

432 “Not to be messed with”

By divine grace our Christian lives are rooted in the forgiveness granted to us by Almighty God our heavenly Father, this forgiveness bestowed upon us by our claiming, in response to His call, the blood of Christ as being shed on our behalf, in our place, in full atonement for our sins. Truly the Lord Jesus Christ is “the Innocent Party” and “the Key”, the titles of our two previous Weekly Reflections. As a result, all Christ-accepters are now “justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (from Romans 5.1-2, KJV): the Good News indeed - to be lived and shared.

Last week we came across those awesome scenes recounted in Exodus Chapter 19, where the Lord God, despite being the God of the covenant freshly affirmed with His people (19.3-8), displayed His power, holiness, and, most crucially, His “wrath” in response to all sin. This display was terrifying yet also merciful, for it left the people in no doubt as to God’s nature: they learned, at very close quarters, the vital lesson that He was “not to be messed with”.

As the Book of Exodus unfolds we read of the extraordinary, meticulous instructions given by God, through Moses, regarding the establishment and functioning of the tabernacle. In Chapter 25 we read of the ark (vv.10-16), the mercy seat and cherubim (vv.17-22), the table and shewbread (vv. 23-30), and the candlestick (vv.31-40). In Chapter 26 we read of the tabernacle itself, its curtains, dimensions, coverings, loops and taches, boards, bars, vail and hanging. Then in Chapter 27 we come to the altar and its equipment (vv.1-8), the court with its hangings (vv.9-19), and the lamp (vv.20-21).

Not finished yet! In Chapter 28 we come to “holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and beauty” (v.2), which are then described in intricate detail, each feature having its own significance; Aaron’s sons too were to have “coats, girdles and bonnets, for glory and beauty” (from v.40). Chapter 29 deals with the consecrating of the priests, step by careful step, and in Chapter 30 we read of the altar of incense (vv.1-10), the offering of the Lord (vv.11-17), the laver of brass (vv.17-21), the oil of holy ointment (vv.22-33), and “a perfume, a confection ... it shall be unto you most holy” (vv.34-38).

Then in Chapter 31, we learn how the Lord had not only planned all these small, beautiful, meaningful details, but had also lined up the key

man to lead all the work, Bezaleel, "... I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom ... understanding ...knowledge ... in all manner of workmanship ..." (from vv.2-5).

On reading these chapters through with Christian reverence, for these words are surely as precious today as they have ever been, the Sinai-message of "God is not to be messed with" could hardly be clearer. We can imagine the scene in "the vestry" as Aaron the high priest was slowly kitted up so "that he may minister unto me (the Lord God) in the priest's office" (28.3b; 29.4ff): this was no charade, it was very clearly "all for real".

Now under the New Covenant of grace, most of these Old Covenant instructions, symbols and rituals have been superseded by Christ Himself, for they could only ever serve as tokens, as "types", pointing forward to the one great "Antitype", the Anointed One who was to come (eg., Hebrews 10.1-18). But the many truths these types conveyed, expressing as they do God's character and His relationship with His sinful creation, remain solidly in place today - God is still "not to be messed with". May we as Christians never take all our Christ-won blessings for granted, and may the casual, complacent sinner be shown that, without Christ, it is still "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (from Hebrews 10.31).

At this time of the death of the Duke of Edinburgh, we pray for Her Majesty the Queen and for members of the Royal Family; for all to be involved in the funeral service at Windsor; and especially for the Archbishop of Canterbury – "that he may evermore be ready to spread abroad thy Gospel, the glad tidings of reconciliation with thee; and use the authority given him, not to destruction, but to salvation; not to hurt, but to help ... through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen" (from the Book of Common Prayer, The Consecration of Bishops).

As always, the Lord Jesus Christ, in humble obedience to His Father's will, makes all the difference: "Having ... boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way ... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith ..." (from Hebrews 10.19-22), and may our lives, deeds and words assist others to do the same.

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