

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS



No. 137

December 2015

Jealousy

Paper by Graeme Smith

Jesus's Post-Resurrection Appearances

Talk given by Russell Collins

Jordan

Paper given by Jenny Roe
at the 2015 Conference

News and Notes

Correspondence

JEALOUSY

Paper by Graeme Smith

Jealousy is a characteristic that, on the one hand, Christians must strive to eradicate, but, on the other hand, they must strive to cultivate.

The two extremes are accommodated by the Greek words from which 'jealousy' is translated. There are three different Greek words:

- the verb 'zeo', which means to be hot;
- the noun 'Zelos', which properly means heat; figuratively zeal; in a favourable sense ardour and in an unfavourable sense, jealousy;
- the verb 'zeloo', which means to have warmth of feeling for or against.

In the King James Version these Greek words are translated by several different English words. Some of the English words used to convey a favourable meaning are emulation, fervent mind, desire and zealous. Some of the English words used to convey an unfavourable meaning are envy, covet, indignation and jealousy. All of the words describe an emotion that has an element of heat, either favourable or unfavourable.

One of the English words used to convey an unfavourable emotion is envy. The Christian must strive to eliminate envy from their character, as Paul exhorted in Romans 13:13; *"Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying"*. The elimination of strife and envying has application in both secular and spiritual spheres.

In the secular sphere, one must strive to eliminate envy towards one who has material goods such as money or property, or has physical talents, or good health. One talent might be the ability to sing; to be able to join in singing hymns with our brethren. However, God might not have given one the talent to do so. And so envy can apply to abstract objects as well as concrete, such as a new car. Either way, whether it is regarding an abstract talent or a concrete possession, envy is one of those characteristics of jealousy which Christians should strive to eradicate. In Romans 13:13 Paul emphasised this necessity to eradicate envy; *"Let us walk honestly, not in strife and envying"*. So envying is one of those characteristics that Christians must strive to eradicate, from both their secular activities and their spiritual aspirations.

The question arises, what to do about this? How do we go about eradicating envy?

Let us consider the secular point of view first of all. I say, these aren't words of testimony. One of the ways that I try to safeguard against becoming envious of people because of their pecuniary welfare is in 2 Corinthians 4:18, which reads, *"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal"*. Those words are well known to us all, but I find that it's a daily challenge to me to keep that text very clearly in mind. Yes, the things that are seen are temporal. In other words, those who have these precious things, they have their reward.

Jesus said, *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal"* (Matthew 6:19). And how true that is. Our house in Canberra is thirty eight years old, and every day I have examples of moth and rust corrupting. Fortunately, we haven't had any thieves breaking in and stealing, but certainly, how temporary are these material things. Therefore keeping in mind what Jesus said, quoted above, *".... But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal"* (Matthew 6: 20). That's a challenge to me, to keep those verses in my mind every day; to realise the temporary nature of those earthly things.

And you know, it's even harder than that. Yes, I know that we are seeking an eternal reward, but those people are enjoying great comfort right now, from their new car or whatever, so it's another level at which we have to try to eradicate envy. Paul said in Philippians 4:11 *"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"*. Now we know something of Paul's history, don't we. He survived distress, shipwreck and all the rest of it, but he learned that in whatsoever state he was, therewith to be content. He learnt it.

And so it is with us, brethren. It's a learning process for today, tomorrow and the day after. Yes, it's a learning process until we finish our earthly course.

As Paul wrote to Timothy, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain"*. What a challenge. *"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."* (1 Timothy 6: 6 and 7). What a challenge. Looking out at the world and seeing how many millions of refugees there are that have neither food nor raiment, nowhere to lay their heads. And so friends, we have food and raiment; let us therewith be content.

That's on the material side, but what about on the spiritual side? I'd love to be able to sing, and I'd love to be able to play like Linton and Tim can play, a real talent or gift, but that's not been the Lord's will for me. And so I refer to 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 17 and 18, *"If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the*

smelling? *But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him*". And I find that text very helpful to me; to really take that to heart. *"But now hath God set the members every one of them"* (every one, you and me) *"in the body, as it hath pleased him."* A challenge. And so I find it a great comfort and help to me, to realise that just because we aren't great musicians, God has placed us in the body. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."* (Ephesians 2: 8 and 9).

As Paul said, *"For I am the least of the apostles, but by the grace of God I am what I am."* (1 Corinthians 15: 9 and 10). And what a great privilege it is to see what we see of the Scriptures. So many people walking in darkness today. Yesterday, Dawn and I were listening to the radio in the car while travelling. They were talking about gender distinction in the community. Experts. We listened to it for about half an hour or so, and they were talking about, frankly, people walking in darkness. Absolute darkness. Absolutely no mention of God's order in creation. No mention at all about relationship in Ephesians of man and woman, marriage and so on. Not a mention. Much philosophy, long words, complex sentences. Poor people, walking in darkness.

And so, it is one of the greatest joys that we are what we are. And how privileged to understand what little we do know about God's great plan and the times of restitution.

Well, enough about the negative aspect of jealousy. How can jealousy be a positive attribute, a positive characteristic, something we have to cultivate? In 2 Corinthians 11:2 Paul wrote, *"For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ"*.

Paul's use of the word jealousy (or at least that is the way it has been translated) in its simplest form expresses a warmth of feeling for them. Paul's love for them was not a cold unemotional love but one that was characterized by warmth; that is, heat.

Paul's warmth of feeling for them was a Godly jealousy because it reflected Jesus' love for them, and it should be the same with us: *"This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."* (John 15:12). Hence Paul also told the believers to love one another: *"But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another."* (1 Thessalonians 4:9).

Another reason why Paul emphasised that his love for his brethren was a Godly love was that he was presenting them to Christ, and in that sense they were the product of His workmanship. 2 Corinthians 11:2 again; *"For I am*

jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”.

Perhaps a third reason why Paul’s love for them was so intense was that he was aware that the devil would harass them: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5:8). Paul wanted them to love one another fervently, because intense love - warm love, not cold mechanical love - would help protect them from the adversary. **We** must also be aware of the devil, **our** adversary: *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end”* (Hebrews 3: 12 to 14). The best way to exhort one another daily is to love them with a pure heart fervently, with great warmth.

As Hebrews says, warm exhortation, fervent love, of each other helps avoid any trace of unbelief creeping in, each and every one being strengthened by the faith of the other, as Hebrews 12:15 states: *“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled”.*

Now we come to what may be termed the pinnacle of jealousy. It is a standard of love that should only be practised by those who are mature in the faith, those whom Paul called *“spiritual”*. Galatians 6: 1 and 2: *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ”.*

There are several important points we must observe arising from those verses.

Firstly, only those who *“are spiritual”* are to carry out the ‘restoration’. In other words, the apostle recognised and understood the dangers and delicacy involved in providing such guidance. However, the situation is made more delicate because there is an element of self esteem in deeming oneself to be spiritual, or more pointedly, more spiritual than another, because the admonition is to esteem another better than oneself, while not forgetting the warmth we must demonstrate to each other: *“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others”* (Philippians 2:1 to 4).

Yes, we are not to be totally self-centered, but are to watch out for each other, 'their things', while at the same time esteeming them better than ourselves. What a delicate balance!

The second point to note, and this emphasizes the delicacy of the task of restoring another, is that the outcome must be restoration, not destruction: *“Let all things be done unto edifying”* (1 Corinthians 14:26). Yes the objective must always be to restore, not to destroy.

Paul also stressed the need that such advice be given in a spirit of meekness, that is, with gentleness and humility. If it is done in a proud or haughty spirit, the one who is trying to restore the other exposes themselves to the wiles of the devil, as Paul expressed in the few words *“Lest thou also be tempted”* (Galatians 6:1).

Nevertheless, in spite of the delicacy of the situation, the exhortation is to *“Bear one another’s burdens”*, that is, being so closely associated that we are ever ready to lend a helping hand should one need it. One way of accomplishing such close association without being intrusive or offensive is to continue to associate ourselves with those of like precious faith.

Close association aids us all to *“Provoke to love and good works”* as exhorted in Hebrews 10: 24 and 25; *“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”*. The thrust of the exhortation is that the provocation will be to good works, and that is to be done with exhortation not criticism.

The apostle Peter summed up all of our considerations today in one verse; *“And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins”* (1 Peter 4:8). Yes, our love is to be a fervent love, a love that is hot, not cold and mechanical, not a 'duty love' but a sincere love for each other, one that has the interests of the other at heart. And such love removes all tendencies towards animosity or fault finding; indeed such love covers over a multitude of sins (or defects).

It eradicates negative heat, which is jealousy, and cultivates favourable jealousy, that is a love and zeal for each other that provokes them to love and good works and negates the darts of the enemy. And may we add that it is always profitable to remember that it is God who has placed the members in the body, and that *“One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren”* (Matthew 23:8).



JESUS' POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

Talk given by Russell Collins

INTRODUCTION

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fundamental teaching of the Christian faith.

There are six independent testimonies to the fact of the resurrection. The testimonies are recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter and Paul. Three of these testimonies are eye-witness accounts. All testimonies agree on the central points. Jesus died, was buried, a stone was placed closing the entrance to His tomb and secured with a seal, and an armed guard was appointed to keep the tomb secure. On the third day after Jesus' death, very early in the morning, He appeared to Mary Magdalene, and He also appeared to many during the following forty days. He then ascended to Heaven and was seen no more, except by Stephen before he was put to death by stoning, and by Paul the apostle in special manifestations.

Paul wrote a stirring defence of Jesus' resurrection in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15, and continued in that chapter to give his readers many detailed comments concerning the resurrection, and how Christians now, and indeed all people in God's due time, will benefit as a consequence of faith in the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of all the dead, justified and unjustified, great and small (Acts 24:15, Revelation 20:12).

After Jesus' resurrection, His followers saw Him, talked with Him, touched Him and saw Him eat. Many of Jesus' appearances are related by independent witnesses, and are entirely free from fanciful or grotesque incidents that could imply evil or Satanic involvement. The appearances of Jesus began within a few hours of the stone being rolled back from the tomb, before legend or imagination could be introduced or incorporated into the accounts.

SOME FANCIFUL ACCOUNTS

We do have some information that has come down to us of what early Christians would have made of Jesus' earthly life and ministry if they had drawn on their imagination instead of sticking to facts. A large collection of second, third and fourth century 'gospels' have come down to us, such as the Protevangelium or gospel of James, which is probably late second century, the gospel of Thomas (third century), of Nicodemus (fourth?), of Peter (second), and the Arabic gospel of the Infancy. In these curious productions we are told that Salome's hand was withered because she would not believe in the virgin birth, that the ox and the ass kneeled to the Child in the manger, lions and leopards adored Him on the way to Egypt, roses blossomed where He trod; all the idols in Egypt fell from their pedestals when He entered the

country; in His village home in Nazareth He struck dead a boy who jostled Him in the street, turned twelve clay models of birds into living sparrows, criticised one of His schoolmasters and killed another, terrified and angered the whole village, and issued from the grave in a form that towered to the skies. Yet these legend-mongers appear to be quite sincere Christians, and artists in their way; some of their descriptions are really very striking. They do at least serve to show what the four gospels would have been like if they had been uninspired fiction instead of inspired fact.

JESUS' RESURRECTION APPEARANCES IN SCRIPTURE

These words were spoken by the apostle Peter to Cornelius and all who were present with him at Cornelius's house. *"You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached - how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead."* (Acts 10: 36 to 41 [NIV]).

1. Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb very early on the first day of the week *"when it was yet dark"* and saw that the stone sealing the tomb had been taken away. She ran to tell Peter and John, who ran to the tomb and found it empty with the linen clothes lying, and the napkin that was about Jesus' head *"in a place by itself."* They did not know or remember the Scripture or the words Jesus had said to them that He must rise again from the dead. They went away again unto their own home.

John recorded for us what happened next. *"Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 'Woman,' he said, 'Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my*

Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ‘ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’ And she told them that he had said these things to her.” (John 20: 11 to 18 [(NIV)).

As soon as Jesus said “Mary”, she knew that it was Jesus Himself who stood before her. Did she touch Him? Some other versions have, “*Do not hold onto me*” or “*Do not cling to me.*” Jesus told Mary to go to the brethren and tell them that He had been raised from the dead. Mary immediately went to the disciples and told them that she had seen Jesus and that He had spoken to her.

Jesus must have been given power to appear in the form of a man, then be able to disappear from human sight again as circumstances made it necessary or desirable, or in accordance with His wishes.

2. Other Women

Some of the womenfolk went to the sepulchre as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week. They were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children (Matthew 27:56), also Salome (Mark 16:1), and Joanna (Luke 24:10). Mary Magdalene must have gone first “*when it was yet dark*” (John 20:1). An angel spoke to the women, telling them that Jesus had risen from the dead and that He would go before them into Galilee. The women departed quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell the disciples.

But as they went, Jesus met them. They held Him by the feet and worshipped Him. Jesus Himself told them to tell His brethren to go into Galilee where they would see Him. On these occasions there were a number of witnesses to His appearance, for it is written that “*the testimony of two men is true.*” (John 8:17).

“Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’” (Matthew 28: 9,10. [(NIV)).

3. Two On The Road To Emmaus

“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, ‘What are you discussing together as you walk along?’ They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, ‘Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?’ ‘What things?’ he asked. ‘About Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘He

was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.' He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' " (Luke 24: 13 to 32 [NIV]).

Two disciples, one named Cleopas and another who is not named, were walking on the first day of the week from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a distance of about 7 miles or 12 kilometres, when they were joined by Jesus, whom they did not recognise. They spoke of the women visiting the tomb and discovering it empty, and of the women seeing angels who told them that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Jesus then expounded to them all the Scriptures concerning Himself, which made their hearts burn within them. Still they did not recognise Him until He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them. Suddenly they realised that it was Jesus who was with them, and as their eyes were opened He vanished from their sight. Jesus used His power to dematerialise from human form and resume His spirit body which they could not see.

4. Peter

"The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon"(Luke 24:34 [AV]).

"And that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve". (1 Corinthians 15:5 [NIV]).

The Lord must have appeared to Peter alone, perhaps when he ran to the sepulchre after the women had returned to tell the apostles all that they had seen and heard. We can (or may) deduce from these two references that this is what happened.

5. Ten Apostles Without Thomas

"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.' Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.'" (John 20: 19 to 25 [NIV])

Jesus suddenly appeared in a closed room. He must have gone to the apostles in spirit form, then materialised into human form to enable them to see Him and talk with Him. He also ate some baked fish and honeycomb before them. But Thomas was not with them.

6. The Eleven Apostles With Thomas

"A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20: 26 to 31 [NIV]).

After eight days, the disciples were gathered together again and Thomas was with them. Jesus again appeared in a closed room and invited Thomas to touch His hands and His side, telling him not to be unbelieving but to be convinced.

Evidently Jesus gave His disciples many other signs which are not recorded, but are mentioned to strengthen faith and help us all to have life through His name.

7. At the Sea of Galilee

"Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

'I'm going out to fish,' Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.' So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?' 'No,' they answered. He said, 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.' When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead." (John 21: 1 to 14 [NIV]).

Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not at first recognise Him. They had caught nothing during the night. Jesus told them to cast their net on the right side of the ship, and they caught one hundred and fifty-three fish. Then John recognised Jesus, saying to Peter, "*It is the Lord*". Peter cast himself into the sea and the others hauled the net full of fishes to land. As soon as they reached the land, they saw a fire of coals with fish and bread being prepared. They all realised that Jesus had done this for them, and they ate of the fish and the bread.

8. More than Five Hundred Brethren

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" (Matthew 28: 16 to 20 [NIV]).

"After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:6 [NIV]).

It seems likely that many were present with the eleven, because it says "*but some doubted*". In any case, Jesus appeared before them, they worshipped

Him, and He gave them commands to preach the gospel and baptise believers.

9. James

"After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles." (1 Corinthians 15:7 [AV]).

The James mentioned by Paul is most likely James the Apostle. It seems that the Lord appeared to him, very likely because he was to be put to death by Herod quite soon in the early days of Christianity (Acts 12:1,2).

10. All The Apostles

Jesus appeared to His apostles and *"opened ... their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures,"* instructed them to remain in Jerusalem until they were *"endued with power from on high"* and led them out as far as Bethany.

"While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.' When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, 'Do you have anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.' When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God." (Luke 24:36 to 53 [NIV])

11. Jesus' Ascension

"After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized

with the Holy Spirit.' So when they met together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.' Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. (Acts 1: 3 to 12 [NIV])

The eleven and "them that were with them" (Luke 24:33) were gathered together to hear final instructions from the Lord and the promise of power to be given to them by means of the Holy Spirit.

Two men stood by the witnesses to Jesus' ascension, telling the disciples that Jesus "shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11) Whether these words are to be understood to mean that the Lord will appear from heaven in exactly the same way as He left this earth, or whether the circumstances are similar, that is, the Lord left quietly and unostentatiously, seen only by a few believers, remains for believers to consider and decide the meaning for themselves.

12. Stephen

Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, was given a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory on the right hand of God. As soon as Stephen was given this vision, he was set upon by the Jews and killed by stoning.

"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul." (Acts 7:55 to 58 [NIV]).

13. Paul

"As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.' The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul

got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.” (Acts 9: 3 to 9 [NIV].)

“And last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.” (1 Corinthians 15:8 [NIV]).

Jesus appeared to Paul in a light from heaven, and he was made blind for three days. Jesus sent Ananias to restore Paul's sight and cause him to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul's life after this intervention by the Lord Jesus became completely dedicated and devoted to the service of God through the Lord Jesus.

A RESPONSE TO ASSERTIONS MADE BY SCEPTICS

The evidence for the truth of the resurrection of Jesus' Christ presented in this article should put the matter beyond doubt. The tomb in which Jesus was buried was found to be empty, even though a stone with a seal affixed had been placed at the entrance to the tomb and an armed guard had been placed on duty to keep watch. It would have been clearly in the interest of both the Jewish and Roman authorities to call the people together, open the tomb and display the body when what seemed to be a claim of a resurrection had been made. This was not done because the tomb was empty and the body was no longer there. It is clearly untenable that multitudes of people could have become believing Christians, or that Saul, later known as Paul the Apostle, could have been converted if it were not generally known that the tomb was empty.

In spite of the evidence of the truth of Jesus' resurrection, some alternative explanations by sceptics and unbelievers have been put forward. One such explanation is that Jesus did not die but had swooned because of the sufferings He experienced. In response it must be said that if Jesus only lost consciousness, then it is surely impossible that a human being so reduced from suffering should be sufficiently revived in a day or so to set Himself free from His grave-clothes, roll away the stone from the tomb and walk some ten or twelve kilometres with pierced and bleeding feet. The Roman soldiers, the priests and His friends who buried Him would all have looked carefully to make certain that He was dead. The spear wound in His side made certain to the Romans that Jesus had died.

If the resurrection was simply a revival after He was placed in the tomb, Jesus and His disciples would have been parties to a deception, and men do not stake their all for something that is not true and that they do not believe. The tomb was empty, but the grave clothes were still there. The wording of John's gospel suggests that the grave clothes were still in position and undisturbed, as though Jesus' body had withdrawn from them without disturbing them. The guards had fled, angels appeared to many at the

scene, and the authorities, both Jewish and Roman, could not produce the body. The four evangelists and Paul testify to these facts.

None of Jesus' disciples could have removed Jesus' body, as is supported by the remarkable change in their demeanour after the event. Such a removal would need more than one or two men, and that deed could not be accomplished with an armed Roman guard present. Following Jesus' execution His disciples became bewildered and timid, but, after seeing the resurrected Jesus, they became bold and confident, willing to face hardship, torture or death, and intent on preaching the good news of the Gospel. Every society or organisation knows the historical facts that gave it birth. There cannot be a mistake on the main issue. Men do not die for what they know to be a lie.

Another suggestion put forward by sceptics and opponents of Christianity is that Christ's appearances to His followers after His death were merely visions. Such an assertion warrants a reply. Students and practitioners of modern psychological medicine agree that visions are intensely individualistic, and are seen by only a small number of people with a special nervous temperament, and then only under stress of particular circumstances, except those who have been certified as insane. Every person's visions are peculiar to himself or herself alone, and evolve from conceptions which arise from a person's subconscious mind. Rarely may a vision be thought to speak, and rarely, if ever, is a conversation carried on. Visions are intangible, and do not alter material things.

The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus do not conform with any of the known criteria concerning visions. Many kinds of people of differing temperaments saw the same appearances at the same time. There were conversations. People touched Him, they saw Him eat, and He even lit a fire and prepared food for His followers to eat.

Jesus' post-resurrection appearances inspired and motivated his followers to act, preach and write with such conviction.

“Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” (John 11: 24 to 27).

JORDAN

Paper given by Jenny Roe at the 2015 Conference

The famous River Jordan flows out from the Sea of Galilee in the north of Judea and into the Dead Sea just 20 km south of Bethany. The Jordan is mentioned many times in Scripture, and is the setting for many of the events which we have come to know and love. The idea of crossing the Jordan is used symbolically, often referring to passing from this life into the next.

The Jordan rises on the western slopes of Mount Hermon, and falls almost 250 metres below sea level to enter the slightly salty sea of Galilee. Tributaries to this river are the Ayun and Hasban from Lebanon, and the Dan and Manias from Mount Hermon. Its wandering course is hemmed in by mountains on both sides. In many parts of the Jordan Valley crops are grown. The Jordan reaches the Dead Sea where rainfall is sparse. When the Jordan enters the Dead Sea, the water is so salty that a person can sit in the water, without support and read the newspaper.

The River Jordan provided a natural barrier to enemies. Evil spirits were thought to inhabit the desert that lay beyond.

In the first century AD, Palestine was divided into three provinces; Judea, Galilee and Samaria, all of which were under Roman rule. There are deserts, mountains, valleys and plains, and the Lord Jesus told parables which reflect the everyday life of Jews at that time. Most people who lived near or with Jesus were involved in fishing or farming.

The four accounts which I would like to share with you are set at the Jordan River. They are well-known to you all, I'm sure, but I would like to look at the lessons which we can draw from these accounts so that we can stay out of deep water and not be overwhelmed before we symbolically cross the Jordan, so to speak.

NAAMAN

2 Kings 5:1

"Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy."

A young Jewish girl was employed as a maid in Syria by Naaman, the prestigious commander of the Syrian army. A proud, strong and fearless warrior, Naaman was struck down with leprosy, that dreaded disease which separated people from their loved ones and relegated them to leper colonies in the depressing company of others who were also dying of leprosy.

The young maid must have waited for an appropriate moment to respectfully suggest that Naaman travel to Israel where a man of God, Elisha, would heal him with God's help. I wonder how much soul searching Naaman undertook before deciding to go. Couldn't anyone in his own country heal him? Could he trust the words of a teenage servant girl?

Naaman made preparations to travel, taking his servant Eliezer and an abundance of valuable gifts. The journey completed, you might imagine Naaman's indignation when he arrived at the house of Elisha in his grand chariot, servants in attendance and Elisha didn't even emerge to greet him! Instead a servant was dispatched with the dubious instruction to bathe seven times in the Jordan River. The Jordan? That dirty river full of suspect water holes! What a demeaning suggestion! Why, the rivers in his homeland were far more beautiful. Why had he been so gullible as to trust a servant girl? But Naaman's servant prevailed. "Naaman, if you had been asked to do something outrageous, you would have done it, so why not fulfil this simple requirement?"

You know the rest! Naaman entered the waters of Jordan: 4, 5, 6 times. Can you imagine his sceptical face? And then, miraculously, after 7 immersions, walked from the river a healed man! The God of Israel had prevailed. The faith of a servant girl had been testified mightily.

Perhaps there is a lesson of faith here for us. When we choose to follow Christ, we enter the waters of baptism. What follows is not always a seven fold dip in the Jordan. God tests our faith. We will be tempted by worldly currents, sometimes feeling that we are sinking in life's demands. We can be buffeted by family concerns and responsibilities, and forget to look for the reassuring lifebuoy that we can cling to if we but set our eyes on Jesus, our lifetime friend, our never failing companion and our eternal lifesaver.

"Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honour Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan - The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." (Isaiah 9: 1, 2).

"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." (Matthew 4: 15, 16).

JOHN THE BAPTIST

A dove circling the head of Jesus, a voice from heaven; what an impact these experiences must have had on faithful John, the baptiser who stood in the waters of Jordan that day with Christ and heard, *"This is my beloved son in*

whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17) How the memory of these words must have sustained John in the anguished hours of being hauled before the evil rulers and sentenced to death by beheading. Some commentators suggest that John may have belonged to the community at Qumran. He may have belonged to the Essenes. And why did he preach in the wilderness when a city setting would have drawn larger crowds?

Perhaps curiosity attracted people. It would not be every day that a man dressed in camel skin and eating grasshoppers and wild honey would preach the coming of a Messiah! Perhaps it was the absence of the corrupt rulers and the distance from the temple and its impact which allowed God's work in John to be seen without political interference. There was water too for baptism. The setting was conducive to all who sincerely sought our Master and Lord.

We could reasonably assume that when John was murdered, his parents Elisabeth and Zechariah were dead. They were old when John was miraculously born to them. But what of Mary the mother of Christ? What of Christ himself? The Bible contains little of emotive language but with our own knowledge of grief we can well imagine.

Mary had been with Elisabeth during her pregnancy, and presumably saw John as a toddler, a teenager and then the herald of her own son. And now his life was forfeited in order that her son be magnified. And what of Christ? His cousin John, the faithful one who baptised in water and prepared the way for him! Beheaded! Hated by the royal family. Jesus later took refuge from the threatening crowds at the very spot where his cousin John had baptised him. What memories must have flooded his mind!

John 10:39, 40a

"Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp. Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptising in the early days."

We can only rejoice that Christ knew that God will bring John back from the grave in the future and he will be in a position of honour in all the earth. John's influence continued beyond his death as the Apostle Paul later met some of John's followers. This is recorded in Ephesians.

"Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Matthew 11:11)

The third Jordan account that I would like to share with you is less well-known and quite extraordinary. It is recorded in the book of Judges.

Jephthah was a social outcast because his mother was a prostitute. Notwithstanding, he was a mighty warrior, and when Israel was in danger of being terrorised by surrounding nations, the elders approached Jephthah to lead Israel against them. The warring Amorites received a politically correct communication from Jephthah, but the King ignored Jephthah's entreaty.

Jephthah had made a vow or promise. He publicly vowed that if he returned victorious from battle he would offer, as a sacrifice, whatever first came out of his house on his return. Little did he imagine that his only daughter, dressed and prepared to celebrate his victory and playing a tambourine to honour him, would be that one! What a heart break for Jephthah! He had to tell her of his promise and keep it, as he had made the vow to God. Commentators differ in their view of the promise. Some say that Jephthah's daughter was alienated from society for life and never allowed to marry or be part of a family. Others believe that after a short time with her friends she was killed. You may like to look at this account to see what you think happened. To this day Israelite women remember Jephthah's daughter in a sombre four day commemoration.

"After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin." (Judges 11:39).

A short time after this sad event, Jephthah carried out what seems to us a bizarre test. This took place at one of the fords of Jordan near Ephraim. This ford is opposite the city of Jericho.

Some of Jephthah's soldiers had lost courage at the last minute and had been renegades. After the battle they tried to return to Ephraim. Jephthah stood on the river bank and tested each soldier. If the soldier could pronounce the word Shibboleth he was permitted to return to his home. If he said Sibboleth instead, he was killed on the spot! Forty two thousand Ephraimites were killed on the basis of this test!. Bloodthirsty but true. Our God, a God of righteousness, has allowed these gruesome events. He knows that one day these men will be brought back to life and will experience a relationship with God that depends on belief in Jesus Christ and not the pronunciation of a word!

May we be faithful to our consecration vows but not make any other. May we keep our focus on Christ the one who knows our hearts and minds and can carry us over the waters of Jordan despite the obstacles which Satan perpetrates.

RAHAB

We all know the story of Rahab and how she concealed the spies under flax on the roof of her house. Following this event God called upon Joshua to

prepare his people to enter the Promised Land. They had been in the wilderness for 40 years.

Forty years of wandering. Many people had known nothing else. They had been born in the desert and knew only the life of a nomad. And then they were to have somewhere to call home. What a prospect! If you have ever travelled for a long time you may have been heard to say 'I got tired of living out of a suitcase!' Imagine forty years of packing unpacking and moving on; only to repeat it month after month.

Joshua would have prepared the people of Israel as well as he could. Within families the younger ones would be carrying necessities for the frailer ones. Pregnant and nursing women were possibly privileged to ride on animals, but the line of plodding people was seemingly endless. A major obstacle brought Joshua and the priests to a standstill. The Jordan! Their Promised Land lay on the other side, but the Jordan was in flood. The melting snow from Mount Hermon had added its icy volumes and the river was impassable. The strapping soldiers could not negotiate the river. Frail women and children certainly could not! A seemingly impossible task confronted Joshua!

God instructed Joshua to send the Ark of the Covenant ahead of the people. It was to be carried about 900 meters in front of the nation. When the priests reached the banks of the Jordan and their feet touched the river bank, the water miraculously stopped flowing. A huge wall of water towered above them. Can you imagine watching your loved ones, your elderly ones hobbling, your younger ones toddling? All crossing this great river on dry land a huge tower of water being held above them by an unseen and mighty power.

"The sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back; Why was it, sea, that you fled? Why, Jordan, did you turn back?" (Psalm 114: 3 and 5).

There are parallels in our own Christian journey. Sometimes we have a problem which seems insoluble! It is so complex that we don't share it with anyone. We have gone over and over it in our mind just as the people of Israel went through endless wilderness. We pray about it but the situation remains. A tower of threatening worry shadows us and we function on 'autopilot'. But our God is able to deliver us and His timing is always perfect. We can look back in life and affirm that God was beside us, and we can walk confidently forward knowing that green pastures await us.

May each of us make it safely across the Jordan to the security of the river bank and into the eternal presence of our Saviour.



NEWS AND NOTES

VISITOR

On Sunday 8th November we enjoyed a visit from Mary Lightfoot, a member of the West Wickham class in England.

AUTUMN CONFERENCE

As reported in a previous issue, our 2016 conference will be held at Lyrebird Park, Yellingbo, Victoria, from Saturday 2nd to Monday 4th April. The conference theme is 'Defending the Christian Hope'.

If you would like to attend, but have not received a registration form, please contact Linton and Lynne Roe at enquiries@cbsm.org.au or phone them on (03) 8711 4033.

CORRESPONDENCE

We continue to be encouraged by messages from our readers here and abroad. The internet has enabled us to reach many interested people throughout the world., and has enabled them to send us questions for our consideration.

QUESTIONS

We have had several questions recently from our readers

Question 1:

Do our dreams have meanings?

Answer

Not one of our class members was able to draw spiritual meanings from their dreams. The Old Testament tells us that in the past God communicated to various people, such as the prophets and some Gentile kings, by visions and dreams. Each of the inspired dreams given in the past contained a specific message, which was God's way of telling people what He wanted them to do or what was about to happen in the future. Since Jesus' first advent, God has changed the way He deals with His people (Hebrews 1:1). After the deaths of the apostles God no longer uses dreams as a method of communication.. In 1 Corinthians 13:8 the apostle Paul tells us that prophecies, the foretelling of events, and tongues, the understanding of foreign languages, which were actions of the miraculous Holy Spirit, would pass away, so we can confidently say that dreams and visions, which were also actions of the Holy Spirit, passed away as well. However, the prophet Isaiah assures us that the word of God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8), and with the example of Jesus' life, and the gospel message which He brought, there is now no need for dreams or other inputs to guide our conduct.

Question 2:

1 Corinthians 7: 14 to 16 tells us, "*The unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband*". How is this possible?

Answer:

The church at Corinth contained people of various nationalities who had been worshipping a number of pagan gods. Many of these people had been attracted to the Gospel message through Paul's preaching, but some still held on to their old beliefs and practices and were not fully committed to Christ. Paul was aware of this problem and tried to persuade the believers not to be "*yoked together with unbelievers*" (2 Corinthians 6:14). He was referring to the marriages of believers to unbelievers, and advised both men and women to be like himself if possible, but if not possible, to marry someone who was a believer (1 Corinthians 7: 7 to 9). In verse 14 Paul told them that, provided both parties remained together as husband and wife, they were considered sanctified, or holy in God's sight. Paul was not talking about their salvation, since no-one can save his brother (Psalm 49:7). From verse one of this chapter Paul was talking about marriage and whether the marriage was acceptable or not. Marriage as a partnership is a divine command. The unbelieving partner is not sanctified to salvation by the believing one, nor is the believing partner alienated by the unbelieving spouse, and the apostle was hoping that the unbelieving partner would eventually be persuaded to accept Christ, and the marriage would then be fully sanctified.

Question 3:

- (a) Should children within a believing family be required to have a personal faith?
- (b) Should children be baptised?

Answer

(a) To be acceptable in God's sight, children within a believing family should develop and maintain a personal faith in Christ. They should not depend upon their parents' commitment for salvation. God requires an individual conviction (Philippians 2:12), and an individual surrender to do His will and to follow Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:24; Acts 4:12). That personal faith should increase as a person grows and matures, gaining knowledge and understanding of the gospel message (1 Peter 2:2).

(b) Baptism of children is not mentioned in the scriptures. Passages concerning baptism point out that faith is necessary in the personal decision to be baptised. That decision requires very careful consideration because it is the outward sign of an inward change of heart and mind, and that change is the beginning of a lifetime commitment to serve God. When a child grows to manhood or womanhood, then he or she can decide for himself or herself whether or not to follow Christ. Infant baptism is a tradition brought into church services by men, and is not authorised in the Bible.

OTHER CONTACTS

We have also been encouraged by feedback about some of the articles we have published.

Sunday Enang from Nigeria commented on the article about 'Journeys' in Issue No. 135. He wrote 'May I suggest that man's first journey was a glorious one: a perfect man walking with God in the garden (Genesis 2:15)'.

Irene Webb, from the West Wickham class in England, sent a poem entitled 'If', in response to the article titled 'Ifs' in Issue No. 136. She said that she had found the poem amongst her father's papers after his death, and does not know who wrote it.

IF

If I can warm with love some lonely heart,
Hope's lustre to some listless eye impart;
If I can make a straight path for the lame,
Or fan some smouldering faith to fervent flame;
If I may help some faltering foot to keep
The painful narrow way, though tough and steep;
If Thou, dear Lord, wilt use me, even me,
To draw some trembling soul more close to Thee;
If, when the end of all things is at hand,
My feeble efforts may help one stand;
If I may live to make truth's message plain,
Ah! Then, 'twill ne'er be said, my life was vain.

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS

The New Covenant News is produced by an editor responsible to the Christian Bible Students (Melbourne). The thoughts expressed do not necessarily represent the opinions of all of the members of the group, and readers are requested to heed the words:

"Prove all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

* * * * *

EDITOR:

Mervyn Buckmaster,
1923 Samaria Rd., Moorngag, Victoria., 3673, Australia

* * * * *

Email: jmbuckmaster@bigpond.com **Web site:** www.cbsm.org.au