

'I stood between the Lord and you'. Bethesda meditation. 15 April 2012.

My text for this morning comes from the fifth verse of the fifth chapter of the fifth book of the Bible ... the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 5 verse 5 ... 'I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord. For you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain'. And I want to focus in particular on Moses' words, 'I stood between the Lord and you'.

Moses was referring back to the events recorded in Exodus 19 and 20, when the children of Israel first came to Mount Sinai and when the Lord communicated His law to them. I read Moses' words, 'You were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain'. Later in the chapter he filled in some of the details, 'It came to pass', he recalled, 'when *you heard the voice* out of the midst of the darkness, and the mountain burned with fire, you came near to me ... and said, 'Behold, the Lord our God has shown us His glory and greatness, and we have heard His voice out of the midst of the fire ... now therefore why should we die? ... If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, we *shall* die ... you go near and hear all that the Lord our God says, and tell us whatever the Lord our God tells you'.¹

I like it: 'why should *we* die ... *you* go'. Although we can hardly blame them. The book of Exodus tells us how they were confronted by thunder and lightning ... by a thick cloud, blackness and thick darkness ... by a tempest and the mountain quaking ... by a devouring fire, and smoke ascending as the smoke of a furnace ... by the sound of a trumpet 'exceeding loud', and getting progressively louder² ... and to cap it all, as Moses reports here in Deuteronomy, God speaking 'with a great voice'.³ I'm sure you get the picture.

Small wonder the people shrank back in terror at the *sight of God's glory* and the *sound of God's voice*. 'They trembled', we read, 'and stood afar off'.⁴ It was then that they proposed to Moses that he alone should draw near to God. Nor was this a light undertaking. The writer to the Hebrews noted of this very occasion, 'So terrifying was the sight that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and tremble'.⁵ But for all that, the good man went ... such was his faith, courage and love for God's people, that he went forward to stand between the Lord and them – that he might relay to them all that the Lord said to him.⁶

In one sense, his words, 'I stood between the Lord and you' would have made a good epitaph to have been inscribed on Moses' tombstone – except that, of course, he never had one, for God Himself buried him.⁷ I say that his words, 'I stood between the Lord and you' would have made a good epitaph for him because standing between the Lord and His people was very much the story of Moses' later years.

For example, in the context of the Golden Calf incident, Psalm 106 records how God 'said He would destroy them, had not Moses ... "stood" in the breach before Him, to turn away His wrath'.⁸ The picture is that of some brave defender who has taken his stand in a gap made in a city wall to prevent the enemy from pouring through.

Yes, following that incident ... as following his many later intercessory prayers on behalf of a murmuring and rebellious people, Moses could have truthfully said, 'I stood between the Lord and you'. Moses was truly an amazing man.

But this morning we have come to remember One who, in the language of the epistle to the Hebrews, is 'counted worthy of more glory than Moses'.⁹ Indeed, whereas Moses is spoken of in the New Testament as the 'mediator' though whom ('by whose hand', literally) God gave the Law,¹⁰ the Lord Jesus is spoken of there as the 'mediator of a better covenant'¹¹ – as the 'mediator of the new covenant'.¹²

And this morning our Saviour is able to say, 'I stood between the Lord and you' with a depth of meaning which goes far beyond that with which Moses could ever say it.

You might recall that occasion in the Garden of Gethsemane when, for a second time, our Lord asked those who had come to arrest Him – men who, having fallen to the ground before Him, had risen to their feet again – when, for a second time, He asked them, 'Whom do you seek' ... and, when, for a second time, they said 'Jesus of Nazareth', He, the gospel writer tells us, 'answered, "I told you that I am He. If therefore you seek *me*, let *these* go their way'.¹³ In this manner, He, the Good Shepherd, was careful to position Himself between His sheep and the wolves ... and could therefore have truly said, 'I stood between your foes and you'!

But I think now, not of Gethsemane but of Golgotha – and, with my eye on His cross, I hear my Lord say to me this morning, 'I stood between the Lord and you'. For, as the apostle Paul once expressed it, 'There is one God, and there is one mediator (not, as Moses, between God and Israel – but) between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all'.¹⁴ And it was 'the man Christ Jesus' ... the One who, in the words of our opening hymn, 'interposed His precious blood'¹⁵ ... He it is who says to each one of us today, 'I stood between the Lord and you'.

Over 700 years before, the prophet Isaiah had written of Him (the Lord Jesus), 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord (the Lord, mark you) has laid on Him the iniquity of us all'.¹⁶ And, as has often been pointed out, the Hebrew word translated 'laid on' occurs frequently in the Old Testament to describe those who meet with, or who fall on, others with a view to smiting and killing them.¹⁷

It is more than likely therefore that we should understand the prophet as saying that, during the three hours of darkness at the cross, the Lord God caused our iniquities to violently assault the Lord Jesus, rushing on Him as some vicious and destructive foe.¹⁸ Oh yes, as I view the bread and wine, I hear Him say, 'I stood between the Lord and you'.

Speaking of 'wine', we read in Psalm 75 that 'in the hand of the Lord there is a cup filled with foaming wine ... and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs'.¹⁹ Alas for me, my sins had helped fill that cup – and it would have been mine to drink had not my Saviour, in the words of a well-known hymn, 'drained the last dark drop' for me. How gladly then I hear Him say to Peter in the Garden, 'Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?' And as I think of that cup of God's fury, I hear Him say, 'I stood between the Lord and you'.

Yes, for me, the living One became dead ... for me the Beloved One was forsaken ... for me the sinless One was made sin. Mine were the transgressions, but His were the wounds – the piercing ... mine were the iniquities, but His was the bruising – the crushing ... mine were the sins, but His was the suffering ... mine was the law-breaking, but His was the curse. Truly, He stood between the Lord and me.

As I am sure you know, it is 100 years to the day since, a little after 2 in the morning, RMS Titanic sank after hitting an iceberg just before midnight. Its wreck remains on the seabed at a depth of about 2,070 fathoms – some 12,400 feet. One man who risked descending to the wreck in a specialised deep-diving sub claimed that 'fewer people have been to this place than have been to outer space'.²⁰ I guess you can understand why the day following the disaster the Los Angeles Times carried the headline, 'Titanic Plunges Headlong to the Depths of the Sea'.²¹

And I should be disappointed if many here this morning fail to connect that headline reference to 'the Depths of the Sea' with the words of the prophet Micah, 'You will cast (you will 'hurl') all our sins into the depths of the sea'.²² And what a wonderfully graphic way that is to describe the blessing of forgiveness – of 'pardon'²³ – that we enjoy in Christ this morning. And it is all because it can be said of our Saviour – as it was once of Moses – that He stood between the Lord and us. As a little later we take the bread and wine may we each hear Him say afresh, 'I stood between the Lord and you'.

Footnote

¹ Deut. 5. 23-27.

² Exod. 19. 16-19; 20. 18.

³ Deut. 5. 22.

⁴ Exod. 20.18.

⁵ Heb. 12. 21.

⁶ Deut. 5. 27.

⁷ Deut. 34. 6.

⁸ Psa. 106. 23.

⁹ Heb. 3. 3.

¹⁰ Gal. 3. 19.

¹¹ Heb. 8. 6.

¹² Heb. 9. 15.

¹³ John 18. 4-8.

¹⁴ 1 Tim.2. 5-6.

¹⁵ From 'Come, Thou fount of every blessing', by John Robinson (27 September 1735 to 8 June 1790). Converted to Christ at age 17, Robinson became a Methodist minister. He later moved to the Baptist church and pastored in Cambridge, England. He wrote a number of hymns, as well as on the subject of theology. His later life was evidently not an easy one, judging from a well known story about his hymn "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." One day, he encountered a woman who was studying a hymnal, and she asked how he liked the hymn she was humming. In tears, he replied, "Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then."

http://www.cyberhymnal.org/bio/r/o/b/robinson_r.htm. But see

<http://www.stempublishing.com/hymns/biographies/robinson.html> and

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Robinson_\(Baptist\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Robinson_(Baptist)).

¹⁶ Isa. 53. 6. Literally translated, the phrase, 'all of us', a single word in Hebrew, begins and ends the verse, bracketing the whole statement: 'All of us, like sheep, went astray...and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of all of us'.

¹⁷ For example, 1 Kings 2. 25, 34, 46; cf. Judg. 15. 12; 1 Sam. 22. 18.

¹⁸ We know that, during our Lord's passion, *men* rushed on Him with hostile intent, for there came 'a great multitude with swords and staves', Matt. 26. 47, 55. So too did *the overlord of evil with his demonic forces*, for Jesus said, 'this is ...the power of darkness', Luke 22. 53; cf. Col. .2. 15. But for Jesus the extreme agony of His passion lay, not in the violent assaults He suffered from men and demons, but in that which He suffered from our sins.

¹⁹ Psa. 75. 8.

²⁰ http://www.davidconcannon.com/images/DGC_Fathoms_Titanic_article.pdf

²¹ <http://www.providentialhistoryfestival.com/265/the-titanic-100-years-later/>

²² Micah 7. 19.

²³ Micah 7. 18.