

## SEENING JESUS ... THE PANACEA FOR ALL EMERGENCIES

But we see Jesus. who was ... crowned with glory and honour. (Heb. 2:9)

Many of the early Christians were in trouble. Their newly-expressed faith in Jesus of Nazareth had been challenged, but a return to Judaism seemed to be impossible because the foundations of the ancient faith had been destroyed. The temple was in ruins, priests no longer ministered in the sanctuary. and God appeared to be unconcerned with what was happening in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the church was being attacked. Believers were being fed to ravenous beasts, others were slain in the arena, and some had been burned at the stakes in the gardens of the emperor. The new converts to Christianity were perplexed: the old faith had almost disappeared, the new one seemed to be on the verge of extinction. and God, apparently. was not interested. It was to explain this situation that someone—maybe Paul—wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. The writer tried to explain that the old doctrines were an introduction to the new, and the ancient priests were ordinary men to be followed by a Priest whose ministry would never terminate. The Aaronic priests had ceased to function, but the work of Christ had only just commenced.

Many problems remained to be solved, and questions needed to be answered. The leaders of the church were unable to explain why certain things had been permitted, but one thing was irrefutable—they could see Jesus, and even though they were mystified and perplexed, the Savior was aware of everything that had taken place. The writer reminded his readers that the Lord Jesus Christ "because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:24–25). Believers, therefore, should keep their eyes focused on the Savior.

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Christians of all ages will be eternally indebted to the ancient author for he expressed the mind of God. The facts he enunciated can be seen throughout the sacred records. During all generations men and women were able to recognize Christ in all kinds of situations. Their inspiring vision led to triumph when otherwise they would have tailed. Four important Scriptures invite attention.

#### We See Christ in Our Distresses

And when he had sent them [the crowd] away, he departed into a mountain to pray. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid. And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased. (Mark 6:46–51)

The account of the disciples survival in the storm on the Sea of Galilee provides excellent reading. We consider that episode in retrospect, but for the followers of Jesus the experience was terrifying. The preceding day had been exceptionally busy. A large crowd was present and it was necessary to persuade the people to return to their

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homes. The sun was beginning to set when the Lord told the disciples to go to the other side of the lake while he sent the multitude away. The word used to describe how Jesus told the disciples to go to the other side of the lake was enagkasen, which, to say the least, was thought provoking. The King James Version of the Scriptures translates it. "He constrained them." The Amplified Bible says, "He insisted that the disciples get into the boat." The Englishmen's Greek New Testament says, "He compelled them." Evidently there was need of persuasion. The disciples were reluctant to obey their Master, and when they hesitated, Jesus insisted they do as He suggested. That situation merits an explanation.

The disciples were experienced fishermen who had spent many years fishing in that area. They were able to read weather signs in the sky and knew when a storm was approaching. Perhaps they reminded Jesus that He was a carpenter, they were fishermen! Or they might have been

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anxious to help in dispersing the crowd. When Jesus said He could manage alone, some might have disagreed, not realizing their presence would be a hindrance. One remarkable fact remains indisputable: Christ sent the disciples into a dangerous storm and it is possible the men questioned the wisdom of their Leader. Eventually, some of them might have asked, "If Jesus loves us, why did He permit this to happen?" When the turbulent seas of life appear to be inescapable, many people prefer to remain on the shore rather than to risk their lives elsewhere. The Lord permitted that storm because it could deepen the experience of His followers. If the Hebrew boys had not been thrown into the furnace, they would not have discovered the saving power of the One "like the Son of God" (see Dan. 3:25). When survival seemed impossible for the disciples "they all saw him . . . and he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased."

#### We See Christ in Our Denials

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. (2 Cor. 12:7-9)

The apostle was elated! He had been specially favored by God and given experiences unknown to other Christians: "He was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (v. 4). The details connected with that experience remain unknown, but Paul also mentioned "the abundance of revelations" (visions), which had thrilled his soul. When he was filled with ecstasy he became aware of a problem that was destroying his happiness. He wrote, "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." The precise nature of this "thorn" or stake was never explained. Throughout the history of the church all kinds of ideas have been expressed, but they were only speculations. Tertullian, one of the early church fathers, believed Paul suffered from earache. Chrysostom said the thorn was continuous headaches. Cyprian said it meant poor health. Most of the modern commentators think the apostle suffered from acute ophthalmia and cite the statement, "... ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me" (Gal. 4:15).

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The exact nature of the apostle's infirmity may never be known, but evidently it caused great distress. Paul was a man of prayer, and the

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intensity of his requests can be seen in the fact that on three occasions he asked the Lord for deliverance. The Amplified New Testament interprets Paul's statement as, "Three times I called upon the Lord and besought [Him] about this and begged that it might depart from me. When his requests were denied, he ceased asking for relief and remembered God's promise: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." God always answers the prayers of His children, but sometimes He says "No."

#### We See Christ in Our Dismay

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:61-62)

Peter was disgusted with himself and believed he was the worst of all men—liar, a cheat, a faithless wretch, the most despicable of all creatures. He was unable to forget the terrible moment when the crowing of a cockerel made him look at Jesus. The pain expressed in the eyes of the Savior increased the anguish in his own soul; even death would be better than a life filled with shame. "And Peter went out and wept bitterly." Christ might forgive his dastardly deed, but Peter would never forgive himself! His boastful utterance had returned to haunt him, and his mind was in a turmoil. It would be difficult to confront the brethren, for they had heard his remarks and would know Peter could not be trusted. He was weak, cowardly, and without honor. Simon found a seat in the darkness and felt the tears running down his cheeks. Poor fellow: he was not alone, for somewhere in the shadows God watched the desolate fisherman. It is now recognized that the Lord turned that tragedy into victory. Throughout the rest of his life Peter never forgot how, in the midst of his dismay, he beheld the face of his Lord and discovered the grace of God was sufficient for his need.

#### We See Christ in Our Departure

But he [Stephen], being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.... And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he

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kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:55, 59-60)

A Christian astronomer who was about to leave this world said, "He who lives with the stars has no reason to fear the night." Paul, at the close of his ministry wrote, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8). Evidently he was thinking more of his reunion with Christ than of his impending death. Surrounded by his enemies, Stephen seemed to be a man in a trance. He hardly felt the stones falling upon his body for his eyes were focused on the enthroned Christ. Whether or not he ever attended one of the Savior's meetings while He was yet on earth is uncertain, but moments before he completed his earthly journey he saw the Lord waiting to welcome him into the everlasting kingdom. That glorious vision removed the sting of death and transformed anguish into anticipation. I have witnessed such a scene when the face of a dying Christian was illuminated with supernatural radiance. David said: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (Ps. 23:4). He did not walk to the valley nor in it, but through it. His destination was on the other side of the valley of death, and that realization thrilled the royal psalmist. The poet wrote,

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Turn your eyes upon Jesus;  
Look full in His wonderful face:  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace.

The story has been told of a Norwegian father who took his two sons on a fishing trip. Unfortunately their little boat almost capsized when a sudden storm whipped the seas to fury. They struggled hard to control their vessel, but the task was almost beyond their capabilities. When the lighthouse ceased to function, they believed death to be imminent. Meanwhile, on shore, an accident in their home started a fire and the wife was unable to subdue the flames. After a long struggle the man and his sons reached the shore, but the husband remained silent when his wife mentioned the fire. Finally, she said, "Don't you understand? Our house has been destroyed." Calmly he replied, "A few hours ago we faced death, and when the lighthouse failed to function it appeared we were doomed. Then we saw a new light and started to row toward

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it. When the glow intensified, we were able to see the shoreline and that helped us to come in. If our house had not burned, we would have drowned!" Blessed is the one, who, seeing the Savior, is able to say, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28).

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