

THE VOICE OF THE BRIDEGROOM

(Br. Alvin Raffel, discourse given in Chicago, April 1966)

The opening verse of the Book of Revelation tells us that this is “the revelation of Jesus Christ which GOD gave him—to show unto his servants... And he [Jesus Christ] sent it by His Angel unto His servant John.” In verse 10 John states: “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet... And I turned to see the Voice... and saw... one like unto the Son of Man and he had in His right hand seven stars.”

You will notice that John saw one like unto the son of man. This was a vision of our glorified Lord shown to John by an angel whom the Lord sent. In the vision the Lord is speaking to John, but the Voice is that of his angel—“I am he that liveth and was dead and, behold, I am alive forevermore... Write the things which thou hast seen, and which are, and shall be hereafter. The mystery of the seven stars thou sawest in my right hand are the angels of the seven churches.” “And the seven candlesticks... are the seven churches.” V. 18 to 20 in part.

This glorious Lord, our Pastor states, we “recognize as the instructor and caretaker of the candlesticks, the churches; whom we are to recognize also as having in his right hand, in his favor as well as in his power, seven stars—the angels or messengers of the seven churches. These stars apparently represent special ministers or servants of the church. In Revelation 12:1 the church is pictured as a woman crowned with twelve stars. These stars evidently represent the twelve apostles as the special lights of the church. Similarly, in the picture before us, the seven stars which the Lord holds in his right hand seem to represent special light-bearers in the church in each of the seven phases or developments.” (R3570-3) “It will be noticed that the messages to the various churches are all addressed to these stars or messengers or angels of the churches, as though he would have us understand that the appropriate message for each appropriate time or epoch in the church’s experience would be sent by the Lord through a particular star or messenger whom he would particularly commission as his representative.” (R3570:2-1)

Continuing in the third chapter of Revelation we have the Lord’s special message to the Angel of the Church of Laodicea—the lukewarm, spewed-out church of our day. Speaking to those who will hear, He says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my Voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

Has the Lord come in to us? And have we been supping with Him? Surely we can agree that we have been enjoying a great feast. Then let us see how this came to us—and how we may continue to feast. Jesus standing at the door and knocking is another way of saying, He has returned! He is HERE! But how did we find out about it? We heard His

Voice! but how did we hear it? Some say we heard it through the Scriptures, but that is only partially true. The Church had the Scriptures down through the age, more or less; but those saints did not hear the Voice of the Bridegroom as we hear it. True to His promise, the Lord was with them in spirit throughout the Gospel Age. But the joy reserved for those who waited to the 1,335 days could only come upon His return as the Bridegroom.

But before we could hear His VOICE someone heard the knock of prophecy announcing the Lord's presence and made the cry of Matt. 25:6, "Behold, the bridegroom! Go ye out to meet Him." This cry still goes forth—and it will continue until all the consecrated virgin class have heard; and until they have had their faith and loyalty tested by it. This is the class that responds to the VOICE from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and receive not of her plagues." This is the class to whom the books of the Old and New Testament have opened in our day; to whom the entire plan of God shines very clearly, as a result of the Seventh Angel sounding. "In the days of the Voice of the Seventh Angel, when He shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished." (Rev. 10:7) We read in Dan 12 that "The wise shall understand but none of the wicked shall understand." True to the Lord's warning, Babylon sits in darkness—her Light has departed! "The light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee: and the VOICE of the Bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee." Rev. 18:23.

Our pastor's comment on this text is revealing: Because Babylon will not permit the Voice to be heard, therefore "The voice, the teaching of present truth is consequently outside her walls; and whoever has an ear for the truth, whoever desires to be filled with present truth, must come outside of sectarianism before he can thus be filled and blessed and used as a vessel in bearing the blessing to others." (R2592:2-4)

This identification of the Voice with the teaching of Present Truth suggests an interesting correlation. "In the beginning was the Word" (the *Logos*)—Jesus in his prehuman existence. The written Word of God which we have, came through this Logos to holy men of old, and although we do not have a perfect translation of it, nevertheless God acknowledges it as His Word. His spirit operates through it to perform His Will, and it does not return unto Him void.

A very deep principle is suggested to the Truth seeker in the words of Jesus, when he said: "He that has seen me, hath seen the Father." The Bridegroom then, being the personification of Truth, and being present, is represented by Present Truth. We believe from our studies, that the Truth which our Present Lord commissioned That Servant to prepare, truly represents Him.

Yes, "clothed with linen," "that servant" did with "the inkhorn" just what the Lord

commanded him. Thus were Matt. 24:45-47; Luke 12:42-44 and Ezek 9:3 and 11 fulfilled in our time (1852-1916). Therefore, "That servant" was made "ruler over," not some, nor most, but was made "ruler over all the Lord's goods." Also, we are well aware of Luke 12:36-38 referring to the blessing of "those servants" (plural) found watching, at the same time. We are also aware of the big difference between recognizing or honoring, and WORSHIPPING.

We believe that the message of Present Truth which has opened the eyes of our understanding and stirred our hearts, is none other than the Voice of the Bridegroom speaking to us. And since this message came to us by the hand of That messenger, it then follows that the message and the messenger together constitute the VOICE. The man and the message cannot be separated!

An outstanding example in the Old Testament of the Man and the Message being inseparable is that of MOSES. The Jews knew that their Law was the Holy Law of God. Nevertheless, it was so associated with the MAN whose powers the Lord used, that it was called THE LAW OF MOSES. Jesus identified the Law in this manner and did not reprimand them for calling God's Law, "The Law of Moses." He evidently did not consider this as taking honor away from God at all; for it is written in 1 Sam. 2:30 "They that honor me, I will honor."

The same principle is demonstrated in the case of Sir Isaac Newton, the British scientist and philosopher who discovered and proved the law of gravity. Newton first comprehended this natural law of God, and set forth its principles in terms that could be understood. It has been known ever since as Newton's Law. No scientist would think of referring to it in any other term, since what is meant is clearly understood. Neither would any, through pride, waste time ignoring what had been discovered to attempt to rediscovering its principles for himself.

It is noticeable that for special leadership, God chooses the few and not the many, and usually only one at a time. There was only one Lord Jesus to redeem our lost race. Only one Paul to declare the riches of Christ to the Gentiles. Only one Moses to lead the hosts of Israel out of bondage, though there was a host of honored co-workers with him. And in later times God raised up special instruments well fitted to lead in reforms such as John Wycliffe, John Huss, Martin Luther, Wm. Miller, et al.

Bro. Russell was well aware of the Scripture texts alluding to THAT SERVANT and his work, but in humility applied them to the Society. We all know that the Society was the Voice of the Pastor through its publications and ministry. His was the controlling voice of policy in every matter. It follows then that if the work of That Servant is the Voice of the Lord at His return, then the food is of God and not of man.

In 1910 the Pastor wrote concerning this point: “Divine Providence has furnished the people of God at this time, an outline of the divine plan and a detail of Bible doctrine such as God’s people never had before in their possession. Without claiming any inspiration for these Studies in the Scriptures, we surely may claim a divine supervision in respect to the matter which they contain, and the TIME of their presentation. Whoever admits that we are in the harvest time at all... must acknowledge also that the Lord promised at that time He would cause His people to sit down to a feast of spiritual food, that he would be their servant and bring forth to them ‘things new and old.’ (Luke 12:37) All who recognize these things must recognize these STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES as being identified with the fulfillment of that promise.” (R4709—last par.)

Today it is being suggested more and more that we give Scriptures only as proof of the thoughts we present, since it is the Word of God we are preaching. True, in witnessing to the world it is necessary to establish that these teachings are not new but the very truths put forth by the Lord and His Apostles. It is important to give a “thus saith the Lord” for all we preach; but sooner or later we must introduce the truth seeker to the source of our own understanding. In fact, we have no right to keep anyone dependent on us for an understanding of the Word of God. God has interpreted His Word for us at this time, through That Servant. It is God’s message, not the Servant’s, and quoting that source is using the means provided. I offer no apology then, for quoting “That Servant,” Bro. Russell. Since we have proved the Truth by the Scriptures which he urged us to do, then we can direct others to the same source of our enlightenment.

In preparing discourses the elders should have the entire Church in mind. We are not to preach as elders to one another. We are to feed the entire flock of God. If we, as elders are keeping ourselves refreshed at the source of Present Truth, then why shouldn’t we point every member of the body to that same source which we find so helpful and necessary? We know nothing of ourselves anyway, and can only preach the things which we have received. We are all followers. None is a leader, save Christ, and even He followed His Father’s Will in all things. The Apostles followed the Lord and invited us to follow them as they followed Him. We may follow a fellow Christian’s example in self-sacrifice, but we may not follow him blindly, hanging on his words because we are impressed with his person. This would be idolatry—worship of the creature and “respect of persons.”

Every special Servant of God had the testimony “that he pleased God,” and the record of his life, laid down in obedience to his commission is an important element in stamping his message as God-given. Our public witness today lacks this stamp or identification with a reformer. We say we can prove our teachings by the Scriptures, and we certainly can, but Christendom accustomed to receiving her light from special teachers such as Calvin, Luther, Knox, Wesley, et al, asks: “Who is your teacher?”

And brethren, this question is a proper one because, as we have shown, the Lord always sends His message by the hand of a messenger. It is true that odium now attaches to the name of Bro. Russell just as it did to Wm. Miller, and as it still attaches to the subject of prophecy. But as our Pastor has shown, this is by the Lord's design so that only the sufficiently humble could hear. The Jehovah's Witnesses realized that to give their message authority they needed to show where their movement began. So claiming Bro. Russell as their Founder gives them roots in a reformation work of history. And while history can be manipulated, history cannot be denied. Have we ever made a united challenge of this false claim in a public way? We make every effort not to be confused with the Jehovah's Witnesses, even though our Reprints, Comment Bibles, Diaglots and some editions of Studies in the Scriptures bear the name of their Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society. By keeping quiet brethren, we may be setting traps for our feet in the future. This is something for all of us to think and pray about earnestly.

It is the Truth SPOKEN that is so devastating to Satan's cause. That is why the Lord is shown by the Revelator on His Return, "with a sharp sword proceeding out of His Mouth." (Rev. 19:15) On the other hand, some of our brethren today pay lip service to the Pastor, but belittle his teachings, and begin printing and preaching their own. The outstanding example of this—and we should NEVER forget it—was the course followed by the Society after the Pastor's death. At that time, the leaders began by saying, "Brother Russell was a Wonderful man, but he wasn't infallible." And to prove it, they reprinted the Tabernacle Shadows with a list of 296 "corrections," as early as 1920, only four years after his death.

This list was printed as an appendix with an introduction which read: "Thirty-nine years have passed since the publication of this booklet; and during that time some of the teachings herein contained have come to be seen in clearer light. In harmony with these clearer understandings we suggest the following alterations in appendix form, leaving the text intact out of deference to the honored and beloved writer of the booklet. It will be noted that no basic teaching of the works is altered."

Now, let's see—we'll mention just two so-called corrections: #2 Eliminates the Levites from the Tabernacle picture; and alteration #4 is the source of a serious error which has plagued the church ever since—"Consecration at the Gate." This is where the confusion on justification originated. To apply the 296 changes to Bro. Russell's text completely destroys the harmony and beauty of Tabernacle Shadows. I repeat then, from the introduction: "No basic teaching of the work is altered."—What a deception!

It is notable that this first attempt to change the Pastor's work should begin with Tabernacle Shadows. We all know it was this work which enabled him to set all the teachings of the Truth in order; which magnified the Ransom for All and made plain the great atonement work. Having started on this course, the Society progressed in its errors

until, finally the great central theme of the Bible—Jesus Christ a Ransom for all—was denied. The end of the matter then shows clearly who its author really was—SATAN. And this same wily foe is with us today—continuing his assault on the Bridegroom’s Voice.

In spite of such an object lesson, the cry is being made again—“Brother Russell was a fine man, but he wasn’t infallible!” Many who are dissatisfied with the food we have been served believe, for one thing, that the chronology is in error. They are seeking through Bible Study (without the Volumes) for greater light which they mistakenly believe is being shed on the Word of God today. As a result, we are witnessing a “Back to the Bible” trend which is growing in popularity among some brethren. This same attitude developed in the Pastor’s day and the Lord caused the issue to be discussed and recorded in the Towers for future need. I quote: “Whoever believes this to be possible” (i.e. that greater light than we have received is possible) “cannot believe that the divine plan is the truth—the true plan of God. It cannot satisfy his longings as nothing else could do, else he would not be longing for or seeking for something further, an independent and special light.” (R4446:2-3) Those “who set themselves up as teachers, and boast of their independent thinking, boast that they do not agree with the ‘Dawns’ [Volumes] and ‘Towers’ on certain features of truth, and by implication give the impression that they should be the more highly thought of on account of this independence.” (R4446-2) “It is not for us to judge of their motives and intentions, but we believe they are deceived, and working more injury to the cause of the Lord than they probably are aware.” (R4446-3) The Pastor continues: “What shall the Lord’s sheep do when those who have been leading them object to references to and quotations from the *Dawn-Studies*...? ... The specious claim is that this is ‘man worship, or book-worship,’ and that God’s people should use God’s Book only—the Bible.” (R4447-3) “We reply that the answer which should be openly made is this: We are unable to see the difference between hearing a teacher expound orally and having his teachings in printed form read or quoted by another. If teaching by the printed page is wrong, then all teaching is wrong. If it is not unreasonable for us to hear with respect the words of one who *claims* ability to assist us in the right understanding of God’s Word, it cannot be unreasonable for us to hear the words from these books which *already have* actually and truly taught us nearly all that we understand of God’s Word. If we ever conclude to have only the one human channel of instruction our decision will be to stick firmly to the one God has used and blessed to our enlightenment...” (R4447-4)

“... Is it not probable that the great adversary who delights to pose as an angel of light and an upholder of the Bible is really deceiving some of the dear friends—attempting to gradually draw them away from the great light which our Lord has now provided for us all, back to the methods in vogue before the true light shone upon our pathway?” (R4447:2-3)

Dear brethren, this VOICE has brought us the glorious knowledge of God's divine plan of the ages which only a few in this world possess. Let's never forget where we got it.

Some say this type of information from the Reprints is "ancient history," but what do you say? Some say we are "worshipping an angel" when we insist upon the interpretations of That Servant over any of our contemporaries. This charge is not a new one. Again, it was made in the past and recorded in the Reprints for our assistance.

Let's hear from the Pastor again: Some crafty ones "indirectly discourage the use of the Society's publications while, in a sense, praising them..." "They seek to turn the minds of the enlightened ones in another direction by telling them that 'each should dig' the jewels of divine truth for himself;... These disobedient 'fellow-servants' suggest further that there is danger of worshipping the Society... They say 'let us have a Bible Study... Let us give the impression we are great Bible Students, who dug these Truths for ourselves. But let us put the matter more plausibly and more humbly by claiming that our only desire is to exalt God's Word and to study it alone.'" (R4482:2-3)

"Our friends reply that they are in no danger of worshipping the Society or anybody else; that their experience in man-worship and sect-worship are things of the past. They declare that they were led out of those forms of idolatry and into the proper reverence and worship of God, and his Word by the Society's publications and no others, ..." (4482:2-4) "They declare that there are no other writings or teachings which can compare with the Society's in loyalty to the Bible..." (R4483-1) "... we are not searching for other plans of the ages. At the very most we look for additional scintillations of light which will make more harmonious and more beautiful than ever the great divine plan, which first stood clearly revealed to us in 1880." (R4483:2-2) Continuing: "As we see some going blind respecting precious truths which they once saw clearly, it will properly grieve our hearts for them. But we are to remember that the Lord's Cause will lose nothing; ..." (R4483:2-4)

Truths so interweave that one lost or perverted, injures presently the beauty of the entire fabric. Our expectation is that the differences will increase, and that the loss of spiritual sight will ultimately extend to every feature of the Divine Plan. "If the light that is in thee become darkness, HOW great is that darkness." (R4399, col. 1, top)

Finally, brethren, let us remember, after having been taught, then it is easy to be "wise." But as is often the case, the pupil soon challenges the teacher and alters the text book to suit himself. If we could only keep in mind that the Truth was sent TO us, NOT through us!

A few aspects of the Harvest Message were adjusted by its author, under divine supervision, in the 1916 forewords to the Volumes and in the Reprints of 1914-16. These

adjustments enable us to reconcile the chronology, and to see that the Harvest belongs to the New Day, and is no part of the old. It puts the Harvest entirely in the Millennial Age and clearly stamps it as Kingdom Work. All the volumes teach this truth whether all readers have grasped it or not.

The Harvest work then, cannot be compared to any previous work of the Gospel Age. When Elijah fled into the wilderness the second time, he was fed by an angel. He then went to sleep and was awakened by the Angel and fed a second time. In the strength of that second feeding he made a journey of forty days and nights to Mt. Horeb.

In 1915 the Pastor wrote in this connection that to his understanding the food especially provided for Elijah after fleeing from Jezebel, represents the special message that is now feeding the people of God.

And “Mt. Horeb” otherwise called the “Mount of God” fitly represents Messiah’s Kingdom. The coming of Elijah to it, portrayed the fact that the Church will be In and Under the kingdom administration while still in the flesh, although the last members of the church will not fully participate in kingdom honors until their resurrection change. (R5752—bottom)

This phase of the Lord’s Reign is fully covered in Volume 3, Study 9 entitled “THY GOD REIGNETH.” That Servant never repudiated this concept of the Reign as some mistakenly believe.

The last issue of the Watch Tower which Bro. Russell prepared and which carried the announcement of his death under the date of Nov. 15, 1916 carried an article titled “THE EARTH TREMBLED AND FELL.” In the first paragraph he states: “... ‘The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof!’ (Psalm 97:1) As we have shown in SCRIPTURE STUDIES, Vol. III, Study 9, this began to be true when our Lord Jesus, having returned to earth to set up His Kingdom, took unto himself his great power. Yet not until his kingdom has been fully established in the earth will his glorious reign be clearly recognized.” (R5989-1)

So dear brethren, we have a rich legacy from the Lord in the Harvest Message contained in the Six Volumes of Scripture Studies, Tabernacle Shadows, and the Reprints. They constitute the 7th and last message to the church. So let us apply the principle of topical study to the Pastor’s writings, and find the harmony which they contain—because they are the Voice of the Bridegroom who yet speaketh.

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God Reigneth. Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice

together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye [when?], when the Lord shall bring again Zion.” Isa. 52:7, 8.

A PRECIOUS COMMODITY

What would we do if we had a bank that credited \$86,400 to our account each morning; carried over no balance from day to day; allowed us to keep no cash in our account and every evening cancelled whatever amount we failed to use during the day?

What would we do? Well, most of us would draw out every cent!

We have just such a bank you know. We call it “Time.” Every morning it credits us with 86,400 seconds, and every night it writes off whatever of this we have failed to invest to good purpose. It carries no balances.

Each day it opens a new account with us. If we fail to use the day’s deposits, the loss is ours. There is no going back. There is no drawing against the “tomorrow”.