

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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COMING TO CHRIST AS THE LIVING STONE

Richard M Brown

Matthew 16: 13-18

1 Peter 2: 1-5

I desire to say a word as to coming to Christ as the Living Stone. When we think of Him in this way we are not thinking of Him so much as on our side, but more what He is for God, what He is as the One who gives character to the great and glorious spiritual system in which God is being served.

When it is a question of our need He comes to us and how near He has come! But when we think of Him in this light it is a question of movement on our part towards Him; and the effect of coming to Him in this way is that we are built in to God's wonderful spiritual house. Now, I will suggest shortly that many Christians have never come to Him in this way. It may surprise you to hear that, but I trust it will become clearer as we proceed. Every believer with the Holy Spirit is a living stone, and each one belongs to this spiritual house. But not everyone has been built in, not everyone is in his or her proper place, and not everyone is filling out that place for the pleasure of God. The passage in 1 Peter 2 indicates that there is a certain moral road we must travel in order to reach Christ in this way. I wish to say a few words about it.

I read in Matthew 16 because it provides the foundation for 1 Peter 2. You may have heard it said before that Peter's first epistle is based on his experience in Matthew 16, and his second epistle is based on his experience in Matthew 17. In order to explain the link between Matthew 16 and 1 Peter 2 I would draw on an illustration from the building of Solomon's temple. You will remember that Solomon's temple was built of stones. It was quite an undertaking because the scripture tells us that he employed eighty thousand stone-masons, 1 Kings 5: 15. There were two parts to the process: firstly, the stones had to be cut out of the quarry and, secondly, they had to be shaped, they had to be fashioned, in order to fit together in the temple. I suggest that Matthew 16 is the securing of the stones out of the quarry. We can think of the world as being like the quarry, and we shall speak in a moment of God's sovereign operations to secure the living stones out of the world. 1 Peter 2 is the shaping, it is the fashioning, in order that we might fit into this wonderful spiritual house.

So I take up Matthew 16 in that light. I suggest that Peter is

representative of us all. In another light, of course, we know that Peter was distinctive as the first among the twelve apostles, and no doubt his experience in Matthew 16 was to fit him for the great mission that the Lord had in mind just for him. But in another sense I think we can regard him as representative. Now, Peter makes this wonderful confession. In answer to the Lord's question he says, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*". That was very precious light he possessed in his soul. And the Lord Jesus brings out that Peter had that because it had pleased the Father to reveal it directly to him. Peter had been the subject of the sovereign operations of God. As the Lord Jesus says to him, "flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee". Peter could not have arrived at this by taking account even of the Lord Jesus in flesh and blood. Nor was it something that any other man had taught him. The only reason he knew this was because God the Father had chosen Peter and it had pleased Him to make it known to him.

Now, I believe the same thing, in principle, is true for us all if we have received light into our souls as to the Person of Christ and, especially, this light as to Him as God's glorious Son. Think of what a momentous thing it is that God has picked you out, dear brother or sister, picked you out from others. He has chosen you in order to impart this light to your soul; not because you merited it, nor because you were better or worse than anyone else, but simply because it pleased Him to do so. We are the subjects of God's sovereign operations. That should be a matter of great thanksgiving on our part. How thankful we should be for sovereign grace. How thankful we should be that God has been pleased to reveal to us what we could not have known any other way; that He should have imparted to our souls, as light, what would otherwise have been darkness to us. If we allow that to sink into our souls, on the one hand, it will bring great stability into our hearts and, on the other, it will move us in thanksgiving to the blessed God.

Then, as we reflect on it, it is intended to prompt a question with us as to why God has been pleased to do that. We can be quite sure that God must have had something in mind. It goes without saying that nothing God does is indiscriminate. Ephesians 1: 11 tells us that He "works all things according to the counsel of His own will". Everything that He does, even to its smallest details, has in mind the accomplishment of His great and wonderful purpose. So we can be quite sure that if God has been pleased to act towards us in this way it was because He had something in mind. I wonder if you have ever pondered what that was. Perhaps I could appeal to the younger

brethren here. Have you ever stopped to think why God has chosen you? Have you ever sat in your class at school, for example, and wondered why God should have been pleased to act this way towards you and not to the person next to you; or at work, if God has picked you out but not someone else in the office?

Well, the Lord Jesus explains why in the verses which follow. He brings out that what God had in mind in operating towards us in this way was nothing less than the building of the assembly. Now, I would like to interest you in this great matter, the building of the assembly, because I would say without hesitation that the assembly is the greatest thing that has ever been built. One reason for that is because it is being built by the greatest Builder that there ever was. Hear His words: "on this rock I will build my assembly, and hades' gates shall not prevail against it". No one can build like Him! What He builds is perfect; there is nothing lacking in it; nothing superfluous to requirements. He builds living stone by living stone. Think of living stones gathered out from every nation on the earth, sovereignly operated on by God and brought to Christ, with a view to being built in to this glorious structure. Every stone is essential. That means that there is a place in this building that belongs to you: only you can fill it out. But what a work this is in the hands of the greatest Builder of all!

Here is another thought: nothing has taken so long to build as the assembly. It has been two thousand years in the making! It took God one day, just one day, to make the sun and the moon and the stars. It took Him less than a week to create the earth with all its many and varied forms of life; but the building of the assembly has taken two thousand years. Then think of this, that the world to come, what the Scripture refers to as "Christ's day", will last a thousand years. God has allotted a thousand years for the public vindication of Christ, representing the climax of His ways on earth; but the building of the assembly has taken twice as long as that! Well has it been referred to as God's masterpiece, the greatest conception of divine love and wisdom. It is that in which the praises of God will be maintained, and it is to be His eternal dwelling-place!

I believe it is of all moment that we should be alive to the greatness of the assembly, especially in these days when this great work is nearing completion. The Lord Jesus is putting the finishing touches to this great work before the assembly's translation to be with Him in glory. We ought to be alive to the greatness of the assembly.

Then too, that we might be impressed more and more with the great blessing and privilege, the great honour, God has bestowed upon us, that we should belong to the assembly. It is the greatest thing in the entire universe.

Well now, I pass on to 1 Peter 2. If we think of Matthew 16 as the securing of the living stones out of the quarry of the world, 1 Peter 2 has in mind the shaping, the preparation, of those stones in order that each one should fit into this spiritual house. You can understand that a freshly quarried stone would have plenty of rough edges and protruding bits that need to be removed in order that it might fit into its place in the building. In 1 Peter 2: 1 we have the rough edges. In this verse Peter refers to five fleshly features which we would humbly have to confess, find a place in our hearts naturally. But they are things which, if left unchecked, will hinder us in fitting in.

Now, when it comes to 1 Peter 2, I do not have to think of you, and you do not have to think of me, but we each have to face this exercise for ourselves. Am I going to fit in? Am I going to occupy my place in God's wonderful new spiritual house? If so, I shall need to attend to these rough edges. He refers to "malice". You can understand that if I am harbouring ill-feeling towards another brother or a sister, I might not express it in any way, but if I allow that feeling it will hinder me fitting in, in taking up my place in this spiritual house. Then he speaks of "guile"; "all guile", he says. One of the helpful things that has been said about guile is that it refers to when we may say something that is true in order to hide the truth. The woman in John 4 is an example. She said to the Lord, "I have not a husband", v 17. If you took that statement in isolation it was of course true, but it was not the whole truth, and in fact it was intended to hide the truth. Over against that, how important it is that we should be open with one another. How important that we should be transparent. There is a series of addresses by Mr. Raven called, "The Moral Features of Christianity". One of them is "Transparency", FER 2: p181. He brings out that it is something which has been set forth in God Himself. It belongs to Christianity, dear brethren. Then we have, "hypocrisies" pretending to be what we are not, how close home it comes; "envyings" - desiring what others have; "evil speakings" - how careful we should be about how we speak, particularly how we speak about the beloved brethren in private. These are all things which mark us naturally, and the word is that they are to be laid aside. Because they mark us naturally they will not just drop off. Laying them aside suggests there is to be definite

exercise with us about them. If I feel that I have a tendency in a particular direction divine support is available. I can have to do with the Lord about it; He will surely help me. And so we are to be exercised to lay these things aside.

Then Peter goes on to say, “as newborn babes desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word”. If verse 1 gives us a whole line of things which have to be refused by us, verse 2 suggests that there is another line of things which we are to positively give ourselves to. He says, “as newborn babes desire earnestly”. We will not get anywhere without earnestness. We have all seen a newborn babe. It has its own way of making it known when it wants its milk, and it will not be pacified with anything else; it must have it. That is how we should feel about the pure mental milk of the word. We should feel that we cannot do without it. We should feel that our spiritual lives depend on it.

This expression “mental milk” is an interesting one. You may have heard the brethren refer to it as “food for the mind”. How important it is that our minds are fed. How important that our minds are nourished with good food. I believe it right to say that our spiritual state at any point in time, and our spiritual growth over a period of time, largely depends on what we have given our minds to, what we have spent our time on. No one knew that better than Peter. You may remember there was an occasion when he spoke out of turn to the Lord, when he discovered that he was out of step with the Lord. The Lord puts His finger on the problem. He says to Peter, “thy **mind** is not on the things that are of God, but on the things that are of men”, Mat 16: 23. He does not say that Peter's mind was on wicked things; He simply says, “the things that are of men”. I believe Satan has gained a great advantage through such things as the internet, where every taste, every possible interest, is catered for, and it is all so accessible; and it has spoiled our appetite for the pure mental milk of the word. “The things that are of men”.

I would like to encourage us all to set ourselves to go in for spiritual things. Perhaps I could especially encourage the dear younger brethren to commit themselves to the reading of the Scriptures, if they have not already. I know there are some here who make that a habit; but commit yourself to the daily careful, prayerful, reading of the precious Word of God. I would encourage us too, to commit ourselves to the reading of the ministry, what we refer to as the ministry of the recovery. It is part of the great spiritual heritage that has

come down to us. It is ministry that was given of the Holy Spirit, in which truth that had been lost sight of for centuries was brought to light once again. I would like to encourage us all to set ourselves for the steady, systematic, reading of the ministry. As we are exercised to take these things up it will not be long before we shall start to discover the power and satisfying character of spiritual things.

So Peter says, “that by it ye may grow up to salvation”. I think growing up to salvation has in mind the increasing apprehension on our part of what it is that God has saved us *for*. There are many true hearts who never get very far beyond what they have been saved *from*. But growing up to salvation I think involves an increasing apprehension of the great system of glory and blessing that God has in mind for us; and it becomes saving, because that will deliver us from the influences of the world.

Then he says, “if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good”. Now, the Lord is good in every sense of the word, and I am sure we have all proved that in many different ways. But I would like to suggest that He is good in the particular context of these verses. You will notice that the first three verses of 1 Peter 2 are all one sentence. And he concludes the sentence with this reference to the Lord as being good. I believe the Lord's goodness is specially to be proved by persons who are moving on this line: that the Lord specially honours, and comes in for, right exercise. I would illustrate that from the experience of Moses. You remember that incident when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and Moses said, “Let me now turn aside and see this great sight”, Exod 3: 3. Moses did not just carry on with his business. He was tending his father-in-law's flock, but he did not quickly go back to the flock. He said, 'No, I am going to stop and take account of this'. And the scripture specifically says that “Jehovah saw that he turned aside”, v 4. And Jehovah drew near and communicated to him in the most wonderful way. It is a simple example of how the Lord honours right exercise on our part. I think it is especially in this context that we will taste that He is good. Tasting that He is good suggests what we have arrived at through experience. I am sure there are others here who can say with me that we have proved from experience, through the Lord's goodness, that spiritual things are deeply satisfying.

So you can see that there is a whole line of things that is to be refused by us, and a whole line of things that we are to positively commit ourselves to. Then it is that Peter comes to this point in verse 4,

where he says, "To whom coming, a living stone". I think it suggests that it is as we have answered to the exercises of the first two verses, as we have definitely committed ourselves to them, we are ready for this further movement towards Christ as the Living Stone. Remember we said earlier, that when we think of Christ in this way we specially have before us what He is as giving character to the great spiritual system in which God is being served. And it calls for movement on our part towards Him.

Now, there are three distinct things which are said about the Living Stone. And it seems to me most significant that the first thing said about it is that it was "cast away indeed as worthless by men". If we are to reach Christ, if we are to apprehend Him, in this way, we need to understand the significance of His absolute rejection by men. It is not simply that He is not here, but He is not wanted either. "Cast away", it says, "as worthless". It indicates that if we are to reach Christ in this way it must be outside of, and apart from, all that belongs to this world. If we are ever to apprehend Christ in this glorious light it can only be by being apart from all that is dishonouring to Him.

That consideration would serve to reinforce in our minds the necessity for the important exercises outlined for us in 2 Timothy 2, as to withdrawing from iniquity, and as to separating from vessels to dishonour. We know how difficult, how painful and how sorrowful, often, that can be. But I would like to fortify the hearts of the saints in relation to it because if there is any compromise, if there is any weakening with us, then we shall come short in our apprehension of Christ. I said earlier that many Christians have never reached Him in this way. Many have little understanding of separation and what it involves in practice. But how important for us to be apart from all that dishonours Him. I would like to confirm and strengthen the hearts of the saints so that we might freshly set ourselves apart for Him; freshly set ourselves apart from all that is not pleasing to Him, in order that we might apprehend Christ, we might reach Him, in this wonderful way.

The next thing said about the Living Stone is that it is "chosen". How blessed to think of Christ as God's chosen One. The most outstanding way in which God manifested His choice of Christ was by raising Him from among the dead. How often we remind ourselves that it was a selective resurrection. The Scripture uses that expression "from among the dead". From among the millions who were lying in their graves, it pleased God to raise one Man. He left all the others in

their graves. It pleased Him to raise one Man; and not only to raise Him but to highly exalt Him. If the world regarded Him as worthless, we can take account of the exaltation of Christ as setting forth God's estimate of His holy worth. Think of that blessed Man who was cast away as worthless by men, now at the right hand of God, in that place where no man has ever been before! That is the complete answer on God's part to the rejection of Christ.

But God has not stopped there. I want to suggest that the establishment of the assembly on the earth was also part of God's answer to the rejection of Christ. It is as if God took account of men having cast Him away as worthless and He says, 'I am going to build something, and I am going to begin with Christ. I am going to build something far greater and more glorious than man could have any conception of at all'. Think of the triumph of it, that *in the very place* where Christ was rejected, God is building, He is securing a holy heavenly circle which takes its bearing, takes its character, from one blessed Man! And we are to have part in that; we are to have part in God's answer to Christ's rejection.

Then Peter adds that He is "precious". Ah, dear brethren, what can we say about the preciousness of Christ to God? Surely there is no more blessed region for our souls than to contemplate the preciousness of Christ to God. Think of Him as the One in whom every moral grace is set forth so outstandingly, the One who is supremely attractive to His God and Father. Then think of Him too, as the One who through his precious sufferings and death has laid the great basis for the accomplishment of all God's thoughts. He is the One who laid down His life willingly, to lay the foundation for the accomplishment of all the purpose of God. No wonder He is precious to God! I love to think of Him as the settled object of the love of God, the One in whom all the deepest feelings of the heart of God find their centre. You think of all God's holy affections resting with supreme delight on this blessed Man. Who could measure the preciousness of Christ to God? Yet a little further on Peter says, "To you therefore who believe is the preciousness", v 7. How wonderful to think that we should have an affinity with God Himself in a shared appreciation of Christ. It says, "yourselves also, as living stones". It is one of the things which characterises the living stones. He is precious to God; through grace we can say He is precious to us!

So Peter goes on to say, "as living stones, are being built up a

spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ". My desire is that we might get a fresh impression of the greatness of the glorious spiritual system in which God is being served, even at the present time. You ask, 'What about the breakdown?'. How we should feel it! How we should be deeply humbled by the ruin of the church. How we should especially be on our faces for the breakdown for which we bear such a responsible part. But let us understand that the breakdown has not altered spiritual thoughts. Peter was writing to the sojourners of the dispersion. The dispersion refers to the Jews who, under the government of God, had been scattered to the four winds. Many of them were many miles from Jerusalem. They no longer had access to the temple there. Among them were the believers to whom he was writing, and he wants to impress them with the fact that this spiritual house exists. This great building work is going on. Oh! that it may lay hold of our hearts. The divine proposal is that, as belonging to this holy priesthood, under the hand of Christ, we should have our living part in ministering that which is for the satisfaction of the blessed God. What could be greater than that? It is what God has taken us up for.

Well, I trust these thoughts will commend themselves to the saints. Above all, I trust that our hearts will be moved in thanksgiving to the blessed God who in sovereign grace chose us, and took us up, in order that we might be for His pleasure and satisfaction eternally.

Glasgow

22nd August 2023

THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE

Keith J May

John 4: 7-14; 5: 24-27; 17: 1-3

I have a simple thought before me, dear friends, as to what God gives, and in particular that He gives eternal life. Men in this world are concerned that they should live, and most of them would like to live as long as possible. God has something much greater than, and different from, that life lived here, and God has gone a very careful way about it, that men should have eternal life. I understand that there are very rich men in this world who have invested a lot of money to try to find a way to live for ever. Even if that was possible in some way, it would not be what God has in mind for men: God has something much greater in mind, and much happier and more blessed; for God's thoughts are always far above our thoughts, Isa 55: 9.

God desires that people should come to know Him, and as they come to know Him, they can enjoy His great gifts to them. It says in chapter 3, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal", v 16. Stark alternatives are given there. God gives them and He warns men; He does even today: it is a question of perishing or having life eternal. This woman of whom we read in chapter 4 was looking for something better than her present experience. She had had a difficult life, an unsatisfied kind of life, and that goes for many today, but God would have you to be satisfied; not satisfied with yourself, but with some sense of being here for Him, because what pleases God will inevitably please the one in whom God has worked in salvation. This woman had had five husbands, and the one she had presently was not her husband. She was living with him, as is fairly common today, but it seems to denote a heart not satisfied. God would perhaps raise the question with each one of us - is your heart satisfied? You will never find satisfaction in this world, because Christ is not accepted there. You might enjoy life to some extent and seem to get on well, but does it last? Does your joy last? Or is it the kind of joy that perhaps ebbs and flows?

The Lord Jesus approaches this woman in a very gracious way. He simply asks her for a drink. You might say, 'What a simple thing, to ask someone for a drink'. But for her it was rather startling, because she was not accustomed to being approached by Jewish men at all.

Whether she actually gave Him a drink I am not sure, but the Lord speaks to her about the water she would draw from the well, and then about the water which He could provide her with: "Every one who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinks of the water which I shall give him shall never thirst for ever". That water would meet thirst for ever. The woman is obviously attracted to this water. He goes on to say, "but the water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life." Then she says, "Sir, give me this water".

I wonder if there is anything in your heart that would be attracted to what God would give, eternal life? There were several people in the gospels who asked the Lord Jesus about eternal life, and what they should do to attain it. The Lord Jesus answers them, of course, as He does: He graciously answers every one. But I want to ask each one of us: do we enjoy eternal life? How would we describe it if we do enjoy it? It is beyond the comprehension of the human mind; it is the gift of God but it is only realised as we know the Lord Jesus Christ, and as we know God. I would like to think that every one here knows God, and knows the Lord Jesus Christ. God is freely giving eternal life, but it is something that did not come without cost to Him, because man naturally, like this woman, is unacceptable to God. Romans 2 speaks of those that are inexcusable, that find fault with everyone else but cannot see that they are doing the same things that they criticise in others, v 1.

How sad that is, but man in God's sight without faith and belief in God is inexcusable. Man has been given evidence from God. This woman had the evidence from the Lord Jesus. She spoke to Him, and listened to Him; He spoke to her, she came to an acknowledgement of who He was. We must come to an acknowledgement of the Lord Jesus, who He is, the Son of God. The woman says, "I know that Messiah is coming, who is called Christ; when *he* comes, he will tell us all things". Then Jesus lets her into that wonderful secret. He says to her, "I who speak to thee am he". What that must have meant to that woman! What does it mean to us? The Lord Jesus Himself would speak to you. What would He say to you? What evidence is there with you, what joy is there with you as a result of your following Him, of being in His favour, of pleasing Him, of finding your eternal satisfaction in the One who has given His all? He has died to save you. His precious blood has been shed; He did that for this woman. I know this is before

He was crucified, but she could not have been saved and come into eternal life, were it not that the Lord Jesus went that way, as He did for each one of us.

What is your relationship with the Lord Jesus? Is He someone that you would do anything for? He has done everything for you. What could you do more for Him? That is a challenge to us all - what could we do for Him? It is not that it makes much of us, but it glorifies Him. Maybe we have enjoyed a certain amount, we have come to a certain knowledge of Him, we have believed that He has died to save us, as He has. Have we believed that He has given the Holy Spirit, which He has? How good God is; how gracious God is! Sometimes we hear of somebody describing a scene in a certain painting, and the Lord Jesus is saying, 'This I have done for thee, what hast thou done for Me?'. Have you committed yourself wholeheartedly, without reserve, to the Lord Jesus? That is how you will come into the enjoyment of eternal life. It is not just by going along with the crowd, but by a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Himself that you will never regret. He is faithful - we might fail and we do from time to time, but how wonderful to enjoy what is eternal! There is much in this world that is not lasting, and many can see that the world is a mess. The governments of the world are weak and are unable to do certain things, although they might boast of their strength but there is One who is over all.

Let me come back to this, because I am exercised about it for myself: what place does the Lord Jesus have in my heart? I might have come a certain way, and maybe He is saying to us, 'There is a step more to take: will you take that step, to be faithful to me in my absence, in a scene where men have cast Me out?'. We might suffer for His Name. Many do. We may find it difficult to confess His Name, but that is one of the ways in which salvation is known and enjoyed, by confessing His Name. I wonder when you last confessed His Name. He is worthy of it, He is absolutely worthy of it, He has done everything that He could for you, and He has perfectly satisfied God. All that He has done has perfectly satisfied God so that each one of us as putting our trust in Him is perfectly clear before God as to our sins and as to our sinful state, as to our eternal destiny. Eternal life is not exactly linked to our eternal destiny; it is something that I believe we enjoy now as having to do with Him.

I thought these verses would encourage us - "he that hears my word, and believes him that has sent me, has life eternal". Are you

conscious of that, of a link with the Lord Jesus Christ, that cannot be broken? Once you put your trust in Him, that link cannot be broken. He is faithful - we might not be faithful, but He remains faithful. We might have sorrow that we fail from time to time, but “*he abides faithful, for he cannot deny himself*”, 2 Tim 2: 13. It is one of the things that God cannot do: He cannot deny Himself.

Where I read in chapter 17, the Lord is speaking to His Father. It is a very intimate moment and we might just enjoy it; He says, “Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee”. Think of what was involved in that: “glorify thy Son”. He was glorified in going through with all that God required, that God might be able to approach man in righteousness and in grace. The Lord Jesus bore for us the penalty that was due to us because of sin; He bore it completely according to the satisfaction of God. Then in order to demonstrate His satisfaction, God raised Christ from among the dead. As it says, “raised for our justification” (Rom 4: 25) - we are set forward completely clear in God's sight from all charge against us. Nothing and no-one, not even Satan, can raise a word against one who is justified. God honours that, and He does. May that be your portion; may it be something that you really enjoy and live in. As He says, “as to all that thou hast given to him”, then, almost as a bonus, as it were, “he should give them life eternal”.

I just desire, dear ones, that we might enjoy life eternal. I desire that we may enjoy a link, an indissoluble, every day of the week link, with the Lord Jesus, so that He consumes our life. He is worthy of it. He fills God's heart. Why should He not fill your heart? May He become ever greater to you, and may you consider whether in your life there is something that you could do for Him, that would please Him more. Each of us will have a different answer to that. It is not that we ourselves naturally can please Him, but as we give the Lord Jesus more room in our daily lives, how pleased He is with that.

May He be glorified, may He be honoured in every heart here tonight, for His Name's sake.

Colchester

8th October 2023

THE TESTIMONIES OF GOD

Alastair J McKay

Psalm 93: 1-5

Romans 8: 38-39

Titus 2: 11-13

Colossians 1: 26-27

Psalm 119: 57-59

The psalm that we have read speaks of a great God. I was confirmed for this occasion with what has become before us in the previous two readings; my exercise is to say a word as to the testimonies of God.

This psalm speaks of the fact that these testimonies are very sure. I seek the Spirit's help to attract your hearts to something that is absolutely certain and absolutely sure. One of the things in the world around us - and indeed it is a saying amongst men - is that the one constant is change. We only need to think back over the last two or three weeks as to all that has taken place in the world around us to know that things change in the world in which we have to live. I do not want to speak only to my young brethren, but I say this, those of us of my generation and perhaps older, we understand only a little of some of the pressures that you are facing. The world in which you are growing up is a very different world from the one that I grew up in. I trust, brethren, that we seek to carry our young people, because we love them. One answer, young brethren, to some of the pressures you face is, I believe, to lay hold with an unshakeable and an immovable hand to what is absolutely sure.

There is a verse just a little earlier from where we read in Psalm 119, that says, "It is better to trust in Jehovah than to put confidence in nobles", Ps 118: 9. The testimonies of Jehovah, beloved, are very sure. You might say surely it would have been enough in speaking of something to do with God just to say that they were sure. But the writer says they are "very sure". They are absolutely certain! I feel burdened by this because things are changing so fast. Now, of course, we look for that soon coming moment when our Lord Jesus will come. We had a reminder in a recent gospel preaching in Witney that God might be waiting for just one person. Dear young person, is He waiting for *you*? If we are left here and the Lord does not come, we shall be under the sound of the gospel on Lord's day, but do not leave it until Lord's day. If

you have not committed your heart to Jesus, if you have not found Him as your Saviour, dear friend, commit your way to Him today. And if He is waiting only for you the Lord will come; He will come and He will take us all in the Father's own timing.

The Lord Himself will descend, with that great assembling shout and the trump of God. What a cry will come, and "in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor 15: 52), we shall be changed. What a prospect. But as we are left here, I want to encourage you and draw you in to what is absolutely sure and what is unchanging. Indeed I would go further than that: I would say it is unchangeable. It cannot change because what we speak about relates to God Himself. We spoke of that in the reading, the things relating to God - His testimonies relate to Him.

So it says here -

The floods lifted up, O Jehovah, the floods lifted up their voice; the floods lifted up their roaring waves.

Jehovah on high is mightier than the voices of many waters.

There is a scripture in Malachi where God says, "For I Jehovah change not", chap 3: 6. "I Jehovah change not". God never changes, *can* never change, and *will* never change. "I Jehovah change not". And then this psalm says, "Thy testimonies are very sure". What are those testimonies? That question is raised in Deuteronomy. There is a scripture there (chap 6 20): "When thy son shall ask thee in time to come, saying What are the testimonies ... ?". When they took the stones out of the Jordan and they put them on the bank, there is a similar question then raised. "What mean ye by these stones", Josh 4: 6. Beloved, can we answer these questions?

There are young families here and in the normal course the children will grow and they will ask, 'What do you mean by this? What is this?'. What are we to say? Can I exercise all of us; whether we are parents, whether we are not, we all have responsibilities in localities. Some of us are privileged to have younger ones in the locality. These questions are asked, and let us be clear as to our answer. What are these testimonies? What are the testimonies of Jehovah? Well, ministry helped me in answering that question. Mr Darby (Collected Writings vol 17 p154) makes reference to three things; he speaks of God's nature, God's character and God's purpose. I would like to simply speak of those three things as testimonies of Jehovah.

A testimony suggests that there is something that is being said, and God is speaking. Hebrews tells us that; "God having spoken in many parts and in many ways formerly to the fathers in the prophets", chap 1: 1. Think of the great extent and the great breadth of God's speaking. God has been speaking to man for something like six thousand years. The first reference in scripture to God speaking to man refers to the voice of Jehovah. They heard the voice of Jehovah walking in the garden, Gen 3: 8. The voice was there. From the very beginning God has desired to converse with man, and He is speaking to us today; He is speaking to us this weekend. And His testimonies have to do with Himself. God is speaking to us as to Himself. And "...at the end of these days has spoken to us in the person of the Son, whom he has established heir of all things", Heb 1: 2.

How precious is the One we have been speaking about today. That speaking has come right down to us, and to today, the 20th October 2023. What is God saying today? God is speaking to us and He is speaking to the whole of mankind as to His own nature, and His nature is love. We had a reference to the scripture in Romans during the reading, which confirmed me in reading it again. Paul says that he is persuaded that none of these things shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. That is where the love rests - that is where it is! God's love has been made known in Christ. We were reading locally just recently of the time when the Lord came into the city of Nain. And what did He see? He saw a situation of utter hopelessness. He saw a funeral procession coming out of the city to bury the son of a widow. It says something very interesting there - it says that "the Lord ... was moved with compassion for her", Luke 7: 13. He was moved with compassion *for her*. Beloved, that is the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. And there was a display of the great nature of God Himself. It says that He reached out with the same hand that we were speaking about in the reading, and He touched the bier. The love of God has been seen perfectly and fully in Jesus in stopping what was proceeding there.

The Lord Jesus suffered for you, dear friend. Our brother challenged us in the reading this morning as to whether we have each laid hold of the fact that Christ has died for *me*. He has died for *you*, and He has done that dear friends in the full and mighty love of God. The love of God was made known there: there at the cross when He laid down His life. He died for me. Did He die for you? The love of God has cleared the way. It has removed the obstacle of death. It has removed

what lay between us and a Creator God. That love of God manifest in Jesus has made known the nature of God Himself. What a tremendous testimony - everything that God is is there in the love of God; it is made known in Jesus; and nothing can separate us from that.

What a glorious thing that is. Distance can come in in the world, can it not? Separation can come in but nothing, nothing, dear brother, dear sister, dear young one, can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Why? Because it is not in a man such as you and me: it is in a Man who in Himself was a divine Person. It is in a Man who was none other than the Son of God Himself. Because that love is in Him nothing can separate us from Him. What a sure testimony - what a certainty! As we go out next week, if we are left here, what a certainty we can carry in our hearts, that whatever happens nothing can separate us from the love of God. Mr Coates says in his ministry, 'If you had every power of the created universe against you, it is measurable, but you are linked up with the love of God in Christ and that is immeasurable', vol 26 p42. If you have accepted Christ as your Saviour nothing can separate you from a resource, from a strength, from a power that is measureless. We have a hymn -

O the love of God is boundless,
Perfect, causeless, full and free! (Hymn 212)

Avail yourself of it, dear friend.

And then as to His grace, I want to turn to Titus. It says here that "the grace of God which carries with it salvation for all men has appeared". My impression is that this is the character of God. This is how He does things; He has done them in grace; He has shown grace to you. What is grace? As I understand it, for one thing, grace brings me into what I did not deserve. That is what the grace of God has done; it has brought me in. Think of the thief on the cross - he accepted that he received the just recompense of what he had done, but he knew that the Man that was hanging next to him was the One in whom the love of God was. "This man has done nothing amiss", Luke 23: 41. And so the Lord extends the grace of God to him - "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise", v 43. That malefactor did not warrant that - he had done wrong; he had sinned. The Lord says, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise". Again, maybe it would seem enough to have said, 'Thou shalt be with me', but no, He adds, "in paradise", a place, as I understand it, of no condemnation. Think of the grace that that man was shown. That grace, beloved, is the character of God Himself; it is

how He operates. And He has saved you by grace. We are told that in scripture. Scripture does not say that we are saved by love; we are saved by grace. Scripture says that very clearly. We are saved; we are brought into what we did not deserve and that is the character of God.

If you have not committed your heart to Jesus, commit your heart to Him now. Find the great strength of the love of God in Christ, the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, and you will come into the area of His grace. You will come into God's great operations for you, to bring you in to the mountain of His inheritance and to plant you there. This is what God has in mind and this is His character. And that testimony of God is absolutely sure; it is certain; you can rely on it; you can depend upon it. Nothing can come in the way of it.

And then simply I want to speak of His purpose. We have had some references already today as to Christ being in us. I read a comment in Mr Coates' ministry that said 'God's purpose was to bring in Christ in the saints' (vol 1 p160) - how simple that is. His purpose is that Christ might have His dwelling place in me and in you, and to bring into His presence Christ in the saints. So Paul speaks of it as a mystery, "which is Christ in you the hope of glory". Not that there is any uncertainty, but rather it is a glory that this world will take account of; it is not yet displayed, but it will come. It will come in that great day of display when the whole world will take account of the greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it will see Him in that great and vast company of the saints.

Does it apply to us in this room? Yes, it does. Does it apply to every saint? Yes, it does. It includes every believer on our Lord Jesus; He desires to bring in Christ in every saint. So here is a testimony of God that I suggest is now in you and me. What grace of God that He should do this and that He should work in this way to establish this great testimony as to His purpose in you and me. But it is still in the Man of His choice; it is still in Christ. And He will bring that glorious Man, and He will bring Him in every one of us in this room. This scripture is addressed to a locality, it is addressed to "the holy and faithful brethren in Christ which are in Colosse". I do not know how many localities are represented in this room but is Christ being brought in your locality? Does He have His place; is there that that is for God's pleasure in bringing Christ in us collectively that there might be a great collective answer and collective response to God, that God might be glorified by it? Because, although these testimonies are to help us and they are to

strengthen us and settle us in a difficult and tough world, they are for God's glory. And may it be proved in our localities, as we work together and as we find our place together, as we take up responsibility, every one of us in our localities; because there is a real need for taking up responsibility. How many of our older brethren are not here anymore? If the Lord leaves us here, who is going to step up? Who is going to step into the ranks? Who is going to take responsibility in their places to maintain what is of God and what is for God? I trust it is going to be you. I trust it is every one of us in this room, because in that there is glory to God. "Christ in you the hope of glory". May we be just exercised about that and strengthened and stimulated in it.

Now I want to refer to Psalm 119. This is a psalm we have been reading at home; it has twenty-two references to the testimonies of Jehovah. I just suggest at the point I have read, that this is someone who has come into the good of the testimonies of Jehovah. He says, "I have sought thy favour with my whole heart". There is what is answering in the heart of the writer to the testimony of God as to His nature. There is an answer in him. I trust there is an answer in you, dear friend. I trust there is something being worked out now in your heart that is for God. This man starts to see things how God sees them. I think that is the result of the testimonies of Jehovah finding their place and finding their home in our own hearts: we see things. We *start* to see things how God sees them.

And that does not wait for the rapture. That is something that we can enter into now. So he says, "be gracious unto me" - not according to my circumstances but, "according to thy word". The writer is beginning to see how important things are to God. And, may it be that as we are exercised in these things we start to see things how God sees them. And then he says, "I have thought on my ways". Well, I feel tested by this. I do not say any of these things as having felt that I have reached them. I feel exercised by them as much as all of us perhaps. It is a good thing you know to think on your ways. May it be that everyone of us does that.

If the Lord leaves us here and He tarries, what will Monday bring? How will we go? Will we think upon our ways? Will we consider our ways in relation to a holy and righteous God who has established His testimonies and set them in our heart? Will we do that, beloved? Will we be focused on what is absolutely for Him? The psalmist says, "I have thought on my ways". We were reminded a little while ago of the

need for contemplation, to contemplate the greatness of divine glory and divine love. Let us contemplate our ways, and contemplate them at the level that God would have us to be. And then he says, “and turned my feet unto thy testimonies”. We had a reference in the reading today to making a conscious decision, a conscious choice. Which way are you going to turn your feet? May we be sure, may we be convicted, may we have the certainty of the testimonies of Jehovah in our heart, that we are prepared to turn our feet unto His way, unto His testimonies.

And then just to go back very briefly to Psalm 93. It says, “Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thy house”. Beloved, you and I are suited then for the house of God. The testimonies of God work holiness in our heart. It is something that God places there, and holiness becomes the house of Jehovah. It becomes the house of God. We are dealing with things that are so important. And God has not changed. He has not changed His standard - His standard is Christ, and holiness is in Him. “I Jehovah change not”.

May we be encouraged, and may we be exercised and strengthened in all of our pathways for His Name's sake.

Edinburgh
20th October 2023

THE DEPTHS TO WHICH THE LORD HAS GONE FOR US

Mark B Grant

Hebrews 2: 14-15

Jonah 2

Hebrews 9: 12 (from “but by”)-14

Luke 15: 1-7

These scriptures all refer in some way to the extent to which the Lord has gone for each one of us; Hebrews chapter 2 is very affecting. If you were to think about the reasons why the Lord came into manhood that would be a subject that you could consider for a very long time and there are many things that you could look at in Scripture about why the Lord came. But this scripture highlights that one of the reasons that He came into manhood was so that he could take part in “the same”, that is the same condition that we are in, “sin apart”, Heb 4: 15. What a wonderful movement of grace of the Lord Jesus that He was prepared to come in as Man for this reason, so that He could take part in “the same”. The Lord Jesus, who is the theme and subject and object of the glad tidings, and yet He knows and understands you, dear friend, because He has been here, and He has taken part in the same condition that you are in. We must always bear in mind that that was “sin apart”.

But He has been here in flesh and blood, and He has lived here; at a different time, two thousand years ago, but the world has not really changed that much. Things outwardly might be a bit different, there are different circumstances and technologies, but the character of the world has not changed. Some aspects were worse then. Israel was under the Roman empire, at that point in time; think of the awfulness of the Roman empire, the cruelty, the violence; He has been here and been through all of these things.

Jesus grew up here; think of the wonder of it! He did not come in, speaking very simply, as an adult and in a public way to take up His rights as a King or anything like that; He came in as a Babe into the most lowly of circumstances. He was laid in a manger. Think of that, the lowliness of His incoming! He was laid in a manger; there was no room for Him in the inn. That was how He came in. He grew up here. We do not know much about those early years, but we know that when He was about twelve years old, He was occupied in His Father's business (Luke 2: 49), and He grew “in favour with God and man”, v 52.

But I just wanted to emphasise that point that, when we are speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, He knows and understands everything about you and He knows what it is like to be here. He knows the kind of trials you go through; He knows the kinds of things you face. He knows even about relationships, natural relationships; when He was about twelve years old His mother and father did not really understand Him. He knows what that feels like, v 48! He knows all these things; so He is completely qualified to sympathise with you, and it says that in this book, in Hebrews 4: 15, it is put in a double negative, so He is able to sympathise with you. I just wanted to draw attention to that, that He was prepared even to come into such circumstances so that He could fully sympathise with you.

But then also He came into a condition in which He could die. Think of the solemnity of that! It could never otherwise have happened. We have to be careful what we are saying, but He came into a condition in which He could die. He came in as a real Man. What a solemn matter, but what grace! What a stoop, from heights of glory, we sang of that -

Once from glory's height descending
To this earth the Saviour came; (Hymn 414).

Think of the glory of deity. We cannot say much about that but He, in His own Person being God, was prepared to make that stoop into manhood -

Here in grace His pathway wending,
Here He magnified God's name.
Lowly Saviour!

How lowly was His incoming, the lowliness of His pathway. He was not given a place; He did not seek a place. Being who He was, He could have caused everyone to be absolutely overawed with His brilliance, He could have done that, but He did not; He came in as a lowly Man, and He served. Humanly and naturally, if we had even the slightest ability, we would be marked by pride and we would seek to let people know how able we were! That is the human heart. But the Lord being Creator, "all things have been created by him and for him" (Col 1: 16), came into the scene that He created and was prepared in grace to be a lowly dependent Man; that is the way that the Saviour came. But He "took part in the same, that through death he might annul him who has the might of death, that is, the devil".

When Jesus came in, He faced that one, the devil. Satan found no entrance, no point of attack; and He resisted, He came through every trial and test in perfection that “through death he might annul him”: that is, to make of no effect. That word annul means that the thing has no effect or relevance anymore. That is how full and complete the work of Christ is! He has done that! He has taken away the sting of death. For those who put their faith and trust in Him and His finished work that article of death is now of no effect. I am not trying to make light of what we go through in relation to those who are taken to be with the Lord and those who die; I am not trying to make light of that at all, we feel these things, but for the believer in Christ death means that we are forever with the Lord and in His presence. So therefore, the sting of death has been taken away; it has been annulled, and the one who has the might of death has also been annulled. What a wonderful full work Christ has done! And “set free all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage”. He was coming to set men free. You might not realise that you need to be set free, but you need to be liberated if you are in your sins and you have not yet owned Christ as your Saviour; you are in bondage. You are in bondage to sin, bondage to your own will and you need One who can deliver you from that bondage, and the One who can do that is the One who has annulled death so that He might set you in liberty.

In thinking of this in relation to the extent to which the Lord has gone for each one of us, I was impressed that He was prepared to come into manhood and take up all that God had in mind in His work, that work of redemption. All that God had in mind in the liberation of men, setting men free from sin: “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”, Rom 3: 23. Without the work of Christ that would have been our position forever, sinners away from God, and come short of the glory of God, never able to do anything about it, never able to do anything for ourselves. What a position of hopelessness we find ourselves in away from Christ, at a distance from God. What Christ has done sets us free but also brings us into nearness. Think of the blessedness of that!

Then in reference to Jonah; the Lord speaks of Jonah as a sign (Matt 16: 4); so we have to be careful in the application. There is a hymn we sing -

Thy grace, O Lord, that measured once the deep
Of Calv'ry's woe, to seek and save thy sheep (Hymn 293).

That was what was in my mind in this scripture; how far the Lord was

prepared to go to save you and to save me. This scripture gives an illustration of how far the Lord was willing to go. It says -

And the flood was round about me:
All thy breakers and thy billows ...,

that is - God's breakers and God's billows - "are gone over me". The Lord when He went to the cross, in those three hours of darkness, suffered the righteous wrath of God against sin and sins, and that is why it says here, "thy breakers and thy billows". Think of that, measuring sin's distance. We cannot even begin to take that in; we do not even remember our own sins, many of them; we might remember some of them, probably a fraction of those that we have committed! But the Lord Jesus measured the distance of sin, and sin is the root cause, it is the root problem, it is the thing that causes us to sin and commit sins, and the Lord Jesus has measured that distance. He has gone into that distance and as doing so He has atoned for sin and sins. He has satisfied God, He has borne all the judgment of God against sin and sins, and there is no more judgment to be meted out against anyone who has faith in Him, in relation to sin and sins because Christ has borne it! If you put your faith and trust in His finished work, He has borne your sins, and therefore that is liberating; so you can be set free from the bondage of your sins because you know Christ has borne them and God has judged them, and Christ has taken each one of them on. It is not just that they have been forgotten about or that they were put to one side: Christ has actually borne the judgment of God against them. That is how far the Lord Jesus has gone for you, dear friend, that He was prepared to do that. It says, "The waters encompassed me, to the soul"; think of the depth of the Lord's sufferings and feelings in relation to this matter. You see it at Gethsemane where "his sweat became as great drops of blood" (Luke 22: 44), as He anticipated what He was about to go through. He suffered in His soul: "The deep was round about me". We spoke in the reading about how the Lord would have felt things perfectly. He would have felt this perfectly in His moral perfection, being made the very thing that He hated the most. Think of how He would have felt that: a perfect Man, sin apart, being made sin. What a sober matter that is, that that is what the Lord Jesus did for me, and He had to do it for me otherwise I would be lost forever! What a sober matter; but blessed too! He has taken it away!

It amazes me that God could say about our sins, "I will never remember any more", Heb 8: 12. I think that is an amazing thing! Why

would God never remember my sins any more? Because Christ has borne the judgment against them! What a wonderful thing it is! It says -

The weeds were wrapped about my head.
I went down to the bottoms of the mountains;
The bars of the earth closed upon me for ever.

Think of the deep; it illustrates what the Lord Jesus went through. I do not know if this is a right way to think about it but when I read this I think of the literal deep, the depth of the ocean; the deepest part is miles deep; we can hardly take in how deep the ocean is! And that is just a physical illustration of the moral depth and the moral matter that was resolved here. It is just a way of trying to picture it in our minds in some way to try and take in a little bit about what this must have meant to the Lord Jesus. How deep and how low: what a sober matter it is. The Lord Jesus had to go that way if God was going to be satisfied in respect of sin and sins, and He went there, "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains". There are mountains in the sea that are far higher than Mount Everest; if you start from the bottom of the sea, they are much higher. That is how deep - it is just an illustration, but it paints a picture in our minds of the depth to which the Lord Jesus has gone, and He went there; it says, "I went"; He took it on Himself. What a glorious matter! "The bars of the earth closed upon me for ever": it was a real matter. He went into that domain, and He suffered there as Man, and we need to be careful what we say because it is a holy matter and it is beyond our minds, but He took it on in a real way; "The bars of the earth closed upon me for ever". There was almost a finality about that judgment: "But Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O Jehovah my God". God is so satisfied with the work that Christ has done that He has raised Him! What a blessed matter. Death could not hold Him; think of the blessedness of that that "Christ has been raised up ... by the glory of the Father", Rom 6: 4.

So, He has been there, He has atoned for sin and sins, and He has suffered there on the cross, and He has died and shed His precious blood. We have read about that in Hebrews 9: "but by his own blood", think of the perfection of that blood, "precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish", 1 Pet 1: 19. Then it says, "how much rather shall the blood of the Christ, who by the eternal Spirit offered himself spotless to God"; it required a perfect holy sinless Offering. No other offering would have been of any effect, but He offered Himself; so it has often been said that He was the Offering and the Offerer; no one else could

do that!

For those who put their faith and trust in that blessed work of His, and put their faith and trust in this precious blood, the effect is that it would “purify your conscience from dead works to worship the living God”. And also, He “has entered in once for all into the holy of holies, having found an eternal redemption”. The Lord has come here as Man and has taken part in the same condition that we are in and He has gone to the cross, and He has suffered the most awful judgment of God against sin, but He has also “entered in once for all into the holy of holies”. He has come out of death triumphant, having annulled Him who has the might of death, and it also says in 2 Timothy, speaking of God's purpose and grace, “but has been made manifest now by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ who has annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings”, chap 1: 10. By putting your faith and trust in what God is saying to you in the glad tidings you can know what it is for death to have been annulled, and for life and incorruptibility to be yours. That is like eternal redemption, so that the work that Christ has done saves you and redeems you, it brings you back to God, and it does so now and forever; how effective the work of Christ is.

In Hebrews it brings it out again, later on in this chapter, He has done it “once in the consummation of the ages” (v 26), and then in chapter 10, “But where there is remission of these, there is no longer a sacrifice for sin”, v 18; so it never needs to be done again. That is how perfect and complete the work of Christ is: it will never need to be repeated. There are the things which go on in the scene in which we are, the jobs that we do and all of those things, and you think you have done a good job, and then a while later you might need to do it again and again, and so on; but the work of Christ is not like that; it never needs to be done again. It has been done in perfection and has an eternal result for God, but also an eternal result for you and for me if we put our faith and trust in it. If you put your faith and trust in Christ and His finished work you are saved for eternity; what a wonderful thing that is. You may lose the joy of it, you may even in human weakness doubt it, but that does not change the fact that you are saved forever. It is a wonderful thing that the work of Christ and its effect does not depend on how I feel about it: it depends on what Christ has done and God being satisfied with it. Therefore, it is certain, absolutely certain, and guaranteed. It cannot be undone! Once you have put your faith and trust in Christ it can never be undone; God will always view you as

righteous because you are covered by the blood of Jesus. What a wonderful thing that is! Our ups and downs and failures do not affect it in the slightest; it is an amazing thing that how we are has no bearing at all on the efficacy of the work of Christ. I say that for our assurance because we are all weak, and we can all find life difficult and there are ups and down, and I do not know exactly what is going on in secret for each one in this room, but you can be absolutely assured that if you put your faith and trust in Christ you are saved forever. You never need to doubt it; that is a blessed thing, and it is an eternal redemption. God is satisfied with the work of Christ and will be so forever.

That scripture was referred to in the reading, “a Lamb standing, as slain”, Rev 5: 6. God will always view us in the light of what Christ has done and His righteousness. There is a hymn which says -

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thyself I cling (Hymn 396).

We could not do it ourselves anyway, and Christ has done it all; that is how far He was willing to go.

Luke 15 is really the scripture which was firstly in my mind in relation to what we have been speaking about, because the Lord Jesus is presented here when it says, “What man of you having a hundred sheep ... does not ... go after that which is lost”; this is the Lord Jesus as the One who cares for the sheep. This confirms what was in my mind; you might ask how far the Lord Jesus was willing to go for you. It says here, “until he find it”. That is how far! There is no boundary put on that, no thought of there being some limit to the distance the Lord Jesus would go to save you, dear friend; it is “until he find it”: it is until He finds you! In our own things if we lose something, especially something we find valuable, or that we are particularly attached to, and we might look carefully for it, but there would be a point where you would give up; you have looked and looked, and you cannot find it. But how much time you would spend looking would probably depend on how much you valued that thing. The Lord Jesus does not give up! In the gospel He would seek you until He finds you; He will never give up! I trust that it would affect you that the One who has been here and gone through so much, suffered at the hands of men, those atoning sufferings that we have gone over a little, all that He has been through, that same Person where He is now, risen and ascended, He would be seeking you as a lost sinner. I trust that would affect you; it says, “and having lost one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after

that which is lost, until he find it?”. And it says, “and having found it, he lays it upon his own shoulders, rejoicing”. Think of the joy to the Lord Jesus if you put your faith and trust in Him and His finished work. It says He would lay you “upon his own shoulders”. He would take you up and support you.

In John 13 it says, “having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end.” He would carry you and be with you forever in this scene. And then when this time is over you will be with Him forever. It says, “and having found it, he lays it upon his own shoulders, rejoicing”; think of the joy of the Lord Jesus in each one who comes to Him. You and I, poor needy sinners having no hope in ourselves, putting our faith and trust in the finished work of Christ, coming to God in repentance, can actually cause joy for the Lord Jesus: that is a real thing; “being come to the house, calls together the friends and the neighbours, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep”; the joy widens. Think of the joy that would be caused to others too! That is what the Lord is saying here: “Rejoice with me”; so the Lord's joy is primary, but others come into it. It is a wonderful thing when someone puts their faith and trust in Christ, what a joyful matter that is. “I say unto you, that thus there shall be joy in heaven”, so it is even wider, “joy in heaven for one repenting sinner”.

This emphasises that each one has to come one by one: “one repenting sinner”. We do not come *en masse*. There have been preachings, and there are some recorded in scripture where thousands were converted, but every single individual came himself or herself, and the work in that person's soul is individual and unique to that person. Dear friend, no one else can do this for you. The gospel is intensely individual: you must put your faith and trust in that finished work yourself. How thankful those of us who have been brought up in Christian households, and have come to the gospel many times can be; how thankful I am for that, but we must come ourselves -

Come as you are in all your sin. (Hymn 245).

That is just as you are! As another hymn says -

If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all (Hymn 208).

You will never get better; you will never be able to resolve the sin question yourself; you must come as you are, putting your faith and trust in Christ's work and owning that He has done everything for you.

That is the gospel message, and it is very simple. Christ has done everything for you!

And then, this eternal redemption, and to “purify your conscience from dead works to worship the living God”; that really requires the gift of the Holy Spirit. As we are left here, we can know what it is to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that is another thing that the Lord has done. He said, “I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter”, John 14: 16. So the Lord has gone on high and therefore the Spirit has come and He has come to be with you and in you forever. There are lots of 'for evers' in scripture but this is another “for ever”; the Spirit will be “with you for ever”, John 14: 16. A divine Person here indwelling the believer: what a great thing that is. How much the Spirit can bring you into, and how He can help you! He can help you in your circumstances but can bring you in to enjoy the greatest things; so therefore we can be found as worshippers, which would really be the end in mind in the gospel. Firstly, we must put our faith and trust in Christ and His finished work, but then as we are left here, and then in a day to come, we will be occupied in worship and praise and the blessedness of the presence of God. That is the blessing that is available in the glad tidings.

I trust that you have been affected by what Christ has done for you. May you put your faith and trust in that work and in Him.

May the Lord bless these thoughts.

Bo'ness

14th January 2024

IMITATORS OF GOD

John N Darby

Ephesians 4: 20-5: 21

Christian conduct, as does every duty, flows from the place we are brought into; and is spoken of in Scripture in different ways. Its motive and energy we find in Philippians 3 - Christ in glory as the object we are following after, and in pursuing which everything else is counted as loss and dung. And we get the spirit of our conversation in Philippians 2, and the pattern, too, even Christ come down, and even going down, in lowliness. And then, as representing Christ in the world, we are the "epistle of Christ." It does not say we ought to be such, but we are, 2 Cor 3: 3. The epistle may be sadly blotted by us, but still, that is what we are "manifestly declared to be." Here, in Ephesians, we are viewed as brought into God's presence, holy and without blame; that is, with a nature and character that suit Him, and are the reflection of what He is. And we are seen sitting in the heavenlies "in Christ"; not running to get into glory, as in Philippians 3. Moreover, we are in the same relationship to God as Christ is, and hence, Christian conduct is spoken of in this epistle as what suits this place, and flows from it.

Through the grace and power of God I am brought into His presence, not seeking to get into it, and my duties flow from the place I am in. People speak as though men were on probation, and the day of judgment would prove how it will turn out with them, whether they will be saved or lost. This is all wrong. Of course each is tested individually, by the presentation of the gospel; but the gospel comes to man and addresses him as one already lost, and needing salvation. Men have not to wait till the judgment to know how it will turn out. It has already turned out that I am a lost sinner. God turned man out of paradise when he had sinned; and as far as he could man has turned God out of the world when He came into it in grace, in Christ. Of course God can come into it in power, and will do so; but as far as man could, he has turned Him out. Man is now lost in himself, but God has acted in grace, so that he who believes in Jesus is saved; just the opposite; and it does not need the judgment to prove either the one or the other. Judgment is for my work (Rev 20: 12), and on that ground all are already lost. But salvation is of grace, and is God's work. What hath God wrought, Num 23: 23! God takes up man as dead in sins, and quickens him: he has a new life, and is "made the righteousness of God," being brought to God, and set in His presence, in the same relationship as Christ.

Christian duties (and there are such), flow from the new relationship thus formed by grace, and in Christ, and we must first be in the relationship before the duties are there. People make a grievous blunder here: putting the duties as a means of getting into relationship with God. Such a thing would never be thought of in natural things. Men's minds are clear enough about their own matters; all is simple to them: but when they come to divine things, and having to do with God, all sorts of blunders are made. How absurd it would be for all you people to get to be my children! You might be never so earnest and diligent; but no amount of earnestness would avail to form the relationship. But if you were my children, all would be simple enough, and the duty, too, to act like children. You cannot fulfil the duties of a child till you are one, or show the love of one either. How unbecoming of a servant to jump up and kiss his master! Quite proper in a child. And if we are children of God, then we are to behave ourselves as such; but our duties as children of God do not commence till we are in that place. Of course there are duties that we have as men, but on that ground we are lost. God makes us His children, and then says, 'Now imitate your Father'. "Be ye followers [imitators] of God, as dear children". We are brought into God's presence, and we are to go out into, and through, the world, and show whose children we are: to show His character, and "walk worthy" of Him. "To walk worthy of God", 1 Thess 2: 12. "Worthy of the Lord", Col 1:10. "Worthy of the vocation", Eph 4: 1. God Himself is our pattern, and we are to imitate Him. He loved us when we were enemies, and He causes His rain to descend "on the evil and on the good," and we are to act in the same manner toward men. I am to be kind to the unthankful and to the evil, for instance: so here, "tender-hearted, forgiving," and why? because my Father is. I am to forgive as, in Christ, He has forgiven me. In all things I am to look to Him, as revealed in Christ, as my pattern, and imitate Him.

Extract from *Helps in Things Concerning Himself*, vol 4