



Volume No. 5 MELBOURNE, OCTOBER —NOVEMBER 1966 Price-- 10 cents

Can the Living Talk with the Dead?

WE feel that this is a very important subject, and that the correct answer from God's Word is the real basis of all truth, upon which we may place our hope and trust for all things, both in this life and also in the life to come.

It may be asked, what could be the motive in the desire for anyone to communicate with a departed relative or friend. At once we realise that it is the heart desire not to be separated from the one we love. We long and yearn for the continuation of those tender ties which rightly bind loved ones together on earth. Thus we see clearly that this fellowship with dear relatives and friends was never intended to be broken. In other words we were never intended to die and man would never had died had there been obedience to the loving Creator. "The wages of sin is death," is the Scriptural declaration throughout God's Word.

Paul says in Rom. 6:21—"For the wages of sin is death, but **the gift of God is eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord." If God had not provided a Means of salvation as a gift of life, there would never have been a resurrection of life to follow in any shape or form after the death sentence was justly pronounced on our first parents.

But it is the longing and yearning within the human breast for lasting association with loved ones, which, while right and proper in itself, can lead to the greatest deception when the truths of God's Word are either ignored or misunderstood. While it may seem strange, it is nevertheless true that God permits misunderstanding of His Word, or ignorance of its truths, in all who are not sincere enough to really wish to know the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Possibly we have all met people who in their bereavement are so strongly influenced by the desire to continue in contact with a departed loved one, so absorbed with the desire to receive messages as to the welfare of the one dead, that they completely isolate themselves from God and His Word. In other words, they want their own will done. They wish their own desires to be fulfilled, irrespective of what God's plan is in regard to humanity, and what God has decreed is best for His human family.

Satan, of course, is active to take advantage of all who are so minded, and Paul tells us in 2 Thes. 2:10, 11 that "Gad shall send them d strong delusion' that they should believe a in this state of mind—"because they received not. the love of the truth, that they -might be saved." They are-deceived by their own, desires when not studying God's Word find out just what it teaches, on the subject.

Let us examine the Apostle Paul's wonderful presentation of the subject of death and the resurrection in 1 Cor 15, from verse 12. This is most enlightening, and helps us to see the true position in regard to death and the life hereafter. (Please read 1 Cor. • 15:12:23.) What, we ask, are the **two outstanding facts** Paul presents in these verses? They are that both **death** and the **resurrection are real**, absolutely true. So true is death, says Paul, that if there be no resurrection of the dead then all hope of a future life is lost. Does Paul contradict other statements in the Bible? Does he contradict or disagree with Christ? No, he surely does not! Who, then, would be proud and foolish enough to set themselves up as an authority and contradict Christ, the Apostle Paul and all the true servants of God? There are thousands of preachers today who are, unintentionally doing just this by preaching the immortality of the soul; in other words, that there is no real death. At a recent funeral service the minister declared, in speaking of the departed one, that death was like going through a door into another life. Then, at the graveside, he declared that in committing the body to the grave we do so in the hope of a resurrection of the dead, unknowingly contradicting the previous statement.

But does someone say there are passages in the Bible which seem to indicate that those passed on in death are still living? Yes, we admit that some parts of God's Word, on the surface, seem to so teach. But no one is entitled to form conclusions on any subject on a mere surface reading of the Scriptures. That is where inconsistencies, misunderstandings and contradictions come in, when there is no Bible study to determine just what God's Word says on any particular subject.

Let us examine some passages of God's Word on which wrong conclusions are based by taking only a surface reading. Matthew 17 from the first verse is one such passage. This was the occasion when the Lord took three disciples up into the Mount. (Please read Matt. 17:1-8.) On the surface it appears that Moses and Elias were with the Lord and the disciples. But when we read verse 9 and examine it, we see what the Lord is teaching us and the disciples at that time." And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, tell the **vision** to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead." What is a vision? It is a picture, a tableau, illustrating something important. From the visions John had on the Isle of Patmos, we find they typified or depicted various phases of the Kingdom and events covering the whole Gospel Age. The nations are pictured by various beasts, and so on. Here in Matt. 17 we have a similar picture, illustrating a wonderful truth.

Paul had wonderful visions and revelations given to him. 2 Cor. 12:1 helps us to see what the Lord meant in taking His disciples up in the mountain and giving them this picture. "I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord." Then he goes on to describe the scenes. He was even carried away, in vision, to the third heavens, and saw things not possible to utter, meaning, of course, that those pictures must have been for his own information, to encourage him in the ministry, and were not to be revealed at that particular time.

Thus we learn that Moses and Elias were not actually present on the mount, but rather were in picture form, representing two phases of the Kingdom, as our Lord indicated in Matt. 16:28,— "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom". And they saw a wonderful picture of Christ in His kingdom. Elias, who was caught up in a chariot of fire, represented the heavenly phase of the kingdom, and Moses represented the earthly phase of the kingdom. And the three disciples saw the Son of man coming in His kingdom, in this vision described in Matthew 17. In 2 Kings 2:11 we read,— "And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." We might think that he went up alive if there were not other Scriptures to help us see that Elijah was taken in death, and made a picture of the Church.

From Heb. 11:5 we find that "Enoch was translated that he should not see death". This is apt to be

misunderstood until we realise that as Enoch pleased God, he was relieved of the experience of dying, of any distress, anguish and pain. He did not see or experience death— God took him. How do we know that Enoch and Elijah were not taken up alive and *are* still living in heaven? Our Lord's words in John 3:13 state—"No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man." It will be realised that Jesus was speaking prospectively of Himself at that time, for He was still on earth when making that statement. Keeping in mind that no one had ascended to heaven impresses the truth that death means death, the cessation of life until the resurrection day. This truth protects us against the deceptive influences of the evil one which would deceive, if possible, those who give themselves over to desiring something which is quite unscriptural.

Old Testament Scriptures are of course in agreement with the words of Jesus. We have the case of David,—“So David slept with his fathers,” and the same is stated of Solomon. (1 Kings 2:10; 11:43.) Job described the death condition in the words—“Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest”. Job even prayed to go to the Bible hell—“O that thou wouldst hide me in the grave (shop!) until thy wrath be passed”. He wanted God to hide him away from the trouble of the world; not to go into more trouble at death, as the creeds teach. Job had the inspiration to know there would be a resurrection call, and he would respond to that call because God would awaken him and bring him back in the resurrection day. (Job 3:17; 14:13-15.)

In Acts 2 a helpful contrast is revealed between our Lord Jesus and David. Of our Lord it states—“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that he should be holden of it”. (Verse 24.)

This is a reference to the prophecy in the psalms—“Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell”. That is, the Bible hell, the condition of death. (Psa. 16:10.) Of David we read in Acts 2:29, 34,—“He is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day; for David is not ascended into the heavens”. This of course confirms the Old Testament record that David “slept with his fathers”, and is still asleep in death, waiting for the resurrection day.

How important it is also to realise that even Christ's resurrection from death was not immediate when He died on the cross. In 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, we read—“Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and he was buried, and rose again the third day”. In our Lord's message to John on the Isle of Patmos, in Rev. 1:1 8, it states—“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death”. Since He has paid the ransom price for humanity, He has the right to unlock the prisonhouse of death, in due time, and bring all mankind back to life, that they may learn to love and obey the laws of His kingdom, and gain lasting life on the restored earth.

Someone may say, What about the thief on the cross, as recorded in Luke 23:42, 43. This thief had repented, and could see this wonderful Man with the inscription over His cross, “Jesus, King of the Jews”. So this man said, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom”. And Jesus said unto him, “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise”. That is the way it reads in our Authorised Version of the Bible. But we know that punctuation is not inspired, but is supplied by the translators. Let us read it correctly —“Verily I say unto thee today, shalt thou be with me in paradise”. That thief is still in the death condition. He was not in paradise with the Lord that day, for Jesus was not raised Himself until the third day. But the thief will be raised from the dead, along with all humanity, and the paradise of God will extend throughout the lengths and breadths of this wide world. Christ's Kingdom will then be operating to bless all humanity who really obey Him. This is the day in which Abraham was assured “all the families of the earth would be blessed” (Gen. 22:15-18). Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day, for our Lord said so,—“He saw it (by faith) and was glad.” (John 8:56.)

Therefore we see from the Bible that it is absolutely impossible to communicate with the departed, for

“the dead know not anything”. In Eccles. 9:5, 10, we read—”For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything . . . for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest”. The great theologians will claim that death does not mean death at all, but that is not what the Bible teaches. Our Lord said on one occasion that the truths of the Bible were “hid from the wise and prudent, but revealed unto babes” (Matt. 11:25, 26).

Eccles. 12:7 is often used to try and imply that the spirit of the departed really goes back to God and lives with Him. “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” When we understand what the “spirit” is,—the gift of life, the breath of life,—which returns to God, we realise that the gift of life is again in the hands of the Creator, to be given back in the resurrection time; He will infuse it into the body which He will create. When Adam was created in Eden, God blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and “man became a living soul”. When the breath of life leaves the body at death, the gift of life returns to God who gave it, and there is no living soul. God has in His keeping the gift of life, and in the resurrection time He will- put that spirit of life into a created body, and there will be a living person again. What a wonderful salvation is the resurrection from death, because of the great sacrifice of Christ!

Acts 7:60, where we have the record of the martyrdom of Stephen, agrees fully with the above. Stephen was stoned to death, and we read,—”he fell asleep,”—the same as David and Solomon and all the patriarchs, and all mankind. From 1 Thes. 4 we read of Paul’s wonderful assurance concerning those who “sleep in Jesus”. Being assured of Christ’s resurrection he says, “them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (verse 14). The Thessalonians were concerned about those Christians who were asleep; they wondered what would happen to those who had passed away in death when the time came for the Lord’s second advent. Paul tells them not to be ignorant concerning those who have gone into death previously; those saints who have been faithful unto death, who are asleep in Jesus, God will bring with Jesus back from death. All the Gospel Age they are asleep, unconscious, awaiting the resurrection. Paul states his own position as being exactly the same,—”henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.” (2 Tim. 4:8.) All the faithful ones are to receive their crowns in the resurrection day.

But what shall we say about the supposed messages from the vale of death? There is an account in 1 Sam. 28 that has given concern to some people. Verse 3 reads—”Now Samuel was dead ... And Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land”. Saul was obedient to the Lord in doing this, because God commanded all witches and wizards to be put out of the land. Reading through this chapter it is seen that Saul disobeyed the Lord, and the Lord rejected him. Saul approached one of these witches to get a message from Samuel, who was dead, because he was apprehensive of what was going to happen with the Philistines approaching.

Saul went to the Witch of Endor for information, as he thought, from the dead Samuel. Under the influence of evil spirits, this woman believed Samuel could be contacted. This is the basis for all the deception today in spiritualistic seances. In Genesis 6 we have a record of some of the heavenly angels taking human form. We read there, “And the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair; and they took them wives of all that they chose”. They disobeyed the Lord in remaining on the earth in materialised form.. They dematerialised at the time of the Flood in Noah’s day and have been restrained from appearing in human form since that time. Jude 6 confirms this matter of the wicked spirits prior to the Flood of Noah’s day, describing them as—”the angels which kept not their first estate”. These wicked angels work in darkness, even though restrained from appearing in human form. So people go to spirit mediums, to see what message they might get, supposedly from loved ones. They hear things that are true, and think they must be from the Lord. All the time it is the work of evil spirits. The deception goes on until people are captivated by it, and then it is very difficult indeed to get out of the clutches of these wicked spirits. Mediums themselves tell people that they are leading a dreadful life, for they cannot throw off the influence of the evil spirits that captivate them. They can make money out of it, but their lives are

most unhappy. Such is the deception of Satan and his wicked spirits in this present-day world. People are deceived in desiring to communicate, and the wicked spirits in impersonating the deceased give them messages that surprise them. Perhaps they tell them things that happened years ago, but the communications are evil, because they come from an evil source. We find even the governments of the day are to some extent protecting the people, in a general way. Very often spirit mediums are prohibited. This is a good thing. Even the powers that be protect humanity, without realising the importance of the matter.

Peter tells us very plainly of these spirits working in the minds of people. Some people crave for mysterious things, things they think are very „deep”. In 1 Pet. 3:18-20 we have an explanation of how our Lord “preached to the spirits in prison”. In verse 19, the words “and went” are not in the original. Referring to our Lord, the verse should read,— ”By which (His death and resurrection) also he preached , unto the spirits in prison”. Our’ Lord did not “go” anywhere in death. He was dead for parts, ‘of three days,.. It was by His death and resurrection that He preached; the wicked spirits could see His devotion to God for 3 1/2 years. They saw how He endured the contradiction .of sinners against himself, as they said, “Himself he cannot save’ .. They saw Him crucified, and go into death, and on. the third day they saw Him, rise. What a lesson.— what a sermon to these spirits in prison! There is hope for the recovery of these wicked spirits, just as there is hope for the recovery of the human family. In 1 Cor. 6 Paul tells us about a judging work during the Millennial Age. With Christ and His saints on the throne to judge the world, those wicked spirits will also come into judgment, with hope of recovery by obedience to Christ’s authority. (See 1 Cor. 6:2, 3.)

In 1 Cor. 4:9 we have an interesting statement from Paul in which he states that “we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men”. The meaning is, that as Christ was made a spectacle to the angels in prison, His faithful followers are also made a spectacle. The question may be, What kind of a spectacle are we presenting to angels and to men, by the Lord’s grace? This is something that comes home to all God’s people. How do our thoughts, our words and our doings appear? Are they lovingly and devotedly upholding the Lord and His Word? Are our thoughts in line with the precepts of God’s Word? Are our thoughts pure and holy and just and noble? “If there be any virtue, think on these things.” All this is implied in being made a spectacle. We must, by His grace, seek to represent

Him in the best way possible, to be an ambassador for Christ, to preach His truth on any and every opportunity, and particularly the truth in respect of the death and resurrection of Christ. The truths of God’s Word really satisfy our longings as nothing else can do, and there is nothing mysterious about it. We have a booklet called “**Hope Beyond the Grave**” which explains about spiritism very helpfully from the Bible itself, and this is recommended to all our readers.

We can be sure of the state of the departed. Instead of desiring to communicate with loved ones departed, if they are kept in memory until the resurrection time, then all will be able to converse together. Members of the human family will rejoice together forever by obedience to the laws of Christ’s Kingdom. Surely we thank God for such a wonderful and gracious Plan provided through the death of Christ, His beloved Son, who paid the penalty that we should live through Him now, and humanity might live to His praise ultimately, for all time.

PEOPLES PAPER AND HERALD OF CHRIST’S KINGDOM.

Published by the Berean Bible Institute,
Melbourne,
Victoria Australia

While it is our invention that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord’s Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used, either in the correspondence or in the sermons reported.

Who Divided the Bible into Chapters and Verses?

(From "A Book about the Bible" by George Stimpson)

EARLY editions of the Bible were not divided into chapters and the smaller sections now known as verses. They did not contain even perceptible spaces between words. The divisions into chapters and verses was a gradual process that started during the Middle Ages. Tertullian, who died before 240 A.D., referred to some sort of sections in the New Testament. Later the Gospels were divided into what were known as the Ammonian-Eusebian sections, which were smaller divisions than our present chapters. Euthalius, a deacon and bishop who lived about the middle of the 5th century, divided parts of the New Testament into minute portions similar to the present verses. About 1226 Cardinal Hugo de Sancto-Caro of France divided the entire Latin Vulgate into chapters and verses somewhat similar to those of today. But even the early printed Bibles, such as the Gutenberg Bible, were not divided into chapters and verses. The first printed New Testament with such divisions was issued in 1527 at Lyons by Sanctus Pagninus. Robert Stephens followed a similar arrangement in his edition of the New Testament printed at Geneva in 1551. This was a two-volume work with the Greek text in the centre of the page and with the Latin of Erasmus on one side and the Latin Vulgate on the other. Stephens, whose French name was Robert Estienne, was a member of a famous family of scholars and printers in France. In the preface to his concordance, the son of Robert Stephens says his father worked out the system of chapters and verses for his edition of the New Testament while he was journeying on horseback from Paris to London. His system of dividing the Bible into chapters and verses was adopted by William Whittingham and his associates in the Geneva or Breeches Bible, the New Testament of which was first printed in 1557 and the Old Testament in 1560. An introductory note to the reader of the Bible says: "The arguments bothe for the booke and for the chapters with the nombre of the verse are added." The Geneva Bible is the first English version with the chapter and verse enumerations we now know them. It should be borne in mind that the Greek classics and other ancient books were likewise arbitrarily divided into sections for convenience and reference. The general plan appears to have been to include each separate sentence or its equivalent in a verse, but this plan was not always followed. Both chapters and verses often disregard natural divisions of thought and are misleading. For instance the first 3 verses of Genesis 2 are clearly the conclusion of the narrative in Genesis 1. But the chapters and verses are now definitely fixed and are regarded as virtually parts of the Bible. Although the arrangement sometimes obscures the sense and interrupts the flow of the narrative, it is so convenient for reference and citation that its elimination would destroy the usefulness of thousands of concordances and other reference books and make millions of citations meaningless.- The Revisers of 1885 tried to solve the problem by printing the chapter and verse number in the margin.

Melbourne Christmas Convention,

The brethren of the Melbourne Class extend a cordial invitation to all friends able to attend their Annual Convention to be held this year (D.V.) on December 24th, 25th, 26th and 27th, in the Masonic Hall, 254 Swan Street, Richmond. Further information from the secretary—Mr. J. Hiam, 16 Kennedy Street, South Oakleigh, S.E.13, Victoria.

BIBLE STUDENTS MANUAL

Copies of these Manuals, otherwise known as Berean Comments, have been published recently by brethren in Chicago, and are now in stock *for* the benefit of our friends. With nice appearance, bound in strong cloth, with gold lettering, the price is \$4.00, plus 15 cents postage.

The Mixed Cup of Providence

(Convention Address)

THIS subject is taken from part of Psalm 75:6-8, —"In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture." This without doubt is the Mixed Cup of Providence from which everyone drinks. The wine is red, as red as fire, as red as blood—wrath. But fortunately it is full of mixture. Apart from his own mixed experiences the Christian is invited to share in the complicated common mixture belonging to others, weeping with some and rejoicing with others. What doctor does not prescribe for his patients some awful concoction labelled "The Mixture", which, after taking according to instructions, one's ills are supposed to disappear? Learning to live under a cloud in the valley of abasement or abounding on the mountaintops of sunshine are rewarding experiences, for even God's curse was mixed with a blessing.

This cup, like our dreams, is so mixed that it is only by the power of the Lord one is able to unravel from conglomerate components a design that shows law and order do prevail when to all appearances chaos seems to prevail. If it were not so, how could one "in everything give thanks"?

When the arch enemy puts darkness for light, bitter for sweet, etc., who is capable of sorting out the confusion? Man in his normal senses should be able to distinguish between darkness and light, since all eyes are fashioned by one law. He should know bitter from sweet since all taste buds react the same. Yet when it comes to moral virtues the issues are so clouded with perversity that one is reminded of the inhabitants of Nineveh, who were unable to tell their right hands from their left. They say all manner of evil falsely concerning the ways of truth. Is it any wonder then, that a mixed cup of Providence hangs over the people generally? A Providence that reproves evil and rewards righteousness under such confused conditions must often appear to favour the evil-doer when he spreads his leaves like a green bay tree.

It must appear at the same time to neglect those who strive to walk uprightly as their troubles and suffering seem to multiply rather than diminish. This mixed Cup of Providence counters the mixed experiences that befall everyone, and the wise man is he who can see the Lord's hand in his cup of blessing or cup of sorrow. How many times do we find things that looked bleak and glum were actually in our best interests, and conversely, when appearances seemed favourable, things went just as we planned, yet the results found an unexpected fly in the ointment to spoil everything.

Joseph's brothers achieved their object in disposing of the lad. Joseph, like Daniel, and countless others of the Lord's people down through the ages have endured privations to the point of death, to later find Providence had a guiding and guarding hand in their lives and ultimately, what seemed to be ill worked out a blessing. Their cups were so mixed that Providence alone could sort it out. Theirs was only to believe and wait, for the "whole disposing thereof is of the Lord".

The race for the prize is not, strangely enough, to him of lightest foot, to the swift. The Word of God has many examples too, where the battle was not to the strong, to those who were better equipped with mighty armaments, nor was victory to the seemingly invincible armies. Success does not always follow men of good sense. Bread is promised to the house of Faith but it does not always find its way to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding. Disappointment is a dreg, yet mixed with the wine of love has useful properties and pleasant surprises. All people, everywhere, drink from this cup, and have the responsibility of separating the dregs from the wine. Remember the story of Midas, whatever he touched turned to gold—what an unhappy experience was his and how he wished for a normal existence. Sometimes whatever we do seems to prosper and on the other hand there are those days when one can do nothing right. This strange mixture of Providence should be a blessing in disguise, where the favoured ones may

learn a valuable lesson in .not presuming on God's grace, and where the abased ones may learn to trust and not despair; where all may recognise their utter dependence on God and rejoice together in mutual trust. I have learnt, says the beloved Apostle, in whatsoever state I am, whether abounding or whether abased, therewith to be content.

Christians may have in one sense, peculiar trials, but who will oppose the idea in 1 Cor. 10:13 when it implies that the burdens and temptations belonging to humanity are common to ALL people? Do we suffer from infirmities, from weariness, from pains, aches, disappointments, etc.? Who doesn't? The advantage the Christian has is that God has promised He will not permit him to suffer or be tried beyond the strength already given, along with grace sufficient for every need. He knows what each one can bear and what one can bear up against. If we rely on Him we will not be overcome. Why should we be concerned with all those difficulties in the way when God "has promised that they will (not be removed, but) not be too great?

In the lives of God's people down through the ages, from Moses to John the Baptist, we find the Mixed Cup of Providence hovered over each one as a series of mixed Providences combined to work out the Divine will. This state of affairs continued with the Apostles. Take from the numerous examples available, the Apostle Paul's journey- to Rome. He prayed, not on the spur of the moment, but for years, that the time might come when he would have a "prosperous journey to Rome". At last the journey became possible, and it included, among other things, 14 days and nights in a cyclone, to be then shipwrecked on a snake-infested island, to say nothing of fastings, exposure to rain and wind, loss of all personal belongings, and many more privations and hardships. But, 275 fellow-passengers experienced exactly the same thing as did the Apostle. Here was a cup full of mixture; the Apostle temporarily lost his chains, the- rest lost all their belongings, but for Paul's sake their lives were saved. It began, as most voyages do, full of promise for all concerned. Paul was a prisoner, apprehended on Jewish bias, and unable to obtain justice re his cause and had appealed to Caesar in Rome. He was being conveyed, as a prisoner of the State, in company with other prisoners, some of whom may also have appealed to Caesar to try their causes. In charge of the prisoners was a centurion, with soldiers to assist him. Then there were the captain, the owner of the vessel, and as passengers Luke and Aristarchus, Paul's companions in travel. More than likely there were other passengers, travelling for commercial reasons, maybe emigrants seeking new fields of employment. There were no tourists, people who travel just for sightseeing. This is a modern business. It is an easy matter to see there were all kinds of people embarked together on this strangest of journeys. The winds, even at the start, were not favourable, as the ship was compelled to hug the shores of

Cyprus and proceed in a stop-go fashion and later forced to shelter in the mouth of the river. It was here that everyone thought Providence smiled on them for a large Alexandrian wheat ship offered them better prospects of achieving their destination. They transferred into this ship and made progress as the adverse winds permitted them, to a place named Fair Haven. Here a conference of responsible people on board was convened to discuss the advisability of proceeding under such awkward conditions. The Apostle Paul was included in this conference; he was a seasoned traveller on both land and sea, and no doubt the centurion had heard him defend himself before Festus and Agrippa. The Apostle voted to postpone the sailing, and gave as his reason, "Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will certainly result in violent weather and much loss, not only of the cargo, but even of our lives". He was outvoted; it was decided to leave this comparatively safe haven "if **by any means**" they might reach Phenice (Acts 27:12). What a strange coincidence, the Apostle in his letter from Corinth to the Roman Christians spoke of his earnest prayer to be among them, "if **by any means**" he might visit them (Rom. 1:10). Notice particularly how both these desires are fused into one experience in time and place. The Cup of Providence with its mixed blessings and adversities had brought together this mixed company who now have all a common aim, "if by any means" their destination may be achieved.

We never could discover the ways of Providence in bringing all these different people together at the same time and in the same place any more than one could explain how all the different members of Christ find themselves in fellowship in time and place. It must be beyond the power of any one to discover the intricacies of the laws of Providence, for the Sovereign Ruler may do as He pleases with His Own instruments. As the progress of this terrible voyage is investigated, a pertinent question proposes itself, Who knows what troubles lay before us? God has been generous to all people, especially to the Household of Faith; He has not rewarded us according to our iniquities. Some meet trouble in the very thing thought to be safety and security. This reminds us of a certain prophecy relating to our times, “When they shall cry Peace and Safety, sudden destruction cometh upon them”.

Let us be vigilant, be sober, loins girt about with Truth, watching unto prayer, for the great and sudden changes in the Lord’s cup of Providence promised in the days of presence of the Son of Man — at the end of the Gospel Age.

The way of man is not in himself, but thank God, subject to Divine will. Many of us may find ourselves in a boat sailing along with the rest of humanity, put out into the seas of confused strife, where many a fiery serpent arrests willing hands, buffeted by wars and rumours of wars, seas and the waves roaring, and what shall we do about it? What did Paul and his two companions do about it — they had no choice but to go along with the rest.

God has His ordinary ways and means of working out His plans and purposes, and then when unusual circumstances call for it, He has His extraordinary ways of achieving His will. In some cases ordinary causes bring retribution and in other cases extraordinary means effect deliverance from evil and evil-doers. To those chastened in love there are two fruits — grievous affliction and peaceable righteousness. Those who decreed that the ship must sail were buffeted for their faults, and those associated with them were buffeted by being associated with them.

One often hears the expression, “These things are sent to try us”. They are when we will not be guided by wise counsel. Paul advised against this voyage, warned of the coming loss of ship and lading. Lives were spared by special intervention of God, and as in the case of Job, and others, permitted to endure extreme severity to the point of hopelessness, in the words of 273 travellers on this ship, “All hope that we should be saved was taken away”. Euroclydon, that dreadful wind soon to lash these travellers, did not, by **chance** happen to blow at that particular time when this particular ship put out in this particular sea. Logic demands that its course was plotted according to all natural laws and conditions. The only unpredictable thing in life is man’s judgment.

The haven in which they were sheltering (like the haven in which we shelter) was not as comfortable as might be desired; there are few people who do not have some present discomforts or complaints. The sailors, especially the master of the ship, the owner, and the centurion, irritated and impatient with pressing difficulties voted for a changed environment. They would chance their luck to the winds of misfortune all knew were to be encountered outside the harbour. Lulled into a false sense of security by a lull in the elements, “the south wind blew softly,” they were very soon out of the frying pan into the fire, with no chance at all to return to that previous discomfort they so unwisely forsook. Could they, in truth declare, “These things are sent to try us”? Present discomforts do try us, especially when one has nothing but his own folly for many an unpleasant experience. Paul and his two companions, Luke and Aristarchus, had to experience this buffeting, against their will and better judgment; for them there was no alternative. The prisoners, the crew, the soldiers, the passengers, had no choice but endure this present hardship, but their attitude to previous experiences contributed to bring them to this shipwreck. Affections and honourable discharge of responsibility may well have woven a pattern for many that would have prevented their presence in this unhappy situation. The full responsibility for the wreck must be borne by those qualified and wise enough to effect a correct decision: the captain, the owner, and the centurion—

three people, whose ill advice over-rode the wisdom of three whose good advice was rejected. Many people sandwiched between these two judgments suffered much adversity and but for Paul's sake must also have lost their lives. It is a mixed cup of Providence here: the responsible officers essayed to leave the comparatively safe haven if **by any means** they might reach Phenice. Paul sincerely desired and prayed God that he might, if possible, **by any means** visit Rome. We pray for what we do not understand. What member of this ship's company would have embarked had he previously known what means would be employed to bring him to his destination? This terrible sea trip and then the ship wrecked; would any captain, or crew, or soldier, or passenger embark knowing they were going to lose all their worldly possessions? And at a later date when eventually the nightmare voyage was in the past, would any sane person refer to it as a "prosperous journey"? Yet this was what Paul prayed for, and no doubt to him it was a prosperous journey, for it accomplished God's will. Everything that God proposes prospers, sometimes in mysterious ways and totally different to our expectation of what constitutes prosperity.

The ship began its disastrous journey with what seemed a smile from Providence —"the south wind blew softly".

We can imagine the centurion chiding Paul, that had his advice been taken what a golden opportunity would have been missed, as under such favourable conditions as this merely a few hours' sailing time separated them from Phenice. Then, like the tempestuous winds that engulfed the disciples on Galilee, the ship was hit by the dreaded Euroclydon, a cyclonic wind that regularly descended in those regions, a southerly changing suddenly to a violent northerly, a pattern that was to continue for a fortnight.

The first three days and nights brought crisis upon crisis in a feverish attempt to lighten the vessel and so control her. The last eleven days must have been an ordeal beyond description, as there was neither sun, moon nor stars, no difference between day and night, all hope vanished. Then came Divine intervention! For Paul's sake all lives in the ship were guaranteed safety. It is yet another case where the salt preserves the lump. God said to Abraham, "Find me five righteous souls and I will spare the city". For the elect's sake the days will be shortened. Troubles did not come singly to this ship's complement. Saved from the calamity of the sea the prisoners were now face to face with as great a problem, and real prospect of death. The soldiers, safe themselves, wanted to destroy the prisoners. Paul must have found that kind of favour with the centurion as Joseph found with the captain of the guard, for at Paul's behest the centurion quashed the soldiers' idea of killing all prisoners. This Paul, the beloved Apostle, now resembles Joseph at his highest peak; no thought of recrimination against the soldiers. They both live the same words—"You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, that many people should be kept alive, as they are today".

It was left to the Apostle to comfort and strengthen the frenzied fear-stricken travellers, in the face of what seemed to them certain death. He also carried his same cheering hope to other disciples in all parts of his missionary journeys, never to lose hope or faith despite adverse outward appearances. Looking back on all his suffering and imprisonment he realised this would present a bleak and dismal outlook to others. But he wanted all to realise, "Ye should understand that the things that happened to me have fallen out rather *unto* the furtherance of the Gospel." We all know the adversities, legion in number, this brave man endured for the promotion of the Gospel, to which also may be added his uncomfortable and painful physical disability. Worse still, as he told Timothy, "I suffer trouble as an evil-doer, even unto bonds." Explaining this seeming anomaly to the Philippian brethren he encouraged them, instead of being downcast and frustrated at what seemed unexplainable adversity, they were to take courage. He was set for the defence of the Gospel by the providence and grace of God; how could things go amiss when God was directing the issues? What a strange and mixed cup was this; the Gospel was going to be enlarged and made to prosper among the Gentiles when its chief exponent was imprisoned. Paul is emphatic about this, "the word of God is not bound."

The momentous voyage, the storm, the shipwreck, the panic, the deliverance, Paul never forgot. He saw the same experiences mirrored in the lives of those styled children in the faith: tossed to and fro on the billows of life's problems, just as that doomed ship was tossed about by the angry **waves**. People, too, are carried about with every **wind** of doctrine by the cunning craftiness of deceitful men. The victims of these crafty deceivers are easily imposed upon, for they lack knowledge and understanding (like the crew and passengers on the ship); they are inconsistent in righteous judgment, and such evil influences are carried far and wide, like the wind-swept clouds in Euroclydon. What a sorry prospect except for the Mixed Cup of Providence; a cup large enough to include blessing with sorrow, chastisement with love, strength with weakness, grace with repentance, mercy with justice, hope with despair, laughter with tears, life with death, and the strangest of all mixtures, Christ in us. Such a cup, under the Lord's supervision, will work all things together for good, and the promise of Job 17:9 will always be true, "the righteous shall hold on his way, and he who hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger?"

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