

The Lonely Christian

by Shaun Willcock

“I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop” (Psa. 102:7)

Loneliness is experienced by many of the Lord’s people today.

In one sense, this has been the experience of true Christians throughout the ages, for they have always been a minority, a “little flock” (Lk. 12:32), and surrounded as they are by a world that hates them, this is not to be wondered at. There are *few* who find the strait gate and the narrow way (Matt. 7:13,14). Few are chosen (Matt. 22:14).

But in a very real sense, there are just so few true, genuine Christians today, and they are frequently scattered so far and wide, that many of them have almost no opportunities for fellowship with like-minded believers – or none at all. Despite the voices of false shepherds telling their mega-congregations that we are in the midst of a revival, and that multiplied numbers are “coming to the Lord”, the reality is the very opposite. *True* Christians are a tiny, tiny minority today. And as for true churches, these are extremely few in number, and for the most part their membership consists of only a handful of believers. This means that the fellowship which true Christians may have in their own local churches is often limited to two, three, or a few more fellow-believers. And there are many others who have no local church whatsoever, and are almost completely isolated.

And this isolation is a fertile breeding ground for loneliness. It is always difficult to stand against the majority. It is made vastly more so when one has to stand alone. This is why the Lord Jesus sent out His disciples two by two (Mk. 6:7), and it is why the Holy Spirit separated Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto He had called them (Acts 13:2); for the Bible says, “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up” (Eccl. 4:9,10). Indeed it is why, at the very beginning of the world, “the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18).

Nevertheless there are times when, for His own wise purposes, the Lord does not provide many companions to travel this pilgrim journey together – and sometimes, not even one. Peter had a wife, but Paul had none. Daniel had his three friends, but Jeremiah, Joseph, Samson and many others had none.

One of the purposes of the local church is to provide fellowship and friendship to believers. Of the first church ever established, the church in Jerusalem, it is written, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine *and fellowship*, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42); and “And all that believed were *together*” (v.44). Such fellowship is a wonderful blessing. David recalled with joy how he used to go with the multitude to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise (Psa. 42:4); and there is that lovely passage which says, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:24,25).

And when we look at Church history, we see wonderful periods, times of heaven-sent revival, when local churches consisted of large numbers of believers, all coming together to worship the Lord, fellowshiping together, encouraging one another. Pentecost was such a time (cf. Acts 1:12-15 with Acts 2:41,42). Of Jacob it is written that “he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous” (Deut. 26:5); and in times of revival, churches have gone from consisting of a few sojourners, a few strangers and pilgrims, to numbering hundreds or even thousands of converted souls. What times those must have been! For the saints who lived

through them, it must have felt as if heaven had come down to earth.

But our time is not like those times. In our time in history a true local church, seeking to live according to the Scriptures, may often consist of no more than “two or three” (Matt. 18:20). And sometimes a child of God may not even have the joy of belonging to a church of two or three. He may be entirely alone. Such is the dreadful spiritual state of these times. There has been such a departure from the truth that genuine Christians are very few in number, and true churches are even fewer.

So what should the child of God do, who finds himself in such a situation? What should he do, when he finds himself alone, craving the fellowship of other believers but only having a handful, or none at all, with whom to travel the pilgrim’s pathway?

The first thing he must do is turn to God’s Word. Does it have anything to say about this, for the encouragement of the lonely Christian? Oh, very much indeed!

The Bible shows us that there were times in history which were *even worse* than our day; and there were other times in history when it was *at least as bad* as our day. And by studying the lives of those who lived in such times, we can find so much for our own encouragement and strengthening.

One of the times when it was even worse than today, was the time of Noah. But it is important that the reader clearly understands what I mean by this. We have every reason to believe that we are living in the days just prior to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth. And it is true that the Lord Jesus said, “But as the days of Noe [Noah] were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matt. 24:37). Thus, as we look around us at the world today, we should expect to find it as bad as the days of Noah were – and indeed this is precisely what we find. As regards the wickedness that abounded in Noah’s day, the times just prior to the second coming of the Lord will be as bad as it was then.

But in looking at all the comparisons between Noah’s day and ours, there is one that is often overlooked entirely: that just as there were few who were saved in Noah’s day, so there shall be few who are saved in our day as well. For as Jesus said: “Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Lk. 18:8).

But even so, despite the fact that there will be few who are truly saved in our day, just as there were few in Noah’s day, there is one difference: Noah’s day, at least in this matter of the small number of those who were saved, was *even worse* than our day! For, as the Scripture tells us plainly: “the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (1 Pet. 3:20). *Eight souls!* Only eight souls were taken aboard the ark. The entire world was destroyed by water, and only eight souls were saved. When the entire world shall be destroyed by fire one day, we have every reason to believe there will be more than just eight souls saved then. A tiny minority, certainly; a few from this place and a few from that; but even so, certainly more than eight. For as every true Christian knows, there are far more than eight believers on the earth now. Even though the numbers are small, they are not *that* small!

And there is something else: those eight souls were saved from perishing in the flood, but were all eight of them *converted* souls, saved everlastingly by God’s grace, through faith in the coming Messiah? We do not know, for we are not told. We are told that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord”, that “Noah was a just man and perfect [margin: upright] in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:8,9), but we know nothing of the spiritual state of Noah’s wife, nor of his daughters-in-law; and as for his three sons, Shem loved and followed the Lord, and possibly Japheth also (Gen. 9:23,26,27), but Ham was a wicked man (Gen. 9:22-25). So then, of the seven other persons in the ark with Noah, he was not in true spiritual fellowship with all of them. Certainly not with Ham, and possibly not with some of the others.

So, dear Christian, when you feel alone; when you are far from other believers; when you look around your local church and see only a handful of brethren, or when you sit at home quietly reading

the Bible, praying and worshipping the Lord, because there is no local church you are able to attend with a clear conscience in your vicinity; *remember Noah*. It was not that there were only eight people in Noah's congregation, but that he could console himself that there were some others in the neighbouring town, and still more in other places – no, there were only eight people saved *in the whole world!*

Try to imagine, for a moment, the loneliness Noah felt. Put yourself in his shoes. See him building that ark, year after year, with only his immediate family supporting him. And then – when you feel isolated, all alone, and very lonely: *remember Noah*. It was worse for him than for you. It was far more difficult for him than for you. But he put his faith in the Lord. “*By faith* Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house” (Heb. 11:7). And this is what you must do as well: by faith, go on! If the path the Lord has mapped out for you is a lonely one, the God of Noah is *your* God!

And another time in history when it was worse than it is today, as far as the scarcity of fellow-believers was concerned, was the time of Abraham and Lot.

Consider Lot. Yes, Lot greatly erred. He sinned. The parting from Abram was not sinful, it was necessary, because of the size of their flocks (Gen. 13:1-11); but Lot chose the best land, instead of letting his uncle Abraham (still called Abram at this point) take it; this was greedy of him (Gen. 13:8-11). And then he “pitched his tent toward Sodom” (Gen. 13:12), which he should not have done, for soon he was living inside it. These were sins on Lot's part. But even so, Lot was a child of God. We know this, because the Bible says so. God “delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)” (2 Pet. 2:7,8). Yes, Lot sinned, as we all do; but he was a man who loved the Lord.

Now think of his time. Where were the true believers? In Lot's own house? No; not one. Not his wife; not his daughters; not his sons-in-law. Abraham his uncle, and Sarah his aunt – they were true believers, they loved the Lord; but they did not live in Sodom. They lived far away. He would have been unable to meet with them on a weekly basis, to worship the true God. No, Lot was alone. He was far removed from the few others who were God's elect on earth at that time. Lot knew what true loneliness was like.

And Abraham would have known what true loneliness was like, as well. It was not quite as lonely for him as it was for Lot, for he at least had Sarah his wife, a holy woman who trusted in God (Heb. 11:11; 1 Pet. 3:5,6), and in his later life he had Isaac; and also, since the Lord said of him, “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the ways of the Lord, to do justice and judgment” (Gen. 18:19), we can be sure that at least some of his servants were converted as well; and in fact we are specifically told of one of them (Gen. 24). But even although Abraham would not have been quite as lonely as Lot, it is not as though there were many others, outside of his own household, with whom he could have fellowship. He and his household were surrounded by the heathen, and they passed through their midst as a tiny believing minority. “*By faith* he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Heb. 11:9).

Yes, the time of Abraham and Lot was a time in history when, as far as fellowship with like-minded believers was concerned, the situation was worse than it is today.

Then there were still other times when, although not worse than today, the situation was at least as bad. One such time was the time of Elijah the prophet.

The wicked Queen Jezebel was hunting for his life, so Elijah “went for his life” – he fled for his life, in other words (1 Kings 19:3). He fled deep into the wilderness, and was so despondent that he requested God that he might die (v.4). Then he travelled on to Mount Horeb. “And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the

children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; *and I, even I only, am left*; and they seek my life, to take it away” (vv.9,10). A little while later, he repeated the same words (v.14). Elijah, after faithfully serving the Lord, came to the conclusion that there were simply no godly people left in the land. He was convinced that he was the only one left who worshipped the Lord – that the entire nation had gone after Baal. As far as he was concerned, he was all alone. He was depressed, utterly cast down in spirits, and wished to die.

But he was wrong! He was *not* alone – the Lord still had his people on the earth! And the Lord said to him: “Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him” (v.18). Elijah might have thought he was all alone in serving the Lord; but the Lord could see what Elijah could not. As dark as the days were, there were seven thousand in the land who still worshipped the God of Israel!

This is how Paul relates it: “Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; *and I am left alone*, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. *Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace*” (Rom. 11:2-5). Paul, in the last verse quoted here, was saying that just as there was a remnant of elect Israelites in Elijah’s day although he did not know who or where they were, so there was a remnant of elect Jews in the first century AD also, Jewish Christians, chosen unto eternal life in Christ. But the application goes further: what Paul wrote here is equally true of our day, regarding an elect remnant of people throughout the earth, true Christians, few in number but nevertheless known to God, who remain faithful to Him, refusing to bow to the modern-day Baals all around them!

Dear Christian: you may feel like Elijah, in this day and age. You may feel all alone. You may be so lonely that, like Elijah, you could wish you were dead, for at least then you would be in the presence of the Lord in heaven. But know this: God has reserved to Himself “seven thousand”, who have not bowed to the image of Baal! At this present time, just as in Elijah’s day, and indeed just as in every age, there is a remnant according to the election of grace! You may not know who or where they are; they may be far distant from you; but they are out there – often just as lonely as you, but seeking to be faithful to their Lord in the midst of this perverse and crooked generation. As terrible as the times are, as wicked, as spiritually desolate – the Lord Jesus is still building His Church upon the earth! (Matt. 16:18). He still has His remnant. And He always will.

Of course, knowing that there is a remnant out there – somewhere – is not directly or immediately of help to you, child of God, if you are isolated and alone, far from the fellowship of other Christians. But a moment’s reflection will be very profitable to you. In the first place, this day and age, although as bad as it was in the days of Noah with regards to the sinfulness of men, is not as bad as his day with regards to the small number of souls who belong to Christ; and if Noah could be faithful, serving the Lord under such circumstances, then so can you – for the God of Noah is your God, no less than his! And in the second place, there were other times in history which were at least as bad as this one, with regards to the small number of the elect in any given place; times when the Lord’s people, even his ministers, felt so completely alone that they could hardly endure it; and yet the Lord sustained them through those times. And the Lord, who sustained them, will also sustain you! For He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). The God of Noah, the God of Abraham and Lot, the God of Elijah – He is the God of every true Christian!

The first thing to do, then, as we have seen, is to study the Scriptures. And when this is done, one finds so much for the encouragement of the believer in his loneliness.

And the second thing to do is to pray, very specifically. If you are in a small church, consisting of just a few members, pray specifically and earnestly for the growth of the church; for the salvation of

others who would then be added to its numbers; and of course, be active in sowing the seed of the Gospel. And if you are in no local church, because there is none you can join in your locality, then pray for companions to share the pilgrim's journey with you. Pray that the Lord would bring other believers across your path. Pray, even, that a local church could be established, in time, if the Lord wills.

But it may be that the Lord's answer to these prayers will be a negative one. You may not live in a place where the Lord has "much people" (Acts 18:10). It may be your lot, in God's providence, to be where there are very few, or no other, believers. If this is the case with you, then pray for grace to endure this trial, and to say from the heart, "The Lord gives me what is good for me, and withholds from me what I do not need." The Lord knows what is best. He has placed you where you are, for this precise time in history. He always does right. There is a reason for what He has done. Humbly submit to His will for you.

Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5), yet not one person outside of his immediate family was on that ark with him! He had preached faithfully, but none had ears to hear. Yet was Noah where the Lord wanted him to be? Certainly he was! It was the will of God for Noah to preach to that generation, even though they did not hear. And it may be the Lord's will for you to be a lone voice, witnessing for Christ to those around you, yet never having the joy of seeing any soul converted. Not all are called to serve the Lord in times of great revival. Not all live to see the fruits of their seed-sowing. Throughout history there have been many believers who have toiled for their Lord and yet seen no fruit for their labours. Did they fail? No! Ezekiel was told by the Lord, even before he began to prophesy, that the people would not listen to him (Ezek. 3:1-11). He told him, "And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear" (v.11).

And the third thing to do, when burdened with loneliness, is to *look to Christ*. "The good man is perished out of the earth.... *Therefore* I will look unto the Lord" (Mic. 7:2,7). Yes, be encouraged by the examples of men who led lonely lives, in Scripture; yes, pray earnestly for the Lord, if it be His will, to provide you with companionship for this pilgrim journey; but above all, *look to Christ!* For as wonderful as it would be to have many fellow-believers with you, you have One with you who *never* leaves you, *never* forsakes you (Heb. 13:5), is with you *always* (Matt. 28:20), and is the "*friend that sticketh closer than a brother*" (Prov. 18:24): the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!

It was *the Lord* who upheld Noah, Abraham, Lot and Elijah; it was *the Lord* who gave them the strength to pass through this world as strangers and pilgrims, alone or almost alone, with the eye of faith fixed on Him who is invisible (Heb. 11:27), who was utterly real to them, and whose presence went with them at all times. Yes, it would be wonderful to be surrounded with a large company of the Lord's saints; to go with a multitude to the house of God (Psa. 42:4). Who among the Lord's people would not love that? But if, in the purposes of God, this is not one of the blessings you enjoy in this life, remember this: *the Lord Jesus Christ is always with you.*

Paul knew this truth, and so he could write from his prison cell, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me.... Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me" (2 Tim. 3:16,17). You may be all alone, having no Christian companions with whom to share the trials of this pilgrim journey; but it was worse for Paul: he *had* them at one time, but then, out of fear for their lives, they forsook him! Better by far not to have had companions, than to experience the acute pain of watching your companions depart. Yet there is a "*notwithstanding*" there! "Notwithstanding", writes Paul, "the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me." And so the Lord will do for all His people, in their loneliness: *notwithstanding* the lack of true Christian companionship, *the Lord* will stand with you, and strengthen you! He never leaves the believer.

Christ Jesus was often alone, and often lonely: in the prophetic words of Psa. 88:18 He says to His Father in prayer, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness"; and in the words of Psa. 69:8 He says, "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my

mother's children." He knows what it is like to be forsaken of His friends (Matt. 26:56). He, then, who passed through these deep waters before us, can comfort and uphold the poor, lonely believer as he passes through this world, and whose own friends the Lord may have put far from him. For just as Jesus was able to say, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (Jn. 16:32); so every true child of God can say the same thing: "Even when I am all alone, as far as frail human companionship is concerned; *yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me!*"

The *Father* is always with the believer; and so is the *Son*: for Jesus said to His people, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20); "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5); and, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and *we* [the Father and the Son] will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (Jn. 14:23).

The *Father* and the *Son* are always with the believer; and so is the *Holy Spirit*: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth" (Jn. 14:16,17).

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit: all three divine Persons of the Godhead are with the believer! Always, in all circumstances, at all times!

Therefore, no matter how lonely the Christian feels in this world, he is never truly alone. Even if he loses every earthly friend, his heavenly Friend is always with him. Abraham is called the Friend of God (Jas. 2:23), and God spoke with Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Exod. 33:11); but that relationship is one which every single believer enjoys! For Jesus said to *all* His people, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Jn. 15:14).

If, then, dear Christian, you feel as if you are "a sparrow alone upon the housetop" (Psa. 102:7), remember this: "the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God" (Psa. 84:3). You are *not* alone, for you dwell in the spiritual house of the Lord, the Church! And Christ is the Head of the Church, and its King. He will never leave you, nor forsake you. "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" (Song. 2:4). And you may therefore truly say, with a song in your heart: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Psa. 23:6).

Yes: even if walking alone, or almost alone, through this fallen world, you dwell in the Lord's house, the Church, and God's goodness and mercy follow you at all times. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way" (Psa. 37:23). Since this is so, even if the steps along the pilgrim pathway are ones which the Lord has appointed for you to take all alone through the wilderness of this world, yet if you watch, with the eye of faith, each step will reveal the goodness and mercy of the Lord to you.

Lonely Christian, may you be enabled to say, from the heart: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psa. 73:25). In this world, now, a few years at most of loneliness; but what a drop in the ocean compared with an endless eternity to be enjoyed with the saints of the Lord, and above all with the Lord Himself, in the glories of heaven! Our Saviour has said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (Jn. 14:2,3). No loneliness there! No lonely believers, wending their weary way through the wilderness with few, or no, companions. Only joy, and fellowship, and light and love for evermore! "*With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the King's palace*" (Psa. 45:15).

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