

Face to Face

by Jeremy James



As believers we read and study the Word of God as the living truth spoken forth by the very breath of God: **“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:” (2 Timothy 3:16).**

As we study His Word we learn to see more deeply into the circumstances in which the prophets and apostles were writing. Quite often we need to do this in any event in order to understand what the text is actually telling us. For example, in the book of Jeremiah, we need to keep track of Jeremiah’s movements, as well as political developments in and around Jerusalem, if we are to grasp the significance of his words.

Jeremiah is somewhat unusual in that he reveals to us a great deal about his own emotional state as he struggles to convey to his cynical listeners the powerful message that God has given him. His life is threatened by his own kinsmen and he is subjected over and over again to verbal and physical abuse. At the most critical phase of his eventful life he is cast into a miry dungeon, a kind of oubliette, and left to die. In the confusion of the hour it is difficult to see how anyone would come to his rescue. Surely, among all his kinsmen and fellow Jews there were still a few who would step forward and plead for his life? The Word of God tells us that salvation came, not from his own people, but through the courageous mediation of an Ethiopian eunuch who was part of the king’s retinue:

“Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin” (Jeremiah 38:7)

The most politically powerful princes, who wielded great influence over king Zedekiah, had long sought to rid themselves of Jeremiah and his annoying messages of doom and destruction. He was even telling the people that, if they were to survive, they must surrender to the Babylonians and depart from Jerusalem. If they did, then God would spare their lives. The princes despised him for this and convinced the king to get rid of him. But now, in the midst of all this an Ethiopian eunuch – whose name was Ebedmelech – had the audacity to go up to the king, in the full view of his advisers and counsellors, and ask that he spare Jeremiah.



Ebed-melech pleads with Zedekiah.

By doing this, he was literally taking his life in his hands. He had no idea how the king would react, especially before such a vigilant and excitable audience. There was every chance he would order the eunuch to be thrown into the dungeon and left to die alongside Jeremiah. But God in His great mercy changed the king's heart. Zedekiah authorized Ebedmelech to gather a team of helpers and retrieve Jeremiah from his predicament. The Word lovingly records the fact that the eunuch even went to the trouble of finding some old rags which Jeremiah could place under his armpits and avoid being torn by the rope as he was hauled out of the pit.

This man, an emasculated gentile, had more courage and compassion than men who were whole. We are reminded of the reference that Jesus made to all the widows who were in Israel in the time of Elijah but God sent him to a gentile woman, and to the many lepers living in the land of Israel in the time of Elisha, but God sent a foreigner, a gentile, to the prophet to be cleansed of his leprosy.

Even in our weakness and our alienated state, a loving God watches over each and every one of us and, to those whose hearts are perfect towards Him, He bestows His strength and protection:

**“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.”
(2 Chronicles 16:9)**



Ebed-melech rescues Jeremiah from the pit.

Approaching the Book of Revelation

For many believers, myself included, the Book of Revelation came like an explosion of Old Testament wrath in the wake of the grace-filled Gospel message. But this wrath was always hanging over mankind. It never slipped from view – its shocking inevitability was always implied, no matter which of God’s prophets was speaking. Indeed, we saw this in the words of the great herald, John the Baptist, who, when he saw the Pharisees coming out into the desert to hear him, asked

**“O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”
(Matthew 3:7)**

The “wrath to come” is a reference to the Tribulation of the End Time. Through his remarkable work on Calvary, the Lamb of God, a substitutionary sacrifice acceptable to God, gave his life so that all who believe in his name may be spared the wrath of the End Time:

**“And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”
(1 Thessalonians 1:10)**

In this paper we wish to examine the Epistles that immediately precede the Book of Revelation and, if possible, find therein words of consolation – provided expressly by the Holy Spirit – that may soften the impact, as it were, of the powerful testimony in the final book.

The six epistles in question are by Peter, John and Jude, respectively. We'll take them in that order.

Multiple occurrences

Multiple occurrences of the same word in the same passage of Scripture are fairly rare. Where they do occur, they are intended to underscore or intensify the message being conveyed. One of the most remarkable instances of this can be found in Jeremiah:

**“We have heard the pride of Moab, (he is exceeding proud)
his loftiness, and his arrogancy, and his pride,
and the haughtiness of his heart.”
(Jeremiah 48:29)**

This emphatic declaration has a parallel passage in Isaiah:

**“We have heard of the pride of Moab;
he is very proud: even of his haughtiness,
and his pride, and his wrath:
but his lies shall not be so.”
(Isaiah 16:6)**

We could cite several more examples, but their purpose is clear. It's as though the word or phrase in question speaks far more loudly when its comes at us again and again in this way.

In his first letter, Peter employs this device through his repeated use of the word “precious” (in Greek *timios* or *entimos*):

“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:” (1 Peter 1:7)

“But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:” (1 Peter 1:19)

“To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious ...” (1 Peter 2:4)

“Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.” (1 Peter 2:6)

“Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner...” (1 Peter 2:7)

The word “precious” echoes like a chorus in his letter. Given the verses where it is used and the general sense in which He employs it, the Holy Spirit is saying: *An immense price has been paid for our salvation, a price so great that we can scarcely comprehend it.* This implies that no trial or affliction that we may ever have to endure can lessen in any way the majesty and magnitude of what Jesus achieved on our behalf on Calvary. If we can keep this in mind we will never lose heart.



Peter continues in the same vein in his second letter:

“Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:” (2 Peter 1:1)

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (2 Peter 1:4)

These “**exceeding great and precious promises**” are unfathomable. Try as we might, we will never find anything in our earthly experience that can match for a moment the glory and splendour that awaits us in Christ.

As we move closer to the book of Revelation, the Holy Spirit takes what Peter has said and brings it to a climax. To appreciate how He does this we need to look at the way certain words chosen by John, so innocuous in themselves, pulsate with Scriptural significance. The phrase in question is “face to face”:

“Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.” (2 John 1:12)

“But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face.” (3 John 1:14)

No doubt millions of believers have read these verses and assumed that they referred only to something that *John* intended to do. But we should keep the example of the Psalms in mind, where here and there throughout specific verses stand apart and speak of Jesus, not just David. Well, these verses, I believe, can be taken in the same vein. If we approach them in this way, the second and third letters by John, which appear rather slight in their own right, can be seen as a loving reassurance from Jesus himself that he too is looking forward to the day – that precious day – when he will come and speak with us face to face.

Face to Face

Let's examine the way the expression "face to face" is used elsewhere in Scripture. We don't have to look very far to find that it almost invariably denotes a dramatic encounter between man and God!

Consider the following verses, which comprise every occasion (apart from John's letters) where this expression is used:

"And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face ..." (Genesis 32:30)

"And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." (Exodus 33:11)

"... for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night." (Numbers 14:14)

"The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire ..." (Deuteronomy 5:4)

"And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face ..." (Deuteronomy 34:10)

"And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face." (Judges 6:22) [Gideon has just met the Pre-incarnate Christ.]

"And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face." (Ezekiel 20:35) [This refers to the momentous End Time meeting between Jesus and the nation of Israel.]

"To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him." (Acts 25:16) [This foreshadows another encounter between man and God, where the "ungodly" (whom we will discuss shortly) will stand in judgment before Jesus at the Great White Throne.]

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

What a glorious spiritual epiphany is enshrined in these simple words, *face to face*!

They are like the clarion call of a trumpet sounding from the page. It is the destiny of all believers to stand before our Savior and see him face to face. As the LORD said to Abraham, **“I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” (Genesis 15:1).**



In the nine occasions where it is used prior to John’s letters, it refers to something of infinite significance. This contrasts sharply with the humble role which it appears to play in John’s letters. However, if we take its Scriptural ‘definition’ from these nine prior instances – as we should – we can see how it betokens something truly profound in John’s letters, namely the coming rendezvous of the believer with Jesus. As such it points to the End Time and to the ultimate destruction of the Satanic world system, where all who love God will meet His Son *face to face*.

It also comprehends another kind of face-to-face meeting, where those who have rejected His Son – whom the Word of God calls *the ungodly* – will ultimately bow before Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Peter had already prepared us for this in his two letters:

“And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:18)

“And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly,” (2 Peter 2:5)

“And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly,” (2 Peter 2:6)

“But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” (2 Peter 3:7)

The Holy Spirit has expressed a doctrine for our edification in Peter’s letters which He returns to later in Jude:

“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Jude 1:4)

“To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” (Jude 1:15)

“How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.” (Jude 1:18)

He is using the word *ungodly* like a hammer, especially in verse 1:15! Men must understand this message, He insists! There is no salvation outside of Jesus and all who reject this salvation will face spiritual ruination. The contrast could hardly be more stark or His declaration more emphatic.

Great is His Mercy, for the counter-hammer, as it were, is also working with unremitting fervor in John’s first letter, where the word *love*, in various grammatical forms, occurs no fewer than 51 times! His epistle is virtually exploding with an emphasis on God’s immeasurable love. The Holy Spirit is saying that we must submit to this love and express it in our lives if we are to know who He truly is. If we do so we will see why Jesus is both the Lion and the Lamb and why he must judge the ungodly and perform “**his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act.**” (Isaiah 28:21).

CONCLUSION

The pride of man is his downfall. What was true of Moab in the time of Jeremiah is true of most of mankind today:

**“We have heard the pride of Moab, (he is exceeding proud)
his loftiness, and his arrogancy, and his pride,
and the haughtiness of his heart.”
(Jeremiah 48:29)**

The judgment, when it comes, will be severe. The ungodly will not listen, but somewhere among those who have not yet come to faith in Christ are receptive souls who will recognize something special when they hear the Word of God – provided we have the courage and the compassion to proclaim it and share it. We can take Ebed-melech as a shining example of what we need to do.

As believers we are recipients of a blessing too great for our limited understanding to comprehend. Nevertheless, through the work of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, we can glimpse, however imperfectly, the unspeakable glory that is yet to come.

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