

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

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SAFE KEEPING

Bill W Lovie

1 Samuel 22: 23; 25: 14-16

John 17: 11-20

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I would seek help, beloved, to say a little about safe keeping. David says here in the verse that we began with, “for with me thou art in safe keeping”. Think of the Lord Jesus in His care and interest for each one of His own! The Lord has died for us; He lives for us; with Him we are in safe keeping. I suppose the context of the scripture is in relation to the time of the reproach and the rejection of David, and publicly that is the situation that we are in at the present time. The Lord Jesus is rejected here. The crucifixion was a public matter, the rejection of the Saviour publicly, but that, dear friend, if you have come to know Him, the way that He has gone, means that He is available as a Saviour to you. I trust that everyone has put their faith and trust in Him and come under the shelter of His precious blood. That is eternal salvation and security and safety. It is secured in that way for the believer who knows the Lord Jesus as Saviour. How vital it is that each one knows Him in that way! But the Lord not only wants to be your eternal Saviour, but He wants to be your present Saviour. Present salvation is a real matter, a necessary matter. The apostle writes in Romans, “Should we continue in sin that grace may abound? Far be the thought”, Rom 6: 1, 2. God has in mind, the Lord Jesus has in mind, that we should grow in our appreciation and knowledge of that and not only know the assurance of eternal salvation but be in the enjoyment of *present* salvation.

So, the Lord Jesus is in rejection, the testimony is in reproach, but with Him we are in safe keeping: “Abide with me”. Think of that! The Lord Jesus should have the first place in our hearts, the first place in our lives, and so everything else has to come after that. We are here in a scene of difficulty; we are here in days of difficulty; and we need to fulfil responsibility; but we need to stay near to the Lord Jesus. We have a hymn that speaks of keeping near to the side of the Saviour:

O Lamb of God, still keep us
Close to Thy pierced side;
'Tis only there is safety
And peace we can abide (Hymn 256).

Think of the security of staying near to the Saviour and His pierced side,

as the hymn says. That would help us in our movements and in our walk and in our responsible pathway. The Lord Jesus too, as having gone on high, lives to intercede for us. He is a wonderful, great High Priest, “living to intercede”, Heb 7: 25. In the days of the tabernacle system of old, the dwellings of the Israelites were round about the tabernacle and when the high priest went in, he had bells and pomegranates on the hem of his garments; as he moved about in service, if you were near enough to the tabernacle, you would be able to hear these bells, Exod 28: 33. What it speaks to us of is a living Man in glory in the presence of God, living and interceding, “living to intercede”. Think of that, the Lord Jesus “living to intercede”! What grace as we stay near to Him! His priestly grace and service is safety for us, safety for the believer, to stay near to the Lord Jesus in that way. He provides, intercedes, brings in what is required.

The high priest also had stones in his breastplate, v 17. It speaks of the saints in his heart; the Lord Jesus has each one of His own in His heart. And there were also stones on the shoulder pieces, which speaks of the strength and power and stability that there is in the Lord Jesus as High Priest if you stay near to Him, v 12. We prove that, prove His priestly grace, prove His priestly support. Whatever may come up in our lives, the Lord Jesus is available, and He has been here, here as Man, “tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart”, Heb 4: 15. He is sympathetic. The One who is our High Priest is sympathetic to us. He is not sympathetic exactly with us if we go out in self-will and sin, but He is available. He is available too as an Advocate if we do that, He has already represented us before the Father in view of recovery. Stay near to Him! “With me thou art in safe keeping”.

When we come to know the Lord Jesus as Saviour, we are *His*. That is unchangeable no matter what happens. In Romans it tells us that nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”, chap 8: 39. Nothing can separate us from that. There is a whole list of things, “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”. It is a fixed matter. How all-embracing this safekeeping is. It has to do with our whole lives; it has to do with our eternal salvation too. “With me thou art in safe keeping”.

And another great comforting matter is “both if we should live

then, and if we should die, we are the Lord's", Rom 14: 8. That is a great comfort, is it not? Our brother in this locality has been taken, our sister in Edinburgh, how many persons we have known and loved that have gone to be with Christ, the Lord Himself having come in. The Lord Himself is going to come and raise the dead that believe in Him. But it is also the Lord Himself that has put the believer to sleep. It is a wonderful comfort, is it not? The Lord Himself has done that, He has not sent anyone else to do it. It is not simply a matter of someone dying, maybe alone, outwardly alone. The Lord has been there and put the believer to sleep. It is His own action in love for His own, so that "both if we should live then, and if we should die, we are the Lord's". The dead in Christ are in wonderful safe keeping; nothing can challenge that position. The side of responsible life and all these things is over, but for the believer in the Lord Jesus, "asleep through Jesus" (1 Thess 4: 14), what safe keeping they are in! What a comfort that is to the soul! What a scope we find in this verse, "for with me thou art in safe keeping". Let us stay near to the Lord Jesus, and know His love!

So, we read in chapter 25 about David's men. It is interesting that David speaks to them and gives them direction. These men that we were speaking about in the reading came out in the same character as David, dwelling with David, abiding with David. They came out in the same character as David; so these persons here were "a wall" to Nabal's servants. They said, "And the men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything, as long as we companied with them, when we were in the fields. They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the while we were with them feeding the sheep". The assembly is a sphere of salvation. I suppose these men were like persons enjoying fellowship, like the brethren, like the local meeting. Well, "as long as we companied with them". What company do we keep? There is a place of safety. It is not a matter of eternal salvation, but it is present salvation, and the assembly is the sphere where that is enjoyed. I remember hearing about a young sister a few years ago that she had said that when she was among the brethren she felt safe. Do you feel safe? Do you feel safe this afternoon amongst the brethren? What a place of safety it should be amongst the brethren! You say, 'Well, we do not live in meetings'. No, and that is right, but the meetings are important. Local meetings are important. We are glad of bigger occasions when we are able to be together and see brethren that perhaps we do not see so often or very often at all, and we enjoy things together. That is what fellowship is; it is enjoyment of our common

portion. It is wonderful, is it not? And it is to be a place of safety. The local meetings are to be a place of safety. Perhaps you have come from a meeting where there are only a few. Still, it is a place of safety because the Lord's word comes in. You get the Lord's mind as to things, go over the Scriptures, be occupied with Jesus, occupied with divine things. How wonderful that is! You might say, 'Well, I do not understand too much of some of these chapters', but it is a place of safety; it settles your spirit. You come in amongst the brethren, and sing a hymn. The brethren are set together in unity in that way, singing together. It is a place of safety; it is a place of salvation; it is where the truth is enjoyed. You say, 'I can enjoy things by myself'. Absolutely! Of course, we do, but when we come together it is like a remark by Mr Stoney. He speaks about how a bee finds some nectar and brings it back to the hive, vol 1 p217. It is brought into circulation, together. You might say all these bees have been out bringing back impressions of Christ, and they are enjoyed there. He says that the wasp on the other hand eats the nectar itself. Well, the assembly is a wonderful sphere of salvation.

So, these persons, these men of Nabal's, or Abigail's as they become, say, "They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the while we were with them feeding the sheep". It is an area of protection. These things are real; Christianity is real; the working out of it is real. Where Christ is loved is a place of safety, and it is a place where we can be built up, built up in our souls, so when we go out in circumstances that are adverse, we are strengthened through the priestly grace of Christ. We have been built up; formation is taking place in the hearts and souls of believers. It is a practical matter, present salvation is a wonderful practical matter. It means, speaking simply, that we are in the enjoyment of our Christianity.

John 17 is a wonderful chapter. The depth in it is tremendous. The Lord Jesus is about to go to the cross, but He is amongst His own. He has brought in certain teaching in previous chapters, but chapter 17 is a prayer. He is speaking to the Father. Think of that! It is the last prayer He leaves His own with in this inside position here. He is speaking to the Father and He is speaking to the Father about His own. He says, "And I am no longer in the world, and these are in the world, and I come to thee". When He says, "these are in the world", He is speaking about the apostles, the disciples, but where we finished reading, He says, "And I do not demand for these only, but also for

those who believe on me through their word”: so it comes down to us. It is coming down to you and me, coming down to us, “those who believe on me through their word”. “And I am no longer in the world”. The Lord says, “I come to thee”. He is going to the Father: “I come to thee”. Think of what was before Him, the cross, as we read in these following chapters. John was there. John writes as a witness that was there to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus on the cross, but here the Lord says, “I come to thee”. Think of what was in His heart! He made the Father known. “When I was with them I kept them in thy name” - that is the Father's name - “those thou hast given me I have guarded”. Think of the care the Lord Jesus expended on His own! Just in the next chapter they came to take Him. “When therefore he said to them, I am he, they went away backward and fell to the ground. He demanded of them therefore again, Whom seek ye?”, chap 18: 6, 7. He gave Himself up to them. They could not take Him. I think these verses in chapter 18 give us an unfolding of the deity and power and glory that was there in Christ. It was generally hidden in His pathway here. Those that loved Him could take account of things, but publicly it was not recognised, but here in the glory and majesty of who He is, “they went away backward and fell to the ground”.

Well, He is going to the Father: “I come to thee”. The Father was looking forward to that. He is looking forward to the Lord Jesus going back into the glory as man: “I come to thee”. He is going to the Person, going to the Person of the Father. How wonderful! What complacency there is in that verse. Think of what lay before Him, but, “I come to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one as we. When I was with them I kept them in thy name”. The Lord kept them in the Father's name. When He was speaking with them, He was unfolding the revelation of the Father to them. Philip says, “Lord, shew us the Father”, chap 14: 8. The Lord had said things that were wonderfully attractive so you can understand why Philip would say such a thing. The Lord says, “Am I so long a time with you, and thou hast not known me, Philip?” v 9. The Father was there. The Father was there in Christ. He could be taken account of by those that loved Him and He “kept them in thy name”. It is what the Lord was doing. He was making the Father known. All through John's gospel He is making the Father known. He kept them in that name, that wonderful name of relationship, the name of love. John's gospel does not exactly give us the side of children; that is more, I suppose, the synoptic gospels. John speaks about the Father's care, and that is true

as well. The Father cares for His own. We are children here in this world and we need care; children need care. But in John's gospel, I think, it is more elevated, the Father is seen as the wonderful name of relationship, and we are brought into the dignity of sonship which awaits the resurrection of the Lord Jesus in John 20: "I ascend to my Father and your Father", v 17. How wonderful that the Lord when He was here kept them in the Father's name.

But now He says, "And these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in them. I have given them thy word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, as I am not of the world". The Lord Jesus was always morally separate from the world. He was in the world, and believers are in the world, and the Lord here is considering for us who are in the world. "I do not demand that thou shouldest take them out of the world". We are not converted to go immediately to glory. There was no delay with the thief on the cross: "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23: 43), and for any believer who comes to know the Lord Jesus who is at the point of death, there is no delay, but we are left here in view of formation. We are left here for two things, as we are often reminded, the testimony and the service of God. We are left here in view of formation, which I think the Lord is speaking about here. "I do not demand that thou shouldest take them out of the world". The Lord could do that; the Father could do that. It is not His mind but that there should be a testimony in the scene of Christ's rejection, a testimony in those that love Him. He says, "but that thou shouldest keep them out of evil. They are not of the world, as I am not of the world."

Then the Lord says, "Sanctify them by the truth". Sanctification involves being set apart, and the truth would have that effect on us. What is the truth that the Lord is speaking about here? I think it is what the Father thinks about Christ. Think of that perfect complacent love that the Lord Jesus enjoyed. He says, "Sanctify them by the truth: thy word is truth". Think of what the Father would delight to bring before us! The Father would delight to bring His well-beloved Son before us, and that has a sanctifying effect; it has a separating effect in the hearts of believers. How wonderful this is! It is inward; it is like the building inward in David's time.

"As thou hast sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world; and I sanctify myself for them"; that is what the Lord Jesus was going to do in setting Himself apart. He was in the world; He is no

longer in the world; He is in glory, and we are to be occupied with Him where He is. "I sanctify myself for them". He was going to the cross; He was going to suffer and die. He was sanctifying Himself for them. He has done that for us so that we may be occupied with Him where He is in all His glory and greatness. What a wonderful occupation! What a safe occupation - "For with me thou art in safe keeping" - if we are occupied with Christ where He is, what the Father is saying about Him where He is, bringing in touches as to His love. It is very wonderful. It should have a separating effect, a sanctifying effect, in the hearts of believers, and it all involves building up. "I sanctify myself for them, that they also may be sanctified by truth". I wish I understood more about it, but how attractive it is, beloved, that the Lord Jesus where He is is available to us that we may be occupied with Him, and we are drawn into another world,

Where nought of sin can enter,
Where joy eternal is (Hymn 259).

We do not have to wait until we are in glory to enjoy glory, but we can enjoy these things in the Spirit's power now at the present time:

Where deceiver ne'er can enter,
Sin-soiled feet have never trod;
Free, our peaceful feet may venture
In the paradise of God. (Hymn 206).

It involves what is spiritual. That is what Paul was concerned about in his epistles, especially perhaps in Corinth. He was exercised that the saints might grow in spirituality. How I feel the need for that myself, to enter into these things. What a safe realm we are introduced into, beloved! May we be helped in these things! May this inward building go on and may we make way for the Father's word, make way that we may be sanctified by truth! Think of the truth as it is in Jesus! We are occupied with that blessed, glorious Man. Paul in writing to Timothy at the end of the first epistle says, "O Timotheus, keep the entrusted deposit", chap 6: 20. Keep it! That is our responsibility. We are responsible for that. I think most of us here have been brought up amongst the brethren; what has been entrusted to you? The most wonderful things have been entrusted to you. Well, keep it, "according as the truth is in Jesus", Eph 4: 21. We have to keep it. From our side that involves a certain responsibility. How attractive John 17 is!

I read in Ezra, who writes of days of recovery. It is under God's

hand: God had spoken about Cyrus long before Cyrus was born. Israel went into captivity because of their unfaithfulness. God used that to bring about His own ways and His own end, but what we have here where we read is that what went into captivity is coming out of captivity. These vessels are persons. It is wonderful to think that we are in days when the truth has been recovered, or rather we have been recovered to the truth because the truth stands. It has been brought out, "brought ... forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer". I do not want to stretch Scripture, but think of what has been committed into the hands of the Spirit! We sometimes sing,

Blest Spirit, who art here in charge of all
God's interests great (Hymn 333).

All God's interests have been committed into the hand of the Spirit, a divine Person. There is no failure in divine Persons and what they do, no failure in the Spirit. Everything that has been committed to the Spirit from the outset of this dispensation has been carried through. Think too of what has been committed to the assembly, and of that glorious vessel, "the pillar and base of the truth", 1 Tim 3: 15! That stands too. How wonderful these things are!

So, what is recovered? "And king Cyrus brought forth the vessels of the house of Jehovah, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem and had put in the house of his god". None of God's thoughts has been lost. Here we are, at the end of the dispensation, 2,000 years on, and none of God's thoughts have been lost; and, in fact, "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former", Hag 2: 9. Think of those days of recovery! Later on in the book we have "two vessels of shining copper, precious as gold", Ezra 8: 27. The moral side is upgraded in days of recovery, "two vessels of shining copper, precious as gold". But here all that went into captivity is brought out, "thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine-and-twenty knives ...". I do not think that means that one is missing. All that has been committed into the hands of the Spirit is in safe keeping. But now they are counted out, "counted them out". I suppose it is a bit like 2 Timothy 19: "The Lord knows those that are his"; and John 10: 3: "he calls his own sheep by name". They are counted out and given "to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah", wonderful type of Christ. "And this is the number of them", every one counted out. "The whole did Sheshbazzar bring up, when they of the captivity were brought up from Babylon to Jerusalem". Well, it is our day, the day that we are in. How

wonderful it is to have part in the service of God! That is where these vessels, I suppose, are displayed:

Brought to rest within the circle

Where love's treasures are displayed (Hymn 136).

These vessels are 'love's treasures', persons like you and me, beloved, brought into the very centre,

Where love's treasures are displayed.

Think of what God has expended! Think of "the riches of His grace" (Eph 1: 7), "the glory of His grace", (v 6), 'love's treasures'! How we appreciate the love of God, and it is in the hand of Christ! At the service of God, the Lord comes in and He leads. Think of that: "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things to be in his hand", John 3: 35. Everything is safe there. I suppose it is a bit like what we have read of here, everything was counted out, persons in the service of God in the hands of Christ. How wonderful, beloved, not the side of responsibility but the side of privilege:

Where love's treasures are displayed!

These vessels are seen. They are in the hand of Christ. They are in safekeeping there, are they not?

Well, may we be helped and encouraged in these things! May each one of us know and appreciate in a greater way the love of the Lord Jesus and know what it is to be in His safe keeping!

May it be so for His Name's sake!

LINLITHGOW

3rd December 2022

GOD'S DELIGHT

Roland H Brown

Genesis 6: 5-8

Luke 3: 21-22

Psalms 16: 3

We sang in our hymn (No 59) about God's heart. What a heart God has! It says that He "so loved the world", John 3: 16. We may have a circle of those that we love; God's love in its scope is universal. In the gospel He makes His heart known to us. He commends His love in the gospel; He commends to us what should never need to be commended. God has given abundant proof of His love and His care and concern for men. He is the God with whom we have to do; all of us have to do with Him; "in him we live and move and exist", Acts 17: 28. One of the early preachers of the Acts says, "himself giving to all life and breath and all things", (v 25); that is often overlooked. People turn to God when they are in trouble sometimes. It has been said that there are times when all men pray. Sometimes when troubles and difficulties arise people see no way out. As a last resort they might appeal to God, people that have never given Him much thought, previously. Have you ever reflected upon that. He is the God who has to do with all men. All men have had and will have to do with God. He keeps us alive; He gives to all life and breath and all things. The very cocktail of air in this room means that God keeps us alive. The scripture says,

If he only thought of himself, and gathered unto him his spirit
and his breath,
All flesh would expire (Job 34: 14,15)

before Him. People take God's name in vain; they blaspheme His name. He could very easily remove them but He keeps them alive. One man said, "Jehovah has kept me alive" (Josh 14: 10); he was conscious of it. He was an old man; he was conscious of God keeping him alive. Why does He keep men alive? He keeps them alive that they might hear and answer to His appeal in the gospel. It is a tender appeal that comes from His heart: the heart of God is love. It is directed to your heart too. God's appeal is directed to your heart, as well as your conscience. He may touch your conscience in the preaching but His object is to reach your heart.

We have read of God's heart. It says, "it grieved him in his heart", when He saw the wickedness on the earth. He was not stoical

about it. It is very easy to look at the news and look at the daily menu of atrocities and calamities in the world and become stoical about them. I remember my father telling me there was a time when he was young, that a murder in London was front page news on the newspaper; it was a headline. Now you might just get a few lines inside the newspaper at the bottom of the page, because murder is so common. It is quite easy to become stoical. God is not stoical about it. When the first man was murdered in this world, God said to his brother who killed him, "the voice of thy brother's blood is crying to me from the ground", Gen 4: 10. I have often thought about that. If the blood of one man cried to God from the ground what a cry must go up into God's ears at the present time. Just take this city in which we are. Where there is a city of men there is a concentration of evil. You think of the cry that goes up to God, the evil. You can see some of it; much of it you do not see, but God sees. He not only sees it, but He hears it. It is interesting to go through the Scriptures and find what God hears. In the gospel He speaks to us about the blood of Jesus. That speaks, too. The blood of the first man that was murdered cried out to God for vengeance. When God's own Son, His only-begotten Son, died, His blood was shed. It says of His blood that it speaks "better than Abel", Heb 12: 24. The blood of Jesus speaks; it speaks to God of righteousness accomplished. It speaks to believers of safety and eternal salvation. It was "an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour", Eph 5: 2. That is how the sacrifice of Jesus is spoken of. He laid down His life in order that those like you and me who are subject to death and judgment, deserving nothing from God but His judgment, might receive eternal blessing.

I just touch on this verse in Genesis because it says God was grieved in His heart when He took account of the state of man. When it speaks of man it could mean mankind, which does not just mean men; it means men and women, boys and girls; and God saw. He wants you and me to see too, what the heart of man is. It says He "saw that the wickedness of Man was great on the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart only evil continually". That is all that comes out of man's heart. We have spoken of God's heart being love. What comes out of man's heart as God sees it is "only evil continually". God tells us in His word that the heart of man "is deceitful above all things", Jer 17: 9. Do you discover that or do you think there is some good in you? That is common. I noticed recently when you ask young people how they are: when I was young, they used to say, 'I am very well thank you'; now I find that my grandchildren say, 'I am good'. I was moved to ask them where

that goodness was. Where is it? The Lord Jesus says, "There is none good but one, God", Luke 18: 19. One day I came to it; in the epistle to the Romans Paul says, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell", Rom 7: 18. Good is not there; that is what God sees. He is the heart knowing God. These things apply to me as much as you. He is the heart-knowing God and it is very solemn to think that God looks into my heart as the creature of His hand and He finds an incapacity for good in it, "just evil continually". "By one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death; and thus death passed upon all men", Rom 5: 12. Scripture says, "all have sinned, and come short", Rom 3: 23. We have been speaking of God's image and likeness. Man was made in that way, has come short of the glory of God and his heart is incapable of doing any good, only evil. People speak of reform. When people are put in prison they talk about their rehabilitation, as if out of something wicked you can make something good. It cannot be done. God says, "The end of all flesh is come before me", Gen 6: 13. A little lower down than where we read it says, "God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth", v 12.

Perhaps this does not sound like glad tidings, but we have to learn to see things as God sees them, and that means looking at ourselves, not as we might like to be or we should be, but as God sees us, as sinners. If you are convicted of that, you are convicted of what is said in these verses, that there is no good to be found there, then the consequence of that, if God touches your conscience with it, is that you will turn to Him in repentance. God, instead of being grieved, will greatly rejoice. The Lord says, "there shall be joy in heaven for one repenting sinner", Luke 15: 7. The gospel is going out this afternoon in many places, many countries, many different circumstances. There will be joy in heaven over one repenting sinner. Could that be you? A repenting sinner, turning to God in repentance, because the way of salvation has not changed: repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

I turn from this passage in Genesis to speak of Him. In Luke 3 Jesus came to be baptised and there were many others in the crowd to be baptised around about Him. When this One blessed Man had "been baptised and praying, that the heaven was opened". Think of that, God opening the heaven for this lowly Man; "and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form as a dove upon him; and a voice came out of heaven".

He had found the Man in whom He had found His delight. Every other man had been a grief to Him; I have been a grief to Him, I would acknowledge that. There was One Man who was never a grief to Him, but on the other hand He was a source of joy, long before He commenced His public service. You get this word, "in thee I have found my delight". He had found it; God found in that Man all that He had ever sought from men. At the same time, Jesus was expressing to men all that God is. He came into manhood in order to lay His life down. We are reminded of that as we gather round the emblems at the Lord's supper, that He came to die. People come to live; they want to live. He came to give Himself, as the scripture says, "a ransom for all", 1 Tim 2: 6. He came to lay down His life in death, but before He did, He suffered on the cross; He suffered for sins on the cross. There was what He suffered at the hands of man; we often comment on that: He had a crown of thorns, and the nails were driven into His hands and His feet. What He suffered from God, who could speak of it, because He made Him to be sin? We are sinners by nature, but He was made sin; it was abhorrent to Him. He was made what He hated. It says, "Thou hast loved righteousness and hast hated lawlessness", Heb 1: 9. Lawlessness is sin. Scripture says that (1 John 3: 4); it is one of those reciprocal expressions, sin is lawlessness, lawlessness is sin, and He was made sin for us, as believers. He was made sin for us that believers might become God's righteousness in Him. For people like you and me who have no righteousness of our own, whose hearts are incapable of good, only evil continually, God has a righteousness. The righteousness of God is "towards all", Rom 3: 22. It is presented in the gospel as towards all; it is available. What is presented to us in the gospel is an accomplished work, an accomplished redemption, and it has set God free to present this righteousness, to clothe whoever will be clothed by it. It is towards all, but it is "upon all those who believe". I ask you, I feel the responsibility to do so, is it upon you? As we sit here this afternoon, how are you clothed? You might say, 'I am wearing my Sunday best'. Are you clothed with the righteousness of God? There is no finer clothing than that; in God's sight you could not be clothed better than if you are clothed with that, one against whom no charge can be brought. I said your heart was wicked and only capable of evil; that is the truth. The work of Christ is such that God can clothe you with His own righteousness and He can say of you that "their sins and their lawlessnesses I will never remember any more", Heb 8: 12. What a word that is. What peace that brings. Do you have peace with God?

You can have peace with God in the knowledge that you will not come under His judgment; and not be uncertain about it.

There are many persons who hope that they will escape the judgment of God. Some try by good works and religious observances of various kinds, and they hope, but they are not sure; there is always that nagging doubt. Have you got a nagging doubt like that or are you sure? You can be sure that if you are clothed in the righteousness of God you are acceptable in God's sight. You are acceptable in the worth of this One in whom God found His delight; He found it in Jesus. There is what He was, but God has found His delight in what Jesus has done. What He has done is that He has gone to the cross, to give His life. He bore and exhausted the judgment of God in respect of sin and sins. He "bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 24. What an affecting thing that is. Think of that holy body, "thou hast prepared me a body", Heb 10: 5. We were reminded of it in the loaf this morning. In that body He bore my sins; they were laid upon Him: "Jehovah hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all", Isa 53: 6. I do not know whether these things affect you, but they affect me, deeply. To think of sins that I have committed: some I remember, many I cannot. It is wonderful to know that those sins, some of them perhaps lightly, casually committed, were laid upon One who was sinless, upon a sinless body. God laid upon Him the iniquity of us all, and He has expressed His judgment for sins and sin without any relief, without any mitigation, on the head of Jesus. Not only did He bear the judgment, but He went into death. The penalty of sin is death and He went into death in order to remove that penalty, that judicial penalty: "the soul that sinneth, it shall die", Ezek 18: 4.

He went into death and He lay among the dead; and from the dead there was a selective resurrection. From among the myriads that lie in death, one Man was selected, and He was raised and glorified and He sits at God's right hand this afternoon. He sits there at God's invitation: "Sit at my right hand until I put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet", Heb 1: 13. What does that tell me? By faith I take account of this glorious Man, sitting at the right hand of God, although we do not see Him publicly yet: the writer of the Hebrews says, "we see not yet all things subjected to *him*, but we see Jesus, who was made some little inferior to angels on account of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour", Heb 2: 8, 9. God presents to you through the gospel a living Saviour, a glorious Saviour, and the fact He is sitting at God's right hand tells me that the work He has accomplished has been

completed to God's satisfaction. If He bore my sins in His body on the tree, they must have been eternally removed from God's sight if He has been raised from among the dead and has been seated at God's right hand. He could not be sitting there with my sins still upon Him. My sins have been removed judicially by God and Jesus sits there as having accomplished everything that He was entrusted to do. He is my righteousness, my righteousness before God. As He is, so am I in this world, 1 John 4: 17. What a blessed thing that is. What peace it brings into the soul. What certainty it brings into the soul.

Persons that are clothed in the righteousness of God are people that are described in this psalm as saints. You might think of saints as people that died long ago, who performed miracles of one kind or another and became elevated to the position of a saint officially, in the Roman Catholic church. The idea is that, whilst they have been named as a saint you can pray to them as if, in some way, they can be a mediator for you with God. It is an evil thing to teach that; Scripture tells us there is one mediator of God and men (1 Tim 2: 5), and it is not the virgin Mary, nor is it any of the myriads of persons who are called saints, that many souls in their ignorance pray to. The word saint means the sanctified one, and God in the gospel intends that you should not only receive remission of sins, but that you might receive "inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me", Acts 26: 18. You must be a believer, you must be clothed in the righteousness of God to come into that sanctified company; otherwise it would no longer be a sanctified company. As you are clothed in the righteousness of God, through faith in Christ and through faith in His blood, you discover that you have an inheritance in the company of those who are spoken of as saints. God gives the Holy Spirit so that that might be real to you. Inheritance involves living in the love of God. The love of God is shed abroad in the hearts where once there was only evil; God is pleased to shed His love abroad in the human heart. What a triumph of God's grace that, in my heart where God saw nothing but evil naturally, He should in His grace shed His own love abroad through the indwelling of a divine Person.

The preacher has a responsibility to ask these questions, and so I ask you, are you conscious of that, are you conscious of having received not only the remission of your sins, but the precious gift of the Holy Spirit? If you are not sure about it, you can ask God for it. The Lord Jesus said, "If therefore ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts

to your children, how much rather shall your Father who is of heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”, Luke 11: 13. You can ask the Holy Spirit to make Himself a reality to you, that you might prove His power that the unseen things of which we were speaking earlier become a reality to you. You need the Holy Spirit for that. You cannot see the great spiritual realities with your natural eyes. There are “Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love him”, 1 Cor 2: 9. He wants you to know what they are and to enjoy them now. The gift of the Holy Spirit has that in mind.

Blessed as all that is, I just wanted to draw attention to this verse which says, “To the saints that are on the earth, and to the excellent thou hast said, In them is all my delight”. I just draw attention to the “all”. When the Father spoke from heaven, He said, “in thee I have found my delight”; that is in Christ. Christ is no longer here, but there are those that are on the earth indwelt by the Spirit, sanctified persons, apart from the whole course of things that is going on to judgment and God says of them, “In them is **all** my delight”. You think of God looking out on the whole scene, nothing for His pleasure in it except this circle of whom we have been speaking, a circle that exists for the glory of Christ. I thought that was one touching thing that I could carry away with me this weekend, an impression of the circle of His brethren, the very circle itself is for His glory. Outside of that in the world around, there is nothing God finds pleasure in. He says, “In them is all my delight”. I just mention these things that we might find our portion in them, we might first of all recognise what our hearts are by nature in order that we might turn in repentance to God and find Christ in whom He has found His delight, has founded redemption, and He is able to clothe us with a righteousness that is not our own which is in view of being for His pleasure here as we enter into the inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ.

May it be the portion of each one of us for His name's sake.

West Norwood

17th September 2023

SALVATION

Walter M Patterson

2 Corinthians 6: 2

Hebrews 2: 10

Matthew 26: 36-39; 27: 45, 50

Psalms 116: 3-5, 13, 1

These things that I have read of, dear hearer - "the day of salvation", "the leader of their salvation", "the cup of salvation" - all speak to us of the goodness of God, the desire in the heart of God to bless His creature. Salvation is a wonderful thought, that there is an intent in the heart of God that He might intervene on the part of His creature to bring in salvation. It is "the day of salvation". That is, we are at present, even in this hour, in a time when God is speaking in grace and offering salvation to His creature. That is "the day of salvation"; it is now. It was also a "day of salvation" last week and last year. It was a "day of salvation" in the last decade, the last century, the last millennium, a "day of salvation", God extending that day in longsuffering. It says that, that God is "longsuffering" (2 Pet 3: 9), that is the patience of God. Think of that, extending the day of grace even to this hour! In view of what? To secure you. Why does it say "longsuffering" as to God? Because He suffers all that has come into the race of humanity. And what is that? Man's disobedience, man's rebellion, man's lawlessness: sin. Sin has come into the world, and God has gone on in His grace through that whole period waiting on men to have to do with Himself in this "day of salvation".

You will notice that I did not speak of tomorrow. I did not say, 'Tomorrow is a day of salvation', because I cannot say that. Scripture does not warrant me to say that; it is God who speaks in the glad tidings, and so the word of God governs what is to be said in the preaching tonight. When Paul the apostle was preaching to those who were in Athens in Acts 17, he said that God "has set a day in which he is going to judge" - note that word "judge" - "the habitable earth in righteousness" (v 31) - note that word: everything that God does is righteous. He is a righteous and holy God, and so a day has been fixed. I do not know when that day is, tonight, tomorrow, the next day. I do not know; so I cannot say that tomorrow is "the day of salvation", because that day may be the day that God has fixed to close the present day of grace.

I have spoken to you about God and His appeal in the glad

tidings, but there is another influence abroad in this world and that is the influence of the devil, Satan, the great deceiver. When God speaks about that personage in Genesis chapter 3, it says he was “more crafty”, v 1. He is deceitful, tells lies, and one of the lies he would tell you is that God's word does not matter. I said that God will “judge the habitable earth”. Who will be judged in that day that God has fixed? Those who have refused His offer in “the day of salvation”, those who have refused His overtures of grace, who have turned away from His appeal in love. That will be their portion, to be judged, but Satan's lie is that it will not happen. He may even say, 'Well, if there is a God, He is a loving God. He is gracious and favourable'. And *He is*. In the glad tidings tonight, in “the day of salvation”, God is gracious, but in *that* day He will judge righteously “by the man whom he has appointed”, Acts 17: 31. It is Satan's lie is that it will not matter: 'Do not listen; do not change your life! Why would you do it?'. The appeal in the glad tidings for you tonight is that you might pay attention to what God is saying: “now is the well-accepted time”.

But there is another reason why I cannot speak of tomorrow and that is because who knows the day of their death? It is a sober and solemn fact, is it not? I suppose many of the people who die in this world began a day when they did not expect that to happen. They did not expect that that would be their portion. But “it is the portion of men once to die, and after this judgment”, Heb 9: 27. That is what the scripture tells us; so I cannot say tomorrow for those two reasons. One is that God will withdraw His offer of grace to men at some time; it is certain. As was said in the street preaching, you *will* have to do with God some time, but you can have to do with Him *now* in “the well-accepted time ... the day of salvation”.

So we are in that day, and I read about “the cup of salvation”, and that suggests something very precious, does it not? It suggests that there is a whole wealth of blessing to be had in accepting God's word and believing what He says. But how has that come about? In fact, how did “the day of salvation” begin? When did it begin? I have earlier gone back one millennium from today but it is about two millennia ago that God raised from among the dead, out of all who were in the grave, His own beloved Son Jesus, the Leader of *your* salvation, the Leader of *our* salvation. Can you say that, Leader of *my* salvation? Mr Darby, who has made a very good translation of the Scriptures, tells us that that word in the Greek is difficult to render. He uses the word

“originator” in one part (Acts 3: 15) and he uses the word “leader” in Hebrews, but what he says as to it is, 'It is used for one who begins and sets a matter on ... it means, 'he began and finished the whole course' (see note 'a' to Acts 3: 15). And that is who I want to speak about now, the One who has completed the work that has allowed God to open the gates of forgiveness, the gates of salvation, to introduce “the day of salvation”. There was an actual day when God was free in His heart to go out to men to offer salvation, and that was when His Son came out of death and was exalted and glorified. So, when it says, “to make perfect the leader” it meant that Jesus was installed in the place where He should be. The One who was here as the meek and lowly Jesus, God has installed Him in the place that was always rightly His, and that is what “to make perfect” means in the sense of Hebrews 2. But it adds these words, “through sufferings”.

There has been a cost to God to open up “the day of salvation”, and a cost to the One who came to bring salvation into this world. When Jesus came in, it says, “and thou shalt call his name Jesus” - 'Jah the Saviour' (see note 'e' which refers to Exod 17: 9 note 'd') - “for *he* shall save his people from their sins”, Matt 1: 21. He came in with that express purpose, to deliver men from Satan and sin and death. He came in to do that. How did He accomplish it? You say, 'Well, I know from the gospels how He wrought very wonderful works; He healed persons; He proclaimed the love of God; He made the grace of God known in all its goodness to men; He brought in healing'. For those who were in the most wretched conditions, the Lord Jesus brought in healing, but, ah, dear friend, that would not be enough for that blessed Man to have remained here and gone on in that pathway of healing men - as He could have done because He was God in His Person. No! If there was to be a “cup of salvation”, then it had to be that that every vestige of God's judgment in relation to sin was emptied from the cup that Jesus took. All that was in that cup for Jesus, a cup of bitterest woe, He took it on Himself. He came in to do that; He came in to die. Yes, to make God's love known, to proclaim that message of the kingdom of God in love and grace, but He came in “to give his life a ransom for many”, Matt 20: 28. He came in to do that, and I can say tonight He has done it. I spoke about that word “leader” being “the originator”. He has set the matter on and He has completed it.

He is the One who has completed every matter for the satisfaction and glory of God but, oh, what a moment! There was a cup that Jesus took and in it was all that was due to you and to me as

sinners, going on in our own lawless way, unheeding perhaps as to the overtures of grace, but, as a sinner I “come short of the glory of God” Rom 3: 23. I do not measure up to God's standard, and that is what the scripture says. None of us would measure up to the standard that God requires. In fact, even more than that, the epistle to Romans says that we have been “enemies” of God (chap 5: 10) and thus deserving of the wrath of God, His righteous and holy indignation about sin. Sin came into a world that God had created, and it spoiled everything. The whole universe, if I might say, the whole fabric of creation, was affected by sin coming in. It came into the expanse, and it came into the earth to affect it; and God's anger, His righteous, holy anger burns against that whole principle of sin. But not against the sinner. God is not against the sinner. He is extending a message of grace to the sinner now in “the day of salvation”.

So, Jesus speaks in the verses read from Matthew 26 of that cup of bitterest woe and of going to the cross as the holy, perfect sacrifice. He *was* holy; He *was* perfect; He *was* sinless; He *was* the obedient One. “Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us”, 2 Cor 5: 21. On that cross He suffered the hatred of men. That was a public matter. It was apparent He suffered the hatred of men as going to the cross. But there, as He suffered for sin in His atoning sufferings - that is, He made reparation: that is what that word means - He made reparation to God for the whole matter of sin coming into His universe and He atoned for sins, for my sins. Can you say that those sufferings were for you? That is the intent in the divine mind that that might be the case as laying hold of the offer of grace in the day of salvation. But there was this cup that Jesus drank, and these three hours of darkness, what sufferings entered into them, the Sin-Bearer, bearing the wrath and judgment of God in relation to sin.

But He is “the leader of their salvation”; and so in Matthew 27: 50 it says, “Jesus, having again cried with a loud voice, gave up the ghost”. He died, that work complete. What a glorious matter, a work complete, God fully satisfied! You might say all that was required of His righteousness Jesus met there; He met it in full, in dying on the cross, so that God is free now, as having raised up Jesus from among the dead, to offer salvation to all. So, He has been made “the leader of” your “salvation through sufferings”. Dear hearer, I cannot stress it enough that in order for that day of salvation to continue, to begin and to continue, it has cost God so much, and it cost Jesus that He should bear

the judgment of God, the whole weight of it, and suffer and die on Calvary's tree.

But there is "the cup of salvation". The experience of the man in Psalm 116 was that he was going to take it, "take the cup of salvation". Will you take it? That is the question tonight. Will you take that cup of salvation? "Now is the well-accepted time". So that means now; it means in your seat; you can do it here. In fact, there may be no better place to do it. You are surrounded by those who have done so before you and who would desire that you might do it.

So it is a sphere of affection here, family affection and feelings. You are among a company like that tonight; so it can be "now" for you, right at this moment to "take the cup of salvation", to take that offer of God in grace. What does it mean to take it? It means to believe God, to believe *in* God, of course, but to believe Him, take Him at His word, believe what He says, that on account of the work of Jesus having fully and wholly satisfied Him as to the whole outstanding matter of sin and your sins, He is able to speak of a "day of salvation", to offer salvation to you, full and free salvation, the salvation of your soul.

I read at the beginning of Psalm 116 because it tells us something else. It tells us something about a man that is concerned. I spoke about judgment at the start, and I do not apologise for that because it is a sobering, true matter as to where you might stand if God should close the door of grace or if you should die. Here is a man who is concerned about it. He said, "The bands of death encompassed me". 'I started thinking about death and where would I stand, where would I stand before God?' Where would you stand? "Then called I upon the name of Jehovah". The preaching of the glad tidings is not just intended to be a kind of happy message - it is, of course, a very blessed message - but it is not meant to leave you just feeling a nice, warm glow, or contented. It is meant to exercise you, to have soul exercise, even those of us who are converted, that we might be exercised as to the reality of our convictions and the reality of our link with the One who is the Leader of our salvation, the One whom God has brought out of death and exalted and glorified because the day of salvation began then. It did not begin when He died and went into the grave; it began when He came out of death. It is a new beginning. God has a *Man in glory*, a *Man in heaven*, and so the divine proposition is that He is going to have men there. Luke 9 speaks of men in glory, "appearing in glory", wonderful thought, v 31. The man of Psalm 116 is going to "take the cup

of salvation”, and the question for you tonight is, are you going to take it? It is available to you.

You might ask me, what is in it? What is in “the cup of salvation”? We have been reading the Roman epistle together here on Wednesday nights, and it helps us to understand more. Romans 3: 23 says, “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”. We spoke about that earlier, “all”, me and you, and every man and woman and boy and girl, but God addresses Himself to you in the glad tidings; so it says, “being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus”, v 24. Now, that is in “the cup of salvation”: redemption is there. For on that cross, after Jesus died, He shed His precious blood and redemption's price was paid. You have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus if you take that “cup of salvation”. It is in it for your redemption, and God has done that for Himself. He has redeemed you to Himself. That is in redemption you are brought into relationship with God, into peace with God. The hymn says it,

Peace, sonship, joy the Holy Spirit giv'n,
Through Him are known. (Hymn 123)

There it is, “the redemption which is in Christ Jesus”. Then it says, “whom God has set forth a mercy-seat”, v 25. There it is; that is “the day of salvation”. And then in chapter 4, as we go on, it speaks about reconciliation and justification; so if we read the end of Romans 4 it says, “who has raised from among the dead Jesus our Lord”, v 24. Wonderful! That Man is out of death, the Man that so pleased God, and has completed that work. He has been “delivered for our offences”, v 25. He went there, dear hearer, for you and for me and He “has been raised for our justification”. That is in “the cup of salvation”, justification. That means that God is going to have you joyful in His presence there without any hindrance, there without any stain on you for God has removed your sins; He has dealt with them in the death of Christ; He has taken them away, cast them into the sea. What a God! What a Saviour God!

So, there it is, redemption in that “cup of salvation”, justification in that “cup of salvation”. What else might be there? We turn over the page and we are in Romans 5: 10, “For if, being enemies, we have been reconciled to God”. “Reconciled to God”: is that not wonderful? It means, dear hearer, as you drink that “cup of salvation”, not only is the outstanding matter of your guilt and sin dealt with by a loving God, but He brings you into His very presence, to be reconciled, to be in easy

relationship with Himself. He would bring you into the divine family. There it is: “reconciled to God”. How has it come about? Through suffering, “through the death of his Son”. And in Romans chapter 8 Paul says in verse 15, “For ye have not received a spirit of bondage again for fear, but ye have received a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father”. In that “cup of salvation”, dear hearer, there is redemption; there is justification; and there is the gift of the Spirit. Think of that, God taking the needy sinner in all your want and need, bringing you into blessing and giving you His Spirit that there might be an indwelling Spirit, the Spirit of God indwelling you. To do what? To cry, “Abba, Father”; that is, to come into a place of sonship.

Peace, sonship, joy, the Holy Spirit giv'n,
Through Him are known.

That is “the cup of salvation”. I said at the outset it was a cup that was full, and it *is* full. What wonderful things God proposes for you, but you have to take it, and that is always the urgency in the appeal in the glad tidings that you might in the faith of your soul reach out because it involves faith. All these things involve faith. It is through faith. You will notice that in Romans “through faith”, faith in the One that suffered and died, faith in all that God has accomplished in raising Him from the dead and setting Him forth “a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood”, all that God has accomplished in the work of Jesus, and it is available to you and to me.

But I go back to the beginning of Psalm 116. There was exercise, a man who was troubled in his soul, and that is where *you* begin. You begin by acknowledging your need, dear hearer. If you are still without Christ in the world, you have a need, you have an urgent need, “now the day of salvation”. And it is available; it is available now. Reach out in faith and lay hold of it!

For His Name's sake!

Glasgow

8TH October 2023

CHRIST - ABLE AND WORTHY

John Laurie

Revelation 5: 1-14

I have a very clear exercise before me, beloved brethren, which I seek the help of the Spirit of God to fill out, and that is to magnify Christ in the affections of the saints. This chapter which I have read is like a remarkable shaft of light, shining forth before the execution of the many solemn, serious and sad judgments that follow thereafter, but we have opportunity, as gathered here at this time, to be occupied with the Lord Jesus and His surpassing glories. His glories are infinite. It must be so because of the greatness of His Person, but He has very many glories. Some of them will yet shine out in greater lustre, and there are two particular glories I may be helped to emphasise in the course of the time together, but He has many, many glories. He is unsurpassed in His greatness. There is no one to be compared with our blessed Saviour. May we love Him more! I would be glad to think that the Lord might use this further time together to strengthen our own affections towards Him, and the affection in the hearts of all here, that there might be a greater response in living energy to Himself, the blessed Source of life. No one need be disappointed thinking they have missed the opportunity for this marvellous celebration; it is yet to come. We are told at the end of chapter 4: 1, "I will shew thee the things which must take place after these things", and immediately after that John was "in the Spirit", and beheld a throne (v 2), and then these many things began to proceed, the start of which we have read here.

"And I saw on the right hand of him that sat upon the throne a book". I might just add to make it clear that it is God who sits upon the throne. Some might be interested to note a footnote which indicates that the Person sitting on the throne or 'the sitter' (note 'g') almost constitutes a divine title, such is the majesty of the One who occupies the throne. But He had "a book, written within and on the back" - how comprehensive in its requirements! - "sealed with seven seals". Some of us have been enjoying looking at some of these passages in Revelation recently locally in Brechin and we were feeling that, amongst other things, it indicates that nothing could be taken from it - it was sealed - and nothing could be added to it - it was written on the back. It was complete and then sealed, "sealed with seven seals".

It says, "And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice,

Who is worthy to open the book, and to break its seals?" You might wonder why I am seeking to speak of something that in reality has yet to take place. Why should it be of importance for the saints as gathered at this very moment? Well, I think it is because the saints of the assembly have to be brought into a full understanding of the wonderful greatness of the Lord Jesus. We are not waiting for that to be fulfilled after the rapture. This is something that is proceeding now and is intended to prompt present response in the assembly. There will be wonderful response in this day that is referred to here and others will be gathered to participate in it, including the angels and the multitude of creatures, but now is the time when there is already response proceeding in the way of affection to the Lord Jesus, and I trust it will be promoted by a further consideration of His many glories. There is glory to God in the assembly now as there will be throughout all eternity. How marvellous! What a wonderful vessel is being formed, the wealth of divine workmanship that also will yet come out into glorious display, "the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, having the glory of God", Rev 21: 10. That is not an allusion to Deity; it is an allusion to the excellence of divine workmanship in expression that will be a witness to what has been wrought and formed even now, one would trust, even at this very hour when we are sitting together here, by way of the increase of the wealth yet to come out.

But there is a great question raised here. Angels in the book of Revelation do not proceed characteristically as independent creatures. They proceed in service and with instruction from the throne, and this strong angel raises the question, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to break its seals?". And it says, "And no one was able in the heaven, or upon the earth, or underneath the earth, to open the book nor to regard it". I am not aware that there has ever been such an extensive search as will take place at this juncture. I suppose the children here sometimes search for things and may have to say, 'I cannot find it anywhere'. Well, that might just be in the very limited circumstances where you might have been looking or where any of us may look, but there has never been a search like this and never again will be thereafter, throughout heaven, earth, underneath the earth, looking for someone *able* and *worthy*. These are the two glories I intend further focusing upon.

The Lord is able; He is able for everything. There is not a thing that can overwhelm Him. Have we got exercises still in our various

localities that we are seeking help to work out? Have we got exercises in our homes? Have we got personal exercises? There is nothing that can overwhelm the Lord. I love to say with perfect assurance, *He is able; He is able for everything*. I have to speak guardedly about others, and there are very many I greatly appreciate among the saints, but I have to speak consciously and guardedly about all because there is no one of whom I can say completely, as I feel free to do about the Lord, *able for everything, able for anything*. How great He is! How worthy He is! Does He not hold your affections, beloved brother, beloved sister? It is intended that He should fill and flood the hearts of every one of us. It is marvellous to think that, although John for the moment was deeply disturbed, the answer was later found. It says, “I wept much because no one had been found worthy to open the book nor to regard it”. Think of that expression! I take that to mean that no one had been found able or worthy to even begin to think about it or begin to consider what could be done about it. It was beyond anyone else other than the One who was identified; He alone is able to fill out the full requirements of the completion of the ways and will of God.

But John wept much. That was not because of being unintelligent. I take it that it was because he is representative of one who carried, through exercise and with a feeling heart, concern about all that was due to God and required by God. Are we like that? Do you have an interest in regard of what is precious to the heart of the Lord Jesus locally? Do you have a care and an interest to seek to preserve what is pleasing to the Lord in your family and household? Heads of houses need always to be exercised about these things, and wives sympathetically supportive. The children, as brought up in “the discipline and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6: 4), we would trust, would be helped to become respectful and appreciative of these things as well. John wept much because he had concern and felt there was a true need of an answer to this question raised by the angel proceeding from the throne.

But then it says, “And one of the elders says to me, Do not weep”. Well, that was not a rebuke for John. It was a comforting word, intelligently given by an elder representing the experience that had been gained and the knowledge acquired among the saints at the present time. Are we growing in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus and of His wondrous ability and worth? I judge that is what the elder represents, one who apparently had the advantage of having gained

experience and knowledge of the work and ability of the Lord Jesus and was on that account able to give John a comforting answer. "Do not weep. Behold, the lion which is of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, has overcome so as to open the book, and its seven seals". What a wonderful answer, given with confidence concerning One *able* and One *worthy* to fill out all that has yet to be accomplished according to the completion of the ways of God. Only One is able to do that, One who had and has a perfect understanding of the totality of the will of God, the Lord Jesus Himself who came here to do the will of God. All that God required of Him was met and answered to by Him. He could say when addressing His Father, "I have completed the work that thou gavest me that I should do it", John 17: 4. He glorified God on the earth but now, according to the account given here, the time was arriving for the completion of God's ways on the earth. We are yet awaiting that. There is an interesting thought that I was looking at before the meeting concerning Judah. It says in Genesis 49,

The sceptre will not depart from Judah,
Nor the lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh come,
And to him will be the obedience of peoples, v 10.

That will have its answer in the Lord Jesus, "the lion which is of the tribe of Juda". He will be the One who will finally establish peace following the execution of the necessary judgments of God upon an evil world. He will be the One who will ensure that there will be conditions, through the subduing of the nations, that will make way for righteousness and peace to prevail on the earth. Are we not looking forward to the world to come? I am sure many of us feel saddened as we think at times of the things that exist all around us in the present world. How marvellous will be the world to come! The saints of the assembly, of course, will be with Christ and coming with Him in all His glory when He appears, but then He, as the Lawgiver and the King and the Ruler, will establish conditions on the earth that will bring about an evident reconciliation between heaven and earth. Things are not publicly reconciled at the moment between heaven and earth. What is proceeding in the world is entirely out of accord in growing measure with the mind of God in heaven, but One is able and worthy to fill this out.

"And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as slain". It is the Lord Jesus who is referred to, the Lamb:

Who would hush the heav'n-sent story
Of the Lamb who came to die?

(Hymn 371)

May we become more fervent in the outpouring of praise to the One who has so loved us, and to whom through grace we have been drawn; and who has, one would trust, become the Object of every heart here! May we all be lovers of the Lord Jesus and in greater measure! "A Lamb standing, as slain"! He lives, but He was seen as the One who had suffered and died, "standing, as slain", an evidence of His wonderful, surpassing, suffering love. You might ask what then is the connection with "a Lamb standing, as slain" and a lion? Is a lion not a figurative expression of a mighty, strong animal? What is the connection with a diminutive Lamb seen "standing, as slain"? Well, it just shows the wonderful way that God's will has been accomplished by Him who came to die and who death by dying slew! It seemed to men weakness and defeat, but indeed He gained the victory and has secured the answer for God's glory for time and eternity as well as establishing the necessary provision for the blessing of our souls through marvellous mercy. As I speak, I trust the Spirit of God will help me to speak in such a way that our hearts will become enlivened even when we are pondering over and contemplating His glory now as together. How great He is, the Lamb, the One who suffered, the One who has gained His bride, the Lamb's wife! He will have an answer in the sufferings of the saints too that will answer in some way to the longings of His own heart.

"Having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God": these are figurative expressions that convey the mighty power that is His. "Seven horns": what strength He possesses! I say again, He is able for everything and He is worthy, worthy to fill out everything to God's eternal glory, "able" and "worthy". Think of these two expressions! If you remember nothing else from this time, I would appreciate if all, even to the younger children, can bear in mind that Jesus is able and He is worthy. How good to go away with a sense of the One who is able and worthy! Men are looking for people and persons, and maybe a single person, able in some way to resolve things, but who could define who is worthy? The answer is in Christ alone. You can search heaven; you can search the earth; you can search underneath the earth; you can try politicians; you can try emperors; you can try what you like; there is only one answer. It is Christ Himself in all His surpassing glory. "Seven horns and seven

eyes”: think of the Lord seeing everything and taking account of everything, and yet He is the One who loves us! It is marvellous to think that the One who knows all about me, including all my failures and weaknesses and even things that I might never wish anyone else to ever know about or see, He knows and sees! It makes me love Him on that account. I have confidence to speak to the Lord about anything. He knows it all in any case, but He loves when we draw near to commune with Himself and to enjoy the intimacy of His love.

It also says then, “which are the seven Spirits of God which are sent into all the earth”, “the seven Spirits of God”. I was connecting that in my mind recently with an interesting reference in Isaiah 11, “and the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah”, v 2. There is a list of seven. How great He is!

“And it came and took it out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne”. I love going over these words, beloved brethren. That was not presumption on His part; it was an evidence of the competency of the Lamb to take up all that was needed on God's behalf. How glorious He is, able to fill out everything in finality in view of the eternal state of blessedness when God shall tabernacle with men (chap 21: 3), not a single element of intrusion ever left to remain and cause disruption in order that God might find a full answer in a living system of things. We have been engaged with what is living: it will characterise eternity. The last enemy, death, will be gone as well. What a living system of things will subsist throughout eternity for the praise and glory of God!

“And when it took the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb”, these intelligent persons and these experienced persons, I have no doubt again it is some witness to the accumulation of the work of God among the saints merging in the appellation of the worthiness of the Lamb, “having each a harp and golden bowls full of incenses, which are the prayers of the saints”. I would think that is an allusion to the prayers of the saints that might still at that juncture be on the earth, not those who belong to the heavenly family to which we are privileged to belong. These are persons with sympathetic interest in relation to what is going up before God in prayer. They are able then to “sing a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open its seals” and so on, persons able to sing with affection and intelligence to the Lamb in all the freshness that a new

song would speak of, persons who have known the blessedness of redemption and its fruitful answer to God “out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation”, and so on.

It is not the privilege of the angels to sing of the blessedness of redemption. They have not had the experience of redemption: that belongs to the saints. The angels are not said to merge in the song sung at this juncture. They have their part shortly, but this is the special portion of the saints singing with intelligence and particular affection to the Saviour in a time of His wonderful, redeeming love, and its glorious answer, “out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to our God kings and priests”. Oh how blessed when you think of those secured and able to take up priestly function in response Godward. We have been engaged over these recent readings thinking of life according to God. There is some evidence of it in activity in this chapter in Revelation surely, life finding its expression in priestly response from intelligent persons as it goes up to God and to the Lamb.

And then there is this vast multitude around the throne, angels, living creatures and elders “and their number was ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands”. I might just say to younger people here, who might be curious in some way about this vast number, you cannot take up a calculator and work it out because it is an indefinite number. It is not a specified number; it is an indefinite number given to convey the surpassing immensity of the answer there will be for God in the multitude of the hosts praising Him out of all the families, especially the saints of the assembly. But what an accumulation of wealth God will have in answer to His glory, vast numbers, “every creature which is in the heaven and upon the earth and under the earth”! What a worthy answer secured! “Worthy is the Lamb that has been slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing”. Count up the number of these expressions as well and you will see how interesting the fulness of them is represented in it! How blessed the answer! How worthy the Lamb is! I might be allowed to repeat again He is *able* and *worthy*. Let us cling with confidence to the Lord who so loves us! He is able to help us in everything that may yet be needed to the end of the dispensation until He comes for us.

Do you feel perplexed and wonder about the terrible upheaval in various parts of the world at the present time, and rising disturbance in the Middle East? Sad as that is, and, indeed, a matter that should no

doubt concern us and cause us to be prayerful before God, may I say, Look up! Occupy your heart with Jesus who is *able* and *worthy* to bring all to conclusion! Things are not ever going to be out of control by the One who “sits upon the throne”. God has committed everything with confidence into the hands of a blessed Man who in His Person is “the root of David”. That is an allusion to His Deity, but as Man He is able to take up and discharge everything for God as He is in love for His own able to help us through. He is *able* and is *worthy*. May we not be falling short in the acclamation of His worth at the present time! It is our privilege now. We do not wait until the time to come. We will have our part in it then as well. I have confidence that we will share in the expressions of worthiness: “To him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb” on account of all that has been secured through redemption in a coming day as well, but it is our privilege now. May we not fall short in response to the Lamb, who has so suffered and rescued us from loss ourselves, and brought us to Himself in order that we might be available in priestly function to His God and Father, and answer with joy as those who belong to the assembly, and to Himself as forming part of His wonderful bride!

Well, I feel I have not more to say except just to add that the living creatures said, “Amen”. I take it that is signifying that these creatures with intelligence given of God see the rightness of such an acclamation of worth and join in saying, “Amen”. In other words you can understand, and we would say, 'So let it be'. And then it says, “and the elders fell down and did homage”. May our hearts too be bound together in response and worthy praise to the Lord Jesus in view of His glory!

Edinburgh

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