

Reflections on 'The Jerusalem Passion'

"He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches"

ARE WE HEARING?

What has God said to us in this music, and what is He saying through us to others? What aspect of the message has had the most impact on us personally, and also on others? Have we looked beyond the poetry (what we might call the 'parable' exterior) to discover and heed the convicting truth concealed?

Along with the trumpet call to hear, the oratorio opens with the call to 'weep and cry'. Have we begun to lament the state of God's people, the New Jerusalem, as Jesus wept over the Jerusalem of old?

Have we understood and accepted the similarity between His rejection by the historic Jerusalem and the present rejection by the church, of Christ's 'coming in the flesh' of His people to dwell in His true temple, the body of Christ?

Have we felt the compelling passion of the Holy Spirit toward the preparation of a bride for Christ - a church fully washed and sanctified?

'Of flocks and folds, there'll be just one?'

'I will gather them together, and they shall be one?'
Have we ourselves begun to gather and be gathered as never before?

'This is my commandment - I have power to lay it down?' Is this His song, or ours also? *'Wherever there is liberty, I can lay it down. We can be together, wherever we lay it down.'*

Do we understand the difference between the celebration of the 'last supper' and the institution of the vital truths of communion? What then does communion mean to us - is it remembrance or participation?

*'But you will know where I will be,
For where My body is,
There the eagles will gather.
For it shall always be
That where the eagles eat and gather there as one,
There is My body,
There is my blood,
There am I.'*

ARE WE BELIEVING?

The dispersion of the nations at the tower of Babel was God's doing. He divided the nations irreparably, so

that He alone could call and regather His people from out of every tribe, nation to be a kingdom of priest. (Rev 5:9-19). Likewise we accept that the present dispersion of His people is a 'sending away' (Isa 27:8) into captivity that reminds us of God's dealings in the Old Testament. Only God will be able to regather His people and unite the nations in Christ.

This helps explain we are hearing a call to gather, but are not yet free to leap up and forsake our present commitments. The Lord is however, preparing us to *'hear the great trumpet call ... those who are about to perish...'* (Isa 27:13) and preparing us in faith and heart attitude toward the gathering of His body.

ARE WE OPPOSING HIS 'COMING IN THE FLESH'?

This question links the first coming of Christ, where He was, which was resisted by the spirit of false religion (called 'Babylon' in the book of Revelation) and by the spirit of Anti-Christ; with His purpose to come now and be revealed in the flesh of His people, the united and perfected body of Christ. We find to our terror that the same principle that opposed Him then is at work now, and in further alarming parallel, is present in the very universal church that claims to descend from Him.

'We have a law and by that law He must die', the descendants of Abraham cried out in a dramatic twist of history. And to be honest, isn't this the very reason why the Spirit can't move as He would like to within the traditions and structures that have been established across Christendom? The Pharisees had 'taken the law into their own hands' so to speak, and used the very law of God to resist His own purpose.

'The problem of reverting to law is our greatest problem today - are we born from above or beneath. Supposedly we are "born from above" and are *"seeking those things which are above"* (Col 3:1). But there is so much "law" in our theology and in our practice which is opposed to the purpose of God, opposed to the incarnation of His life in us.

- Wherever there are the "traditions of our fathers" (Acts 7:51)...
- Where there are constituted church structures which are not of the New Testament pattern...
- Where there is reversion to religious, ritualistic, even Judaistic practices...
- Where there are pyramidal power structures

pretending to be biblical...

- Where there are self-centred reactions and divisions based on 'right and wrong' (reminds us of the tree of ... good and evil)... **THERE IS LAW**
From 'Unto Perfection' by Hall, Wylie and Watt; page 26.)

ARE WE BEING CLEANSED?

'O Lamb Most Pure, Your face of light brings all my darkness to your sight'. Do we understand how the blood can actually become active? Do we know what it means to walk in the light? (1John 1:3,6,7). Have we found a power in the better blood of the New Covenant? Are we being changed? The 'purging of the conscience' is more than the fixing up of the outward appearance. Even the blood of bulls and goats did this!

'However the blood of Christ can do much more because it can purge the "evil conscience" of its power and role in motivating sin unto death. (Heb 9:14; 10:22).' (Page 80 'Unto Perfection').

'The cleansing of the conscience is not just a release from guilt, but involves the purging and new birth of the heart. With a new motivation the individual can serve God from the heart...' (Page 73 'Unto Perfection').

ARE WE COMMITTED?

'He drew me out of many waters, receiving me into His bosom ... Into Your hands I commit My Spirit ... For You are my rock'

Who can forget the ardent devotion with which we sing these words? And which of us is able to grasp the import of what took place at that moment for Christ?

There are a myriad reasons why Christ could not have gone from this moment into hell, as many of our confessions of faith state. If He did, then for just as many reasons, the whole of our salvation is in vain. He had already faced the torment of hell in His body, soul and spirit while alive on the cross, as well as His greatest torment, the eternal darkness of exclusion from the Father (during the three hours of blackness) - for which reason He cried 'My God ... why hast thou forsaken me? Thus when He cried, 'It is finished!' it was

finished. It could not possibly be unfinished. All enemies had been overcome; Satan, sin and the law had all been silenced.

Rejoining the Father, in death, is the very hope of salvation! 'Now I go away to Him who sent me ... because I go to the Father.' (John 16:5, 16, 17). What significance does this have? Why have so many been touched and comforted by the Spirit as they have discovered this moment of His spotless offering? No one took His life from Him. He yielded it as a spotless (perfect) offering. He was 'perfected, through sufferings' and gloriously, it is this same quality of spotless offering that we are to be perfected by the blood which can accomplish 'how much more'!!

'Through His commitment to the Father and by the sustaining hand of the Holy Spirit, the Son endured the discipline of the cross, as God processed sin and utterly dealt with it in Him. He was made perfect, and conformed to the image. In so doing, He opened up the process by which we may return to relationship with the Father'. (Page 37 'Unto Perfection'). See also 'He was broken to open.' (page 38)

'At this point the cross takes on a whole new meaning. Here there is much more! As He offered Himself by the eternal Spirit to God, the Son reached for the Father who responded from on high and "drew Him out of many waters." (Psalm 18:16). He was reunited in the bosom of the Father. Harmony, peace and righteousness were restored.' (See 'How much more" page 46).

The whole meaning of death was transformed in these moments. Death was not the end. He passed through the veil Himself into the presence of the Father. And John, realising this essential truth, looked through the veil and beheld the new and living way which he had opened. A breach had been made upon the prison house of man's sin; but more than this, a breach had been made upon God Himself. The veil was torn, and a way of purification was opened up, not just into casual relationship with God, but into the very innermost sanctum of His holy life and fellowship.

HAVE WE BEEN RAISED?

The body of Christ was in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. His body didn't see corruption, so that His actual flesh would be raised as the new temple of God.

'This is why He made such deliberate reference to destroying the temple and raising it in three days. The three days were to be a sign to Israel and all mankind, that the only temple of God is the temple of His body, which was raised after three days. This is the focus of our hope, for it was the MANY MEMBERED BODY, inclusive of us all, that was raised. (Eph 2:5-6).'

(page 50 'Unto Perfection'). In the glorious truth of our inclusion, body soul and spirit, in the actual body of Christ, not in some spiritual or legal connection, that our Christian hope lies. *'Do you not know that your bodies are the members of Christ'. (1Cor 6:15)*. That we can be raised, NOW, into living union with Christ, in the name, in heavenly places of the true temple, is the real New Testament hope. Have we heard this message?

DO WE KNOW WHERE TO FIND HIS BODY?

In which church do we look to find His body? Is the universal church His body, or do we look outside the church to find it?

'Where will we find Your body, to worship You? Not on the mountain, but in Spirit and in truth.'

The true dimension of the body of Christ and our participation in it, takes place in spirit and in truth. And this is not a 'mystical' experience but rather a very real and practical dimension.

We are all aware that we have only found the 'body' such as it ought to appear and function, in partial reality. We have all searched in places of death, and perhaps we are still hoping in vain, that the living realities of the body of Christ will be found where death has already corrupted these realities.

WHERE ARE THE EAGLES?

'My body is, where the eagles are - eating and drinking, gathered as one, and there am I in the midst of them. Here is my body. Where are the eagles?'

'The image of believers gathering, by instinct of the new nature, as if with an eagle's instinct for a slain body, is one of the glorious symbolic images found throughout the scriptures ... The more powerful and compelling becomes the image of the Christian whose

very nature, like the eagle's draws him to feed upon the body and blood of the slain Lamb. In the action of gathering to the dead body (cf. the elements of His sacrifice represented in the communion) we become the vital parts of His living body, His church on earth. ... The symbolic theme of the eagle highlights the cry for Christian unity which dwells within the new-born nature of every Christian. The hope of unity is planted deeply within me.' (From Vision One Newsletter No. 9).

WHERE IS CHRIST?

'Why don't we hear, why don't we see? Why can't we hear this important message that the Spirit is addressing to the churches? In this matter of Christian unity, we are in an indefensible position. When the man on the street looks for Christ, where is he to look? He should not have to "hiss and shake his head" (Lam 2:15) as he watches a constant parade of arguments over fine points of religious practice. He needs to see an united body of eagles flocking to one communion celebration.' (From Newsletter No. 9)

WHY MUST WE MEET AT ONE TABLE?

'The bread which we break, is it not the communion (participation, i.e. the actual participation) of the body of Christ?' The physical partaking of the cup which we bless and the bread which we break is the point of actual participation together. Of what life do we partake? Is it not the very covenant life of the blessed Trinity? Thus communion can never be the communion of this or that group. Nothing should stand between us as we come together to join the actual participation of those who eat together and who thus share in the blessed life of the Godhead.

This uniting of Christians seeking to be one body must surely become a frequent occurrence as we proceed on in restoration in these last days. Meeting together for communion is not the beginning of the process of coming together, but rather, represents the expression of commitment once the matters of vision and foundation have been worked through. We cannot use the communion as a token of Christian unity without the reality that it represents.

When we speak of 'one communion' in a city, it is not suggested that all other 'tables' except one are

invalid. We shall qualify the attitude that is conveyed by speaking of 'one communion' and commend this attitude to all who seek a practical way to move toward being one body.

In speaking of 'one communion', our attitude of faith toward the 'table' is this:

- that it is **His** table, and not the table of a denomination, or of an independent church;
- that at His table **He alone is the minister**, with every member free to function in 'His mind' according to the grace given. Priority of ministry is only according to the grace given, not according to position;
- that it expresses our faith and commitment toward the vision of one body;
- that it expresses the desire of every elder and member to 'speak the truth in love' with other Christians, and so 'grow up';
- that it expresses our discernment and acceptance of the whole body of which we are just a part. We are committed to trust the integrity of other Christians, and to accept the gifts and ministries of others who are not yet in full fellowship with us.

It is with this attitude that we may meet at our several 'tables', believing for the certain day when we will meet at 'one table' in each city. If this attitude were held, it would surely be the starting point for 'speaking the truth in love' that we may 'grow up' to greet the day when our paths toward the hope of perfection bring us together, to eat and drink at 'one table of friends'

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT 'HEAVEN IS COMING DOWN'?

Heaven coming down

As a fitting conclusion to the oratorio account of Christ's passion for His people, His bride - also symbolically referred to as the New Jerusalem city - our attention is drawn to John's vision of this city '*coming down from God out of heaven*'. (Rev 21:2). The poetic interpretation given in the narration - '*I John see heaven coming down...*' is to draw attention to the finale of the whole everlasting covenant theme, which sets forth the union of the heavenly and the earthly in the tabernacle of God in the flesh.

The record of God 'coming down' to dwell in and with man as His final abode is one of the major directions of the Scriptures. God's firstborn, Israel, was

led out of Egypt by the cloud of His presence, and we read further through Exodus of the various interactions between the people and the cloud, as God 'came down' among them to reveal His eternal desire for a covenant, and for the cloud of His fiery presence to come to rest upon a tabernacle of flesh.

Later, Ezekiel's prophetic vision was of the cloud of His throne's presence arising from the former tabernacle and moving to alight upon the final temple.

We then note that in the coming of Christ Who was the incarnation of the full glory of God, **heaven came down indeed**, with the veil of flesh then rent before the eyes of all, showing the new and living way opened through His flesh into the glory of heaven itself.

The scriptural account of 'heaven coming down' then takes an unexpected turn with the apostolic announcement that through divine birth by water and Spirit, a translation into the kingdom of heavenly places was to be effected. (Col 1:13).

'God has made us alive (by "new" birth) and raised us up together with Him and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' (Eph 2:6)

Heavenly places

The fruit of our salvation is that 'heaven has come down', and furthermore we are 'raised up into a living union with Christ, not yet to heaven, but to 'heavenly places'. A dimension of existence 'in the Spirit', a context for life, relationship, worship, service and function has been established, which is neither the 'shadow' of the old typical situation, nor the ultimate of heavenly citizenship, but which clearly links us to the latter in relation to the ultimate purpose of God.

Hebrews 12 adds further strength to this New Testament reality:

'You have not come ... but you have come to Mount Zion, the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to innumerable angels, to the church of the firstborn in heaven ... to the spirits of just men made perfect ... ' (Heb 12:18-24).

By divine birth we have been translated into heavenly places, where we participate in that which 'comes down' from heaven.

The body in heavenly places

According to the apostle's discourses, particularly in Ephesians and Colossians, this body of Christ here and now, including Jew and Gentile without distinction, teaching and admonishing, living in love, with peace ruling, putting to death the earthly members, **is the temple of heavenly places.** (Eph 2,4; Col 3).

This means that the truly 'spiritual' lifestyle of heavenly places is one of love, relationship and fellowship - what Paul called the sound doctrine of godly relational living. (1Tim 1:10; 2Tim 4:3). The loss of focus on the true nature of heavenly places has led to a loss of focus on the '*more excellent way*' (1Cor 12:31) of relational living. This subject of functioning relationally in heavenly places is important to our later study of music and worship.

It is critical and urgent that there be a real apprehension of this truth and context of heavenly places, in far more than a legal sense, if there is to be any understanding of the context for worship, indeed for the whole of New Testament life. If our perception of heaven is limited to a future, eternal reward entered through the veil of death, we become blind in a 'cloud of unknowing', to the most basic and startling New Testament revelations. The heavens are open; there is an open door into heavenly places, and a company of priests are '*ascending and descending upon the Son of man*'. (John 1:51).

Foundations

There are essential foundations for an apprehension of the corporate Christ, both individually and collectively. An adequate discussion of these is again beyond this address, but the importance of these matters to the practical framework to follow cannot be ignored.

Raised or fallen

The expression, life and power of this body that has been raised to worship and function in heavenly places, should be clearly evident. However, in the words of the address to the seven branches of the candlestick, we realise we have 'fallen' from the first love and first works of the corporate Christ in heavenly places.

Principle of Babylon

Consequently we find *ourselves 'from beneath'* (John 8:23) trying to ascend, reflecting the same religious self-determining attitude as was manifest at the tower of Babel. The attitudes of spirit found at Babel

extend across the whole of history and finally manifest as the spiritual 'Babylon' of the book of Revelation. The 'principle of Babylon' describes the whole attitude of 'ascending' which is inherent in all false worship and religious activity, which attitude is expressly refuted in Romans 10:

'Do not say in your heart, who will ascend into heaven ... that is to bring Christ down ...'. Rather, 'the word of faith is near, even in your mouth and in your heart'. (Rom 10:6-8).

Spiritual - mystical

There is a vast and irreconcilable difference between a spiritual apprehension of 'heavenly places', and the mystical, transcendent attitude that is inherent in much religion. To the degree that the former has been lost, the attitudes and activities of the latter have been substituted, having features more in common with the adornment of the Old Testament shadow than with the reformed temple of heavenly places. When the context of heavenly places is not apprehended, mystical notions of access and religious experience are substituted, and these are perceived to be the very truth of which we speak.

The classic incident surrounding the 'golden calf' draws attention to the propensity within the spirit of man to conceive what he believed to be the very same God that led him out of Egypt. (Ex 32:4). In the extension of that false construal, the people built an altar to this god of the imagination, established the vital principal of offering, proclaimed a feast, and finally 'rose up' to a liturgy of song and dance.

*'A song of communion they composed,
A song for the true God, they supposed.
Let me alone that I may consume them in wrath,
This liturgy of falsity,
This unrestrained perversity,
Presumptuous idolatry.'*

It is a timeless principle, that in the search for a transcendent experience, within the human spirit, a god of the imagination has often been conceived, an access to 'holy ground' has been presumed, and a communion with God has been claimed. All these dynamics were operative at the 'golden calf' incident, whereupon the true ideal of individual and corporate priesthood was forfeited. Subsequently, a single class of priests was substituted, serving as a lesson in both covenant eras that a clergy-laity distinction fell short of the covenant intention of God.

'O black day of loss when they thought they knew

God, a god of imagination,
In a cloud of their unknowing.
Gone is the priesthood from you Israel,
Gone to a single tribe of Israel,
And even then to be defiled and vanish away.
O black day of loss when they thought they knew
God.'
(From 'The Touch of God')

ACCESS THROUGH OFFERING

It is evident across the church of our day, that the Holy Spirit is addressing this matter of presumed access and individualistic conception of spiritual realities and operations. There is a new song beginning to sound forth, a new episode in the sovereign will of God is being declared. However, just as the re-establishing of **burnt offering preceded** the restoration of the **new song** in the Old Testament (2Chr 29:26; Ezra 3:2,10), so today the subject of offering is vital to our function 'in Spirit and in truth' upon the holy ground of heavenly places.

We observe that there is a renewed zeal across Christendom to draw near to God, to seek His will and lay hold upon His promises in restoration, to minister His Spirit and power; however we heed the thoughts expressed as a prophetic narration in 'The Touch of God':

*"But where is my offering?" says the Lord.
You come with reverence, with desire,
But where is the offering made by fire?"*

*New song you hear proclaim, "It's time!"
But where is the offering wholly Mine?
Come with bold conspiracy,
Fashion glorious liturgy,
Come with keys of want and wager;
"No open door!" from Him who holds the key of David.*

*Come with an offering most precise
To holy ground of covenant life.
Accepted then, a meeting in the fire,
Or else a deadly funeral pyre!*

The clear lesson of the interactions with the cloud in the 'shadow' dispensation was that man's approach to the expropriating fire of His 'holy ground' had to be through sacrifice and offering, and with meticulous preparation of heart and attitude. Christ came as the incarnation of this same cloud of glory, and by the spotless offering of Himself, He entered the heavens - to which we are now also raised, called now to offer spiritual sacrifices

Meeting in the fire

It is clear that if we are to approach and commune with God in His fire of perpetual offering, then there must be a purifying work in regard to the offering of ourselves. In Malachi we are told of this very day when as heaven comes down, He will sit as a refiner of silver and deal with us in relation to defiled offerings, until an acceptable offering in righteousness is brought forth.

*'With an offering whole we meet You in the fire, Our
perfume is the ascending of desire;
With a heart to stand upon Your holy ground,
To attend upon the worship of the throne,
May our gift for Your delight
Be accepted in Your sight,
Receive this offering made by fire.'*
(from 'The Touch of God')

Understanding that God is dealing with His church in relation to offering and the problem of presumed access gives clear sense to the recent activities of the Spirit across the church.

*'How have we been darkened?
This our grief and sorrow.
For lack of offering whole and true,
For lack of truly knowing You
Here enshrined in hearts of flesh;
The veil was rent of separateness,
No longer stands the fiery cloud
Obscured by dark transcendent shroud.*

*But bursting through and alighting surely
Upon the shrine of incarnate glory,
On final resting place, bestowing.
Gone the cloud of our unknowing.'*
(from 'The Touch of God')

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Gradually we have looked past the poetry, artistry, and even 'romance' of the parable (in the sense that musical expression to some extent always romanticises its subject), to accept the word as a two-edged sword which must surely pierce the reins of the heart. We see that religious romanticism and idealism have pervaded the church and its ministry of the word, promoting individualism of expression and independence of enterprise and direction. The Jerusalem Passion and our ministry of it will be just the same unless, in the

end, it *"brings every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"* (II Cor 10:5).

Too many mystical understandings have replaced true spiritual perceptions, and romantic notions of Christian life and ministry have replaced the 'sound doctrine' of relational godliness being lived. Some of us live in a world of spiritual make-believe - presuming that the presence of God is with us, granting to ourselves thoughts of God's kindly disposition, forgiveness, blessing and grace. When the cloud of God's glory moves on, so must we, for to remain behind is to be left in a world of fantasy and presumption.

'O black day of loss when they thought they knew God, A god of imagination, in a cloud of their unknowing'

(from 'The Touch of God')

There is so much more of the glory of God for us to move into. The cloud is moving on. In some instances, the cloud is gone - and not even fervent prayer will bring it back again.

DO WE WANT THE TOUCH OF GOD?

Are we afraid to be blessed because of the demands He may place upon us? Isn't this basically why we shrink back?

We want to do our own thing, and have God's blessing upon it. And we are afraid of being asked to do God's will, of being taken into captivity.

But if we knew that we could be cleansed of our own way, wouldn't this make a difference? It's the inner wickedness with which we struggle that stops us coming to Him - the secret sin, the deep inner self-justification, the anger, hurt and resentment.

We become locked up to some of these secret motivations and need the touch of God to release us.

*'O touch my heart,
Cleanse me from secret sin.
touch my hands, purify them again
Anoint my eyes, anoint my lips
Anoint my head, till my cup overflows
Amen, amen, amen.'*

(From "The Touch of God")

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