

STUDIES 1 - 10

STUDENT MANUAL

Stephen Nemeth Lectures

Cornerstones Of Christianity

Studies 1 - 10

Student Manual

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Stephen Nemeth Lectures

THE GREATEST VERSE IN THE BIBLE

STUDY 1

Scripture Portion (NIV): John 3:16

Which is the greatest verse in the Bible? Many Christians would say without hesitation that it is -

John 3:16 -

Perhaps there are two reasons for this.

First - no other verse is so full of the gospel. In just twenty-six words it gives a complete survey and declaration of God's provision and plan for the salvation of men and women!

Second - no other single verse of scripture has led so many people to the assurance of salvation in Christ.

If you read the verse though carefully you will be struck by the simplicity and clarity of the truth it contains. Here, in one verse, is a synopsis of the gospel. In our English translation of the Bible, the word 'gospel' is actually spelled out in that verse.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and Only Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not Perish but have Eternal Life."

In today's world, we have grown accustomed to an excessive use of superlatives. This detergent produces the *cleanest* cloths. That car features the *newest* technology. A certain airline carries the *greatest* number of passengers. This store guarantees the *lowest* prices..... What exaggerations!

But, there is no exaggeration when we say that **John 3:16** is the *greatest* verse in the Bible. Let me demonstrate this to you.

1. THE GREATEST POSSIBLE LOVE.

Notice how the verse begins - '*For God so loved the world.....*'

A gypsy friend of mine, a radiant Christian, once met a man who told her he did not believe God loved him.

He went on to say, "If you can show me in black and white that God loves me, then I will

believe it.”

She replied, “I *can* show you in black and white that God loves you. Here it is!” She pointed to **John 3:16** in her New Testament. There it was - black print on white paper!

God’s love is the greatest possible love for two reasons.

It is divine love.

It is *God* who ‘*so loved the world.*’ Human love can be very wonderful, as many of us know. The love of father, mother, husband, wife or child can enrich our whole lives. Yet, all human love is imperfect.

But God’s love is pure and holy. Indeed, God IS love. It is, therefore, no exaggeration to say that His love is the greatest love in the world because -

It is love for everyone!

God loves ‘*the world!*’ We do not love everybody, but God does. We do not really love those who commit terrible crimes or who are cruel to little children. But God loves everyone, though He does not love their sin.

He loves people of every nation and color, whether they are old or young, rich or poor. He loves the world, as I learned very early in life when my parents taught me to sing -

I am so glad that our Father in heaven
Tells of His love in the book He has given;
Wonderful things in the Bible I see,
This is the dearest, that Jesus loves me.

When we read that ‘*God so loved the world*’ we are reading about the greatest possible love.

2. THE GREATEST POSSIBLE GIFT.

Notice how the verse goes on - ‘*that He gave His one and only Son.....*’ God could not give a greater gift than this. His love for mankind expressed itself in the gift of His Son, His only Son.

This was the greatest possible gift that God could bestow upon us, for two reasons.

1. He gave His very own Son.

It was not an angel, not some other exalted being, but *His very own Son* whom He gave.

Galatians 4:4-5 -

What a tremendous statement!

It is a plain declaration that God planned in eternity past to give His Son for the salvation of men and women, and that He did this when the fulness of His time came. That was the depth of His love for us!

b. It was His one and only Son.

The second reason for saying that God gave us the greatest possible gift, is that Jesus, the Son whom God gave, was '*His one and only Son.*' This description of the Lord Jesus is mentioned only by the apostle John.

It refers to the unique Person of our Lord, to His eternal Sonship, to His oneness with the Father.

God had only one Son, and He gave Him!

What a gift! Surely this was the greatest gift of all, the greatest possible gift.

I am reminded of our Lord's parable of the landowner who rented his vineyard to some farmers then went away on a journey. Then -

Matthew 21:34-39 -

This is a picture of what happened to God's Son when He came into the world to be our Saviour. See how Paul describes it in -

Philippians 2:6-8

What a gift for God to make, especially when He knew how His Son would be treated!

3. THE GREATEST POSSIBLE PLAN.

Our text goes on: "*that whoever believes in Him.....*"

Here we begin to see God's clearly revealed plan, His method for the salvation of men and women. We are saved by believing, that is, by trusting the Saviour to save us.

This is the greatest possible plan for man's salvation for two reasons.

1. Believe and trust.

We all know what it means to believe and trust. We do it all the time. We look in the paper to see what time the church service is to start. We believe what we read. We arrive at the church and find that our faith has been justified!

So God has chosen a method of salvation that is easy for everyone. All we have to do is to exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as we exercise faith in the doctor and trust him to give the right treatment, prescribe the right medicines; or just as we deposit money at the bank and trust for its safe keeping, so now we are to trust the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is well able to save us. We are to rely upon Him to do just that.

2. All of us can believe on and trust in the Lord Jesus.

The second reason why God's plan for saving men and women is the greatest plan that could be conceived is that *all of us* can believe on and trust in the Lord Jesus.

If salvation cost money, some of us might not be able to afford it.

If we had to produce a certain number of good works then some of us could not do this and others might have an unfair advantage due to their environment or circumstances.

But, we can all put our trust in the Lord Jesus. We can all take Him at His word. We can all listen to what He says and believe that He will do what He says.

These are His words -

John 5:24 -

If you have never done this, you can do it right now!

4. THE GREATEST POSSIBLE DELIVERANCE.

We go on to read the words '*shall not perish....*'

Here is a solemn warning: if you do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you are perishing. You are perishing now. You will remain in this state for as long as you do not believe on Him.

It means that you are separated from God. You are spiritually dead. You are under condemnation. You are passing on towards a Christless eternity, which the Bible calls

hell.

You may not feel this or even believe it, but *God says it*.

The fact is that we are all sinners. All of us have come short of God's perfect standard.

Romans 3:23 -

We must *repent* of our sins, turning to God and asking His forgiveness. Have you done this? God does not want you to perish. This is what **John 3:16** is all about. God is not willing that any should perish. That is, He does not desire the death of a sinner.

Salvation through trusting the Lord Jesus is the greatest possible deliverance for two reasons.

1. It offers immediate safety here and now in this life.

b. It offers eternal security.

When you come to the end of this life, when you die and go out into eternity, if you are trusting the Saviour, you will go immediately into the presence of the Lord Himself. The moment you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you 'get into the lifeboat' which is Christ Himself.

It takes place immediately you believe. You are absolutely safe from that moment on, for this lifeboat cannot sink. When you die, or when the Lord Jesus comes again for His own, you get safely to the heavenly shore.

What a deliverance this is!

There is one more truth in this verse. What is it?

5. THE GREATEST POSSIBLE POSSESSION.

This greatest verse in the Bible concludes with these words '*.....have eternal life.*'

Think of it *eternal life* is offered to people who are -

Ephesians 2:1 -

and who are, thereby, separated from God!

Everlasting life is surely the greatest possible possession for two reasons.

a. *Its quantity.*

It is, as the verse says, everlasting, eternal, unending. But it is also the greatest possible possession because of -

2. Its quality.

That is, because of what this life is. It is divine life. It is *the very life of God*.

Ponder these words -

1 John 5:11-12 -

Well, I have eternal life. I have received this new life, and I know it! I have this life in the Person of my Lord, who is my Saviour and in whom is all my trust. I have got this life. *I have got Him!*

Have you? If not will you put your name in **John 3:16** now?

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that

(who) believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

Signed by me on _____(date).

CAN I BE SURE?

STUDY 2

Scripture Portion (NIV): 1 John 5:13

1 John 5:13 -

How wonderful to *know* - to know that you have eternal life!

Some years ago I received a letter from a friend, at the end of which he had added a postscript: "Is it not grand to be saved and to *know* it!" Well, it certainly is and I am profoundly thankful that I know it!

Do you?

It is quite clear from the Bible that it is God's will that we should be *safe*, for we read that -

2 Peter 3:9 -

He also says -

John 10:28 -

But it is equally clear from the Bible that God not only wants us to be safe; He wants us to be *sure*. He wants us to know without the shadow of a doubt that we have received eternal life, that our sins have been forgiven and that we are safe for all eternity.

The fact remains, however, that thousands of Christians lack the assurance of their salvation. Their language is something like that of the little girl who was traveling in a lift from the beach to the top of the cliff. She was heard to say "I know we will get to the top all right, but I am frightened that we will not!"

This is the attitude of many of God's people. They know they belong to the Lord and that He will never let them go. Yet they are fearful that, after all, they might not reach the top!

These good folk love John Newton's hymn -

'Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;
Do I love the Lord, or no?
Am I His, or am I not?

People who sing those words live in Doubting Castle! God never meant His own children to be full of doubts and uncertainty, especially concerning the matter of their soul's salvation.

If we lack the assurance of salvation, our testimony will be stifled; our service will be spoiled; our growth will be stunted. We shall know little of the joy of the Lord and -

Philippians 4:7 -

In other words, our Christian experience will be a most unsatisfactory and burdensome thing. We shall be very little use as servants of the Lord. Some people, though, think it is a great presumption for anyone to say that he knows he is saved.

Many years ago, Dr. Alexander Maclaren said, "The sin of the world is false confidence, a careless taking for granted that a man is a Christian when he is not. The fault, sorrow and weakness of the church is a false diffidence, an anxious fear whether a man be a Christian when he is."

The early Christians had no doubts at all about their salvation. Listen to Paul -

Romans 5:1 -

Ephesians 1:7 -

2 Timothy 1:12 -

Listen to John -

1 John 2:12 -

1 John 3:14 -

The one condition of salvation is faith in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. We learn this from such scriptures as -

John 3:16 -

John 5:24 -

Acts 16:30-31 -

Romans 1:16 -

In each of these verses salvation is spoken of as the present possession of those who "believe." Let me give you three reasons why I, as a believer, know for certain that I am saved.

6. HIS WORK *FOR* ME MAKES ME SURE.

My salvation depends entirely upon what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for me.

Upon a life I did not live,
Upon a death I did not die,
Another's life, Another's death,
I stake my whole eternity.

My feelings may change a thousand times, but the fact that the One in Whom I am trusting has shed His blood for me can never change.

The Lord Jesus Christ, in His death upon the cross of Calvary, fulfilled all the requirements of the broken law, the law which I had broken. Therefore, the law can have no claim on me whatsoever. I have already passed out of death into life. I shall never come into condemnation. The words of Jesus Himself assure me of this.

John 5:24 -

If you will turn in your Bible to **Exodus 12**, where we have the record of the institution of the Passover, you will read that God said -

Exodus 12:13 -

As I gaze by faith at the wounds of my Saviour, and trust in His atoning blood, I know that I am every bit as safe in Christ as the Israelites were in their homes when the blood of the Passover lamb had been put on the doorposts.

I need no other argument,
I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.

Romans 8:1 -

7. HIS WORD *TO* ME MAKES ME SURE.

Let us visit one of those homes in Egypt on the Passover night. Let us speak to the father who is inside with his family gathered around him.

“Are you saved?” we ask. “Yes!” he says. “When the destroying angel comes, thank God we shall all be saved!”

“You seem very sure about it!” we comment, to which he replies, “Yes, indeed we are. We have every reason to be sure. We have put the blood on the posts of the door,

according to the word of the Lord. We know, therefore, that all is well. Listen to what He said -

Exodus 12:13 -

Was it presumption on the part of the father to rest back in calm assurance upon the word of God? No! It would have been a greater presumption had he doubted God's word.

The blood of Christ makes us safe. The word of God makes us sure.

If I have received the Lord Jesus as my Saviour, I *am* a child of God -

John 1:12 -

If I have truly believed on the Lord Jesus, I *have* eternal life and will never perish because -

John 3:16 -

If I have really come to the Saviour, if I am trusting Him alone for salvation, then He *has* received me because -

John 6:37 -

If I have accepted the Lord Jesus, then I *have* eternal life because -

1 John 5:12 -

This truth is very aptly illustrated in a poem which was found written on the back of an old one pound Bank of Ireland note.

It read -

This piece of paper in your hand
Declares to you that on demand
You twenty shillings shall receive:
This simple promise you believe,
It sets your mind as much at rest
As though the money you possessed.

So Christ, Who died but now doth live,
Doth unto you this promise give -
That if on Him you will believe,
Eternal life you shall receive.
Upon the first you calmly rest:
Which is the safer? Which the best?
The bank may break, heaven never can;
'Tis safer trusting God than man!

Is it a greater presumption to believe what God says or to doubt what God says?

3. HIS WITNESS IN ME MAKES ME SURE.

This witness is twofold.

1. The witness of the Holy Spirit.

The moment we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and accept Him as our own personal Saviour, the Holy Spirit enters our hearts to live there forever.

Romans 8:16 -

Galatians 4:6 -

Yes, I know I am saved because of the inward assurance given to me by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.

You cannot understand it? Neither can I, but, praise the Lord, I know it is true!

If one should ask of me how can I tell:
Glory to Jesus, I *know* very well!
God's Holy Spirit with mine doth agree,
Constantly witnessing Jesus loves me!

2. The witness of a changed life.

2 Corinthians 5:17 -

Many things I used to love I now hate. Before I became a Christian, I craved for pleasure. I had no real love for the things of God, for the Bible, for prayer or attendance at church.

But, when I trusted Christ as my Saviour, something wonderful happened! My affections and desires were completely turned around! I no longer craved for the worldly excitements, but found my greatest satisfaction in the Bible and in meeting with God's people.

This was a miracle! But this is what happens when a man is saved and really comes to know the Lord for himself. He becomes a new person altogether. This happened to me. I knew then, as I know now, that, by His infinite grace, the Lord Jesus had saved me.

Your soul's salvation! That is the one thing above everything else that you need to be absolutely sure about. *Are you sure?*

John 9:25 -

Have you this assurance?

NOTES

FORMULA FOR ADEQUACY

STUDY 3

Scripture Portion (NIV) Isaiah, 41:10

One of the things we need every day of our lives is adequacy. Adequacy may be defined as the ability to endure the strains and stresses of life.

I want to give you a formula for adequacy, one taken from the Bible. It is not *my* word, therefore, but *God's* word to you and to me. It is -

Isaiah 41:10 -

I think you will agree that this is a great word from the Lord to every one of us!

Sometime ago I met a friend of mine, a man who has experienced much trouble in his life. I said to him, "Give me a thought from God's word!"

"Certainly!" he replied. "**Isaiah 41:10**. Do you know it?"

"Yes," I said. "It goes like this, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed....."

"Oh, not so fast!" interrupted my friend. "You must not race through it like that. Think of it like this:

"Do not fear....."

- that is **Sunday's** word.

"For I am with you....."

- that is **Monday's** word.

"Do not be dismayed....."

- that is **Tuesday's** word.

"For I am your God....."

- that is **Wednesday's** word.

"I will strengthen you....."

- that is **Thursday's** word.

"I will help you....."

- that is **Friday's** word.

"I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

- that is **Saturday's** word.

Is not that wonderful?"

Here is a formula for adequacy. Here is God's word to you and to me for each day of the

week. It is exactly what I need and exactly what you need too. It is a kind of doctor's prescription handed to us to give us strength, support, encouragement and hope for the day - and for every day.

And the doctor who gives us this prescription is the Great Physician, the Lord God Himself!

O course, a prescription is of very little use unless it is acted upon! The prescription enables us to obtain the remedy. The remedy must then be applied or taken. Only then does it start to do any good.

It is just like this with God's formula for adequacy. If we seek His help, He will surely give it. But, we must *act upon* what He says. We must not only be hearers of His word to us, but doers of it.

James 1:22 -

I do not know what day of the week it is when you are reading this, whether it is Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday or Saturday, but just think for a few moments about this formula for adequacy.

SUNDAY'S WORD IS "DO NOT FEAR....."

Do you not agree that this word comes right down to the point of our need? At one time or another, every one of us is gripped by fear. But God knows all about our fears. This word for Sunday is, in fact, a command. "Do not fear." He says, "Do not be afraid!" He can command that because He is able to banish our fears; with the command comes His enabling.

Are you gripped by some particular fear at this moment? Sunday's word is, "Do not fear!" Let the Lord free you from it. He can free you gloriously. Have you ever noticed how frequently God tells us in the Bible not to be afraid? "Do not fear!"

The constant repetition should be all the proof we need that He wants to set us free from our fears and that He can do it. He can free you from fear as He did the psalmist, who said -

Psalm 34:4 -

So, Sunday's word is "Do not fear!"

2. MONDAY'S WORD IS "FOR I AM WITH YOU....."

This is **why** we need not fear: the Lord is with us!

Psalm 23:4 -

I will not fear anything! Why?

Because the Lord Jesus Himself is with me on Sunday, or better still, on Monday fear just has to go. Fear is banished.

"Do not fear, for I am with you....." Sunday's word overflows in blessing to Monday. God has said -

Hebrews 13:5 -

So we say with confidence -

Hebrews 13:6 -

When you think about it, if the Lord Himself really is with you, how **can** you remain fearful? The realized presence of Christ is the secret of release from fear. My Lord is with me! And, because He is, I need not be afraid.

Yes, Monday's word is: "For I am with you."

3. TUESDAY'S WORD IS "DO NOT BE DISMAYED....."

This can quite legitimately be translated, "Do not be discouraged!" Discouragement is one of the prevailing maladies today. Discouragement always comes from the devil whose aim is to get us down and keep us down.

But, we need not be discouraged. God loves us very much and cares intimately for us. He reaches down from heaven, as it were, and says to us "Do not be discouraged! Do not lose heart!" Yes, it is God Himself Who says this. I am reminded of -

1 Samuel 30:6 (AV) - *And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.*

Maybe, as you read these lines, this is the very word of encouragement you need. Is it? Well, take it from the Lord Himself. "Do not be dismayed!" Take that for Tuesday!

4. WEDNESDAY'S WORD IS "FOR I AM YOUR GOD....."

If God, the Almighty One, is **our** God, and if He is with us, does not it put all our fears and problems into a new perspective? “I am **your** God!”

If you are bruised and battered, or even if you have been broken in the trials and testings of life, take this word from the Lord right now and realize how personal it is. Say to Him, “Thank You, Lord, for this word! I accept it from You. I take it now as Your word just to me!”

The important thing to notice is that it is not the believer who is saying to the Lord, “Lord, You are mine!” but it is the Lord saying to the believer, “I am yours!”

So, however fearful or uncertain you may feel, if you are a Christian (that is, you have put your trust in the Lord Jesus as your personal Saviour) He gives you this firm assurance. He says, “I am your God!” Let me ask you: what more could you want?

Well, that is Wednesday’s word. But there is more to follow.

5. THURSDAY’S WORD IS “I WILL STRENGTHEN YOU.....”

Sometimes after I have preached, one of my friends has said, “The Lord supported you again today!” Yes. He does just that, and not only when we are preaching but when we are facing the demands of ordinary everyday living He gives His gracious and wonderful enabling. He says -

2 Corinthians 12:9 -

And it is!

I can testify to that. I have proved it to be true again and again in my own experience. I have met countless other Christians who have proved the same, that God’s strength has been made perfect in their weakness.

The power of Christ has rested upon them and, like Paul, they have been able to say -

2 Corinthians 12:10 -

If you are in special need of strength right now, take this word, Thursday’s word, from the Lord. To you He says, “I will strengthen you!”

6. FRIDAY’S WORD IS “I WILL HELP YOU.....”

Have you ever noticed those wonderful words that say that the Holy Spirit helps us -

Romans 8:26 -

I know the immediate reference is to prayer, but we must not confine the application of this glorious truth to the matter of prayer alone. The fact is, we are weak and strengthless in ourselves, but the Lord comes alongside us, indeed He comes inside us, to strengthen us. He says to us "I will help you!"

Do you need His special help at this very moment? Is it perhaps some physical need or a need connected with your home or business? Is it a loved one who is ill or in trouble? Or is it that you yourself lack the assurance of God's love and forgiveness?

Well the Lord is with you right now to help you. He will do just that if you will give your whole situation and your whole anxiety over to Him. "Yes," He says, "I will help you!"

And God always means what He says. He will certainly help you. That is Friday's word.

7. SATURDAY'S WORD IS "I WILL UPHOLD YOU WITH MY RIGHTEOUS RIGHT HAND."

I can say that I am absolutely safe for time and eternity! Does that sound presumptuous? No. It is *not* presumptuous, for MY GOD is holding me and He is upholding me!

Read these wonderful words of Jesus -

John 10:27-29 -

How completely safe and secure I am. So are you if you are one of His sheep! Absolutely safe and secure!

Are you one of His sheep? Do you belong to Him?

Well, there is God's formula for adequacy to cover every day of the week, every week of the year, and every year of life itself.

“Do not fear.....”
- that is **Sunday**’s word.
“For I am with you.....”
- that is **Monday**’s word.
“Do not be dismayed.....”
- that is **Tuesday**’s word.
“For I am your God.....”
- that is **Wednesday**’s word.
“I will strengthen you.....”
- that is **Thursday**’s word.
“I will help you.....”
- that is **Friday**’s word.
“I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.
- that is the word for **Saturday!**

One final thing: go through **Isaiah 41:10** again and notice how very personal it is.

Notice the words: “I,” “you,” “I,” “your,” “I,” “you,” “you,” “I,” “you,” “my.”

In other words, it is all between the Lord Himself and you, just you!

So take Him at His word now.

Thank Him for His formula for adequacy.

Tell Him that, by His grace, you are going to begin to live in the good of what He has said!

And before you put this booklet down, read the following verses.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say, than to you He hath said, -
To you, who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

“Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, I will still give thee aid;
I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand.

“E’en down to old age all My people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And then, when grey hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne.”

NOTES

MONDAY MORNING PARABLE

STUDY 4

Scripture Portion (AV): Mark 4:1, 2 and 9

Mark 4:1-2 -

Mark 4:9 -

In these words from the fourth chapter of Mark's gospel, we read about our Lord's favorite method of teaching, namely, by telling parables, that is, earthly stories about people, animals, places and things, with a heavenly meaning.

In this brief message, I want to do the same thing; to tell you about an earthly story which enforces some spiritual lessons.

We had a 'tragedy' in our house one Monday morning, at least, any housewife would regard it as a tragedy.

It was quite unexpected and, when it fell upon us, it was not so much that it was serious as that it was completely exasperating and frustrating. It was all the more trying because it happened on a Monday morning.

I will tell you what happened. Just as my wife had finished a big wash and had hung the whole of it upon a long line, the whole lot, like Humpty Dumpty, fell down!

It was not that the line broke, but the tree which had been used as a post for at least thirteen years broke off eighteen inches from the ground.

The reason? It was completely rotten. In fact, it was a wonder that it had not broken off before.

The Lord spoke to me through all this. He gave me a "Monday Morning Parable." Let me share it with you.

What are the lessons we learn from this incident?

It is gloriously possible to engage in praise and thanksgiving, even in the midst of the most adverse circumstances.

Here was a test indeed - a whole morning's effort in the dirt! What is one's natural reaction to a happening of this kind? Surely it is to be irritated and filled with complaint. Indeed, some people might even swear.

But surely this is not God's way. Therefore, it is not necessary to react in this way. Listen to this.

Philippians 4:4-7 -

“But,” you may say, “is it possible to rejoice and to be under the control of the Holy Spirit in the midst of a trying experience and not be anxious but be filled with thanksgiving and the peace of God?”

Yes! It is possible. I know it is possible: first, because the Lord commands it; second, because I have seen it happening. For example, look at the following testimony.

Habbakuk 3:17-18 -

Whatever happens to us, God's grace is sufficient. If the washing falls down and the neighbors look over the garden fence and see that our reaction is the kind of reaction which commends the gospel, what a testimony that is. By the way, Jesus said -

Mark 4:9 -

It is often helpful to take a comparative view of the things which happen to us.

Frequently we wear ourselves out by fretting and fuming over the little things that happen to us day by day, that is to say, comparatively little things.

I am not denying the fact that the washing episode was most trying, but it was a trivial matter compared with other things that were happening to other people. In fact, we have forgotten it now.

Only that morning, two hours before the washing fell down, we received a letter from a loved one telling of a member of our family circle who was seriously ill in hospital. How trivial the washing episode was in the light of that! This is not just worldly philosophy, for the writer to the Hebrews says -

Hebrews 12:3-4 -

The other day I was fretting because my eyes were not at ease and my glasses did not seem to suit me. Then there was a ring at the door bell. It was a blind man asking for a gift for the work among the blind folk in our district.

“I had the blues
Because I had no shoes,
Until upon the street
I met a man who had no feet.”

No. This is not worldly philosophy. This is something that the Lord would say to us concerning our reactions to the things that happen to us.

“When upon life’s billows, you are tempest-toss’d,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessing, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.”

By the way, Jesus said -

Mark 4:9 -

3. It is fearfully easy for any one of us to neglect the cultivation of our own inner life.

Now, the tree in our garden was rotten inside. That was the reason it could not bear the strain put upon it. It was an apple tree. It had been barren and had brought forth no fruit for many years. What was the reason?

The reason was that for some while the tree had not been drawing up any nourishment from the earth.

It was, therefore, sapless and dead; like some people of whom we read in -

2 Timothy 3:5 -

There it was - a tree, but it was useless. Indeed, it was worse than useless. It was dangerous.

How beautiful is God’s description of a Christian -

Psalm 104:16 -

This is God’s ideal, desire and plan for every one of us that we should draw in strength and grace and bear fruit day by day.

Psalm 1:3 -

How easy it is to be outwardly correct and inwardly wrong; to be outwardly active and zealous, but inwardly out of touch with the Lord.

Some time ago I read the terrible story of a man who was highly respected by all his friends. Then he was involved in a most sordid court case. No one would believe that he was guilty until the police announced the fact that they had discovered a great deal of obscene literature hidden in the drawer of his desk. You see, the tree was rotten.

How solemn this is. We go to church to worship in the presence of God. We pray, we sing, but what are we like inside?

Proverbs 24:10 -

A Hebrew scholar has suggested that this should read, "If you play the slacker, in the day of adversity your strength will be inadequate."

How sad to become a "castaway," for that is exactly what happened with the tree in my garden. It was still my tree, but it could no longer be used. A younger, live tree had to be brought into commission.

By the way, Jesus said -

Mark 4:9 -

8. It is usually possible to gain some benefit and profit even from life's failures and disasters.

It was quite a sight to see all that washing on the dark earth. But, ten minutes later it was having a second wash and I dare to suggest that even that fact may have been beneficial.

I should also add that, since the tree proved to be so ineffective as a post to hold up our washing line, a kind friend presented us with a concrete post strong enough to last until the millennium.

There are all kinds of hidden blessings in the trials that beset us. An American evangelist was stricken with polio. He began at once a ministry of writing which God has blessed to thousands.

Dr. Joseph Parker was nearly beside himself with grief when his beloved wife was suddenly taken from him, but those who used to listen to him at the City Temple, London, said that he was quite different after the tragedy. He was more powerful, more sensitive

to other people's needs and more effective as a preacher and a pastor.

Miss Corrie ten Boom could not speak as she did all over the world if she had not been in the fires of affliction where she suffered much at the hands of men.

Even our failures can be made a blessing to us and to others. How qualified Peter was to warn and help others after he had been truly converted. How ready and equipped he was to strengthen his brethren.

Failures enable us to be forewarned and forearmed, so that we do not fail so easily again. You see, as long as I live I shall take care to examine any tree or post that we may want to use to hold up our clothes line.

How wonderful it is that God is able to take our curses and change them into blessings.

Deuteronomy 23:5 -

By the way, Jesus said -

Mark 4:9 -

5. Finally, it is on Monday morning (not on Sunday) that the reality of Christian experience is tested and demonstrated.

It is comparatively easy to sing and pray on Sunday. It is easy to be sweet and holy when we meet together in God's house. It is delightful when we gather for worship with the people of God to sing heartily -

“Through all the changing scenes of life,
In trouble and in joy,
The praises of my God shall still
My heart and tongue employ.”

But, what about when a morning's work is down among the daisies? Do we still praise God then, when others are watching to see how we react?

It is what we are in the home and in the office that counts.

Are you living as a Christian there? What is your answer to this question? What do our friends say in answer to this question?

Well, there is my “Monday Morning Parable.” Think about it. Remember that Jesus taught them many things by parables. It is Jesus Himself Who says to us -

Mark 4:9 -

*“Open my eyes that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unclasp and set me free.*

*“Open my mind that I may read
More of Thy love in word and deed
What shall I fear while yet Thou dost lead?
Only for light from Thee I plead.*

*“Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my eyes, illumine me,
Spirit divine.”*

GOD'S PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

STUDY 5

Scripture Portion (AV): Acts 9:6a

It was when Saul of Tarsus, enemy of the infant church, was on his way to Damascus, where he intended to persecute those who were followers of Jesus of Nazareth, that his program was changed in a most dramatic way. Standing there before him, in all His glory, was the very One against whom Saul had been fighting - Jesus, the eternal Son of God.

In a moment the proud and haughty Pharisee was humbled to the dust and was bowed in complete submission before Him. Words full of deep significance fell from his lips -

Acts 9:6a -

It was the moment of conversion of Saul of Tarsus. From now on his was to live an entirely new life. Saul's conversion was a miracle if ever there was one. It was only the beginning of miracles in his life, too.

The Lord is still arresting men and women on the world's great highways and bringing them away from their own wild and selfish plans into His own eternal purpose for them.

True, He does not always work in this same dramatic way, for He is not by any means stereotyped in His method of saving lost people.

The Lord works in a great variety of ways, adapting His methods according to the special circumstances and the temperament of the person with whom He is dealing.

Was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus part of a great plan, or did it happen by accident?

Was it 'by chance' that Saul suddenly became Paul, that this proud man became a humble penitent? Or, was it part of a wonderful plan that the Lord had for his life? To find the answer to this question, we have only to look at what the Lord told Ananias -

Acts 9:15 -

This simply means that the Lord had planned to bring Saul to Himself and to use him in His service.

Yes, God had a plan for Saul's life just as He has a plan for your life.

The Lord has a definite plan and purpose for the life of each one whom He brings to Himself.

Just think this through: “God has a plan for my life. He is great and holy; I am weak and sinful; yet He has a plan for my life. I am ‘a chosen vessel’ unto Him.”

Can there be anything more wonderful than this, that the eternal God, your Maker and your Redeemer, has a perfect plan and purpose for your life?

What confidence this should give us in the days in which we are living. On the other hand, can you think of anything more humbling than this?

In the Bible we find abundant evidence that there is a divine plan for every redeemed life. David prayed -

Psalm 143:10 -

Was that a vain prayer, a wrong kind of prayer? Surely not! The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Colosse -

Colossians 1:9 -

Later he said that he yearned that these believers might -

Colossians 4:12 -

The most important thing in life is to discover what is the Lord’s plan **and purpose**.

That, surely, is obvious. The tragedy of so many lives today is that they are self-planned.

Isaiah 53:6b -

It takes some people a very long time to turn from what *they* want and instead to desire and choose what *God* wants for them. Yes, God has a plan for your life; but the solemn thing about this is that you may fail to enter into His plan for your life.

The friends of a young missionary candidate said to her, “But you will have to alter the whole course of your life. You will have to give up your good job, leave your home, your friends and your family!”

At her valedictory service in London, just before she sailed for Africa, this young missionary said, “There is only one thing that matters. *God wants me in Africa!*”

You see, she had realized what many others have been brought to realize, namely, that

the greatest thing in life is to discover God's will and to do it.

How about you? Is the will of God the most important factor in your life, or are you planning it yourself irrespective of the fact that the Lord's plan for you is far more wonderful than any man-made or self-made plan?

If you want your life to be a tragedy of the first magnitude then all you have to do is to ignore and fail to discover what God's plan for your life is. How solemn and sad it is for any rational human being to choose such a course as this.

3. Only the Lord knows what is the plan for your life.

Strangely enough, Saul of Tarsus actually thought he *was* fulfilling God's plan for his life when he was persecuting the Christians.

Acts 26:9-10 -

But he was wrong. Even Ananias did not know what God's plan for Saul's life was until the Lord revealed it to him. When the Lord told Ananias to go and help Saul, Ananias raised objections until the Lord said to him -

Acts 9:15-16 -

What the Lord was really saying to Ananias, in effect, was something like this: "Ananias, I know it must seem strange to you, but I have a glorious plan for this man's life. My purposes are being outworked in his life. He will be My true ambassador. He will experience many trials and testings which he will gladly bear for My sake."

So often we think we know the way, whereas we are mistaken. Only the Lord knows what He has planned for your life.

If you would discover that plan, you must consult Him as Saul did, "*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*"

-
4. You enter God's plan for your life when you accept the Lord Jesus as your own personal Saviour.
-

Notice just when it was that Saul entered God's plan for his life. It was at the precise moment when, recognizing the Lord Jesus as his Saviour, he acknowledged Him as his living Lord and bowed before Him in humble obedience.

"Who art Thou, Lord?" "I am *Jesus*....(Saviour)."

Until that moment of time, Saul had been out of God's plan for his life. But, from the very moment of his submission to Christ as Lord of his life, he was in God's plan.

I am not saying that God had not been interested in Saul or had not loved him prior to his conversion, for Saul was 'a chosen vessel' from eternity past. Yet, it was from the time of his surrender to Jesus as Lord and Sovereign of his life that he could truly claim to be in the will of God.

If you have so far not trusted the Lord as your Saviour, you have not yet begun to know God's plan for your life. You are living outside the will of God! The initial step into His plan and purpose for your life will be taken only when you bow submissively at His feet and say, "Lord.....!"

5. You continue in God's plan by daily and hourly submission to Him and to His revealed will.

The *crisis* of submission to Jesus as Lord must become a *process* governing the whole of your life. If you enter into God's will for your life when you truly say, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" you continue in it only as you submit to Him and allow Him to work out His will in and through you.

Saul's question, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" was not a question he asked only at the beginning of his Christian life. It was a question he asked every day and in every circumstance of his life.

This submission to the Lord carries with it *an unquestioning trust* in the Lord for whatever He plans for us. It means that we bow to His will, whatever that may be and however hard it may seem.

We have the glorious consolation of knowing that His way is best. Therefore, we not only resign ourselves to His will but we rejoice in it!

Can you truthfully say, "Lord, Thy will be done?"

You need not fear to trust Him
His love and skill are such;
New lessons He will teach you,

While yielded to His touch.

5. The Lord will reveal His plan to you as you obey Him.

How does He do it? A step at a time. You have to take the first step before He reveals the next step. This is beautifully illustrated in the experience of Saul.

Acts 9:6b -

Acts 9:6c -

Saul had to arise and go before the next step of the way was revealed to him. This is exactly how the Lord deals with us. He has the plans. All we have to do is to carry out His instructions with implicit faith and complete obedience.

Psalm 37:23 -

When we set out on one of our overseas tours, we quite literally went under ‘sealed orders.’ We knew in general terms where we would be traveling in order to minister God’s Word, but as to the precise details of each commitment and meeting, these were only made known to us, in some cases, day by day, ‘a step at a time.’

And this is how the Lord opens up the way before His children. All we need to know, therefore, is *the next step*. We can say, and we should say, “One step enough for me!” - the next step!

7. His plan for your life is an eternal one.

There are two parts to God’s plan for the life of each one of His children: the earthly part and the heavenly part.

The earthly part may be likened to the foundations of a building.

The foundations must be well and truly laid. The heavenly part may be likened to the structure of the building that stands upon the foundations.

The earthly plan is God’s plan for your life while you are here upon the earth. The heavenly plan is God’s plan for your life in heaven, throughout all eternity.

We often have a very limited conception of the plan of God for His children. It is not something that relates only to time. It is something that relates to eternity. It is not a plan for a few years only. It is an eternal purpose that God has for every redeemed person. What a wonderful thing is to be living in God's plan now!

Will you bow at the feet of your Saviour and say, "Lord, what wilt Thou have *me* to do?"

Teach me Thy way, O Lord,
Teach me Thy way!
Thy gracious aid afford,
Teach me Thy way!
Help me to walk aright,
More by faith, less by sight;
Lead me with heavenly light:
Teach me Thy way!

Long as my life shall last,
Teach me Thy way!
Where'er my lot be cast,
Teach me Thy way!
Until the race is run,
Until the journey's done,
Until the crown is won,
Teach me Thy way!

- B. Mansell Ramsey

LIFE'S TRUE VALUES

STUDY 6

Scripture Portion (NIV): Philippians 1:21a

Philippians 1:21a -

I want to ask you a very important question. What do you value most in life? What is it that means more to you than anything or anyone else?

Some years ago, when I was on business in the north, I read an article in the northern edition of one of our best known national newspapers.

This said that a member of the staff of this paper had been commissioned to go to one of our large cities and hand a cheque to each of six different people who would answer the question, "What do you value most in life?"

The question was asked of an engineer, a waitress, a hairdresser, a butcher, a salesman and a town councillor. I was so interested in their answers that I copied them down. Here they are.

The engineer valued his good health above everything else.

The waitress put her boy friend first.

The hairdresser said his shop meant more to him than anything else.

The butcher said his home was more important.

*The salesman, who worked in a large store and was probably constantly surrounded by movement and noise, said that what he valued more than anything else was *peace and quiet!**

The last person, *the town councillor* said that what she valued most was *being able to serve others.*

Now, I like the answers given by these six people. They are just the answers one would expect to get from a cross-section of the community and, so far as they go, they are very good.

For instance, many people would give anything to have good health. I am sure we all sympathize with the girl who has fallen in love. There must be great fulfillment in building up one's own business, and, one of the greatest blessings in life is to have a good home, and to be able to get peace and quiet.

Perhaps the finest answer of the six, however, was that of the town councillor, whose first thought was for others.

But, although these answers are good, do they go far enough?

What if our health fails, or the boy friend proves false? What if our loved one is taken and our home is broken up? What if our business fails, or frustration and disappointment drive away our peace and quiet? What if we find our days of active service are over? What then?

What do you value most in life?

If you were asked to write down your answer to this question in one word, what would it be? Would you write husband? Wife? Son? Daughter? Health? Home? Business? Money? Pleasure? Sports?

What do you value most in life?

If that newspaper reporter had asked me the question some years ago, I might well have answered, health or home or loved ones. But, though these are still very dear to me, I should give a different answer now.

You see, there came a day in my experience when I knew for the first time what Paul meant when he said, "For to me, to live is *Christ*."

Yes, that is my answer to the question "What do you value most in life?" Most of all, I value the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me tell you why.

The first reason why I value Jesus Christ most in life is because He is "the Lover of my soul."

I do not use those words in a light or sentimental sense. We often sing, "Jesus, Lover of my soul....." and that is just what He is. He loves me very deeply, as He does you, too.

Ever since I was a child I have known about the love of Christ. One of the first hymns my father taught me was -

Jesus loves me! this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.....

He also taught me -

I am so glad that our Father in heaven.
Tells of His love in the Book He has given;
Wonderful things in the Bible I see;
This is the dearest, that Jesus loves me.

It was not until I was almost out of my teens that I fully realized the extent of that love. Because the Lord Jesus Christ loved *me*, He had come down to earth, lived the life I had failed to live and died the death I deserved to die.

He had actually taken *my* place there on the cross of Calvary; carrying *my* sin in His own body, in the words of -

Isaiah 53:5a (AV) - *But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.....*

When I realized that He loved me that much - that He died and rose again and lives to be my Saviour - then I fell at His feet and acknowledged Him as my Saviour and Friend.

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

I gladly gave my all to Him - to Jesus, the Lover of my soul.

The second reason why I value Jesus Christ most in life is because He *is* my life.

He is not only the divine Lover of my soul, but He is my life, for I can say with Paul, for to me, to *live* is Christ and -

Galatians 2:20b -

When I first learned that a Christian is one who has received the Lord Jesus Christ into his/her heart and life, it came as a tremendous revelation. I had thought that I was a Christian because I was born in a Christian country, brought up in a Christian home by Christian parents, had tried my best to follow the example of Jesus Christ, and also attended a Christian church.

Surely anyone who did these things was a Christian? After all, what more could anyone do?

But, I discovered that a Christian is one who has *received a new life* - the life of Jesus Christ Himself.

I learned for the first time that a Christian is “Christ-in” - that I could only become a Christian, not by turning over a new leaf, but by receiving a new life; not by doing

anything, but by receiving the Lord Jesus Christ into my heart and life.

If an artist were to say to me, "Will you copy one of my paintings?" I should have to reply, "That is impossible. I cannot paint." But, if he could transfer his genius to me, *into* me, then I could copy the picture.

That is exactly what takes place when a man becomes a real Christian, a Christian in the New Testament sense of the word. Christ come in and lives His life in him and through him.

3. The third reason why I value Jesus Christ most in life is because He is my Liberator.

He loves me and He has given His life for me. But, He has done more than that. He has set me free and I can truly say that living to serve Him is perfect freedom.

Some people imagine the Christian life is one of bondage and restriction. That is a delusion!

The Christian life is a life of glorious freedom; freedom from the penalty of sin; freedom from the power of sin; freedom from self in all its subtle forms and freedom from fear and doubt.

Are you in bondage? Are you fettered? Then Jesus Christ can set you free, for -

John 8:36 -

Really free! . This is not a theoretical matter. It really works. I am not just telling you something out of a book. I am telling you something out of my own experience and that of thousands of others too.

It can be true in your case. If you are imprisoned, in bondage or are fettered, then Jesus Christ can set you free. He waits to be your Liberator.

Someone has said that today's Public Enemy No. 1 is Fear.

We live in a world full of fear. It invades every area of life. Many are in bondage to this horrible enemy, fear, along with its allies, worry, depression, frustration and despair.

Is there any deliverance from these things which spoil our life and rob us of joy and peace? Thank God, there is!

Are you fearful? Constantly harassed by some haunting memory of the past? Powerless to rise above the memory of that sudden loss, that crushing tragedy, that foolish decision, that terrible injustice?

There is One Who is able and willing to set you free, to flood your soul with His “peace which passes human understanding.”

Perhaps your fear concerns the future.

Business or financial worries confront you. Or you face uncertainty about where you are going to live. Or you have become ill. Or your loved one is ill and hopes of an early recovery have already been dashed to the ground.

As you look out into the unknown, you are filled with fear, doubt and a thousand other unsettling emotions. Is there deliverance for you? Yes! Jesus Christ can set you free!

Again, if you are imprisoned by sin, by some habit which you have tried to break but which, instead, has nearly broken you, if you are powerless against the evil thing which grips you and threatens to overthrow you completely, *then Jesus Christ can set you free!*

Professor Henry Drummond, a great preacher and writer of the 19th century, used to spend his summer holidays with friends in Scotland. Once, as he was leaving, his hostesses asked him, “Could you do something for us? We are very troubled about John, our coachman. He is drinking heavily. We have warned him again and again, and he is on his last chance now. Could you speak to him and try to help him?”

When the coachman brought the carriage to the door to take him to the station, Henry Drummond climbed up beside him. He began to talk about the horses. As they came to a very dangerous bend in the road, he said, “What would happen if you lost control of these two horses and they ran away with us here, John?”

“It would be a bad job for both of us!” replied John.

“But, if you knew that I could control any horse, what would you do?”

“That is easy to answer,” said the coachman. “I would give you the reins.”

“John,” said Henry Drummond, “do you ever feel there is something in you like a pair of wild horses that threatens to run away with you again and again?”

John hung his head. He knew only too well.

The professor continued, “I know Someone Who can control all these wild passions, if you will only let Him into your life to do it for you.” Then, as they reached the station, Drummond said, “John, will you give Him the reins?”

The following year Henry Drummond traveled up to Scotland again. He was met by John, the coachman. As they met, John touched his hat and, with radiant face, said, "I have given Him the reins, sir!"

I have given Him the reins of my life. I value Him above all others because I have proved during the past many years that He is able to control my life and give me victory over all that would threaten to spoil and mar it.

6. The last reason why I value Jesus Christ most in life is because He is my Lord.

I have given Him full control. In return, He has accepted the responsibility of my life. He guides me, provides for me and blesses me. He is my Lord.

If my health, my home or my loved ones go, if other trials and testings come, I still have Him - Jesus, my Lord and Master. When I come to the end of life's journey all will be well, because He is mine and I am His.

Jesus Christ offers Himself to all. And that includes you. *He loves you!* He wants to set you free. He wants to be Lord and Master of your life. Will you bow before Him now, receive Him as your own personal Saviour and make Him Lord of your life? You can do so if you will read -

Revelation 3:20 -

and pray the following prayer -

"Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for Your amazing love to me! I acknowledge my need of You. I invite you now to come into my heart and life, to be my Liberator, to be my life and to be my Lord. I hand over the reins of my life to You. I thank You now for hearing and answering my prayer. Amen."

HOW TO FACE A CRISIS

STUDY 7

Scripture Portion (NIV): Daniel 2:19

Daniel 2:19 -

Sooner or later everyone has to face a crisis, a point of time when an important decision has to be made. In fact, life is made up of crises. It is quite possible that you are facing such a time now.

What should you do? How should you act so that the decision you make is the right one?

Let me say at once that the thing to do in a time of crisis is to *pray*.

If we had the space for it in this lecture, I could refer you to many people of whom we read in the Bible who were faced with a crisis. *They prayed* and God graciously heard and answered their prayer. He undertook for them, guided them and brought them safely through their crisis-time.

The one example I want to give you is that of Daniel. You will find it helpful to read the record for yourself, **Daniel 2**, to gain the full benefit of this effort on my part to help you.

Actually, it makes thrilling reading, quite apart from the sheer, down-to-earth help it offers to us.

King Nebuchadnezzar had had an amazing dream but had forgotten it -

Daniel 2:1 -

He summoned his magicians, enchanter, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed and to interpret it for him -

Daniel 2:5-9

The wise men of Babylon protested, telling the king it was impossible for anyone to reveal what the dream had been quite apart from the interpretation of it -

Daniel 2:10-11 -

The king was furious and ordered that his wise men, who included Daniel and his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, should be put to death -

Daniel 2:12-13 -

Daniel then sought an interview with the king, promising that he would reveal the dream

and its meaning -

Daniel 2:14-16 -

This was a very bold thing to do.

This very real crisis in the life of Daniel and his three friends was one of many which he experienced during his long eventful service for the Lord. Each time he faced a crisis, what did he do?

He prayed!

And we, living twenty-five hundred years later in the history of the world, should do just the same. In our times of crises we should go directly to God in prayer.

What a difference it would make if we would do this in times of *national crisis!* For an illustration of this read -

2 Chronicles 14:11-12 -

We should also pray to the Lord in times of *religious* crisis, as the early Christians did. For a prime example of this is, read **Acts 4:23-31**.

Then, of course, from time to time, we all experience *domestic* crises - one of which we read about in **Acts 9:36-43**.

It may be at this particular moment you are facing a *personal* crisis, concerning your health, your business, your loved ones or? What should you do about it?

The answer is: do what Daniel did - *pray!*

If you will read **Daniel 2:14-23**, you will see how to pray in a time of crisis. Let me suggest the sequence.

SET ASIDE A TIME FOR PRAYER.

It is significant that Daniel asked the king for time. Why did he want time? He wanted time to pray. He had his regular set times for prayer -

Daniel 6:10 -

The need now, however, was for a special time of prayer for he was facing a crisis.

If you are facing a time of crisis now, the first thing you should do is set aside a definite time in order to seek the face of God and place the whole perplexing situation into His hands for solution. Will you do that?

Then what should you do?

2. GO TO THE PLACE OF PRAYER.

Daniel 2:17a -

This simply means that he not only *decided* to pray, but that he *actually did* pray. In his house he had a place of prayer, a special room where the windows were open toward Jerusalem.

The Lord Jesus had a place of prayer -

Mark 1:35 -

Luke 6:12 -

Peter had a place of prayer -

Acts 10:9 -

The God-fearing women of Philippi had a place of prayer -

Acts 16:13 -

Do you have a place of prayer, somewhere you are in the habit of going when you want to speak to the Lord? Well, in the hour of crisis, go to that place as Daniel did.

While it is important in certain circumstances to go alone, it is also helpful to go with others to have the encouragement of their fellowship in prayer.

This is the next thing to notice.

3. SEEK FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER.

Jesus instructs us to pray privately -

Matthew 6:6 -

He also encourages us to pray with others -

Matthew 18:19 -

Daniel sought the prayer fellowship of his three companions. Can you picture him telling his three friends about the crisis, then the four of them down on their knees pleading with the Lord to hear and answer their prayers? Surely God could not refuse such petitions!

In the Bible we are encouraged to pray with others. So, in your time of crisis, go to one or more like-minded believers, share your problem with them, then pray together.

4. BE DEFINITE IN PRAYER.

Daniel 2:18a -

You will see here that the four men prayed about this specific matter.

Their prayers were not vague and indefinite. They wanted something.

They asked God for it -

just as Gideon prayed for a sign and got it -

Judges 6:39 -

just as Hannah prayed for a son and God heard her prayer -

1 Samuel 1:9-13 -

just as Elijah prayed that it might not rain and God answered that prayer -

James 5:17 -

What do you need at this moment? Well, ask God for it! If it is money, pray for money.

If it is wisdom for making an important decision, pray for wisdom. If it is healing, pray for healing. If it is patience and courage to endure suffering, pray for patience and courage. Whatever it is, ask the Lord and He will help you.

Read His gracious words in -

John 14:13-14 -

If you will ask God, for Jesus' sake, to hear and answer your cry, He will certainly do so. He has promised!

See what the Lord Jesus said about being definite in prayer and receiving definite answers to prayer.

Matthew 7:7-11 -

Be definite in your asking and God will be definite in His giving.

5. WATCH YOUR MOTIVE IN PRAYER.

We are told that Daniel and his friends prayed -

Daniel 2:18b -

Does this mean that they were praying that they might save their own skins, "Lord, do not let us perish with the others?"

I think, in order to understand the meaning of their prayer, we need to read -

1 Kings 18:36-37 -

Elijah prayed to God to do a mighty thing and to do it in order that the people might recognize the power and presence of God Himself. In other words, Elijah's motive was right. He asked God to do something that would be for His glory.

Daniel's motive was also right.

If God is to hear and answer our prayers, then our motive must be right, too. The true motive which we should have in anything that we ask of the Lord is that He may be glorified and that His kingdom may be extended.

Read **John 14:13-14** again. Jesus conditions the answer to our prayers by saying that we must ask in His name, "so that the Son may bring glory to the Father."

Here is the same idea. Our motive must be right when we pray and what we ask for must be pleasing to the Lord and in accordance with His will.

James 4:3 -

This reminds me of the man who prayed for the conversion of his wife so that she would be less irritable and less of a nagger! We understand his problem, but surely his motive in such a prayer should have been that God would be glorified in the salvation of her soul?

But there is something else to notice.

6. EXERCISE FAITH IN PRAYER.

That is to say, when you pray, pray believingly. Daniel, as the account clearly shows, had implicit trust in God that He could *and would* hear and answer his prayer.

Daniel 2:18b -

Daniel knew in his heart, when he offered his prayer, that God would hear and answer him.

One reason why our prayers do not prevail is because of our unbelief. Can we not trust our almighty, loving heavenly Father to hear and answer our prayers? Of course, we can!

All the way throughout the Bible, He promises to hear and answer the prayers of His people.

Numbers 23:19 -

There is one final thing to notice.

7. RECEIVE THE ANSWER TO PRAYER.

Daniel 2:19-23 -

Notice the kind of answer that God gave to Daniel's prayer. It was a definite answer, **verse 19**. It was a miraculous answer, also **verse 19**. It was an answer that called for thanksgiving and that glorified God, (**verses 20 and 23**).

What are you going to do in your time of crisis? Are you going to pray?

Will you not come before the Lord and commit yourself and your needs into His hands and then trust Him to see you through?

O, what peace we often forfeit,
O, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Always remember this: the God Who lived in Daniel's day is just the same today!

NOTES

WHEN A CHRISTIAN DIES

STUDY 8

Scripture Portion (NIV): Psalm 116:15

Psalm 116:15 -

If this statement appeared in a newspaper over the obituary column, it might seem very strange to the ordinary reader. But, it does appear in the Bible. Though it may seem strange, we can be sure it is true.

From earth's viewpoint it is always a sad thing when someone dies, for those who are left behind must experience the pain of bereavement and separation. Death as the result of an accident, or happening to a young child, we even call a tragedy.

How different it all is from heaven's viewpoint. God says -

Psalm 116:15 -

Notice what this verse does not say.

#1 - It does not say, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of anyone."

That would be untrue. The death of some people is a most tragic thing.

When an unbeliever dies, he dies without hope, without God and without Christ. He dies a lost soul. He goes out into a Christless eternity. There is nothing 'precious' about that. Indeed, it is the most solemn and tragic thing that can happen.

No, there is a qualifying word in this text - the word '*saints*'. It is only a precious thing when a *saint* (the Bible word for a real Christian) dies.

#2 - It does not say, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of some of His saints."

When a prominent Christian dies, we sometimes say, "He must have had a wonderful welcome from the Lord." But, *every* Christian will have a wonderful welcome into His presence.

We are not saved because of our prominence in Christian service or by any efforts we may make. We are saved *by grace alone*. Therefore, whoever we may be, our death will be precious to the Lord because '*precious in the sight of the Lord is the death*' of all His saints.

Do you say, "But I am such a failure?" Who is not a failure?

It is through the everlasting mercy of our God. Because of His abounding grace towards us that we shall be brought into His holy and immediate presence when we die or when the Lord comes. This to Him will be very precious simply because we are His saints.

#3 - It does not say, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the suffering of His saints.”

It is good for us to remember that suffering is precious to the Lord. There is a ministry of suffering. Should the Lord permit testings and trials to come into our lives, it will always be for a good purpose, always to benefit us in the end, and always to bring Him glory.

1 Peter 1:7 (AV) - *That the trial of your faith, being (is) much more precious than of gold that perisheth.....*

Some people, when laid aside by illness, believe that healing is the most important thing. Their minds can focus upon little else.

But, the most important thing is being in the centre of God’s will, whether that means healing or whether it means a further period of suffering, and to be able to glorify Him in the midst of it all.

#4 - It does not say, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the love of His saints.”

As a matter of fact, our love is very precious to Him. When He comes to us and asks, “Do you love Me?” His heart is filled with joy if we can answer -

John 21:16b -

Yet this is not what our text says.

#5 - It does not say, “Precious in the sight of the Lord are the achievements, the victories, the successes of His saints.”

I am quite sure that our heavenly Father is gladdened by the achievements of His servants, yet our verse is not speaking of these things, but of death.

#6 - It does not say, “Precious in the sight of the Lord are the prayers of His saints.”

All the prayers and praises of God’s people are precious to Him. They rise before him as a sweet-smelling savor.

But that is not what our text says.

We can, of course, go on mentioning things *not* included in the text, but then we are brought back to the fact that this statement of scripture declares that it is *when a Christian dies*, it is *that* which is precious to the Lord.

Why is this?

Let me suggest four principal reasons.

8. THE DEATH OF A CHRISTIAN IS PRECIOUS TO THE LORD BECAUSE IT IS, IN FACT, THE HOME-COMING OF HIS CHILD.

When you buy something from a shop, however insignificant it is, you want to take it home with you or have it delivered at the earliest possible moment simply because it now belongs to you.

The Lord Jesus has purchased every one of His saints with His own precious blood -

1 Peter 1:18-19 -

That is why all His saints are precious to Him. So it is a great moment when they are safely delivered to their heavenly home.

In His great intercessory prayer, Jesus said -

John 17:24 -

When a believer dies, this desire of Jesus is fulfilled. His own people are brought home to be with Him.

When I was in India some years ago, I discovered that many of the missionaries had to send their children away from the heat and humidity of the plains to schools up in the hills.

But what tremendous reunions these missionaries had when their children returned home and the families were together again.

Do you not think our loving heavenly Father feels like that? Is it not true that He looks forward to the home-coming of His children, so that those He has redeemed at such cost, those who mean so much to Him, can be with Him at last?

For the child of God, death is simply the watchman who opens the door to the Father's house.

Jesus said -

John 14:2-3 -

When a Christian dies, he is immediately -

2 Corinthians 5:8b -

This is a very precious thing to the Lord Himself, not to speak of the great blessing it is to the believer.

9. THE DEATH OF A CHRISTIAN IS PRECIOUS TO THE LORD BECAUSE,
FOR A CHRISTIAN, DEATH HAS NO STING AND HOLDS NO TERRORS.

The Lord Jesus, by His own death, has conquered death. The apostle Paul cries out triumphantly -

1 Corinthians 15:54-57 -

And we find the same apostle actually longing to die.

Writing to the Christians at Philippi, he says -

Philippians 1:23 -

Is it *'better by far'* to die? Yes, it certainly is, if you are a Christian.

Just before D. L. Moody passed into the presence of the Lord, his loved ones gathered around his bedside. This is what they hear him say, "*Earth recedes. Heaven opens before me. If this is death, it is sweet! There is no dark valley there. God is calling me and I must go. This is my triumph, my coronation day!*"

Acts 7:59-60 -

How wonderful to drop off to sleep and wake up in the arms of Jesus. I want to set you free from the fear of death so that you will be able to say -

Psalms 23:4 -

10. THE DEATH OF A CHRISTIAN IS PRECIOUS TO THE LORD BECAUSE IT MARKS THE END OF THE EARTHLY LIMITATIONS AND THE START OF GLORIOUS HEAVENLY LIFE IN THE 'LAND OF FADELESS DAY.'

The apostle Paul said -

Philippians 1:21 -

But he did not stop there. He went on to say -

Philippians 1:2b -

D. L. Moody once said to a friend, "One day you will see in the paper 'Moody is dead. Do not you believe it. I will be more alive than ever.'" How right he was.

Our present life is very restricted by sin and by these bodies in which we live. We have to contend with physical frailty, sinful tendencies within and a powerful enemy without.

We live in a cruel world. We are beset by trials and testings. We experience sorrow and suffering. But, in contrast, think of the joy, the gladness, the blessedness which will be ours 'over there' in God's presence, where there will be no more sin, tears, sorrow, suffering or separation. That land is a land of pure delight.

C. H. Spurgeon told of a child who once found some beautiful eggs in a bird's nest. A week later, he went to look at them, then went heartbroken to his mother crying, "There were some beautiful eggs in that nest, but they have all been destroyed and there is nothing left except bits of broken shell!"

His mother said, "Those eggs were not destroyed. There were little birds inside those eggs. They broke the shells themselves when they got out. Now they have flown away and are singing up in the trees!"

"And," said Spurgeon, "so it is with us. We look at our departed loved one and our heart says, 'What a sad end. All has failed. All is finished.' But then faith whispers, 'Not so! The shell has broken. Your beloved has flown away, right into the Father's presence!. Right now, up there among the 'birds of paradise' your beloved is singing a song of endless joy and praise to the God Who does all things well!'"*

Oh, it is not a loss to die. It is *gain*, a lasting, perpetual and illimitable gain.

When Richard Baxter lay dying an agonizing death, a friend asked, "Dear Mr. Baxter, how are you?"

"Almost well!" replied Baxter. And he was right.

*For the sake of clarity, we have paraphrased Spurgeon's 19th century wording.

Revelation 14:13 -

There is no question about it. It is really a blessing for a Christian to die.

11. THE DEATH OF A CHRISTIAN IS PRECIOUS TO THE LORD BECAUSE OF THE DEEP SATISFACTION IT BRINGS TO HIS OWN HEART.

The Bible tells us that the time is coming when our Saviour -

Isaiah 53:11a (AV) -

In other words, He will see some of the fruits of His death and resurrection.

What is it that will bring satisfaction to His heart? Is it the new heaven and the new earth which are going to be brought into being? Is it the anticipation of His glorious reign upon the earth? Is it the final banishment of Satan and all evil?

No, not these primarily. It is the gathering into His presence, to be with Him through all eternity, of millions of sinners whom He has redeemed by His blood and saved by His grace.

What a day that will be *for Him*, when - *'He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied!'*

No wonder the scripture says -

Psalm 116:15 -

I read an article in which the writer described the last visit he paid to an aged missionary, now at the very end of his earthly life. The article concluded with these words -

"I left him with a final clasp of his hand and a cheery word, 'I'll see you in the morning!' So he passed over, this worthy servant of God, 'and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side!'"

If death should come to you today, or tomorrow, would it mean 'morning,' 'eternal day' for you? Or, would it mean 'darkness' and 'nighttime' for ever and ever? What a 'morning' that will be when all who love and trust the Saviour will meet and be together in His holy presence forever!

NOTES

SOMEDAY WE WILL UNDERSTAND

STUDY 9

Scripture Portion: John 13:7b

John 13:7b -

These words were spoken by our Lord to Peter when Peter expressed great concern that the Lord should want to wash his feet. But I am going to lift them out of their immediate context for they have an extremely relevant message for us today, especially concerning what we quite rightly call the mysteries of life.

Painful and pleasant.

Broadly speaking, life for all of us is filled with two kinds of experiences: the pleasing and the painful. We are not worried by the pleasing things that happen to us for our faith is not tested by these experiences. Indeed, we would like life to consist only of pleasing things, of sunshine without any shadow or clouds.

Sooner or later, however, the shadows and the clouds come and the painful experiences cross our path. Then we are disturbed, our faith is tested and sometimes it falters. We even find ourselves asking “Why?” “Why has this happened to me?”

Then, if we are not careful, we become embittered and go round in circles asking, “If God loves me, why has this happened? If He cares, why has He allowed this thing in my life?”

Worst of all, we may even get to the place where we ask, “Does He still love me? Does He still care?”

I once heard it said that, when the Lord speaks to us concerning His will for our lives, there are several questions we may and should ask. For example, we should always ask “What?” as Saul of Tarsus did at the time of his conversion when he asked -

Acts 22:10a -

We need to know what to do.

We should ask “Where?” for we need direction.

We should ask “How?” for we need practical guidance concerning the will of God.

And we should ask “When?” for the time factor enters in.

But, there is one question we should never ask, and that is “Why?”

However, we do often ask “Why?” when, in our perplexity and failure to understand God’s purposes and dealings with us, we ask “Why?” He says to us, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand!”

In other words, He draws near to us and says, “It is quite all right. You do not understand now, but you will later on. In the meantime, I want you just to trust Me.

The story is told of one of our Anglican bishops who was called to the scene of a pit disaster. Someone placed into his hands a beautiful piece of unfinished embroidery on which the words “God is love” had been worked.

The bishop held this up so that the grief-stricken people could see only the tangled ends on the underside of the embroidery. Of course, those ends did not make sense at all. Then he turned the cloth round and they saw the beautifully worked message “God is love.”

This story illustrates the meaning of our text. God’s plans and His work are perfect. They are initiated and outworked in love, but we cannot see the completed pattern *now*. Yet, some day we *will* understand.

When we look at our text, we notice that it contains three profound yet clear truths.

1. THE LORD IS DOING SOMETHING IN, WITH AND THROUGH THE LIFE OF EVERY ONE OF HIS CHILDREN.

What did Jesus say? “.....what I am doing.” You see, the Lord is active. He is at work.

Romans 8:28 -

It is very helpful when reading this verse to place the emphasis on the word ‘works.’ We know that in all things God *works* for the good of those who love Him. The worker is God Who is doing something in your life and in mine. There is a divine activity going on.

When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, he said -

Philippians 1:6 -

When he wrote to the Christians at Ephesus, he said -

Ephesians 2:10 -

According to plan.

(1) What God is doing in your life and mine is according to a plan.

There is nothing haphazard about God. He has a plan for the life of every one of His children.

Psalm 138:8a -

Psalm 37:23 -

How very wonderful! God has the master plan of our life and He is working to them.

(2) All that He is doing, He is doing in love, therefore it is for our good.

Jeremiah 31:3 -

And that love is operating every moment. He is silently planning in love for each one of us. Because He loves us so much He is causing all things to work together for our good.

Perhaps, you reply, that you have been through some dreadful experience of testing and trial?

Well, the God Who loves and cares for you so much has permitted that for your good. "But that takes faith," you may say.

Yes it does - but this is the life of faith!

God never makes a mistake.

Take to heart this fact right now. *God never, never, never makes a mistake.* He is not only all-loving, but He is all-wise. He is our sovereign Lord. Do you believe that? You must! How could God make a mistake?

But there is a second truth embodied in our text.

2. FOR THE PRESENT WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LORD IS DOING IN, WITH AND THROUGH THE LIVES OF HIS CHILDREN.

3. Jesus said, *“You do not realize now what I am doing.....”*

We know, of course, that He is training us.

We know He is using all the things that happen to us, the experiences through which we pass for the molding of our characters. We know that He even uses our reactions to trouble and to pleasure as a testimony to others.

The following verses should always be connected.

Romans 8:28-29 -

Yes, we know that God loves us, that He is at work in our lives, that He is working to a plan, that He will never make a mistake and that He is training us and conforming us to the likeness of Christ.

But, when we have said all that, we have to admit that there is still a mystery about His dealings with us.

We do not really understand what He is doing. Sometimes we can say, “I see why the Lord allowed that to happen.”

But we cannot, by any means, always say this.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.....

How many illustrations we could give of this very thing; of servants of the Lord suddenly cut off in the prime of their usefulness; of missionary candidates, after several years of intensive training, arriving on the field and then having to return home almost at once through failing health; of devoted servants of God whose leadership seemed almost indispensable having to lay down their work?

Yes. We cannot understand why Stephen is martyred, or why James is beheaded, but we are not expected to understand these things now, for Jesus said, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

4. It does not make sense!

Some years ago now, Mr. Fred Mitchell, a director of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, was suddenly taken Home to be with the Lord when the aircraft in which he was traveling exploded in midair.

It was absolutely right for one of our great Christian leaders at that time to say, "It does not make sense!" There is nothing audacious or irreverent about that. There is no unbelief in that statement, for to us it simply does not make sense.

Jesus said it would not make sense, "You do not realize *now* what I am doing....."

How many long hours are wasted and how much nervous energy is expended when we insist on trying to trace the hand of God at work in our lives, in other words, when we try to live by sight and not by faith.

Sometimes we *can* see the purpose of His gracious working. This brings great encouragement. More often than not, however, we cannot see what He is doing.

All this leads us to our third truth.

3. ONE DAY WE SHALL UNDERSTAND.

Oh, yes, it will all be clear and we shall be glad about every trial, mystery and perplexity that we have know here.

Jesus said, ".....later you will understand."

Not till each loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the canvas,
And explain the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver's skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

Then He will explain the reason why. We shall no longer look at the tangled ends.

We shall see only the words "God is love" and the perfection of His completed pattern for our lives.

1 Corinthians 13:12 -

Then we shall understand. In the meantime, what are we to do? I will tell you. We are to simply trust and obey.

5. Trust Jesus.

If you are in trouble or perplexity, if you are overwhelmed by the mystery of the things that have been happening to you, *relax in the arms of Jesus*. Tell Him that you love Him and that, by His grace and enabling, you are going to trust Him and rely upon His unfailing love and skill. Tell Him -

I'll trust where I cannot see, Lord,
I'll trust where I cannot see.
No matter how dark the way may be,
I'll trust where I cannot see.

The most important word in that old chorus is the word "Lord." When the truth sinks deep into our hearts that this One Who loves us, has a plan for our lives, is working out that plan and never makes a mistake, *is the Lord*, and when we acknowledge His sovereignty in our lives, then we are in the place where we are willing to trust and obey, the place of quiet rest, of blessing, of true faith and of victory.

Your Lord Jesus is saying to you, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

It is true! *Some day we will understand.*

THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

STUDY 10

Scripture Portion (AV): Psalm 23:4

The Rev. John McNeill, the Scottish evangelist and preacher, likened this glorious **Psalm 23** to a well-tuned harp of five strings.

Each verse is a string and each string is so perfectly tuned by the Divine Musician that any fingers that stray among the strings, however artlessly, should bring forth some music from them.

It is the fourth string I want to strum just now.

Psalm 23:4 -

The psalmist likens the Christian life to a journey, which journey begins with -

Psalm 23:1a -

Have you started the heavenly pilgrimage there? Can you say, “He is *my* Shepherd?”

The end of the believer’s journey is -

Psalm 23:6b -

If you have started the journey in verse one, you will finish it in verse six; the in between verses are all the varied and wonderful experiences through which you will pass as you journey on to the house of the Lord, where you will dwell forever.

Now, take a good look at our text.

1. The **PATHWAY** on which we are traveling.
2. The **PROSPECT** that is before us.
3. The **PERSON** Who goes with us.
4. The **PERIL** we overcome.
5. The **PROTECTION** we enjoy.

THE *PATHWAY* ON WHICH WE ARE TRAVELING.

What kind of a pathway is it? See what David says -

Psalm 23:4a -

The path along which you and I are traveling is a dark, gloomy valley. David is thinking of those dark ravines with high towering walls that seem to go up to heaven, through which he had often led his sheep.

For all of us, this life is a valley experience. The road that leads from grace to glory must go by the way of the valley. It is a vale of tears and sorrow, trial and disappointment.

Come with me a moment and look into the valley through which we are traveling.

Do you see that little home? The curtains are drawn. There is sickness. There is death.

Listen! What are those noises? A plane has crashed! That is the valley. That is something we all encounter on the journey of life.

See how slowly that woman walks. She is in the valley of the shadow.

Why is that man walking with a crutch? He is in the valley, too.

Who is that? A policemen?

Yes. Of course, we are in the valley. Whichever way we look, we see the valley and the shadow. As one of our best known hymns puts it - "Change and decay in all around I see....."

No traveler on the journey of life is exempt from the valley of the shadow experiences. Rich or poor, king or beggar, young or old, we are all in the dark, gloomy valley. Jesus said -

John 16:33b -

But surely our text refers to death? Perhaps it does, but not exclusively. Even in life we are in the midst of death.

There is no need to wait for death in order to experience the shadows and valleys of life.

Life for us all is a living death. We are dying all the time. Yes, we are traveling along a dark, gloomy pathway.

But David tells us in our text about -

2. THE PROSPECT THAT IS BEFORE US.

What a wonderful prospect the child of God has, for, with the Lord as our Shepherd, our future is bright indeed.

The words I want you to notice are “walk through.” We are not at a standstill. We are traveling forward. We are going through the valley. This is not our home. We are pilgrims bound for a better and a heavenly country.

In the words of one of our hymns, we are “traveling onward to a city bright and fair.”

What a blessed word is this word “through!” Are you in the valley of sorrow, trial, disappointment or darkness? Are the dark shadows falling depressingly across your path? Is the part of the road along which you are at present traveling very rough?

Listen. You are traveling *through!* There is radiant brightness and perfect joy for you at the end of the journey, if the Lord is your Shepherd.

In Damascus there is a long, dark lane which ends in a tunnel. The traveler descends and passes through the tunnel. On the other side he emerges into the courtyard of a beautiful oriental palace, flashing with color and sunlight.

We are going through to the sunlight of our heavenly Home. What a prospect. Every day that passes we are a day’s march nearer Home.

Have you ever stopped and thought of all the sin, sorrow and suffering there is in the valley of this life? Have you then asked, “Is this all God made us for? Is this the best He can give us? Must we know only ‘blood, toil, sweat and tears?’ Will the doctor and the surgeon always be needed? Is there nothing better than this?”

Of course there is! We are going through to the other side.

I knew a man in business who was a better churchman than he was a Christian. One day he said to me, “I want to tell you something that really amuses me.” He then went on to tell me about a certain bishop who was convalescing after a very serious illness.

The thing which amused my friend was that he had heard that bishop preach on heaven and how marvelous it will be to be there. Within a few days he became so ill that everyone thought he was going to heaven, but they called in doctors and specialists to do all they could to keep him alive on this earth.

When they had succeeded in saving his life, the bishop was so keen to go to heaven that he went for a Mediterranean cruise so that he could get his health fully restored and stay on earth for a bit longer.

It seemed a great joke to my business friend.

If heaven is our Home and we are going there, and it is so much more beautiful and glorious than anything here, why are we so loth to go there? It is because God has given us an instinct within us which makes us want to live on this earth as long as possible.

Thus, when we are sick, we strive to get better. But let us not lose the optimism that should characterize us as travelers to our heavenly Home.

But, notice a third thing in our text.

3. THE *PERSON* WHO GOES WITH US.

“Though I walk through.....Thou art with me.” You are not alone in the valley.

David knew that whenever his sheep were going through the valley, he was there with them. In the same way, if he was in the valley, then the Lord, his Shepherd, would be with him. How wonderful. He would never be alone.

Do we sufficiently count on the Lord’s presence with us? Does the presence of our loved ones mean more to us than His presence? Is His presence as real as theirs? It should be, and much more so.

Let us, therefore, count on His presence more. There is never a shadow, but He is there. In every valley experience of life, He is there - our Lord and Shepherd, the Mighty God.

Then the psalmist tells us in our text about -

4. THE *PERIL* WE OVERCOME.

David says, “I will fear no evil.” I will fear nothing. No fear?

What is the greatest peril in your life and mine? It is fear. It is our greatest peril because, while we fear we do not trust. Fearing and trusting are opposites.

How can I get rid of fear? fear of the past, the present and the future? O, the havoc “fear” and its twin brother, “worry”, play in the lives of men and women. Listen!

“I will fear no evil, for *Thou art with me.*”

Listen again.

Hebrews 13:5b-6a -

Isaiah 43:1c-2 -

Here is the antidote for all fear, worry and anxiety - the realized presence of Christ.

Do you remember when the disciples were crossing the lake their little craft was tossed with the waves, the wind was contrary, they were troubled and cried out for fear?

Then what happened?

Jesus came and said -

Matthew 14:27b -

When we realize His presence, fear and doubt and anxiety go. Have you overcome this peril?

Once, when Paul was afraid to preach, the Lord said to him -

Acts 18:9b-10 -

Then -

Acts 18:11 -

The realized presence of the Lord banished Paul's fears. The same can be true of you.

But there is something else our text emphasizes about the journey of life -

4. THE *PROTECTION* WE ENJOY.

“Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”

There are many dangers in the valley. David knew that. Very often as he had been leading his sheep through the valley, a lion or a bear had lurked near to harm the sheep.

Very frequently he had had to protect his flock with his rod and staff; the rod, a heavy club with which to slay any wild animal, and the staff, a shepherd's crook, with which to restrain the sheep from wandering.

How we need this twofold protection:

First, we need it from all the outward attacks of Satan.

Secondly, we need it from all the inward waywardness of self.

We are such silly sheep, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,” but He gives us His wonderful protection right to the end of the journey.

What a comfort! “Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”

An unbeliever once said to a Christian, “Supposing, when you get to the end of life’s journey you find there is no such place as heaven after all?”

“Well,” said the Christian, “I shall say to myself, ‘I have had a wonderful time getting here, anyhow!’”

We know that one day we shall have passed through the valley and we shall be “in the house of the Lord forever.”

But, what a grand time we are having, even in the valley, with the presence of our Lord and Saviour ever with us!

“Thus, when we come to the end of life’s journey,
Think of the battles we lost and we won--
Then we shall see it was worth all the conflict,
And, best of all, we shall hear His ‘Well done!’”