

church times

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The Heavenly Vision in the New Testament

In the last issue, we saw the heavenly vision in the Old Testament, namely God's words to Moses on Mount Sinai which constituted the standards of serving Him. But the Israelites failed utterly and forsook God and His words, so His glory departed from them. God however does not give up, He wants to recover and accomplish His will. So He sent His Son 2,000 years ago. The Lord Jesus came to end the Old Testament and usher in the New. His forerunner, John the Baptist, testified for Him, prepared His way and turned people to Him. Both their message was: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matt 3:2; 4:17)

The Lord Jesus' ministry – set up the kingdom of the heavens

The Lord Jesus came to save His people from their sins (Matt 1:21). At His birth, an angel announced Him as the Saviour and Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). He came also to rule, to recover the glory of God's kingdom. After His baptism and temptation by the devil, He started His ministry in the power of the Spirit (4:1-14). He healed all kinds of sickness, taught in the synagogues and declared: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." (4:18-19) His people had fallen into darkness, bondage and oppression. He came to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide their feet into the way of peace (1:79).

For His believers to express God's kingdom and glory, the Lord taught them the kingdom's laws, showed them its reality through parables, and demonstrated the Father's will by His own actions, e.g. He cleaned up the temple and rebuked: "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple and taught: "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" (Matt 5-7, 13, 21-22, 24-25; John 2:14-16; Mark 11:15-17) His righteous wrath served to show the Jews their sins. The temple was God's dwelling which He had separated and put His name on for the Israelites to pray and serve Him there, but they made it a den of thieves and hindered the execution of His will.

While preaching the gospel of the kingdom, the Lord Jesus called twelve disciples to work with Him, gave them authority and sent them out to preach the gospel. He exhorted them not to labour for the food which perished, but for the food which endured to everlasting life (John 6:27), i.e. to focus on things eternal. When we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, He will add to us all that we need (Matt 6:33).

(continued on page 2)



*"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Luke 12:40)
"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." (Matt 25:13)*

At the Lord's Day Meeting recently, we have been hearing these words which remind us of the Lord's coming again. Have we any feelings or reaction? All the saints in this age have been focusing on the fulfilment of this prophecy or the time of the Lord's coming again. However, the Bible tells us clearly no one knows the day or hour except the Father. What the Lord wants us to focus on is preparing ourselves always to receive Him, lest we find it too late to regret!

How should we prepare ourselves? Actually, the Lord has told us everything we need to know, e.g. love God and men (Matt 22:37-39), come to the Lord and enjoy Him (Rev 22:17), keep and do His word (John 14:21-23), take heed not to be weighed down by carousing, drunkenness and cares of this life, watch and pray always (Luke 21:34-36), serve the Lord diligently (Rom 12:11), set our mind on things above (Col 3:2).

Brothers and sisters, our life and breath are not in our hands, so let's not slumber any more but rise up to get ourselves ready!

The editors

The vision revealed to Peter

Let's review how the Lord Jesus revealed the heavenly vision to His disciples. One day, Jesus asked them: "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matt 16:15-19) First the Lord affirmed His identity and mission, then He revealed His purpose to set up the heavenly kingdom. Finally, He promised Peter the keys and called him to open the doors of the gospel of the kingdom, which Peter did first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (Acts 2; 10).

The Lord also entrusted to Peter the shepherding work in the heavenly kingdom. Before His ascension, Jesus told Peter repeatedly: Feed My lambs; Tend My sheep; Feed My sheep. His commission to Peter was not only to bring men into the kingdom, but also to care for the building of the kingdom. Then Jesus prophesied: "When you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish. ... Follow Me." (John 21:15-19) The Lord Jesus knew it was not easy to build the church and there would be much suffering, so He prepared Peter's heart and revealed to him that he would be martyred for God's kingdom.

From Jesus' revelation to Peter, we know that the heavenly vision is the Lord's desire to gain and set up His kingdom. Christ and the building up of the church is the great mission for the New Testament disciples. The burden the Lord gave Peter is the church's mission today. Hence the church should focus not only on saving sinners from eternal perdition, but also on shepherding those who are saved, so as to establish God's kingdom. At the same time, we need to be prepared to pay the price, for the building of the church is not easy.

The vision revealed to Paul

The Lord also gained Paul who laboured much for His kingdom. Before his conversion, Paul was a zealous Pharisee who knew neither God's way of salvation in the New Testament nor the true worship and service of God by the believers of the Lord Jesus. He mistook persecuting them for serving God. Then one day the Lord Himself appeared to him: Suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said: "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." (Acts 9:1-5) So Paul received the heavenly revelation that the Lord and His believers were one, and persecuting them was synonymous with persecuting Him. He also realised that the church was the kingdom God wanted to set up in the New Testament.

Through another member of the body, Ananias, the Lord confirmed His work and showed that He would use Paul for the expansion and building of His kingdom (Acts 9:10-18). Paul's epistles affirmed that he was entrusted not only to work among the Gentiles, but also to reveal the mystery hidden from the ages. He was clear about the execution of God's plan. He knew that

the church is the heavenly kingdom and the body of Christ, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Eph 1:23). He understood that the various gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers) to the church were "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." (4:11-16) He was faithful unto death and finished what God had entrusted him with.

The vision revealed to John

The Lord revealed to the elderly John the churches as golden lampstands and their development (Rev 1-3). "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' ... And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. ... The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it." (Rev 21:1-26) John was so blessed to foresee all these, for which he remained faithful unto death.

Conclusion

From the examples of Peter and Paul, we see clearly that the heavenly vision is to build up God's kingdom, the church, on the earth. To express the testimony of His kingdom, the Lord needs every member of His body to co-work with Him in preaching the gospel and shepherding one another. The vision of John shows us the ultimate manifestation and glory of the kingdom. Countless believers in the past have faithfully finished their race, now the mission is passed on to us. Will we be faithful as well? May the Lord have mercy on us His believers at the end of this age, that we learn from Israel's history in the Old Testament and be ruled by the vision of the New Testament. Let's present our bodies to have a part in the expansion and building of the Lord's kingdom. May the Lord strengthen and transform us by renewing our mind, that we may prove what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom 12:2). Amen!

Gospel-preaching in Fuzhou, China

1. The Lord's Faithfulness & Preservation

From 23 December 2010 to 5 January 2011, I was in Fuzhou with sister Shufang and my daughter to preach the gospel to my loved ones. Thank the Lord for this opportunity to reach out to more than 30 of them and by His grace, nine got saved, five of whom are my family members!

I did not expect to meet so many of my relations in such a short visit. I had not met a few of them for more than 20 years, yet they travelled from afar despite the cold weather and the long and arduous journey. In fact, a niece had to journey for 40 hours just so that she could meet us and as it happened, she arrived on the same day as we did. We were so encouraged that she accepted the Lord readily.

At a gathering on 25 December, a cousin warned me: "When you visit your parents in the village, do not preach Jesus to them or you may be thrown out! But if you can persuade your father (a priest who performed funeral rites) to believe in the Lord, we will all follow Jesus!" Everyone was in agreement. I replied firmly: "With God, all things are possible; to Him, nothing is too difficult. You must keep your word." I asked the Lord to touch my parents, for they might become a hindrance to others. Knowing that we were warring against Satan, that night we prayed on our knees in one accord for the Lord's wonderful work on my parents.

Amazingly, when we preached the gospel to my parents, they were very open.....Thank the Lord, He had started His good work and exalted His name, for all knew the Lord Jesus was great!

Amazingly, when we preached the gospel to my parents, they were very open. My mother even said she knew the Lord Jesus was the greatest because the mediums in the village could not do a thing when Christians were around. Thank the Lord, He had started His good work and exalted His name, for all knew the Lord Jesus was great!

The following morning was gloomy and cold, so my mother predicted that it would snow. Appalled by the thought of being trapped for the few days that we had instead of being able to get around freely to preach the gospel, I said: "It shall not snow or rain." Taken aback, my mother asked: "Are you the Creator?" I answered: "No, but my God is, and He rules. I will pray!" She said: "Will He hear your prayer? Can it be so real?" Immediately I looked up and told the Lord: "Ruler of heaven and earth, please command the wind to blow the dark clouds away and hold the snow by Your mighty hands. Let my mother see Your wondrous works. Oh Lord, do this for Your name's sake." Thank the Lord, the sun appeared! My mother was very surprised and said if it did not rain for three days, the next nine days would be sunny too. Since we would be returning to Singapore on the ninth day, we thus had ample opportunities to testify for the Lord!

The night before our departure, my mother accepted the Lord as her Saviour. Hallelujah! Adding to our amazement, the rain began to pour only on our way to the airport, and afterwards it even snowed heavily. The Lord is truly the faithful One who preserves us. Glory be unto Him. Amen!

Sis Yu J.Y.



Preaching the gospel in Renyan village



2. God Rules Over All

On 26 December 2010, we visited sister Meiying. There we met her sister-in-law Lanfang. She had meant to visit Meiying earlier that day, but something cropped up. We had also planned to visit Meiying earlier that day, but were delayed. I realised this was God's sovereign arrangement and preparation for a son of peace (Luke 10:6). I could see Lanfang was prudent, knowledgeable and experienced, but she needed Jesus. Her husband also came by briefly and said he would believe in whomever could prove Himself the real God!

As Lanfang told me her life stories, I listened patiently by the Lord's grace and prayed for wisdom and an opportunity to testify for Him. When we talked about her son, the chance came. He had been cheerful and bright, but became abnormal under the pressure of university life. She gave up her job for him, sought help from various gods and finally chose Buddhism in the hope of being granted a miracle. I urged her to pray to the Lord Jesus and shared many testimonies with her. I also said our lives were in God's hands, He was the Lord, He acted according to His will, our part was to pray and depend on Him.

Sensing Lanfang's agony in my spirit, I felt I shouldn't press her to receive the Lord then. But I suggested praying for her. Thank the Lord, she was very willing. As we prayed, we heard her weeping. Knowing that she was touched, we prayed more fervently. After praying, she told us she did not know why, but she just could not

hold back her tears. I was sure it was the work of the Holy Spirit. She even stayed for dinner with us. Thank the Lord, we planted, God gave the increase (1 Cor 3:6).

.....He nodded, so I taught him the song based on John 3:16. Everyone joined in and we even memorised it. I asked if he cared to know the story of the song and he nodded again! Knowing the Lord was there ruling over all, I testified of His salvation in faith.

Unexpectedly, Lanfang asked me to testify to her family and even prepared them for my visit on 30 December. As we chatted, I asked the Lord inwardly how I should start preaching the gospel. Then a singer appeared on the television and our conversation turned to singing. Thank the Lord for opening the way, the son loved singing and his father said he sang well. I seized the chance and asked if he would like to learn a Christian song. He nodded, so I taught him the song based on John 3:16. Everyone joined in and we even memorised it. I asked if he cared to know the story of the song and he nodded again! Knowing the Lord was there ruling over all, I testified of His salvation in faith. Everyone listened attentively. When I wondered whether to lead him to accept the Lord, I saw him focusing on the line: The blessings of believing in Jesus. Clear that the time had come, I asked emphatically if he wanted this great blessing. He nodded. Thank the Lord, we prayed and he returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of his soul (1 Pet 2:25). Glory to the Lord's name!

Sis Zhuang S.F.

Children's Camp
– 8-10 June 2011

“For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” (Matt 6:13b)

By the Lord's grace, about 80 children, including some gospel friends, attended the camp. The theme was: “His Kingdom Come”. The key messages were: our salvation; our attitude and behaviour as a believer; and how we should equip ourselves to resist the evil one. The shepherds, some youths and children also put up a wonderful skit on the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:21-35).

In line with the theme, we visited the Battlebox at Fort Canning Hill where we saw how Singapore defended herself during World War II. As citizens of the heavenly kingdom, we realised we must arm ourselves with God's word to fight against our enemy, the devil (Eph 6:10-20).

Aside from hymn-singing, games, art & craft, the children put in great effort to memorize the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13), which they presented in choral speaking at the end of the camp. Thank the Lord for such a fruitful and fun time together. Thank the Lord also for the sisters who cooked for us so that we could enjoy feast after

feast throughout the three days!

All praise and glory be to our Lord Jesus Christ!



*Citizens of the heavenly kingdom,
put on the whole armour of God!*

Youth & Young
People's Conference
– 13-15 June 2011

The theme was: “My Christ”, with specific emphasis on Christ as my Saviour, Shepherd and King. Most of the youths and young people are the fruits of the Children's Meeting which they attended from young, and many of them come to the meetings now through the encouragement of their parents or serving ones. With this in mind, the goal of the conference was to help our young saints to grasp the chance to experience Christ as their Saviour, Shepherd and King in all circumstances, and to desire that this Christ be a practical experience in their living as well. So, at the very first meeting, the brothers encouraged them to cultivate the habit of spending time before the Lord to be with Him. This is the key to experiencing Him as “my Christ”.

In the group fellowship, we considered the examples of Mary, Peter and John to inspire the young people to desire and pursue the Lord. We also tested their familiarity with biblical characters and the hymns through games. Thank the Lord, some brothers and sisters realised how superficial their knowledge of spiritual things were, which spurred them on to pursue the Lord more diligently. Amen.



*Lord, help us to know You personally
as our Saviour, Shepherd & King!*



(Recordings of the messages given in the conference are available from the audio service.)

Margaret Elizabeth Barber (1866-1930)

Having looked at Barber's hymns on faith and spiritual warfare in the last two issues, we now move on to her hymns on submission and the way of the cross.

Barber was a very submissive person, not only to the Lord, but also to all the circumstances He measured to her. She was like a lonely sojourner who came to and left this world quietly. Twice in her life, she answered the Lord's call, left her homeland and sailed all alone to faraway China where she faithfully offered up her best years for the Lord's service. At her funeral, a brother said this of her: "Like Mary, she has done what she could." (Mark 14:8)

Barber was once summoned back to England because of a false accusation of fornication, a most cruel charge against a single sister. However, she did not defend herself at all. Finally one of the brothers who examined her, sensing her innocence, had no choice but to say: "Are you silent because of submission to God? I charge you in the Lord's name to tell the truth!" Only then did she speak up. Not vindicating oneself is truly the hallmark of one absolutely submissive to the Lord.

Once Watchman Nee mentioned: "Barber herself said that everything she met was related to her personally." One time, she wrote to a brother: "What did you learn from this illness? Do all the changes reflect a problem in your absolute submission to God?"

This is one of her hymns about submitting to God like the Lord Jesus did:

1 *Via Bethlehem we journey,
We whose hearts on God are set;
Babelike souls of Jesus learning,
While our cheeks with tears are wet;
For the manger and the stable
Are not pleasant to our eyes,
But our feet must follow Jesus,
If our hands would grasp the prize.*

2 *Via Nazareth! the pathway
Narrows still as on we go,
Years of toil none understanding,
Yet God teaches us to know
That the servant is not greater
Than the Lord, who thro' long years
Hid Himself from this world's glory,
Follow Him! Count not the tears.*

3 *Via Galilee, we see Him!
Stones are hurled, and curses hissed
By the men who gather round Him,
Has He not the pathway missed?
No! unharmed the Saviour passes,
And this rough bit of the way
We must travel, since like Jesus,
Nothing can our purpose stay.*

4 *Via too, the awful anguish
Of the hours beneath the trees,
Where the hosts of Satan linger,
Awful hours of anguish these!
Yet we fail not, for God's angels
Minister to us, and say,
"Look, beloved, at the glory,
Conflict is but for a day!"*

5 *Then the cross! for via Calvary
Every royal soul must go;
Here we draw the veil, for Jesus
Only can the pathway show;
"If we suffer with Him," listen,
Just a little, little while,
And the memory will have faded
In the glory of His smile!*

6 *Then the grave, with dear ones weeping,
Knowing that all life has fled;
(Fellow-pilgrims, art thou numbered
With the men the world calls dead?)
Thence we rise, and live with Jesus,
Throned above the world's mad strife,
Gladly forfeiting forever,
All that worldlings count as life.*

7 *On we press! and wonder gleaming,
Nearing every day, we see
The great walls of that fair city,
God has built for such as we;
And we catch the tender music
Of the choirs that sing of One
Who once died to have us with Him
In His kingdom, on the throne.*

8 *Just a few more miles, beloved!
And our feet shall ache no more;
No more sin, and no more sorrow,
Hush thee, Jesus went before;
And I hear Him sweetly whispering,
"Faint not, fear not, still press on,
For it may be ere tomorrow,
The long journey will be done."*

1 My Help is The LORD Who Made Heaven & Earth

My mother-in-law was hospitalised and found to have over ten tumours in her brain and lungs. The news that she might live for only another month hit us like a thunderbolt. As I considered her hard life and our neglect of her due to our busy lives, I felt very sorry. I could only pray for her to rely on the Lord's mercy and grace in her sufferings.

We decided that, in her best interest, my mother-in-law should spend her remaining days in her home with me. She was very glad to be home. Initially she could move around with help, but soon her physical and mental conditions deteriorated, making her fully dependent on me for all her needs. I did not know how long this would be, but I knew everything was for me to learn submission. The Lord said: "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matt 25:40) So I served my mother-in-law, who was also a sister in Christ, whole-heartedly. I often prayed in tears for more grace and strength. Thank the Lord, whenever I called on Him, I felt His presence. I read the Bible to my mother-in-law and prayed with her, urging her always to remember the Lord and to tell Him all her pains.

We had a visit by my sister and a sister from the church in Singapore. Their love and hymn-singing filled my mother-in-law with joy. They also preached the gospel to my sister-in-law who accepted the Lord. Thank the Lord for giving me a spiritual partner.

Eventually my mother-in-law became bedridden and had bedsores. Each time I changed her clothes, she experienced extreme pain. Recalling that the Lord had taken our infirmities and borne our sicknesses (Matt 8:17), we prayed and called on Him together. Then she no longer felt as much pain. Knowing her days were numbered, I would often get up in the night to pray about the time of her departure. Thank the Lord, He gave her a final joyful reunion with the whole family during the Chinese New Year.

Funeral rites in rural China are very elaborate and tedious. After cremation in the town, the ashes are taken back to the village for burial. When everything is completed, a meal is served to all present. The rainy spell in the few days before my mother-in-law's funeral meant it would snow soon, so I prayed fervently. Thank the Lord, He gave us fine weather throughout the funeral. It started drizzling only after all was done and everyone was on the way home.

I am deeply thankful for the Lord's love and leading throughout this ordeal. From the love of many brothers and sisters who came to support us, my relatives and friends had the chance to know the Lord and see His glory. May the Lord remember the saints' labour, and may all my relatives and friends be gained by Him. Amen!

Sis Yu S.Y.

2 The LORD Sits as King

The LORD sat enthroned at the Flood, And the LORD sits as King forever. (Ps 29:10)

Sixteen of us were set to attend a wedding thanksgiving meeting on 5 February 2011 in Bahau, Malaysia. On 31 January, I received a prayer request: it had been raining for a few days in Malaysia and there were floods in several places; train services had been suspended as the stations too were flooded; and if the rain continued unabated, we would certainly not be able to travel as planned. That night, the church prayed about this matter in oneness.

On 1 February, the newspapers reported that the rainy weather was likely to continue until the 5th. Some of us seemed shaken in our faith and had doubts if we could make the trip or if the flood water would recede in time. But I was assured and proclaimed: God sits above the waters! Do not fear, only believe! We must believe that the Lord has heard the church's prayer.

Indeed, thanks be to our Lord, the rain subsided on that day and by the following day, the flood had receded. By 3 February, the skies had cleared; we were only afraid that the train service would not resume in time. A young sister among us wondered if we would really be leaving as planned the following day. I replied that we should continue to pray and experience a miracle. I then committed the matter to the Lord in prayer with a sister. That evening, a sister from Bahau informed us that the train service had resumed. Hallelujah, glory to the Lord!

At the Bread-breaking Meeting on 6 February, we testified together with the saints in Bahau of the Lord's wondrous work. In the few days of our visit, we had the opportunity to lead some gospel friends to the Lord. We went and came back in peace. Our Lord is the King of kings and Lord of lords! Amen.

Sis Grace Twan



Announcements & Prayer Items

Gospel Meeting

Date : 6 Aug, 3 Sep, 1 Oct 2011
Time : 7:30pm
Venue : Hall 1

Church Conference

Date : 4-7 Dec 2011
Venue : Le Grandeur Palm Resort Johor