

Witness. Leader. Commander

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Affairs on the earth, whether in war or in peace, have their ebb and flow. If we are overmuch occupied with them our spirits and feelings will be subject to a corresponding ebb and flow: we shall alternate between depression and elation. To be securely anchored in peace of heart our minds must be stayed upon the Lord; and the knowledge of His fulness, expressed in all the characters He wears and the capacities He fills, is a great help to this.

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus were in the depths of depression. With them it was no ordinary ebb in the tide: events had the appearance of a tidal wave of disaster. Yet the exposition by the risen Christ of the "things concerning Himself" in "all the Scriptures" made their hearts to burn within them. We too may be disciples whose hearts are all aflame if we contemplate Him steadily and often in the same way.

We may safely assume that the great Messianic passage, Isaiah 52: 13-55: 13, had a prominent place amongst those to which the Lord directed the thoughts of the two disciples. In it, we start with a prediction of the coming exaltation of the once humbled Servant of Jehovah; passing to consider Him in His rejection when His soul was made an offering for sin. We discover that His shame and suffering instead of annihilating all prospect of His glory are the secure foundation on which for ever His glory shall rest. This is emphasized in the last verse of Isaiah 53: "**Therefore** will I divide Him a portion with the great . . . **because** He hath poured out His soul unto death." Then in Isaiah 54 we read of the consequent restoration and blessing of Israel, when that hitherto barren nation shall burst into song. In chapter 55 follows a call to "**every one** that thirsteth," which must bring in the Gentiles. From the Old Testament viewpoint the blessing of Israel comes before that of the Gentiles, but in actual historical fact the cry to the Gentiles, which results in the calling out of an election from their midst, has preceded the national blessing of Israel.

In the coming day, of course, there will be an exhaustive fulfilment of Isaiah 55, in the millennial blessing of the Gentile nations in connection with Israel. Yet there is a present-day fulfilment of this chapter. Verse 5, for instance, foreshadows the announcement which the Lord made in Matthew 21: 43. So also "the sure mercies of David" (ver. 3) is quoted by Paul, in Acts 13: 34, as referring to Christ risen from the dead. Such mercies are now available to all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile.

This makes perfectly clear the bearing of verse 4, which may now occupy our thoughts for a few moments. In this verse the word for "people" is in the plural. Speaking of the once humbled Servant, who made atonement in His death, who is now risen and dispensing the "sure mercies of David," the prophet says, in Jehovah's name, "Behold I have given Him for a Witness to the peoples, a Leader and Commander to the peoples." In these characters He will fully be displayed in the coming age; we anticipate the spiritual blessing of that age, for we know Him thus today

As the Witness to the peoples He stands absolutely alone. He only is the Declarer of God, being the only begotten Son, who abides "in the bosom of the Father" (John 1: 18). He is "the faithful Witness," and again, "the faithful and true Witness" (Rev. 1: 5; Rev. 3: 14). Hence in Him we really know God as He is. There is much need to continually remind ourselves of this, since the men of the world always have the tendency to judge of God by what they find in the world. Thus they utterly misjudge Him, and formulate their complaints against Him; and we may often be tempted to make the

same mistake in principle, complaining of His ways in permitting this or that to come upon us. If, however, we turn our eyes upon Jesus, **and keep them there**, we shall be dwelling in the light of the knowledge of God. In Jesus the light of His countenance has been lifted up upon us, and thus we have peace.

If He stands alone as Witness, we can discern a contrast when we consider Him as Leader and Commander. Here others are necessarily in view — those whom He leads and commands. As Leader He goes before us, marks out the path and shows the way. As Commander He issues directions and instructs us in all that is the will of God. We need both: we find both in Him, for God has made that same Jesus, whom men crucified, "both Lord and Christ" As Lord He stands on God's behalf, administering and instructing, which answers to "Commander." As Christ He takes His place as the risen and anointed Head of all redeemed creation, and Head of His church in particular. This is a fuller expansion of that which is set forth in "Leader."

His own words when on earth were, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me" (John 12: 32). This is a clearer statement of the fact stated in verse 5 of Isaiah 55. We Gentiles who were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise," have been called by Him, and are a kind of firstfruits of the nations that shall run unto Him, because Jehovah.

As Leader, then, He puts Himself at the head of His saints, and He is their great Representative before God: as Commander, He speaks with all Divine authority in making known to us the will of God. Others are in view, as we have noted, yet in both these capacities He is solitary and singular. The offices are exclusively His. To no other do we owe allegiance. By no other can the authoritative word be spoken.

The commandments He issues are not legal enactments, on the keeping of which our standing before God depends, as was the case in the law of Moses. But nevertheless they are **commandments**. No Apostle speaks more of them than does the Apostle John, both in his Gospel, recording the Lord's words, and then again in his Epistle. The Apostle Paul asserts that even detailed instructions as to what is becoming in the assemblies of saints, are the commandments of the Lord (see 1 Cor. 14: 37). "His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5: 3)