

# COUNSEL

**SOME THINGS TO BE THANKFUL FOR**

**ANGELIC VISITATIONS IN LUKE 2 & 22**

**THE GLORY OF HIS FELLOWSHIP (JOHN 1:14, 39)**

**LESSONS IN WORSHIP FROM MARY OF BETHANY**

**PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP**

**LOOKING FOR THE SAVIOUR**

**CONSTANTLY ABIDING**

**BEYOND TODAY**

*September—October 2008*

## Some Things to be Thankful For

It is dangerous to ignore problems. Facing up to them is the first step to solving them. The church has problems and we do well to face them. But constant occupation with problems is not healthy. It is good “to count your many blessings” now and again. Here are some things to be thankful for.

I am thankful that assemblies exist around the world. Some have been functioning for over one hundred years, others for less than a year. The New Testament assembly was intended to function throughout church history. Its simplicity of order, its ease of duplication, its gathering to the Lord Himself and making Him central, all of this and more is something to be thankful for and embrace with enthusiasm and courage. I am thankful assemblies exist around the world.

I am thankful for elders who are doing their very best. I know it is easy to criticize oversight and deplore the lack of shepherding. Yes that is an observable fact. But I am thinking about the many elders I know who are faithfully discharging their calling.

I am thankful for elders who courageously deal with difficult problems. I am thankful for elders who patiently examine matters that arise among the flock, taking into account all the facts, and endeavor to apply the scriptures to such situations. It is easy to apply scriptural principles in a detached and even theoretical

way. It is another thing to consider this application of truth to real situations affecting real people.

I am thankful for elders who give of their time and energy to shepherd God’s people. Many of them forego opportunities of business or hobbies because their own family and the duties of the flock consume their time. I am thankful for such men.

I am thankful for elders who “*labour in the word and doctrine*” (1 Tim. 5:17) often after a busy work day. And even after those hours of work, they know they will never be among the great expositors of church history, yet they equip themselves sufficiently to recognize error when they see it. I would not want to try and put something past them. They are sharper than you think.

I am thankful for the many servants of the church, often called deacons. Many others simply serve without formal recognition. They keep things going. Often on the surface their work looks to be without much spiritual content. But there is far more to it than meets the eye. They are believers of sterling quality who serve behind the scenes and are content with the Lord’s recognition. They eschew any recognition by man. These brothers and sisters serve the Lord by serving His people. They, according the Lord’s assessment, are the truly great among us. (Mark 10:44)

I am thankful for many young men and women who show a keen interest in spiritual things. I visit many assemblies where this is the case. I see young people at all the meetings taking in the ministry. I see young people taking on responsibilities in Sunday schools, young peoples meetings, children’s clubs, camps and so on. Sure they make mistakes. Who doesn’t? I am thankful for tomorrow’s backbone of the assembly.

I am thankful for young men developing gift in preaching and teaching the Word of God. I am often stunned at their grasp of scripture and ability to communicate it effectively. Like elders these young men have lots of pressures and responsibilities with work and young families. Yet they give whatever time they can to study the scriptures.

I am thankful for many senior saints who continue to be faithful in the “sunset years.” What an encouragement you are to the younger generation. Your presence alone at the meetings sets the pace. If you can make it to assembly meetings with the challenges many of you face, what excuse do the rest of us have? I notice young people have an enormous respect for the seniors. The young married couples see themselves like you if the Lord does not return soon. This gives them strength to go on. I am thankful for the seniors.

I am thankful for the many efforts at gospel outreach. True evangelism requires courage, prayer and perseverance. It always has. The gospel preaching, seed sowing, Bible studies, camp work, Sunday schools, children’s clubs, coffee hours, meetings in senior’s homes, day by day witnessing in the work place, neighbourhood and school; all of it adds up making Christ known and as Paul wrote, “*I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice*” (Phil. 1:17).

Yes there is a lot to be thankful for. “*...Let us not be weary in well doing*” (Gal. 6:9). The Lord is coming! “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*” (1 Cor. 15:58).

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**Brian Gunning**  
St. Catharines, Ontario



# COUNSEL

TIMELY TRUTHS FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Volume 38 • Number 5

**Postmaster:**

Please send address changes to:  
COUNSEL P. O. Box 427  
St. Catharines ON L2R 6V9

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**Purpose:**

To present truth in words easy to be understood; to bring the Word of God to bear on the confusion of thought that exists in many places today regarding the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, His assembly, His purposes, His people, their privileges and responsibilities Godward and manward. To give a variety of ministry by edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3).

**Price:**

COUNSEL is supported by those who appreciate the aims and ministry of this work. It is sent freely on request, as the Lord enables. All funds received are used entirely to produce and mail the magazine. No salaries, gifts, honorariums, nor expenses are paid to any of the committee or contributing writers. We are thankful to those who feel their responsibility in this ministry and express their appreciation by practical support.

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*Printed in Canada*

**Canadian & overseas donors:**  
COUNSEL  
P. O. Box 427  
St. Catharines,  
ON Canada  
L2R 6V9

**U. S. donors:**  
Counsel Magazine  
P. O. Box 176  
Palos Park, IL  
60464-0176  
USA

**U. K. and Ireland donors:**  
COUNSEL  
c/o Roy Hill  
The Glebe House  
Stanton Drew  
Bristol BS39 4EH  
Cheques from U.K. donors  
make payable to 'Counsel Magazine'

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# Angelic Visitations in Luke 2 & 22

**“Coming into  
the world,  
(Jesus) says  
... Lo, I come  
... to do, O God,  
thy will,”  
... And in the  
Garden of  
Gethsemane ...  
when this resolve  
was tested  
to the extreme,  
He responded  
in prayer with the  
well-known words,  
“not my will,  
but thine,  
be done.”**

In his gospel, Luke records several angelic appearances, each concerned in one way or another with our Lord Jesus. This article focuses on the two angelic visitations which took place during our Lord's life here on earth, and both of which took place at night.

First, Luke tells of *“the (literally, ‘an’) angel of the Lord”* who paid a visit to a field in the region of Bethlehem (Luke 2:8-9) to announce the birth of the Saviour, then lying in a manger (Luke 2:7). Second, he tells of *“an angel”* who paid a visit to the Garden of Gethsemane to strengthen our Lord Jesus during His conflict (Luke 22:43) then lying on the ground (Mark 14:35).

The first occasion was a time of *“great joy”* (Luke 2:9). Indeed, the angel's announcement brings to a climax the theme of rejoicing which has been running through the opening section of the third gospel. In chapter 1, we read, respectively, of the joy of Zacharias, of Elizabeth, of her son John, and of Mary. But now the angel declares to the shepherds mounting guard over their sheep, *“For, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy,”* (Luke 2:10).

God once asked Job, *“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? ... who laid the corner stone thereof; when the morning stars sang to-*

*gether, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?,”* (Job 38:4-7). And this angel in Bethlehem's field would have been among those angelic *“sons of God.”* But, when he shouted for joy at the world's creation, little did he think that the day would come when the very One who had laid the foundations of the earth would Himself come down to the earth He had created to lie in a manger—in some animals' feeding trough!

But if the angelic visitation of Luke 2 marked an occasion of the greatest joy, the angelic visitation of Luke 22 marked an occasion of the greatest sorrow—of a grief which beggars description. For we read that, at that time, Jesus *“began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them (His disciples), My soul is exceeding sorrowful,”* (Matt. 26:37-38).

Initially in Luke 2 there was only one angel (v. 9) but, as soon as that angel had delivered his momentous message, he was suddenly joined by *“a multitude of the heavenly host (army),”* (v. 13)—not come to do battle with anyone, but to sing an anthem of praise to God. For the same wondrous birth which had earlier drawn Mary and Joseph from Nazareth (v. 4) and would soon draw shepherds from their flocks (vv. 15-16) now drew a large troop of angels from

the invisible world. And this angelic military choir came to ascribe glory to God in heaven above and to invoke peace (well-being, blessedness, that is) to men on earth below, v. 14.

But surely, if anything, this “*multitude of the heavenly host*” were needed, not so much in Luke 2, but in Luke 22—not in the field of Bethlehem, but in the Garden of Gethsemane. And, yes, they could have come there ... and, yes, they would have come there ... if the Lord Jesus had only asked. We recall His words to Peter in that Garden, “*Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to (‘appeal to’) my Father, and he shall presently (‘now’) give me more than twelve legions of angels?*,” (Matt. 26:53). A single Roman legion comprised up to 6,000 men. “*More than twelve legions of angels*”—probably in excess of 72,000 angels—would certainly have formed a respectable “*multitude of the heavenly host!*” But, no, the Lord Jesus would not ask His Father to assign them to Him.

The virgin birth spoken of by Luke in chapters 1 and 2 had been foretold well over 700 years before the event; “*the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,*” (Isa. 7:14). And the prophet Isaiah is careful to tell us that this word of the Lord had been given to King Ahaz “*at the end of the conduit (the channel, the canal or aqueduct) of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller’s field,*” (Isa. 7:3).

This precise location features in only one other incident recorded in the Old Testament, again recorded by Isaiah; “*the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh (the Commander-in-Chief of the Assyrian army) from Lachish to Jerusalem unto king Hezekiah with a great army. And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller’s field,*” (Isa. 36:2),

from where he sought to intimidate the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the days of Ahaz’s son, Hezekiah, and to brow-beat them into submission and surrender to Sennacherib, the King of Assyria. But the Assyrian invasion and siege came to an abrupt end, when “*the Lord sent an angel,*” (2 Chron. 32:21)—yes, just one—who “*smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand,*” (Isa. 37:36). The psalmist David said of angels that they “*excel in strength,*” (Ps. 103:20), and the apostle Peter that they “*are greater in power and might,*” (2 Pet. 2:11). Sennacherib would have agreed!

## **A “multitude of the heavenly host” would have encountered no difficulty whatever in dispatching the “great multitude with swords and staves (or cudgels)” who accompanied Judas into Gethsemane to arrest Jesus that dark night**

If one angel alone could do that, what could over 72,000 do? We can take it for granted that such a “*multitude of the heavenly host*” would have encountered no difficulty whatever in dispatching the “*great multitude with swords and staves (or cudgels)*” who accompanied Judas into Gethsemane to arrest Jesus that dark night (Matt. 26:47). The absence of something over 72,000 angels would probably have gone unnoticed in the heavenly court, populated as it is with millions of angels. But their sudden arrival in Gethsemane’s garden would not have gone unnoticed by a certain Roman “*captain*” and his few hundred men!

But no! For, as the angel in Luke

2 revealed to the shepherds, our Lord had come as “*a Saviour.*” And, if He was to be that, He needed to go from Gethsemane to Golgotha. There could be no large-scale angelic invasion!

Concerning the birth of Jesus (of which Luke wrote in chapter 2), the writer to the Hebrews records that “*coming into the world, he (the Lord Jesus) says ... Lo, I come ... to do, O God, thy will,*” (Heb. 10:5-7 New Translation). And in the Garden of Gethsemane (of which Luke wrote in chapter 22), when this resolve was tested to the extreme, He responded in prayer with the well-

known words, “*not my will, but thine, be done,*” (v. 42).

And so, although the one angel of Luke chapter 2 was soon followed by many (vv. 10-13) the one angel of Luke 22 remained alone (v. 43). For, such was our Lord’s unreserved devotion to God and His unbounded grace to us, that He would not ask His Father for more!

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**Malcolm Horlock**  
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# The Glory of His Fellowship (John 1:14,39)

**F**ellowship entails communion, sharing and partnering in a common activity. As we examine the Lord's invitations it becomes clear that He desires our close fellowship (John 1:39).

Of all the disciples Peter, James and John entered into this like no other. John's intimate relationship with the Lord was described as "*the one whom the Lord loved*" (John 19:26).

Immediately after His resurrection the Lord taught Mary to cling to Him only after He ascended to His Father (John 20:17). Customarily serving with a visible Lord, His people would soon fellowship with the ascended Lord of glory (2 Cor. 5:16).

## **Come and Live (Matt 11:28)**

The Lord Jesus is eternal God, the source of both physical and spiritual life (John 1:1-4; 1 Jn. 1:1-2).

**Having received  
Christ's life  
the moment we  
are born again  
we have the  
opportunity to  
offer our life  
back to Him**

Conversely we are born into this world dead, having no spiritual life (Eph. 2:1). Thus the Lord invites all to come by faith and cling to Him (Matt. 11:28; John 3:16). Labouring to escape sin's burden we must stop struggling and accept the rest He offers through His finished work on the cross.

All who receive His life (Col 3:4; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 John 5:11-12) have the assurance that God has called them into the fellowship of His Son (1 Cor. 1:9). What's more it is through His Son we have fellowship with the Father (1 Jn. 1:3).

The Lord Jesus desires intimate fellowship and it is only limited by our refusal to accept His terms. One is that we must die (John 3:30).

## **Come and Die (John 12:23-26)**

The Lord Jesus was often invited to turn away from the cross. Among others the devil (Matt. 4:1-11), Peter (Matt. 16:22-23), Jews (John 6:15) and possibly the Greeks (John 12:20-21) all solicited Him to spare His life. However He rejected all offers.

Hearing the Greeks request, the Lord revealed instead that His death would bring glory to Him (John 12:23) by bearing spiritual fruit (John 12:24).

## **Illustrated by the Seed**

In nature a seed must be planted

and die so that the outer husk can shed and the germ of life within it be activated. This life will then grow into a plant and bear fruit (John 12:24).

Despite containing life, if a seed is spared it will remain alone and bear no fruit.

Desiring to include us in His fellowship the Lord did not spare His life but gave it.

The Lord Jesus took the body given to Him (Heb.10:5) and planted it by His death and burial. Rising from the dead, He is the plant that continues to bear fruit as each one is added to the church.

## **We can give back our life**

Having received Christ's life the moment we are born again we have the opportunity to offer our life back to Him (2 Cor. 5:15).

There are only two choices, we either spare (love) our life or give (hate) it (John 12:25). Sparing our life is a major barrier to Christ's fellowship while offering our life allows us to draw near (John 13:23).

Paul, desiring Christ's close fellowship mentioned three characteristics that all involved death (Phil. 3:10).

## **The power of His resurrection**

Our position is in Christ and therefore we died and rose with Him (Rom. 6:4; Eph. 1:20; 2:6).

Yet to know His power in our daily lives we must live out this truth. We must die, conduct a funeral service and permanently bury our self. Only then will His powerful life be lived out through us (Gal. 2:20).

Longing for Christ Paul knew this would only happen when he let himself go.

He also looked forward to the day when this same power would instantly conform his lowly body to His glorious body (Phil. 3:21).

Christ (Luke 6:22; John 15:18-21). It views the cross as shameful or foolish but to those who believe, Christ is the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24).

Knowing one needs Christ's communion and partnership, an effective

**To know His power in our daily lives we must live out this truth. We must die, conduct a funeral service and permanently bury our self. Only then will His powerful life be lived out through us**

George Mueller said,

"There was a day when I died; died to self, my opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren or friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."

Speaking of Jim Elliot, a missionary who gave his life for Christ, a pilot once remarked,

"Jim Elliot's body expired in this life, but Jim Elliot died while a college student ... several years before. He yielded his life to God then, no matter the consequences."

One man lived a short life, the other a long one. Yet both knew that once the outer shell dies, they could face every circumstance in life with the same power that raised Christ from the dead.

**The fellowship of His suffering**

Through church history Christ's fellowship has carried a reproach. His name is never loved in worldly circles and He resides in rejection outside the camp (Heb. 13:13).

However He is no longer on a cross outside Jerusalem but is now seated in glory. All who desire fellowship with Christ must separate from worldly associations, stand beside Him and carry His Name.

Bearing His name carries a reproach and the world will hate us because it hates

servant takes their cross and follows His path (John 12:26). While suffering is the price for His intimacy (2 Tim 3:12) we can take comfort that He empathizes.

Losing family, friends, occupation or reputation for His name is clear evidence that one has let go and gained Christ (Phil. 3:8). This process prepares us for the day when we might be called to physically die for Him.



# To win the battle every soldier must be willing to die. As Christ's soldiers ... should God expect any less from us?

## Being conformed to His death

The pattern has been set. It's through Christ's infinite death that God is harvesting a bountiful harvest. Since the servant is not above the master we must be willing to follow Him.

Nate Saint, a martyr for Christ remarked in a radio sermon,

"During the last war we were taught to recognize that, in order to obtain our objective, we had to be willing to be expendable ... Yet, when the Lord Jesus asks us to pay the price for world evangelization, we often answer without a word. We cannot go. We say it costs too much."

To win the battle every soldier must be willing to die. As Christ's soldiers (2 Tim 2:3) should God expect any less from us?

Throughout the centuries believers knew they might die for their faith. Many accepted martyrdom

because they had already conformed to His death. Having done so, they lost nothing.

If the Lord carries we'll eventually die, so the reasonable choice is to be a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2).

Jim Elliot said "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

## Rewards

Christ's life will bear fruit in and through our lives in direct proportion to our willingness to die (John 12:24).

The fruit is evident as we change into His image and people are added to and encouraged in the fellowship. The rewards are significant and will reach into eternity (John 12:25-26).

The Father loves the Son (John 5:20) and gives honour or eternal weight to what He did. When we follow His path the Father's joy is evident in the honour He bestows on us (John 12:26) as we experience

the glory of His fellowship (John 14:21, 23).

Stephen gave his life and was honoured to see the Lord Jesus before his spirit ascended to meet Him (Acts 7:55-56). Someday we'll see Christ's glory (John 17:24) but He wants our fellowship now.

## Make your choice

Protecting itself our flesh could rise in fury and shout "spare." Worldly temptations might entice us by whispering "spare" and the devil will certainly attempt to divert us. Even well meaning friends could object and recommend "spare."

Amidst this clamour Christ softly asks us to die and enjoy the glory of His fellowship.

---

**George Ferrier**  
Ottawa, ON

**Someday we'll see Christ's glory  
... but He wants our fellowship now.**

# “Constantly Abiding”

## A study of the word *meno* in John’s Writings

**We share the Godhead’s eternal life with and in Christ, and so experience the very atmosphere and fellowship of heaven, even while ... living ... on earth**

The Greek word *meno* occurs many times in both the Gospel by John and his first two Epistles, more times than in all the other books of the New Testament put together. The aim of this article is to study its various shades of meaning, its usage concerning Christ Himself, unbelievers, and especially believers today, with a view to understanding its importance for our lives and Christian testimonies.

### Its Meanings

In His teaching on “*abiding*” the Lord Jesus took a well-known word and gave it a much deeper spiritual significance. Basically, *meno* means “to dwell” or “to remain,” and, in the New Testament generally, often means no more than “to stay in a place,” “to continue,” “to live on,” “to stand firm,” “to endure,” or “to last.” But in John’s writings the Lord often used the phrase “to remain,

or abide, in” in a technical sense to express the closest possible relationship between Himself and His Father, and also a similar one between Himself and all true believers. It is this latter meaning of the word that is the main subject of our study.

### Its Usage

#### 1. Concerning Christ

In John 14:10 the Lord states that, “*I am in the Father, and the Father in Me,*” so that the Father “*dwelleth in Me,*” where He uses the word *meno*. This expresses the most intimate relationship between the Father and the Son, which resulted in Christ acting in continual oneness with His Father. John 1:32 states that the Holy Spirit “*abode upon*” Christ from the moment of His baptism by John the Baptist, which also implies that His whole Person remains in a lasting and unique relationship of nearness to the other members of the Godhead. In fact, this intimate fellowship between the Persons of the Godhead is the very essence of eternal life.

#### 2. Concerning Unbelievers

Sadly, unbelievers know nothing of this divine fellowship. By their unbelief they are cut off from all spiritual life, light, and love. For Scripture says that they are continually exposed to the judgement of God’s wrath (John 3:36); their sins remain unforgiven (John 9:41); they remain

spiritually blind (John 12:46), and dead (1 Jn. 3:14-15); and they do not remain true to the doctrine of Christ in any way (2 Jn. 9). The word *meno* is used in all these verses to describe the terrible fate of unbelievers.

#### 3. Concerning Believers

By happy contrast, all true believers enjoy the assurance of the same kind of spiritual relationship with Christ as He has with His Father (John 17:20-23). According to verse 3 of that same chapter, we share the Godhead’s eternal life with and in Christ, and so experience the very atmosphere and fellowship of heaven, even while we are living here upon the earth. In John 6:56, where *meno* is translated as “*dwelleth,*” abiding in Christ is linked with our acceptance by faith of the saving power of His sacrificial death. For this is how we can feed upon Christ as the Bread of life. And we receive the assurance that Christ does indeed abide in us by His indwelling Spirit, according to 1 John 3:24. Now this abiding of individual believers in Christ creates an inner unity, which is illustrated in John chapter 15 by the vital link between Christ as the True Vine and all believers, His branches. But Christ’s abiding in believers depends on the abiding of His word in them, as is made clear in John 8:31, 15:7, and 1 John 2:24, in which verses *meno* is twice translated as “continue.” For abiding in Christ makes us Christ’s property to the very

# For, if we are abiding in Him, we shall not need to be ashamed before Him at His coming

depths of our beings, and involves our implicit obedience in following Christ's example in His perfect life (1 Jn. 2:6). Abiding in Christ in this way leads to the reproduction in us of the fruit of Christ-like character and conduct (John 15:5). Isolated acts of disobedience can break the enjoyment of our communion with Christ, and lead to the loss of our personal testimony before men, but do not result in the loss of eternal life, which remains secure in the vine stem, Christ Himself. For, in the light of other verses in Scripture which clearly teach the eternal security of the true believer, this is the most probable meaning of John 15:6, which speaks of a failure by the believer to abide in Christ. Restoration to fellowship is effected by confessing our specific sins to God, and the Advocacy of Christ with His Father and ours (1 Jn. 1:9-2:1). If we do abide in God's Word, however, we shall be able to overcome the evil one (1 Jn. 2:14), and the anointing of the Holy Spirit will guard us from being deceived by false teachers (1 Jn. 2:26-27). Also, abiding in the light of God's presence will lead us to love other believers (1 Jn. 2:9-11; 4:12 and 16). Finally, abiding in fellowship with Christ inevitably results in righteous living (1 Jn. 3:6). For, although *meno* is not always translated as "abide" in these verses, the meaning is the same.

## Its Importance

To abide in Christ is of crucial importance for the maintenance of a vibrant and productive spiritual life in a variety of ways. We shall consider these by taking the three main ideas suggested by the word *meno* in its different usages, and commenting on each of them in turn.

First, then, "abiding" suggests that we have an intimate daily personal communion with our Lord as we go through our lives here and now. Without this there will be failure and loss of testimony to the world. With it there will be a radiant personal testimony, a fulfilling prayer-life in which we receive answers because we are in harmony with the will of God, and Christ-likeness in every way. Others will take knowledge of us, "that we have been with Jesus."

Secondly, "abiding" suggests sheer Consistency in our Christian lives, a characteristic sadly lacking in so many of us. If we constantly abide in Christ, as He abides in His Father, the same evenness of temperament and consistency of conduct will mark us as marked Him, "the Same yesterday, and today, and forever," which is actually a title of His Deity. O to be full both of grace and truth like Him in equal measure! Abiding will lead to spiritual balance and fully-rounded maturity of Christian character.

Thirdly, "abiding" suggests faithful Continuance right on to the end of our Christian pathways on earth. We may suggest that this will be seen in three ways. First, in our individual personal Witness to all our fellow-men and women. We shall always be ready to speak an appropriate "word in season" for the Lord and to help people in need. Secondly, in Well-doing both within the home circle, the local assembly and the wider household of faith, and

also to all needy men and women around us. Thirdly, in Waiting and Watching for our Lord's imminent second coming. For, if we are abiding in Him, we shall not need to be ashamed before Him at His coming (1 Jn. 2:28).

## Its Practice Exemplified

The delightful cameo in Luke 10:38-42 of Mary of Bethany sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His Word well exemplifies the practice of abiding in Christ, even though Mary was at the time living just before the dawn of the day of grace and the indwelling of the Spirit of God within all believers of the Church age. Her position and attitude were both those of one who is "abiding in Christ." It was undoubtedly here that she learned of her Lord's imminent death and resurrection, truths which were not understood by many, if any, before the cross. We, too, all need this individual personal communion with Christ on a daily basis, meditating upon His Word and conversing with Him in prayer. And those who know this as a daily reality can certainly testify that, "Nothing can be compared to the joy of abiding in an intimate loving relationship with Jesus Christ." The hymn-writer has expressed it well:

Abiding, oh, so wondrous sweet!  
I'm resting at the Saviour's feet;  
I trust in Him; I'm satisfied,  
I'm resting in the Crucified!

This is the "Rapture divine" of "Constantly abiding" in Christ.

---

**Malcolm C. Davis**  
Leeds

# Beyond Today

If we could see beyond today  
As God can see;  
If all the clouds should roll away,  
The shadows flee,  
O'er present griefs we would not fret,  
Each sorrow we would soon forget,  
For many joys are waiting yet  
For you and me.

If we could know beyond today  
As God doth know,  
Why dearest treasures pass away  
And tears must flow;  
And why the darkness leads to light,  
Why dreary paths will soon grow bright;  
Some day life's wrongs will be made right  
Faith tells us so.

"If we could see, if we could know,"  
We often say,  
But God in love a veil doth throw  
Across our way;  
We cannot see what lies before  
And so we cling to Him the more,  
He leads us till this life is o'er;  
Trust and obey.

—Author Unknown

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# Lessons in *Worship* From Mary of Bethany John 12:1-8

**Nothing was too costly to her to expend on Him. I wonder if we realize in our souls that our worship of Him should cost us of our time and energy, a meager measure compared to His great sacrifice.**

It was only a few days before the Passover and Jerusalem was filling up with visitors who came from the country to be purified so that they may keep the feast. The city was full of rumors about how the leadership was seeking to destroy the Lord Jesus. Any one who knew His whereabouts was to report Him to the authorities, (John 11:55-57).

But a few souls who loved Him were determined to honor our Lord; they made Him a supper, (John 12:2) in a small village on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

There in that house at Bethany they were gathered with one purpose in mind, to show their appreciation of the most wanted Man in the city. They seem to have been oblivious to the dangers that could befall them for doing so.

How very much like our “worship meeting!” as we gather to honor and adore Him in a world that knows Him not and that is blatantly hostile to His cause.

Was the purpose of the supper then only to thank Him for the raising of Lazarus from the dead? Or was it a public confession by all who were present of His Messiahship, something that was denied by the leadership of the Nation? At the end of the supper He was the only Anointed One; the Christ indeed.

Mary’s action will be the focus of our meditation here. Her older sister

and her brother were both engaged in serving the Lord and witnessing of His life giving power respectively.

But Mary was the true worshipper at His feet. She did not keep back her Spikenard though it was very costly. Nothing was too costly to her to expend on Him. I wonder if we realize in our souls that our worship of Him should cost us of our time and energy, a meager measure compared to His great sacrifice.

Her action was spontaneous; she did not confer with anyone else beforehand. Likewise our worship ought to be the spontaneous outpouring of our grateful redeemed hearts.

Her adoration was uniquely for Him for she broke the box and no one else could have shared the ointment with Him (Mark 14:3). He ought to be the one and only object of our hearts.

Her act did not go un-noticed for the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. So it should be with us, for when our worship is neither artificial nor fabricated, all who are present would recognize in it the sweet savor of Christ rather than our well chosen words.

Since her worship was in spirit and in truth its savor must have ascended into heaven itself. The fragrance of the ointment must have also accompanied the Redeemer to Golgotha, to the grave and beyond.

But the most amazing thing about

Mary's actions that evening was her knowledge and understanding of the purpose of anointing the Lord.

Why would she anoint Him if she did not know that He was on His way to die? She surely must have been aware of His upcoming sufferings. Interestingly we don't read that she was with the other women who went to the tomb to anoint His dead body. She chose to anoint a living Savior before He tasted death. To anoint a dead body was an accepted tradition among the Jews. But anointing a living person in anticipation of his imminent death was almost unknown at the time. Did Mary understand that though He will die He was surely going to rise again from among the dead? Certainly the other disciples did not have such understanding (see John 20:9)

now this very same One was going to taste death by the grace of God for every man. How then could death keep its prey if the prey Himself was the Prince of life? Could the grave conceal Him any longer? She knew that by anointing Him while still alive that she was bearing testimony of her faith that He will rise again.

Beloved, we remember a Savior who once died for us, but we worship a living victorious Redeemer. We should be conscious of His presence in our midst, now that He was brought back from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant (Heb. 13:20). He may be invisible indeed to our physical eyes but truly revealed to the eye of faith. Remembering Him means being occupied with Him; the Giver, not with the gifts we received from

Scriptures the beauties and perfections of our King? To the end that we will be able to offer them to our Father and to our Redeemer, in either our private or our public worship.

Shouldn't we be asking ourselves before we come to the worship meeting "what kind of spikenard do I have to offer to my king today?" Is it just a habit or a sense of duty that brings me to the meeting? Or is it a genuine desire to be in His presence and to worship Him? Let us first examine ourselves and thus eat.

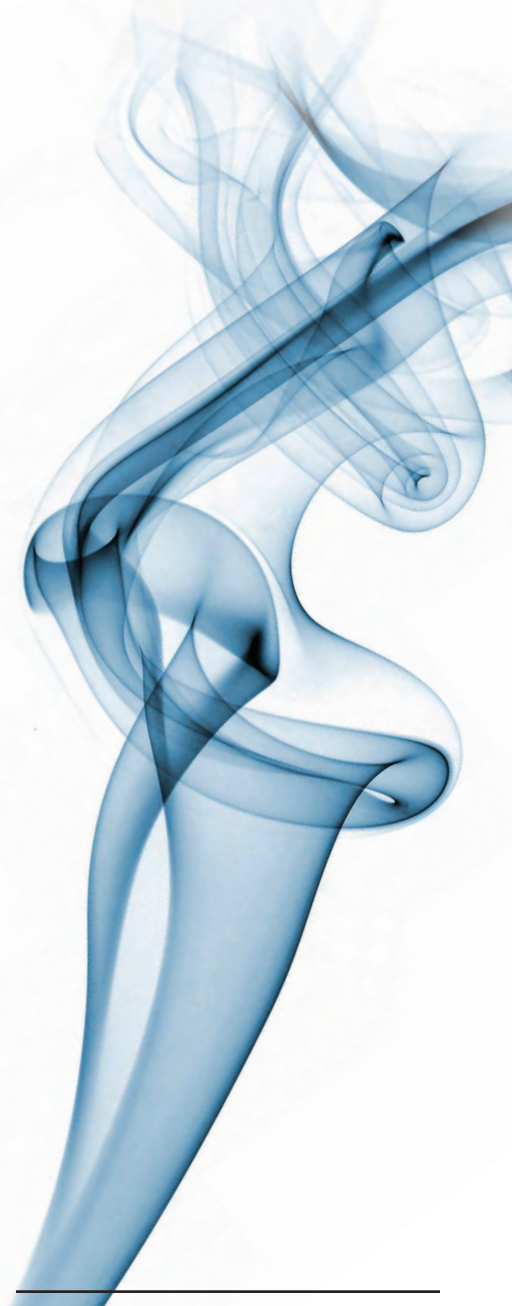
**Her action was spontaneous; she did not confer with anyone else beforehand. Likewise our worship ought to be the spontaneous outpouring of our grateful redeemed hearts.**

But where did she learn these truths about His death and resurrection? Most certainly from the Master Himself at whose feet she sat and heard His word (Luke 10:39).

We can see her standing at her brother's grave and hearing the Lord of Life calling "Lazarus come forth." She saw in wonder and amazement how her brother came out of the grave all wrapped in grave clothes. This must have confirmed in Mary's mind the truth that Jesus indeed was who He claimed to be: the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). But

Him. Consider Him who endured the cross in all its agony, not what we necessarily got as a result of Calvary. Our blessings with which He has blessed us should not have priority over the Blessor Himself. *"While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the fragrance thereof"* (Song 1:12).

How often do we care to engage throughout the entire week in gathering the spikenard of the unsearchable riches of Christ from the Word? Should we not cultivate the discipline of habitually digging out of the



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# PREPARATION for Corporate Worship

## INTRODUCTION

**W**orship is the highest form of service in which we can engage ourselves this side of heaven—the privilege of ministering to the heart of God. Now in many ways worship must be spontaneous. The idea of worship being mechanical, regulated and choreographed is as grotesque as expecting a fiancée to script and rehearse each term of endearment that he intends to use when he is with his beloved. Worship will come spontaneously when the heart is filled with its object, and longs to express itself. The Psalmist captured this thought when he wrote “*My heart is inditing a good matter: I*

**When the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, he disengaged his own from the distracting things of the world by taking them into the seclusion of the Upper Room.**

*speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue [is] the pen of a ready writer” (Ps. 45).* Such is the nature of worship.

However, having said that, there is need for preparedness. All through the scriptures we discover that approaching God required certain provisions to be put in place, and for certain conditions to be met. See for example, the complex rituals of the Levitical economy which emphasise that the offerer and the offering must be prepared beforehand. One could not approach the presence of God any which way. Thankfully, the strictures of Law have all been dispensed with through the sacrifice of Christ, but there are spiritual principles in these sacrifices that apply when we come to offer our spiritual sacrifices to God, and it is those that we wish to consider together in this study on Preparation for Worship.

## PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP:

### SEPARATION:

A vital precondition to worship God involves disengaging ourselves from the legitimate pursuits of our world-based life, and distancing ourselves from the things that otherwise would distract. For example, Moses went to Pharaoh

and insisted that they make a three day journey into the wilderness in order to worship their God, and that nothing less would be acceptable. Pharaoh suggested that they worship in the land, but Moses was adamant—three days journey into the wilderness or nothing. Abraham was asked to offer his son upon the altar, but God insisted that he leave home, and it was on the third day he saw the place afar off and reached Moriah, there to offer his son as a Burnt Offering. When the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, he disengaged his own from the distracting things of the world by taking them into the seclusion of the Upper Room. Finally, when the apostle John was about to receive those great visions of Heavenly things, we read “*After this I looked and behold a door was opened in Heaven; and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said ‘Come up hither’ ..... and immediately I was in the spirit.*” John’s unprecedented views of the glory of the Lamb in the midst of the Throne, was possible because he had disengaged himself from things of earth, and being in the Spirit, was caught up to heaven.

This is a principle that is very critical to our assembly worship. It is es-

sential that we learn how to distance ourselves from the world, even the legitimate things that occupy us during the week, if we would worship God. I spent 42 years in business, and at one stage occupied a senior management post that demanded everything I had, and my ability to disengage was overwhelmed by the pressing urgency of the business world. In the end, it was either abandon my priestly privileges forever or somehow disengage from the problem area. In my case it demanded stepping down and being content with a much less exotic career path

#### **SANTIFICATION:**

There were several occasions in the Old Testament when worship was not possible because of certain impediments that were present among the priests. For example we read

*“But the priests were too few, so that they could not flay all the burnt offerings: wherefore their brethren the Levites did help them, till the work was ended, and until the [other] priests had sanctified themselves: for the Levites [were] more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests”* (2 Chron. 29). Again, *“For they could not keep*

## **It is essential that we learn how to distance ourselves from the world, even the legitimate things that occupy us during the week, if we would worship God**

and I can assure you that was absolutely worth it. But there may be other areas from which we must disengage. For example, we cannot possibly spend Saturday night occupied with the sports or entertainment scenes of the world, and then expect to be ready for worship a few hours later on Sunday morning. We are not made that way. Disengagement and occupation with the object of worship is essential before hand. We sometime sing so truly:

There, there on eagle wing  
we soar,  
Where time and sense appear  
no more,  
There heavenly joys  
our spirits greet,  
And glory crowns  
the Mercy Seat.

*it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem”* (2 Chron. 30 (AV)). These were sad days in the spiritual experience of Israel, when the priests had not sanctified themselves and therefore could not function. This principle is also applicable in our day.

Those who approach the presence of God must be *“sanctified.”* This is the idea of 1 Corinthians 11:28 *“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of [that] bread, and drink of [that] cup.”* Note that it does not say that a man should examine himself, and stay at home. How many of us would be left if that were the case. No, the idea is that we rid

**May the Lord  
give us that  
exercise of heart  
to come into His  
presence full  
and overflowing  
with those things  
we have made  
concerning  
Christ.**

ourselves of all unconfessed sin in our lives, and find that cleansing from all unrighteousness that we are promised, before we appear in the presence of God. To do otherwise is to court disaster, because the apostle goes on to say that some were evidently appearing without this self-examination, and he tells them *"For this cause many [are] weak and sickly among you, and many sleep"* (1 Cor. 11 (AV)).

#### **PREPARATION:**

When God asked Abraham to offer up his son Isaac, Abraham began meticulous preparations. We read about him taking the fire, and the wood, and the knife. He was anticipating all that he would need, and he wanted to be ready when the moment came.

the whole Levitical system is full of the elaborate preparations that the offerer and the priest had to make, and the suitability of the offering. Under the Levitical system, the tribes of Israel had to appear before the Lord three times a year to celebrate the Feast of Jehovah. One of the preconditions that God gave was ... *"and none shall appear before me empty"* (Exod. 23:15). When Moses asked Pharaoh to let the people go three days journey into the wilderness to worship God, he insisted that all their cattle should go with them. Pharaoh could not understand this, but Moses said that *"not a hoof shall be left behind,"* and he explained to Pharaoh why. He said *"Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God; and we know not with what we must serve the LORD, until we come thither"* (Exod. 10:26).

When we come over to the N.T. and the Lord is about to institute the Lord's Supper, we hear Him instructing the disciples *"And he shall*

had been raised from the dead. Suddenly, Mary appeared with a box of alabaster ointment, very costly we are told, and she broke the box and poured the ointment on the head of the Lord Jesus as an act of worship. The woman came well prepared and we read that the whole house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

So it should be as we come into the presence of the Lord to worship him in assembly capacity. We should come prepared, but not rehearsed or determined to say what we have to say whether it fits or not, but ready to participate if the Holy Spirit should so direct us. The principle stated by Moses when he spoke to Pharaoh is how we should approach in worship. He said *"we know not with what we must serve the LORD, until we come thither."* In other words, Moses did not know exactly how the Lord would lead, or what He would require before-hand, so he wanted to have enough material and in sufficient variety, to be able to respond to any eventuality. He did not want to come determined to worship in a certain manner, but prepared to worship as the Lord directed.

The Psalm we quoted at the beginning of this study shows us how the Psalmist prepared. He speaks about offering the *"things I have made concerning the King."* May the Lord give us that exercise of heart to come into His presence full and overflowing with those things we have made concerning Christ.

#### **PRESENTATION:**

All preparations necessary must eventually find their conclusion in offering our worship. We would have thought it strange if after all the preparations the O. T. priest made in selecting and preparing the

## **May the Lord give us the desire to offer our freshly minted expressions of praise and worship to Him, the Lamb in the Midst of the Throne.**

Similarly, before the Passover, the Israelite had to search out a Lamb beforehand and keep it under observation for four days, to ensure its fitness to be the sacrifice. Again,

*shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready"* (Luke 22:12). Just before he went to the Cross, the Lord Jesus went to Bethany, and we remember the scene well. The Lord was seated at the table with the disciples and Lazarus was there who

sacrifice, if he did not put it on the altar. This is the final act of priesthood: Offering Up. It is not sufficient to prepare in the manner we have described, but also important to be willing to offer. Abraham took the fire and the wood and knife and he used them when he arrived on the summit of Moriah. Again my brethren, allow me to ask you to be deeply exercised with regard to rising to your responsibilities to offer. How sad, if we come into the presence of God, to be greeted with long barren silences, and restless fidgeting instead of priestly activity. How sad to find that the silences provoke the need to fill the time with some dissertations on scripture unrelated to remembrance, or endless hymn singing. May the Lord give us the desire to offer our freshly minted expressions of praise and worship to Him, the Lamb in the Midst of the Throne.

Saviour thy dying love  
thou gavest me,  
Nor should I aught withhold  
dear Lord from Thee,  
In love my soul would bow,  
My heart fulfill its vow,  
Some offering bring thee now,  
Something for Thee.

#### **SUMMARY:**

In concluding let us summarise what we have learned from our study regarding preparation for worship:

First, we must take the time during the week to accumulate material that could be used when we come to the assembly worship meeting. Meditate on Christ and accumulate precious thoughts of Him that can be offered to the Father. We must come prepared in heart and mind

Secondly, we must learn the art of disengaging ourselves from all that would distract or hinder worship. Disengaging should start on

Saturday night in preparation for Lord's Day morning. I would also suggest that we should be in our seats 10 mins before meeting starts to spend our time in meditation on Christ, and so make this final disengagement from the things of self and the world.

Thirdly, we must practice self-examination before we come into the presence of God, and through confession, rid ourselves of all unrighteousness.

Fourthly, it helps in our preparation for worship to spend time reading passages of scripture that lead us into Worship. For examples, many of the Psalms are worship Psalms; other passages anticipate the Cross; others the Glory and Majesty of Christ and so we could go on.

Finally, we must feel responsible as a Holy Priesthood to act in that privileged capacity, and so fulfil this highest of all services this side of Heaven—the privilege of ministering to the heart of God. We must get beyond the idea of ministering to each other or even speaking about our blessings, great as they might be. There's a beautiful Hymn in the Believe'rs Hymn books which captures the essence of all true worship and it reads.

O fix our earnest gaze,  
So wholly Lord on Thee,  
That with Thy  
beauty occupied,  
We elsewhere none may see.

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**We must feel responsible as a Holy Priesthood to act in that privileged capacity, and so fulfil this highest of all services this side of Heaven—the privilege of ministering to the heart of God.**



# Looking for the **SAVIOUR**

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself (Phil. 3:20-21 NKJV).

From the unsavory description of the earthly minded citizens the Apostle Paul directs his readers to consider Heaven's citizens, "For our citizenship," he writes, "is in Heaven, from where also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our lowly body, that it may be fashioned like His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil 3:20-21). The contrast is distinctly marked, for here are the true representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. While the place of their present worship and witness is earthly, the actual source and center of their lives is heavenly. Christians are like the diver in the ocean. Though in the ocean, he is not of it, and all his resources for life and its sustenance come from above.

In our study of these two precious verses, let's look first at the delightful theme of:

## **Our Heavenly Citizenship (3:20a)**

If our earthly citizenship is in a country where we have liberty to preach the Gospel, along with other freedoms, we have reason to be exceedingly grateful. The Christian, however, has an infinitely greater and better citizenship—he is a citizen of Heaven! The Philippian believers would have readily understood Paul's meaning, James Moffat having picked up the thought is his translation, "but we are a colony of Heaven." Philippi was a Roman colony—"a bit of Rome away from Rome"—enjoying the status and all privileges of those in Rome. In similar fashion Christians in this world are a spiritual colony of Heaven whose Ruler is not Caesar but Christ Jesus, the Lord. Furthermore, the substance of our heavenly commonwealth is not "meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

The word of "Heaven" is literally "heavens," setting forth the region in its fullness in contrast to earth. In his helpful book on Philippians, Guy H. King mentions a one-time medical missionary to China, Dr. Duncan Main, who was told that the Chinese equivalent of his name was "Dr. Apricot, of Heaven Below." Applying this to our passage, King said, "That second part is ... applicable to every Christian—he, she, is of Heaven Below" (Joy Way, p. 92). Christians, wherever they are in this world, should be a little bit of Heaven on earth in order to make earth a little bit like Heaven.

The hymns of Christians through the years bear witness to the truth set forth here by Paul (e.g., "When We All Get to Heaven"; "This World Is Not My Home"; "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder"; "My Home, Sweet Home"; "Sweet By and By"; "O That Will Be Glory"; "Meet Me There"; "Face to Face"; "To Dwell Above"; "We're marching to Zion"; "I am Bound for the Promised Land"; and J. N. Darby's great hymn, "I Shall Be Like Thy Son," just to name a few).

As James Montgomery wrote:

Here in my body pent,  
Absent from Him I roam,  
Yet nightly pitch my moving tent  
A day's march nearer home.

Let's look now at the second main thought unfolded by this brief but blessed passage—namely:

## **Our Happy Expectation (3:20b)**

"From where also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." In these words both the Saviourship and Sovereignty of Christ are underscored. As the Saviour He is coming to the air to complete our salvation (1 Thess. 4:16-17 with Rom. 8:19ff.; 2 Cor. 5:4; Rom.

13:11), and because He is Lord He is able to carry out all He has promised to do. Nowhere in the Scriptures are Christians bidden to look for signs. Rather, we are exhorted to “look for the Saviour,” the verb for “look” meaning “to await” or “expect eagerly” (cf. Rom. 8:25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Heb. 9:28). That the stage is presently being set for the ultimate fulfillment of such signs as the Lord Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24 and 25 there can be no question (e.g., the Jews’ return to Israel, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, false messiahs), but it is for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself that we are to look. “From where” conveys the thought of location, while “Saviour” is the emphatic position indicating that it is to be taken predicatively

## **Christians, wherever they are in this world, should be a little bit of Heaven on earth in order to make earth a little bit like Heaven.**

with the full title, the “Lord Jesus Christ.” The fact that these various signs are discernable should cause us to realize how very near we must be to our Lord’s return with all the more reason to be eagerly awaiting the realization of the Church’s “blessed hope” (Tit. 2:13).

Dr. A. T. Robertson, the celebrated New Testament scholar of a past generation, has discerningly stated:

“This blessed hope exerted a powerful influence for holy living and Christian activity among the early Christians. Some of them misunderstood the promise as definitely made for their own time. The centuries have dimmed for many the

brightness of this star of hope, but without reason, for a day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day (2 Pet. 3:8). The promise of the first coming of the Messiah seemed long in realization, but Christ did come in the fullness of time” (Paul’s Joy in Christ, p. 123).

Lastly, we want to consider something of the glorious subject of:

### **Our Hastening Transformation (3:21)**

#### **Christ’s Promise**

The verb translated “small change” has to do with outward change, as in 2:8, and may be rendered “shall fashion anew” (cf. Matt. 17:2; 1 Cor. 4:6; 11:13). The words “vile body” are

better rendered “body of humiliation,” this translation having come into prominence through Archbishop Whatley when on his death bed. He had his chaplain correctly render the words, and regarding the King James translation said, “Not vile—nothing that He has made is vile.” The word for “humiliation” (see Luke 1:48; Acts 8:33) has reference to the fall in Genesis 3. At Christ’s coming all remains of sin and sin’s disgrace shall be removed.

#### **Christ’s Pattern.**

Our future spiritual body will be “like unto His glorious body.” “Fashioned like” (lit., “conformed”) refers

to likeness in the inner nature (cf. 2:6; 3:10; Rom. 8:29). Inwardly and outwardly our future glorified bodies will be perfect mediums for the expression of Christ’s life (see 1 Cor. 15:35-53). Presently we do not know just what changes our Lord’s body went through following His resurrection and ascension, but we do know that every physical limitation gave way to the transforming power of a glorious spiritual change. John tells us that our knowledge of the future state is very limited, but we do know that when Christ appears, “we shall be like Him” (1 Jn. 3:2).

#### **Christ’s Power**

The word for “working” is literally “energy” (see Ps. 17:15). It has reference to power in exercise and is used only of superhuman power (see John 1:12; 2 Pet. 2:11). Although there are many unanswered questions relative to the resurrection and change that Christians shall experience at the rapture, we need not entertain any doubts about our Lord Jesus Christ’s power. The words “He is able” should completely satisfy any uncertainty about the present or future. These are wonderful words: “He is able” (cf. 2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 3:20; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 2:18; 7:25; Jude 24). “Subdue” is literally “subject,” and it is here revealed that God’s work in Christ involves not only transformation, but subjugation, and that, not only of the body but of all things (cf. 1 Cor. 15:25-27; Rom. 8:18-20; Eph. 1:10, 21-22; 4:10).

Are we really “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Pet. 2:11) in this world, or have we become settlers? Do we really love steadfastly Christ’s appearing (2 Tim. 4:8)? Does “that blessed hope” have a genuine sanctifying effect on our lives (1 Jn. 3:3)?

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## Crowns

The Crown of Thorns that Jesus wore  
Was victory over sin,  
He suffered shame and scourging sore  
That He our souls might win.

Oh, we can't grasp this love divine,  
'Tis love beyond compare,  
Nor height nor depth can separate  
God's love in Christ so fair.

Look now He wears a diadem,  
He's Conqueror and King,  
He sits upon a throne in heav'n  
As we our praises bring.

And as we serve Him here below  
A Crown of Life there'll be,  
To all who love Him to the end  
When we His face shall see.

Oh may our course be finished well  
That we a crown might gain,  
To cast it at His lovely feet  
When we with Him shall reign!

—Edith MacLelland