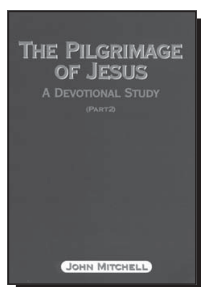


A new life of our Lord: Part 2

John Nicholls



The Pilgrimage of Jesus: A Devotional Study. Part 2: From Bethany to Calvary, John Mitchell, Penrhyn Books, 6 Traeth Penrhyn, Penrhyn Bay, Llandudno, LL30 3RN; email penriteuk@yahoo.co.uk

Price: £8.00*

LAST YEAR WE reviewed the first part of Brother John Mitchell's devotional study of the life of Christ, based on articles published in *The Testimony* many years ago ([Sept. 2003, p. 337](#)). Our brother has now published the second part, entitled *From Bethany to Calvary*, a volume which has been found to be in every way as good as the first. Like the first volume, it consists of about seventy chapters, or cameos, each complete in itself, so that the book can easily be read over a long period (every night, for example, before going to sleep) or in larger chunks. This volume is written with the same beautiful English as the first, making it a joy to read, and also with the same perception and careful research.

The overwhelming impression gained from the book is the hope of the Kingdom and of the fulfilment of God's purpose as the basis of the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is perhaps not surprising, as these things would have loomed ever larger in the mind of the Lord Jesus as the time of his great sacrifice drew near: "for the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). And Jesus understood the need to prepare his disciples by teaching and by parable for the day of his coming and the judgement. The other general impression gained was that every word, action or thought of the Lord Jesus carries exhortation and encouragement for us. If only we could put his example into practice in our own lives!

A balanced approach

The balanced approach that Brother Mitchell shows in his writing is well illustrated in chapter 94. Would you have linked a time period in the prophecy of Daniel with the rejoinder of the Lord to the Pharisees: "the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk. 17:21)? This is what the author does in the course of his exposition of and exhortation on this hard saying of Jesus, extending the exhortation to our day with the comment:

"A close study of the international scene, with Bible in hand, provides us with a thrilling confirmation of our faith and a justification for that which we have preached for so long. Scoffed at we may be, as 'fundamentalists', but here we have irrefutable evidence that the pattern of events the Bible has taught us is being fulfilled. And as long as we handle the Word with humility and do not indulge in overconfident predictions as to the turn events will take, our case will become stronger and stronger, to the confusion of those who oppose the Word, and to the edification of sincere seekers after the Truth".

A second example of this balanced approach is found in chapter 115, "The Two Aspects of Love", where Brother Mitchell writes:

"Of course, when we compare this perfection of love, shown to us in the life of the Lord Jesus, with our own performance, we are infinitely saddened. So much love streams from God, through Christ, to us, and so little is passed on to our neighbours that the comparison shames us . . . Love of God and love of our neighbour are 'like unto' one another.

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Copies are available in Australia from Brother Graham Kennedy, 17 Shakespeare Avenue, Plympton Park, Adelaide, NSW 5038; email grahamkennedy@ozemail.com.au; and in the USA from Brother Tom Graham, 2621 Riata Court, Camarillo, CA 93012; email tom@bigbrand.com.

They have the same quality, and they amount to the same thing: denial of self. We cannot be selfish even over the love of God . . . Not having the love of God causes men and women to look for satisfaction elsewhere. A man must worship something, and he must love something. If he turns away from the True Love, he must embrace the false in one of its many forms, only to find that it fails him in the end”.

Jesus was confronted with all the real-life problems we are ever likely to come across in our lives, and many of these are found in the book. Chapter 82, “Except you repent . . .”, deals with people called by the author “ordinary, decent folk”—the good fathers and mothers, who work hard and keep on the right side of the law. “Yet”, he writes, “between them and us there is a great gulf fixed”. He continues: “Comparisons, either with ourselves or with those outside the faith are, therefore, beside the point. We are all unworthy of salvation, even the best of us, but those with faith in Christ have, in the mercy and love of God and by the sacrifice of Christ, bridged the flood. It is by this faith, and this alone that we hope one day to enter the Kingdom of God”.

Other issues, such as chastisement, paying taxes and the question of why some people suffer so much more than others, are also dealt with in various parts of the book.

Parables

Jesus seemed to increase the number of parables as he got closer to the cross; or is it that the Spirit has selected more from that part of the Master’s teaching? The author comments on them without trying to fit all details into a meaning, but instead giving the general meaning as befits the context in which the parable was given. Chapter 100, “Showers of Blessings”, concerning the parable of the penny given to the labourers in the vineyard, was one that stood out for the reviewer, as did chapter 112, “Come to the wedding!”.

Chapter 95, “God will not fail”, regarding the parable which we often refer to as The Parable of the Unjust Judge, has a humorous touch:

“There is even a hint that the judge was afraid, not only of the woman’s tongue but also of physical violence. One rendering of his reason for capitulating to her demands is ‘*lest by her continual coming she black my eye!*’ Ederheim follows Meyer in assuming that the judge was afraid of bodily harm, and the picture of the poor widow brandishing the

Palestinian equivalent of her umbrella under the judge’s nose, certainly adds a lively touch to the story”.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is extremely well related (chapter 90), with a memorable closing sentence: “[Jesus] sets the example of the true elder brother, who laboured solely for the joy of bringing home many prodigals from the land of death into the household of his Father”.

The author is always conscious of the context of the parables, many of which were spoken against the religious leaders of Jesus’s day. At the end of chapter 111, regarding the Parable of the Vineyard, after quoting those ominous words of our Lord, “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Mt. 21:43), he says: “Even then these ‘vessels of wrath’ did not repent. They perceived quite clearly that the Lord Jesus had spoken the parable against them, but instead of taking note of its awesome import for themselves, they became more incensed and were restrained from laying hands on him there and then only by the fear of the people who took Jesus for a prophet. So they left him and went away biding their time until that hour of darkness should come”.

Drama

Brother Mitchell appreciates the drama of the last days of the Lord’s mortal life, and he captures the mood with imagination and splendid prose. Especially is this the case in chapter 121, which recounts Judas’s betrayal of his Lord and the incident in which Peter and John go to prepare the Passover. Chapter 123 and other places in this book give a good analysis of the character of Judas and his sad motives.

The time in the garden of Gethsemane is recounted in chapter 131, and then we come to the account of the drama of the betrayal and arrest of the Lord Jesus. The trials of the Master before Annas, the Jews, Pilate and Herod are all very well described, and so is the denial of Jesus by Peter. The chapter that stood out for the reviewer, though, was 140, “The Thief on the Cross”. Brother Mitchell writes:

“Here, then, were three ‘serpents’ on a pole—two real ones and one of brass. The brass had the appearance of the serpent race but was in reality holy, harmless, and undefiled. Being in the form of God, he thought it not ‘robbery’ to be equal with God but made himself of no reputation. He humbled himself and

became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He assented fully to the significance of the brazen serpent, saying, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God so (in like manner) loved the world that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life' . . . One crucified robber would not respond. He went his way to the dust. The other repented. He 'died' with Christ, was judged and found worthy of a place in the Kingdom of God, even Paradise, restored. There he will eat of the tree of life, and live for ever".

Background

In the review of [Part 1](#) it was noted how well the background and topography had been researched, and the same can be said of Part 2. For example, in chapter 106, "Occupy till I come", dealing with the Parable of the Pounds, the journey to a far country by the nobleman to receive a kingdom is linked to that made by Archelaus the son of Herod the Great, who was made King of Judea by the Romans. In chapter 86, "When you are invited to a feast", there is an extensive quotation from Geikie about the way the couches were arranged at feasts and the social status that these held for the guests. The author quotes other writers as well, and uses a variety of translations.

Exhortation

For the reviewer there were so many good chapters full of exhortation in the book that it is almost impossible to select one that is better than the others. Perhaps one of the most memorable is 107, "The Fragrance of Love". After a perceptive paragraph on page 161 about Judas Iscariot, he continues:

"Compare this with the attitude of Mary [Lazarus' sister], and we have the contrast between light and darkness; between the spirit of Christ and the dark machinations of the sinful heart of man. Mary at that moment stood for far more than she realised. A daughter of Eve, who is the mother of all the sin-stricken sons of men, she had seen and recognised the promised Saviour who would bruise the Serpent in the head, but who was about to be bruised himself in the heel. Mary had realised the great sacrifice that the Lord Jesus was about to make for mankind, and in her womanly, helpless way had done what she could to express her gratitude and her love. In so doing she had also demonstrated to the world what the love of Christ himself, which she was reflecting, could accomplish. Eve had begun by gratifying her own desires, deceived as she was by sin. Mary had poured out her precious nard as a fragrant token of herself and of her loving obedience and care, using a woman's glory, her hair, to wipe the very feet of her Lord. In that moment she represented the bride of Christ, the Church itself, and the company of believers of all ages, prostrate in love and devotion to the One who has saved them by his blood. No wonder the odour filled the house!".

Concluding matters

The book has a small index that covers both of the volumes, and is carefully and nicely produced. It is warmly commended to all who wish to get to know our Lord and Saviour better and therefore to love and follow him more closely. It will appeal to brothers and sisters in Christ, to their children, and to their friends who are seeking the Truth.

Magazine and Book Index

The 2004 edition of this powerful tool is now available. The **Magazine Index** covers *The Testimony*, *Bible Student*, *Christadelphian*, *Contending for the Faith Quarterly*, *Herald of the Kingdom*, *Lampstand*, *Logos*, *The Bible Magazine* and *The New Bible Student* magazines up to end 2003. It has a **subject** section in keyword order and a **Bible** section in Bible book order. In addition to **subject** and **Bible** indexes, the **Book Index** also has an up-to-date list of publishers and suppliers. It contains a list of over 1,000 books and pamphlets by title.

Available on CD from the compiler Brother Aleck Crawford, 6 Ingomar Court, Hallett Cove, South Australia 5158; email: aleck@chariot.net.au, at AU\$20 plus post/packing, or equivalent in other currencies. For the UK contact Brother Peter Talbot, 6 Ridge Lane, Radcliffe-on-Trent, Nottingham, NG12 1BD. Tel. 0115 933 3683; email: Talbotpj@aol.com. See http://users.chariot.net.au/~aleck/Index_description.html for more details.