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The Evangelist and the Ethiopian

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Stewart Lavery

Scripture Reading Acts 8:26-39

Many years ago two Africans, a master and his servant, were driving by the desert route that goes down from Jerusalem unto Gaza. The former had been to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 8:27). This man, like so many well-meaning people before and since, had earnestly gone through the required rites and rules, but failed to find the true peace that the knowledge of the Messiah alone can give. But he had procured an unerring guide to that knowledge in a roll of the Prophet Isaiah.

The Ethiopian "was returning, and sitting in his chariot reading Esaias the Prophet" (Acts 8:28). On his return journey this nameless man travelled not only by the desert way but also along the avenue of Bible thought. On this wonderful journey he was engaged and employed in a most profitable occupation of reading the story of the Messiah. He had reached the climax of the Book of Isaiah, the 53rd chapter, and was actually reading the words: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer; so opened He not His mouth: In His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." While thus engaged, a voice at his side inquired, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" The speaker

was Philip the Evangelist (Acts 21:8) who had at that particular moment run alongside the chariot.

It well becomes us to especially note that Philip was so anxious to spiritually help this man that he “ran thither to him” (Acts 8:30). Had he not done so, this dear man, a most inquiring reader of Isaiah, would, had he continued his reading, have been occupied with what we now know as the 54th chapter of Isaiah which presents an entirely different line of thought to that set forth in the previous one, the 53rd. We have here a most impressive and important lesson which we do well to learn and lay to heart especially by all those who seek to serve the Lord. Let us, then, not delay but be willing to be active and alert in carrying the message of redeeming love and be up and doing in the blest service of our Lord and Master. It will require decision and daily dependance upon the Holy Spirit to enable us to witness and work in a becoming manner for our absent, but soon coming LORD.

We now return to hear the answer given by the Ethiopian to the Evangelist. “How can I, except some man should guide me?” (v 31), and he bade Philip to come up into the chariot and sit with him. There, “Of whom speaketh the Prophet this; of himself or of some other man?” asked the Ethiopian. At once Philip “opened his mouth and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (v 35). What a privilege! As the African carefully listened, he was convinced like millions since, both Jews and Gentiles, that this Jesus was indeed the Messiah the hope of Israel, and the Saviour of all who trust in His work of salvation. The most fruitful result of his personal belief was seen in that he confessed his new-found faith, was baptized, and

“went his way rejoicing” (vs 36-39). Well might he rejoice since he had believed that “Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (v 37), and had in his possession a copy of the imperishable writings in the Roll of the Prophet Isaiah. What a possession!

The Ethiopian was a man of great authority in the world, Chancellor of the Exchequer to his Queen, Candace, a common designation of the Ethiopian sovereigns. Returning to this Queen he bore a priceless treasure in this particular copy of the Prophet Isaiah. True, within the Royal residence were many choice valuables of rich and rare distinction, but none to outclass and outshine this precious and particular part of the Old Testament. The message of Isaiah 53 outlasts and outlives every age and every generation, and is still read by millions throughout the whole world. Can such a story ever grow old? The Queen of the Ethiopians has for ever passed away, her palace, her power and all her possessions. Her words, wisdom and works are no more. “But the Word of the Lord endureth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:25). This ever blessed living Word contains treasures far exceeding all earth’s gems and gold; treasures that those who find them by faith in Christ can never lose in Time or Eternity. We must never forget there are in the Sacred Scriptures treasures of God’s love, of the sacrifice of the Sinless Son of God, of His compassion, mercy, grace, cleansing power, eternal life and forgiveness. Oh, what priceless treasures!

The Ethiopian and millions of mankind have passed away, but, blessed be God, there still remains the Book of Isaiah with its wonderful 53rd chapter. To this chapter we do well to turn and engage in the most profitable occupation of musing and meditating upon the

One who is presented to our wondering and adoring gaze. Thus musing, thus meditating, we can only look into those awful depths of death and judgment as solemnly set forth in this chapter, Isaiah 53, and bow our hearts and heads in worship.

In drawing our message to a close our sincere prayer is that we seek the needed grace to take a deeper interest in the Word of the living God. This shall be evidenced by the fact that we want the Bible, the whole Bible. The man of Ethiopia had only the Roll of the Prophet Isaiah. We need nothing but the Bible as authority and chart on life's voyage. Having such a Book, the Book of books, the child of God can face all that life may hold. The Holy Scriptures, from commencement to close, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, ever delight to pour out their unstinted wealth and weight of testimony and tribute to our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the eternal God. Oh, what an outpouring!

The Meaning of The Message

The Meaning of The Message

Stewart Laverty

“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

In turning our attention to the above portion we are not surprised to learn that there is such holy and blessed teaching gathered up in this wondrous verse that it has been called The Gospel in a Nutshell, God’s Golden Gem and The Bible in Miniature.

Truly the message and meaning of such a verse is the unfolding of the divine counsels. It is the revelation of those divine plans and purposes which were conceived in Eternity by the great heart of love of our God.

It is the remarkable record of what God counselled in the silence of Eternity so as to make known His nature, His character, His love, Himself. What a Revelation!

What a unique unfolding of the heart of God!

What a deep, rich and full expression of the divine bosom!

What holy and blessed truths are gathered up in this one verse!

What food for musing and meditation!

What a theme for thought! What wonder for worship!

What holy, happy and hallowed truths are seen in this verse concerning the LOVE of God!

Surely our hearts may draw much comfort and consolation from these rich stores of divine truth and grace. Yes, rich stores which carry an exceedingly interesting and profoundly affecting truth, which guided by the Holy Spirit would surely lead us to prayerfully ponder over the deeply profound wonders and ways of the love of God as magnified and fully manifested in God's only begotten Son. What a manifestation!

In this verse we have the highest expression of the LOVE of God as revealed in Christ Jesus.

This message excels and exceeds in a scale of greatness by far that of any truth previously made known. Where will you find even a hint in any of the books comprising the Old Testament of the truth of John 3:16?

Throughout the Old Testament there were many servants of God, including patriarchs, prophets and psalmists, to whom repeated revelations of the Lord were given. These divinely chosen and commissioned messengers whose names are for ever revered, and whose work and witness extended throughout a period of thousands of years, during which they witnessed amongst many other truths to the coming of Christ whose work was foretold and foreshadowed, predicted and depicted, throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. Read 1 Peter 1:11.

Yet the most distinguished writer, worker or witness of the Lord in the Old Testament was not privileged or permitted to tell of the distinctive blessing of the Love of God as set forth in the words of John 3:16.

Think of the heights to which Isaiah rose as he delighted in the grandeur and greatness of his prophetic

utterances, and that of many others of those who witnessed for God in the Old Testament.

But never, never upon the lips of any person of the Old Testament times trembled the words of our lovely verse. As the different dispensations passed and the stream of time continued on its divinely appointed course, these thrice blessed words of life and light were specially held in reserve for the coming forth in matchless mercy and limitless love of God's only Son. From Him, for the first time, we hear the marvellous message, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Little wonder then that since these wonderful words of life were first uttered they have brought millions of mankind to trust in the Saviour, Son of God. For the unfolding of this wondrous message God sent forth the darling of His bosom, who made known in an understandable way the exceedingly interesting and profoundly affecting truth of the heart of God. We must have here the most elevated, devoted development of truth concerning the bosom of God to be found upon the imperishable pages of inspiration. We also have here the precious presentation of our Lord, the setting forth of His glory and the ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, The Blessed Revealer of the heart and mind of God. It is a verse in this respect unequalled in the Holy Scriptures.

What a privileged people we are to have this particular verse of the Sacred Scriptures! May we ever seek the needed grace and guidance to muse and meditate over and over again upon the elevated character and range of truth presented to our wondering and worshipping

hearts in that precious portion of the Gospel of John. May we ever have a strong spiritual attachment for this particular verse because amidst the darkness and departure of these days our hearts are sustained in the fulness, the freshness and the fragrance of the blessed words of John 3:16.

We are thus forcefully reminded that the total number of words in our text are twenty-five, and a point of immense importance which we would do well to always bear in mind is that the centre word is that of three wonderful letters, the word SON, who is the centre of divine affection (John 1:18). We have in this wondrous word the message —

S alvation

O ffered

N ow

In our verse we also see the good news of the blessed fact that:

God, so loved the world, that He gave His

Only Begotten

Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not

Perish, but have

Everlasting

Life.

We further see in our verse:

God's

Only

Son that

Provides

Everlasting

Life

God's

Old and

Story is that

Proclaimed

Earnestly and

Lovingly

What a message!

In view of these truths there is an indescribable charm and peculiar sweetness in the twenty-five wonderful words of this verse, the depth and tenderness of which tranquilizes the heart, the mind and the soul.

Oh, what a verse!