard *what the content of His gospel is*—i.e. the *light of His life; we will not hear this from any other lips, from anywhere else in the universe!*
- God alone is to be worshiped above all others because *He alone delivered His children from the house of slavery* (Deut. 5:6f.).
- Jesus alone has the words of eternal life (John 6:68); He alone can deliver true, abundant life, life that is eternal in quality and quantity.
- Eternal life will not come from the ‘gospels’ of Islam (in spite of expensive TV campaigns!), of instantly sated desire, of capitalism, of infinite individual ‘rights’, of ethical corruption—even in ‘christian dress’, of ‘christianised’ growth-gospels, of self-righteous ‘christian religion’, of infinite individual ‘gods’ of our own spirituality, etc., etc., etc., etc.
- Elements of truth—and so eternal truth—in the vast array of human (even human religious) wisdom? Yes, but utterly dependent upon the eternal gospel itself, and must repent and bow to it.
- All other ‘gospels’, human wisdoms/systems that claim our allegiance, are empty and deadly idolatries.

THE ETERNAL GOSPEL’S CLAIM

- The gospel: God Himself in sovereign grace has fulfilled His covenant with the whole creation in the person of His Son Jesus Christ.
- Such absolute grace (its greatness/holiness) lays absolute claim upon us and all people for allegiance, true response, the obedience of faith, ‘worship’ (Rev. 14:7).
- The gospel makes this claim incisively in its ‘judgements’—i.e. the revelation of evil and sin, and of their consequences in death, its condemnation of them, and its call to repent of them.
- Judgement is of a piece and inseparable from the gospel; not in isolation from, much less in contradiction to it; *the gospel itself actually necessitates judgement*.
- The loci of the declaration of judgement and the declaration of the gospel *are the same* (Rev. 8:17; 14:6).
- True ‘fear’ of God (reverence; awe), is the beginning of, and coinheres in, wisdom that leads to the gospel and eternal life (Prov. 9:10; 14:27).
- ‘Give Him glory’—i.e. simple, due, full acknowledgement of His greatness/holiness revealed in the gospel (cf. Rom. 1:21).
- ‘He said in a *loud voice*’—the voice goes out to every atom of the universe, to command hearing (Ps. 19:1, 2, 4); yet they do not all hear (Ps. 19:3).
- The Word of the gospel’s judgement addresses the rebellious, and only those who will hear do hear.⁶

⁶ G. C. Bingham, *Revelation*, p. 133.

An Eternal Gospel to Proclaim

- ‘The hour of his judgement has come’: the hour for those who have rejected the Lamb in the ‘great day’ (Rev. 6:16), or the dynamic revelation of the judgement of the gospel that comes continually to the rebellious throughout history?

THE ETERNAL GOSPEL’S CLAIM— ON THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

- As the gospel is for and toward all the earth and its inhabitants, it lays claim upon them to its goal (Rev. 14:7).
- God ‘made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water’, and covenanted all creation to His purposes (Gen. 1:1–5, 28–31).
- He claims the ground beneath our feet; He claims us (He ‘pulls all ground from under our feet’); *the gospel’s claim is universal*—there is no such thing as ‘private truth’.
- The Church must bear witness to this against all ‘other gospels’.
- Yet, ‘judgement starts with the household of God’! (1 Pet. 4:7; Amos 3:2); to invert Forsyth!—‘that which goes widest to the world, [first] *goes deepest to the heart!*’
- Where in the Church, in us, does the incisive judgement of the gospel fall?
- This Word of the judgement of the gospel comes to *the rebellious*; are we, the Church, ever completely *out of that camp?*
- Only as the Church, and we, live *in this judgement* of the gospel—and so *in the gospel*—are we a true, effectual ‘light to the nations’ (Isa. 49:6).
- Jesus is the Eternal Gospel, to and for the whole creation, in His person and work as Incarnate Lord and Saviour. Have we received Him? i.e. are we of eternity?

WORSHIPPING THE ETERNAL ONE

- *All is for ‘worship’!*
- True, full, holy, adoring communion—i.e. *loving the Father*.
- This is true human *bliss*.

STUDY 12

The Great Co-Mission and the Great Commission

Ian Pennicook

William Carey is known as the father of modern missions and that is an honorable title. He was not the first to make the point,¹ but it was the publication in 1792 of his booklet, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the conversion of the Heathen*,² which marked the beginning of a new era of missionary work, particularly by Protestants. The Roman Catholics had a far better record. One result flowing from Carey's stress on the binding nature of the Great Commission has been an almost universal agreement with him, while another has been summarised by Roland Allen:

It is almost universally taken for granted that missionary work is the work of a paid professional class, and that the utmost that can be expected of those who do not belong to this class is to support those who do; and even that is not expected of the majority. Missionary societies began their crusade, not by striving to call out the spirit of Christian men whose occupation carried them abroad, not by trying to impress upon the Church at home that Christ calls all His people to witness for Him wherever they may be, wherever they may go, but by creating an army of professional missionaries. The whole system of societies, boards, offices, accounts, contracts with missionaries, statistical returns, reports, reeks of it. From every missionary society there goes out every day and all day into every part of the world with one insistent, unceasing voice the proclamation, that the Gospel must be preached in all the world, and that it must be preached by special agents maintained by a society for this particular work.³

It is interesting that although the argument runs that the Great Commission is still binding on Christians, even Carey thought of preaching as a special function. Speaking of Acts 8, he wrote:

all *the preachers* except the apostles were driven thence, and went everywhere preaching the word.⁴

whereas Luke observed that all the church was scattered, except the apostles, and those who were scattered preached the word (Acts 8:1, 4). But whatever our opinion of this, the dominance of the Great Commission stands.

¹ See Peter O'Brien, 'The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20' in *The Reformed Theological Review*, vol. XXXV, no. 3, pp. 66–78; Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1961.

² A pdf version will be supplied by email on request, or may be downloaded from various internet sites.

³ Roland Allen (1869–1947), *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It* (1927), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1962, pp. 106f.

⁴ pdf version, p. 6.

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First, I want to examine a couple of aspects of the passage Matthew 28:16–20.

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

It is the eleven who are specified. The presence of doubters (v. 17) has been taken by some as suggesting others besides the eleven, but the text does not say so.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’.

Could this be more than just ‘Jesus is Lord of all’? Given the introduction of Matthew’s gospel, where the lineage of Jesus is shown from Abraham and that in Abraham (i) all the nations will be blessed; and (ii) all that was true for Adam was re-stated⁵ (is the word ‘genesis’ [‘genealogy’ NRSV] in Matt. 1:1 significant?) and given the great status of the first Adam in the creation (Gen. 1:26), can we see this claim by Jesus as the declaration that the last Adam stands before the eleven, fully set now to rule the creation? More, he is set to rule the nations (see Psalm 2), so what follows may be complex, but it is not unimportant.

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

‘Go’ is emphatic in English, but the Greek may be a little more complex. ‘Go’ translates *poreuthentes*, an aorist participle, which, standing alone, would mean ‘having gone’. But as it is linked with ‘make disciples’, *mathēteusate*, an aorist imperative, the participle has been understood to be functioning in the same way as the main verb. Hence, if the main verb is a command, ‘make disciples’, then the participle simply adds force to the command. That is the way it has been expressed in every English translation which I have examined.

But this need not be the case in every situation.⁶ The traditional translation has

⁵ See N. T. Wright, ‘Adam, Israel and the Messiah’, in *The Climax of the Covenant*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 18ff.

⁶ The specialist Greek grammar of Blass Debrunner and Funk (University of Chicago Press, 1961, pp. 174f.) puts it: ‘Participles originally had no temporal function, but denoted only the *Aksionsart*; their temporal relation to the finite verb was derived from the context. Since, however, a participle expressing the notion of completion often preceded the finite verb . . . so that the sequence normally was: the completion of the action denoted by the participle,

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made certain assumptions. But what if there was a good reason for maintaining the full force of the participle? ‘Having gone, make disciples’ may very well reflect: (i) that Adam was commanded to ‘fill the earth’; (ii) that fallen humanity rejected that (Gen. 11:4); so (iii) that now the disciples of the last Adam will naturally be one with him in his going, as he will be with them (v. 20).

‘Make disciples of all nations’ is distinctly Abrahamic in its intention. Wonderful as seeing individuals (‘out of every tribe’; etc. Rev. 5:9; etc.) coming to faith may be, the goal is the nations (*ta ethnē*) gathered as one, multi-ethnic bride.

²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

The nations are to be made disciples *of Jesus*. This has already been implied in Matthew 7:21 and 24 etc, where doing ‘the will of my Father in heaven’ is equated with hearing and doing ‘these words of mine’.

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

If the disciples are to be one with him in his going to claim the nations as his inheritance and the ends of the earth as his possession, then they should remember that he is with them always, not to help them when they can do no more but as the one who is doing it all through them. The end of the age comes when he ‘hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet’ (1 Cor 15:24–25).

It is evident from Acts 8:1 that the apostles did not see leaving Jerusalem, even in persecution, as an obligation. Going to the nations was forced upon Peter at one point (Acts 11:12, 17, ‘who was I?’), but he remained an apostle to the Jews (Gal. 2:7–8). Later traditions aside, the scriptures say almost nothing about the apostles going to the nations. Just as James 1:1 indicates that James was writing to Jewish Christians, a good case can be made for saying that 1 Peter 1:1, ‘to the exiles of the dispersion’, means the same thing.

then the action of the finite verb, the idea of relative past time became associated to a certain degree with the aorist participle . . . The notion of relative past time, however, is not at all necessarily inherent in the aorist participle. The element of past time is absent from the aorist participle especially *if* its action is identical with that of an aorist finite verb’ (my emphasis). But my question is simply this: how can we say that the action of the participle is definitely identical with the action of ‘make disciples’? That is an exegetical decision.

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So what of the command to make disciples of all nations? Given to the eleven disciples, why did they, at least, not go? But the twelve (i.e. including Matthias) or the thirteen when we include the ‘untimely born’ Paul, and the wider apostolic band (i.e. those immediately associated with them) could never on any physical level have completed the task. But, as apostles they are completing it now, just as Christ is still at work winning the nations! It is Paul who stresses the way this is taking place, in 1 Corinthians 1:17–18 etc., where his mandate is to proclaim the gospel, because that alone is the power of God (see Rom. 1:16). But more, this gospel is ‘apostolic’ not because it derives from them; it is apostolic because of their unique role (just as the church is ‘apostolic’)—but their gospel is authoritative and powerful because it was given by Christ. So Galatians 1:11–12:

For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

A generalisation no doubt, but the dullness of the church, pre-Carey and now, does not lie just in disobedience to the Great Commission, but in the reduction of the apostolic gospel to something substantially less than the power of God. The gospel has been reduced to information that requires ‘unpacking’ or explanation but never to simple faith-full proclamation. So it requires trained ‘professionals’ who hold the keys of death and Hades in their educated hands. And the people of God love to have it so!

By some, the gospel has also been reduced to varying degrees of social action. So I want now, briefly, to examine the message of Luke 4 and 24. First Luke 4:17–21:

[T]he scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: This has been called the ‘Nazareth Manifesto’ and usually examined the context of Christian social action.

¹⁸ ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release [*aphesis*] to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free [in *aphesis*], The quotation is from Isaiah 61:1–2 and 58:6. In its context it does indeed relate to social action, especially as Israel was conspicuously ignoring its obligations as the people of God (see Isa. 58:1–7). Within this framework, the use of this passage is no different to the message of John the Baptist in Luke 3:7–14.

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ ‘The year of the Lord’s favor’ was the jubilee year, the 50th year when all debts were cancelled (Lev. 25:8–24ff.).

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

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²¹ Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' The anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit marked the breaking in of a momentous fulfilment of this promise. The gift of the Spirit upon Jesus declares that he is the one who is fully Israel and so the one who will accomplish all that Israel ought to have done. As the fulfilment of Israel, he pointed to the way that Gentiles received a benefit under Elijah and Elisha, perhaps implying that they would do so again from him. This was a confrontation with the prevailing attitude of the audience and provoked a violent response (Luke 4:28–30).

The writers of the four gospels were acutely aware of what they were about. Each, in his own way, produced not just a biography of Jesus but a proclamation of him. This section of Luke is a significant part of the whole gospel. It marks the commencement of Jesus' public ministry and sets its agenda.

What should be noted is Jesus has reassigned the promise of Isaiah to himself. More than that, Luke has shown us what is fundamental to Jesus' ministry, by the use of the word *aphesis* which I have inserted into the text above. Prior to this, that word was used by Luke at 1:77 and 3:3. On both occasions the reference is to John the Baptist and the *aphesis* of sins.⁷ So, later at the climax of the gospel, when Jesus speaks with the eleven and their companions in Luke 24, he simply asserts that these will be engaged in the ministry which he has. But it is an amazing assertion:

Thus it is written [that] the Christ [is] to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and [that] in his name is to be proclaimed repentance and forgiveness [*aphesis*] of sins—beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:46–47, my translation).

Jesus' focus was indeed on *aphesis*, but that is the *aphesis* of the forgiveness of sins! There is no command here, either for the apostles or for the church. There is simply the statement that this is the way things will be. There will be a proclamation that is one with the prophetic anticipation of Jesus by John and with Jesus himself. So these men are to wait. They are witnesses of these things but they must go as he did, 'in the power of the Spirit' (Luke 4:14; John 20:21–22). So they needed to be 'clothed with power from on high' (Luke 24:49). Hence Acts 1:1–8. And that is what happened. The church, filled with the Spirit, is his 'witnesses'. Through them he will continue to speak the liberating word, for he is 'Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth, who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood' (Rev. 1:5).

⁷ The same word is used in the LXX of Lev. 16:26 where the context is the sending away of sin (remission).

STUDY 13

The Power of the Gospel

Martin Bleby

EVANGELIST OR TEACHER?

My qualification (or lack of) for taking this session: in terms of Ephesians 4:11, I would regard myself as a teacher (of the church) rather than an evangelist (of not-yet-believers). Even when setting out to announce the gospel in an evangelistic setting, I have found myself talking to already-believers.

Even so, I seek to proclaim the gospel in all my teaching, and always desire to see the gospel occupying centre space in the life of the church. We could ask, in the context of 1 Timothy 4:1–5, with its emphasis on ‘the utmost patience in teaching’, whether ‘do the work of an evangelist’ is exclusively with regard to not-yet-believers? It is difficult, on the basis of the New Testament, to keep the various ministries mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 in watertight compartments.¹ Furthermore, Geoffrey Bingham says:

I personally believe that teaching is the best form of evangelism. I am not convinced that extremely simple presentations of a few points with strong pressure to ‘make decisions’ is the best way to bring life to the churches and the churches to life. Even so, I believe God uses all kinds of human endeavours, often in spite of ourselves, our ideas and our methods.²

HERE IS A WRETCH WHO CRIED

Whether a teacher or evangelist, I have made some attempts at presenting the gospel in ways that might bring to faith those who were yet to believe. In one such attempt I was taking a group of well-heeled young marrieds through *Christianity Explained*.³ At the end of it I had the impression that it had been listened to politely, but with little impact. Several years later I came across one of them whose life had been turned around to committed faith and active service of God during those meetings. On closer enquiry it was not anything I had said in the teaching sessions—though it was clearly

¹ Barnabas is called both an apostle and a prophet, and possibly also a teacher (Acts 13:1; 14:14); Paul was an apostle, who proclaimed the gospel, and taught (1 Cor. 9:1–2; Acts 20:20); Peter was an apostle who also spoke as a pastor (1 Pet. 1:1; 5:1–4); and so on.

² Geoffrey Bingham, *Eager to Preach*, NCPI, 1998, pp. 16–17.

³ Prepared by Michael Bennett, Scripture Union, Queensland, in the 1980s.

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a setting in which the gospel was ‘in the air’—but a ‘chance’ remark I made in a conversation with him over supper, that made the difference.

What we may learn from that comports with what we heard Jens Christensen saying in Study 2: ‘you are God’s means’. We may think that we come equipped with our gospel programs or whatever—and we must indeed ‘preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season’ (2 Tim. 4:2, RSV)—but it could be that in God’s way of doing things the telling witness is us as we have been dealt with by God. Each of us personally is the means. We ourselves are the weapon in God’s hands, the missile He launches into the enemy’s ranks. Christ’s gifts in Ephesians 4:11 are *people*.

Roxby Downs, a mining community in the north of South Australia, has become very multicultural. Ministering there recently we met a Christian woman from Papua New Guinea who befriended a newly-arrived Nepalese woman. Nothing was said about Christian faith, but after a while the Nepalese woman asked to know more of Christ. Without any special preparation, the PNG woman told her John 3:16, and Christ met her. I am reminded of a conversation among a group of students in Europe about how best to evangelise, as they discussed various methods and materials. Finally they turned to a student from Africa and asked her how they evangelise. She replied simply, ‘We find a non-Christian village and place a Christian family there’.⁴ Or friends of ours who have hosted overseas students in their home, which has not been without a measure of dysfunction, and the grace evident in that situation has brought more than one of them to convert to Christ.

One translation of Psalm 34:6 reads:

Here is a wretch who cried, and the LORD heard me:
and saved me from all my troubles.⁵

Can we say of such a person with whom the Lord has dealt in this way that *this* is the power of the gospel?

UPON THIS ROCK

A key statement in Ian Pennicook’s *Power in the Church* is this:

To reduce the gospel, in the mind of the preachers at least, to the mere imparting of information is a denial of the wonder of the unity of the preachers with the one whom they proclaim.⁶

We are not saying it is all up to us, but we are saying that the proclamation of the gospel is not apart from the person who proclaims, and the person who proclaims is not apart from Christ, and this is the power of the gospel.

We take the example of the apostle Simon Peter. To him Jesus said:

you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church (Matt. 16:18).

⁴ I think this comes from John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*, SCM, London, 1972; but I have been unable to locate it.

⁵ The Anglican Church of Australia, *A Prayer Book for Australia*, Broughton Books, 1995, p. 254.

⁶ Ian D. Pennicook, *Power in the Church*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1997, p. 62.

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‘Peter’ here is Πέτρος (*Petros*); ‘rock’ is πέτρα (*petra*). The normal Greek word for ‘rock’ is *petra* (fem.); *Petros* is a masculine form of it, applied to Simon as a nickname. The difference in the form of these words has led some to claim that *Petros* is not the same as *petra*, but a smaller version of it—say, a ‘little rock’ or ‘stone’. This attempt to dissociate the word ‘rock’ from the person of Peter himself is largely in reaction against the Roman Catholic use of this verse to undergird the primacy of the Pope in succession to Peter as bishop of Rome. Similar misgivings lie behind the interpretations that take *petra* not to be referring to Peter but rather in principle to Peter’s faith, or to his confession of Jesus as the Messiah. Even if this were so, neither Peter’s faith nor his confession can be dissociated from Peter the person. Behind the Greek form of both words would have been Jesus’ Aramaic utterance, using the word *kēpha* (‘rock’) for both (compare John 1:42). So literally it would have been: ‘You are Rock, and on this rock I will build my church’. We need have no qualms about saying that Peter himself is a rock on which Christ will build his church. Paul speaks of the household of God being ‘built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets’ (Eph. 2:20), and John saw the holy city as having foundations on which are written ‘the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb’ (Rev. 21:14). Peter himself, with his understandable new interest in rocks and stones, speaks of *persons* as the ‘living stones’ that are ‘built into a spiritual house’ (1 Pet. 2:5).

But what of this person Peter on whom Christ will build his church? The name is newly given by Jesus to one called Simon, and it is not Simon as Simon he is referring to but Simon as dealt with by God: as one to whom the Father in blessing has revealed the identity of His Son (see Matt. 16:17), and to whom He has given faith and boldness to utter it.

Even so, upon subsequent showing, Peter would appear to be a rather shaky foundation—a bit of a rocky road and a rocking ride (see Matt. 16:21–23; 26:31–35, 69–75; John 18:10–11). But even here it is Peter as the person for whom Christ has prayed (see Luke 22:31–34), for whom Christ has died (see 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18), to whom the risen Christ has made himself known (see Luke 24:34), and in whom, perhaps to Peter’s surprise, the love of Christ has been discovered (see John 21:15–19). We are in no less a position. In this position, can we not say that we, speaking this word from the Father—‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’—are ourselves, in that saving action of God, the power of the gospel for salvation to all who believe? Even, or especially, when we have failed and been restored by His grace?

WEAK IN HIM, LIVING BY THE POWER OF GOD

This does not make us the powerful ones (as in Mark 10:42–45), or the power vendors (as in Acts 8:17–24). Paul suggests it is the cracks in the clay jars, arising out of weakness and suffering, that allow the light of Christ within us to shine out as an effective witness:

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

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always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you (2 Cor. 4:5–12).

Ian Pennicook comments on 'he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God' (2 Cor. 13:4):

it is worth observing that Jesus' weakness is probably not to be understood as some sort of deprivation . . . His weakness in which he was crucified was his humanity. He lives now, as he always lived, by the power of God (II Cor. 13:4). Likewise, 'we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God' (II Cor. 13:4). The context of Paul's dealing with a specific issue in Corinth aside, the principle remains that both Christ and those in him are ontologically weak and only know power as weak persons. Of himself, Christ, either as pre-existent Son or as incarnate Son, had no power. The only power available to him or us is the power of God, that is, the power of the Father.⁷

Our weakness is not just momentary, but ontological—part of the way we are:

Paul is not saying that the Lord occasionally gave him bouts of weakness and that it was at those times that the power of God was available to him . . . There are no times when we are not weak, and there is no power which is not from God. All human boasting is thus excluded. This does not mean that God somehow wants to humiliate us by depriving us of any grounds for boasting. Rather, by depriving us of grounds for boasting He is restoring us to our true humanity:

For in [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness *in him*, who is the head of every ruler and authority (Col. 2:9–10).

Even when Christ is proclaimed 'from envy and rivalry . . . out of selfish ambition, not sincerely', rather than 'from goodwill . . . out of love'—even when the intention is to increase the suffering of an imprisoned brother—the power remains undiminished: 'Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice' (Phil. 1:15–18).

We must indeed never underestimate or deny 'the unity of the preachers with the one whom they proclaim'⁸—the one who has saved us, even from our deficiencies in proclaiming him, and thereby testifies to the glory of our Father.

⁷ Pennicook, *Power in the Church*, pp. 67–9.

⁸ Pennicook, *Power in the Church*, p. 62.

STUDY 14

A Robe Dipped in Blood and the White-Robed Armies

Noel Due

This session focuses on two co-ordinate images found in the Book of the Revelation. On the one hand the armies/multitudes of heaven are clothed in white robes, pure and spotless; the other hand the Son of God wears a robe dipped in blood. Why is his bloodied and ours not? What difference does this make?

As we will see, these images take us to the heart of the nature of Christ's relationship with his people. They also teach us about the nature of his mission in the world, in which the armies of heaven participate.

CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN?¹

From the account of creation onwards, clothing serves an important socio-theological function in the Scriptures. Garments often have a symbolic quality. For example, we may think of the ineffectual fig-leaf 'breeches' (as the 1560 Geneva Bible famously called them) of Adam and Eve, and the far more robust animal skin garments God replaced them with (and all this implies about sacrifice and atonement); or of the contrasting types of clothing associated with mourning, desolation, joy and festivity; or of the special attire of the priests and Levites and its symbolism; or the significance of clothing (and changes of clothing) in the story of Joseph; or of the clothing of believers in and with Christ (e.g. Gal. 3:27–29; cf. 2 Cor. 5:3; etc.). Conversely, being exposed to nakedness is a sign of shame and judgement (e.g. Lam. 4:21; cf. Rev. 16:15). Thus:

The imagery of garments and clothing is of major importance in the Bible. Its significance can be physical, economic, social, moral or spiritual. The imagery of investing and divesting a person of clothing is usually symbolic of larger issues. The function of clothing, moreover, is multiple: clothing can protect, conceal, display or represent a person's current state and can be symbolic of moral and spiritual qualities. The fact that garments wear out is also important.²

¹ Mark Twain's quote actually says, 'Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society'.

² 'Garments' in L. Ryken *et al.*, eds *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Leicester: IVP, 1998, p. 317.

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The armies of heaven have spotless robes *which remain spotless*. They do not wear out, nor are they self-generated, as if the army had kit itself out. The garments declare who the armies of heaven are because of what their Saviour has made them to be. That the garments are white is statement of *his* work. To put the matter in another way: the garments do not *conceal* their wearers, but *reveal* them. The saints are not white-washed tombs, only outwardly covered in a Pharisaic righteousness, but they are *fully righteous* in the Son.³ To be clothed *with* Christ is the same as being baptised *into* Christ, in an inseparable union. The garments thus not only identify them as Christ's people, but protect them from his enemies, since the great power of Satan lies in his role as the accuser of his brethren (Rev. 12:10).

The fact that clothing was of special importance in the Roman world—in which Revelation was written—is also likely significant. In Roman society, social status was paramount, and clothing marked status. Status could be gained by a variety of means, such as military success, wealth, political position, or by virtue of patrician lineage. Clothing bore a direct relationship to status, acting as a visual display of position. Togas, for example, were public display garments, indicating rank, office or title. They were worn by Roman citizens only and strict rules applied to who should wear them and when they should be worn. Given this context, it may be justifiable to see the clothing of believers in Revelation as a statement of reverse status. Though mostly poor, often slaves, and frequently persecuted, the real status of believers was revealed in their heavenly garments, not their earthly ones. They were indeed citizens of heaven, pure and exalted members of Christ's own royal household, whose Lord was Lord of all.

SIGNIFICANT CLOTHING REFERENCES IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

Allusions to the co-ordinate images mentioned above occur in the following passages:

The white-robed church appears in Revelation 3:4, 5, 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13, 14; 19:14. The robes of Christ are described in Revelation 1:13 (as part of his attire as the glorified High Priest); in 19:13 (where his robe is dipped in blood, and he is clearly designated as the Word of God); and 19:16 where his robe bears the inscription 'King of kings and Lord of lords'.

In Revelation 7:14 the numberless multitude is said to 'have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'. Here, the robes of the Church are not bloodstained, even though they have come from great tribulation on the earth. They are washed in the blood, but bear no bloody marks. The Word of God alone bears the

³ This, of course, is the importance of Luther's *simul iustus et peccator*. Believers are 100% righteous and 100% sinners *at the same time*. But their righteousness is always Christ's and their sin is not imputed for his sake. This prevents us leaning on ourselves in any way, either on the right hand or on the left. We rely neither upon ourselves for our righteousness nor despair of ourselves for our unrighteousness. Either way our own conduct, inner attitudes, thoughts or feelings, are not to be the cause for depression on the one hand or pride on the other, for we are in Christ. It is this which will be fully and irrevocably *revealed* on the last day (cf. Rom. 8:18f.; Col. 3:1-4). The preaching of the gospel is the means by which this revelation is brought to us now, in the time of travail and anxious longing. Only in hearing his good news are our hearts freed to overflow with the Spirit's harvest. In one sense, we never look to the white garments we wear, but only to the Lord who has given them.

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blood of his sacrifice-battle.⁴ The Church is always freed by the blood, but not stained with her own blood. The filth and bloodshed of the Church has been washed by God's own judgement, wherein his own Spirit of burning has opened up a fountain to utterly cleanse his people (so Isa. 4:4; 9:5; cf. Ezek. 36:25; Zech. 3:1–5; 13:1, 9 and thence Matt. 3:11–12).

The white robed multitudes are but one picture of the Church and her apparel. In other places (e.g. 12:1; 21:3, 11) her raiment is creational (the sun, moon and stars; great gems) or she is simply said to 'have' the glory of God. In all instances her clothing is *given*, rather than manufactured. Even when speaking of the 'righteous deeds of the saints' these are 'granted' to her from God (as the Divine passive implies). On the other hand, the gaudy clothing of the Harlot-City (Rev. 17:4; 18:16)—by which she tries to *contrive* her glory—contrasts starkly with white robes and creation-glory of the Church. Elsewhere in the Book, the colour 'white' is associated with the glorified Jesus (e.g. 2:17; 14:14; 19:11); his messengers (e.g. 6:2) and the throne of God (20:11). Throughout the Scriptures, 'white' (and the dazzling light often associated with it) bespeak God's glory, purity, and transcendent holiness.⁵ That the Church shares in these characteristics is astounding.

In Revelation 11:3, the two witnesses are clad in sackcloth, although also 'clothed' with authority from heaven. This assures them of great power, even as they suffer and die because of their testimony to Jesus. Though their precise identity is much debated, they are at least part of the Church (for those reluctant to identify them *as* the Church), and they preach the gospel in the midst of the City. Their garments bespeak humility and repentance. The Church has received the *gift* of repentance from God (e.g. Acts 3:26; 5:31; 11:18), and so preaches the grace of repentance to the world.⁶

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND TO REVELATION 19:11–16

Isaiah 63:1–6 corresponds most clearly to Revelation 19:11–16:

Who is this who comes from Edom in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? 'It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.'² Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?³ 'I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel.⁴ For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come.⁵ I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought

⁴ I use the phrase to indicate the *inseparable connection* between the victory of Christ and the sacrifice of Christ. In the commentaries, opinion is divided as to whether his robe is stained with the blood of his cross (e.g. H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* [London: Macmillan, 1923], p. 249; L. Morris, *Revelation* [Leicester: IVP, 1987], p. 230) or the blood of vengeance on his enemies (e.g. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* [London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974], p. 200). As we will see, the saving and judging work of God are two aspects of the one action. His atoning sacrifice *is* his victory.

⁵ There are some negative references, but for obvious reasons, e.g. in the laws regarding leprosy.

⁶ Preaching repentance is part of the 'good news' (as in Luke 24:47). God's goodness and kindness leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4) so that the joyful fruit of repentance follows on the hearing of the gospel. This marks the difference between evangelical and legal repentance. It has a strong Old Testament background, e.g. Jeremiah 31–33, summarised in Jeremiah 33:8–9, 'I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.'

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me salvation, and my wrath upheld me.⁶ I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth' (Isa. 63:1–6, ESV).

There are a number of threads here:

Firstly, we pick up the theme of *Yahweh as Israel's warrior*. Though extensive in the Old Testament, we deal with it only in cursory form. We see it, for example, in the encounter between David and Goliath. This was an Old Testament instance of champion warfare attested to elsewhere in the ancient world, but David was *not* the champion of Israel. His battle cry was born out of his experience of the Lord's faithfulness, not out of trust in his own skill: 'All of this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear *for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hands*' (1 Sam. 17:47).

When Goliath fell dead at his feet, David knew that *God* had defeated him. It always was so, and ever will be. Even if God uses a human instrument, *he* does the work (cf. Exod. 14:13; cf. 15:1; Num. 14:9; 2 Chron. 20:15–17; Ps. 27:1–2; 46:1; Isa. 41:10; Hosea 13:4; etc.). Goliath strode out against David, cursing him in the name of his gods (1 Sam. 17:43). David ran out to meet him in the name of Yahweh (1 Sam. 17:45–46), with only his slingshot in his hand. After flooring him with a rock to the forehead, he seized Goliath's own sword to finish the job, and took his head to Jerusalem as a spoil of battle (1 Sam. 17:54).

Leaping ahead in the narrative, Saul's defeat by the Philistines at Mt Gilboa is reported with all the brutality of ancient warfare. After he had fallen on his own sword (out of fear of being publicly humiliated and tortured), his foes 'cut off his head and stripped off his armor and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people' (1 Sam. 31:9). The writer of Chronicles reports this, but adds 'And they put his armor in the house of their gods and fastened his head in the house of Dagon' (1 Chron. 10:10).⁷

Is this but bloodied trophy hunting; the unfettered cruelty of ancient warfare before the vocabulary of 'war crimes' and 'atrocities'? Or is something more being indicated here?

In the ancient world, people understood that a nation stood or fell by virtue of the gods ruling over it.⁸ Armies were not expressions of secular power, but the earthly combatants in a spiritual conflict. In battle, Dagon's forces were pitted against Yahweh's. Israel's defeat meant that Saul's head was a trophy to Dagon, as Goliath's was to Yahweh. So, when Dagon falls on his face, decapitated and rendered powerless, it is Yahweh alone who is responsible (1 Sam. 5:1–7).

Isaiah 36 provides us with another example. The Assyrian military envoy (the Rabshekah) taunted King Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem by belittling both Yahweh's *power* and more importantly, his *willingness* to save them. His propaganda ran thus: Assyria's armies had trodden underfoot any nation standing against them. They had swept out of their homeland by the power of their gods, brutally dispatching any opposition. The gods of their enemies were ignominiously deported to Nineveh, as so much captured booty. Now the Assyrian forces sat menacingly at the gates of

⁷ Dagon was the chief god of the Philistine pantheon, having the head and hands of a man and the body of a fish.

⁸ For a full discussion of these principles see Millard Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior: the Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1980) and Tremper Longman III & Daniel Reid, *God is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

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Jerusalem, which lay as a tethered lamb before a hungry wolf. Resistance was futile. What hope did Judah have, especially since Hezekiah had undertaken a great reform by cleansing the land from its idols? Besides Assyria had come up against them in the name of Yahweh himself (a powerful half truth), so trusting the Lord was useless. The Lord had delivered Judah into their hands, so why cry to *him* for help? The Assyrians had reached into the surrounding nations with all the ease of a man plucking eggs from a nest. Judah's fate would be no different.

The speech was crafted to dishearten the people by undermining trust in God. So it was then, and always is. Satan, *always* seeks to undermine trust in the Lord and to turn us towards our own ability for protection and deliverance. God had called Israel to trust him, no matter what, since he was Israel's warrior (e.g. Exod. 14:13; 2 Chron. 20:14–17), but they had to be strengthened to do this, since their hearts had failed them. We cannot lift ourselves up when we're down. Discouraged and demoralised sheep don't know where to run. They need to hear someone call them by name, to get them to turn from the enemy's countenance to look at the shepherd's face.

This was Isaiah's great ministry. He was raised up as the Lord's prophet to stir the hearts of the king and the nation, not to renewed commitment, but to renewed faith. This is always the goal of the preaching of the Word. The nation's inability was the occasion for the Lord's strength to be made perfect in their feebleness. God did not help *them* get their defences in order, so they could rout the Assyrians by their brilliance and bravery. He did it all himself (Isa. 37:33–38).

This is one of the main contrasts between Israel and other ancient Near Eastern societies. Whereas in other cultures the gods *assisted* the kings to bring victory, Yahweh *himself* was Israel's warrior. And the very mode by which this occurred was also different. In other nations the gods needed to be bribed to be favorably disposed to their devotees. In Israel, God rescued his people in remembrance of his own faithfulness.

Likewise in Isaiah 63:1–6 God acts to defeat Israel's enemies. As *always* he fights for Israel,⁹ on this occasion against *Edom*.

Secondly, we note the *symbolic importance of Edom*. Edom had entered an opportunistic alliance with the Babylonians, and rejoiced loudly over Jerusalem's destruction, encouraging the Babylonians to make a proper job of it (Ps. 137:7). The Edomites had long been enemies of Israel. Though Esau, their progenitor, had come to terms with the fact that Jacob inherited the blessing, his descendants let the matter fester. They had entered into other anti-Israelite alliances (e.g. with Moab and Ammon) in Israel's earlier history. They had been defeated by Saul, and again by David, becoming a vassal state of Israel under his reign. This situation continued under Solomon, but after the Israel/Judah schism they became a vassal of Judah. The Babylonian invasion seemed an opportunity too good to miss, and they cheered on the plunderers with alacrity.

This brought the long history of antagonism and animosity towards Israel—what Motyer calls 'ancestral . . . age long, festering hatred'¹⁰—to a head. Edom hated Israel because of Jacob, but also because Israel was thereby the bearer of the promised Seed, so Edom's hostility was but one aspect of Genesis 3:15 expressed in history. It thus comes as no surprise to learn that Herod the Great was an Edomite (Idumean). His

⁹ Even when he fought against Israel he was *for* her, as Hosea 11 and other places makes clear.

¹⁰ A. Motyer, *The Story of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001, p. 131.

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action against the infant Messiah bespoke his people's long hostility to Israel as much as his own insecurity. Ultimately, however, in attempting to murder the infant King, he was acting as the agent of the ancient serpent himself.

At the time of Jerusalem's devastation, Jeremiah saw that the Lord would not let Edom's haughtiness stand (e.g. Lam. 4:21–22). Together with Isaiah (Isa. 34:5–6), Ezekiel (Ezek. 25:12–14), Amos (Amos 1:11–12) and Obadiah (Obad. 1:10–16), he prophesied Edom's destruction (Jer. 49:7–11).

Curiously enough the history of ancient Edom ends with a whimper more than bang. We have no clear account of what happened to them as a national entity.¹¹ No overwhelming military conquest marks their demise, for example, and there is no evidence of natural disaster overtaking them. We also need to reckon with the curious fact that Herod's line rose to great status internationally. Taken together, these suggest we should read the references to their obliteration as alluding to something other than mere national retribution. Rather, Edom stands for the archetypal foe, and the judgement of Edom becomes the symbol of God's eschatological destruction of his enemies. The significance is not in the nation *per se*, but what they represented. Thus, in rabbinic theology of the Roman period, Edom represented Rome itself.¹²

The vocabulary of 'trampling down', which connotes the crushing of the Serpent's head in Genesis 3:15, gives further weight to this conclusion. Such language is also echoed in Psalm 91:13 and 110:1 (cf. Ps. 2; 44:5; 108:9–13; Deut. 33:29; Josh. 10:20–25; etc.), all of which signify the utter defeat and disarming of God's foes. God has promised that all his enemies will be under the feet of his Messiah, as the uncontested Lord of all. Ultimately, *the* enemy is the serpent, and crushing all the subsidiary allies is part and parcel of crushing *his* head.

Thirdly, we note the *juxtaposition of the concepts of judgement and salvation*. The day of retribution and vengeance and the day of redemption and grace are but two sides of the one event. The LORD—whose garments are crimson with the blood of Edom—is (or speaks) 'righteousness' and is 'mighty to save' (Isa. 63:1). The day of vengeance is also the year of redemption (Isa. 63:4), which is why Isaiah 63:7ff. *follows* God's action of recompense. Just as in the exodus, God's judgements save his people and lead to worship.

This is a common thread in the Old Testament (e.g. Isa. 61:2; Nahum 1:6–7; Isa. 34:8; 35:4; 47:3; 59:17; Zeph. 3:15; etc.), expressed beautifully in Micah 7:7–10:

But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. ⁸ Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me. ⁹ I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication. ¹⁰ Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, 'Where is the LORD your God?' My eyes will look upon her; now she will be trampled down like the mire of the streets (ESV).

God's righteous judgements and impeccable holiness are the grounds of his saving deeds (see Ps. 38, 39, 51; Isa. 35; and Micah 7). The unity of these concepts is far clearer in biblical thought than in our own understanding:

¹¹ Which some take as a sign of how thorough was God's destruction of them.

¹² Bruce Cresson, 'Isaiah and the Restoration Community', in *Review and Expositor*, 65:4 (Fall, 1968), p. 434. He quotes C. G. Montifiore and H. Lowe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* in support.

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Righteousness and love, grace and justice, are held together as differentiations within the same unity, and even within the unity of a single thought or word . . . righteousness and love are essentially of the same tissue and are only thought of as they involve one another . . . when God's love prevails at last in the salvation of men, it is as holy righteous love. And because this love finds an answer of salvation rising out of the ground of the divine righteousness itself, far from evading righteousness, it actually puts the sinner in the right with God and His righteousness. This is justifying love which, now that righteousness has no other demands, can be trusted without fear.¹³

Fourthly, we notice how these ideas overlap with the wider concepts of *God's intercession/intervention for his people*. God helps when no one else is willing or able to help. But his people are not innocent victims, imprisoned like some virginal heroine in a fairytale tower. They themselves are their own worst enemies. There is but one hero in the biblical narrative. He alone acts—baring his own arm when there is none to save (Isa. 41:28; 50:2; 59:16)—by taking up his armour and marching out to battle, with his people, for his people. He defeats them by his grace, and releases them by his judgement.

Significantly, in Isaiah 53 we are shown that this intercessory action is also his salvation. Isaiah 53:6 and 53:12 use the same verb as 59:16:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD *has laid on* him the iniquity of us all . . . Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and *makes intercession* for the transgressors . . . He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one *to intercede*; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him.

Isaiah 59:15b–21 is a hinge of grace on which Israel's history turns. The picture of iniquity, transgression and sin painted for us in Isaiah 59:1–15a is truly scarifying. The glorious images of Zion found in Isaiah 60–63 are breathtaking. The grace of God which acts to bring such transformation is amazing, indeed, scandalous.¹⁴ In a manner parallel to Isaiah 63:1–6, the Warrior is also the Redeemer. His actions lead to praise and thanksgiving from his redeemed people in both instances. His intercession alone makes the difference.

WIDER NEW TESTAMENT CONNECTIONS

Many passages could be adduced to underscore the points we have been making. One of the clearest is Colossians 2:13–15, where the intercession of God in forgiveness is at the same time the means by which the principalities and powers are disarmed:

¹³ T. F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1946, pp. 19–20.

¹⁴ Matthew Henry's Commentary on Isaiah 59:16ff. says in part:

How sin abounded we have read, to our great amazement, in the former part of the chapter; how grace does much more abound we read in these verses. And, as sin took occasion from the commandment to become more exceedingly sinful, so grace took occasion from the transgression of the commandment to appear more exceedingly gracious.

Observe:

I. Why God wrought salvation for this provoking people, notwithstanding their provocations. It was purely for his own name's sake; because there was nothing in them either to bring it about, or to induce him to bring it about for them, no merit to deserve it, no might to effect it, he would do it himself, would be exalted in his own strength, for his own glory.

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¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him (ESV).

We were dead in sin, under the power of the enemies (cf. Eph. 2:1ff.). What has God done? He has made us alive with Christ. How could this be, if death comes by virtue of sin? He forgave our trespasses. How could God do this? He cancelled the certificate of debt, and removed the guilt of the legal demands of the broken law. How could God do this, and still be holy? He nailed it to the cross! With what consequence? The rulers and authorities were defeated. They were overcome in Jesus, our Warrior–Lamb. Only in him and only by his sacrifice could they be overcome. Lifted up from the earth on the cross, he cast Satan out even as he himself was bruised to the point of death (John 12:31):

Sin was the ground of Satan’s dominion, the sphere of his power, and the secret of his strength; and no sooner was the guilt lying on us extinguished, than his throne was undermined, as Jesus Himself said (John 12:31). When the guilt of sin was abolished, Satan’s dominion over God’s people was ended; for the ground of his authority was the law which had been violated, and the guilt which had been incurred . . . All the mistakes have arisen from not perceiving with sufficient clearness *how* the triumph could be celebrated on His cross.¹⁵

Through this same sacrifice the Warrior–Lamb secures us forever (Heb. 7:25). In him we are protected by God to receive an imperishable salvation (1 Pet. 1:5). He is able to keep us from falling and present us blameless at the day of his coming (Jude 1:24–25). How? We, like Joshua in Zechariah 3, have received a change of garments, and so Satan has no purchase on us (Zech. 3:1–6). He has been defeated by a day of recompense and vengeance on all our sin, for the Branch of Jesse has removed the iniquity of the land in one day (Zech. 3:8–10). Thus, the saints overcome the evil one only by the word of their testimony to Jesus, their Warrior–Saviour (Rev. 12:10). With him the armies of heaven come in white robes, the gift of his own bloody sacrifice.

Though accomplished once and for all on Calvary, the blood of Christ *goes on* cleansing us from all sin throughout all ages (1 John 1:7). This total cleansing is his gift to us. It is the gift of his own victory to us. It is the action of the Lion of Judah, who fought for us on the cross as the Lamb in our place. His Priestly intercession in heaven is but the ongoing expression of his faithfulness on the one hand and his acceptable work on the other. The blood has cleansed, and as a redeemed people, we are led to the Father’s presence in him, who is the High Priest of our confession.

The armies of heaven in white robes are one with the redeemed on earth. The difference is one of perspective. All God’s works have been completed in Christ, but we share in his mission, to proclaim the gospel of his grace to the world. We wear his garments. They come from him, and are kept spotless by him. We are with him, and he owns us as his own, fellow citizens of his Father’s heavenly kingdom. He has fought for us in our place by taking all our sin into himself on the cross. We were trampled down *in him* under the judgement of God, which holy action created the very possibility of resurrection on Easter morn. The Lion of Judah is the Lamb of

¹⁵ George Smeaton, *The Apostles’ Doctrine of the Atonement*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1870, pp. 307–8.

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God: our champion is our sacrifice. He overcame by entering the holocaust of Calvary; the Lion is the *'olah*, the Lamb the conquering hero. Only in this way is the ancient serpent overcome, but overcome he is, once and for all. The resurrection harried hell and released the captives, creating one new man. God stood up for us on Easter day, when there was no one else who would or could. We stand in him, never to die again.

All the while Satan and his cohorts assumed Christ to be stricken, i.e. smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced through for our transgressions. The Lord caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him. He has forgiven us by judging our sin in Christ. He has removed Satan's siege works around Zion by cutting off his supply line at the root. He now takes us with him to the nations to proclaim the victory of his grace.

Many of his people are killed, but they remain his eternally. Many stumble and fall, but he makes them stand because all his works are sure. Many cry out, 'How long O Lord?' and he assures them of his presence. He is speedily avenging his elect, and gathering in the rest of our brothers. In every circumstance the effective judgement-intercession he has brought about in the cross secures the Church, for all time and in eternity. We are the Church defeated by the Warrior-Lamb, which defeat is also our salvation.

The Continuing Battle: The Church in the World

Randall Lawton

INTRODUCTION

The whole matter of being in a battle is a reality. For the believer it is not whether we choose to enter into conflict, but rather we are in it with God. It is his battle. It is not fought as the world wages its wars. Nevertheless, it is real and requires moral fortitude in grace to not get crushed in the fierce opposition that we encounter. We do not glory in warfare as such, but we are to give glory to God, who will glorify his name through the defeat of all lovelessness and evil that contradict himself.

THE UNRELENTING AND DIABOLICAL WAR

- It is no mistake that the final book of the Canon is the book of Revelation, in which we find a great apocalyptic war. There is a battle against God and his people. The reality of what is seen and felt is one thing, but the unseen truth is greater. Great enemies, such as the red dragon (Satan, the devil), the beast, second beast (false prophet), who are very powerful, intelligent, royal, sleek, but blasphemous and vicious. There is also the erotic, seductive and opulent world system, Babylon. This is what we swim in, and with which we ‘wrestle’ (Eph. 6:12), all being worked out in our relationships (Eph. 6:12; cf. 4:26–27). Furthermore, we all participate in a groaning creation under God’s judgement (Rom. 8:20), and find ourselves within God’s historical judgements against evil. Paul calls it ‘this present darkness’ (Eph. 6:12).
- In the OT, Israel was redeemed through war (Exod. 12–14; cf. 15:3). Immediately after the Exodus they were attacked by the Amalakites (17:8–16) and finally entered the land by conquest (see Num. 1). The Lord for Israel is a ‘Warrior’ (Exod. 15:3), ‘the Lord of hosts’, which means ‘the Lord of armies’ (over 200 times). He is ‘the Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle’ (Ps. 24:8). When they lost their land, the prophetic understanding of their war shifted from nationalism to an apocalyptic, cosmic and universal battle; the

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fulfilment of the covenant under the sovereignty of God (e.g. Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah; cf. Gen. 12; 15). The promise of God was that there would be complete peace one day (Isa. 2:4; Micah 4:3), Israel restored (Ezek. 38–39), the nations blessed, all evil destroyed. But there would be a massive battle, ‘a time of trouble’ (Dan. 12:1) to get there. Christ and the apostles understood themselves to be in this apocalyptic crisis. The church under the New–Warrior–Son–King follows him into battle (John 12:27–36; Rev. 6:2; 17:14; Mark 13; Eph. 6:11f.; Acts 2:19–21; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Thess. 2:1–12). The people of God become warriors, super-conquerors in Christ (Rom. 8:37). In the Revelation, to be a person of faith, is to be a warrior of faith (e.g. Rev. 2:17; 12:11). To be sure, in the new covenant the battle is now not only a matter of faith, but truth and love.

THE BATTLE OF TRUTH AND THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

- The church is called to put on God’s armour and to use his sword, ‘that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm’ (Eph. 6:13; cf. v. 17). In this way God does his unique work as the divine warrior (Isa. 59:17). Truth is what we fight in and for (Eph. 6:14–17; cf. Isa. 59:21).¹ The battle in truth is the battle for love and holiness (Eph. 4–5; 1 Cor. 8:1–3; 13 [in context]; 1 Pet. 1:13–25). Humanity in the flesh fights against the truth with ‘hostile’ minds (Rom. 1:18; 8:7). We are called into a fight and wield the sword: how we do this calls for wisdom (Gal. 2:11–14; cf. 2 Tim. 2:24). The word proclaimed is primarily the cross (Rev. 12:11). The battle constantly rages against grace in our marriages, families, churches, workplaces and nation. The church has been given the truth and must live in it (Col. 3:16). More often than not the battle is won by living quiet lives of holiness and love (1 Thess. 4:1–12), but at times there needs some swift and strong moral action to save the day (1 Cor. 6:1–11).
- The word that comes to us in the Scriptures, and is an inherent element in the apocalyptic corpus, is the truth of God’s utter sovereignty. All things are working according to the counsel of his will. God is giving power to evil beings and through all things is pressing history to his pre-determined goal of salvation (Rev. 13:5–10; 17:7–16; cf. Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11). This is the word of great comfort to the church amidst the suffering of the battle and in the pain and loss experienced for loving God and his truth. The attacks come to his people at all times, in their sleep, at work, in their communities. God has determined some will suffer unto death (Rev. 13:9–11), but this is the necessary battle of love for love: love is not love until there is sacrificial loss for the other: in loss there is victory for it is love that conquers. This is the mystery of love revealed through the words and actions of the church as it shares in the love-life of the Father, Son and Spirit. This love bears eternal fruit and joy and one day it will be without impediment.

¹ Note the *inclusio*: ‘the belt of truth . . . the word of God’ within which the other elements of righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation find their substance.

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THE MILITANT BRIDE AND MEN OF WAR

- The church is the ‘bride’ dressed in ‘fine linen, bright and pure’ but she is also the ‘armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure’ (Rev. 19:8, 14). She is one flesh with her Warrior–Husband. She is called to ‘put on’ her ‘New Man’, and ‘put off’ the ‘old man’ (Eph. 4:17–5:9; Col. 3:1–4:6) and follow him into battle. Her strength by grace is in her obedience, love, kindness, gentleness and resilience in mental toughness to remain true to him. Her direction is towards the home, submissive to her husband, serving the family, but not limited to it (Titus 2:4–5; Prov. 24:3–4; 31:10–31). The Bride builds a home in the creation under the headship, supply and care of her Husband, yet in this age it is always somewhat ‘on the move’, as the battlefield progresses under her Husband’s direction due to his strong drive to war (Rev. 19:11–16). It is his war against all evil, to conquer, and to free the entire creation from uncleanness so that she may one day finally, fully, live in her beautiful home without all the constant upheaval of foolish intrusions (Rev. 21:2, 27). This is the truth of the ‘feminine church’.
- Christ as the true Husband leads men into leadership in the battle. The church is patriarchal in the sense it reflects the Father–Warrior through its familial life (Eph. 3:14) as it also follows the Son–Warrior–Husband in the world. This functions in particular through the uniqueness of masculinity in family and church. Men are the leaders in home and church, particularly in the word and worship, and into the battle. It is their ability to grow into mature manhood in the home that qualifies them to lead the church in the ministries of the word (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22–6:4; 1 Tim. 2:11–3:13; Titus 1:5–9). As the true Husband crushed Satan and, unlike Adam, they do not stand idly by but deliberately attack evil and destroy it through the gospel and its action (John 12:27–36; cf. Gen. 3:6, 15). In so doing they lead their wives into battle against the evil one. This is all to protect the love and worship of marriage and family before God. Likewise, in the church, overseers are to ‘teach the word’ (1 Tim. 3:2), ‘give sound instruction in sound doctrine and also rebuke those who contradict it’ (Titus 1:9). Even if done gently, it often remains a point of conflict. Jesus called and trained his Apostles to enter into the battle, into the storm of multitudinous demons (Legion), debilitating illness, and heartbreaking death (Luke 6:12–16; 9:22–56). He then sent them out to ‘proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal’ (Luke 9:2). Their whole lives were a battle in the elements and spiritual warfare (e.g. Paul in 2 Cor. 6:1–13). They called other men to join with them ‘to wage the good warfare’ (1 Tim. 1:18). No doubt leaders need the wisdom of God in the battle: ‘A wise man [*geber*, a strong man, warrior] is full of strength, and a man [*ish*, man, male] of knowledge enhances his might, for by wise guidance you can wage your war and in the abundance of counsellors there is victory’ (Prov. 24:5–6). And victory is assured one way or another for all his prophets:

But I will deliver you on that day declares the LORD, and you shall not be given into the hand of men of whom you are afraid. For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but you shall have your life as a prize of war because you have put your trust in me, declares the LORD (Jer. 39:17–18).

STUDY 16

The Freedom of the Church— Now and Then

Deane Meatheringham

Scripture: Romans 8:1–25, especially vv. 1–4

THE THEN COMES INTO THE NOW

What wonderfully blessed people we are to know now that the future judgement of the Law has been abrogated (Rom. 8:1–4).

- Our future Judge has come into our space and history to condemn all flesh where sin dwells.
- Justification is an eschatological act of God's grace and truth.
- Christ's atoning death for our sins was the great judgement of the world (John 12:31). In a world which streams with so much blood, lies, ruin and misery the most profound crisis we can face between God and ourselves has been effected by the destruction of guilt and the taking away of the sins of the world.
- The crisis of our judgement was *in Christ Jesus* as the order of this mortal world has been broken through in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

O Lord, I do not deserve a glimpse of heaven, and I am unable with my works to redeem myself from sin, death, the devil and hell. Nevertheless, you have given me your dear Son, Jesus Christ, who is far more precious and dear than heaven, and much stronger than sin, death, the devil and hell. For this I rejoice, praise, and thank you, O God. Without cost and out of your pure grace you have given me this boundless blessing in your dear Son. Through him you take sin, death and hell from me, and grant me all that belongs to him. Amen.¹

FREEDOM NOW

The whole of Romans 8 teaches us the new liberty for everyone from the Law of sin and death. It also tells how God meets the bending and breaking of the law by establishing it anew in Jesus Christ. God sets us free for a life of obedience and hope in the new life of the Spirit under his grace (Rom. 8:4, 12–16, 17–27).

¹ Luther's Prayers, edited by Herbert F. Brokering, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, 1994, pp. 15f.

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The Church is to go on living in the freedom of Christ:

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (Gal. 5:1; cf. John 8:36).

- By not cancelling it with treacherous teaching on rewards and losses at the judgement.
- Smothering freedom by cajoling believers with tasks for congregational management.

FREEDOM FOR THE CHURCH LIVING BY THE SPIRIT

The regeneration of the Holy Spirit works simultaneously in the present time in union with our being liberated in Christ from the Law of sin and death (Rom. 8:1–4). Life in the Spirit is a life under God’s will of grace.

- The coming of the Spirit is the entering now of the life of the age to come (Heb. 6:5).
- Paul presses the truth that we no longer live by a legal letter but in the competence of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6).²
- ‘The Lord is the Spirit [the Spirit belongs to the divinity of the Lord], and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom’ (2 Cor. 3:17). ‘The letter [*gramma*] kills but the Spirit gives life’ (2 Cor. 3:6).
- The Spirit wills us to cleave to Christ and keeps us there to go after Christ and go forward with him (Col. 3:1–3; Phil. 1:21; 1 Thess. 5:10).
- In the freedom of the Spirit we are able to take fresh directions without a legalism (Acts 8:24; 10:19; 16:7).

Problems arise when we separate the work of the Spirit from the ongoing ministry of the Word, leading the Church into Gnosticism. Without the Spirit the Church sterilises the Word and hardens in its orthodoxy.

The Spirit ‘is immanent to the Word (for this Word is a perpetual act); he imbues it, flushes it, brings it, carries it home from within for the individual soul . . . The Gospel is always the Spirit in action, not from afar, not from an old inspired past which never loses its force, but also from the direct present using that timeless past.’³

As we find ourselves in the communion of the Spirit we are in a vitalising force which wakens all of our powers for living ministry and the Spirit awakens life in the created world. The Spirit awakens our lives for the world ahead, causing us to sigh and to hope for the promise of the Gospel to set us and the creation from its bondage to decay (Rom. 8:18–25).

² See my study on ‘The Pastor and the Gift of the Spirit’, NCTM Ministry School, 2010.

³ P. T. Forsyth, *Faith, Freedom and the Future*, Independent Press, London, 1912, pp. 30–1.

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THE FUTURE FREEDOM OF THE CHURCH

The promise of the Gospel is our future inheritance of the earth, the Kingdom and ultimately God himself. As I said in my earlier session, the Father's plan in creating all things in his Son was to make a home for his people by regenerating the creation, by abrogating our deserved judgement and by glorifying his Church.

- Now under Christ as Cosmocrator he leads his saints with creation to its goal of ultimate redemption through his defeat of all evil and death in his cross by abrogating our condemnation and as the first born of the dead (1 Cor. 15:20–28).

With the resurrection of Christ the order of this mortal world has been broken through. On resurrection morning we have the first day of the new creation. The crucified, dead and buried Jesus *appears* first to Mary and then to the other disciples as a normal human being who was first mistaken for the gardener (John 20:1–23). There was no body, minus its spirit, left in the grave. Jesus' soul had not gone to heaven. Jesus' body had been transfigured, changed and glorified. Jesus had surmounted death and the first morning of the new world had begun.

- As 'the first fruits' Christ is the pledge of the full harvest (1 Cor. 15:20).
- God does not regard the bodies he created as redundant and worthy only for the scrap heap. He will change them to coincide with Christ's body (Rom. 8:11, 21; 1 Cor. 15:19–21; Col. 3:3; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2; etc.).
- The term 'intermediate state' gives some Christians anxiety about what happens when we die? Do we have a 'soul snore' until Christ's final appearing brings the resurrection of the dead? Is there a gap between a believer's death and the Parousia?
- 'How do we link these together? Only by thinking of them exclusively *in Christ*, in the one person of Christ in whom human nature and divine nature are hypostatically united, and in whom our human existence and history are taken up into the divine life'.⁴

FREEDOM IN THE NEW CREATION OF ALL THINGS

I make my starting point again with the risen Christ being the first fruits as a creature of the creation (1 Cor. 15:20; Rom. 8:18–25).

- 'Resurrection and creation belong together, for the raising of the dead and the annihilation of death are viewed—and rightly so—not only as surmounting the consequences of the Fall, but as the consummation of creation-in-the-beginning'.⁵
- With the creation being set free from its bondage to decay, Paul says the creation 'will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rom. 8:21).

⁴ Thomas Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1976, p. 102.

⁵ Jurgen Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness Arise!: God's Future for Humanity and the Earth*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2010, p. 67.

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- The children of God are God's heirs who inherit his promise initially given to Abraham and reaffirmed by Christ (Rom. 4:13; Matt. 5:5).
- Our glory will be our complete transformation in the image of the true man, Jesus (1 Cor. 15:49; Col. 1:15; 3:10). In Christ's image we will reflect the glory of God and the glory of his grace (Eph. 1:5–6).
- The freedom of glory will be expressed in our now fulfilling the creational mandate of Genesis 1–2 but with indwelling sin now non-existent.
- We will inherit God himself (Col. 1:12; 3:24; Rev. 22:4; 1 Cor. 13:12). We will no longer need images or pictures to represent God for we will live in unhindered participation and full enjoyment of God. In perfect perichoresis the world will be in God and God in the world (1 Cor. 15:28).

Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).