

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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DEPTH

Luke 22: 39-46

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JD On Lord's day where we were in Aberdeen we began the morning meeting with hymn 293 (CA Coates). The first line says,

Thy grace, O Lord, that measured once the deep.

I wondered if we could consider in our enquiry together, 'Thy grace, O Lord, that measured once the deep'. That is why we have read in Luke 22 and the verses which give us some insight as to how the Lord measured the deep. There are certain matters that can be brought out in our enquiry but the cup itself suggests the thought of measure, always keeping in mind that there was that which only He could measure; none other could measure. The second scripture we read in Jonah also brings before us the sufferings of our Lord and what He passed through, the depths, the severity of what the Lord measured, what the Lord endured, what He took upon Himself.

We also read in 2 Corinthians and 1 Peter where the link may be less obvious; it has not always been obvious to me either but I am sure the Lord and the Spirit will help us. I was thinking of how the consideration of the depths that the Lord went through is worked out in persons. Understanding that there was that which only the Lord could go through as a divine Person, there is to be that which corresponds in the believer. We have an example in 2 Corinthians 1 where we read as to the depths that Paul went through, and the corresponding features that marked such a person.

The scripture that we read in Peter does not describe what he went through but what he had experienced is expressed in how he writes. I felt it was necessary to end with the reference to "the pure mental milk of the word". There is what relates to the mind that runs through each of the scriptures that we have read. In Luke 22, it says that the Lord's "sweat became as great drops of blood". In Jonah, the weeds were wrapped about his head. In Corinthians, Paul despaired of living. "The pure mental milk of the word" would link with the mind and the thought of what is nourished, leading to what is built up. It says, "that by it ye may grow up to salvation". We will get help as we carefully proceed, do you think?

GBG In Luke 22, is the Lord going through matters and feeling the bitterness of it in His spirit, going through it with His Father? “If thou wilt remove this cup from me”; He had perfect knowledge of what was involved in that cup. He would feel the bitterness and the depths of it, would He not?

JD Yes, and the principle that entered into the Lord's life was that He received everything from the Father. Christ refused everything that the devil offered Him! We know that the devil had appeared to the Lord earlier in the temptations, and then left Him for a while and now returns here. Conflict is mentioned; it says in verse 44, “And being in conflict he prayed more intently”. He was not in conflict with the Father; it was conflict with the devil. He is in the presence of the Father, and He wants to receive, and does receive, everything from the Father's hand. Where we began to read it says, “And going forth he went according to his custom to the Mount of Olives”. Luke in a particular way is the gospel that presents the Lord as the pattern. The first verse we read provides an example of keeping ourselves in the love of God and keeping ourselves in the divine presence. It was from that area represented by the Mount of Olives that the Lord approached what lay before Him; He approaches the circumstance that has come into His life, that has come into His soul, we might say.

GBG So, for our help, the apostle says, “the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God”, 1 Cor. 2: 10. Do you think this is involved and we get some impression of it?

JD That is very helpful and affecting because what is brought out here is the perfection of Christ and His sufferings, the perfection of His manhood in suffering. And so He must necessarily say, “if thou wilt remove this cup from me”. That could never suggest that there was any weakness or hesitation in relation to the Father's will, but it brings out the perfect holiness of the manhood of Christ that He should face such a matter. As you have said, the bitterness of all that lay before Him, and yet the Spirit searching these matters brings out and magnifies, the perfection of the Person that was undergoing such a matter.

GBG Do you think it is intended to form depth in our own souls, not just to go along in an easy, light manner but to feel things that we are asked to pass through. Of course we are speaking of the Lord just now but the forming of depth in our souls is a great thing. It gives tone to a person, does it not?

JD Yes, I am so pleased you have said that, because you have helped to explain more clearly the link that I had in mind with the third and fourth scripture we have read. The Lord's sufferings were not theoretical, and the sufferings that we pass through are not either. The forming of what is moral and spiritual involves what we may pass through providentially, practically, physically and mentally.

APG In Ephesians 3 the depth is mentioned: "the breadth and length and depth and height", four dimensions. The assembly has a particular appreciation of the depth and the love of Christ involved in that, do you think?

JD Yes. I may think more of the assembly as an answer to His glory, but the assembly is a fit answer to His sufferings. It shows what a wonderful matter the assembly is because she has the capacity to appreciate His sufferings like no other vessel, as well as appreciate His glory.

JL At one point God raised five different questions with Job, asking him how much he knew about this area of depth and suffering in relation to death. And He said to him in conclusion, "Declare if thou knowest it all" (Job 38: 16-18); but only the Lord knew the depths, did He? No one else could expound on that, could they?

JD I am glad you say that because we should underline what is unique to the Lord Himself. He undertook what only He could as a Man, and as a divine Person. Another hymn says,

None could follow there, blest Saviour Hymn 298.

There is what was unique to Him and yet there is what we can enter into, but understanding as Job needed to that there always remains that which only He could do. But we can take account of it. Here there is the stone's throw. The stone's throw not only suggests that there is that beyond us in Christ, but the stone's throw also suggests what is within man's reach. There is that which comes within our reach to take account of. Another consideration around the stone's throw, is that I may take myself outwith the distance of a stone's throw. I may not be as close to the Lord as I should be, but the Lord desires us to be close enough to take account of Himself, do you think?

JL Yes, I find all that very interesting. I really feel deeply touched today to think of it being said of the Lord that in the midst of all this, "he prayed more intently". I find that a very affecting expression. We are accustomed to being told that He prayed, but to pray "more intently" is a

very impressive remark, is it not?

JD We mentioned the cup in relation to measure but it would also suggest what is compressed and condensed. "He prayed more intently": it brings out this matter of Him measuring the deep more intently. I think -

Thy grace, O Lord, that measured once the deep
would involve Him praying more intently as the matter came before Him. Do you have more to say?

JL I find it very remarkable that that should be said of the Lord Jesus. So, with ourselves, we should take up things with increasing depth of interest and exercise the more we understand the meaning of what has been involved in Christ's death for us, do you think?

JD The section that you are referring to at the beginning of verse 44, "And being in conflict he prayed more intently", comes after the remarkable matter that an angel appeared to Him from heaven strengthening Him.

CAMcK It does not say, 'prayed more intensely' but, "more intently".

JD We may say the scope of the matter is before the Lord, and links with the thought that the Lord measured the deep. He anticipated and felt all that lay before Him in His suffering.

PAG Would praying more intently include as far as the Lord went, that He was actively excluding the distractions that the enemy would seek to put in front of Him?

JD Yes, that is helpful, because the devil wanted a place in all of this. It is awful really to think of it, but he wanted to bring death to bear upon the Lord. It was a necessary matter that the Lord should go by way of death, but the Lord was excluding all other influence. The Lord was the direct focus of the devil's attention like none other was. All of death's forces were marshalled against the Lord Jesus, and against Him proceeding in dependence upon the Father, and the Father's will in taking the cup. So that helpfully brings out what you have said that the intentness was to exclude any other person from this whole matter except it being between Christ as the Son and the Father. He is presented here as the suffering One. When He takes man's place before God it is as the Victim, but here it is Christ before the Father and His love for the Father's will. Think of His intentness that every other consideration should be excluded. That is beautiful.

PAG The angel appeared from heaven. It says in Deborah's song, "From heaven was the fight", Judg 5: 20. The enemy would lower the level of things. Although we are speaking about the depths, the Lord went through it in the height of His dignity. He went into the depths in His own power. He went into the depths of His own volition, no one put Him there, and yet He accepted it because it was the will of His Father. "From heaven was the fight", and it was not going to be from anywhere else, was it?

JD That is good, and that links with the way that the portion of scripture that we have read begins; that He had gone as was His custom to the Mount of Olives. So, as you say, it is from heaven that this matter proceeds in dignity. I have often wondered about the scripture, "having despised the shame", Heb 12: 2. His suffering was going to involve both reproach and shame from man, but nothing could change the nobility, the dignity of Christ as He moved forward.

NJH He was withdrawn from them; He could only take them so far, but He went further. I was thinking in Leviticus 16 where the priest goes in alone, and it says, "there shall be no man in the tent of meeting when he goeth in to make atonement in the sanctuary until he come out", v 17. There was what was beyond man to contemplate. Is that right?

JD Yes; so it says that the disciples slept. I can only have sympathy for them because I sleep through plenty, which suggests a lack of exercise and urgency, but they slept. They were not even able to be in the shadow of what the Lord was passing through, never mind entering into the substance of what He was passing through.

RG It goes on to say, "having knelt down he prayed". Do you think that shows His holy dependence and the dignity and the perfection of His manhood in dependence?

JD It does. It is beautiful how the simplicity of scripture describes it, "having knelt down he prayed": the perfect testimony of the perfect dependence of a perfect Man. And a Model for us too; it has been said that you cannot lose your footing when you are on your knees. It brings out how significant this matter of dependence is for us as creatures because the only legitimate power that we have is *dependent* power. So how the Lord prays is an example to us.

DAB Why is the thought of the cup mentioned here? In verse 42 it says, "saying, Father, if thou wilt remove this cup from me: - but then, not my will, but thine be done". There is the element of concentration

there, is there not, and yet it was a measured matter?

JD We may say simply that some word or description is needed to be used to convey what the Lord was going through. He was not receiving a literal cup, but the Spirit of God uses an illustration that would help to give us some understanding of the concentration, and of it being a measured matter regarding what Christ was facing and anticipating.

DAB It does not lessen the depth of the conflict that the Lord Jesus went through and yet His grace measured it. We began by referring to,
Thy grace, O Lord, that measured once the deep.

JD The other consideration regarding the cup is that it brings before us what is to be drunk and the whole matter of what the Lord tasted. What can we say? How real this was to the Lord. It was suggested in a cup. It is not abstract; it was what was entering into His soul, His holy feelings, Christ feeling this as none other could because of His perfection, because of His holiness. And yet it is described as a cup, suggesting the tangibility, if we could say that reverently, of the sufferings of Christ. He is facing them now in the perfect dependence of His manhood.

GBG He was speaking to His Father, and the Father knew perfectly what was involved in this.

JD Yes. I do not know what to say really. There is perfect accord between the Father and the Son as this matter is being worked out. He can say, "if thou wilt remove this cup from me: - but then, not my will, but thine be done". The relationship between the Son and the Father enters into this.

TMcL Our brother Alex Craig said in a preaching that the Lord never refers to it as 'my cup' but, "the cup which the Father has given me", John 18: 11.

JD He does not say, 'my cup'; it is, "this cup": "if thou wilt remove this cup". The sufferings of Christ were vicarious. There was nothing that attached to the Lord personally that caused Him to go this way. It was only His love that caused Him to go this way and His perfect obedience that caused Him to go this way. He went this way *primarily* in His love for His God and Father and His love for the will of God; and then His love for us. I think that is the order.

NJH I was thinking in considering the cup, He says, "shall I not drink

it". His holy inwards were affected by what He drank.

JD The cup involves the matter of drinking but then how beautiful it is to recall the actual words of scripture. "Shall I not drink it?", showing the feelings involved in it. There is contemplation involved in it because that is what Gethsemane is. It is the contemplation and the anticipation of what lay before Him.

PAG The cup may indeed involve the matter of measure, although in a sense as you have said that is beyond us, but you get some sense of that in the fact that the resurrection will be in the twinkling of an eye, 1 Cor 15: 52. It involves every saint that is to be raised in a twinkling of an eye. And yet, although it does not come into Luke, what this cup involved was three hours. The immensity of it is beyond any calculation. The aggregate of all that are saved can be raised in the twinkling of an eye, and yet the meeting of sin was three hours of darkness on the cross and all that surrounded it. I want to ask then, if the cup would also suggest what is complete.

JD Yes, that is very helpful. It would be a comfort to our hearts that if the cup suggests measure there was Someone who could encompass such measure. But then as you suggest it is not only measure but that the whole matter has been completed. The hymn writer says,

... - love drank it up;
Left but the love for me. (Hymn 415)

The Lord drank every last dark drop. There is nothing left. What you say as to the twinkling of an eye and the three hours helps us to apprehend the magnitude.

JL Two thoughts run together a little, do they, in that the cup itself was complete? The full involvement was implied in that when the Lord said, "this cup", but then in fully drinking it; so, is the matter fully resolved? There were two possibilities we might say: either it had to be removed, which was not possible, or else totally consumed with its fruitful result for all the saints and for God as a consequence.

JD That is good to bring before us. And so there is measure and there is completeness and there is the full resolution of everything for God. I was thinking of hymn 415:

Death and the curse were in our cup,
O Lord, 'twas full for Thee!

But Thou has drained the last dark drop,
 'Tis empty now for me.
That bitter cup - love drank it up;
 Left but the love for me.

This whole matter involved the righteous demands of God, of God's glory, being met - fully met. Think of the exactitude, you might say, of God's glory involved in this matter, and yet Christ met it all. He glorified God; is that not wonderful? He glorified God as a Man; and glorified God as a Man who knelt down to pray. He glorified God as a Man who felt matters so significantly that His body was affected evidently, because it says an angel appeared to Him from heaven strengthening Him.

APG It says, "rising up from his prayer". He was not overcome was He? He overcame, did He not?

JD Yes, is that not beautiful? It does not just say, 'rising up from prayer' but it is, "his prayer". I think the Spirit would ensure that was put there just to guard that this was "his prayer". It is how He prayed, and how He moved forward, and what He did: how wonderful! And then too the angel appeared to Him. It is a wonderful matter. The Lord, of course, existed before angels did but He then came into this condition, condition of manhood: "made some little inferior to angels on account of the suffering of death", Heb 2: 9. And an angel comes and strengthens Him. The angels would always have been the servants of the Lord because of who He is, but Mr Darby makes a comment that it was at this moment that formally the angels become His servants. That must be because the angels for the first time saw a Man who was prepared to be obedient even unto death. How beautiful that is. And so now both formally and morally the angels must be the servants of the Son of man.

DCB You referred to His going to the Mount of Olives, and I wondered if that had some bearing on that, and really His manhood in the excellence of it as going to a place that would suggest for us the presence of the Holy Spirit.

JD That is strengthening for us; we have faith, but we also have the Holy Spirit and can be strengthened by the Spirit. The Lord did everything by the Spirit. He did everything by the Spirit and also, "who by the eternal Spirit offered himself spotless to God", Heb 9: 14.

DCB Well, I was wondering too about the whole thought of holiness that affects this. The measure is according to the holiness of God, and

the holiness of the Lord Jesus Himself. That was why He would desire not to drink the cup; it was because of His holiness.

JD His holy soul would recoil from such a matter. Anticipating what it was to be made sin His holy soul must recoil. How beautiful that is.

BWL We can think of the Lord's feelings in relation to being made sin. It was going to involve the forsaking, and no communion. The Lord in particular in Luke's gospel goes to the Mount of Olives; He is in communion, is He not? That communion was going to be broken.

JD That links with what has been said. We can think of Him as a Man before God and His holy unbroken communion with the Father, and it is from that standpoint that He prays, and this whole matter of the cup comes before Him. It would bring before us how He must have felt this whole matter. He was always in communion, and the Holy Spirit would emphasise to us His holiness and His communion with the reference to the Mount of Olives. It is to help us more fully appreciate what it must have meant for Him to anticipate the time when He would be forsaken and communion would be broken. He would feel it like none other could feel it, because He had had unbroken communion as a perfect Man before His Father.

GBG Why did He twice say to them, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation"?

JD Just earlier in the chapter the Lord had spoken to Simon and said, "Satan has demanded to have you", v 31. There seems to be some consideration of how the devil may be allowed to test God's work in our hearts. It was mentioned earlier how the devil sought to even have a part in this very matter. It was suggested that the word "intently" would involve the matter of the exclusion of any other influence or any other person. Did you have more in your mind?

GBG The Lord certainly knew Satan was near; He had been dealing directly with Satan. They would need to pray in view of that, would they?

JD Yes, it has been said that the devil comes to the meeting. How near he is. And if you think of Peter, if such a person as Peter could be influenced in such a way, any of us can be. "Behold, Satan has demanded to have you": the Lord is bringing in a cautionary word to them, do you think?

GBG When Peter suggests that the Lord would not need to go this

way He says, "Get away behind me, Satan", Matt 16: 23. It is exactly what Satan sought to do.

JD It suggests that the believer has to be careful even with apparently right desires that they might not be serving God in their actions.

Maybe we should move to the scripture in Jonah. We have touched upon some of these matters already, but we read in Jonah 2: 5,6, and it says,

The waters encompassed me, to the soul:
The deep was round about me,
The weeds were wrapped about my head.

Where we read in Luke 22 it says that "his sweat became as great drops of blood, falling down upon the earth". I wondered about that. I do not mean to stretch the application of Scripture but when we go to the scripture in Genesis 3, it speaks there about what came in as a consequence of sin. The ground was cursed and then it says, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread", v 19. It is as if there is a suggestion in the "sweat became as great drops of blood" of all that the Lord was taking upon Himself vicariously as a result of what had come in through sin. And then too I have often thought of those words that "his sweat became as great drops of blood" and linked them with Hymn 435.

On that same night, Lord Jesus,
When all around combined
To cast its darkest shadow
Across Thy holy mind.

I say all of that because where we have read in Jonah 2: 5 it says, "The weeds were wrapped about my head". How this matter of what the Lord suffered involved, speaking carefully and reverently, His mind and His spirit and His soul.

JL Would it be true to say that the Lord looked for no way of escape? But in addition to that are these significant words "encompassed", and then "round about me", and then "wrapped about my head"? What would you say about these expressions?

JD I find I like to try to escape certain things, and Jonah was a bit of an escapist as well, but that could never be said of the Lord Jesus. How wonderful was His committal. In type, His ear was bored through with

an awl, Exod 21: 6. There was no thought of Him not being fully committed to the will of God and to His own. So it is not 'no man'; it is "No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends", John 15: 13. It says, "no one". It does not say 'no man', because it is divine love and what is marked by divine measure. But then you mentioned the words "encompassed" and "round" and "wrapped". Please help us.

JL It just seems to stress again the fulness of what was involved, set out typically here, but the fulness of what was involved for the Lord Jesus in measuring the totality of the depth of all that was before Him; and I might just add also in relation to our previous scripture, we are indebted to the Spirit for the knowledge of what the Lord prayed because no one else was there to hear what He said. So the Spirit's feelings must have entered into that too in permitting such a record now to be put in Scripture for us, would you think?

JD Yes, how indebted we are to the Spirit because it says if all the things "were written one by one ... not even the world itself could contain the things written", John 21: 25. The Spirit is able to bring to us what entered into the Lord's life that may not have been necessarily recorded. In thinking of what we are considering now in Jonah, the brethren can help as to this matter of "encompassed" and "round" and "wrapped". Mr Darby says,

When, deep to deep still calling.

Think of it. What was coming upon the Lord:

And - death and wrath appalling -

Their waves shall o'er Thee roll (Spiritual Songs).

There was no mitigation for Christ was there? None at all. How important that is to think about. There was no mitigation whatsoever, and so Mr Darby also says that for Christ "death was death ... all dark, without one ray of light even from God", vol 7 p169 So Christ has known like no other what it is to be alone; like no other - truly alone. The hymn says that:

Truly alone! (Hymn 152).

CC Does Psalm 22 help in some of this for our contemplation? I was thinking as to:

Many bulls have encompassed me; Bashan's strong ones have beset round me", v 12.

Would that link a little as to what has been said?

JD There was what would be around the Lord literally as He went to the cross and His trial, His crucifixion, and what He suffered from man on account of righteousness as we have been taught, and then from God on account of sin as made sin. And there are these different companies represented, whether it is the Pharisees, the religious element, or the rebellious element. They were all there. But then where we read it says,

The waters encompassed me, to the soul:
The deep was round about me,
The weeds were wrapped about my head.

I think there is some insight into what was beyond the physical eye, giving us an indication by the Spirit of what Christ endured.

GBG The Lord Himself relates this to Jonah: "Even as Jonas was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights, thus shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights", Matt 12: 40. So does burial come into this?

JD Yes, I am glad you say that. So the full extent, again using words carefully, is that Christ went not only into death, but was buried. It was burial. It says,

I went down to the bottoms of the mountains;
The bars of the earth closed upon me for ever.

He went down to the bottoms of the mountains. I tend to think of mountains suggesting the thought of purpose, the hills perhaps suggesting the ways of God. So in His death there is not only what He did for us but the matter of securing the purpose of God.

BWL "I went down": I was thinking of the grain of wheat: "Except the grain of wheat falling into the ground die", John 12: 24. The Lord was not sown; it was His own act in going into death and burial, but then we have the result, do we not, for God in the much fruit?

JD It was the Lord's own act. It was His own act to come into manhood, of His own volition: "Lo, I come", Heb 10: 7. And it was His own act to die:

I went down to the bottoms of the mountains.

JSp I was going to ask about that verse. You cannot go any deeper than the bottom; why was it "the bottoms of the mountains". It is plural;

it is not the bottom of the sea. Do you have any thought on that?

JD Well, you can help us further; I am enquiring too. "Whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea, and in him the amen", 2 Cor 1: 20. There is the bottoms of the mountains, but I thought too of purpose which is a greater matter than promise. He was securing on an irrefutable basis the rights of God, and establishing what would be for God as a result of His dying, do you think?

JSp I think that is helpful. So all of God's purposes, all of them, are secured by Him.

JD That is beautiful because then that brings before us that everything is centred in this Person. Everything is centred in this Person and everything is centred in what this Person accomplished. And this is one Person, and the only Person, who could secure everything for God: He is that Person. He is so great! It says in Romans 3: 23, "for all have sinned, and come short", that is man, "of the glory of God". The footnote says that the coming short is not dependent on 'have', note *p*. That is that even man in innocence, and certainly as fallen, could never come close to the glory of God. But here is a Person who is the expression of the glory of God, and is securing the glory of God. How wonderful. Only Christ could secure the glory of God, and thus He went to the bottoms of the mountains. "The bars of the earth closed upon me for ever", suggesting what has been removed forever: the man who gave offence. There is what has been taken away by Christ never to be seen again, involving the removal of the first order of man before God. And then it says,

But thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O Jehovah my God.

How right you might say - Mr Coates uses the words, "morally bound", vol 25: p112. It was a life which was morally bound to end in resurrection.

PAG In Proverbs 8, wisdom says, "Before the mountains were settled ... was I brought forth", verse 25. The wisdom of God is seen, do you think, in that now the mountains are settled because He, the Lord, has been to the bottoms of the mountains? So everything of the purpose of God is settled, and what remains is for Him to head up all things in the Christ, Eph 1: 10.

JD That is very good. I do not know too much about wisdom in relation to the scripture in Proverbs. It is somewhat personified. I do not think we can quite go as far as to say it is Christ, but it is seen in Him;

it anticipates that there is this Person who can settle matters. We spoke of the cup involving a complete matter and this a complete matter too, is it not?

PAG Christ “has been made to us wisdom from God”, 1 Cor. 1: 30. He was there before wisdom was there. Wisdom was brought forth; Christ was never brought forth.

JD What a Person He is. He is a divine Person, and He is a real Man. He is all these things, but He was never brought forth because He has an eternal personality. He brought the lustre of His eternal personality into manhood.

DCB I was wondering if Ephesians 4 would relate to the bottoms of the mountains: “But that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth”, v 9. That is, He has gone to the bottoms of the mountains but that really is the ground on which He has ascended above all the heavens.

JD None could go further. I might say simply, none could go lower as a man, and none could go higher as a man. Is that not wonderful? We might say that in Christ as Man the depths and the heights are commensurate. How beautiful that is to think of. The One who went so low has now gone so high. He is highly exalted! No wonder scripture says He is the one whom heaven not only ‘will receive’ but, “must receive”, Acts 3: 21.

JSp You referred earlier to where the Lord refers to Jonah. He says “more than Jonas” and “more than Solomon”, Matt 12: 41, 42.

JD Even in the words used He says, “more”, because we cannot fully define just how great He is, but be satisfied that whoever it is - Jonas or Solomon - but whoever it is, it is more. It is always more. When you come to Christ, you come to what is beyond comparison.

The third scripture we read is in 2 Corinthians, and it was mentioned earlier how we ought to enquire what the connection may be. The consideration of the sufferings of Christ and the way that He has gone raises the question as to how these things are worked out substantially in our hearts. It cannot be simply through reading the scriptures, reading ministry, and praying, as blessed as all this is. These things are also worked out through what we experience. It should be for the comfort of us all, and for anyone who may be struggling in the circumstances of life, and what has been brought to bear upon them, whether it is circumstantial or physical or mental, that

God intends to form something in us related to the sufferings of Christ.

I just want to acknowledge the matter of mental health, and the pressures that come upon the saints and how these things are intended to work out something in us morally and spiritually. That is a sensitive matter, but it is a precious matter. We see it in Paul; think of the depths that Paul evidently went through and also of the heights that he experienced. It has been suggested that outside Lystra when Paul was stoned and they took him up for dead (Acts 14: 19) was when he may have had the experience of being caught up to heaven, 2 Cor 12: 2. You can see then that this is not a theoretical matter; it is worked out through the circumstances of life that through them we may have some further insight and appreciation as to what Christ has done, and to what God is now doing in the hearts of one another. Is that sensible?

GBG Paul was certainly a sufferer. He says in Philippians, “I have learnt in those circumstances in which I am, to be satisfied in myself. I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound. In everything and in all things I am initiated both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer privation. I have strength for all things in him that gives me power”, chap 4: 11-13. So that is an outlet, is it not, in whatever measure we pass through in the ways of God to cause us to suffer trials? It is the only outlet, is it not? You might be at your wits’ end, and feel desperate hardly knowing what to do.

JD We should be simple as to what we have read - it says, “For we do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, as to our tribulation which happened to us in Asia, that we were excessively pressed beyond our power, so as to despair even of living”. I do not wish to be ungracious, but I do confess to hearing a conversation in a meeting where it seemed to be reasoned away, that somehow this might not have been actual. Paul despaired of living; He had an experience that he despaired of living. And then it says, “But we ourselves had the sentence of death in ourselves”. He understood the application of it morally to himself that we should not have our trust in ourselves. What a realisation he must have come to. “God who raises the dead; who has delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver; in whom we confide that he will also yet deliver”. Paul had the practical experience that allowed him to prove and confirm the truth in his own soul.

PAG What you are saying is important because we have spoken of the Lord when “his sweat became as great drops of blood, falling upon the earth”. The pressure on His mind was such that that was the

physical expression of it. And if the Lord had not said what He said in John 12 we would never have attributed it to Him; He says, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?", v 27. Such was the pressure on His spirit that there were no words that could adequately express it. It is not that words failed Him; you could never say that of the Lord, but human language was insufficient to express the pressure on His spirit. So, when a brother or a sister feels pressure in their spirit, the Lord sympathises with that just as much as He does with pressure in our bodies. I am not making one better or different, but our sympathies should be as much towards brethren who suffer in their minds as it is towards brethren who suffer in their bodies.

JD Yes, they should be. There are dear brethren who are passing through extreme exercise in their bodies physically, but there is also a great amount of suffering in the spirits of the saints. This is something that is not necessarily seen. The word 'tone' was used earlier. If we are to be like stringed instruments then I suppose we will need to be continually tuned. How are we going to be attuned, and how are we going to have better tone? This is how it comes about. I get help from the scriptures and ministry, but it is by the Spirit and what we experience that there is added depth and tone that then flows into the service of God. How wonderful that is. In Revelation it speaks about the magnitude of the city, the size of it and the substance of it, and the forming of it is taking place now and has taken place in those who have gone before, the substantiality of God's work in the saints in correspondence to the work of Christ.

DAB Do you think there is a link in what the Lord said as to the Spirit being the Comforter? He said, "another Comforter", John 14: 16. The Lord was a comfort to those of His here, and the Holy Spirit has been given to be a comfort to us, do you think? I wondered if that expression would support what you have in mind in helping us through.

JD That is helpful. It is another Comforter. The Lord knew the importance of this matter, "another Comforter". If He is then referring to Himself as a Comforter, and then to the Spirit as Comforter, there is a certain emphasis being made. The thought of Comforter is also not only comfort as we would describe it, but involves someone who comes in and takes charge of affairs. As the brethren know, the first epistle to the Corinthians has been suggested as like the water being applied and the second epistle as the towel being applied, JT vol 6, p224. If Paul is going to apply the towel, he needs to be a prepared vessel. We know

Paul had a wonderful experience on the road to Damascus. What happened to Paul was very concentrated, Acts 9. For three days he could not see and did not eat (v 9), and then “straightway ... he preached Jesus, that *he* is the Son of God” (v 20), but that did not mean that Paul was suddenly the finished article. Paul still had to learn, and the suggestion here, in the matter of “despaired even of living”, is that if Paul had applied the water and he was going to be competent to apply the towel then there were certain deep exercises he had to pass through. If we think of this matter spiritually it would be a linen towel. The priest wore linen garments (Exod 39: 28), suggesting that there is nothing to agitate the flesh. But linked to the thought of comfort we can think of a certain softness in this towel that would not have been there otherwise if Paul had not gone through such exercise. And is that not blessed? The simplicity of how this is worked out. The great apostle had to pass through such a deep exercise so that he was as he says, a competent new covenant minister, 2 Cor 3: 6. How competent he was to minister and comfort the saints because of what he himself had gone through.

APG Do we see that in Jonah as well? He was being prepared for the service of preaching.

JD Yes; it has been said in relation to any service that the Lord has as much to do in preparing the vessel as He does in preparing the word.

AML You referred to 2 Corinthians 12. I wondered about the matter of fourteen years in connection with Paul. Would that be the time of formation, do you think, developing?

JD So everything does not just come out at once. I think Mr Coates says (see vol 28 p65) if we had had the experience that Paul had we would have been desperate to tell the brethren, 'Well, look where I have been. I have been to the third heaven and caught up into paradise', but Paul keeps that for fourteen years. It is consolidated in his heart; how blessed that is. And then it comes out in his ministry. It comes out in the epistles. And whilst we are referring to 2 Corinthians 12 it says later in the chapter that the Lord said to Paul, “my grace suffices thee”, v 9. And then Paul says, “Most gladly therefore will I rather boast in my weaknesses, that the power of the Christ may dwell upon me”. In our Christian pathway we need to learn how to be strong through dependence and prayer as we have referred to in Luke 22. Perhaps it is a further thought, or a more mature thought, to learn how to be weak. Paul learned how to be weak. He says, “I rather boast in my

weaknesses, that the power of the Christ may dwell upon me. Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in insults, in necessities, in persecutions, in straits, for Christ: for when I am weak, then I am powerful”, v 9, 10. Although Paul was an elect vessel and an apostle he was also a real person, which is why it says at the beginning of chapter 12, “I know a man”.

NJH He credited Timothy with being thoroughly acquainted with what he had gone through in persecutions and sufferings. The local setting is “in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra; what persecutions I endured” (2 Tim 3: 11), and so on, but it was a credit to the younger man that he had made himself aware of it, is that right?

JD Yes. And do you think it must have been worked out in Timothy's soul because Paul also says in relation to Timothy that he had “no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling”, Phil 2: 20. Timothy would have seen genuine feeling in Paul, and Paul had experienced it from the Lord. It was his first impression on the road to Damascus when the Lord says to him, “*I* am Jesus whom *thou* persecutest”, Acts 9: 5. Think of the feelings that were involved in that declaration to Paul right at the beginning of his spiritual journey.

BWL The Lord says to Ananias in Acts 9, “*I* will show to him how much he must suffer for my name”, v 16. Paul's sufferings were all in relation to the name of Christ, were they not?

JD Well, that is a consideration, because it is certainly something that we would naturally shrink from. How distinct a vessel he was. We will speak of Peter in a moment, but we know that Paul speaks of the Son of God: “God ... was pleased to reveal his Son in me”, Gal 1: 16. “In me”: think of the substantiality of that. The Son of God is revealed *in* Paul, and the Son of God is revealed *to* Peter.

We have not read about Peter's experiences but we know that he was tried and he was tested. He denied the Lord. He was tested by the Lord at the end of John's gospel, and all of this has had an effect. Where we read in 1 Peter 2 it says, “laying aside”. There are certain things to be laid aside. And then he says, “as newborn babes desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word”. There is what suggests nourishment and upbuilding. It says, “that by it ye may grow up to salvation”. Perhaps we should just have a short time on this scripture.

GBG I think it has been said that these things do not fall off like autumn leaves. It is intent; there is definiteness about it. So we judge

ourselves, do we not, or they will not be laid aside?

JD Yes, there needs to be the intent, and there needs to be self-judgment, and then it makes way for the dependence that would mark newborn babes who “desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word”. Milk is an interesting thing, and so is honey, because neither are made available through death. Milk supports the thought of life; the first thing a child feeds upon is milk. We could also link the thought of milk with the epistles. I think we get the pure mental milk of the word as the truth is explained in the epistles. It has been helpfully said that the gospels perhaps involve the thought of meat, meat for full grown men. In the epistle to the Romans it comes to a point at the end of chapter 7 where it says, “*I myself with the mind*”, chap 7: 25. So these things are worked out in a way that is instructive.

JL Does that all bear on the difference between obtaining salvation, and growing up to salvation? Maybe you could enlarge on that significant point.

JD We have spoken about experience but it is not as if we are to be left with some kind of unformed outcome. We have the pure mental milk of the word so that we can relate our experience to the word of God. We may have Christian experience that we may not be able to describe but then fresh light comes to us to make the matter intelligent. Then we can identify that experience, and we can then start this matter of growing up to salvation. This scripture goes on to speak about “a spiritual house, a holy priesthood” (v 5), and it goes on to speak about “a kingly priesthood”, v 9. It really has in mind that as we are growing up spiritually, and that there should then be a holy priesthood, suggesting what is for God, and a kingly priesthood, suggesting what there is for men in testimony, do you think?

JL Yes, I am sure that is right. It should be a constant exercise with us right to the moment of the rapture that there should be continuing steady development; not merely waiting, and we surely are waiting, but development while waiting, would you say?

JD Yes. So, in that sense we should be like sunflowers. The sunflower will turn towards the sun, and the warmth and light of the sun will cause it to grow up. Christ is above; Christ is in heaven: we are growing up to Him. How attractive that is, that we “may grow up to salvation”. That is, we are growing in spiritual stature. We are being more attracted to, and becoming more like, Christ. And then it just says

simply, “if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good”. If you taste that the Lord is good, you will have the taste of something that will never leave you.

Dundee

11th November 2023

List of Initials:

DABrown, Bo'ness; DC Brown, Edinburgh; C Cummings, Aberdeen;
J Drummond, Aberdeen; R Gardiner, Aberdeen; GB Grant, Dundee;
AP Grant, Dundee; PA Gray, Linlithgow; NJ Henry, Glasgow; J Laurie,
Breachin; AM Lidbeck, Aberdeen, Idaho; BW Lovie, Aberdeen;
CAMcKay, Brechin; T McLaren, Dundee

HOW THINGS ARE MAINTAINED

Alan D Munro

Genesis 47: 11, 12; 50: 21

2 Samuel 19: 31-33

1 Kings 17: 1-4, 8-16

I would like to speak about how things are maintained: maintained from God's side, but then maintained on our side. The two things go on together. Obviously, what comes from God's side far exceeds anything that we do but Zechariah speaks about "the day of small things" (Zech 4: 10), and I think we know something about that.

The settings of these scriptures are completely different. In the first one in Genesis, Joseph is in supreme power in the land of Egypt. He is a type of the Lord Jesus as the glorious Administrator. He is subordinate to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh in a slightly abstract way could be a type of God, but I think the scripture more draws attention to the perfect administration of Joseph. In one sense he was in a foreign land; he was in Egypt. Jacob had to be encouraged to come down, to leave, what you might call the promised land and come into Egypt. It was an interim situation, but it was for the preservation of the people of God and particularly for Jacob's family.

What impressed me is in what Joseph says, "there will I maintain thee" (Gen 45: 11): although he was in a great position of power and administration, what was closest to his heart was what was in the family, family life, family preservation. It is quite interesting to think about that: the Lord Jesus is really maintaining things with a view to the pleasure of God, the satisfaction of God. He would preserve life. Joseph here was in charge of the food supply, but it was more than just food he provided for them. He provided them with an environment, and he provided them with atmosphere. They were near to him, and I think that the secret of maintenance in our localities, dear brethren, is being near to the Lord and then being near to one another so that there are mutual conditions promoted and maintained.

When we come to chapter 50, Jacob has died and sadly it is almost as though Joseph's brethren did not trust him. It is actually a very sad picture, but he says again, "Fear not: I will maintain you and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spoke consolingly to them". I think that is a wonderful thing, to be reminded of the interest

the Lord Jesus has in us, every one of us. It is interesting that he refers every time to “little ones”. I think the children are of great value in the sight of the Lord, value in our own sight, especially as we get older. What a thrill it is to see the generations coming along!

Now, there is a different set of circumstances in Samuel: things are improving. David had been in rejection, but the tribes were coming round, and he was going to be reinstated in his place of kingship; but he was not forgetful of what had been done to him in his time of rejection. He wanted to honour Barzillai and to thank him for what he had done. The type obviously falls short because the Lord Jesus is not indebted to anyone, but David here, while he is a type of Christ, shows feelings of respect and reward. He was going to reward Barzillai. But it is not really Barzillai I want to speak of but David, what he had in mind for him. It was really the best of the land: “Pass thou over with me”. He wanted him to leave the wilderness, the area of shortages and difficulties; he wanted him to come to the royal residence. Typically he wanted him to come into the Father's house, to enjoy life at its highest level but, sadly, it seems that Barzillai's faculties had deteriorated. I did not read the negative side, but he complained about his age and asked, “can I discern between good and bad, can thy servant taste what I eat and what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women?” v 35. If he could not hear “the voice of singing men and singing women” it is unlikely that he would sing either. It is a sad picture. We are not un-christianising such a brother at all; the scripture says, “he was a very great man”, but David had something more in mind, and the Lord has great things in mind for us, but we have to be willing. If we are going to be maintained at His level, we have to come with Him; we have to cross the Jordan; we have to go through these spiritual exercises. The Red Sea speaks about the death of Christ for us, but the Jordan speaks about our death with Him, and we go through that in the *power* of attraction. There is not the Egyptian army bearing down on us as at the Red Sea. It is a question of leaving one order of things and passing over into another order of things.

But when we come to 1 Kings it is a different picture again; things have deteriorated. David has reigned for forty years, and Solomon has reigned for forty years, but alas! things began to deteriorate, and that is what happens when things get into the hands of man; but there again, the Lord always has the answer. This man Elijah is not given an introduction; there is very little told us about him, just

where he stayed, but he came on the scene as a man who had the answer. He had power to bring in what was positive, what related to food. I am impressed that the answer to departure or decay, or a waning in any sense, is to bring in the glories of Jesus. I was impressed with that on Saturday at the address at Glasgow, the way our brother spoke about the Lord Jesus as the Firstborn; and as he went on, his heart seemed to expand. I found it was very infectious. Similarly, our dear brother preaching here on Lord's day read six scriptures, but his impression was six different characteristics of the Lord Jesus, and it was edifying; it was upbuilding; it was comforting; it was encouraging. That is in principle what comes in here. Elijah comes in with a word, but then God is going to take care of him, going to look after him. The interesting thing is that it does not say that the ravens maintained him. The ravens brought bread and flesh, which is a very unusual thing for a raven to do, because the raven would tend to eat everything in sight and would be selfish, and would not think of anyone else; but the God who made the ravens is the One that can control them; so the ravens were used to bring food to Elijah in the situation in which he was.

What a difference takes place with the widow that she was going to "maintain" him. There is a difference between existing and just getting by and no more, and *living*, in power and in satisfaction. I think that was a wonderful conclusion to the whole incident. First of all, the meal did not waste and the oil did not waste. These suggest the glories of Jesus and the service of the Spirit. I think the Spirit would help to maintain us in the light and in the power and in the joy of our heavenly calling. It has often been said that in Hebrews 3 you get the Apostle (v 1) - that is the height of the calling - and in chapter 2 you get the "faithful high priest" (v 17) - that is to maintain us at the height of the calling, and we need both. There is a divine system of maintenance. In the world, when certain things have not been used actively you put them on to a care and maintenance arrangement; there is care and maintenance in the divine system, but it is of a far higher level. Things here were in smallness; there was a widow, and she was going to gather these sticks and she was going to die. She had no outlook, and when Elijah comes on the scene, you would almost think he is being selfish. He asked for a cake first. He puts divine claims first, and the widow replies to it. She responds to it. She had the resources, and she did not realise it: "a handful of meal in a barrel". One impression of Jesus is enough to maintain us forever. And then the "oil in a cruse", that was again what the Spirit can do. He can take a simple remark or comment in a reading

and then open it out and we all get the benefit. The food supply is a wonderful thing. Here it was in a very small measure, but it says, “and she, and he, and her house, ate a whole year. The meal in the barrel did not waste, neither did the oil in the cruse fail”, and it will not. The things of Jesus and the things of the Spirit and the things of God will never waste, but our blessing and prosperity lie in relation to them. I trust the Lord will bless this impression.

Grangemouth

6th March 2024

ENCOURAGEMENT IN A DAY OF SMALL THINGS

Archie D Melville

Zechariah 4: 1-14

1 John 4: 4-6

Zechariah was one of the post-captivity prophets and lived in a day when a great recovery was taking place. Israel had suffered the government of God by being taken away captive to Babylon, but there was a great movement afoot in Zechariah's time, and his function was to encourage those who were coming once again, as it were, to be recovered to the truth. I think there is nothing more important than having a vision, like an impression, about divine things. I do not think there was anything visible that Zechariah could see in the way of a lamp-stand of gold, but the chapter deals with this matter, and the impression he had and is asked about when he is awakened up by the angel. It is a good thing to be awakened because we might tend to fall asleep, especially when things are so difficult and testing. Indeed, there is a word in Ephesians, "Wake up, thou that sleepest", chap 5: 14. We need to be awakened and alert, and Zechariah was awakened here. An angel came and woke him up, "as a man that is awakened out of his sleep", and said, "What seest thou?". He describes what he saw, "a lamp-stand all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon, seven lamps and seven pipes to the lamps, which are upon the top thereof; and two olive-trees beside it, one on the right of the bowl, and the other on the left of it". I think what he really saw was a system operating according to the divine order. During the children of Israel's journeys through the wilderness, there was a very important service to be carried out which was to replenish the lamps with oil. That involved physical effort and service by the people to maintain the light. There was a lampstand in the tent of meeting and the lamps had to be maintained, Exod 27 v 20-21.

It is a unique situation here, I think, and it shows an almost self-functioning source of light in this golden lamp-stand. We might say it is the divine order of things without the assistance of the priests or of man. It is a view Zechariah gets of a lamp that is of gold and it was being supplied by two olive-trees, and there are pipes and lamps and seven pipes to the lamps. It suggests there was a continual supply of oil to maintain divine light. The divine system is a system that will never fail. Our brother has been telling us about that, the oil not failing for a whole year. I think that really means for the whole dispensation. In the whole

period of time that we are in there will not be any failure of God's thoughts and purposes. What we have here is different from the seven golden lamps of Rev 2: 1 which are the assemblies, and there it is man's responsibility, and there *was* failure, and there *is* failure in man's responsibility, but there is no failure in this system here. There is supply, unending supply. There is oil for the lamps and there are pipes, seven pipes, to each lamp providing an abundant supply.

As we go down the chapter, we find the angel continues to speak to Zechariah, who is quite honest. He does not know, he does not understand what is going on, but the angel is patient, and divine Persons are patient with us if we do not understand what is going on; and we will have another opportunity to ask. "Knowest thou not what these are? And I said, No, my lord and he answered and spoke unto me, saying, This is the word of Jehovah unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts". Zerubbabel was the governor and Joshua was the high priest as we read in Haggai 1. Zerubbabel and Joshua were involved in the reconstruction of the temple, and here we find that Zechariah gets this word, "the word of Jehovah unto Zerubbabel", and the word was very important. They were surrounded by enemies, persons who scoffed and made light of them and mocked them so much so that they actually gave up building for a while, but Zechariah's word was greatly strengthening for them, and the word was, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts". So the resources were not their resources; they were not natural resources. It was not the children of Israel operating using their own resources. Then the word Zechariah gives is "Who art thou, O great mountain?". The Lord speaks of faith removing a mountain in the Gospels, which I think is the same idea, Matt 17: 20. Whatever opposition, whenever a great and terrible problem raises its head, in the power of the Holy Spirit these builders will overcome it, the mountain becomes a plain and the headstone of this great edifice will be brought forth "with shoutings". God will complete His work. There is no question about that, whether we have faith for it or not. Someone will take up the work if we drop out, and there will be those who will carry on, but the word is, be strong and do not drop out.

The word came to Zechariah that the foundations had been laid by Zerubbabel, the wall was rebuilt and this house would be completed: "his hands shall finish it: and thou shalt know that Jehovah of hosts hath

sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things?”. You may think things are so small. Sometimes there are so few brethren around, you may think things have just petered out. Do you think divine thoughts will ever peter out? Do you think God will allow His thoughts to fail? I do not think so, and neither did Zechariah. “Yea, they shall rejoice - even those seven - and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel”. This was no substandard building. Zerubbabel had the plummet in his hand. Do you know what the plummet was used for? It was to ensure that things were built upright and plumb and, really what he is saying is, according to the divine standard: “these are the eyes of Jehovah, which run to and fro in the whole earth”. God is observing what is happening. If our building comes short in any way, then we should take heed to this word to ensure that what we build is according to the divine standard and the plumbline.

It goes on to speak about the olive trees and the lamp-stand. “What are these two olive-trees ...?”. Well, God operates through persons. “Knowest thou not what these are? And I said, No, my lord and he said, These are the two sons of oil, that stand before the Lord of the whole earth”. I think we could say Zerubbabel and Joshua really would be represented by these two sons of oil. They were the ones who were occupied and engaged in this work and they were the ones that would encourage the people and get things operating again.

I turn to 1 John 4. John is a very positive writer, and he says, “Ye are of God, children”. He was looking at the believers as the work of God. They were “of God” and because of that they had overcome “because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. *They* are of the world”. The world surrounds us and it tries to overthrow us, but further down he says, “*We* are of God”. I think John is looking at the pure work of God. He was not being occupied by failure. He was encouraging those that he wrote to and strengthening them and telling them that they were the work of God and “he that knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error”. What encouraging words these are for us! I desire that we might find strength in reading these things even in a day of small things, for His Name's sake.

Grangemouth

6th March 2024

WHAT GOD FINDS PRECIOUS

John S Speirs

Matthew 17: 1-5, 8

Genesis 24: 15-22

Ezra 8: 26-28

Malachi 3: 16, 17 (to “hosts”)

Luke 21: 1-4

I am conscious that I have read a lot of scriptures and, although I am not able to go into them in detail, I felt encouraged just to say a brief word as to what God takes account of and finds precious. That is why I began in Matthew 17, because we see how God took account of the Lord Jesus and found Him infinitely precious. Our brother has been speaking about the standard. This is God's standard, you might say, the gold standard, the Holy and the True, the One who never failed, the One in whom God found His delight: “*This* is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight”. Think of all that God had found His delight in, in this One in His time on earth, up to this point and what He would yet find His delight in!

I wondered if we might be encouraged to see that God is still taking account of those on the earth; and I think, that, although only the Lord was perfect, God takes account of what is in measure precious to Him on the earth at the present time in believers; it is features of Jesus that He finds precious. That is what He finds His delight in and, beloved, God is taking account of each one of us here tonight. He is taking account of this gathering, and if there are features of Jesus in evidence in any one of us, God is finding that precious. It speaks in the psalm of “the saints that are on the earth, and to the excellent thou hast said, In them is all my delight”, Ps 16: 3.

Think of God, the One who took account of His well-beloved Son - you might say, the perfect Assessor, assessing the perfect Object. God did not miss anything, not underestimating, not overestimating, but making a perfect, true assessment; and what He took account of in Jesus was perfection. How He delighted His heart, “in whom I have found my delight”. But, beloved, because of God's grace, He has provided Him as a Saviour for us; He has provided the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, and also as our Model. Not only that, He has provided power in the Holy Spirit so that we are able to follow Him as Model whilst we are here. It is wonderfully encouraging to think that

when the Lord Jesus was here as a dependent Man, everything He did was in the power of the Holy Spirit. That same Spirit is available to us; what a wonderful fact!

So, I wondered if we see in these various passages different features in persons that God takes account of and finds precious. In Genesis, I thought Rebecca was one who was marked by service and *willingness* in service. How beautifully we see that in Jesus, the willing Servant! Think of His willingness to undertake whatever His Father's will was. I think the Holy Spirit loves to take account of willing service at the present time, those who in their measure are like Jesus, willing to serve. It is a feature of the assembly. It says, "And the man was astonished at her". Of course, we could never say that the Holy Spirit was astonished exactly, but I think we might say that the Holy Spirit, typically, delighted to see these features in this woman; He loves to see them. Have you done something willingly for the Lord Jesus? The Holy Spirit has taken account of that; it would have delighted His heart, and reminded Him of Jesus. Well, may we be engaged in willing service! May we be reliant on the power that God gives us to serve. It maybe something very simple; this woman drew water. Have you done something simple to refresh a fellow believer? God finds that precious; He is looking on and He is assessing it. With His perfect assessment He is finding what is pleasurable to Him in service.

In Ezra we see these copper vessels. In amongst all the substantial quantities of gold and silver vessels there are these "two vessels of shining copper". I wonder if there may be the suggestion of these being representative of those who have endured suffering, suffering on account of righteousness, suffering for what is morally right in the testimony. These were recovered vessels; we are all recovered vessels. Thanks be to God in His grace and His mercy that He has recovered us through the giving of His well-beloved Son. Well, beloved, who suffered like Jesus in His pathway here? How precious it was for the Father to see the Lord Jesus doing His will even despite all the suffering He endured at the hands of man! The scripture says, "consider well him", Heb 12: 3. Think of how God considered Him! - how His Father saw Him do His will in perfection, suffering as a result of it at the hands of men. As Peter says, "If ye are reproached in the name of Christ, blessed are ye; for the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you", 1 Pet 4: 14. I thought about these two vessels of shining copper: it suggested to me something corresponding to "the Spirit of

glory and the Spirit of God” resting upon them. They were vessels, they were usable. They were “shining ... precious as gold”, that is God’s assessment of them. You might have said they were of insignificant value compared to all the gold and silver, but if you are suffering for the name of Jesus and willing to accept suffering in the pathway here for His Name, “the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you”. There is something precious that God takes account of.

In Malachi, we see these persons who are speaking together. I wondered if God would have a valuation of the speech and conversation of believers: “Then they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another”. How the Father delighted in the words of Jesus, those “words of grace which were coming out of his mouth”, Luke 4: 22. “Thy speech is comely”, it says in Song of Songs 4: 3. The beautiful speech of the Lord Jesus, His words, what He said and how He said them, everything was perfect, delightful to the Father! Are we able to say something about Jesus, about His glory, to one another for our encouragement or to God in praise? Think of how the Lord Jesus said that “I praise thee, Father”, Matt 11: 25. What a model for us, perfection in praise, but then how He spoke to men here as well! He spoke to them about His Father. He spoke about God’s love to man. Are we able to do that? I think the gatherings of the saints are precious to God too. “Then they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another; and Jehovah observed it, and heard”. God is not only looking on us, but He is listening to us, listening to everything we say. Are you speaking words about Jesus to your fellow-believers, to your fellow-men? Are you speaking of His glory to God Himself? God finds these things precious. He is taking account of your speech and if it is of Jesus, and if it is in the power of the Holy Spirit, it is precious to Him.

This woman in Luke was one who was marked by sacrifice. Of course, when we think of sacrifice, there was no greater sacrifice than that made by Jesus. What a sacrifice! It says of this woman that she cast in all of her living. “She out of her need has cast in all the living which she had”. Think of the Lord Jesus, the One who “sold all whatever he had”, Matt 13: 46. There was no sacrifice like His. We cannot comprehend what it meant to Jesus to descend into manhood’s form and then to descend into death itself. What a Saviour, the descending One, His willingness to sacrifice, “offered himself spotless to God”, Heb 9:14! How delightful He was and is to God! Well, beloved, in our measure, if we are marked by sacrifice, seeking to do it

for the Lord, not to make anything of ourselves, for I do not think this woman was doing this for show, He takes account of it. I do not think she was even aware that anyone was watching, but the Lord was taking account of her. No matter how small a sacrifice you might be making for the Lord, He is taking account of it. It is precious to Him. It is precious to God because it reminds Him of the supreme sacrifice! "We love because *he* has first loved us", 1 John 4: 19.

May we be willing to be marked by these features, conscious and reassured and encouraged that God is taking account of us; not that we might make anything of ourselves but simply and dependently seeking to do God's will in the power of the Holy Spirit, and as these features come out that are like Jesus, God will take account of them and find them precious. May we be more encouraged to go in for these things for God's glory!

May the Lord bless the word.

Grangemouth

6th March 2024