

My Words Shall Not Pass Away

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I am very pleased to speak at this Annual Meeting, not least because I find myself in full sympathy with this Union's doctrinal basis and evangelistic aims.

Turn with me, please, to Matthew 24. As the context makes clear, our Lord had been teaching in the Temple but, leaving it for the last time, He proceeded to the Mount of Olives where His disciples asked Him about the future and, more particularly, about the last things. The disciples actually put two questions to our Lord (recorded in Matthew 24:3), 'Tell us, when shall these things be (the Temple's

buildings levelled to the ground)?' and 'What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world (the token to indicate the consummation of the age)?' Christ responded to these questions with the longest answer He ever gave during the whole of His ministry. In fact, His answer fills the whole of Matthew 24, and overflows into Matthew 25, stretching altogether to 94 verses. It is commonly called 'The Olivet Discourse'.

Heaven and Earth Shall Pass Away

The words I wish to emphasise are to be found in Matthew 24:35. Here, Christ carries us to the most distant point in time, and says, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass

away'. By 'heaven and earth' is meant the entire universe and, in harmony with other prophetic scriptures, Christ declares that this universe will 'pass away' or, more literally, 'go by'. Notwithstanding its apparent stability, it will one day give place to another and better world.

We think immediately of such Scriptures as (Hebrews 1:10-12), 'Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the works of Thine hands. They shall perish: but Thou remainest: and they all shall wax old as doth a garment: and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail'. The words of (Revelation 21), also come to mind, 'I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away'.

To begin with, I shall concentrate on the first part of this verse - 'Heaven and earth shall pass away', although the major emphasis in this address will be on the second part - 'but My words shall not pass away'.

Why must Heaven and Earth Pass Away?

Scripture gives a number of reasons for this exceeding great and total change:

First of all, Satan has left his trail here and, as a result, the vile taint of sin is to be found on everything in this world. It is

not just that 'men' have 'together become filthy' (Psalm 14:3): 'sin', we are told, has 'entered into the world' (Romans 5:12). Now, sin is defiling by nature (Hebrews 12:15; Jude 23) and ultimately it affects even the very fabric of this world (Romans 8:21). The only remedy is to rebuild. The entire creation needs to be renewed and restored.

In the Mosaic Law, particular attention was given to the plague of leprosy, that dreadful disease which typified sin. We read in (Leviticus 14:45), that if this disease was discovered, the 'priest' shall 'break down the house, the stones of it, and the timber thereof, and all the mortar of the house; and he shall carry them forth out of the city into an unclean place'. Ceremonially, not only was the leper unclean, but uncleanness was also reckoned to have permeated his dwelling-place. This detail is relevant to our study. It explains why the present heavens and earth must perish. It is because sin - which is worse than any plague - has taken hold of man and adversely affected his earthly environment.

Secondly, this change is required because God's curse, or sentence upon sin, has effected dreadful and catastrophic results. Immediately after sin appeared, God spoke to Adam in judgment, saying, 'Cursed is the ground for thy sake' (Genesis 3:17). The consequence was disorder and decay everywhere: droughts, floods, extremities of

temperature, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, pests, obnoxious weeds, and the most fearful of diseases.

It is only through Christ that this curse can be removed. How noteworthy it is that when our Lord was suffering the judgment due to sin, he bore the symbol of the curse pronounced upon the earth!

'They ...platted a crown of thorns and put it about His head' (Mark 15:17). By His dreadful sufferings, He not only saved God's elect, but also saved this poor, wretched world from the divine judgment. One day, in a new heaven and a new earth, the redeemed will fully appreciate this; and they will rejoice together in the truth that 'there shall be no more curse' (Revelation 22:3).

Thirdly, this world must be removed because it is filled with the evidences of human rebellion. According to the decree of Darius, King of Persia and Babylon, anyone in open revolt against his authority was to suffer awful personal punishment and, in addition, the man's house, on which he may have lavished a great deal of care and expense, was to be destroyed and laid in ruins. The King's actual words were: 'Let timber be pulled down from his house...and let his house be made a dunghill' (Ezra 6:11).

The Lord our God has bitter, inveterate enemies too, who oppose his kingdom and His kingly rule. Almost everywhere are to be seen the monuments of their godless

works, built through perverse ingenuity and standing, Babel-like, as costly towers to human pride. How true is the verdict of Scripture - 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'! (Ecclesiastes 1:2). There are houses, estates, cities, works of art, theatres, laboratories, satellites, and so on. The list is endless. Yet all have been produced by men in a state of enmity with their Maker. Somehow it seems both right and proper that, when the rebels themselves are judged, 'the earth' and 'the works that are therein' shall also be 'burned up' (2 Peter 3:10; cf Is 2:12-17).

Fourthly, such an event must take place because the earth has become the scene of terrible human misery. Sin has filled this once happy world with indescribable sorrow and distress. As the Apostle observes, 'the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain' (Romans 8:22). Is there not a crying need for some kind of radical change?

Let me put it to you like this: the room where sickness has wasted beauty, and where death has brought corruption, is the room where even the atmosphere is heavy with sadness, perhaps even with despair. If this is to be dispelled, there is only one possible course of action: the room must be completely redecorated and refurbished. Even so, if this world's misery is to be replaced with happiness, God will have to perform a radical work and make everything new. Peculiarly apposite, therefore, are the prophet's words, 'I

create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create' (Isaiah 65:17,18).

We confidently await such transformation when 'there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Revelation 21:4).

Fifthly, it should be remembered that 'in the beginning', when time first began its course, God created the world and told man to obtain and exercise mastery over it (Genesis 1:1,27,28). Surely, when time ends, and there is 'the beginning' of eternity (if I may so speak), we may reasonably expect the Lord God to recreate and produce another world.

'We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness' (2 Peter 3:13; cf Revelation 21:1).

Sixthly, the new creation will be part of the great reward; and, as such, it will have to surpass everything we have formerly experienced. The Bible's closing chapters constitute a psalm of ecstasy over the saints' future inheritance where God will eternally dwell with a beloved and redeemed people. Of necessity, then, there has to be a difference between the old order (with which we are familiar) and the new order (which, through God's grace, we joyfully anticipate). How

surpassingly wonderful that future inheritance must be! Truly, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him' (1 Cor 2:9).

Seventhly, and lastly, a new world will be required because the bodies of believers shall, at last, be incorruptible and immortal (1 Corinthians 15:54). Somehow the environment will have to be brought into harmony with this final and glorious state. The imperfect will have to give way to the perfect, even as the transient will have to give way to the permanent and the eternal. Our text reads, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away'.

The Perpetuity of the Earth

Now, as already observed, the word translated 'pass away' literally means 'pass by'. It suggests a passing from one condition to another and so not really destruction, but transition. This universe will undergo change - radical change; but while its outward form will be altered, its essential matter will remain forever the same. Martin Luther once wrote, 'God will make not the earth only, but the heavens, much more beautiful than they are at present. At present, we see the world in its working clothes, but hereafter it shall be arrayed in its festal robes'. Careful study of God's Word will oblige us to agree with Luther in his conclusion.

Furthermore, Scripture plainly teaches

that the earth is to exist for ever (Ps 78:69; Ecclesiastes 1:4). Although ruined by sin, the Son of God, through His sufferings and death, has removed the awful sentence passed upon it and therefore the world awaits deliverance (Romans 8:21).

According to our Lord, it will experience a 'regeneration', by which term we understand a change in condition (Matthew 19:28; cf Titus 3:5). We are told, in fact, that 'they (the heavens and the earth) shall perish (with respect to their present condition); and (that) they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed...' (Hebrews 1:11,12).

On that stupendous day, Christ shall 'restore' what he 'took not away' (Psalm 69:4); and, then, where 'sin abounded', 'grace shall much more abound' (Romans 5:20). Christ with his blood-bought people shall reign in this new world and Satan and his hosts shall be banished for ever. The Bible says, 'He shall reign for ever and ever' (Revelation 11:15).

My Words Shall Not Pass Away

Now we can turn to the latter part of our text - 'But My words shall not pass away'. Our Saviour intends us to understand that whatever may happen to the existing heaven and earth, it is certain that His

words need no renovation and that they will therefore remain.

Although our Lord speaks particularly of His words (such as were spoken then and throughout His public ministry), there is a very real sense in which this phrase includes all the inspired Writings. The following considerations lead us to that conclusion.

Whenever God has expressed His thoughts, He has done so through His Son. Hence, the Son is repeatedly called 'the Word' (John 1:1 etc). The Apostle John writes: 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him' (John 1:18). Since He has always been the Father's divine and authoritative spokesman, we must believe that He was responsible for every communication recorded in this Holy Book. He supplied the teaching of the Old Testament, even as He supplied the teaching of the New.

Following this line of truth, we turn, first of all, to the Old Testament. According to (1 Peter 1:11), it was 'the spirit of Christ' in 'the prophets' which predicted His 'sufferings' and 'the glory that should follow'.

Later, in the same epistle, Peter returns to this same subject, illustrating it with reference to the patriarch Noah. He states that it was actually 'Christ' who 'went and preached to the spirits in prison; which

sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah' (1 Peter 3:18-19). Although notoriously difficult, this appears to mean that the pre-incarnate Christ testified through Noah to the ungodly sinners living before the flood, even to those who are now shut up in hell's terrible 'prison'. In other words, Christ's spirit moved in Noah ('a preacher of righteousness', 2 Peter 2:5) and thus addressed the wicked and unbelieving men of that generation.

If Christ really did speak through the prophets, then the whole of the Old Testament must be from Him, consisting entirely, as it does, of 'the scriptures of the prophets' (Romans 16:26).

Confirmation of this may be found in Paul's statement concerning the book of Psalms. 'Let the word of Christ', he says, 'dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs' (Colossians 3:16). These terms (psalms, hymns, and songs) were used in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, with reference to the Biblical Psalms. The Greek heading of Psalm 76, for example, reads: 'For the Precentor in Hymns, a Psalm of Asaph, a Song with reference to the Assyrians'. The Apostle was familiar with this version. He often quoted it in his Epistles. Now what he says in this verse is that, when Christian believers sing from the inspired Psalter, they are actually singing 'prophecy of the Scripture' and

therefore 'the word of Christ'.

The Westminster Larger Catechism states: 'Christ executeth the office of prophet, in His revealing to the church, in all ages, by His Spirit and word, in divers ways of administration, the whole will of God' (Question 43).

Thus, we call to mind the ancient Scriptures when we hear Christ declare: 'My words shall not pass away'.

Consider now the New Testament. Christ Himself, of course, in his private and public teaching, spoke the words recorded in the four Gospels. This is borne out by such references as: 'I speak to the world those things that I have heard of Him'; 'As My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things'; and again, 'The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself'. During his earthly ministry, He communicated verbally to His chosen Apostles, giving them the 'word' which they were to 'keep' and 'teach' to others (John 17:8,14).

The Book of Acts begins with a reference to Luke's 'former treatise' (the Gospel) which contained 'all that Jesus began both to do and teach'. This implies that this latter treatise describes what He continued to do and teach. Thus we are prepared to hear Christ in the Book of Acts continuing his works and words through the Apostles.

To them, Christ also promised the Spirit

who would enable them to reveal even more of His mind and will. He said to them, 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come' (John 16:12-13). The fulfilment of this promise is to be seen in the apostolic epistles, where we find such statements as: 'This we say unto you by the Word of the Lord' and 'If any man think himself to be ... spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord' (1 Thessalonians 4:15; 1 Corinthians 14:37).

The last book in the New Testament canon is entitled 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ' because Christ is not only its subject but also its author (Revelation 1:1): a fact confirmed by the subsequent mention of our Lord's 'testimony' (Revelation 1:2) and, thereafter, by other statements much to the same effect (Revelation 1:10; 2:1ff; 4:1; 19:10; 22:16).

Return now with me to the words of (Matthew 24:35). Surely, we must understand 'My words' to embrace the entire corpus of the Old and New Testament writings. This makes the latter part of verse 35 particularly important. Our Lord says, 'My words shall not pass away'.

The Importance of Words

Heaven might have remained perfectly quiet. Silence might have prevailed. However, the Lord, in His grace and mercy, has spoken, communicating his divine thoughts to men. 'My words' - What a phrase that is! The Lord, even 'Him that speaketh from heaven' (Hebrews 12:25), has conveyed a message to poor and needy sinners. 'God...hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son' (Hebrews 1:1,2).

From this phrase we may further understand that God's revelation has been mediated through language. The Lord has communicated, not in ideas or concepts, but in 'words'. In short, it is verbal and propositional revelation. Accordingly, we find David saying in (2 Samuel 23:2), that God's 'word' was upon his lips. And certain men of God, both before and after David, have made claims of the same kind (e.g. Jeremiah 1:7,9; 26:2; Ezekiel 3:4,10,11; John 6:63; 1 Corinthians 2:13).

In the goodness of God, their utterances were cast into written form. Through a process known as inspiration, the Lord exerted such an influence upon his writing Prophets and Apostles that they were enabled to produce an accurate and faithful record, without omission, addition, or error of any kind. Thus, we read in (Deuteronomy 31:24), that 'Moses made an end of writing the words of the law in a

book' (See also: Joshua 24:26; 1 Samuel 10:25; 1 Chronicles 26:22; Jeremiah 36:2; Habakkuk 2:2). As a result, words remain - but they are no longer merely audible: they are legible words.

The same is true when we come to the New Testament. The additional revelation is carefully incorporated into Scripture. In his Gospel, John tells us that such was the immeasurable fulness of Christ's life and ministry that everything could not possibly be recorded, but 'these (the divinely chosen and most significant facts)' he says, 'are written (in the Gospel which bears John's name), that ye might believe...' (John 20:31; cf 1 John 5:13; Revelation 1:11). Other New Testament writers similarly declare that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they have been used to 'write' down precious and revealed truths (Romans 15:15; 1 Corinthians 4:14; Galatians 6:11; 1 Peter 5:12; 2 Peter 3:1).

It is the same revelation, you understand, but instead of being something heard with the ear, it is now something read with the eye. 'Thus saith the Lord' has become 'It is written' - and the result is that we now possess 'the holy scriptures' or 'the holy writings' (2 Timothy 3:15).

This emphasis on 'words' is vitally important. Some people today have a totally inadequate view of Scripture. While readily acknowledging that there are truths in the Bible, they are unwilling to

concede that it is entirely free from errors and mistakes. We take issue with them at this point, believing with Augustine that 'not one of these authors has erred in any respect in writing'. God-breathed Scripture consists of God-given words; and since it is impossible for God to lie, we may wholly rely upon this Book to its very letter. Here, in our hands and (I trust) in our hearts, is 'the scripture of truth' (Daniel 10:21).

Inspiration, then, has extended to 'words'. Believing this, Christ was able to refute His critics by appealing to just one word (Matthew 22:45; John 10:34-36). Does not this prove that He understood the words of the prophets to be actually the words of God? Yes, I believe it does prove that; and, what is more, His Apostles evidently held the same view, for Paul can also be found establishing doctrine upon a mere word (1 Corinthians 15:27; Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 4:7; 8:13). Is it any wonder that Clement of Rome later said - 'Look into the Scriptures, the true words of the Holy Spirit'?

What this Book contains is nothing more nor less than the utterances of God. Indeed, the expression 'the Scripture saith' may be considered an exact equivalent for 'God saith', as may be seen from the following passages: 'The Scripture saith unto Pharaoh...' (Romans 9:17); and 'The Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through

faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham...' (Galatians 3:8).

Not surprisingly, then, it is reckoned perfectly legitimate when quoting Scripture to attribute its statements directly to God. Our Lord did this in one of his replies to the Pharisees. Addressing them on the subject of marriage and divorce, He said: 'Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?' (Matthew 19:4,5). He was quoting, of course, from the book of Genesis, but instead of referring to 'Scripture', He referred to 'God'. To Him, so perfect was the process and product of inspiration that the terms 'Scripture' and 'God' could be used interchangeably. God's pure word is to be found within these pages!

For this reason we believe the Bible deserves great reverence. I know critics will accuse us (falsely) of 'bibliolatry', but there is no sense in which we worship this Book. We do believe, however, that God would have us regard His written Word even as His spoken Word. God speaks in Scripture: let us be all attention and evidence proper regard to His divine authority. 'To this man will I look', the Lord says, 'even to him that...trembleth at my word' (Isaiah 66:2).

The doctrine of Scripture's verbal

inspiration and consequent inerrancy is being challenged and, as you know, even denied. Satan has already gained great advantage over the professing Church by convincing some that this Book contains errors in matters of literal fact. We know his cunning design is only to weaken faith in the essential integrity and trustworthiness of the written Word. We therefore need to hear more teaching on this subject so that we become absolutely convinced that the Bible is God's pure and holy Word. Then, by God's grace, we shall be able to contend far more valiantly for the historic Protestant and Evangelical Faith. Believe this in your hearts and then declare it with your lips, that in this sacred Volume we are privileged to possess 'the oracles of God' (Romans 3:2).

The Matchless Excellence of the Divine Word

'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away'. In marked contrast to the present heaven and earth, Christ states that there is something firm, constant, and abiding about the Holy Scriptures. It is to this that I now draw your attention.

First of all, observe from what Christ says here that the Bible is a perfect production, without parallel in human literature. Sin has not been allowed to mar its pages. Corruption has not jettisoned its veracity. Although rationalists suppose

contradictions to exist, these are all apparent rather than real. Careful study will show that even the most difficult of them can be harmonized. The Bible is God's Book and, as such, it is absolutely true.

Hence, unlike the spoiled heaven and earth, it stands in no need of restoration or renewal. As one Confession of Faith states: 'We believe the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its Author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter'.

Secondly, the Bible is a living Book, full of strength and vigour. It has perennial freshness about it, which means that it will never grow old nor will it ever become obsolete. 'The Word of God', we read, 'is quick (or living) and powerful': it 'liveth and abideth for ever' (Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23). So here is another contrast. The physical universe has smarted under the curse and now appears full of disorder and decay. On account of its ever-increasing infirmity, God has said that one day He will introduce a new world. But His Word is not in such a wretched condition. Far from showing signs of weakness, it retains all its original and vital power - the same living energy, in fact, as when it first proceeded from the mouth of God.

The formulae 'He saith' or 'the Holy Ghost saith' (present tense) often

introduce scriptural quotations. This has the effect of emphasising the Bible's inexhaustible vitality: 'Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high...' (Ephesians 4:8); 'And of the angels he saith...but unto the Son he saith... (Hebrew 1:7,8); 'As the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice...' (Hebrews 3:7).

God's Word still has its dynamic efficacy. It can convict of sin and convert to God. It can comfort the sorrowful, strengthen the weak, and direct the confused. This Word, accompanied by the blessed Spirit, can even revive the Church and transform the world. This we believe with all our hearts!

Thirdly, it shows what rock-like stability the Book has. When our Lord spoke of this present world He intimated that it was subject to change, both for the worse (as a result of the Fall) and for the better (as part of the redemptive programme at the end of time). However, His written Word has remained unaltered through the centuries and therefore it stands in no need of reconstruction. This is undoubtedly what the Psalmist meant when he said, 'Concerning Thy testimonies, I have known of old that Thou hast founded them for ever' (Psalm 119:152).

So while there is nothing permanent about God's world, there certainly is about His Word. We have, as the apostle Peter reminds us, 'a more sure (or, firm) word',

namely 'Scripture' (2 Peter 1:19,20). What an inestimable blessing! In a world where all is mutable and transient, the Truth provides the only safe resting-place for our souls. Upon this foundation we may build our expectations for eternity.

Fourthly, our text also bears witness to the fulness and sufficiency of God's Word. The reason why this earth and the rest of the solar family will pass away is because everything has to become 'new' (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1). Here, the Greek word (*kainos*) means what is 'new in respect to form or quality'. It implies a deficiency which somehow has to be made up. The Word of God is strikingly different. Scripture revelation is perfectly complete and stands in no need of additional elements. In fact, there is a solemn warning appended to its last book to deter any who would 'add' to it or 'take away' from it (Revelation 22:18,19).

John Calvin, the Reformer, once wrote of 'Scripture' that 'nothing useful and necessary to be known has been omitted, so nothing is taught but what it is of importance to know'.

Fifthly, these words teach us that God exercises a very special care over his Truth. Our Lord would have us believe that He would sooner let the present order of things perish than to lose one letter from the sacred writings - so much more valuable are they in His account (Cf Matthew 5:18; Luke 16:17). Hence,

while heaven and earth shall be removed, God will never allow anything comparable to happen to his Word. 'The word of our God shall stand for ever' (Isaiah 40:8; cf 1 Peter 1:23-25).

In another place, Christ Himself says, 'the Scripture cannot be broken' (John 10:35). The term 'broken' literally means 'unloosed' or 'undone', as a form of destruction. That simply cannot happen to the Scripture. Almighty God will not allow it to happen. We are therefore justified in believing in the preservation of the inspired Text. As the Westminster Confession correctly states: the Scriptures, 'being immediately inspired by God', are 'by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages' (Ch.1; Sect. 8).

There are those, of course, who tell us that the Book our fathers read, loved, taught, defended, and propagated is no longer trustworthy. We remain, through grace, unshaken in our faith, believing that God keeps His promises and that He has provided for us a faithful and accurate Bible.

Sixthly, we may further deduce from this text that God's Word shall never be found to fail. Evidently, this universe will, for its dissolution is here predicted; and, from other passages, we know that the effects of the final crisis will be universal grief and despair. When the cataclysmic events of the end-time occur, this world's

ungodly inhabitants shall be driven to absurd expedients, crying out to the visible creation for shelter and relief. Tragically, this staggering world shall not be able to afford them any help or hope (Revelation 6:12-17).

It is altogether otherwise, of course, with the Word of God. On that stupendous Day, those who trust in God's saving Truth shall discover that His promise holds and that their souls are everlastingly secured. 'Not one thing' shall fail 'of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you' (Joshua 23:14). God will allow 'none of his words to fall to the ground' - a metaphor taken from water which, when spilt, proves totally worthless and useless (1 Samuel 3:19; cf 2 Kings 10:10). On that great Day, believers (unlike all others) shall rejoice to see the ultimate verification of the Truth. They shall rejoice to know that, even when everything else gives way, God's Word proves unfailing.

Seventhly, and last of all, our Saviour would have us understand that, whereas judgment will befall the heaven and earth, an everlasting salvation will attend the Word and those found believing in it. As Christ said elsewhere, 'He that heareth My Word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life' (John 5:24).

The Truth, then, shall endure for ever,

both in us and with us, as the incorruptible seed of eternal life (2 John 2).

How replete is this verse with instruction and consolation! 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away'.

Closing Words of Application

Since all this is true, our hearts should be altogether taken up with the written Word. Like believers of old, we should be reading and hearing it often and meditating upon it day and night. Why? Because in an unstable world, it is the only true source of comfort and assurance. It strengthens us against our unbelieving fears. It tells of a wonderful Saviour who loves us more than we will ever know and who one day soon will re-appear to receive us to Himself and introduce us to everlasting Glory.

We do well to choose and follow this path of sacred Truth. Others sadly take the sinner's road through life, only to find that it proves grievous now - and ruinous hereafter; but grace inclines our hearts to take God's way and, as we follow it, we find that in this way men walk with God and hold sweet fellowship with His people. Moreover, it is the way which safely leads through trials while at the same time affording us the choicest experiences of joy and peace. This is the way appointed for us, and if we are wise, we shall set it

always before us and determine never to turn aside or go astray.

Should Satan launch some vicious attack upon God's Word, our duty is to rally to its defence. This is precious Truth - Truth which has been used to convict us of sin, enlighten us in the knowledge of Christ, and persuade us positively to respond to the Gospel's gracious and tender invitations. By this same means, we have been assured of the pardon of all our sins, past, present, and to come. We have also been enabled by it to overcome temptation and seek after holiness. Furthermore, it is through this Truth that we have been supported in every trial and maintained in that grace which leads to heavenly glory. Attack this blessed Book? If Satan, or any other, so much as attempts it, we vow this day to stand by it and (God helping us) to quit ourselves like men in the good fight of faith.

However, it is not enough simply to defend the Word. We must also publish it - throughout the world. It was never intended to be exclusively in our possession. This message is for 'all people' - for 'every creature'. Our consciences will not allow us to withhold it from the multitudes all around us. Why, it brings news of liberty to slaves, of forgiveness to rebels, of peace to enemies, of friendship to outcasts, and of salvation to those lying on the borders of death and hell. We are charged by the Sovereign of the Skies to declare this message to the whole world

of sinners, in the assurance that whoever of them will believe shall certainly be saved.

Finally, we should hold this Book close to our hearts, both in life and in death. When weakness at last overtakes us, God's Word should be our strength and stay. It will then increase our faith; but it will also afford us the clearest and brightest views of the world to come. At the beginning of our pilgrimage we came to love this Book; and, as the years have passed, we have found ourselves loving it more and more. Yet we shall love it most of all when passing through the opened gate of glory. Experience will then confirm that everything within these sacred pages is true, wonderfully true!

Our faith confidently rests upon this grand old Book. Given to us through supernatural inspiration, it has been faithfully and accurately translated in our Authorised Version. This Version adheres faithfully to the meaning and spirit of the divinely preserved Text and it embodies and expresses God's Truth in all the soul-stirring tones of which human words are capable. While we do not claim perfection for it, we nevertheless believe it to be the best English translation of the Scriptures. We therefore refuse to change it for any of its inferior rivals.

Possessing this treasure, we adoringly bow in gratitude before the Throne of God; and, once again, our hearts are

thrilled to hear the Saviour say: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away'. Amen.