

## CONTENTS

<a href="#"><u>The Terms of Peace</u></a>	2
<a href="#"><u>Fellowship News</u></a>	4
<a href="#"><u>Salisbury Conference 2019</u></a>	5
<a href="#"><u>Senior Endeavourer Camp 2019</u></a>	6
<a href="#"><u>Genuine New Birth</u></a>	7
<a href="#"><u>Ezra, the Ready Scribe</u></a>	8
<a href="#"><u>The Killing Times</u></a>	16
<a href="#"><u>Epilogue</u></a>	23

## THE TERMS OF PEACE

The battle had raged fierce and long, and the names of hundreds of brave soldiers would soon be added to the long lists of killed, wounded, or missing; but now the awful day of bloodshed was over, and the time for counting the cost had come.

Scattered over the wide field of battle no sight was more interesting than that of two soldiers who were conversing together in a shaded portion. One of them having been severely wounded, had crawled into the bush for shelter; the other, his companion, having searched and found him, was seeking to help in his hour of need. After ministering to his creature wants, he tried to minister to the deeper needs of his soul.

“Shall I read you a portion from *The True Guide to Peace*?” he enquired. The wounded man nodded assent.

He commenced with the gracious invitation: “Come unto Me, *all* ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

“Stop! Stop!” cried the dying soldier; “These words were never meant for me! You know I’ve been God’s enemy all my life and have fought against him hard and sore. No, no; they can’t be for me!”

“Enemy or not,” said his friend, “ I assure you they *are* meant for you, for are you not included in the *all*; are you not indeed one of the *weary*; are you not specially mentioned in the *heavy laden*? His enemy no doubt you are, as I once was; but here God sets before you His terms of peace.”

“Terms of peace, did you say?” - and the enemy of God realising that he was so soon to meet Him, grasped at the thought of being at peace with God - “Terms of peace: let me hear more.”

“I will read further,” said his Christian friend; and he read to him portion after portion - John 3.16, John 5.24, Romans 10. 9, &c.; then turning to 2 Corinthians 5.20, he read: “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” These are God’s terms of peace. Though

an enemy, as you admit, and full of sin, as you are, because He has made Him (the Lord Jesus) to be sin for such as you are, peace, pardon, life, and joy may be yours now, through believing in Jesus Christ. The question is, Will you here and now accept these terms of peace?"

The dying soldier's countenance changed and, reaching out, he grasped his friend's hand with a dying grip, and slowly, though deliberately, he whispered, "I accept the terms."

Thank God: 'mid scenes of war, he found peace with God, and during the remaining hours of his life he frequently repeated the words, "Thank God - -at peace, at peace!" and before the list was issued of those who had been "killed" or "died from wounds", he was in that happy land where wars and rumours of wars shall be heard no more, for ever.

God's terms of peace are just the same to soldiers in health and to soldiers wounded unto death; just the same to all - soldiers, sailors, civilians - peace through the blood of Christ's Cross (Colossians 1:20); peace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5.1); peace now, and grace and glory to follow.

Reader, the question for you is, Will you, here and now - on a battlefield, by the wayside, or on the very spot where you are - accept God's terms of peace, and be 'saved with an everlasting salvation'? or will you, here and now, reject God's terms of peace, continue at enmity with Him, only to be condemned and then "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power?" (2 Thessalonians 1:9)

### **The Precious Blood of Christ**

Until I saw the blood,  
'Twas Hell my soul was fearing;  
And dark and dreary in mine eyes  
The future was appearing.  
But when I saw the blood,  
And looked on Him who shed it,  
My right to peace was seen at once,  
And I with transport read it.

## FELLOWSHIP NEWS

It was with heart-felt thankfulness to God that we witnessed the baptism of two friends during the morning of the Lord's Day, 30 June. Their clear testimonies describing their spiritual journey over the past few years were a great blessing and encouragement to us all. At the close of the evening service, at the Lord's table, both were received into the membership of the church. Our prayer is that they will both be much encouraged as they continue their walk with the Lord and in fellowship with His people

On Saturday, 13 July, we were grateful to our friends at Crosslanes Chapel for allowing us once again to use their field and facilities for our annual church picnic. After an overcast start, by mid-afternoon nearly 50 had gathered and the sun filtered through the clouds. The younger ones enjoyed games with a football and frisbee, while others enjoyed a walk in the Forest. We give thanks to God for this further opportunity of fellowship with one another.

Our Evangelistic Barbecue took place at Grove House during the afternoon of Saturday 20 July. We were very pleased to welcome a good number of visitors on this occasion to share in our enjoyment of the warm sunshine and good food! But more importantly, during an interval between courses, one of our members shared with us the message of God's salvation, received by faith in Jesus Christ. We are glad of these opportunities to make known the Gospel, and we look to God to water the seed sown.

It was good to have another visit from our friends, James and Rachel Swanson on Wednesday 24 July, to give us an update on the Lord's work at Lefkosa Protestant Church in Cyprus. As in all God's work, there have been encouragements as well as disappointments. It was helpful to see pictures of those whose names are becoming familiar to us and for whom we have been praying. James directed our thoughts to Paul's second letter to Thessalonians 3, exhorting us, with Paul, to "pray... that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified". We appreciated James' and Rachel's regular news from Cyprus via e-mail and assure them of our continued prayerful support.

King David's words in Psalm 35:4 came to mind ("let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt") as we experienced God's gracious answer to our prayers for the Open Air witness on Saturday August 3rd. The Pride event planned for that same morning became more or less a non-event,

whereas in other cities throughout the world they were thousands strong. One of our elders was able to preach the Gospel freely, while a few people awaiting the other event sat nearby on the Guildhall steps. These gracious tokens from God, assuring us of his presence with us, are a great stimulant to our faith, as we remember that “if God be for us, who can be against us?” May all who heard the truth of the Gospel that morning be caused to consider eternity and their relationship to God.

*“Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy” Psalm 33:18.*

## **SALISBURY CONFERENCE 2019**

**Date:** 27-28 September

**Guest Speaker:** Dr. Gerald M. Bilkes (Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, USA)

**Theme:** Redemption in the Old and New Testaments

Friday 27 Sep	7.30pm	.....	<i>Moses and the First Exodus</i>
Saturday 28 Sep	10.30am	.....	<i>Elijah and the Second Exodus</i>
	1.00pm	.....	<i>Christ and the Final Exodus</i>
	2.30pm	.....	<i>The Goal of the Exodus</i>

God willing, Dr. Bilkes will be preaching at the Sabbath Services on 29 September at 11.00am and 6.30pm and also at the After-Church Meeting at 8.30pm.

We warmly invite you all to the Conference, hoping that many of you will be able to join us.

# REPORT OF THE SENIOR ENDEAVOURER CAMP 2019

“Why? Why would you want to come camping with 14 teenagers?”

Clearly the teenagers asking the question didn't think I knew what I was walking into. Actually, the prospect of camping with teenagers had not been a concern but, as my car forged through the spray and driving rain towards Salisbury, camping in relentless downpours seemed a far more challenging proposition!

Saturday morning was dry at any rate, as we loaded everything into the trailer and Pastor Green led us in prayer, seeking God's blessing and asking for suitable weather. The thrumming on the tents that night led to the popular misconception that this was a prayer unanswered. Yet, despite occasional showers, slippery mud and stuck minibuses, every activity we had planned took place in sunshine and warmth. We played swing-ball, went bike-riding, enjoyed walking, managed climbing on the rocks, and, of course, we spent time swimming in the sea. The BBQ was held outside and I had my first *s'more* one evening after the epilogue. The food so generously supplied was delicious and plentiful and the kitchen, with large oven and whatever that thing is that keeps food warm, was a great asset. The showers were warm and the queues long! Chatter, laughter and occasional shrieks contributed to the general hubbub of the day. Camping with teenagers was wonderful!

It was on Sunday night, however, as I shared my testimony, that I gave the real reason for my presence on camp. It wasn't for the experience of camping again after many years. Strange as it may have seemed, I wanted to get to know these 14 teenagers, most of whom I had met on a couple of occasions after accepting the invitation to camp. I wanted them to get to know someone too, just as I had while still a teenager. I wanted them to come to know Jesus Christ.

Each morning camp split into two groups to think about Bible teachings, illustrated by stories such as that of the young man who did not want to be

caught speeding, and the Leaning Tower of Pisa and its foundation. In the evenings, the invitations we receive from Satan, and all the world has to offer, were contrasted with the invitations of Jesus in the Gospel; the consequences of sin with the salvation in Christ. Conversation flowed throughout the days and along with the light-hearted banter, random topics, and amusing stories, there were opportunities for sharing more serious thoughts and questions on life and faith.

After all was quiet, the leaders met to pray over the day, the messages, and for 14 teenagers. It was for this that I was on camp.

I am hugely grateful for the friendship, fellowship and fun I found on camp from both leaders and teens. I'm so glad I've had the opportunity to get to know them all better. After all, it turns out I wasn't brave, but truly blessed to be on camp this year.

And yes, I'm still praying for 14 teenagers.

## **GENUINE NEW BIRTH**

### **George Whitefield (1714-1770)**

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” 1 Peter 1:3*

I have heard of a person who was in company once with fourteen ministers of the gospel, some of whom were eminent servants of Christ, and yet not one of them could tell the time God first manifested himself to their soul.

Zacchaeus's was a very quick conversion, perhaps not a quarter of an hour's conviction: this I mention that we may not condemn one another. The Lord works with each of us differently and in different seasons.

We do not love the Pope, because we love to be popes ourselves, and set up our own experience as a standard to others.

Those that had such a conversion as the jailor, or the Jews; O, say you, we do not like to hear you talk of shaking over hell, we love to hear of conversion by the love of God and of being drawn to him for his great love; while others that were so shaken, as Robert Bolton and other eminent men were, may say, you are not Christians, because you had not the like terrible experience.

You may as well say to your neighbour, you have not had a child, for you were not in labour all night. The question is, whether a real child was born, not how long was the preceding pain; but whether it was productive of a new birth and whether Christ has been formed, that proves the reality of the thing.

## **EZRA, THE READY SCRIBE – A NOTABLE EXAMPLE**

*What follows is a devotional address to the students of the Seminary given a member of our church, and himself a student, on Tuesday 10 September 2019*

**“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10).**

Here, in this seventh chapter of the book of Ezra, we have an introduction to Ezra, the minister of God. It begins with a genealogy, showing his descent from Aaron, Israel’s High Priest and his right therefore to act as a Priest. Yet he is called to minister in a very difficult time – a time of captivity, and in a very difficult place – the country of Babylon. We are told that he was living there and it would appear that he was a man of some importance, for the King of Persia, Artaxerxes, obviously thought highly of him and his God-given wisdom. He is quoted as saying, “And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand...” (verse 25)

Ezra was also a man of very considerable learning: he was a “ready scribe”, skilled in Moses’ Law (verse 6). Babylon, at this time, was famed for its learning and, in particular, for the study of literature and astronomy, but Ezra chose to devote himself to the study of God’s Word, and he evidenced great zeal for the truth in God’s Word. I’ve read that the Jews sometimes referred to Ezra as being ‘a second Moses’ and they say that it was he who collected and collated the copies of the Scripture. Derek Kidner, in his commentary, writes: “it was



he, more than any other man, who stamped Israel with its lasting character as the people of a book”.

Ezra's piety and zeal are perhaps a fulfilment of God's promise to Phinehas, one of Ezra's ancestors, for God once said to him: “Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the children of Israel.” (Num. 25:11-13)

Ezra clearly had a great desire in his heart that Israel should know reformation, that the believers of his day should attain to a better standard of holiness and so become more pleasing unto the Lord. This was why he asked the King if he might return to Jerusalem (verse 6). He sought biblical reformation for his people and spiritual restoration.

In this, he provides for us an inspiring example of how we are to be as the ministers of God. I fear we live in days of great spiritual declension. The church, in general, is not at all what it ought to be. Many are poorly taught and not convinced and convicted of crucial doctrines as they certainly ought to be. Sadly they do not even seem to think much upon the things of God. They do not place high value upon the Word of God: and they do not seriously consider the great essentials of the Faith, such as the Person and Natures of Christ; His redeeming work, accomplished for the elect; and the doctrines of the Church, the Lord's Day, and worship, and we could go on. It seems that we live in such times as Paul spoke of, “they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (2 Tim. 4:2-5).

Well we will spend some time this morning looking to Ezra's example of how we are to be as those called into the ministry; and we will base our thoughts upon verse 10 of this chapter, where we read: “*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments*”.

In God's providence I was given to read this passage the evening before I began at the Seminary here, and it immediately struck me that this verse sums up so well what the Lord has called us to be and do and therefore what we are seeking for in our studies here at the Seminary.

Let us notice at once that Ezra had “*prepared his heart*”.

You see for Ezra, it was more than just a religious interest, and he wasn't simply satisfying his intellect, as the other prominent men in Babylon were doing. He was concerned for the state of his heart. My friends, as ministers, we must have a heart-religion, and such was Ezra's heart that he longed for the Truth and his heart's desire was to know the God of that Truth.

In the pursuit of his studies he wanted to understand more of the mind and will of his God, and to perform and to teach the same. How is it with you this morning? Is it your heart that drives and engages with all your seeking, doing and teaching? Does your heart thirst for the truth of God? May we be careful to guard ourselves against ever slipping into an intellectual pursuit of knowledge. In this sense my friends we are not professionals. True religion must be a matter of the heart. What does Scripture say? “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” (Prov. 4:23)

If we do not have true heart religion, then people will quickly see through our ministry; and we cannot hope that it will ever stir people up to seek the Lord. We must exercise our faith and make good use of the means of grace to keep our hearts warm. We must walk in the full light of the sun each and every day be on guard lest we should slip into a formal, heartless ministry.

Learn from Ezra. He carefully prepared his heart. By this we understand that he sought an experimental knowledge of the Word and indeed an experimental knowledge of the God who gave the Word.

Nothing would distract him from his devotion to these things, his heart was fixed. We get the sense from other verses that preparing of the heart involves the putting away of sin, and the drawing near to God. particularly that of idolatry. In 1 Samuel 7:3, for example, we read, “And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord...”; and again, in 2 Chronicles 19:3, we read: “Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God”.

Ezra knew that his heart must be right before God if he was to be able profitably to seek, do, and teach the Law of the Lord. Indwelling sin had to be repented

of and put away; we must be right with God in order to set ourselves to the proper, devotional study of His Word.

Should we not ask ourselves this morning: Are we fully devoted to the study of these things? Or are our hearts occupied with other things? The apostle Paul wrote: "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all." (1 Tim. 4:15).

This said, let us observe what follows in this verse presently being considered. In the first place, mention is made of "seeking the law of the Lord."

## **Seeking**

Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord. This work 'seek' properly means 'to tread' or 'to frequent', which gives the idea of a pursuit. Ezra seeks the law of the Lord. His desire was to know God's word, and thereby His will. I do not doubt that Ezra would often have been found searching the Scriptures.

He desired to know the Word and the sense of that Word. I'm sure that Ezra would have shared the thoughts of the Psalmist when he said, "O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day." (Ps. 119:97).

Do we have such a love for God's law? Do we seek to know it and to know the meaning of it? Do we study with all devotion and diligence? Are the truths of God all our salvation and all our desire?

We have far more to help us in this than Ezra had in his day and we have the freedom and the time. But do we have the inclination?

May God give us a renewed love for His Holy Word. May we be given to see the immense value of God's Word, and may we seek daily to search it, to find Christ in it, comfort, peace, and joy, in it.

This seeking the law of the Lord takes much reading, but it involve not just reading: it must also involve much prayer for blessing upon our studies. The verse does not say that Ezra prepared his heart to read the law, but to seek the law. True seeking of the Word requires much fervent prayer, that the Lord would give His Holy Spirit to anoint our eyes and to teach us wonderous things from His Word.

May God be our Teacher. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to bless us and to remove the darkness from our eyes and to give us understanding. We can be encouraged when we remember that our God “is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6).

It seems almost too obvious to mention, but it was essential for Ezra first to know, and then to do and teach. We must be persuaded before we minister to others. It is not good to get up and preach on something about which we only know half the truth. We would then be standing on shaky ground. Let us rather have true conviction for all that we bring to our people, let us “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Furthermore, we do not want to be in danger of speaking in error, and so, not just at Seminary, but all our lives long, we must be students of the Word of God, always seeking to know and to learn more.

It is a lifetime of study. And we must be humble as we engage in it that, as we seek the law of the Lord, we may find that previously we have been in ignorance or perhaps seriously mistaken, and we shall need to repent and to be ready to state Truth as it is revealed..

May God stir up our hearts that to have a true desire for His Word, that we may be found truly seeking the law of the Lord with all our hearts,.. that we ourselves may say with the Psalmist, “I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.” (Ps. 119:113), or with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

Mention is next made of “doing” this law.

## **Doing**

It was Ezra’s seeking that inspired his doing. He lived the things that he learned. In this he shows that he put his personal relationship with the Lord first. This is the result of true heart-searching of the Word of God. It brings personal reformation. Ezra’s desire was to know and, knowing, to obey. Dr Joel Beeke writes, “there is no true knowledge where there is no true piety.” We begin, therefore, with ourselves. Obedience to the Word of God is central to the life of the believer. Let us not be those who apply the Word to others, but never to ourselves.

How is your walk with the Lord? Can it be said of you that you are seeking and doing the law of the Lord?

My friends we need to be doing and living the things we learn and especially the things we teach. We must be “doers of the word, and not just hearers only” (James 1:22).

This must always be our priority, that we are living in accordance with God’s Word. As those going into the ministry, our lives must reflect what we teach. Our lives, in a sense, will be on display, and we should not hide from this, remembering what Paul wrote to Timothy, “But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience...” (2 Tim. 3:10).

Your lives as ministers will be closely watched and scrutinised by many, and if we are not genuine, or if we are seen to be living in a way that is contrary to the Truth we teach, then it will do great damage to our ministry. Dr John Owen wrote, “If a man teach uprightly and walk crookedly, more will fall down in the night of his life than he built in the day of his doctrine”. No matter how accurate and wonderful is the doctrine we teach, if we are found to be in great sin, or living in hypocrisy, great damage will be done to our churches.

On the other hand, “A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hands of God.” (Robert Murray McCheyne). John Boys once said, “He doth preach most, that doth live best”. Our people need our own personal holiness. It’s a great responsibility. We must have an experience of the power of the things we preach to others. In 1 Corinthians 9:14, we read, “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel”. I know that this text speaks of the practical support which a minister should receive that he may live of the gospel, but is it not also indicative of our conduct and manner or life, if we preach the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, then we must be living in a way that supports, complements and honours that gospel.

Jonathan Edwards used to say, “I go out to preach with two propositions in mind. First, every person ought to give his life to Christ. Second, whether or not anyone else gives Him his life, I will give Him mine”.

We desire that others would learn and do as we teach, but we must be resolved to lead by example and so to confirm the Truth

We see from the rest of the book of Ezra that this man really did live what he had sought from and found in the law.

In chapter 8, for example, we read that he proclaimed a fast and the he and his company afflicted themselves and besought God for their safe passage, because, in faith, he had not asked the King for a band of soldiers to accompany them, that the king may see that the hand of God was upon them when they did arrive safely.

Also, when he came to Jerusalem and found that many were guilty of taking wives from other nations, he rent his garments, he plucked the hair from his head and beard, and he cried unto the Lord, and this is what he said: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens" (9:6).

See how he counts himself as sinful as the others - "our iniquities". He does not adopt the "holier than thou" attitude but he is humble. His long seeking of the law of the Lord has highlighted his own failings and iniquities and he humbles himself and repents *with the people* for their breaking of God's law.

Then we read that "there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore" (10:1). In the Hebrew that literally reads "they wept a great weeping." You see it was not Ezra's teaching alone which stirred up such repentance and reform in the people, but by God's grace it was his teaching *coupled with his living, his conduct*, that proved a powerful ministry.

Finally, we note that Ezra "taught" them God's states and judgments.

## **Teaching**

Having sought out the truth exemplifying it in his life, he sought to teach his brethren, that they too may know and do.

If we had the time, we could read Nehemiah, chapter 8, and see Ezra reading the book of the law before the people from the morning until midday, and we read that the ears of the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

O that people could be that attentive today, that they might listen attentively to the Word of God from morning until midday. And in verse 8, we read: “So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading”.

Mark that. Ezra did not just read, but he also taught. He expounded what he read, and he was able, by the Holy Spirit, to give the sense and to cause the people to understand the reading. In a way, you could say that his seeking of the law had paid off. He was able to teach, to give people understanding.

When I think of Ezra here in this chapter I think of a verse in Malachi 2:7 “For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.”

If we seek reformation in our day, if we desire to see the personal transformation of sinners, then we must ensure that we faithfully preach the Word of God, for the word of God is sufficient to accomplish much for God’s glory.

We read in Romans 10:14 “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” and again, in Romans 10:17, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”.

Faithful preaching of the word of God is what is needed, that people may know the truth and that the truth would set them free.

And that is why we are here today. It is because God has appointed us to teach and to preach. We are to preach the Word. Preach that which we have sought in the law of the Lord, preach the Truth.

Ezra preached the Word, he gave the sense and caused the people to understand the reading.

The word ‘teach’ here could also mean ‘to goad’, or to correct with a rod. It was not that Ezra was deliberately fierce and harsh but that he was firm on sin

when he saw it. He was not afraid to correct the people, from the Word of God. And that is how we are to be, with meekness and lowliness, yet with firmness at all times. In this, we must not compromise or become men-pleasers. “The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd” (Ecclesiastes. 12:11).

By God’s help we should so speak in order to stir men up to the practice of duty. This may mean that for our preaching, we are not popular, some may take offense whenever we seek to correct them. But may God give us grace to preach the Word of God and the whole counsel of it, ever keeping faithful teaching to what God actually says in His Word, avoiding every error, and every religious fad, and every whim of popular opinion.

Well, I hope you have seen that the order in this verse is very important, Ezra sought, he did, and he taught - in that order. Derek Kidner writes: “With study, conduct and teaching, put deliberately in this right order, each of these was able to function properly at its best: study was saved from unreality, conduct from uncertainty, and teaching from insincerity and shallowness”.

But, as we conclude, it will be an encouragement for us to remember that Ezra did not do these things in his own strength. How could he? We know that left to ourselves we could not truly seek the law of the Lord, and do it, and teach it. No, Ezra was enabled of God, and we are left in no doubt about this because six times in chapters 7 and 8 we read that “the hand of the Lord” or “the hand of God” was upon him (7:6,9,28; 8:18,22,31).

May the good hand of our God be upon us to enable us to serve him faithfully in all these ways.

## **THE KILLING TIMES (1679 – 1688)**

**Dr. A. McCaig**

### **John Brown of Priesthill (c.1627-1685)**

I suppose most of you have heard or read something of the troublous times in Scotland, over 200 years ago, called the days of the Covenanters. The story of John Brown is a story of those “dark days” which perhaps you have not all heard, in any case it will bear retelling.



You know at that time the King and the great men tried to make all the people Episcopalians. Bishops and Curates were appointed to the different parishes, and the services carried on according to the Prayer-Book of the Church of England. Now the Scotch people were nearly all sturdy Presbyterians; they didn't believe in Bishops and Prayer Books; they thought that Episcopacy, or Prelacy, as it was generally called, was very near akin to Popery (and, do you know, I think they were not very far wrong), and ever since the time of brave old John Knox the Scotch had had a perfect hatred of Popery. But even if Episcopacy had been the best possible form of religion, it was not right to force it upon people who did not believe in it. So, these Scotch folk thought; and, as they believed they ought to worship God according to their own understanding of His Word, they would not be made Episcopalians for all the Kings, and Bishops, and Curates in the world.

Of course, there were some people who did not care much about religion at all, who were quite willing to believe and worship as the King told them; and there were even some ministers who were ready to change their faith at the word of the King, and who became Episcopalian clergymen, and some of them even rose to be Bishops. But most of the Ministers refused to go against their conscience, and so they were turned out of their churches and their homes; and very many of the people were of the same mind and refused to have anything to do with the new clergymen and their services. All those who were, of this way of thinking were called Covenanters, because they had signed a document called the Solemn League and Covenant; in which they bound themselves to follow the Word of God and to have nothing to do with Popery in any form. The Covenanters from time to time were terribly persecuted, thousands of them being butchered.

About the time that the persecution was raging very fiercely, the man John Brown lived in the parish of Muirkirk, in Ayrshire. The name of his farm was Priesthill, and so he was known as John Brown of Priesthill. Besides farming he was also engaged in business as a Carrier and, being a very godly man, he was known as the "Christian Carrier." Of course, John Brown was a true-blue Covenanter, and was greatly loved by all the people of the neighbourhood. John's wife died and left him with a little daughter named Janet, and after a time he got a new mother for his little girl - he married an

earnest Christian woman named Isabel Weir. The marriage ceremony was performed by one of the Covenanting ministers, named Alexander Peden, who was a very wonderful man. Many strange stories are told about him: He spent a great part of his time in the mountains and moors hiding from the wicked soldiers and preaching to the poor people as he had an opportunity. Many of his sayings seemed like prophecies, and things happened as he foretold in a wonderful way.

Well, Alexander Peden married John Brown and Isabel Weir, and after the marriage, which for security took place in a glen, Peden took Isabel aside and said to her, "Isabel, you have got a good man to be your husband, but you will not enjoy him long; prize his company, and keep linen by you for his winding-sheet, for you will need it when you are not looking for it, and it will be a bloody one."

This was in 1682. Three years afterwards James II, who had just come to the throne, resolved to take harsher measures with the Covenanters, and he found one who was ready to do any deed of blood, John Graham, of Claverhouse, who is known to this day as "Bloody Claver house."

When Graham came into the district where Brown lived, he soon heard of the piety and conformity of the carrier. So, on the 1st of May, 1685, he with three troops of dragoons to the farm of Priesthill, which he reached as early as six o'clock in the morning. John Brown had risen with the dawn, and, after family worship, had gone out to his business on the farm, when Claverhouse and his soldiers came upon him and surrounded him. They led him down towards his house, and little Janet, then about eight years old, seeing them ran to tell her mother that a band of soldiers were coming down the hill with her father. Mrs. Brown, crying out, "The thing that I feared is come upon me; O give me grace for this hour," wrapped her baby boy in a plaid, and holding him in one arm, and leading Janet by the hand, went out to meet them.

Then Claverhouse asked John Brown why he did not attend the Curate's services; he replied that he "acknowledged only Christ as the supreme Head of the Church, and could not attend the Curate's because they were placed

there contrary Christ's law, and were mere creatures of the bishops, as the bishops were creatures of the king.”

“Go to your prayers,” cried Claverhouse, “for you shall immediately die.” Right well did John Brown know how to pray, and, falling on his knees, he prayed for his wife and children so earnestly and tenderly that even the stern soldiers were greatly softened. Then he asked his wife if she were willing to part with him, since his life was to be given as a witness to Christ. The brave woman said, “Heartily willing.” “This is all I ask for,” said John, “ ‘O death, where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory?’ ” Then he kissed his wife and boy, and afterwards kissed little Janet, saying to her, “My sweet bairn, give your hand to God as your guide, and be your mother’s comfort.”

Meanwhile Claverhouse ordered six of his Dragoons to shoot the good man, but they had been so impressed by his prayer that they refused to obey their cruel Commander, but, so ferocious was he, that, snatching a pistol from his belt, he himself shot the faithful follower of Jesus through the head. All the soldiers were horrified, but Claverhouse jeeringly asked Isabel, as she bent over her murdered husband, what she thought of her husband now? She gave the memorable answer, “I thought aye muckle guid o’m, but noo mair than ever” (which is, being interpreted, “I always thought much good of him, but now more than ever”).

I well remember, when a little boy, looking with interest and awe at the pictures in a book containing sketches of the Covenanters, which my mother treasured as something beyond price; but of all the pictures none impressed me more than that of the dead body of John Brown stretched on the sward (the expanse of short grass), and his kneeling wife gathering his scattered brains together and covering the dead corpse with her plaid (a tartan cloth worn over the shoulder)..

I have not space to tell how the people gathered together and lamented for the martyr, and comforted his widow and little ones, how together they sang the 27th Psalm, and in the dead of night, on the very spot where he fell, made a grave wherein they laid the mortal part of saintly John Brown of Priesthill.

Sometime afterwards, the following rough lines were graven on a stone which marked the spot:-

*“In Death’s cold Bed the dusty part here lies,  
Of one who did the Earth as dust despise.  
Here in this place from Earth he took Departure;  
Now he has got the Garland of the Martyr.  
Butchered by Claver’s and his bloody Band,  
Raging most Rav’nously o’er all the Land,  
Only for owning Christ’s Supremacy,  
Wickedly wrong’d by encroaching Tyranny:  
Nothing how near soever be too Good,  
Esteem’d, nor Dear for any Truth his Blood.”*

It may interest you to know that some of the descendants of this worthy man are still living, and one of them is known by name to many of you, and is a very welcome visitor at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and a dear friend of its Pastor (Mr Spurgeon) – I refer to Mr. Hugh D. Brown, M.A., the honoured Pastor of the Harcourt Street Baptist Chapel, Dublin.

Now don’t you think the name of John Brown of Priesthill is worthy to be honoured and held in everlasting remembrance? I hope you, young people, will feel, when you read such stories, that the glorious gospel for which so many brave witnesses have laid down their lives ought to be highly prized by us? We ought to feel that that for which so many have willingly died is worthy the devotion of our life. I hope you will all take the advice which this good brave man gave to his little girl, “Give your hand to God as your guide,” and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Friend, ever hold fast to His truth.

### **Andrew Hislop: The Eskdalemuir Martyr**

Andrew Hislop was the son of a widow, a good Christian woman and a friend of the persecuted Covenanters. Andrew was about 16 years of age, and he had early learned to love his mother’s Saviour. One bleak, cold day a poor wandering Covenanter – a Cameronian he was called, because a follower of Richard Cameron, who had fallen in battle against the persecuting soldiers – came to Mrs. Hislop’s cottage door and craved for shelter from his pursuers. Mrs. Hislop had a kindly heart, so she took the poor man in and fed him and

cared for him, but before long he died. She knew well that if her Christly deed should be found out she would have to suffer for it; so in the dead of night, assisted by her son Andrew, she had the body taken out and buried in a field. Not long after the grave was discovered, and the widow Hislop's part in the matter was also found out. The dragoons were sent to inflict punishment; they stripped the house of all its contents and then rased it to the ground; and poor Mrs. Hislop and her children became homeless wanderers, hiding in the hills and moors as best they could.

One dark day Claverhouse and his rough men came upon Andrew and made him a prisoner. Claverhouse did not proceed to act as he had done in the case of John Brown. He seems to have been desirous to pay some respect to the forms of justice, so he brought the young lad to the residence of a notorious persecutor, Sir James Johnstone, Laird of Wetherall. This man had at one time been a Covenanter himself, but he had renounced the faith and become one of the bitterest enemies of the people of God. He was now in great authority, and before him Andrew Hislop was put upon his trial. But there was really no trial in the true sense. Without delay Johnstone passed sentence of death upon him, and told Claverhouse to carry out the sentence. But, bad as Claverhouse was, he seems to have been touched with some feeling of pity in this case. The youth of Andrew perhaps made him hesitate, and it was thought, too, that his conscience had troubled him a good deal about the murder of good John Brown, which had taken place less than a fortnight before this. But the Laird of Wetherall had nocompunctions, and insisted that the youth should be put to death.

Then Claverhouse ordered three of his dragoons to fire. When the guns were loaded and presented, he told Andrew to draw his bonnet over his eyes; but instead of doing so he stood with Bible in hand, and pushing up his bonnet above his brow he said, "I can look you in the face. I have done nothing of which I need to be ashamed. But how will you look in that day when you shall be judged by what is written in this Book?" Then these brutal men fired their muskets, and, faithful, fearless, Andrew Hislop fell dead, a true martyr in the cause of Christ.

I wonder how many of us could have been as brave. It is easy to sing, "Stand up for Jesus," and mean it, when our friends love the Saviour and encourage us to confess Him, and when, at worst, we have only to meet with a sneer and a jeer from our companions, though I grant these are sometimes hard to bear; but what moral courage was needed to confess Christ in the face of such a fearful death!

Andrew's courage came to him through the Book which he so greatly prized, that Book which had taught him to love the Saviour and to be "faithful unto death." And his was the courage of a heart at rest, a conscience clear. He knew that he was serving Christ, doing the will of God, and so he could look his persecutors in the face and say, "I have done nothing of which I need to be ashamed." The man of woman, the boy or girl who trusts Christ and is true to Him has nothing of which to be ashamed, and they can look death in the face without flinching.

Andrew believed in the whole Book. He was persuaded that a judgement day was coming when these cruel men would have to answer for their deeds. That day is coming to all of us, and not only will those who have persecuted the followers of Christ not be able to look Him in the face, but those who have not trusted Him as their personal Saviour will also be put to confusion.

It is only when through faith in Jesus we can look forward to the judgement without fear, knowing that Christ has put away our sin, that we can look difficulties, dangers and death in the face unabashed. And knowing that Christ has saved us with a full salvation, and is so worthy of our love and homage, we ought to be prepared always to confess Him. Certainly, in confessing Christ, we are doing nothing of which we need be ashamed. Rather, as the great C. H. Spurgeon used to say, "we ought to be ashamed of being ashamed of Jesus."

May none of my young readers be ashamed of Jesus now; may they all live by the Book of God, and at last be acknowledged by Christ before men; may they be able to look into His dear face and find their Heaven there for evermore.

*The Sword & the Trowel, 1905*

# EPILOGUE

*“Praise ye the LORD.”*

The Hebrew word “Hallelujah” is translated “Praise ye the LORD”. This phrase occurs a number of times in the Book of Psalms and elsewhere in Scripture. The numerous repetitions in the Psalms of this Hebrew word surely shows how important it is to praise our God and Saviour in our worship and lives. This exhortation is not just confined to the Psalms and the theme of praising the Lord is one recurring throughout the whole of the Bible.

When scripture uses the name LORD in capitals, it is a translation of the word Jehovah. This name was revealed to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3 and reveals God to be a covenant keeping God.

We should praise God when we consider the wonders of His creation. He created, out of nothing, the earth, sun, moon and stars; the sea and the land, mountains, hills and valleys; all plant and animal life including ourselves. The marvels, variety and complexity of creation are still being discovered by scientists, but we must give God all the glory.

We should praise God for the redemption of His chosen people. God planned our redemption before the world was formed, God the Father entering into a covenant with God the Son to save a people from eternal damnation. The Bible reveals the story beginning in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. In the fulness of time Christ was born into this world, and though without sin, suffered at Calvary the wrath of God for our sins, so that we might be clothed in His righteousness for eternity. The enormity of this undertaking by God the Son, for us, is almost incomprehensible. The only response we can have is to Praise our Lord.

Christ will come again at the end of time to receive us into heaven so that we may behold His eternal glory. We will then be enabled to worship Him as we should, praising the Lord for all eternity. Let us begin to praise the Lord while we live, for this is pleasing to God, who inspired the writers of the Scripture so frequently to write “Hallelujah”, ‘Praise ye the Lord.’

*Bill Norton*