

TABLE TALK

Official Publication of the LMS-USA

...these words... shall be upon your heart; you shall
teach them... and talk of them... Deut. 6:6,7



February 2013

Vol. 20 No. 1

THE LENTEN SHOFAR

by Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears

Welcome to Lent, the season of looking within! Put aside thoughts of sadness or the morose. Lent is a time to take a closer look at the personal life and the walk with Christ to the Cross, and with Him, to life eternal.

As we read in Joel (2:12-19) when the Children of Israel began a new season, usually on new moon, they blew the trumpet to make announcement to the whole community. The trumpet that was blown was a Shofar or ram's horn. This was back in the day when horns were really horns. Actually these could be crafted not from cattle but

(*Schofar*, continued on next page)



A High View of Scripture

In the previous issue of Table Talk, comments introducing an article on *Men and Women in the Church* touched on how for the Christian, the Bible - the revealed Word of God to us - should be the final authority in all matters of faith and life. Unfortunately the majority of people, including many who claim to be Christian, consider anyone who holds such a view of Scripture to be narrow minded, intolerable, and mean spirited, especially when dealing with some of the issues today such as abortion, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, living to-

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from the horns of any kosher (clean) animal – sheep, goat, gazelle or onyx; which by the way produces a very long, gently twisted horn that sounds a lower, mellow tone. So as to sound the proper note as a call to Lent, we have this month - The Lenten Shofar! The Shofar can produce two pitches, one principle tone and another, one fifth of the scale higher. Since they were used as signals in battle and to spread alarm, these trumpets had to give a clear and distinct sound. Even today the Shofar is blown in some temples to signal the beginning of Sabbath and for such festivals as Yom Kippur. Historically, as stated by one Jewish authority, “The shofar is one of the oldest and most recognizable symbols of Judaism (it is depicted on a 4th BC coin), even more than the Menorah or the Star of David”. No wonder then that 1st Corinthians 14 warns that, “If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who will be prepared..?” (The clarity and reliability of the kosher animal horn depends very much on the ‘cup’ that is fashioned on the very end of the horn corresponding to the mouth piece on which a modern horn player depends. Finding just the right mouth piece is essential preparation for producing a clear and certain sound.)

So then we must be clear and certain concerning our preparation in the Season of Lent. Jesus states it best in His signature teaching familiar to us as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6) to be read on Ash Wednesday along with the Joel passage.

We are to develop and improve our piousness or righteousness during this time but never for bragging rights – “to be seen by men”. Why? Because that defeats the purpose of righteousness making it self-righteousness. But improve we should. Two items are mentioned: prayer and contributing to the needs of oth-

ers (giving alms). In fact, when contributing alms is one time we are not to blow the trumpet. Apparently some of the rich men of the day just happened to have the trumpet blown to call attention to their sizable contribution to the Temple. This led to the term ‘blowing your own horn’, a kind of ‘hello, look what I’m doing’. Instead as we improve in our walk with God in the manner of Christ, it is less and less about us and more about the rightness of what we do in the eyes of God, even to the point of being secret about it. So God sees and blows the trumpet for us.

Jesus saw a widow making her contribution to the Temple when no one else could see. No one that is... but Him. Two copper coins - the ‘widow’s mite’ - made the treasury of the Temple much richer than the contribution of those who made over \$250,000 a year. (Oops, sorry - couldn’t resist.) Discrete and sincere gifts – that’s the point – “not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing”. Sincere and humble prayers are a powerful force - known only to God, given freely even at some sacrifice to the giver. Jesus said of this woman that he had pointed out to the Apostles that she had given everything she had. It is such a subtle difference on the face of it – but the outcome is so different. For, “He that sees in secret will reward you” - far more we might add - than any earthly reward that you could receive.

So as we grow in grace, we mature in our own personal walk with God which is its own reward, the reward of inner knowing! That’s like blowing an inner shofar!

As a part of our discipline for Lent, try writing your own prayer, committing to paper your inmost thoughts in the form of a prayer. Years ago, I had asked a class to rewrite the Lord’s Prayer in their own words. A lady, the oldest in the class, at first, objected, “How could we

touch that”, she commented, “why, that’s holy!” But in the next session she was the last to offer what she had written nonetheless. What she read was simple and profound, creating a tribute of silence from the class when she finished. Yes, it is holy stuff and we are invited to participate.

Secondly, locate a prayer that is especially meaningful to you. It may be a prayer out of the Bible - and there are quite a few, or one from

other literature. Some prayers have been made into hymns or anthems. Some that I treasure are found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the section of Hymns of the Essenes. The *Hymn of the Initiates*, so called, out of the *Manual of Discipline* is a remarkable inspiration.

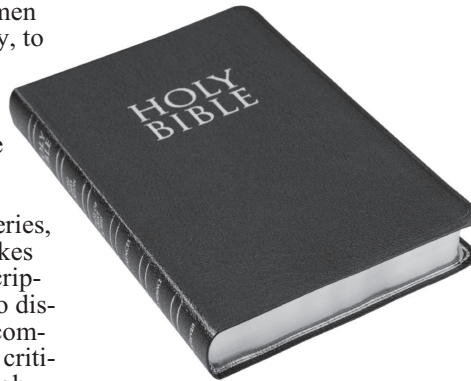
In all of this might we find and cherish the Face of Jesus, our Savior, our Teacher of Righteousness and see Him face to face! Ω

(Scripture, continued from next page 1)

gether outside the covenant of marriage, and the ordination of women to Word and Sacrament ministry, to name a few. Such a high view of Scripture was, however, the view of the reformers, i.e. *Sola Scriptura*, and it continues to be the position of those who are truly Confessional Lutherans.

Dr. John MacArthur in his series, *Principles for Discernment*, makes the point how we understand Scripture will determine our ability to discern properly. Dr. MacArthur comments with regard to those who criticize Christians who hold to a high view of Scripture as being too high minded, too narrow minded, too intolerant of other opinions; “precision is everything. ...if you were to go to the medical doctor and you are having severe headaches, debilitating headaches, you went to the doctor and the doctor said, ‘well, it could be a lot of things. It could be a fatal brain tumor growing or it could be too much sugar, drinking too much soda pop. Or it could be just being out in the sun. But you are welcome to believe anything you want.’ That’s not helpful!”

What normal people want and need when we are looking for medical advice, is doctors who are narrow minded and indeed, intolerant of a great many other opinions. It is interesting, is it not, why people want narrow mindedness and intoler-



erance of mindless opinions when it comes to matters of physical help and safety, but when it comes to the eternal matters of soul and of what might be God’s will for their lives and the lives of others, they are willing to think in broad and uncertain terms and to seek the advice of those who are willing to base their opinions on anything other than what is the Truth (John 17:17).

You, the reader, are encouraged to consider the question raised by Justin Lonas in his article *How Does Scripture Hit You?* Then consider also the practical application of one who holds to a high view of Scripture as seen in one man’s struggle with homosexuality in the article *My Struggle with Same Sex Attraction*, by Rev. Tom Brock. Ω

How Does Scripture Hit You?

King Josiah and the Power of God's Word

by Justin Lonas

Can we make too much of Scripture? That is a charge often leveled at Christians who hold to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and seek to the best of their abilities to match their lives and actions to the Word. Sometimes this comes out as, “How can you spend so much time studying the Bible with so much suffering in the world?” Sometimes it is, “How can you possibly understand and apply all that stuff from thousands of years ago in today’s complex world?”

Those accusations might stick but for the curious fact that careful and faithful reading of the Word breeds lives that are attuned to the Father’s will and ready to act as He leads to meet the needs of a fallen world and proclaim His message of reconciliation. It is the living and active Word that informs, motivates, and enables all our righteous deeds.

Perhaps the best example of the power of Scripture in the lives of its readers is the account of King Josiah of Judah in 2 Kings 22-23 (and 2 Chron. 34-35). Josiah was born into Judah at a time of gross rebellion against God. Though his great-grandfather was Hezekiah, a great king who mostly trusted the Lord and led the nation back to Him, those days were long gone. Hezekiah’s son Manasseh dragged the nation into heinous idolatry and all manner of evil, prompting the Lord to proclaim judgment on the whole nation.

“Because Manasseh has done these abominations, having done wickedly more than all the Amorites who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols; therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am bringing such calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both of his ears will tingle.... I will wipe Jerusa-

lem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down” (2 Kings 21: 11-13).

When Manasseh died, his son Amon succeeded him and “did evil in the sight of the Lord, as Manasseh his father had done” (2 Kings 21:20). After just two years of Amon’s reign, he was killed by his own servants. 2 Kings 21:24 says that the people, apparently fed up by the evil pattern, killed those who killed the king and installed Josiah, Amon’s son, as king. This moral and political circus that ended with an eight-year old on the throne of David could have been for the rest of the world the punch line of a joke at God’s expense as His chosen people imploded, but He had other plans. In God’s sovereignty, Josiah chose to obey God and turn from His family’s wickedness, and the Scripture played a significant role in this.

We are not told how he came to this place of faith, possibly from the influence of some of Hezekiah’s other descendants who remembered the ways of righteousness, but 2 Kings 22:2 says that “He did right in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the way of His father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left.” From this starting point, and through the story that unfolds, there

are six lessons about our approach to Scripture that we can take away.

I. Josiah Sought God in His Youth - His Heart Attitude Was Correct

We are told that “in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David” (2 Chron. 34:3a). Before the Word of God can have an impact in our lives, our hearts must be inclined toward God. Because Josiah sought God, he was prepared for what came next.

II. Josiah Served God According to His Available Knowledge - He Acted in Faith

In the 12th year of his reign, Josiah began to purge Jerusalem and the whole land of idols installed by previous generations (2 Chron. 34:3b-7). In his 18th year, he instructed Hilkiah, the high priest, to use the money collected by the temple doorkeepers to repair the temple (2 Kings 22:3-7) which had been allowed to “go to ruin” by previous kings (2 Chron. 34:11). In this process of reconstruction, Hilkiah discovered the long lost “book of the law of the Lord given by Moses” in the temple (possibly hidden to prevent its destruction by Manasseh and Amon) and sent them to the king by Shaphan the scribe (2 Chron. 34:14-17).

Scholars differ on whether this book was the full Pentateuch or only the book of Deuteronomy, but in either case, Josiah was presented with a message from God he had not previously known. We see that despite not yet having the full Word of God at his disposal, Josiah stepped out in



faith to obey God according to the knowledge he had been given. He knew enough about God to know that idolatry was sinful and that the worship of the One True God in His chosen house was a priority, and he proceeded to fulfill these parts of God’s will that were plain to him.

In the same way, we should obey fully what we understand from the Scriptures. Not every Christian will be a Bible scholar, but every Christian is called to believe and obey. When we are

faithful in following what we do understand, the Spirit will open our eyes to deeper truths and lead us into fuller obedience.

III. Josiah Mourned Judah’s Disobedience - He Responded to God’s Word

After Shaphan read the rediscovered book to Josiah, the king “tore his clothes” and dispatched Hilkiah and his assistants to “inquire of the Lord...concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the Lord that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us” (2 Kings 22:11-13). Even though he had pursued a course of righteousness, when the rediscovered Word was read, Josiah was convicted of his people’s sin in omitting so much of what God asked of them.

Josiah models a proper response to Scripture for us. Whenever we are shown a new passage (or a familiar one in a new light) that brings conviction of previously unrecognized sin, we should be quick to lament

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our disobedience, repent, and search out what God would have us do to return to the right path. God honored Josiah's repentance, speaking through Huldah the prophetess that he would be spared from seeing God's promised wrath poured out against Judah (2 Kings 22:18-20).

IV. Josiah Read the Book of the Law to the People - He Proclaimed the Word of God

After Huldah's prophecy in 2 Kings 22:16-17 that the nation would still be punished (despite Josiah's reforms), Josiah gathered all the people of Judah to the temple and read the lost book to them (2 Kings 23:1-2). He then lead the nation in a covenant "to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book" (2 Kings 23:3). This proclamation and rededication was taken seriously by the king and the people. We are told, "Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands belonging to the sons of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel to serve the Lord their God. Throughout his lifetime, they did not turn from following the Lord God of their fathers" (2 Chron. 34:33).

Josiah did not keep to himself the discovery of God's Word, but shared it boldly and accurately with all in his sphere of influence (which, as king, included the whole nation). Likewise, we should be faithful to teach and share the truths that God reveals through Scripture to our families, our friends, our churches, and to a world that does not know Him so that He can be obeyed, worshipped, and glorified by as many people as possible.

V. Josiah Destroyed the Idols, Altars, Etc. - He Obeyed the Word of God (Negatively)

2 Kings 23:4-20 recounts a "righteous rampage" as Josiah and the priests systematically destroyed, "defiled", "did away with", and "ground into dust" everything in the land associated with the people's unfaithfulness to God. The list includes the instruments of worship of false Gods (v. 4), the unrepentant idolatrous priests (vv. 5, 9, 20), the idols themselves (vv. 6, 14), the houses of cult prostitutes (v. 7), the "high places" (vv. 8, 13, 19), the pagan altars (vv. 10, 12, 15), horses and chariots used in pagan rites (v. 11), and even the bones of those who were buried near the sites of false worship (v. 16).

When we are convicted of sin by the Word of God, we rightly grow angry at the sin in our lives and purge it vigorously. True worship and unconfessed, unrepentant sins cannot coexist in the heart of a believer.

VI. Josiah Reinstated Passover - He Obeyed the Word of God (Positively)

In addition to the purge of the nation, Josiah led the people to return to the celebration of the Passover that their fathers had abandoned (2 Kings 23:21-23). This celebration was unlike any other in the nation's history in scope, drawing the whole people together for a massive slate of offerings (2 Chron. 35:1-19).

Just as the Word motivates us negatively to reject sin and false teaching, it moves us positively to rediscover the depth and breadth of the worship of God for which we were designed. The Passover was the signature event of the Jewish calendar, commemorating the very formation of the nation of Israel through

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their deliverance from Egyptian slavery by God's miraculous power. As Christians, we can now see that the message of God's sacrifice once for all (the "true and better Passover", as some might say) is woven through the whole of Scripture, and faithful study will drive us to reflect upon the cross of Christ and worship Him "in spirit and in truth."

Conclusion

Josiah's story serves to remind us of the vital role that Scripture plays in our understanding of God and His will. The whole theme of Israel's history was a cycle of forgetting and returning to God's Law. When the leaders read and taught the Word, the people obeyed; when the leaders strayed and ignored the Scriptures, the people shamed God's name and brought judgment on themselves.

The Word of God is for us to read and believe - God will honor those who seek after Him in faith with the understanding they need from His Word to obey and glorify Him.

In today's Christian world, where we have unprecedented access to Scripture and to those who study and teach it professionally, how much greater is our shame if we allow God's Word to be forgotten or ignored? As the author of Hebrews cautions, "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not

united by faith in those who heard" (Heb. 4:2). The Word of God is for us to read and believe—it is no blessing to us if it sits idle or is misused for our own purposes. But God will honor those who seek after Him in faith with the understanding they need from His Word to obey and glorify Him. For those who believe, there is no fruitless time spent in Scripture. Ω

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A Reminder ~
The 2013 Annual Conference and Convention
of the Lutheran Ministerium & Synod - U S A
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Christ Lutheran Church
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MY STRUGGLE WITH SAME SEX ATTRACTION

By Pastor Tom Brock

I have struggled with homosexual temptation most of my life. By the grace of God I have always been celibate but the struggle for me has been intense. Sadly, the battle was also with my own denomination. In my 22 years as a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America I spoke at church conventions for the Biblical standard of celibacy for those with same sex attraction. Sadly in 2009 the ELCA adopted a more liberal view and began ordaining practicing homosexuals. I have left the ELCA but I continue in my television ministry to uphold the truth that homosexual behavior is sin, and the fact that I struggle with this temptation does not give me license to practice the behavior.

This summer I testified before a hearing at the convention of the Presbyterian Church USA as they debated whether to change the definition of marriage to include homosexual couples. I explained that I am a person who struggles with same sex attraction but the last thing I want to see is the Church endorse a behavior that hurts people in this life and which excludes them from the Kingdom in the next (I Corinthians 6:9-11). I stated "Is it not arrogant to think that we are somehow more enlightened than all the Christians who came before us?" I believe it is safest to interpret Scripture the way Christians have understood it for 2000 years and the solid testimony of church history is against homosexual behavior. The Biblical interpretation that has led some denominations astray--notably the ELCA, Presbyterian Church USA, the Episcopal Church in America, and the United Church of Christ--maintains that the Bible does not condemn homosexual behavior per se, but only

promiscuous homosexual behavior. As much as part of me--my flesh--would like to believe I can legitimately engage in homosexual behavior, the Bible remains a permanent obstacle. An objective reading of Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Deuteronomy 22:5, Romans 1:26-27, I Corinthians 6:9-11, I Timothy 1:8-10, Jude 6,7 makes clear that the Bible's condemnation of homosexual behavior is a blanket one. There is never the added caveat: But it is okay if you love each other.

At the Presbyterian convention, one pastor testified that the denomination should allow her to marry lesbians in her congregation because "If I don't I will hurt them." I responded "No, to encourage them to engage in a behavior which will rob them of salvation, that is what will hurt them."

I was interviewed on Minneapolis radio about my struggle and the interviewer asked "Pastor Brock, why don't you just go with this orientation as who you are." I responded "I'm glad I didn't. I'd be dead. Many men my age who went into this lifestyle are dead." Some liberal Lutheran bishops I know believe they are being loving by affirming homosexual behavior. The truth is they are hurting people. As one old Lutheran pastor said "They are nicing people right into hell." I can't tell you how grievous it was for me with my struggle to hear bishops endorse something that I knew was evil.

So what does one do if one suffers from same sex attraction? I believe the answer is: fight. Nowhere are we told the Christian life will be easy. I once heard someone say "But God would never ask you to deny something so central to your make-up as

homosexuality". I thought "Why not?" If we believe in the doctrine of original sin---that we are all born sinners because of Adam's fall (Romans 5)—then indeed every Christian is called to battle the sin that is so central to our make-up. One often hears "But I didn't choose this." I can relate. I never consciously asked to have these temptations. But most alcoholics do not wake up one morning and say "I think I'll have a drinking problem." Kleptomaniacs do not say "I think I'll have a problem with shoplifting." We may not choose our temptations in life, but we do choose what we do with our temptations. To be tempted is not sin. Jesus was tempted in Matthew 4. What we do with temptation shows whether we are endeavoring to follow Christ. And, praise God, even if we do fall under temptation, there is forgiveness when we repent and turn to Christ.

What will help people who struggle with same sex attraction? Of course, regular prayer, Bible reading and being in a good church, a church that has not compromised on this issue. But for most people struggling with same sex attraction, the crucial key is accountability. I have been part of a Christian support group for those who struggle with same sex attraction. If you google "Exodus International" you will most likely find a group in your area where you can join other Christians who have this struggle. Also very important for me are the weekly phone calls I make to my accountability partner who helps keep me on the straight and narrow. Lastly, where does homosexuality come from? Is it nature (in the genes) or nurture (in one's upbringing)? I lean toward the latter but ultimately it does not matter. Wherever it comes from, we are called upon to follow Christ and say "no" to it. As our Lord Himself stated "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily

and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Ω

Tom Brock was born in Omaha, Nebraska and graduated from Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota with a degree in Biblical and Theological Studies. He received a Masters of Divinity degree from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was ordained a Lutheran pastor in 1979 and has served congregations in Florida and Minnesota. He served on the board of reform groups attempting to bring Biblical renewal to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America before he left that denomination over their position on issues such as abortion, homosexuality and universalism. Pastor Brock for 24 years has had a television ministry. He does guest preaching and teaching at churches. You can check out his ministry at his website - <http://pastorsstudy.org/>

Thoughts for Lent from J. C. Ryle

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should do well to look around us. It may humble us to remember that thousands of so-called Christians neither understand nor value Christ's death at the present day.

Let us look well to our own hearts. We live in a day when false doctrines about Christ's death abound on every side. Let us see that Christ crucified is really the foundation of our own hopes, and that Christ's atoning death for sin is indeed the whole life of our souls. Let us beware of adding to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, as the Roman Catholic does. Its value was infinite. It admits of no addition. Let us beware of taking away from Christ's sacrifice, as the Socinian does. To suppose that the Son of God only died to leave us an example of self-denial, is to contradict a hundred plain texts of Scripture. Let us walk in the old paths. Let us say with Paul, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Gal. 6:14.) Ω

Some thoughts for Lent from J. C. Ryle -

***The Prediction Which Our Lord Makes
About His Own Death***



And taking the Twelve, Jesus said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what he said.

Luke 18:31-34 (ESV)

The importance of our Lord's death appears in the frequency with which He foretold it, and referred to it during His life. He knew well that it was the principal end for which He came into the world. He was to give His life a ransom for many. He was to make His soul an offering for sin, and to

bear our transgressions in His own body on the tree. He was to give His body and blood for the life of the world. Let us seek to be of the same mind with Christ in our estimate of His death. Let our principal thoughts about Jesus be inseparably bound up with His crucifixion. The corner-stone

of all truth concerning Christ is this--that "While we were yet sinners, He died for us." (Rom. 5:8.)

Let our principal thoughts about Jesus be inseparably bound up with His crucifixion

The love of our Lord Jesus Christ towards sinners is strikingly shown in His steady purpose of heart to die for them. All through His life He knew that He was about to be crucified. There was nothing in His cross and passion which He did not foresee distinctly even to the minutest particular, long before it came upon Him. He tasted all the well-known bitterness of 'anticipated suffering'. Yet He never swerved from His path for a moment. He was straitened in spirit until He had finished the work He came to do. (Luke 12:50.) Such love passes knowledge. It is unspeakable - - unsearchable. We may rest on that love without fear. If Christ so loved us before we thought of Him, He will surely not cease to love us after we have believed.

The calmness of our Lord Jesus Christ in the prospect of certain death ought to be a pattern to all His people. Like Him, let us drink the bitter cup which our Father gives us, without a murmur, and say, "not my will but yours be done." The man that has faith in the Lord Jesus has no reason to be afraid of the grave. "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:56, 57.) The grave is no

longer what it once was. It is the place where the Lord lay. If the great Head of the body looked forward to the grave with calmness, much more may all His believing members. For them He has overcome death. The king of terrors at the worst is a conquered foe.

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, the slowness of the disciples to understand Christ's death. We find that when our Lord described His coming sufferings, the disciples "didn't understand a thing he said. Its significance was hidden from them, and they failed to grasp what he was talking about." We read such passages as these, perhaps, with a mixture of pity and surprise. We wonder at the darkness and blindness of these Jews. We marvel that in the face of plain teaching, and in the light of plain types of the Mosaic law, the sufferings of Messiah should have been lost sight of in His glory, and His cross hidden behind His crown.

But are we not forgetting that the vicarious death of Christ has always been a stumbling-block and an offence to proud human nature? Do we not know that even now after Christ has arisen from the dead and ascended into glory, the doctrine of the cross is still foolishness to many, and that Christ's substitution for us on the cross is a truth which is often denied, rejected and refused? Before we wonder at these first weak disciples for not understanding our Lord's words about His death, we

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