

THE PRESENT TRUTH

Bishop Stephen D. Lewis

To Move Progressively

The vast armies of Israel marched in glad triumph from Egypt, the scene of their long and cruel servitude. The Egyptians would not consent to release them until they had been signally warned by the judgments of God. The avenging angel had visited every house among the Egyptians and had stricken with death the first-born of every family. None had escaped, from the heir of Pharaoh to the eldest-born of the captive in his dungeon. The first-born of the cattle also were slain according to the mandate of the Lord. But the angel of death passed over the homes of the children of Israel and did not enter there.

Pharaoh, horror-stricken at the plagues that had befallen his people, called Moses and Aaron before him in the night and bade them depart from Egypt. He was anxious that they should go without delay; for he and his people feared that unless the curse of God was removed from them, the land would become a vast burial ground.

The children of Israel were joyful to receive the tidings of their freedom and made haste to leave the scene of their bondage. But the way was toilsome, and at length their courage failed. Their journey led them over barren hills and desolate plains. The third night they found themselves walled in on each side by mountain ranges, while the Red Sea lay before them. They were perplexed and greatly deplored their condition. They blamed Moses for conducting them to this place, for they believed they had taken the wrong course. "This surely," said they, "is not the way to the wilderness of Sinai, nor to the land of Canaan promised to our fathers. We can go no farther; but must now advance into the waters of the Red Sea, or turn back toward Egypt."

Then, as if to complete their misery, behold, the Egyptian host is on their track! The imposing army is led by Pharaoh himself, who has repented that he freed the Hebrews and fears that he has sent them out to become a great nation hostile to himself. What a night of perplexity and distress was this for Israel! What a contrast to that glorious morning when they left the bondage of Egypt and with glad rejoicings took up the line of march into the wilderness! How powerless they felt before that mighty foe! The wailing of the terror-stricken women and children, mingled with the lowing of the frightened cattle and the bleating of the sheep, added to the dismal confusion of the situation.

But had God lost all care for His people that He should leave them to destruction? Would He not warn them of their danger and deliver them from their enemies? God had no delight in the discomfiture of His people. It was He Himself who had directed Moses to encamp by the Red Sea, and He had further informed him: "Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honored upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord."

Jesus stood at the head of that vast army. The cloudy column by day and the pillar of fire by night represented their divine Leader. But the Hebrews did not patiently bear the test of the Lord. Their voices were lifted up in reproaches and denunciations against Moses, their visible leader, for bringing them into this great peril. They did not trust in the protecting power of God nor recognize His hand staying the evils that surrounded them. In their frantic terror they had forgotten the rod with which Moses had changed the water of the Nile to blood, and the calamities which God had visited upon the Egyptians for their persecution of His chosen people. They had forgotten all the miraculous interpositions of God in their behalf.

"Ah," they cried, "how much better for us had we remained in bondage! It is better to live as slaves than to die of hunger and fatigue in the desert, or be slain in war with our enemies." They turned upon Moses with bitter censure because he had not left them where they were instead of leading them out to perish in the wilderness. Moses was greatly troubled because his people were so wanting in faith, especially as they had repeatedly witnessed the manifestations of the power of God in their favor. He felt grieved that they should charge upon him the dangers and difficulties of their position, when he had simply followed the express commands of God. But he was strong in the faith that the Lord would bring them into safety; and he met and quieted the reproaches and fears of his people, even before he could himself discern the plan of their deliverance.

True, they were in a place from which there was no possibility of release unless God Himself interposed to save them; but they were brought into this strait by obeying the divine commands, and Moses felt no fear of the consequences. He "said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

It was not an easy thing to hold the hosts of Israel in waiting before the Lord. They were excited and full of terror. They lacked discipline and self-control. Impressed by the horrors of their situation, they became violent and unreasonable. They expected speedily to fall into the hands of their oppressors, and their wailings and recriminations were loud and deep. The wonderful pillar of cloud had accompanied them in their wanderings, and served to protect them from the fervid rays of the sun. All day it had moved grandly before them, subject neither to sunshine nor storm; and at night it had become a pillar of fire to light them on their way. They had followed it as the signal of God to go forward; but now they questioned among themselves if it might not be the shadow of some terrible calamity that was about to befall them, for had it not led them on the wrong side of the mountain into an impassable way? Thus the angel of God appeared to their deluded minds as the harbinger of disaster.

But now, as the Egyptian host approaches them, expecting to make them an easy prey, the cloudy column rises majestically into the heavens, passes over the Israelites, and descends between them and the armies of Egypt. A wall of darkness interposes between the pursued and their pursuers. The Egyptians can no longer discern the camp of the Hebrews and are forced to halt. But as the darkness of night deepens, the wall of cloud becomes a great light to the Hebrews, illuminating the whole camp with the radiance of day. Then the hope that they might be delivered came to the hearts of Israel. And Moses lifted up his voice unto the Lord. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto Me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: but lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea."

Then Moses, obeying the divine command, stretched out his rod, and the waters parted, rolling up in a wall on either side, and leaving a broad pathway across the bed of the sea for the children of Israel. The light from the pillar of fire shone upon the foam-capped billows, lighting the road that was cut like a mighty furrow through the waters of the Red Sea until it was lost in the obscurity of the farther shore.

All night long sounded the tramping of the hosts of Israel crossing the Red Sea; but the cloud hid them from the sight of their enemies. The Egyptians, weary with their hasty march, had encamped upon the shore for the night. They saw the Hebrews only a short distance before them, and as there seemed no possibility of escape, they decided to take a night's rest and make an easy capture in the morning. The night was intensely dark, the clouds seemed to encompass them like some tangible substance. Deep sleep fell upon the camp; even the sentinels slumbered at their posts.

At last a ringing blast arouses the army! The cloud is passing on! The Hebrews are moving! Voices and the sound of marching come from toward the sea. It is still so dark that they cannot discern the escaping people, but the command is given to make ready for the pursuit. The clatter of arms and the roll of chariots, the marshaling of captains and the neighing of steeds, are heard. At length the line of march is formed, and they press on through the obscurity in the direction of the escaping multitude.

In the darkness and confusion they rush on in their pursuit, not knowing that they have entered upon the bed of the sea and are hemmed in on either hand by beetling walls of water. They long for the mist and darkness to pass away and reveal to them the Hebrews and their own whereabouts. The wheels of the chariots sink deep into the soft sand, and the horses become entangled and unruly. Confusion prevails, yet they press on, feeling sure of victory.

At last the mysterious cloud changes to a pillar of fire before their astonished eyes. The thunders roll and the lightnings flash, the waves roll about them, and fear takes possession of their hearts. Amid the terror and confusion, the lurid light reveals to the amazed Egyptians the terrible waters massed up on the right hand and on the left. They see the broad path that the Lord has made for His people across the shining sands of the sea, and behold triumphant Israel safe on the farther shore.

Confusion and dismay seize them. Amid the wrath of the elements, in which they hear the voice of an angry God, they endeavor to retrace their steps and fly to the shore they have quitted. But Moses stretches out his rod, and the piled-up waters, hissing, roaring, and eager for their prey, tumble down upon the armies of Egypt. Proud Pharaoh and his legions, gilded chariots and flashing armor, horses and riders, are engulfed beneath a stormy sea. The mighty God of Israel has delivered His people, and their songs of thanksgiving go up to heaven that God has wrought so wonderfully in their behalf.

The history of the children of Israel is written for the instruction and admonition of all Christians. When the Israelites were overtaken by dangers and difficulties, and their way seemed hedged up, their faith forsook them, and they murmured against the leader whom God had appointed for them. They blamed him for bringing them into peril, when he had only obeyed the voice of God.

The divine command was: "Go forward." They were not to wait until the way was made plain, and they could comprehend the entire plan of their deliverance. God's cause is onward, and He will open a path before His people. To hesitate and murmur is to manifest distrust in the Holy One of Israel. God in His providence brought the Hebrews into the mountain fastnesses, with the Red Sea before them, that He might work out their deliverance and forever rid them of their enemies. He might have saved them in any other way, but He chose this method in order to test their faith and strengthen their trust in Him.

We cannot charge Moses with being at fault because the people murmured against his course. It was their own rebellious, unsubdued hearts that led them to censure the man whom God had delegated to lead His people. While Moses moved in the fear of the Lord, and according to His direction, having full faith in His promises, those who should have upheld him became discouraged, and could see nothing before them but disaster, defeat, and death.

The Lord is now dealing with His people who believe present truth. He designs to bring about momentous results, and while in His providence He is working toward this end, He says to His people: "Go forward." True, the path is not yet opened; but when they move on in the strength of faith and courage, God will make the way plain before their eyes. There are ever those who will complain, as did ancient Israel, and charge the difficulties of their position upon those whom God has raised up for the special purpose of advancing His cause. They fail to see that God is testing them by bringing them into strait places, from which there is no deliverance except by His hand.

There are times when the Christian life seems beset by dangers, and duty seems hard to perform. The imagination pictures impending ruin before, and bondage or death behind. Yet the voice of God speaks clearly above all discouragements:

"Go forward." We should obey this command, let the result be what it may, even though our eyes cannot penetrate the darkness and though we feel the cold waves about our feet.

The Hebrews were weary and terrified; yet if they had held back when Moses bade them advance, if they had refused to move nearer to the Red Sea, God would never have opened the path for them. In marching down to the very water, they showed that they had faith in the word of God as spoken by Moses. They did all that it was in their power to do, and then the Mighty One of Israel performed His part, and divided the waters to make a path for their feet.

The clouds that gather about our way will never disappear before a halting, doubting spirit. Unbelief says: "We can never surmount these obstructions; let us wait until they are removed, and we can see our way clearly." But faith courageously urges an advance, hoping all things, believing all things. Obedience to God is sure to bring the victory. It is only through faith that we can reach heaven.

There is great similarity between our history and that of the children of Israel. God led His people from Egypt into the wilderness, where they could keep His law and obey His voice. The Egyptians, who had no regard for the Lord, were encamped close by them; yet what was to the Israelites a great flood of light, illuminating the whole camp, and shedding brightness upon the path before them, was to the hosts of Pharaoh a wall of clouds, making blacker the darkness of night.

So, at this time, there is a people whom God has made the depositaries of His law. To those who obey them, the commandments of God are as a pillar of fire, lighting and leading the way to eternal salvation. But unto those who disregard them, they are as the clouds of night. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Better than all other knowledge is an understanding of the word of God. In keeping His commandments there is great reward, and no earthly inducement should cause the Christian to waver for a moment in his allegiance. Riches, honor, and worldly pomp are but as dross that shall perish before the fire of God's wrath.

The voice of the Lord bidding His faithful ones "go forward" frequently tries their faith to the uttermost. But if they should defer obedience till every shadow of uncertainty was removed from their understanding, and there remained no risk of failure or defeat, they would never move on at all. Those who think it impossible for them to yield to the will of God and have faith in His promises until all is made clear and plain before them, will never yield at all. Faith is not certainty of knowledge; it "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." To obey the commandments of God is the only way to obtain His favor. "Go forward" should be the Christian's watchword. {Testimonies to the Church Volume Nine Pg. 20-27}

Significance of Its Colors: Let us look a little closer that we may think God's thoughts after Him. Did God require these particular colors without a purpose? Did He repeatedly insist upon strict obedience to the pattern without a reason? most assuredly not. The plan of salvation and the work of Christ which the sanctuary typified mean too much to God as well as to His children for Him to talk at random, or without serious meaning. Let us ever remember that "The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." Ps. 12:6. These royal colors must have some definite spiritual meaning in this divine object lesson. What is it? White is a symbol of purity and righteousness. Rev. 19:8, Scarlet represents sacrifice. Rev. 19:13. Purple signifies royalty. John 19:2,3. Blue indicates obedience to the eternal truth of heaven, as shown by God's direction that a ribbon of blue should border the uniform to be worn by the children of Israel. Num. 15:7-40. This blue ribbon, from which has come the expression "true blue," was to be a reminder that God's children are to obey all His commandments; they are to be "true blue" As blue mixed with scarlet produces purple, so obedience to God's eternal truth added to sacrifice makes royalty. These significant symbols apply both to Christ and to His followers. The fine white linen represents His righteousness, the blue, the scarlet, and the purple - all royal colors - represent His eternal truth, His sacrifice, His kingship.

The Four Pillars: The gate of the sanctuary court was hung on four pillars, Ex. 27:16, - only four, no more, no less, with the command, "See that thou make it after the pattern," lest thou mar God's great plan. Why four? For the same reason that the veil, which represented His flesh, Heb. 10:20, was hung on four pillars, and for the same reason that when He tabernacles on earth, inspiration gave us His life in four gospels. As seven in the Bible indicates completeness and perfection, so the number four in the sanctuary, dictated by God, must have some divine significance. This number occurs in the four coverings, the four ingredients of the shew bread, the incense, the anointing oil, also in the fourth commandment and in other places, where it always points to Christ. As the number four points to Christ, so the multiples of four, 12, 24, 48, 60, 12,000, 144,000 are used to indicate special groups of His true followers. Continuing our study, we shall notice that this number, the number four, recurs frequently, and to the spiritual minded the promise is, "The Spirit of truth will guide you into all truth." John 16:13.

The Gate a Position of Authority. In ancient times, the gate of a city was the place where just judgment was dispensed. Deut. 16:18. In summoning one to the gate, no preliminaries were necessary, no writings, no delay. In a short conversation any matter could be stated. Ruth 4:1. The position at the gate was one of prestige, honor, and authority. Among the special purposes for which it was used may be mentioned a place of audience for kings and rulers or ambassadors. How fitting that the gate of the sanctuary, the way to the throne of God, should represent King Jesus, Heaven's Ambassador to me and to you here and now in this earth, He who is "the way, the truth, and the life!" John 14:6. The gateways of royal palaces were often richly ornamented. Sometimes sentences from the law were inscribed on and above the gates. Deut. 6:9.

Christ Our Gate of Refuge. At the gate of a city of refuge anyone fleeing thither could declare his cause, be admitted into the

city, and be given a place to dwell there in safety. Josh. 20:2-4. To such a refugee the gate was as the gate of heaven. When Jacob was fleeing from Esau, the ladder that he saw in his dream reached from earth to heaven, and the Lord stood above it." When he awoke, he exclaimed, "This is none other but the gate of heaven." Gen. 28:13,17. This ladder represented Christ, Gen. 28:12; John 1:51; PP 184, who is our gate to the heavenly city of refuge. Like Jacob's ladder, the gate of the court also represented Christ, the entrance to The Path to the Throne of God.

Christ the Way. As the gate was the way, and the only way to the sanctuary court, so Christ is the only way to heaven. In answer to the question of doubting Thomas, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." John 14:5,6. In the sanctuary we shall find not only "the way" to Christ, but "the truth," and at the end of the way "the life" - eternal life. David answered this question when he said, "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary." Ps. 77:13. "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, few there be that find it." But is it not better to travel with the "few" than to be among the "many" who enter the wide gate, and travel the broad way that leads to destruction? Matt. 7:13,14. Although "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, it is a glorious way - a way consecrated by the footprints of Christ who has promised, "Lo, I am with you alway, (all the way and all the time) even unto the end of the world, Amen." Matt. 28:20. So, with Christ as companion and guide, and angels speeding back and forth between heaven and earth ministering to our infirmities, why should we lose our way? So long as we remain outside the gate, we are "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Eph. 2:12. What a pitiful condition! But God, "who remembered us in our low estate: for His mercy endureth forever? Ps. 136:23, leaves us not alone with our enemy outside the gate. If we will enter, He will listen to our plea for pardon and protection, and will dispense mercy and judgment.

"Come Unto Me." By faith we see Jesus, whom the gate represents, standing at the entrance to the sanctuary court beckoning to all who, like Thomas, know not the way, and calling out "softly and tenderly" in tones that reach to "the ends of the earth" Isa. 45:22: "This is the way, walk ye in it." Isa. 30:21. "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden." Matt. 11:28. Come, "kings of the earth, and all people; Princes and all judges of the earth: Both young men and maidens; Old men and children." Ps. 148:11,12. Let the children come, for "of such is the kingdom of heaven.." Matt. 19:14. "Whosoever will, let him come." Rev. 22:17. "Time is now fleeting, the moments are passing, Passing from you and from me; . . . Though we have sinned, He has mercy and pardon, Pardon for you and for me. Come home, come home; Ye who are weary, come home!" W. L. Thompson. And so I come to the gate, the Lord from heaven - "Just as I am, without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me, And that Thou bidst me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come."

Our Behavior Within the Gate. Within the gate of the sanctuary, we are on holy ground. It is important that we "know how . . . to behave . . . in the house of God on earth which is the church of the living God." 1 Tim. 3:15. With humility and becoming deco Rom we should enter the gate of the court, for in that place of honor, Jesus stands to welcome us to His house. Even at the gate of the house of God on earth we are on holy ground. "There are those who conduct themselves in His house as they would not presume to do in the audience chamber of an earthly ruler, These should remember that they are in His sight whom seraphim adore, before whom angels veil their faces." PP 252. "To the humble, believing soul, the house of God on earth is the gate of heaven. The song of praise, the prayer, the words spoken by Christ's representatives, are God's appointed agencies to prepare a people for the church above. From the sacredness which was attached to the earthly sanctuary, Christians may learn how they should regard the place where the Lord meets with His people . . . Happy are those who have a sanctuary, he it high or low, in the city or among the rugged mountain caves, in the lowly cabin or in the wilderness. If it is the best they can secure for the Master, He will hallow the place with His presence, and it will be holy unto the Lord of hosts." 5T 491, 492,

THE COURT AND ITS WALL: The Two Squares of the Court. The court was an unroofed enclosure one hundred cubits long and fifty cubits wide, or at least seventy-five by one hundred fifty feet, as large as two ordinary city lots. Ex. 27:11-13. Hastings' Bible Dictionary divides this space into two squares, each fifty by fifty cubits, with the entrance, of course, at the east end. In the eastern square was the brazen altar and the laver, the altar doubtless being located in its center. In the other square was the sanctuary proper, including the holy place and the most holy place. At the center of this square was the ark in the most holy place. The first of these two squares illustrated the work of Christ on earth for our salvation; the second symbolized His work in heaven.

The Two Centers. These two centers, where were located the altar and the ark, are most significant. The cross of Christ is typified in the altar on which the sacrifices were offered; His throne is typified in the ark. The cross of Christ, represented in the altar, is the center of Christ's life and of the Christian's life on earth; the throne, represented in the ark, is the center of His life in heaven and of the Christian's future life in heaven. Everything on earth centers in, or rotates around, the cross of Christ. Everything in heaven centers in, or rotates around, the throne of Christ. The sacrifice of the "Lamb of God" at the altar is the only possible atonement (at-one-ment) for sin, which is the transgression of God's law located in the ark. 1 John 3:4; Rom. 4:15. It is the only possible way to heaven, where it will be the delight of all to obey God's law because it has been engraved with the Spirit of God in the fleshy tables of their hearts. II Cor. 3:3.