

'I stood between the Lord and you'.

My text comes from *the fifth* verse of *the fifth* chapter of *the fifth* book of the Bible, from 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 (when He *'spoke'*) His law to them.

Just now, I read Moses' words, 'You were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain'. Later in this same 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, that 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 you tell us all that the Lord our God says to you'.¹

I like that! 'Why should *we* die ... *you* go'. Although, in one sense, we can hardly blame them. The account in 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 5, 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 elsewhere, '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 am exceedingly afraid and tremble'.⁵

But, for all that, the good man *went*. Such was his faith, courage and love for God's people, that Moses 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, Moses' words, 'I stood between the Lord and you' would have made a good epitaph to have been inscribed on his 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 infamous Golden Calf incident, Psalm 106 records how God 'said He would destroy' the whole nation, 'had not Moses ... *stood* before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath'.⁸ The picture is that of some brave defender who has risked his own life by taking his stand in a gap made in a city wall to prevent the enemy from pouring through.

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

But we meet week by week 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 Galatians 3 as the 'mediator' through whom ('by whose hand', literally) God gave the Law¹⁰ (gave, that is, that which is referred to often in the epistle to the Hebrews as 'the *first* covenant'¹¹), *the Lord Jesus* is spoken of in Hebrews 9 as the 'mediator of a *better* covenant',¹² and as the 'mediator of the *new* covenant'.¹³

And today our Saviour is able to say to each of us, 'I stood between the Lord and you', with a depth of meaning which totally eclipses that with which Moses could have ever said it to the people of Israel.

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 (those who, having earlier fallen to the ground before Him, had risen to their feet again), 'Whom do you seek', and, when, for a second time, they replied 'Jesus of Nazareth'. The gospel writer assures us that, following their reply, He then answered, 'I told you that I

am He. If therefore you seek *me*, let *these* go their way'.¹⁴ We can hardly miss that way in which He, the Good Shepherd, was careful to position Himself between His sheep and the wolves. He could have truly said to His eleven disciples who were there with Him at the time, '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* today, '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'.¹⁵ And it is that mediator, 'the man Christ Jesus', who says to each one of us, 'I stood between the Lord and you'.

Over seven hundred years before the Saviour entered the world, the prophet Isaiah had written of Him, '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 We do well to note two details in that familiar text from Isaiah 53.

First, literally translated, the English phrase, 'all of us'¹⁷ both begins and ends the verse, forming as it were its bookends: '*All of us*, like sheep, went astray ... and the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of *all of us*'. And, second, as has often been pointed out, the Hebrew word translated 'laid on' in most English translations is used frequently in the Old Testament to describe those who meet with, or who fall on, others with a view to smiting and killing them.¹⁸

It is most 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.

We know that, during our Lord's passion, *men* rushed on Him with hostile intent; for there came, so we read, 'a great multitude with swords and staves'.¹⁹ So too did *Satan with his demonic forces*, on account of which Jesus said at the time 'to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders, who were come against him', 'this is your hour *and the power of darkness*'.²⁰ But, for our Lord, the *extreme* agony of His passion lay, *not* in the violent assaults He suffered from either *men* or *demons*, but in that which He suffered on account of our sins. Oh yes, as I partake of the bread and wine each Lord's day, it is not difficult for me to 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'.²¹

And I know that my sins helped fill that cup, and it would have been *mine* to drink had not my Saviour 'drained the last dark drop' for me.²² How gladly then I hear Him say to sword-waving Peter in the Garden, 'The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?'²³ And as I think of the now-empty cup of God's curse and wrath, I hear the Saviour 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, not only was the Word *made flesh*, but 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, my Saviour 'stood between the Lord' and me.

And the great cost of such great salvation reminds me of an incident which took place over 23 years ago. I wouldn't expect that many of you remember the name 'Tony Bullimore'.²⁴ Well, the late Tony Bullimore²⁵ was a British yachtsman who, in early January 1997, capsized about 1500 miles²⁶ off the south west coast of Australia in the icy waters of the Southern ocean. He had then been at sea for two months, competing in a round-the-world non-stop solo yacht race.²⁷

Mr Bullimore was sheltered in a tiny air pocket in the upturned hull of his yacht for the best part of five days. Canberra marine rescue officers had received a distress signal, which triggered a huge rescue mission. Australian defence forces were involved in a long-distance air and sea operation. Nobody had ever been rescued so deep in the Southern ocean before, but, in spite of appalling weather conditions, the rescue services continued their search, until Mr Bullimore was rescued on 9th January 1997 by Warship HMAS Adelaide.²⁸

Mr Bullimore later wrote a book, appropriately titled "*Saved*".²⁹ In it he tells how, a few days after his rescue, he arrived safely at Fremantle, by Perth. It was estimated that 10,000 people lined the dockside. No less than 150 journalists were there. After Mr Bullimore had given a brief speech, one journalist questioned the huge bill for the rescue, which had fallen upon Australian taxpayers. Apparently, Warship HMAS Adelaide alone had used 600,000 litres of fuel. Apart from which, there

had been the risks taken by the rescue forces as RAAF pilots had skimmed giant waves in winds that rarely dropped below 45 knots.

'There is something a little absurd about the tremendous cost of rescuing people who attempt difficult challenges', Tony Bullimore admitted. 'I have thought about it very deeply, and I don't know whether we have the right to lean on society, communities or countries to say, "Well, here we are, come and rescue us" ... Let me say one last thing. Thank you Australia for giving back my life. Thank you very much'.

No, there was absolutely no way that Tony Bullimore could begin to justify the enormous cost of his rescue. He could only be extremely grateful that it had been paid.

And, frankly, I am in a somewhat similar position. I had no right to look up to heaven and say to the Son of God, 'Well, here I am, come and rescue me. Come and stand between the Lord and me'.

But then, do you think that, biblically speaking, Lot (following his own reckless decision to live in Sodom) had the right to say to Abraham, 'come and rescue me' at the time when he (along with the other inhabitants of Sodom) had been dragged away captive by Chedorlaomer the King of Elam and his three confederates?³⁰

Or do you think that Jehoshaphat (following his foolish alliance with ungodly and wicked Ahab³¹) had the right to say to God, 'come and rescue me', when he was surrounded by the chariots of Syria?³²

Certainly not. And yet Abraham did speed at the head of his 318 trained men to save Lot,³³ and God did help Jehoshaphat, causing the captains of the Syrian chariots to recognise Jehoshaphat and to draw away from him.

And I say again, 'I had absolutely no right to look up to heaven and say to the Son of God, "Well, here I am, come and rescue me"'. But, He did. He did just that; He came and rescued me ... without even being asked! In the much-loved words of the hymn writer Samuel Stennett, 'He saw me plunged in deep distress, He flew to my relief'.³⁴ And, because the Lord Jesus did it, I too have been 'Saved'!

But at what a cost! ... at what a staggering cost!

Can I justify the expense? Can I justify the incarnation, the scourge, the thorns, the nails, the cup of God's wrath, the divine forsaking (accompanied by the darkness)? No, no ... a thousand times 'no'!

All I know is that I have every reason to be thankful (and to be so through endless ages) that for me *all* the expense *was* met, *all* the cost *was* paid ... and that because my glorious Saviour once 'stood between the Lord and me'.

Notes

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. 'Most likely the sepulchre remained hidden precisely to prevent the Israelites from taking Moses' body with them to Canaan, thus violating the divine command to disallow Moses entry there', Eugene Merrill, *Deuteronomy: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (The New American Commentary)*, page 453. Compare Joseph; Gen. 50. 23; Exod. 13. 19; Josh. 24. 32; Heb. 11. 22.

⁸ Psa. 106. 19-23.

⁹ Heb. 3. 3.

¹⁰ Gal. 3. 19. Philo speaks of Moses as acting like a *μεσίτης καὶ διαλλάκτης* (mediator and reconciler), 'On the life of Moses', part 2, Chapter 31 (159); accessed at ... <https://www.ellopos.com/blog/4371/philo-on-the-life-of-moses-second-part/19/>.

¹¹ Heb. 8. 7, 13; 9. 1, 18.

¹² Heb. 8. 6.

¹³ Heb. 9. 15 ('*καινης*' – fresh; cf. 2 Cor. 3. 6); cf. Heb. 12. 24 ('*νεας*' - recent). See R. C. Trench, 'Synonyms of the New Testament', section ix – especially the penultimate paragraph.

¹⁴ John 18. 4-8.

¹⁵ 1 Tim. 2. 5-6.

¹⁶ Isa. 53. 6.

¹⁷ A single word in Hebrew.

¹⁸ For example, 1 Kings 2. 25, 34, 46; cf. 'they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not *fall upon* me yourselves', Judg. 15. 12; 'the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and *fall upon* the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and he slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod', 1 Sam. 22. 18.

¹⁹ Matt. 26. 47, 55.

²⁰ Luke 22. 53; cf. Col. .2. 15.

²¹ Psa. 75. 8.

²² The expression 'drained the last dark drop' is taken from the second verse of Mrs. Anne Cousin's deeply moving hymn, 'O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head!'

²³ John 18. 11.

²⁴ See http://www.nytimes.com/1997/01/11/world/australia-rescues-sailors-but-is-wincing-at-the-costs.html?_r=0 and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Bullimore.

Bullimore said he felt he had been "born all over again" ... Although the Australians are not putting a price on the rescue, the cost is likely to be in the region of pounds 1m [probably too high estimate]. The Queen ... sent a message to ... the Australian rescue services, congratulating them on their "dramatic rescue", Ian Burrell ... accessed at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/thank-god-its-a-miracle-1282403.html>.

²⁵ Tony Bullimore died on 31 July 2018, aged 79.

²⁶ 2,500 kilometres.

²⁷ The Vendée Globe; the only non-stop solo round the world race without assistance.

²⁸ On 9th January 1997.

²⁹ 'Saved' was published by Little, Brown and Company in 1997.

³⁰ Gen. 14. 1-12.

³¹ 2 Chron. 19. 2.

³² 2 Chron. 18. 31.

³³ Gen. 14. 14-16.

³⁴ From the hymn, 'Majestic sweetness sits enthroned' (or 'To Christ, the Lord, let every tongue'), penned by Samuel Stennett in 1787.