

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE GOODNESS OF GOD

John A Brown

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I have been affected in thinking of this gospel by the scripture, "the goodness of God leads thee to repentance", Rom 2: 4. We get so used to the passage of time and to coming to this meeting, the gospel, every week; but I was freshly affected by why it is that God has seen to it that there should be another opportunity for the gospel to be preached. It is because of "the goodness of God". It is not just because time passes that we are here again, a week after we last heard the gospel; it is because God has wished us to hear again the story of His love and how it brought Jesus into this scene.

The goodness of God leads men to repentance. I have been thinking about that and wondering; is it so, has it done that with me and with you - led us to repentance? We were reading on Thursday evening at the end of Genesis about the history of Joseph and his brethren. The brothers of Joseph did a terrible thing when they sold him into slavery in Egypt. It was marginally less terrible than what they were going to do with him, which was to kill him. They were going to do away with him anyway. They put him in a pit; they sold him into Egypt. We know what happened; it is an amazing narrative when you read these chapters. Twenty two years later - that was the time that passed between when they sold him into Egypt and when these "brethren went down to buy grain out of Egypt" (Gen 42: 3) - they came down because they needed Joseph. They did not know who he was at that time; they came down because there was grain in Egypt. There was famine in Canaan and in Egypt too, and they came because they needed him, and he worked with them. He spoke roughly to them at one point, he rebuked them, he disciplined them, and he put them in prison for three days before he sent them back with their money in their sacks. And then they had to come again and he speaks to them again. He still does not let them know who he is; he sends them again with their money in their sacks and he puts his own cup in Benjamin's sack and then he has them brought back again. He goes on working with his brothers. You might ask whether he could not just have forgotten what had happened,

twenty two years before. It almost seems that *they* had; after all that time they were going on with life as normal. The first time they came they explained that “the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not”, chap 42: 13. Imagine saying that: they must have remembered what they had done, but Joseph carries on working with them. Twenty two years have passed and Judah says on behalf of them all, “God has found out the iniquity”, chap 44: 16. In principle Judah came to repentance, and that was when “Joseph made himself known to his brethren”, chap 45: 1. Dear friend, I would like to ask you, what does that mean to you? You may say that the gospel is about believing in the Lord Jesus, and it is, that is the first step; belief and faith in the Saviour. If you believe in the Lord Jesus, that is the way to salvation; God takes you that way. But what I feel the need of for myself as believing in Christ, is that the next step must be repentance. Otherwise it is superficial - and I do not lay that on anyone here because I know it for myself. I have been brought up as you have been, most if not everybody here, in a Christian household, in a family of brethren coming to meetings like this, hearing the gospel preached in this room and rooms like it every week of my life. That is my history. I need this as much as you do, repentance, “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ” as that scripture in Acts speaks of. Dear friend, I trust there is nobody here who has never come to belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, but if there is, God would give you the opportunity and it may be like it was for this thief on the cross. It may be the last opportunity that you will have to put your trust in Jesus; the Man who the thief refers to as “*this man*”.

It speaks in these chapters in Genesis of “The man”, chap 42: 30. “The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us”. The brothers speak about Joseph as “The man”, and the narrative speaks about him in the same way. The thief in Luke 23 says, “**this man**”. Dear friend, do you know Him, this Man that this thief came to know? How long had this man known Jesus? Only during the length of time it took to walk from the gate of Jerusalem to Golgotha, it would seem. It says in verse 32, “Now two others also, malefactors, were led with him to be put to death”. What happened during that walk to Calvary? He no doubt listened to what Jesus was saying; he would hear what He said to the daughters of Jerusalem, “do not weep over me, but weep over yourselves”, v 28. He would watch as Jesus was nailed to that cross, and these malefactors too were nailed to their crosses, and then the crosses were raised up and put in their sockets on the ground. This

thief comes to something in his soul. I want to ask you, dear friend, have you come to what this malefactor came to? One of the malefactors was completely unaffected, and the other one was completely broken down by the Man who was beside him; "this man has done nothing amiss". Oh what a wonderful thing it is to see the work of God in a soul. As the hymn says of this malefactor -

Redemption's earliest trophy stood (Hymn 145).

"But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost *thou* too not fear God, thou that art under the same judgment? and *we* indeed justly, for we receive the just recompense of what we have done". What was that? Repentance - realising that we deserve this. Dear friend, I would ask you again, have you come to that in your soul? "This man has done nothing amiss"; "Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom". This man's experience in these minutes - because it may not have been much longer than that - this man's experience with the Saviour encapsulates the gospel. He came in repentance to put his trust in a Man who he saw was more than He appeared to be, more than what they were. Three of them led out; two malefactors and One who "has done nothing amiss". Oh dear friend, the appeal of the gospel, the appeal of God's presentation of Jesus! May you answer to it, but may you answer to it in repentance: "we indeed justly, for we receive the just recompense of what we have done; but this man has done nothing amiss. And he said to Jesus, Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom". This malefactor had to go that way, the way of salvation, and Jesus gives him the end in view, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise". These three verses are the whole experience of a soul in microcosm; faith in Christ, repentance, blessing. Is that your experience? Belief in the Lord Jesus, putting your trust in Him; can you remember when you did that? This point in time would be marked out in heaven, when the first trophy of redemption was secured. There have been millions since, and I would ask if you are among them. You may be breaking bread, you may have been coming to meetings like this for sixty years as I have, but the gospel is for you and you are responsible to answer the question. Have you put your faith and trust in Jesus? I was greatly sobered by something I was told last summer of the brethren in a place in the south of England. This happened a long time ago. There was an old lady who had been breaking bread all her life, and at the end of her life, she told a preacher that she was not a believer in the Lord Jesus. Somehow she had come into fellowship, she was

breaking bread, but she had no faith in Christ. I am not saying there is anyone like that in this room, but we come and need to be affected by the gospel every week. We know each other here, we have known each other all our lives in most cases, but God knows us better than we do. That is why God has secured that there might be a preaching tonight and that this appeal can be made; and I need it as much as you do. I also know what superficiality is. God would deepen us in our faith, living faith, faith towards God, faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, repentance towards God. It is not a static thing, it is not a position that you reach and then you stop. It is not that you say 'Yes, I believe in Jesus; so I am going to be all right; I can do what I like; it does not matter; I am safe'; it is not like that, dear friend. The gospel brings you into an area of life, of living relationship to this blessed One who spoke to this malefactor, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise". What Jesus was saying was that death is not the end, and in His case - blessed be His name - He went into death and He came out of it.

But before He went into death in these three hours of darkness He bore my sins in His body on the tree. That is why I read in Galatians. It is not just a matter of believing who He is, although we must start there. You cannot come to repentance without belief, because in the gospel God presents His beloved Son for your acceptance, for your faith, for you to believe in. As soon as you do that, you come to a different view point. You come to God's view point of who you are and what you are and what you have done. You view it in the light of what it cost Jesus to bear your sins, what He took on in these three hours of darkness which it speaks of here: "there came darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour". Oh, what Jesus had already suffered. The marks on His back would still be there as He hung there and spoke to this man. Jesus had just been scourged by the Romans. That was a horrendous thing to do to a person, the skin probably scourged from His back. "Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged him", John 19: 1. The Roman scourging was an awful thing. So Jesus would have these stripes on His back.. Then He has to listen to the taunts of His own people. That was a different kind of suffering. The cruelty of the Romans, the brutality of man, was one kind. The enemy used violence against Christ. But then Jesus had to suffer in a different way as He hung there on that cross and listened to the jeers of those He had come to save. "He came to his own, and his own received him not", John 1: 11. He listened to these Jews. He was a Jew and He had come to them to save them, but they mocked Him. How deep were the sufferings of

Jesus at the hands of man and at the hands of His own people. But then infinitely worse was the forsaking, so much so that we cannot ever fully understand what He went through in these three hours when He was made sin. But what I can say about what happened then is that He went there for me and during these three hours all of my sins were taken away by my Saviour. I cannot even remember most of them, I can only remember a tiny fraction of the things that I have done that would have offended God, and condemned me had I not been a believer in the efficacy of the work that Jesus did there. In these three hours of darkness, He bore what I deserved to bear, and He bore it as the Son of God. Oh what a blessed Saviour! Come to Him tonight in repentance if you have never done that before. Do you know Him as your living Saviour? Not just Someone that you have heard people talk about, not just Someone that you have heard about, read about in the Scriptures, but Someone that you know that you speak to, Someone that speaks to you, Someone that you love; Someone that you know loves you. Dear friend, the relationship that you have with the Lord Jesus is the deepest and most meaningful relationship that it is possible to have and you need Him. You cannot do without Him. You have sung it; I have sung it-

I could not do without Thee,
O Saviour of the lost, (Hymn 220)

Oh, come to Him tonight, put your trust in His precious Person, put your faith in Him, the Son of God. That is what defines you and me as believers; we believe that He is the Son of God. But as believing that, we come to repentance. That is what happened seven weeks after this. Peter was standing in Jerusalem, Peter who had run away, who had denied the Lord as He stood in the house of the high priest; seven weeks later, after Pentecost, he was preaching this crucified Saviour to the men who had crucified Him. How bold he was; he says "this Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. And having heard it they were pricked in heart", Acts 2: 36, 37. Something got in.

Dear friend, can I ask you, have you ever felt that prick of conscience, which is where repentance begins? You may listen to a gospel preaching or someone talking about the Lord Jesus, and you know that you need Him and you know that you do not have Him. These men in Jerusalem were pricked in heart and they said to Peter and the apostles, "What shall we do, brethren?". Peter is very clear: "Repent, and be baptised, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for remission of sins", v 38. I present to you the necessity of a living link

with this risen and glorious Man. He is not in death now. He did die: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit. And having said this, he expired". Men hung Him on the cross, but "he delivered up his spirit", John 19: 30. What power He had as He went into death. What a glorious Saviour. The Saviour that I know is the One who has overcome the power of death and has risen from it triumphantly, and so Paul can say, "the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me". May there not be anyone in this room who has not had that initial experience that the malefactor on the cross beside Jesus had. You need it and I need it. You need Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Belief brings us to realise how awful the state of man is, because you see it in yourself, you begin to look at yourself from God's point of view. You begin to see that what these men did when they crucified Christ, you and I would have done, if we had been there, because we are no better. I begin to see that the little lie that I told as a child, or maybe more recently than that, necessitated Jesus going that way of suffering and death. It has often been said - you have probably heard preachers saying it dozens of times - that if there had only been one sinner and only one sin, Jesus would have needed to go this way. What is a sin? It can be just a little lie. You are asked, 'Did you do that?' and you say 'No, I did not do that', although you did. That is sin. That is why Jesus had to go that way. Oh that we might see the awfulness of it, and then come to repentance. Not just to say, 'I am sorry I told that lie', but to come to a deep and full judgment of what I am that causes me to be like that, and to realise that it does not have to be like that. You begin to understand God's view of sin and the price He had to pay in the death of His well beloved Son, and in that blood which flowed from the side of Christ. He bore my sins in His own body; they were washed away. I thank God I can say that about every one of them: they are all washed away in that precious blood that flowed when the soldier pierced His side. As Paul could say, "the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me", and I can say too, 'the Son of God who loves me', because it is current.

I want to turn to Acts 20, because here we see what Paul had preached to the saints in Ephesus, and I suppose to the population of Ephesus. He had preached much more than this, he had outlined the truth of the assembly, but here he is speaking about the truth of the gospel: "in every house, testifying to both Jews and Greeks repentance towards God". Repentance comes from understanding the awfulness of the kind of man that crucified Jesus, from realising that that is what I am

after nature, no better than that howling mob who chose Barabbas and wanted to crucify Jesus. They made that choice, and that is still man's choice. That is this world's choice. God has, I trust, for you as well as for me, brought us to a judgment of that kind of man, and to "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ". Repentance is a current matter, faith is a living thing. Is it for you? It is not just belief in an article of faith. There is something called the Westminster Confession of Faith. Some people subscribe more or less to these articles of their church, they say 'Yes, I believe that', and they sign it and then they may think that is all they need to do. Faith is a living thing; faith is the entrance into everything. Dear friend, I ask myself, is my faith alive? If it is not, it is not faith. Faith has to be living, faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. I do not know if I am reading too much into these words, but every word of Scripture is divinely inspired. Every single word is there for a purpose. Paul could have said to the elders from Ephesus, 'faith in our Lord Jesus Christ', but it is faith *towards* Him. Oh, that we might be kept living in our faith, and for that we need the Holy Spirit. God takes us along this way. We must start with belief. Mr Darby refers to Christian teaching in his day that emphasised the need for repentance as the first step, thinking that, if you come to repentance for what you are and what you have done, then you will believe. But it is not like that; you have got to start with faith. That is how the malefactor on the cross began. He saw Someone hanging beside him, Someone with whom he had walked to the cross, and his faith in that blessed One was kindled, no doubt through the sovereign work of God, and he put his faith in Him: "Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom." How did he know that He had a kingdom, this man who had just been scourged by the Romans, and had been led out with them? What a wonderful thing is faith; it is living, it is operative. I challenge myself and every one of us in this room; is your faith alive? Have you spoken to the Lord Jesus today personally in the privacy of your room; have you been on your knees to ask Him for what you need, and to hear what He would say to you? A living relationship - that is not a label, it is not a form of words, it is a description of an experience. From that point of view, all of Christianity is experiential. There is truth and doctrine and we must hold on to that, it is in Scripture and we do hold it; but Christianity in essence is the experience of a relationship with a living Man in heaven. We shall spend eternity with Him. So faith leads into this relationship; faith, repentance, forgiveness. God is not going to forgive something that you are not repentant about. If you would like to

be forgiven for your sins, you have got to come to repentance. There is a blessed pathway that God would take you along. I trust everyone here has come to faith in Christ; then you come to repentance, you come to the position that Job was in when he said, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes", chap 42: 6. God says, 'I can forgive a man like that'. Forgiveness is forgiveness for repentant sinners. What a blessed God He is. Full repentance leads to full and free forgiveness, and that is how you get peace. You know that God has justified you through the work of Christ and you come into peace, a wonderful thing. I remember when I did not have that; I believed in Jesus but I did not have peace. Have you got it? I believe that that malefactor on the cross got it; I believe that he died in peace. "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." He was in great pain and he was still alive when these cruel Roman soldiers came back and broke his legs to hasten his death. No doubt he died in agony, but I believe that he died in peace. "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." What a blessed thing is God's plan of salvation; faith, repentance, forgiveness, peace.

Well, I just want to say a few words from Revelation. I know that this is an address to Laodicea, an address to a church that was going on only with outward form. These persons who the Lord was going to spue out of his mouth were not Christians, but outwardly they were going on with the profession of Christianity. Mr Coates said we must beware of the danger of Laodiceanism (Letters p16), every one of us who are believers. I just want to finish by speaking about these verses. "I rebuke and discipline as many as I love." That is what Joseph did with his brothers; he rebuked them, he disciplined them, he spoke roughly to them, he put them in prison, but he loved them. You might ask why there is so much suffering. Why do believers have such terrible illnesses? This might be Jesus speaking, "I rebuke and discipline as many as I love; be zealous therefore and repent". Here is a call to repentance. Laodicea was going on with cold formal nothingness. They thought they were rich, they thought they had it all and inside that crust of outward formality there was nothing. Jesus says, "I am about to spue thee out of my mouth", v 16; He also says, "be zealous therefore and repent". It was open to the Laodiceans to come to this too, and it is open for every one of us. I emphasise that I am not saying that anyone here is in the state that the Laodiceans were in, but nevertheless, the language of Jesus is very attractive, "Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking". Have you ever heard Jesus

knocking? It might be in circumstances that you go through; it might be in circumstances that people you know go through. I think the Lord Jesus is knocking just now; there has been illness, there have been several taken to be with the Lord, including young people. The Lord knocks, but it is not just the knocking we have got to hear, it is His voice. "I stand at the door and am knocking; if any one hear my voice." What is He saying? Well, I believe He is saying, "be zealous therefore and repent". I know the need in my life to be deepened in repentance continually. Then, "if any one hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me". That is another way of describing the relationship that a living believer with the Holy Spirit has with the Lord Jesus. He comes into our circumstances, He helps us in them, but then He takes us into His circumstances. It is a wonderful privilege to know the Lord Jesus in this way, to know the personal intimacy that the believer can have with his Saviour, with her Saviour. Dear friend, I would ask if you have got this? You may be a saved Christian but do you know personal intimacy with this blessed One? He wants it, that is why He is knocking, that is why He is speaking. He would call us to the enjoyment of this, but to do it we need to believe in Him, we need to repent. Only in that way can we know the joy of forgiveness and the blessedness of peace and nearness to Him. May you know these blessings - that is why we did not sing the last verse of our hymn at the beginning, but we are going to sing it now - about these blessings that the hymn writer speaks of -

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

It is not in an objective way but in your experience. May it be the portion of everyone here to know Jesus in that way, for His Name's sake.

Kirkcaldy

22nd January 2012

“BE OF GOOD COURAGE”

Garth McKay

John 16: 33 (from 'In the world')

This is a fine word, is it not? It is a message from Jesus Himself: “be of good courage”. In your pathway where you are you might need courage. I do not know what you face in your life, what worries and burdens you carry, but I know this, that the Lord Jesus has a simple message for you today, “be of good courage”. That is all I want to talk about, just to add a word of encouragement that we might be strengthened for the pathway that we are on.

We read recently in Corinthians that the word of God comes for three reasons: the first is to edify, the second is to encourage, and the third is to console (1 Cor 14: 3); and I would like to add a word of encouragement, that through these simple words of Jesus we might be strengthened for what we face.

I would like to ask you if you have put a step on the path for Jesus. Are we all conscious of having put our foot on the pathway? We may have asked to break bread, to remember the Lord Jesus, as one young person has done in this place recently; that is a good step on the path. What a thing it is to put a step on the path for Jesus! And He is looking for that, some definiteness, some definite step from you and from me, so that He can see, and the brethren can see, that you have taken a step on the path. And as you do it in faith, who knows what the next step will be? Someone said to me recently, 'The next step is always the hardest one', but if you do it in faith there is a wonderful message from Jesus tonight: “be of good courage”. It says, “In the world ye have tribulation”; He does not promise that the road is going to be easy. Have you found that already? If you have not found it already, no doubt you will find it, if you are on the road. It will sometimes seem that the road is not easy, but from the glory Jesus says to you and me, “be of good courage: I have overcome the world”. It is a fine word from Jesus, the One who overcame the world Himself; “be of good courage”. Paul speaks about our path, and he speaks about being in a race. I wonder if you are conscious of that, the fact that we need to run. He says there (1 Cor 9: 24) that it is as if we are contending for a prize; that is how he puts it; it is going to take some effort. You have put your foot on the path, as I trust you have done, and it is going to take some effort to be here for Christ. There is a race to be run, and you run it as if you

are contending for a prize. It is not that we race against each other, that is not the point, but we run because we want to attain something. Paul says, “forgetting the things behind, and stretching out to the things before, I pursue,” Phil 3: 13. “I pursue”; I wonder if we have got a sense of that, that we are in a race; there is something to be attained, something to do for Christ. Have you put your foot on that pathway, dear friend, have you done it, and are you conscious of it? As you do, and as you go on, Jesus would say to you, “be of good courage”. Whatever might come up, He says, “be of good courage: I have overcome the world”.

Paul goes on to speak about looking towards the goal, he had a goal. Have you got a goal? You are not going to get far in this race if you do not have a goal in mind. It is a simple thing, if you run a race you have to look to the things in front of you. A young child may be a fast runner, but he has to be taught how to run; you run with your eye on the tape: you do not look to this side or that side, or get distracted by anything else; you run with your eye on the goal, with that goal in mind.

What made you put your foot on the pathway? What made you take a step in faith? Have you got an eye for the goal? Paul says, “for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”, Phil 3: 14. That was the prize for him; what a prize it is, “the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”. That is the goal, and that is why we run; we run with our eye on the finish line.

I want you to have a sense of being in this race, and of running. It will take endurance as well. Paul speaks about that too. He speaks about the race-course: we do laps round this course; it is going to take stamina to get on in this race. Mr Alec Craig used to speak to us about the race-course and he told us how we need to go round and round the assembly calendar week by week. These things take stamina; are you ready for that? Recently we were reading one of the parables of the Lord where He speaks about a man who built a tower, and he did not finish it, and the people said, “this man began to build and was not able to finish”, Luke 14: 30. I wonder if you feel like that, feel faltering in any way? The remedy is to get in your heart these simple words of Jesus. Get to Him. He will give courage whatever it is that makes you falter, when you think you cannot climb the mountain. There are obstacles and sorrows and burdens to carry, and they are not mine to go over, but they are carried by the saints, and Jesus says, “be of good courage: I have overcome the world”. It is a personal message, something for you

wherever you are on the road, wherever you are in the race. He knows what you need, and He says to you, "be of good courage".

And then it speaks in Hebrews 12 about the race "having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us", v 1. Where are the cloud of witnesses? They are all around you. There are a hundred or more in this room, persons who have given their lives to Christ; they are in the race, and they are all around you. The writer has gone through them in the chapter beforehand, the men of faith, Noah, Abraham and Moses; there they are in the history and more recently too: church history is full of the great cloud of witnesses, all great helps to us, helping us to run. How many millions there are who have had their part in the race, and I want to ask you today if you are conscious of having your part. Are you a kind of bystander, or do you know your part in the race? Have you heard the words of Jesus to us, "be of good courage"?

"Laying aside every weight, and sin which so easily entangles us." Are there things in your life that are entangling you? Are they weighing you down? The writer says, 'lay them aside'; get rid of them. Mr Coates speaks about that; you could be sitting still with a heavy weight in your pocket and you would not know it was there until you started to run, vol 20 p108. So it says, "Let us ... run with endurance the race that lies before us". Let us get some strength and resolve to do it, to run towards the goal, to have our eye on the tape, "Let us ... run with endurance the race that lies before us". These are simple things, but they are an exhortation, and as we do them we hear the words of Jesus, "be of good courage: I have overcome the world". It says, "looking stedfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith", v 2. There is the key. If we are going to take part in the race there is only one recipe for success and that is a power within, which is the Holy Spirit, and an Object without, which is Christ in the glory. The Spirit's power is the power for running, power within. It is not something external; it is not outside, it is inside, God-given power of the Holy Spirit, the power to run. I wonder if you know anything about it? If you have a foot on the pathway you will know something of it; it might only be a little, but the power is endless. Have you thought of that? There was no end to the oil that was poured out. It says, "Bring me yet a vessel", (2 Kings 4: 6); it would have gone on and on. That is the kind of power that is available in the Holy Spirit, that is the power that is within, but there is an Object without, too, and there is nothing more important than having your eye on Jesus.

This is what you *have* to do. You need to be taught how to run, looking steadfastly on Jesus; that is the only way that you will succeed. There is only one goal in this race: "Let *us* ... run with endurance the race that lies before us, looking steadfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith". He is the Goal, and He is the Object, He is the motive, He is why I run. Ask yourself that question, 'Why do I run?'. Run for Jesus, run for Him, run with your eye steadfastly on Him, never deviating. If you look away, you find you lose strength, like Peter; he walked on the water; an amazing thing, he walked on the water to go to Jesus, but then he looked to the side and he saw the contrary wind and he started to sink and he had to cry out, "Lord save me", Matt 14: 30. He got his eye off Christ. "Looking steadfastly on Jesus"; that is the only way that we will be preserved, the only way that we will get to the end, to have our eye on the goal, to have our eye on Him; a power within, and a motive without and above. There He is in the glory calling you to Him, calling you to the end of the race, "the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus". Have you got the strength for it? Do you feel inspired by it? Will you go in for it? I would urge you to, for Jesus says this word, "be of good courage: I have overcome the world". How it gives us strength, how it revives us, in the path, to go on another step. I would urge young and old, to go on another step. Maybe only you know what it will cost you, but go on dear friend, go on another step and take courage from the words of Jesus.

As we go on we think of Him and have our eyes steadfastly on Him. We think of Him, the Holy Spirit having come upon Him, being led by the Spirit in the wilderness forty days, tempted of the devil, Luke 4: 2. If you read the account in Luke it suggests that He was tempted throughout the forty days, for the whole time. Humanly speaking, fasting for forty days would bring increasing weakness, and still the devil's temptations went on and on and on. Have your eye steadfastly on Him, steadfast on a Man there living in complete and utter dependence on God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and suffering these temptations. This was not a demonstration by some kind of superman, as people might think of it. This was Man according to God's purpose, down here on the earth as we are, tempted as it says in Hebrews "in all things in like manner, sin apart", chap 4: 15. If you want to have strength for the journey, look to Jesus, look to Him, it is the only answer. I was reading an interesting thing the other day about Martin Luther, very great servant of the Lord that he was, and in the midst of his despair, before his real conversion when he was full of his own

helplessness and the terror and fear of God, there was an old monk in the monastery, and he said to Luther 'Look to Christ, it is there you will find grace'. What a thing that was in that monastery, and in the church that was so full of darkness at that time: there was a man there who said. 'Look to Christ'!

There is only one recipe; look to Jesus. And so we see Him there in the wilderness forty days without food. It is the limit of human endurance, (we speak carefully about the manhood of Jesus); it was real, and He was at the limit of human endurance. The devil tempted Him when He was at the ultimate levels of testing; it was no agent of the devil, it was the devil himself, he tempted my Lord and Saviour, he tempted Him in an exhausted state, humanly speaking near to death. He suggested that He could turn a stone into a loaf of bread and Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God", Luke 4: 4. Do you feel as if you are tested to the limit? Do you feel in an exhausted state? Look to Jesus, look to the Man who overcame the world, and overcame the devil; look to Him, and run with endurance the race that lies before you, putting another step forward in faith. Then the devil tested Him about whether He would do homage to him. Would He do homage to the devil? Would He for a moment forsake the claim that God had over Him? Would *you* for a moment resist God's claim and accept the claim of another? Would you give up your committal to God? What did Jesus do? Could the devil get an advantage? If you want to know how to take another step on the road, look to Jesus; there is no one else who is worthy of your attention; but this Man is worthy of all our attention, the One who never failed, tempted "in all things in like manner, sin apart". "Thou shalt do homage to the Lord thy God and him alone shalt thou serve", v 8.

Finally the devil took Him up to the temple and said if He cast Himself down the angels would come and protect Him. There was Jesus with divine power available to Him; would He step outside of His place in manhood for a moment? He could have done. We cannot do that, but He could. But He would not deviate for a moment from that place of dependent manhood. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God", v 12. Then it says, "the devil, having completed every temptation, departed from him for a time", v 13. I believe that really means what it says, that through those forty days, including those three temptations that are recorded for us, Jesus resisted every temptation. You might think that He does not understand the modern things that we have to

face, but it is not true, the Lord knows, He understands. More than that, not only does He understand but He has won the battles already, tempted in all things means that in principle He met every device of the devil. Everything that the devil can bring against you, Jesus has met already, and the way to run the race is to have your eyes steadfastly on Him and occupy yourself with Him. Every other type of occupation will bring us down in our thoughts; occupation with Him is the only way to run, and having put our foot on the pathway Jesus Himself would personally say to me and you today "be of good courage: I have overcome the world". The Lord speaks of the devil as the prince of this world, John 12: 31. You can look around the world and you can see him that way: look in a newspaper and you can see the prince of this world, and Jesus says "the ruler of the world comes, and in me he has nothing", John 14: 30. What a worthy Object He is. The devil never got one little advantage over Him. He could get an advantage over me, but there is only one view that will get me through, and that is to have my eyes fixed on my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

He did not only overcome in His life. I was thinking of those words "be of good courage: I have overcome the world"; you could drop the last two words, 'be of good courage: I have overcome'! There was nothing that He could not meet; what is there that He has not overcome? He has overcome everything! Whatever frightens you, whatever worries you, however horrible, Jesus has overcome it; He has annulled "him who has the might of death", Heb 2: 14. Death is the final thing; a place that was not fitting for Jesus to have been, but for us. He did not belong in death, but He entered it in order to overcome it. So this means that however far you go, whatever tests and trials you might think of, at the very end you have to put death itself, even death! He overcame the power of death - merely by entering it, by being there. The realms of the heavens are His rightful place. It is fitting that He is there, but it takes some thinking about, to think of Jesus going into the realms of death, so that he who has the might of death might be annulled. These things are worth pondering in our hearts. How great Jesus is; how great the things He has done: every challenge has been met, every power overcome. They came to the tomb and it says they saw "the linen cloths lying, and the handkerchief which was upon His head ... folded up in a distinct place by itself", John 20: 7. It is not like Lazarus. Jesus called him forth, and he was bound with the grave clothes; Jesus is not bound: Jesus broke the power of death merely by being there. That handkerchief folded is a profound thing to me. Many

have experienced the desolation of death. Here you see the answer; the answer is look to Jesus, the answer is to have our eyes steadfastly on Him, because the power of death is broken, the handkerchief was folded up. Mr Darby says it was "a resurrection accomplished ... with all the composure that became the power of God ... There had been no haste, everything was in order: and Jesus was not there", Synopsis, John's Gospel p405. The Scripture speaks of death as the last enemy (1 Cor 15: 26), the ultimate one; Jesus has finished its power for ever. So whatever tests or trials or hindrances or obstacles you can name, there is an answer to them all: Jesus has overcome them, and if there is one thing that will get us through it is to have our eyes fixed steadfastly on him, and to hear His words from the glory, "be of good courage".

So I would urge everyone, put your foot on the path; do it definitely. Paul says, "I therefore run, as not uncertainly" (1 Cor 9 26); the Lord is looking for definiteness. Take one step on the road for Jesus and He will give you the strength, the power within, the Holy Spirit, and an Object and Goal above, that is, Christ in glory, that we may obtain "the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus".

Another feature of the race is that Christians turn aside and give thanks to God for all that He gives. I would like to mention that too, the opportunity that the service of God gives to give thanks to God. Christians that are in the race turn aside from the race and fill their hearts with heaven. This opportunity is before us tomorrow, the Lord's day, if we are left here, to turn aside from the race for a while and to give thanks to Him. I was reading Nehemiah, about the wall that they built. The wall was all completed, the towers, and the gates and everything; and it is as if the Lord's day comes, and Nehemiah brings out the two great choirs, and there they are upon the wall. One choir went one way, and half the princes of Judah and the people, certain of the priests' sons with trumpets, and so on; he lists them all out, as if he was standing there admiring as they went with their musical instruments to take part in the service of God. And then there is the second choir, that goes in the other direction, and then it comes upon him, he says, "I after them". It is as though he stood admiring everything for so long and then it almost seems as though he would be left behind; so he says, "I after them": he went after the second choir, chap 12: 31-38. How do you feel about that? Have you got your part in it? There is a place for you. You would not want the two choirs to leave without you: "I after them", it applies to you. How do you feel about it? Have you got your place

secured? Are you going after the choir, are you turning aside in this race to give thanks to God? They went round the wall they had built and they met and they stood in the house of God and the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off, v 43. That is what we can enjoy as we go along; it is not all about tribulation. The tribulation is very real; consolation is needed, strength is needed, courage is needed: the Lord Jesus says, "be of good courage". But there is rejoicing to be had, "I after them". Is that you? Or have you held back? Are you faltering? The Lord wants you in the house of God, He wants you in the choir. So whatever it is that is stopping you, whatever it is that makes you falter, be of good courage, take the words from Jesus Himself and take a step forward in faith. May you do it for His Name's sake.

Warrenpoint

31st March 2012

THE PROPHETIC WORD

Andrew E Mutton

Haggai 1: 1-9

2 Peter 1: 19-21

1 Corinthians 14: 1-5, 26-33

1 Thessalonians 5: 12, 13 (to 'work'), 20, 21

I seek the Lord's help to say something as to the prophetic word. I feel extremely limited as to what I can say but I am led to speak of it. Every month at least, or may be more regularly in some of our localities, we have a meeting for prophetic ministry; and I wonder, beloved brethren, what we are expecting to come in at that meeting. What are we expecting to hear? What marks it out from other meetings? It is announced as different. I hasten to say that the prophetic word is not limited to that meeting, but we have that meeting every month - maybe every week - and I would just challenge all of us as to what are we expecting to hear. Some of us are expecting to speak too - and, I hope, more will after today.

Now prophecy is interesting, and I have spent most of my life thinking that prophecy and the prophetic word speak about the future. Many did that in the Bible; many are referred to as prophets; Daniel in particular had a very distinctive prophecy, and a great wealth of information as to the future was imparted to and by him. We have it recorded for us. John is another, and this man of whom we have read, Haggai, is another; all referred to as prophets. Some prophesied who were not prophets by designation: Saul, for example. I have come, however, to see that the prophetic word and prophecy in the day in which we are now is not primarily about the future. It is God's word for now: direct impartation and speaking from divine Persons for today. That immediately puts a very different complexion on the meeting for prophetic ministry. We have it announced locally as the meeting for ministry of a prophetic character, and I like that because it tells you exactly what we ought to expect as we come together for that meeting: ministry that has a prophetic character; that is God speaking for the time, speaking forth directly. I wonder firstly whether I am ready to receive that word and acknowledge it for what it is, and also, as a brother, ready to be the one through whom that word comes. I find the meeting for prophetic ministry is one of the most challenging meetings. You get home from a day's work, and perhaps you have twenty minutes until the ministry meeting. You try to prepare a word, and it will not

come. This is not about it being my word; it is not what I think the brethren ought to hear: this is to be God speaking. A prophetic word, something distinctive, something that God sees and gives that no one else in the locality or even wider may see. God would see a need for a word to come in, and He is going to make sure it does. It is not up to me to choose who gives it, or whether I do or do not, I just need to be ready, so that if the word comes I either give it or I receive it. I am aware I am speaking primarily of the ministry meeting but in a wider sense I include everyone in this. In one of the later scriptures we read it speaks about everyone having a prophetic word, and there may be other times; so, sisters and younger people, no one is excluded from this. There is, however, a greater responsibility, and therefore a greater challenge, to the brothers who stand up to speak in the ministry meeting to be ready and simply to communicate only what God would have to say.

I read firstly in Haggai because this is a beautiful prophetic word. The setting was in Ezra's day. If you look, you will see in the book of Ezra that this word came in in chapter 5. The building of the house had been restarted and there had been considerable energy, in work sanctioned by Cyrus the king. Then other people had come along and tried to mingle themselves with what was being built, but the people of God said, 'No, that is not right, this is for us to do'; and they refused them. Those same people went away to another king, king Artaxerxes, and told him that if they continued doing what they were doing he was going to lose tax. So he wrote a letter to them and, with all the pressure that came upon them, they stopped building. As I understand it, there was a period of fifteen years in which no building took place at all. That is not to say that the people did not do anything, because evidently they did. They were evidently very busy; and we touched on this in the reading as to the busyness of our lives in the modern world. These people had been very busy, but none of it had been towards God, and therefore God has to speak to them in the prophetic word. He has to intervene. It says here, "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month" - how specific, a word for that moment - "came the word of Jehovah by the prophet Haggai". This appeals to my heart: there "came the word of Jehovah by the prophet Haggai" - a man ready simply to relay what God is saying. I wonder if I am specifically ready just to relay what God would have me to say? By the power of the Spirit, by my closeness to God, my being so aligned with what He is thinking, I am ready to say only what He wants me to say right now. We can read up things and we have such a wealth of ministry

as well as the Holy Scriptures, and I think we could find something to say almost all the time. Maybe I am alone in that, but we could find something to say almost all the time about the wonderful things that God has for us. Haggai speaks, “the word of Jehovah” here and *nothing* else - “the word of Jehovah by the prophet Haggai”, and then the word comes. He starts, “Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts” - “Thus speaketh”. As the prophetic word comes, it comes through someone who is so in tune with his God, so in tune with what the divine movements are at the moment, that he is able to speak only from God, and of nothing else. I am probably not expressing it very well but it appeals to me; I tend to add so much, maybe others here do too. When we say something we may add our own thoughts; a prophetic word never does that. A prophetic word is from God; it has clarity. How often do we say to one another that we would just like to know what God would have us to do? What would the Lord's mind be in this? The prophetic word answers that. The question is whether I am available to hear it and ready to act upon it. God intervenes here after fifteen years of nothing recorded for His pleasure - how sad that was - and God says, “**This** people say, The time is **not come**, the time that Jehovah's house should be built”. We have spoken of it in the reading, this glorious wonderful house, one that was to have such beautiful things in it that God could take account of as He came and made it His habitation. The people said it is now *not* the time that this should be built; what a thing! No wonder God intervenes in the prophetic word. He had a man in Haggai, who was ready for service, and now He says, 'You say it is not the time for my house to be built but look at what you have been doing for fifteen years', “Is it time for you that ye should dwell in your wainscoted houses, while this house lieth waste?”

Now I just bring this challenge as a word for today, and it has two bearings, it seems to me. The first one is for all of us. Are we dwelling in our “wainscoted houses, while this house lieth waste”, while our part in building it is not attended to? We may say that now is not the time for building; we are just going to wait until the Lord comes. Here it does not even refer to it as *His* house; it says, 'You dwell in these houses', and “**this** house lieth waste”: think of the feelings of God as His house lies waste.

The second application I would give it would be a public one. As you look at the wreckage of Christendom, can we really say it is not time for building what is for the pleasure of God, while His house lies waste?

Christendom, as we speak of it, goes on and builds bigger and bigger churches and cathedrals, and all that is outward, and yet the house of God lies waste. Think of the feelings of a holy God as all this activity goes on. Here are those that He has given another opportunity to rebuild, brought them out of captivity to do it, brought them out of that bondage that they might do it, and they spent fifteen years allowing it to lie waste, So He asks, 'What have you been doing?'. What a challenge, is it not? "Consider your ways": what have you been doing? I take the word to myself - what have I been doing in the last fifteen years? We referred in the reading to the fact that our lives are very busy; we all know that. There is no one here that would not say they are busy. Apparently when you retire, I am told, you are even busier than when you go to work. "Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but are not satisfied; ye drink, but are not filled with drink; ye clothe yourselves, but there is none warm; he that earneth wages earneth wages for a bag with holes". I know some of you young people have found yourselves part time jobs over the summer holidays, when you do paper rounds or take cleaning jobs or other things. You go and help out in different places. If you imagine this, you spend all that time, get up early, work hard, you work in the evening, but all you earn is a bag with holes. How useless that is! Jehovah says, "This people say, The time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built", it is not time. 'My house lies waste and you spent all this effort, all this time and effort, and you have earned a bag with holes'. Jehovah then repeats, "Consider your ways"; when He repeats things we are to take account of them: "Consider your ways". Here is the beauty of the prophetic word, beloved brethren. Not only does God come in and point out where His work is needed, but He also brings the answer. He says, "Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain". "Go up to the mountain". Where is all this work going on? It is down here on the earth. We say we are very busy; where are we busy? Here on the earth doing legitimate things, maybe not worldly things, maybe not wrong things, doing legitimate things. We are very, very busy; the enemy specifically keeps us busy to keep us away from the things of God. God comes in, points it out, and says "Go up to the mountain". Why do you need to go up to the mountain? Because that is where you will see Christ. That is where He will show you things of Himself. That is where you will get a view of divine things that you can never get from down on the plain, where you are busy with all these other things. "Go up to the mountain and bring wood"; there is Christ. How many

different types of wood are referred to as types of Christ in the Bible? You will know some of them, the acacia wood, those great cedars of Lebanon; remember the wood that was cast into those bitter waters of Marah, to make the waters sweet. How many different impressions of Christ do you get as you go up the mountain? It will involve some work. They have got to go up the mountain and cut down this wood to bring it down, to start building practically. It is for building, down in their everyday lives that we have spoken about already. We are always in the house of God; so what is pleasing to Him applies to every part of our lives. We have got to go and cut the wood and use it; we have got to go and appropriate what is of Christ and use it in our lives, and, through the prophetic word, you will find it up the mountain. Through Haggai, God brings that in, in clarity. It says, "and build the house, and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified"; this is the effect of the prophetic word.

I just apply this to the word that I or others would seek to give as they stand up in a meeting for prophetic ministry. What skill is seen here; is this a word of Haggai's? No, "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts". God's direct speaking is available and is ready to come; now, who is it going to come through? Who is going to speak? This must have been such a moment for the people. A bit further down in this chapter, it says, "And Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the remnant of the people, hearkened to the voice of Jehovah their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet", v 12. They hearkened to the voice. The prophetic word has a distinctive note about it, I believe. When Moses came down from the mountain after the people had failed, when he came down with the second tablets of stone, it speaks of the tenor of the God's word (Exod 34: 27), and I think we have some impression of what that means. I am not suggesting we do not experience it; I know we do. When someone stands up and truly gives a prophetic word, the words have the tenor of the words of God Himself. It has the tenor of the truth about it, the conviction of being applicable to something at that time, in that locality, or maybe for the brethren more universally. Maybe as I am sitting listening to it, just for me, it has the character of coming from heaven itself. I would like to encourage all of us to desire to be in such a state, so as to be ready to be the conduit through which such speaking can come.

In Peter, we see that this will not come by our own efforts. I have

tried. I would say this particularly to the younger brothers here, I have tried to give words in my own strength, and they have failed. God may be pleased to use something; He can use just the reading of the scripture to effect something, but if you try to do it in your own strength and with your own interpretation, and, if I might say so, with your own motive in mind, it will fail. It may even do damage. It says here, "for prophecy was not ever uttered by the will of man, but holy men of God spake under the power of the Holy Spirit". Here is the power for the prophetic word - the power of the Holy Spirit. It says here, "for prophecy was **not ever** uttered by the will of man". The will of man enters into so much but has no place in the things of God. If I desire, maybe even with a right motive, to speak according to what I think, it will come to naught. I have to give myself over to the power of the Holy Spirit to bring such a word in. It is difficult sometimes, as we can feel very strongly about things. I am sure Haggai had something in his heart as did Ezra. They had felt the situation for fifteen years but God chose the timing and He chose the words and He chose the message, and the prophetic word is exactly that. It is God's word. The speaking comes from someone who is so close to God they are able to speak on His behalf. We would scarcely claim it, would we? But we can claim to have the power to do it because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is a wonderful gift, and it enables us to enter into such realms. It says, "holy men of God"; none of us would claim that in our own right, but if we are in the dignity of everything God has called us to, we are available to Him in the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can speak on His behalf. The brethren will understand that I am seeking to speak very carefully here about these things.

One other point that is made here in Peter is "that the scope of no prophecy of scripture is had from its own particular interpretation". To search out the scriptures for something to support my own point of view will not be supported by the Holy Spirit. Simply to search for something that supports what I want to say is wrong, and again I have learnt this; I have learnt it bitterly. If the Spirit gives something to say, if God gives you something to say, you will *always* find it supported by Scripture. I would just urge my brethren to do it that way round. I know even in the recent times there are many exercises that affect the saints, many things that go deep; but searching the Scriptures and the ministry for self-justification, or justification of a point of view, is not the way that it works; it will not be supported by God. It works when God brings in His own word, and the Scripture will then support it. How good God is. He

is so faithful to us; if we truly want to have this direction and hear this word, He will bring it in. There were those, Ezra and Zerubbabel among them, who wanted to hear this word, and they respond to it immediately. The prophetic word is a powerful call to action and God brings it in, in His own time.

There is some very practical advice here in Corinthians. Apparently there was a problem in Corinth that Paul seeks to address, in that those who were speaking with tongues were crowding out the prophetic word. Paul has to say, 'If you are speaking in another language or another dialect, the only person who can understand you is God, and you should confine that to speaking to God'; and there certainly are things which have their place when we speak just between ourselves and God. Prophecy comes into its own when it is brought into the local assembly and it edifies that local assembly. A prophetic word is a very positive thing. It says here, "he that prophesies speaks to men in edification, and encouragement, and consolation". What a word to be able to bring in, beloved brethren; a word that can do these things. Edification - we always need that, there is the word, bring in Christ. I have been listening over the past few months in meetings for ministry and, almost without exception, some glory of Christ comes into the prophetic word. No matter what the subject is or what scripture is taken up, Christ comes in, and is brought before the brethren; and immediately we are edified, our constitutions built up because of the glory of the One who is brought before us. This is edification; feeding on Christ will always be of benefit to the saints - such a wonderful Man. What a subject He is for any prophetic word: whatever the time, whatever the problem, whatever the situation or circumstances, feed on Christ. "And encouragement", it says. We always need encouragement. We are always aware of the situation and testing circumstances in which we are. The brethren always need encouragement, every Christian needs encouragement, we cannot always be at the peak of our enjoyment. We are in the flesh and we fail and we get disappointed with ourselves. We may get disappointed with other people. The prophetic word would encourage and stimulate the people of God. "And consolation" - I have thought long and hard about this. There are those in this room who will have proved the prophetic word consoling them more than I have, those into whose lives sorrow has come in a very specific way, and I am sure the prophetic word has brought in consolation; comfort and consolation. Seek out the prophetic word; seek out what God would say. He will bring it in. It is

very easy to be able to say a few comforting words, perhaps sympathise with someone, but true consolation, consolation according to the word of God, is something that is very, very precious. He is the One that has the everlasting arms, He is the One who can bring in consolation at a time that you and I could never do it naturally. Again I would refer to what we said earlier, what is natural will *never* become what is spiritual. The finest example of what is natural, the height of what is natural, will never become what is spiritual or according to God. He may in His ways be pleased to use it, but it never becomes spiritual. What comes from God is spiritual and it has power and it can effect that whereunto it is sent. Paul goes on to say, "He that speaks with a tongue edifies himself; but he that prophesies edifies the assembly". I like to equate this with the beautifying of God's house that we spoke of earlier on; to have the privilege of being the one through whom the word comes which edifies the assembly is to be desired. Your local meeting, the local place in which you have been set, is a place where you can be one such, a channel through whom God can speak to edify the assembly. Why would we want to be anything else? The prophetic word is not something that should stumble or should cause offence; it is something that should edify. Whatever the word is, whether it is corrective or consoling or encouraging it should further and edify the local assembly and help all those who are there.

This does require on the other side those who are listening to it and who are under the sound of the word as ready to accept it too. Sometimes that may be difficult; can I get beyond the person who is giving the word? More importantly, can I get beyond the history of whoever is giving the word? He is my brother in the Lord, he is speaking, if he is, in the power of the Spirit on behalf of God, and it behoves me to listen to what God is saying. There would have been those in Haggai's day who would have been in this group of those who stopped working, who really felt the edge of the word coming in. There were those who may have been quite closely aligned to Ezra who would have said, 'Yes, but you know what is going to happen if we start building again'. It is going to be difficult, times are going to be difficult, but God prepares them to continue building. The beauty of it is that, having hearkened to the prophetic word, by the time they come to the end of the book of Ezra, they are ready to take some quite drastic action when it comes to those that they had mingled with. They were ready to be before God. There is one instance where Ezra rends his clothes and falls before God, chap 9: 5. There were those who were ready, and in a

state to be able to do that, because they had listened to a prophetic word. In verse 26, there is more practical advice. I do not want to go into all the detail, but I would simply say that it says here, "each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation": everyone has one. I sometimes may think that it has always got to be me who gives the word; that is not the case because everyone has something. Conversely, I may always think that someone else has always got a word, so I am not going to bother. That is not the case, everyone has one. We need to be ready to use it. We need to be ready to be active in the service of God in bringing in a prophetic word that will edify all the assembly - givers as well as receivers. How good God is! He will not leave us without edification; everyone can be active.

Then there is some practical advice, "let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge". We often use this scripture, do we not and apply this word - "let the others judge". If I have given a word, it is up to others to judge; it is not for me to proclaim that that is how it must be. I simply want to be a mouthpiece for God. Then scripture says, "And spirits of prophets are subject to prophets". I am rather touched by that, having experienced it. As the brethren know I was asked to serve in the gospel after a three day meeting, and I was a little nervous in doing so as I had sat through the three day meetings, and I had not contributed vocally at all. The subject was very helpful and it was challenging, but I felt that I was a little out of my depth and not really able to contribute. The thought went through my mind that I was about to get up and preach the gospel but I had not taken part. All these brothers who had expended and worked were now about to listen to me. However, I can tell you that as I spoke, I was absolutely aware that the brothers who had most served, and those perhaps in whom the work of God was very clearly developed, with whom there was a real depth, were the most supportive; and that was a real lesson to me. They were prophets being subject. Now I hope I am not taking that too far; all I would say is, if we love the word of God, we love to hear it through whomsoever it comes and we will be ready to listen to it. A young brother stands up to give a word; he may find it difficult, he maybe stumbles over the words, or is not sure what scripture to use. We will always be ready, if it is a prophetic word, to rejoice in the fact that it is coming, and be ready to support him. "Prophets are subject to prophets".

I trust the brethren will be gracious enough to accept such a direct word. For His Name's sake.

Bexley

21st April 2012

THE RAPTURE

C Kenneth Robinson

1 Thess 4: 15-18

I would like to say a few words about the rapture. Clearly, the Lord has in mind that we move from our circumstances to His circumstances. The exercise of all ministry has had its place in the dispensation to encourage believers not to settle down in their own circumstances, be it personal, family, business, ecclesiastical, anything of that nature. The rapture is a majestic triumph to take us from our circumstances into His circumstances for ever. To me that is wonderful, and a very precious thought to consider. We may struggle, we may struggle in moral exercises, but feel we are making a little progress; but something far greater is very, very imminent. It is a majestic thing to think about it, and it is delightful to see how Paul touches on it. In actuality, it will happen in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye. That is a marvellous matter to think about. We as believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. He will come from where He is to meet us in the air to take us to that place which He has prepared. He went before, and says, "In my Father's house there are many abodes; were it not so, I had told you: for I go to prepare you a place", John 14: 2. Do you not wonder what it will be like? It is not a physical house: it is a spiritual house, never to be touched by sin, and never to be touched by weakness or even touched by death. Everything of nature is finished. We will have the glorious enjoyment of being in the presence of Christ forever. That is all as a result of God's operations with every one of us to bring us to Christ, through the operations of the gospel, and His own sovereignty that caused us to respond to the presentation of Christ. We have, I trust, received Him into our hearts. There are those who have died who are the dead in Christ; they will be raised first. Their spirit may be with the Lord but in actuality the body awaits the change: "Thus also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruptibility. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power", 1 Cor 15: 42, 43. Sown in mortality and corruption; raised in immortality and in incorruption. How precious it is, therefore, to contemplate. Let us appreciate the blessing of such a glorious future. We go to where He is. Redemption has accomplished this and divine purpose has called us into it. I, for one, can only say that I long to be there, to leave circumstances of weakness and worry and concern and illness. And the Lord would touch our

affections to make us realise that. He supports us by His priestly service in grace through every hour and day and night, but the rapture will take us entirely out of this need, into a realm where He is. He comes into the air: "The dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall be always with the Lord". Let this settle into our affections and particularly into our minds as well that, when we may get down or depressed, what immediately lies before us is the precious privilege that we will meet the Lord in the air, and be taken into what divine glory and divine planning has prepared for us. This earth is not our home. We go through it. This earth and all that relates to it, commercially, economically, everything of that nature is not where we ought to find our interests. The Lord would draw us and appeal to us and quicken our affections that He has another realm altogether. And He, having been rejected here and humiliated, now is the Centre and the Sun. There is another world of which Christ is the glorious Centre, and we will be there.

I trust this is for edification. Pause for a minute and look forward to consider what is immediately before us. We do not fix the time. The timetable is by divine appointment. The Father, who is in charge of all the seasons, knows when it is going to be, and He will give the word when Christ will rise from the throne, and He will come into the air, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. What a gathering that will be! How many souls there are. How much history has been involved in this scene, and "then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together ... to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall be always with the Lord". There is a great comfort in that. We shall be always with the Lord. What I am, my weak conditions, are transformed into a glorified body. We shall be in a glorious condition for that realm and be sustained there to enjoy with Christ the perfection and glory of divine thoughts for us. You look around and look at your local brethren and ponder, 'Where are we finding our life?'. Is the life and circumstances here, and every aspect of it, our life? Do we respond to a quickening touch in relation to divine things and divine Persons? Let us set ourselves for that by the power of the Holy Spirit that Christ touches our inwards and affections and draws us to His circumstances. The Song of Songs says,

"Draw me, we will run after thee", chap 1: 4.

I suggest we need to ponder the greatness of the rapture. We could then go on and talk about the appearing, when we will come out

with Christ. But that is another subject in itself: the glory of it, when He will reign and He will have the assembly alongside of Him. I wanted just to emphasise what a great truth the rapture is. But let it be more than a truth: it is going to be a reality.

May these things touch and stir and move our hearts, for His Name's sake.

Glasgow

24th July 2012

