

**“Restore us to yourself, O Lord .....**”

One evening, some years ago, at a Kingdom Faith Camp, Colin Urquhart was reading from 1 Peter. He suddenly stopped and said “That’s good isn’t it – I’ve never read that before!”

Colin Urquhart had never read that verse in 1 Peter? – Those of us who heard him were thinking - Surely not!! He then went on to say that he had, of course, read the verse hundreds of times before, but that night an unrecognised, till then, meaning stood out and ‘hit him’.

I had that sort of moment last Sunday morning. Nigel was introducing his theme for the streamed service from Holtwood and in it he mentioned Biblical lamentations – in the Psalms and of course in the Book of Lamentations itself. He read the concluding verses of this book:

<sup>20</sup> Why do you always forget us?

Why do you forsake us so long?

<sup>21</sup> **Restore us to yourself, LORD**, that we may return;

renew our days as of old

<sup>22</sup> unless you have utterly rejected us

and are angry with us beyond measure.

One phrase produced that ‘Eureka’ moment – **“Restore us to yourself, Lord”**. It started me thinking about a number of the Psalms, about the attitude of God’s Old Testament people. When things went wrong they associated their problems with the Lord forgetting, even forsaking them. Their plea to the Lord was that He should restore them to Himself, that He should make things as they were before. It was clearly something for the Lord to do, the people had no part in it!

Contrast that with our Methodist standpoint. We have a loving and caring Heavenly Father who desires each one of us to have a relationship with Him. Not all will; but the offer of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus is available to all.

*“All need to be saved. All may be saved. All may know themselves saved. All may be saved to the uttermost.”*

I spent a teaching exchange year in Australia in 1994/95. During that year Jackie worked part time as a Lay Pastoral Worker in a ‘local’ Anglican Church. (At the time she was doing a part time course at Oak Hill Theological College in North London). We discovered something interesting about Sydney Diocese Anglican Churches – they nearly all have the same ‘flavour’. Go round any large town in the UK and you will find a wide range of Anglican styles – from the ‘high’ (incense coming out of every available orifice) to the ‘low’ (labelled by some as happy-clappy) Evangelical wing.

Sydney Diocese is ‘Low’, Evangelical and is very strongly influenced by Calvin. The Rector of St Paul’s Church, still a very dear friend, firmly believed that he, himself, had played no part in his own salvation. He had not accepted the offer of Grace – God had planted that saving Grace in his life. He had been predestined for salvation.

It would have worried him greatly to think that he had in any way made a contribution, even in responding to the Gospel message.

In 1733 Charles Wesley, 26 years old and a junior tutor at Christ Church, Oxford was introduced to a 19 year old Pembroke College servitor ( an undergraduate, working as a servant, to pay for his university education) – by the name of George Whitefield. The latter became a member of the ‘Holy Club’ and was ‘converted’ in 1735 – three years before the Wesleys. Ordained at the age of 21 George became a popular and successful preacher. Like the Wesleys , before him, he sailed to America where he was well received but 4 months later set sail back to a post Aldersgate Street England,.

It was George Whitefield who started preaching to large crowds in the open air – he could rightly be called the ‘father of the evangelical revival’. On Saturday March 31<sup>st</sup> 1739, John Wesley linked up with George Whitefield in Bristol and the following day was ‘challenged’ as Whitefield preached again in the open air. We read in JW’s journal that George Whitefield had departed by Sunday evening and on Monday April 1<sup>st</sup>:

*“At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people.”*

George Whitefield desired to return to America and left his work, especially among the miners of Kingswood, in the hands of John Wesley. Unfortunately relations between the two men deteriorated seriously over the question of predestination or free grace. Whitefield adopted Calvinist theology while Wesley remained Armenian, the two emphases having already been outlined.

I remember reading (but cannot find any reference now!) of a letter George Whitefield wrote to John Wesley from America – having been informed that Wesley was preaching “all **would** be saved”. Wesley replied that he did not preach “all **would** be saved”, but rather “all **could** be saved”. The two men agreed that both had to continue preaching – Whitefield to inform the ‘elect’; Wesley to offer grace and salvation to those who responded to his message.

This division was fundamental and extreme, yet Whitefield always showed great respect towards John Wesley and actually requested Wesley to preach at his funeral. George Whitefield died and is buried in America but John Wesley did preach at three memorial services in this country.

A quotation from John Pollock’s book “George Whitefield and the great awakening” illustrates the difficult theological division existing between the two men but the respect and affection that remained from their past:

*John Wesley never encouraged criticism of George.*

*‘Do you think we shall see Mr. Whitefield in heaven?’ asked one small-minded disciple.*

*‘No’ replied Wesley, and the man looked pleased that he had aimed his flattery well.*

*‘No, sir,’ said Wesley, ‘I fear not. Mr Whitefield will be so near the Throne and we at such a distance we shall hardly get a sight of him.’*

*In private, however, John Wesley and Whitefield retained their mutual doubts of each other without lessening their mutual affection. ‘I cannot help thinking,’ George wrote to Charles Wesley in December 1752, ‘he is still jealous of me and my proceedings.’ Charles always remained the closer friend despite their temporary breach.*

The division between these two ‘giants’ of the Eighteenth Century revival; a division still existing in present day denominations, seems to echo that Old Testament approach to the relationship between God and His people:

**“Restore us to yourself, LORD”.**

The Old Testament appeal seems to equate with the theology of John Calvin, that of an ‘Elect’

It is poles apart from our view that:

‘All need to be saved, All can be saved’ - through the “Love of God, the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”

**Eric Brown**