

fight the good fight of faith, that salvation might spread around the world. The disciples' excited conversation must have been silenced as the Saviour granted them his blessing, then began to ascend out of their sight. And although we do not know to what part of the wide heavens our Lord passed, we can imagine the acclamations of joy that greeted him as legions of angels rejoiced and escorted him to the right hand of his mighty Father. Hallelujahs such as mortal men have never heard echoed around the throne of glory—praise not yet capable of being grasped by mortal men.

It may be, at this very moment, that great preparations are being made for the Lord's promised return. What a day for us to contemplate! And what a privilege to be there! On earth, two angels spoke a stimulating message to those left behind. How did they react? Were they dispirited because they were leaderless? Had dejection overwhelmed them at the thought of the work to be done? Not a bit. Luke emphasises their exuberance with one word: when they first met their risen Lord they could not believe for *joy*. When the Lord left them they were filled with great *joy*. That one word underlines their tremendous zeal and new-found confidence. They returned to the city of intrigue and murder with a new assurance. Their fearless

proclamation of a new creation rang around the city walls. They had a great heritage to share, for which we are grateful, and we share with all who will listen.

*Speed on, O God, the hour when, free from sin,  
We'll rise, Thy sons of power, glorious within:  
And, with Thy Christ confest,  
Blessing and ever blest,  
Rule o'er the earth at rest in the Amen.*

(Hymn 174)

That same joy is imprinted on our hearts. Death is defeated, and no amount of earth covering our lifeless bodies is an obstacle for Him Who created all things. The future is a glorious prospect: we can have no fear. We can reign with this unique man, a true King of kings and Lord of lords, serving the survivors of the judgements to come that they too may see the overwhelming mercy of God and share our precious heritage (Ps. 145:10-12). They will see that the Lord who had so humble a beginning will have no end, for, like the angels—and like us!—life will stretch into eternity. It will be a life of quality unlike anything that we have ever envisaged. How wonderful if, this very moment, an angel opened our door and said, "The Lord is here! Come, ye blessed of the Lord".

## Exposition

# "Behold the man!"

## The titles and descriptions of Jesus of Nazareth

### 21. The nourisher of the ecclesia

Greg Palmer

**T**HE TITLES in this article focus on the care that our Lord gives us. He is not a distant and aloof stone monument seated at God's right hand. Jesus Christ is at hand, that is, near, for the purpose of giving aid to his children.

#### Shepherd

Jesus Christ is not merely described as a shepherd, but "the good shepherd" (Jno. 10:11), "the chief Shepherd" (1 Pet. 5:4) and "that great shepherd" (Heb. 13:20). The word "shepherd" in the Greek is *poimēn*. The words "chief shepherd" are one Greek word, *archipoimēn* (arch-shepherd). Jesus is not only a shepherd but the chiefest. The scriptures

of the Old Testament abound with references to the qualities of a shepherd. Psalm 23 springs to mind as a testimony of praise to Yahweh as a shepherd. Having seen already that God's character is identical to Jesus', can we expect him to be any different? Let us take a closer look at the qualities that are recorded of Jesus in the context of his being a shepherd:

- compassionate (Mt. 9:36; Mk. 6:34)
- gives his life for the sheep (Jno. 10:11)
- knows his sheep by name (v. 14)
- cares for all his sheep irrespective of where they are (v. 16).

We, as Israel were, are called upon to be shepherds

likewise. Do we match the above example of care? Would it really trouble us if that tiresome brother fell off a cliff? It would deeply concern the great Shepherd.

Jesus is particularly a shepherd for the wayward. Call to mind the words of Peter: "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25). How is it that we return? Because we are faithful and righteous and knew we should return? No! Our shepherd has gone out looking for us. We may not and ought not to abandon those who stray; but rather, as a faithful shepherd, we should seek them out and restore them. Where would we be if the great Shepherd were a hireling? Let the words of warning from Ezekiel 34 ring loudly in our ears. God will require the blood of the lost sheep at the hand of the worthless shepherd. Let us strive rather to feed, clothe, restore and heal those sheep that are entrusted to us, after the example of the chief Shepherd.

### **The bread of life**

All of us require food. We need to be provided with good food that will nourish us and keep us healthy. As with the natural, so with the spiritual. When Jesus declared in John 6:35 that he was "the bread of life", he was not speaking of wonderful pastries. The connection was made by our Lord himself when he recited from Deuteronomy 8:3, "know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live".

The bread represents the Word of God. Jesus Christ is, then, a source and provider of spiritual food. Later, in John 6:63, he declared, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life". The actual eating of his flesh would not give life, any more than merely the eating of bread in remembrance of him does. The real bread is the words that he spoke. There would be no dietary deficiencies for any one of us if our spiritual diet consisted of the "gracious words" which he spoke. In the mercy of God, they have been recorded for us in the pages of Scripture. If we hunger and thirst after righteousness, we may come to him, and we shall never hunger again.

### **The true vine**

This again is a title that Jesus takes to himself. The words are found in John 15:1, where it is recorded that Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman". In that Jesus declares himself

to be the *true* vine, we can expect that there are also false vines.

Reading on in John 15 we find that we are the branches. We should note that the vine is one with the branches. The vine is that which supplies support, sap, life and productivity to the branches. We may think that the world about us, or strength within, will do those things for us. They will not! They may for a time; our leaves may flourish momentarily; but those false vines do not endure. If we do not have Christ we can do nothing and will ultimately be gathered as a dry branch to be burned (Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 15:1-5).

The function of being in the vine is to bear fruit. The nourishment that is supplied by the vine is given to that end. We should not, therefore, complain that Christ has not given us wealth or prestige that we may think we need. He will give us only that which is needful for the production of fruit. Not only so, but we can expect the Husbandman (God) periodically to prune the branch that bears fruit, that it might bring forth more. The vine has been planted by God, the Husbandman. We are not native to the vine, even though we are now part of it. We stand with the vine by the good hand of the Husbandman, Who will just as easily cut us off if we do not bear fruit.

### **Physician**

This is a title mentioned four times in the Gospels. Jesus is claiming to be a Divine healer of sinners. The services of a doctor are not required for those who are well. Jesus told the Pharisees that, since they felt they had no sin and the publicans did, it was right for Jesus to be with the publicans, healing them of their sin. Since sickness and death are both directly and indirectly the result of sin, the figure of a doctor is appropriate. By applying the teaching of our Lord to our lives, our spiritual ailments can be reduced and even in some cases cured. It will not be until he is able to change mortality to immortality that his greatest healing work will be accomplished.

It is common for doctors to be given honour and respect for the health they restore and the lives that they save. This should be doubly so for the great Physician. Do we ignore his instructions? Are we forgetful to apply his remedies? Our health will only improve in proportion as we follow the cures prescribed by our Lord. The medical advice given to anoint the eyes with eye salve in order to see is just as pertinent for us as it was for the Laodicean Ecclesia.

[\(To be concluded\)](#)