

The Green Glens of Antrim

Anyone who travels north on the coast road from the town of Larne, in County Antrim, will view some of the most spectacular scenery found on the island of Ireland. The sight of rugged cliffs, sandy beaches and the deep valleys, also known as glens, has created in the hearts of many visitors a desire to return to this beautiful area. This desire to return must be even stronger in the heart of one of the local people who had to leave home and try to settle down in another country.

The lyrics of that marvellous old song, 'The Green Glens of Antrim,' speak into this situation, as they express the thoughts of a person who once lived in the Glens but, for some reason that is not mentioned in the song, at some stage decided to emigrate. The words of the song reveal the fact that he is now very far from the place he loves so much and, what's more, he feels the separation.

Reflection

And now this exile sits quietly and reflects on bygone days, and memories come flooding back. How he would love to once more walk through each of the nine Glens. Can't you just picture him feeling the call of his beloved Glens, and in his mind wandering slowly through each one, taking time to absorb their various attributes? As he muses, his mind takes him back to *Glenarm*, to the Forest Park, where he can enjoy the beauty of one of the oldest estates in Northern Ireland and view the Castle which, since the 17th Century, has been the home of the McDonnells, the Earls of Antrim.

He can picture himself in *Glencloy*, the Glen of the hedges, where Slemish Mountain stands as a reminder of the time Saint Patrick spent tending sheep during the days of his slavery in Ireland. Patrick eventually escaped from his captors and returned to his own country. Each year, on Saint Patrick's Day (17 March), pilgrims climb Slemish to commemorate the great work Patrick did when he later returned to Ireland to proclaim the Gospel message.

In *Glenariff*, known as the Queen of the Glens, he spends time admiring the beauty of the waterfalls.

His memories take him back to the summit of Lurigedan Mountain, which borders the north side of Glenariff and separates it from *Glenballyeamon*, to marvel at the spectacular views of Scotland and the Scottish Islands.

In *Glenaan*, the glen of rush lights, he visits the grave of the famous Gaelic warrior poet, Oisín, son of Fionn MacCumhaill.

He then moves on to *Glencorp*, the Glen of the Slaughtered, so named because of its connection to 'The Battle of the Boglands,' fought in 1559, during which the McDonnells defeated the MacQuillans.

He continues his journey by taking a leisurely stroll along the riverside in *Glendun*, with its viaduct style bridge spanning the river Dun and the Glen road.

Then he stops on the high road in *Glenshesk*, to view Rathlin Island one more time, before visiting the Castle in Drumenia which bears the name of the Gobán Saor, that legendary figure in Irish folklore.

His thoughts finally take him to lovely *Glentaisie*, which lies in the shadow of Knocklayde Mountain.

His memories of the Glens are very powerful, and this is probably not the first time he has, in his mind, pictured himself wandering through these valleys that mean so much to him. So it is not at all surprising that he would say, *"The Green Glens of Antrim are calling to me."*

Separation

It is very evident from the words of the song that he is thinking of home. However, many miles separate him from where he longs to be, and he must have spent many a long day wishing things were different, and that this separation had never happened.

It is one thing to be separated from home, or from the people you love, but there is a separation that is far more serious than this and, unfortunately, we are all affected by it. According to the Scriptures, we are separated from God.

- What is the cause of this separation?

It is caused by our sin! The Lord makes it clear in His Word that *'It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore'*.¹

- Who is affected by this separation?

Everyone is affected! The Bible highlights the fact that we are all sinners – *'As the Scriptures say, "No one is righteous—not even one." For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard'*.³

- What is the result of this separation?

In the Scriptures we are told that, *'The wages [penalty] of sin is death'*.⁴ This includes spiritual death, physical death and, for all who die in their sins, eternal death. This means separation from God for all eternity, with no more opportunity to repent. The final separation will be pronounced on Judgement Day: *"Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons.'*"⁵

Reconciliation

Can anything be done about this separation?

Yes! In one of his Epistles, Saint Paul writes, *'We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back [be reconciled] to God!"'*⁶ In this context reconciliation is the act whereby sin, which is the cause of the hostility between a holy God and sinful man, is dealt with and taken out of the way. The barrier that caused the separation is removed.

But how can this happen?

Some people may desire to be reconciled to God, but don't know how. Consequently, they think it can be accomplished by:

- Their membership of a particular church.

But according to the Scriptures there is only one way of reconciliation. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."*⁷

- The mediation of the Saints.

However, the Bible makes it clear that the Saints cannot mediate for us because there is only one mediator in Heaven – *'For, There is one God and one Mediator who*

can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus.⁸ There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved'.⁹

➤ Their good works.

But God tells us in His Word that, 'He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.'¹⁰ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it'.¹¹

➤ Merits or indulgences earned as a result of their participation in Pilgrimages and various religious activities.

However, we are told in the New Testament that, 'The grace [unmerited favour] of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people'.¹² For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord'.¹³ This means that salvation cannot be earned or merited.

Many people think reconciliation can be achieved through various means, but the Scriptures make it clear that there is only one way - 'For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son'.¹⁴

Reconciliation is an act of God – 'And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him'.¹⁵ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation'.¹⁶

Salvation

We, as sinners, can be reconciled to a holy God because the guilt of our sins was put to Christ's account. He became our substitute and sin bearer, and paid the penalty for our sins as He suffered and died upon the cross. The prophet Isaiah, speaking about Jesus, says, 'But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all'.¹⁷

When our penalty was paid by Christ, a pardon was granted. This pardon is put to the account of all who will repent of their sins and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. 'He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins'.¹⁸ But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin'.¹⁹ The sins that had separated us from God are forgiven. Our guilt is taken away, so now we can be reconciled to God.

Hesitation

The words of the song, 'The Green Glens of Antrim,' imply that the exile felt as if his memories of Antrim were drawing or calling him to return to his beloved valleys, and the desire of his heart was to do this. But how did he respond? Did he settle for an occasional trip down memory lane, or did he actually answer the call and return? Perhaps he felt he was too busy, and his time was taken up with his family, friends and career. It is also quite possible that he may have been waiting for a more convenient time. But I wonder if he left it until it was too late?

Decision

Friend, what would you have done? If you were in his position, how would you have responded to the call? Now let me ask you a very important question! How would you respond if God called you? What if the Lord is calling you today to come to Him, to repent of your sins and to put your faith in Him? ‘Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”²⁰ The time promised by God has come at last!” he announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!”²¹

Could it be that the Lord is calling you right now? ‘Come now, let’s settle this,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool’.²²

How will you respond? There are some very challenging statements recorded in the Scriptures concerning God’s call. The Lord said, “I called you so often, but you wouldn’t come. I reached out to you, but you paid no attention.”²³ He also asked, “Why was no one there when I came? Why didn’t anyone answer when I called?”²⁴

Perhaps you feel you should wait until a more convenient time? However, you have no guarantee that you will ever have another opportunity to hear or respond to God’s call.

Many people are aware of the fact that they need to get right with God, and would say they know what they should do. They say it often crosses their mind. They spend time thinking about it and considering it, but leave it at that.

Friend, remember how the exile from the Glens was separated from where he longed to be, and how he must have spent many a long day wishing things were different? Perhaps you feel the same way, and are wishing that your separation from God would end? The good news is that God has provided a way of reconciliation for you through the death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Will you answer God’s call, repent of your sins, put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive the gift of eternal life and the assurance of a home in Heaven?

Don’t hesitate!

Don’t wait any longer!

‘For God says, “At just the right time, I heard you.
On the day of salvation, I helped you
Indeed, the “right time” is now.
Today is the day of salvation.”²⁵

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Scripture References

1: Isaiah Ch.59 v.2
3: Romans Ch.3 v.23
5: Matthew Ch.25 v.41
7: John Ch.14 v.6
9: Acts Ch.4 v.12

2: Romans Ch.3 v.10
4: Romans Ch.6 v.23
6: 2 Corinthians Ch.5 v.20
8: 1 Timothy Ch.2 v.5
10: Titus Ch.3 v.5

11: Ephesians Ch.2 vs. 8, 9
13: Romans Ch.6 v.23
15: 2 Corinthians Ch.5 v.18
17: Isaiah Ch.53 vs.5, 6
19: 1 John Ch.1 v.7
21: Mark Ch.1 v.15
23: Proverbs Ch.1 v.24
25: 2 Corinthians Ch.6 v.2

12: Titus Ch.2 v.11
14: Romans Ch.5 v.10
16: 2 Corinthians Ch.5 v.19
18: Ephesians Ch.1 v.7
20: Matthew Ch.11 v.28
22: Isaiah Ch.1 v.18
24: Isaiah Ch.50 v.2

