

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE PERSONAL GLORIES OF OUR LORD JESUS

John 1: 1-5, 14, 29-34

RMB I thought, dear brethren, that we might speak together as to the personal glories of our Lord Jesus. The Lord's day is a particularly suitable opportunity for doing that, when the saints have already been occupied with His love and glory, and we trust that in going over verses that might be familiar to us we should not only be freshly established in the truth, but that by the Holy Spirit we should also receive a fresh view of Christ Himself. The scriptures that we have read are very profound, so we shall need to be careful how we speak of them, and I am sure we would all appreciate the need for a worshipful spirit as we approach such verses. I was thinking that the opening verses of this gospel tell us about His Person, they tell us what He was and where He was. It says, He was "with God" and He "was God". It brings out that He was God as to His Person, and also that He is eternal as to His existence. So these are the glories that belong to Him because of who He is. Then in verse 14 we have what He "became". It says that "the Word became flesh"; that is, He became something that He was not before; and in the paragraph beginning at verse 29 we see that as a result of what He became others of His glories have come on to our view. The principal ones there are that He is the Lamb of God, He is the One who baptises with the Holy Spirit, and He is the Son of God. These are glories of Christ that have come before us as a result of what He has Himself become.

JSG I do believe with you that it is greatly profitable for us to be occupied with the Lord Jesus personally. I should like to enquire as to John's use of the title "the Word", whether you could say something about why it is used in connection with these eternal glories of which you first spoke.

RMB Well, I think it has been said that that title, "the Word", was one by which the Lord Jesus was known to His disciples, as may be indicated by Luke 1: 2. We understand it involves that there was in Himself all that was necessary to make God known. So John is using a title that was familiar to the disciples, and he is showing us what the greatness of this Person was.

JSG It is a very extensive thought then. The Lord has several distinct things to say in this gospel as to what He Himself is: "I am the light of the world" (John 8: 12), for example, and other expressions of

that kind. But to think of it as such a comprehensive and perfect expression of God Himself would increase our appreciation of the Lord's personal glory, would you say?

RMB Yes. These verses help us to understand how great He is because it says that He "was God". So we need to understand that Jesus is God in His Person. But it also says that He was "with God". And the scripture emphasises that point because in verse 2 it says, "*He* was in the beginning with God". It brings out His eternal existence.

GCB The Spirit of God has infinite wisdom in the use of language and expression which we do not have. It just occurred to me as we have taken up this scripture that the name "Jesus" did not apply in a past eternity, "the Son of God" would not apply in a past eternity, but the Spirit of God has used this word to identify the Person. Would you say more about that?

RMB I think we have been taught that though the Lord Jesus has many names and titles, no single one of them is sufficient to describe everything about His Person. I think John is taking up a title in "the Word" that the disciples were familiar with, and he is saying, 'This is who He is'. Maybe for the persons he was writing to this was further light as to His greatness.

GCB The question arises in my mind as to why we so seldom use this title now?

RMB Did you have any thought about that yourself?

GCB No, I did not; but it may be that it is because the Spirit of God is infinitely wise, as guarding against the mistakes that come in in Christendom. He uses this title to preserve the impression of who the Person is; whereas we know that there are those who speak of "the eternal Son". This scripture does not say that here, it says, "the Word".

RMB Well, that just emphasises the importance of keeping to the words of Scripture. We know that much has been made in Christendom of seeking to put things into a creed or into a formula, but man is not capable of producing a sentence, or a collection of sentences, that is able to embrace every aspect of the truth of this holy Person. We have simply to keep to the words of Scripture. I am sure there is preservation in that.

RHB The two statements in the verse that He "was God" and "was

with God” are perhaps difficult for us to grasp at the same time. Can you elaborate on that for us a little?

RMB The statement that “the Word was God” is a reference to His nature, that as to His Person He is God, He has deity. The fact that “the Word was with God” shows, speaking carefully, that He had His own distinct existence. It was not that this Person whom we speak of as “the Word” came into existence at a point in time. The fact is, “*He* was in the beginning with God”. He had His own distinct existence “with God”. What do you think about it?

RHB I think that is a helpful way of putting it. In the last verses you read there are three Persons referred to. John says, “he who sent me to baptise”, which I take it is a reference to God, or **God the Father** as we would know Him (because it says that John was sent from God); “he who sent me to baptise with water, *he* said to me, Upon whom thou shalt see **the Spirit** descending”; and then there is **the One** upon whom the Spirit descended and abode; so that the Persons of the Godhead had a distinct existence before, as the Old Testament bears out. The scripture that asserts that “God is one” in the epistle, and “the mediator of God and men one” (1 Tim 2: 5) we have to hold to, but God has been revealed to us in this way, and it is that that we have to accept as revelation, do we?

RMB Yes, we do, and by simply accepting what these simple but profound statements say we are preserved from many errors. So, for example, throughout Christendom there is a very common error that the Lord Jesus derived His deity from the Father. Persons have struggled to understand the expression, “the only-begotten Son”. There is in the creed the expression that He was “begotten of the Father before all worlds . . . begotten, not made”. This simple statement, “*He* was in the beginning with God”, would show us that that is not the truth; and that the Lord Jesus did not derive His deity from anyone because He “was God”. So these things preserve us in our minds, and in the way we approach these most profound truths.

RHB Indeed, later in this gospel he says distinctly that, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8: 58), which is an assertion of that truth that He had an existence prior to incarnation, which is often disputed. The simple reading of the scripture makes that clear.

RMB Yes it does, so that it is important to understand that Those we refer to as the three Persons of the Godhead have always existed, but

They have only been revealed as such as a consequence of the incarnation. There are very clear allusions to the Trinity in the Old Testament. Consider the name Jehovah, for example: while we sometimes hear it said that the Lord Jesus is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and that is certainly true as a general principle, there are instances where that name is used of the Father and, at least on one occasion, of the Holy Spirit (see eg JND Collected Writings vol 9 p 298; vol 30 p 39).

AM The word “beginning” here is not qualified, is it? It is not the beginning of something, it is simply “the beginning”. As far back as man can go, He was there.

RMB Yes, it would take us back beyond the beginning that is referred to in Genesis. So it is before even the beginning of time, which really our finite minds are not able to properly apprehend.

DAS I was just thinking about what is said here, “All things received being through him”, and about what you referred to in Genesis. There it is “God”. Note *a* to Genesis 1: 1 refers to “Deity in the absolute sense”. Does that bring out what you are saying as to the glory of this Person; who He is as God?

RMB Yes, it is interesting that the act of creation is attributed to Him. We speak of the three Persons of the Godhead, but the active work of creation is attributed in the New Testament to the second Person, to our Lord Jesus. Again, the Scripture emphasises it: it not only says, “All things received being through him”, but adds, “without him not one thing received being which has received being”. What would you say about that?

DAS Only that it leaves nothing out. I was just thinking that it says, “In the beginning **God** ...”. I wondered whether it emphasised to our minds the glory of His Person in deity.

RMB And creation in the true sense of the word is something which only belongs to God. It is only God that can bring something into being out of nothing.

RHB Is there a further thought in Colossians 1: 16, that “all things have been created by him”, and then it adds “and for him”? This goes as far as Himself being the Creator, but it is a very substantial thought that everything has not only been created *by* Him but it has been created *for* Him, would you say?

RMB There is another scripture which develops that. Revelation 4: 11 says, "Thou art worthy, O our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy will they were, and they have been created." All things have been created for His will, for His pleasure; and of course that would come down to each one of us.

MIW Does the thought of "the Word" convey, amongst other things, what is expressed?

RMB Yes, I think it does.

MIW So that the One that dwelt among them, what was expressed, what they took account of in Him, was the expression of God Himself. In that respect it would go back to creation; what was expressed was God Himself, do you think, by this blessed divine Operator?

RMB Yes, I think when we come to verse 18, "No one has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, *he* hath declared him", we begin to see what is involved in that, do you think?

MIW Yes, John 1: 18 involves what was expressed as He came into manhood.

RMB Verse 4 says, "In him was life". Verse 3 tells us that He created all things, but there was one thing that was not created, and that was life, because it was in Him inherently. Then he adds, "and the life was the light of men". What do you say about that?

KGS That blessed Person gave effect to everything that was for God. Is that right?

RMB Yes, but He had life in Himself. It is something else which marks Him out as distinctive. Then, "the life was the light of men". It is a very precious thought that the "light of men" is not a body of doctrine, nor a creed, but the life which has come on to view in one blessed Man.

JSG I was wondering whether what Peter says in his confession in John 6: 68-69 helps at all, where he says, "Thou hast words of life eternal; and we have believed and known that thou art the holy one of God"; and whether the reverence with which they would be in the presence of such a Person, and listen to His words, and watch His movements, ought to be carried in our souls as you mentioned it earlier. But the character of life that has been introduced as light for men is of

that distinct nature, is it not?

RMB Yes, something has come on to our view. That is what John brings out in the opening verses of his first epistle. “In him was life”, it was there all the time in Him inherently, but as a consequence of His becoming Man it has come on to our view. Now life consists of relationships and communications. I remember a brother observing that he thought John 17 might be an example of this. John 17 would have been *light* for the disciples as they saw the way that the Lord Jesus spoke to His Father, and as they heard what He spoke about. They may not have understood it all then, but it would have been a revelation to them of the character of this life.

JSG Very good. So what you say implies that the prime way in which life is expressed would be in our relations with God. It would reveal the true character of our life according to God.

RMB So verse 14 that we then read tells us what this Person became. When we think of what He “was”, as described in the opening verses, it makes all the more glorious what He “became”.

RHB Reference has been made to the thought of what is expressed, and Paul in writing to Timothy says that “God has been manifested in flesh”, 1 Tim 3: 16. That is a complete thought, if we can use that word reverently of God. It is not a partial revelation, but all that God is in His infinitude has come within the range of finite minds such as ours through coming into flesh. Is that the sense of it?

RMB That should greatly affect our hearts, to think that One who was there in the beginning with God, One who was Himself God, should become flesh. These things may be familiar to us, but I think that the Spirit of God would seek to work them into our affections that we might be enlarged in our appreciation of His blessed Person and His wonderful movements in grace.

RHB The presentation in Philipians 2, that He emptied Himself, and humbled Himself, and became obedient (v 7, 8), seems to emphasise more those moral features and the humility of His descent; but this presentation seems to convey more a sense of majesty about it, that such a One should become flesh.

RMB Yes, and the way that it is presented in verse 14 shows us that it was His own act. The Authorised Version reads, “the Word was made flesh”, but evidently Mr Darby thought it more accurate to translate it

this way; and that seems right, that the coming into flesh of the Word must have been His own act.

These things are intended to enlarge in our hearts as we reflect on them prayerfully: the Holy Spirit would enlarge our understanding of them. But one point I think it important to see is that some of the confusing ideas as to the Trinity that are abroad stem from the erroneous idea that by coming into flesh there has been a fundamental change in God. Whereas it is important to understand that when the Word became flesh He came into a new condition, but *there was no change in His Person*.

MIW Referring to what our brother said earlier, we can draw on that scripture in 1 Timothy 3: 16, and the way the hymn writer puts it:

'God manifest in flesh, O wonder of His universe!' (Hymn 400).

It was the greatest matter, was it not, that in such a One coming into manhood there is the full manifestation of God Himself. Hence the use of the title, "the Word". It is a complete thought.

AM The Lord Jesus in becoming flesh came into that condition of relative lowliness, but that detracts nothing from Him, but it is in fact an added glory. It is pure moral excellence that was seen in Him as becoming flesh, that we would never have seen otherwise.

RMB That is what I had in mind, when we come to the paragraph beginning at verse 29, that further glories have unfolded to our view as a result of this wonderful coming into flesh of "the Word". But I only made the earlier remark so that we might be preserved in a right understanding in our minds, that He has come into a new *condition* but there has been absolutely no change in His *Person*. It is not that as a result of the incarnation God has become something else. There has been no change as to His Person though in a new condition.

MIW I am just enquiring as to your use of the term "condition" which I understand: the Word becoming flesh would refer to His manhood, would it not, so that it is a continuing thought? Is that right? He came into a condition of flesh and blood. He is not in a condition of flesh and blood now, but the thought of the Word having become flesh remains, does it not, because it connects with His manhood?

RMB Yes; so He became, or began to be, something that He was not before. The point I was emphasising was that that relates to the

condition into which He came and not to any change in His *Person*. Would you agree with that?

MIW Yes. I was raising the question really because the thought continues now at the present time, although the Lord Jesus is now in conditions of glory above. The thought is that it is a continuing matter.

RHB In the epistle where it speaks of God sending His Son “in likeness of flesh of sin, and for sin” (Rom 8: 3), it had in view that He came into a condition in which He could die, does it not? It had in view that He took upon Himself a flesh-and-blood condition in order that He might lay down His life to accomplish the will of God.

GCB And He remains a Man for ever, does He?

RMB Yes. There is a distinction between the condition of humanity that Christ entered into as having *become flesh* (John 1: 14), which He retains for ever in His body of glory, and His *taking part in blood and flesh* (Heb 2: 14). The latter refers to what He entered into in order to suffer and die, and which was finally laid down in His death.

GCB We find no indication in Scripture otherwise; and our link is with that glorious Man, and evidently our links with Him are eternal.

RMB I suppose one scripture that would confirm that is the verse in 1 Corinthians 15, which refers to the Son being placed in subjection (v 28), do you think? That describes “the end”.

GCB Yes, that is the very end of time there. Is that right?

RMB That is right. He says, “Then the end”, v 24. So in those verses he is describing how things would be at the end, and of course the great ultimate is “that God may be all in all”; but that includes something which is very deep to understand, it includes the Son also being brought into subjection. That must be an allusion to His place in manhood.

GCB No doubt the title “the Son” would involve His manhood as well.

RMB The Scriptures certainly seem to speak of Him as the Son of God in connection with His incarnation and what flows out of that.

JSG I would like to ask, as to the reference at the close of Philippians 3 to “his body of glory”, as to the present condition of the Lord. It is not exactly revealed to us, but it is so described by Paul. He says in 1 Timothy 2, “God is one, and the mediator of God and men one, the man

Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all”, vv 5, 6. So that the One about whom Paul was writing, who was known to believers as having given Himself a ransom for all, was known as “the man Christ Jesus” in His present place.

RMB And John 1: 14 brings in this very touching additional thought that He “dwelt among us”. What would you say about that?

JSG I would be glad of your thought, but it suggests the expansion which John gives in his first epistle, in the first chapter, as it was referred to earlier, what was seen and handled.

RMB That is good. It shows that He was not just passing through. He “dwelt among us”. We know He was not to be here permanently, but He came to stay for a time, and that is a very blessed thing to contemplate when we think of who He was and where He had come from.

JSG We must speak reverently about these precious things, but to think of such a One described in the Scriptures as “the Word”, having been in circumstances which are described in a way involving where men move, such as in a boat and at the house, causes us to wonder at the lowliness of this remarkable incoming.

CCDR John's epistle begins with, “That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes; that which we contemplated, and our hands handled, concerning the word of life”, 1 John 1: 1. It emphasises the reality of all these things you are speaking about. It would have greatly impressed John, would it not, handling, seeing, and now reporting and contemplating?

RMB Yes; the lovely thought that comes out there is that there was something that was “with the Father” (v 2) that has come within our range. If it had remained with the Father we would never have known about it; but how near it came! “That which we have seen with our eyes”, John says, “and our hands handled.” That is very close.

CCDR I was thinking of the reality of these things. It would have greatly impressed these early disciples and it should impress us. What we are speaking of is not something that is ethereal, but this is the true humanity of Christ; yet that is something which is, in one sense, beyond us.

RMB That last point is important, that there is what is beyond us, and there always will be as to His Person, because He said Himself that “no

one knows the Son but the Father”, Matt 11: 27. We cannot work it all out in our minds, that as to His Person He is God and yet He became a real Man, but we keep these things in our minds, on the one hand His eternal existence, and, on the other, the way in which He has come near to us.

DAS So it speaks of what we can contemplate. Is that where we get help, and where we should seek the Spirit's help - in contemplation, recognising, as you have said, that there must always be because of His Person what is beyond us? We cannot comprehend Him even as having become Man, can we? But we can contemplate, would that be right?

RMB Yes, I think that is most important, because we can see what terrible error persons fall into where the mind of man is introduced. So we need to be kept subject in our hearts and minds, and ready to be taught by the Holy Spirit, because He would surely bring Christ's glories before us where we are open for it.

GCB You remember a little earlier it was said that this brings out the majesty of His becoming flesh. It would take impressions from the whole of the Scriptures to bring out the detail of His becoming flesh, would it not? And of course the Holy Spirit's service is essential to that; linking on with what our brother said as to contemplating. Here we see majesty; but there is so much to contemplate, is there not?

RMB Yes, there certainly is. We might now consider the verses from verse 29. What we see there is that as a consequence of Him becoming flesh more glories come to light. The first one is that He is the Lamb of God. That John should introduce it in a chapter where he has already spoken of the deity of the Lord Jesus and His eternal existence, gives a lustre to the fact that He should take on this title as “the Lamb of God”.

RHB What does that title convey to us?

RMB I would be glad if we could enquire about it together, but I connected it a little with Genesis 22: 7 and 8: Isaac said, “Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the sheep for a burnt-offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself with the sheep for a burnt-offering”. God has provided Himself with a Lamb. Man was unequal to that. “Behold the fire and the wood”: the tokens of God's judgment. Who could face that fire? But the word is, “God will provide himself with the sheep for a burnt-offering”. I wondered whether that is

what is set forth in the Lamb of God. What do you think of that?

RHB I think that is a helpful connection. God has provided what was necessary to meet the case, the sin of the world. There was no other, was there? God has provided One who was great enough to take it away. Is that the force of it, that it is drawing attention to the greatness of His Person, that He was great enough to take it away? Every other man has contributed to it, but on to view came a Man who was great enough to remove it from God's sight, and that stands in its own glory. It is quite apart from what He has done for me personally, which I appreciate; but is seeing the magnitude of what He has accomplished for God what bows our hearts in worship?

RMB I certainly think that in verse 29 it is His Person and His work from God's side. It involves the removing of the stain of sin from the universe. So we might ask what is involved in taking away the sin of the world.

RJG It involved the cost of Him dying. What is your thought?

RMB I am sure that that is the great basis of it - His great sacrificial work. But I wondered whether it would extend beyond that, whether it would include His new-creation work, and His work in judgment. But what do others say about that?

GCB Tell us about His new-creation work please.

RMB Firstly there is His work in judgment; which we see in Revelation 20, that He puts things away. That is the point of it there, not exactly that persons should be condemned, although it will include that, but things are put away. Then, having done that, He is able to bring in what is new. As far as new creation is concerned, that has already begun in the hearts of believers. What do you think?

GCB Perhaps I have been too limited as to new creation. God says at the end, "I make all things new". We know of course it must be close to the work of Christ, but you have in mind what the Lord Jesus does in that matter?

RMB Yes, I think one of the things that has been said in the ministry is that He takes away the sin of the world by bringing God in (F E Raven vol 5 p 21). So John says in his epistle that "the darkness is passing and the true light already shines" (1 John 2: 8). The taking away of sin, thinking of it from God's side, is of course based on Christ's mighty sacrificial work; but it is something that He will complete before that glorious day when He will offer up a perfect universe for the pleasure of

God.

RJG We get a reference in Revelation 5 to the Lamb acting for God.

RMB That is a good connection. I suppose what is specially emphasised in Revelation 5 is that He is morally qualified to undertake the work of carrying out the government of God on the earth. A great search is made for someone who is “worthy” and “able” to do it, and no one is found until attention is drawn to the Lamb. What comes out there is that it is by His sufferings, it is by the way through which He has passed, that He has demonstrated that He is morally qualified to take up every question for God.

MIW Does the use of the singular, “the sin”, bring out the greatness of what this blessed divine Operator has done for God? It is a complete matter, clearing the ground entirely of what was against God. That paves the way for what is completely new in new creation.

RMB Yes, it is important to understand not only that the incoming of sin has had the effect of bringing about the fall of man, so that we are guilty as sinners, but it has come into the universe. It has come even into the heavens, sin and the stain of sin, and we can understand that before God could rest every last vestige of it must be taken away.

CCDR Does the scripture in Isaiah 14: 12-15 as to Lucifer support what you are saying as to sin in the heavens? What have you in mind as to that?

RMB It would be in that connection, because Satan's place is in heaven until he is cast down out of it. Therefore, I believe it right to say, the incoming of sin has caused an unsettlement even among the angels. I do not think the angels would ever have doubted that in the end God would resolve that question, but until the coming in of Christ they would not have known *how* He was going to do it. Which is why, for example, the gospel is something “which angels desire to look into” (1 Pet 1: 12).

RHB It says of Him in John's epistle that He “has been manifested, that he might undo the works of the devil” (1 John 3: 8). That is an extraordinarily comprehensive statement as we think of what those works are in their extent and in their intricacy and in their poisonous effect. But there is One who has been manifested to undo them. That is a great joy for God, but it is to be a great joy for those of us who have been delivered by Him, do you think?

RMB If we think of the corruption and the confusion that the devil has introduced, we can see that only one so great as our Lord Jesus is capable of unravelling that, and resolving all the questions of good and evil.

JSG I wanted to ask about whether Hebrews 10, where you get the Lord saying, “Lo, I come . . . to do, O God, thy will” (Heb 10: 7), presents the Lamb of God beyond all the sacrifices which went before. And it says, “He takes away the first that he may establish the second; by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”; whether that would not in some way link with the thought of sacrifice which is conveyed in the name “Lamb of God”, v 8, 9. In the previous chapter there is the reference to His having “been manifested for the putting away of sin by his sacrifice” (v 26), and then appearing “to those that look for him the second time without sin for salvation” (v 28), so it is entirely finished so far as believers are concerned when He comes. But your enquiry is as to how it goes beyond that as to the effects of sin in the whole creation.

RMB Only to bring out the greatness of His Person. The emphasis in verse 29 is not on the greatness of the sin of the world, but on the greatness of the One who is able to take it away. What you say is helpful; and there would be a connection because “Lo, I come . . . to do, O God, thy will” links with what we were saying as to it being His own act that the Word should become flesh.

JSG You have something further in mind as to the other references in this final paragraph?

RMB Well, I think our time has gone. Perhaps it is something for us to think about, the fact that He was marked out as the One who baptises with the Holy Spirit. How great must a Man be to be able to baptise with the Holy Spirit? And then, finally, that He is manifested to be the Son of God. Those are things for us to contemplate.

East Finchley
12 November 2006

Key to initials

R H Brown, East Finchley; R M Brown, East Finchley; G C Bywater, Buckhurst Hill; J S Gray, East Finchley; R J Gray, East Finchley; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; C C D Remington, St Albans; K G Samways, Buckhurst Hill; D A Smith, Bexley; M I Webster, Buckhurst Hill

KEEPING THE CHARGE

G John Richards

Numbers 8: 23-26;

1 Samuel 17: 17-20, 29;

1 Thessalonians 5: 12-14;

Luke 2: 41-52

It is my desire, beloved, to speak a little about what the Scriptures in the Old Testament describe as “the charge”: formally described in the Book of Numbers and, I suggest, illustrated in the history of two men, Jesse and David. Another phrase we could use to explain what we mean and what the Scripture means as to keeping the charge is 'taking up responsibility'. Now, the background to our responsibility is the immensity of the privilege we have been brought into. It is a true saying, in whatever aspect it is used, that privilege and responsibility go together; that is never more so than in Christianity. Beloved, as believers on the Lord Jesus and subjects of the grace of God, we have been brought into the greatest privilege. Have we all really considered the fact that, as believing on the Lord Jesus, we may “become companions of the Christ if indeed we hold the boast of hope firm to the end” (Heb 3 v 14).

I will speak about Jesse first before I speak of the scripture in Numbers, for I love the way the scripture presents this man. Generally when we turn to Samuel it is to read about David, Jesse's son, but I would like to speak to you today about Jesse. Just before where we read in chapter 17 we read, “Now David was the Son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem-Judah whose name was Jesse”, v 12. I think Jesse represents a man who, in our own language, was a fine local brother; he probably did not travel around very much and perhaps not many people knew him. There are many such today, beloved, and they are like pillars on whom we rely. There are others of whom I will speak in a moment, but there is something so beautiful about this man. I think he was fairly obscure, a plain local brother, and I suggest that he illustrates what is described in Numbers as someone who kept the charge. If I was local with him and something about me was a cause for concern, he would notice, and would make it his burden to carry that before the Lord. Perhaps he would say something to me: I hope to enlarge on that when we look at the scripture in Thessalonians. I believe that the local assembly is a place where persons are taken care of, where the Lord's interests are jealously guarded, and where there is resource to

preserve persons and even to correct persons.

Now, can you imagine the conditions in this era in which Jesse lived? Here is Saul, king over Israel, and here are the Philistines and there is no battle. There is a stalemate, there is no power, beloved. Satan really, in the figure of Goliath, is dominating the situation. The armies of the living God are defied. (You might say that today Christianity is in disrepute and there seems no power publicly to deal with anything.) And here in Bethlehem is this man Jesse, and see how he has the testimony in his heart! You say, 'Well, where was the testimony?' There are whole ranks of Philistines, whole ranks of Israel, and nothing is happening. Nothing can happen, there is no *man*. What a stalemate, what a sorrow, beloved! That is the public position of Christianity. Publicly it is in disrepute. There are false religions gaining the ascendancy, false Christians publicly gaining ground, as well as true Christians acting beneath their calling. Beloved, there is a need for persons who understand that there is a charge to be kept, that in Christ and in the Holy Spirit we have every resource that we need. God has established a testimony on this earth which He has not withdrawn. He will withdraw it soon: one day, when the Father gives the word and Jesus rises from the Father's throne, the testimony as we know it now will close. Until that time God preserves His testimony here and maintains it in localities. Meanwhile we read in 1 Samuel 17: 16, "And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days". Forty days! How could anyone ever have the courage to lift up their head in the ranks of Israel? Here is this defiance forty days, twice a day, and here in this little place of Bethlehem there is a man called Jesse, and what does *he* have? He has the interests of God at heart. *He* does not see stalemate and hopelessness and defeat. He is a man of wealth and he says, 'I am going to provide for these people'. "And Jesse said to David his son" - David had been anointed king just a few chapters before, and what had he done? He had gone back to the sheep. Delightful, is it not, the spirit of the man, type of the Lord Jesus as the great Shepherd. But here I think he is the type of one of us, with feelings just like Jesse his father. So Jesse says to David his son, "Take, I pray, for thy brethren" - "thy brethren", not the helpless, hamstrung soldiers but "thy brethren". He gives corn and ten loaves, and he says, "carry them quickly to the camp to thy brethren; and carry these ten cheeses to the captain of the thousand, and visit thy brethren ...", "visit thy brethren". I think that is the sort of thing that Jesse would, as a younger man, have done himself. There are those who do that,

beloved; you do not see them on platforms maybe, but they visit their brethren and they care how the brethren are getting on. I am speaking mainly of older persons, persons who understand what it is to keep the charge and have the interests of God's testimony at heart, and in their local places they are faithful. Here is Jesse, a man of wealth, a man of substance, and what a fine thing that is. That would be normal. But in the most difficult of days, here is someone who is wealthy, who knows what it is to have the word of the Christ dwelling in him richly (Col 3: 16), and he has a son, his son is David, and he has the same spirit as Jesse. That is a very fine thing. I suppose you could say, here is Paul and Timothy; Jesse and David.

I speak now to young men and young women here; what about you in your localities? Do you have the same spirit as older persons? You know, the Lord will not lay on you more than you can carry. If you are twelve - we will see that later, perhaps if you are twelve the Lord will only expect you to act as a twelve year old. He will not ask -you to act as a thirteen year old if you are twelve, but there is such a thing as filling up the measure that we have. When Paul the apostle wrote to Timothy he did not say, 'You be like me or be like Barnabas', he said, "fill up the full measure of thy ministry" (2 Tim 4: 5); that is to say, what the Lord has given you, your capacity, you fill it up, make it full, do what you can. So David does just that. Here he is, carrying something, the wealth of the land, and he takes it into this desolate zone, and see how he comports himself! Firstly it says he "rose up early in the morning". Well, when do you rise up early in the morning? You rise up early in the morning when you have something important to do. Often we read in the Scripture of persons rising early in the morning. (Once a brother said, 'If you have something important to do, do it early in the day'.) That is one reason why we break bread on Lord's day *morning*; we do not wait until the afternoon. It is of the greatest importance; so we do it early in the day. Then he "left the sheep with a keeper". What was his customary occupation? His customary occupation was not a runner for the army. His customary occupation was to take care of the sheep. What does he do when Jesse gives him this charge? He personally ensures the safety of the sheep; he left the sheep with a keeper. That is his first concern. He was ready for another service, he was ready to be a messenger, a runner for his father, but he did not neglect his first concern. Then he "took his charge and went". You see the dignity of this man, still a young man, who had been charged with something and he is carrying it out. Transferring this to Christianity, do you think that it

is possible today in your locality, that the Lord might charge you with something, something simple, and you might carry it out? Yes, He would give you the grace and the power to do it. Older brethren will recall ministry as to fulfilled responsibility (see James Taylor's letters vol 1 p 122 esp paras 3 and 4). There is such a thing, beloved brethren, as fulfilled responsibility. It was remarked at our meetings in Malvern during August, that the assembly is the only vessel ever to have the capacity to fulfil responsibility. Did Israel, called out of Egypt, have the power to fulfil responsibility? In type, yes, but not in actuality. Beloved, the assembly has power in the Holy Spirit actually to fulfil responsibility, and you in your locality can fulfil your responsibility. You can do it! Then we read, he "went, as Jesse had commanded him". You see, he is not volunteering. No, he is not. You will see that in a moment. "And he came to the wagon-defence", and so on. Then he "left the things" - that is what he had been told to do, these valuable things, these fruits of the land, God's blessing which he has brought for others. He left them "in the hand of the keeper of the baggage, and ran into the ranks" v 22, and what does he do now? Beloved, please let us grasp this, he "saluted his brethren". Who, or what kind of person, do you salute? You salute people you respect. He "saluted his brethren". Even a man as great as the apostle Paul saluted the brethren. I have never been in military service, but to me the brethren, the Lord's people, wherever they are, in whatever state they are found, are persons to whom the greatest respect is due. Remember, these persons were in a state of helplessness: the power of God was not evident in the ranks of these people. And David, what does he do? He runs to them and he "saluted his brethren". These are the same people in the midst of whom he had been anointed just one chapter previously. David had been anointed in the midst of his brethren (chap 16: 13), he was the supreme one among them. He had since been feeding the sheep, and now today he runs with groceries (messages, you would call them) and he salutes his brethren. What greatness according to God, and what serviceableness to the Lord! Someone, one of his brothers, says, "Why art thou come down? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?" Oh, beloved, let us never think of our brethren like that, however small our localities are. Let us never think of our brethren as "those few sheep" or 'those few brethren'. He says, "I know thy pride and the naughtiness of thy heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle", v 28. There was hardly a battle to see, but what does David say? I love this (the older brethren know it

well) but may all, especially younger brethren, take this home today, he says, "Was it not laid upon me?" - "*laid upon me*". If the Lord gives you something to do, you have only to answer for it to Him, you answer to nobody else. But if He lays something on you, maybe to be exercised to carry some of the wealth of the land, (that is to say the inheritance which we have in Christ), and what we enjoy collectively in our meetings, to take that and carry it to someone else, you do it. The Lord will help you, the Spirit will help you. "Was it not laid upon me? And he turned from him to another, and spoke after the same manner", v 30. How beautiful! We have no need to engage in any argument; Paul says to Timothy, "And a bondman of the Lord ought not to contend", 2 Tim 2: 24. "And he turned from him to another ..." - beautiful also!

Now we might turn to the Book of Numbers. I thought of this scripture just a little while before we came from the house so I have not had time to research it, but the Levites, as I understand it, were a tribe which Jehovah said He would take for His service instead of the firstborn of every house. You remember that before the people came out of Egypt God smote the firstborn of Egypt, and He said at that time (Exod 13: 2), 'I am going to have the firstborn of Israel for myself', but in His wisdom He took a whole tribe, the tribe of Levi, in their place, Num 8: 16-18. When settled in Canaan they lived in their own cities, including the cities of refuge, Num 35: 1-6. They were special cities because they had walls, and there were special rights and so on when it came to buying and selling in a walled city. This speaks really of assembly truth. Also, within that tribe there were the families, the children of Kohath, Gershon and Merari. The Kohathites carried the most holy things. They carried the ark, "they bore what they carried upon the shoulder", Numbers 7: 9. The Gershonites handled the curtains. Imagine the weight of the curtains of the tabernacle, all those skins and woven cloth and the size of them! Imagine the weight! Imagine the exercise of a Christian pathway maintaining the truth, the principles of fellowship, in a world that is entirely contrary to it. And then there were those who carried the boards. They had wagons to help them, because they were big boards, covered in gold, and were very heavy. Certain princes provided those wagons, a little bit like our collection on Lord's day morning. Have you ever wondered why, as well as the loaf and the cup at the Supper, we have the collection basket on the table? Well, the scripture that helps me is Numbers 7: the princes bring the wagons to the tabernacle, not to some place outside; they bring them to the tabernacle. And Jehovah says to Moses, "Take it

of them”, v 5. That scripture helps me.

This little paragraph that I have read tells us that these Levites were not to begin service until they were twenty-five years old, and at fifty years old they were to retire. Now, when you think about the carrying of the most holy things, it was not physically heavy, was it? Carrying the ark with the staves upon their shoulder, that was not *heavy* work: that was most dignified, most privileged work. Carrying the curtains, I suppose, would have been quite heavy work. Carrying the boards would definitely have been heavy work, taking them down, putting them onto the wagons and off again, and putting them up. But these people would be well nourished, because they were going to be feeding on the manna. (Moreover, Numbers 8:18-39 and other scriptures show how well provided for the members of this tribe were.) So I have been asking myself, why retire at fifty? I am not speaking of literal ages today, but why retire at fifty? They are going to have plenty of exercise and excellent food. They were drinking of the rock which followed them, which was the Christ, 1 Cor 10: 4. They were well nourished. They are not going to be exhausted at fifty. I suggest, beloved, the reason for them retiring at fifty (and I have not researched this either but commend it to the brethren) is so that *younger persons might be made way for*. In what? In the labour of the tabernacle, carrying for themselves mature exercises in relation to God's testimony here, the maintenance of the precious truth of Christ in His Person, and the representation of God's grace towards men. What, however, would not change upon their retirement? You know. What did not change at fifty when they retired from the service was the keeping of the charge. What does that mean to you? What that means to me is that there are younger persons in your locality or in mine, and you do everything you can to encourage them to take up their responsibility; but you never hand over *your* responsibility. You encourage them to do things, you encourage them to ask questions, you encourage them to promote the Lord's interests in whatever way you can, but *you never lay down the charge*.

Now I will speak briefly from 1 Thessalonians. What we have here is an exhortation to a young Christian company, and the apostle begins by saying, “But we beg you, brethren, to know those who labour among you, and take the lead among you in the Lord, and admonish you”. What, in the language of Numbers 8, are these people doing? Well, I think they are keeping the charge. There are those we look up

to; there are persons I look up to in my locality and round about, throughout the world, there are persons I look up to, and I think of them like this: they are persons who labour among us and who take the lead among us in the Lord. They take on a very serious task. They hold themselves accountable to the Lord. We read in Hebrews 13: 17 "Obey your leaders, and be submissive; for *they* watch over your souls as those that shall give account". Then earlier in that chapter (v 7) "Remember your leaders who have spoken to you the word of God". How gladly we do that! We remember leaders from this place who have spoken to us the word of God and their life had a meaning, that is that Jesus Christ was their life. We remember them, but now we are to obey our leaders, and that is at the present time. The principle of leadership is of God. Democracy is not of God. If something needs to be decided in your locality you do not have a vote, you do not sound out people, you look for leadership, persons who hold themselves accountable to the Lord. They do not lord it over your souls, Paul says, "Not that we rule over your faith", 2 Cor. 1: 24, but they "take the lead among you in the Lord, and admonish you", and we are to "regard them exceedingly in love on account of their work." Then he says, "Be in peace among yourselves."

I now want to touch very briefly on this matter of admonition. I would not give an address on it, but just touch on it. It is mentioned twice within three verses. One of the things about those who give a lead, one thing that we must expect, is that sometimes they will admonish us. Now, it is quite different from exhortation. There is exhortation and there is admonition. They are quite distinct. If a brother says to me, 'John, I have seen something in such and such a book of ministry. I think you would enjoy it, I think you should read it', what are they doing? They are exhorting me. He is not correcting me, he is exhorting me, but I well know that there is such a thing as admonition, and I will give you an example. There was a time when we had a fellowship meeting in Malvern and I did not go to the address, I went to work. It was not to meet a life and death situation, but still I went to work. You might be shocked at that, with good reason, but I did it. I had had some railway sleepers delivered and I wanted to move them, but life would have gone on had I left them where they were until Monday. A brother was giving an address in Malvern, and it was pretty poor that I was absent. A local brother came to me soon afterwards and he said, 'What happened?' What he then said to me was not exhortation: what he said to me was admonition, and I can tell you,

never again have I missed an address at a Malvern fellowship meeting! I would not want to. I say this in passing that there is such a thing as admonition. We rightly receive a good deal of exhortation, but there is room for admonition, and we all may need it - none of us is too old to need it. In Ecclesiastes there is a scripture which says, "Better is a poor but wise youth than an old and foolish king, who knoweth no more how to be admonished", chap 4: 13. May we remember that, we are never above it, never beyond it, and it is one of the services in love which we can expect from our local brethren. Let us not take offence if we find we are being admonished because it is one of the resources the Lord has put in the place, and it is used by persons who keep the charge.

Now, I am not going to let you go home thinking about that: let us look at Luke 2. The Lord Jesus is here in manhood. Remember what I said that if you are twelve years old the Lord does not expect you to act as a thirteen year old. If you are five years old, the Lord expects you to act like a five year old, exactly that. Here in this passage of scripture we have presented to us the Lord Jesus in manhood, described not as a man but as a boy. How touching that the Lord Jesus, blessed Man that He is, as expressing every feature of manhood according to God, when He was twelve years old, was described as "the boy Jesus". I speak very reverently, but I suggest we see here Someone who took up the charge in perfection. I do not think I go too far to say that in this passage we see the Lord Jesus taking up responsibility. Soon we will find Him thirty years of age. Scripture says that, "And Jesus himself was beginning to be about thirty years old", "beginning to be" (Luke 3: 23), not twenty-five but thirty years of age. How patient He was! One of the gospel writers tells us that He did not start to serve publicly until John the Baptist was delivered up, Mark 1: 14. Think of such a Man, the Lord Jesus Himself, *the* great Servant, He would not publicly serve until His forerunner was delivered up. He would not overshadow the ministry of John. Here in this Gospel we find Him as a Boy in Jerusalem, and there He is found "in the midst of the teachers and hearing them and asking them questions". What an ear that was! That was an ear that was ever open to the Father's voice. Here His ear is open to the elders and the teachers, and He is found here among them. We know what His mother said, "Child, why hast thou dealt thus with us?" Consider His reply, "Why is it that ye have sought me?" What that conveys to me is that as the Lord Jesus felt drawn to His Father's business He would have expected everyone around Him to understand just that. But they did not: what a holy, heavenly Stranger. He says, "Why is it that ye have

sought me? Did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business?" "My Father's business" could translate, "the things of my Father". That reminds me of what Paul says to the Philippians, "For all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ", chap 2: 21. Here was a blessed Man at twelve years of age, and He is finding His occupation in His Father's business. I say to anyone here who is twelve years of age or older, persons who are high school age: the field is open to you, to occupy yourself in the Father's business, the things of the Lord Jesus. You can express it in all sorts of simple ways and you have no idea how much it will cheer the older brethren. Sometimes, not often, we go to the mid-week reading in Worcester, and we often find present persons who are of that age, high school and in their teens. What a cheer it is! Last year we visited some of the meetings in Germany, and there at the prayer meetings we found young persons. It is a cheer to find persons interesting themselves in the Father's business. Of course, there is one very great privilege open to you. If you have the knowledge that you belong to the Lord Jesus and you are finding pleasure and satisfaction in the things that the brethren are finding pleasure and satisfaction in, there is a way you can express that shared satisfaction. Do you know what that is? I put it that way round deliberately. What does scripture say? John says that there is such a thing as having fellowship with God, 1 John 1: 6. If you find your delight and your pleasure in the Lord Jesus and in what is pleasing to Him, that is what the Father finds His pleasure in, and if you have the desire and the resolve that your life should be governed by the Lord Jesus, what is standing in your way? The brethren will know if you are ready. That is how we come into the privilege of remembering the Lord in the breaking of bread. It is that way round. The remembrance of the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread, the Lord's Supper, is not the gateway into fellowship; it is for persons who are in fellowship, and is the expression of that fellowship. Paul gives us the principles of fellowship in chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians; in chapter 11 he gives us the truth of the Lord's supper, so here is sound teaching for us. The numbering of the chapters in the epistles is not inspired but the order of teaching is.

Well, I commend these thoughts to us, beloved. We are not going to retire. We desire to keep the charge until the Lord comes. May we be preserved in doing so! For His Name's sake.

Edinburgh
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SEEKING FIRST THE KINGDOM

D Andrew Burr

Matthew 6: 31-34

The other day, at another meeting, we were looking at a passage further on in this gospel, in chapter 18 verses 15-20, where the Lord gives directions as to how a brother might be gained. If a brother offends, then one or two - or three, in fact - might undertake to gain a brother. I do not want to go into that procedure because my thought tonight is not exactly related to recovery, although that would be one application of the passage. But it raises the question, 'What would I want to gain a brother for?' You might say, 'He used to be a good friend of mine and I would like to recover the friendship that might have been lost', but I wonder if it really would satisfy the Lord's directions if that was your only kind of object, if that was your horizon. What we saw in our enquiry is that you would be seeking to gain a brother for the kingdom. You would have in mind that he might be gained or restored to his part in the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of the heavens. (I will be allowed not to go into the distinction between these expressions now.) There are a number of reasons in that passage for reaching such a conclusion. One is that the brother is gained on the principle of subjection; that is, he hears you. But perhaps more precious still is what the Lord goes on to say, that "where two or three are gathered together unto my name" - that is, perhaps, you and the brother you have gained, and a brother you took with you to gain him - "there am I in the midst". The way the kingdom is presented in Scripture shows that the Lord Jesus embodies the kingdom. If He is there in the midst, then the blessing and glory of the kingdom is experienced. So your object in gaining a brother would be to create conditions in which not only the brother had his part, but in which the Lord Jesus Himself would have His part. Your object would be so to clear the problem that had arisen that the Lord might feel comfortable in your company. The Christian circle should be like that. It should be a place in which the presence of the Lord Jesus is enjoyed. It should be a place into which the Lord Jesus can come, in the midst, and feel at home; a place He would want to come to. If that is to be realised, then clearly things must be in order, because after all, if we speak of the kingdom, He is the King. And it would be very wrong, I am sure everyone would understand, for a king to come into something that expressed his kingdom and find contrary wills and other offences allowed that disturbed his enjoyment of it.

Well, all that gives rise to a further question: would it be possible to seek to gain a brother for the kingdom if I am not in the good of the kingdom myself? Why would I want to do that? Why would I want to

establish a brother in something that did not command my life already? And that brings me to say a word, beloved, about entrance into the kingdom. How is it that any of us might enter the kingdom? I want not simply to show you where the gates are or the door, but I would like to do it in a way which made everybody want to come through them and to live in the enjoyment of what they will find if they do. I want to take up this verse here to encourage all of us to be seekers of the kingdom seekers. And not only - seekers, but those who "seek ... first the kingdom of God"; maybe to establish it more as a priority in the lives of every one of us.

Those of us who are familiar with Matthew's gospel - and others can become so by reading it - will know how full different parts of it are with teaching about the kingdom. I will just go over a little of it. It will have to be simple because beyond that is beyond me. I would like to just sketch out a few things about the kingdom with the object of making them attractive. The kingdom of the heavens was the great theme of the ministry of Jesus on earth. Of course some will say He touched on a lot of other things, and He did. But the central theme of His ministry on earth was the kingdom of the heavens. And I say that because, when He began to preach, He said, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh", chap 4: 17. That was something new, and it was new because for the first time there was to be communicated to people here on earth the principles of a kingdom that belonged not to this earth but to heaven. Not only did it belong to heaven, but because it belonged there it had a heavenly character. It follows from that that there is no man-made element to it. If you take account of the kingdoms of the world - the United Kingdom, for example, but there are others - they really express the outcome of a process by which they have been formed through the development of human ideas. But I want to show that there is no such element in the kingdom of the heavens. It is something that does not have any relationship to the political story of the world's history. It comes from, and it belongs to, a context which is outside the world, apart from its history. It does not bear the world's character - it cannot bear the world's character: it is entirely different from what you might find in the politics or the affairs of men. It is the kingdom *of God* - that is who it comes from. And, not only is it of God, but it has a character which belongs to things that are of God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift", James says, "comes down from above", Jas 1: 17. That is the character of the kingdom: it is superior to the earth. And the blessings and benefits which you will receive as entering into it are all better than anything you would receive here on earth. It is embodied in the Person of Jesus. If you think, for

example, of the United Kingdom - we are not there today; and those of us who have been there have not been to see it all. Therefore any of us only has a partial idea of what that kingdom is all about. But this kingdom is expressed in its fulness in the Lord Jesus. You might say He is King and kingdom. Not only does He give character to it, but He expresses every aspect of it fully. So entering into the kingdom becomes very simple. It is not a question of filling in green forms or white forms and negotiating with some immigration officer or queuing up and all these things we have to do. You come to Jesus. It is very simple. The most approachable Person there has ever been is the embodiment of the kingdom of God. And any of us can come to Him: little children - hundreds, thousands of them - have come to Him. The Lord Jesus says that in chapter 18. In fact, He says - and this shows how different this kingdom must be to any earthly kingdom - "Unless ye are converted and become as little children, ye will not at all enter into the kingdom of the heavens", v 3. Now, little children do not fill in forms and deal with officials and bureaucrats and all those things. They do not need a level of understanding or intelligence, or all these other things which might be associated with claiming residence or title to something earthly; but little children know what it means just to come to Jesus. In fact, they do not have to come, because He takes them and brings them. What a blessed thing that is! It shows the character of the kingdom. It is a system of administration, one major feature of which is its consideration of the needs and interests and understanding of little children. What a blessed thing! I appeal to the young people, that the Lord Jesus is very anxious that, at the earliest possible opportunity you should seek entrance into His kingdom. And you do not have to look very far: if you want to find that entrance, you simply come to Him.

Having got on to the subject of the King Himself, I would like to say something about how the kingdom has become established. You might say it has always been established. It has come from heaven, from a place where there is nothing to overcome; there is no victory to secure. But in a practical sense, the sense in which we may now take it up and enter into it, the kingdom is presented to us in the light of this great truth, that the Lord Jesus has died. It may be a little new to some people if I say that, but the kingdom practically in the operation of it - and certainly as far as our entrance into it is concerned - is established on the great principle of redemption. What that simply means is that the King of whom we have been speaking, the Lord Jesus, has a precious claim, a very personal claim, to every single person who belongs to His kingdom. They are not simply His subjects, they are His redeemed. What a wonderful thing that is, that the Lord Jesus Himself has provided

that security, that basis, on which we may now have part in the blessings over which He is, and which He administers for our benefit. How precious it is to think of the Lord Jesus Himself being prepared to suffer and die. I will not go at length into the sufferings of Jesus, but think of that. Consider the question that Pilate asks in John's gospel, as to the kingdom. He says, "Thou art then a *king*?", John 18: 37. Think of his wonder contemplating Him. Here was a man arraigned before him as a troublemaker and in some mysterious way a criminal, and yet apparently a king. He says, 'Thou art a *king*?' He did not look like one. He did not look like someone to whom Pilate had any cause to be subject. The Lord Jesus says, "... I am a king". He says, "My kingdom is not of this world", v 36. It was not a kingdom that derived from earth, and it was not a question of establishing its rights in relation to the Roman empire. The Lord Jesus was able to testify in the course of His trial before Pilate that He had a heavenly kingdom. Think of the Lord Jesus about to be crucified, about to be refused by His earthly people; left by all His friends, standing apparently alone in the midst of the most abject and humiliating circumstances: "I *am* a king". Does that appeal to you? Let me emphasise the appeal it ought to make to you. He stood there, not then to claim His earthly throne, but to claim *you*. And, in order to make that claim to you good - and dare I say irresistible - He proceeded from that miserable trial to hang upon a cross. There He hung as a King. And He laid down His life. He took upon Himself every obligation of all His subjects, and answered to God's holy claims for them all. In order to do that, He suffered what it was to be forsaken by God for three hours on the cross. Beloved, think of it! He did that because He wants you to "seek ... first the kingdom". He wants you to consider your priorities. He wants you to think about what is important to you and, in order to make you think about it, He would like you to think just for a moment about what was important to Him. Beloved, you can measure how important *you* were to Him by considering for a moment what He was willing to do for you. Now, I draw this from things I have read, and I would not dare say it if I did not know that somebody else I respect had said it; but when it says in the Scripture that "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us" (2 Cor 5: 21), what that means is that not only did He bear the penalty of death that must be paid by the sinner; but He also bore the wrath of God which must be endured if the offence of sin is to be atoned for in the presence of God. In order to bear, and fully taste and exhaust the wrath of God, for those three hours on the cross He had to know what it was to have no sense of the love of God (see JND Collected Writings vol 7 p 178-190). I would just like to ask you to think. I suppose we all know something about the love of God, but none of us can imagine what it would feel like if for three hours

there was no sense whatever of the love of God. In its place was God's holy wrath against sin. That is the way, dear believer, in which your redemption was secured. It was not secured like some market transaction; it was done in three terrible, terrible hours, when the King who had all those rights stood in the place of His subjects and atoned for them before God. How wonderful that is! Beloved, He did that to establish for us what we had no right to whatever, and He did it in love. As a consequence of doing that, He has established a claim in redemption. It is not simply that the basis for redemption has been secured, but the claim of redemption has been established. Everybody owes to Him the acknowledgement of a right over us. And in order to make that acknowledgement good, we have to face the things that will bring us into the kingdom.

Scripture speaks about many such things but I want to look at just two. One is repentance and one is conversion. It is worth saying as to conversion that it is not something you can do yourself. You cannot convert yourself. I might think that, in ordinary things, if I started off for example as a civil servant, by a process of training I might turn myself into a teacher or something of that sort. But you cannot convert yourself in this sense. It is something that you are dependent on God to do in you. But you must recognise at any rate the necessity of it. And the reason why it is so necessary is that, otherwise, you would want to bring into the kingdom things for which the King has suffered and died; and that cannot be. The kingdom is a place where there can be no offence. We read of that in chapter 13: He says, "they shall gather out of his kingdom all offences" (v 41) - all of them. If you want to see the process by which that is accomplished, you can read the book of Revelation and you will see how severe and unsparing the gathering is. There cannot be offences in His kingdom, and in order that you should bring no offence into the kingdom, you have to understand what it is to be converted.

There are several references to conversion in the New Testament, and the immediate bearing of them all is on Jewish people. It is important to understand that because, for a Jew, his history and what he had been before was very important. For the Jew to feel he had a proper and legitimate claim to the blessings of God, he had to be quite sure that he was a Jew. And therefore his history and all that went before was important. But the Lord Jesus shows that it will not give you entrance into the kingdom of the heavens. There were people who came and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of the heavens?", Matt 18: 1 He says, 'it is not a question of being greatest; you will need to be converted'. So, all the things you thought might make you great

do not count. They will not help you. You see that you have to submit to the work of God to clear away all the things that might give you status or standing or whatever it might be - your interests, and all those things that do not bring you any nearer to God; and you have to submit to the work of God in you.

Now, the means by which you express your submission to the work of God in you is repentance. That means that you come into the presence of God; it is not just to say you are sorry, or you will try and do better, or something like that. You must come into the presence of God and ask Him to show you not only how what you have done seems to Him, but also to ask Him to show you how *you* seem to Him. You must get an understanding in the presence of God of what a sinner looks like to God. What God will say to you is that your sinfulness is a source of offence; it is unclean. He cannot have it in His presence. At the same time, He will show you that He loves you, and that He wants to have you for His pleasure and glory; and in order to do that, He will separate you from your sins. He will visit His unsparing judgement on *them*, and save *you*. Now, in order to be a repentant person, your judgement of all those things has to line up with God's. You have to recognise that the things that God has judged are rightly judged; and you are going to judge them as well. You are going to submit to the will of God, and to the ordering of God. You are going to hear the gospel, and the way that God presents His message of salvation to you. And by these means, beloved, you become a subject of the kingdom of God. You become qualified, and entitled for entrance into His kingdom, the kingdom of the heavens. How precious this is, that God has made all this provision for you! Through the gospel, He presents to you this wonderful prospect of coming to Jesus just as you are, recognising the work He has done for you and its atoning power, putting your faith in it, and receiving the righteousness it gives - "righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ" Rom 3: 22. Think of that - it says that here, "seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness". God's righteousness has been displayed, it has been displayed at the cross. It has been displayed in the ministry and in the Person of Jesus. There it is! It does not depend on your righteousness; you have none. If you had it, it would be worth nothing. And why would you want it when God presents His own righteousness, in the work and Person of a perfect Man, who has suffered and died for you? 'Seek it!', He says, "Seek ye first ... his righteousness". What a precious thing, that we might be the recipients, the beneficiaries, of the righteousness of God! It is a principle of the kingdom. Things are not wrong in the kingdom. Things are not out of order, or out of place. Relationships are right, relationships between God and His subjects,

between the King and His subjects. They are as right as they are between God and the King. What a wonderful thing that we should be free of the things that intrude into our relationships and disturb our peace with God. These things can be removed on the principle of subjection, and recognition of the will of God, and the rights and principles that mark the kingdom.

The kingdom of God manifests itself in very practical ways. The Lord Jesus speaks of some of these things here and it is worth remembering them. He says, "your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of these things". The needs of every day, He knows that you have need of them. Because you are a subject of His kingdom, He makes it His responsibility to ensure that your needs are provided for. So there is no need for the believer to worry. The future has many uncertainties to it, some big changes and things that bring in doubts and fears, and perhaps changes that we would prefer not to happen and hope will never happen. But we can trust the Father about them because He has brought us into His kingdom. And, having brought us into His kingdom, He does not simply impose obligations of subjection upon us, but He takes upon Himself an obligation for our care and well-being even in our practical circumstances here. Oh, you say, 'You said it was the kingdom of the heavens'; and so it is, but the kingdom of the heavens can look after people who are on earth. It can look after them better than earthly-minded people can look after themselves. I like to think of Joseph in his kingdom. (Joseph was in effect the king in Egypt.) You can look at some of the simple practical ways in which he used to administer. Take his father: he loved his father and he had a special relationship with him, but see how he puts the kingdom of Egypt at his disposal. He knew what his father was feeling. He said, 'You do not worry about all those things; you come into the kingdom and all your needs will be supplied. You do not have to worry about these things, things you have had to do for yourself, things you have to worry about for yourself - worrying about where next year's crops were going to come from and all those things. You do not have to worry about all that - put it out of your mind.' "Come to me", he says, "and I will give you the good of the land", Gen 45: 18. What a king he was! And, then at the end of his life, his grandchildren - the next generation, were born on his knees, Gen 50: 23. That is rather an unusual thing, for a grandfather to be at a birth like that, but you see how it shows how the kingdom is concerned with people from the very outset of their lives, so that from 'day 1' onwards they should know the blessings and benefit not only of the kingdom, but of a personal and family relationship with the king.

I would just like to say one more thing, and that is that one of the

important practical manifestations of the kingdom is fellowship, fellowship among the subjects of the kingdom. The teaching shows that there is a distinction between the kingdom and fellowship - that may very well be, but the truth is that the same principles that prevail in the kingdom govern fellowship. We have fellowship together, and it is a very precious thing. I would just like to leave with you the thought that the welfare, and certainly the peace, of the fellowship depends upon us all abiding by the principles of the kingdom. You do not take anything for granted in the kingdom. You do not start saying you have rights in the kingdom, or anything of that sort. The kingdom subsists on the basis that subjects are subject. They recognise that what they are brought into is not a right but a privilege. The young people need to understand that, that the fellowship proceeds on the basis that participation in it is a privilege. I am among the majority here who have been brought up, as we say, 'in fellowship'. I have never known anything else. My earliest memories are of coming to meetings - probably the oldest memories I have include memories of coming to the meeting. When I gained a certain age, I was commended and I have broken bread ever since - for forty-five years, I have broken bread. You might say that is all very natural, and it is very happy and very simple. But I would not like any one to come that way and think they were taking the principles of the kingdom for granted, as if they did not apply to them.

There are two great principles I would like to leave you to think about. The first is what I have gone over about conversion. You might say, 'I have never been out in the world. I have never been like that; why do I have to change? I grew up 'in fellowship', why do I have to change?' I would just like you to bear in mind that the mere fact that you grew up in a Christian household, and as a member of a Christian company, does not of itself entitle you to entrance into the kingdom. If it did, you would be able to bring into the kingdom the things that someone who had an unbelieving background would not be allowed to bring. So you have to come the same way as everybody else. You have to accept the gospel. You have to have the transaction with God that I have spoke about. You have to understand and recognise what sin means to God; and you have to recognise how intolerant His kingdom is of offences. And you have to judge those things in yourself. You have to come by way of the cross just like everybody else. That is a firm, specific, explicit transaction. It is associated with the principle of baptism, and those of us who were baptised as infants have to come to the point at which we can say, 'well, if my father had not taken responsibility for my baptism, today I would want to take that

responsibility myself'. That is how you enter into the kingdom, by facing up to that question.

The other thing which comes out in this passage is that the kingdom is for people who want to commit themselves. It is not for people who have a passing interest in God's things. It is not for people who are glad to take His benefits without putting anything in. It is not for passengers. Let me just make that clear by pointing out that the way the kingdom was established was by the Lord Jesus making a total, absolute, irrevocable commitment. That is the basis of His kingdom: it underlies everything in it. The blood of Jesus - there it is, you cannot get away from it. It gives a moral character to the whole of the kingdom; that it is founded on the blessed real fact that the One who gives character to the whole thing gave *everything*, never thinking that anything of what He gave could ever be taken back. You might think that that sounds rather frightening if that is what you have got to do, but in principle that is what you have got to do. You have got to say that this kingdom attracts me so much that I am going to seek it first. From now on, there is nothing that I will allow ahead of the claim that God has established over me as a subject of His kingdom. That does not mean that you cannot do anything else, but you do this *first*. In return for that - being whole-hearted - you will get all the blessings of the kingdom. Let me say this, the kingdom was established for man's blessing. There is no system of blessing like the kingdom of God. His blessings are not confined to the circumstances of daily life. They are not confined to time. They are not confined to youth or old age. They are not confined to particular kinds of people. In their scope, they are universal; and in their extent they are eternal. They cover every need you might have, not only in your circumstances but in your soul. And God has the ability to provide you with fulfilment and satisfaction that you will find nowhere else. Now, if you want to be half-hearted, you are giving up a lot. And my appeal, in the light of what I have said, is, let us resolve to seek *first* - not the things of earth, not material things, not the things you can find outside, not the things you might share with those who do not know anything about this; but seek *first* the kingdom of God and *His* righteousness. Seek it first, and take up everything else, as the Lord Jesus says, in the light of that first priority that you have established.

May He bless the word.

Calgary
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