

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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SAFE AND WELL

Ron D Plant

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We have been speaking about very great things, indeed glorious things, together over these days, and, of course, we would always have to confess that we but touch the very fringes of them. That is why I think Paul, writing to the Ephesians, prays in the first of the two prayers in that epistle that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him, being enlightened in the eyes of your heart”, Eph 1: 17, 18. There are wonderful things which are available to the believer by the Spirit, the greatness of God's inheritance in the saints, also touched on there in Ephesians, divine thoughts in their fulness, such that if we could only open our hearts to the fulness of them it would eclipse everything that this world can offer. These are very great things and I trust that there has been some impression left that may have whetted our appetite a little for them.

My impression for this preaching is the wonder that the One who is so great, the One we have spoken of, “by whom also he made the worlds” (Heb 1: 2), who created all things, “the visible and invisible”, and all the things that we read of in Colossians which “have been created by him and for him” (1: 16), our Lord Jesus Christ, is the One who in the glad tidings has a care for you. We know what it is like to sit in the preaching and other meetings and to listen to the truth being spoken and to hear of great divine things, and apparently some of the company enjoying them very much, and yet they seem to pass us by. It is a wonderful thing to know that the One who inhabits the highest glory is the One who would come near to you. He would come really near to you with a desire that you might not just be an onlooker in the vicinity of divine things, but you might be brought into the fulness of them. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Lord of glory would come near to you tonight in the glad tidings to appeal to your heart.

I read the reference in Luke 15 where the servant goes out to the older son and says, “because he has received him safe and well”. Somebody said to us once that God's desire for you in the glad tidings is

contained in those words, "safe and well". It is not that you might just be on the periphery of divine things but that you might be 'safe *and* well'. There are two things there because we know what it is, some of us, to be safe, but not well; we know what it is to know God's salvation yet not be in the enjoyment of it. We know what it is to know our sins forgiven and to have peace with God in relation to our eternal destiny, but as far as the present time, we may be troubled and unsettled as to many things. I think that expression covers both, "because he has received him safe and well". The Lord Jesus has a desire for you, as He has a desire for me, and for everyone here, that you might not only be aware of the greatness of divine things, but that you might be a participator in them, and for that you need to be "safe and well". Do you know what it is to be safe? Are you safe in relation to your eternal welfare and destiny? Are you safe? Young people like to be safe. Parents provide an environment, as far as they are able, which is safe. But as far as our eternal destiny is concerned, these things are beyond the reach of human ability, and when we look for safety as to our eternal welfare we have to do with God, we have to do with our Lord Jesus Christ.

I will tell a little story, which I have told many times. The people of Israel were in Egypt, and Pharaoh was refusing to let God's people go. God had brought the plagues upon Egypt, and the final plague came upon them where the firstborn in every house in Egypt was to die as Jehovah passed through the land. Now, suppose there were two houses in Egypt at that time, both with Israelite families in them. They had heard the word of God that they were to take of the blood of the lamb that they had kept in the house, and they were to dip a bunch of hyssop into the blood, and put the blood across the top of the door and down the two door-posts of the entrance of the house. God had said, "I will go through the land of Egypt and smite all the firstborn ... and when I see the blood, I will pass over you", Exod 12: 12, 13. The man of the first house could not see and understand how applying the blood like this could possibly make any difference. He was in terrible fear for his family and anxiety about what would happen, but in obedience to the word, despite his anxieties and concerns about it, he took of the blood and put it on the door-posts and the lintel of his house and shut the door for the night. He spent the whole night in anxiety, awake and waiting for the morning to see what would happen. There was another man in the second house who had full confidence in what was said. If God had said that the blood on the door-posts and the lintel of his house would ensure its safety, he had full confidence that if God said that, that is what

would happen. So he took of the blood and put it on the door-posts and the lintel of the house, shut the door, confident in his God and in His word, that what He said He would do. 'Now', the old preacher has asked, 'which was the safer house?'. The answer was that they were both safe, because it is not what I see and understand of the blood of Jesus, it is what God sees, and if I take shelter under the blood of Christ, my eternal destiny, my eternal future is secure through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that, if you remember nothing else, that when it comes to faith in the blood, it is not what I see in the value of the precious blood of Christ - I could never put the proper value upon it - but it is what God sees. What God sees is that the One who meant everything to Him, the One who fulfilled His will, the Man who was here upon this earth, in obedience to His will, who demonstrated in manhood everything that He had ever looked for in a man, went into death and shed His precious blood that that blood might become the purchase price for the safety of millions. There are countless millions of persons who put their confidence in the fact that what God saw in that blood was great enough to save them forever. These are very precious things. Remember this: both the houses were safe. It is not your feelings or fears, it is what God sees. By faith lay hold of that work of Christ, which you can never appreciate in its fulness; what God sees in it is great enough to save you. Have you got that? Do you know what it is to put your confidence in God and in the work of Christ in relation to all your sins and your guilt, and all the things that have entered into your life?

The younger ones here will know something like me about the guilt of sin. What a wonderful thing it is when we come to put our trust in relation to all of that in the Saviour's work and in His Person, and in His present position as a risen and glorious Saviour:

My sins - O the bliss of this glorious thought -
My sins - not in part, but the whole -
Were borne on the cross, and are gone evermore.
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! (Hymn 238)

Have you got that? It is a precious thing if you have your faith in the blood of Jesus and in His precious work, and in the fact that He is now a risen, glorious, living Saviour in heaven. "If thou ... shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from among the dead, thou shalt be saved", Rom 10: 9.

That is the first thing I would like to speak of in the glad tidings,

that ability to save. Nothing man can give you can save you. Man does his best, but how often in relation to this world things go wrong, things break down, things do not work any more, or do not work as they should: catastrophes and disasters come about. There has never been a catastrophe in relation to the word of God. Everything that He says is sure; that salvation is secure. I can tell you this, beloved young one, that for myself, my faith and trust is in the blood of Jesus, and the work of Jesus and the Person who has risen out of death and lives in heaven, a glorious living Saviour. That is what it is to be saved.

But are you well? As we get older, we learn that we are not always well. We are not always well in our Christian life either, in relation to the Christian pathway, where sometimes the enemy can assail us. Sometimes we know what it is for Satan to come in and trouble us in our thoughts and try to destabilise us. These are very real things. I wonder how many troubled hearts there are amongst us. It says in scripture, "why are thoughts rising in your hearts?", Luke 24: 38. The Lord Jesus knows all this and the glad tidings come to us, not only to save us, but to make us well.

I have read these other scriptures because they speak of those who have been made well. John is the last gospel written, written in days when things were breaking down publicly. John does not write directly about the assembly, he does not write about any organised structure, he does not speak about disciples in that way. He has one thing only before him: he speaks about Christ. He presents the Lord Jesus Christ; he loves to speak of Jesus. John is not a historical gospel; he does not write it as a history like the others. He writes with a purpose. He says at the end, "Many other signs therefore also Jesus did before his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life in his name", John 20: 30, 31. He speaks about a Man. We have been speaking of the glory of that Man, and John loves to speak of Him, and he writes as a lover of Christ. He speaks about the Lord Jesus Christ all the way through his gospel, and you find things in it that you do not find in the other gospels; and always he speaks about the Man, the Man that was here. I have read of one of those occasions. John the baptist says, "A man comes after me who takes a place before me, because he *was* before me", John 1: 30. John, the writer, as an admirer of Christ, uses every opportunity that he can use to magnify Jesus. I would like to do that. In this scripture that

we have read, the man by the pool at Bethesda says, "Sir, I have not a man". The woman in chapter 4 says, "Come, see a man who told me all thing I had ever done" (John 4: 29), and in John 9 the blind man who was healed says, "A man called Jesus made mud and anointed mine eyes" (v 11), and right at the end, as Pilate brings out the Lord Jesus Christ to die, even he, hardened, hard-bitten Roman governor, is moved to say, "Behold the man!", John 19: 5. That is John's gospel which in summary, you could say, is about the Man.

The gospel is about a Man, not about a creed. It is not about a book of laws; it is about the Lord Jesus Christ Himself personally, God's Man. I want you to imagine this pool at Bethesda, which apparently had healing powers as an angel appeared at certain seasons and troubled the waters. I cannot say much about it; that is what the scripture says - any one who went into the water first was healed. You can imagine that man had made something of this place as a place of healing and Bethesda had these five porches. Entrances had been built into the place, as men would do with such places. It is a bit like the gates of Christendom, all the different entrances that men's minds have conceived, Methodism, Catholicism, and all kinds of 'isms' in Christendom that purport to show the way to salvation. Maybe these are like the porches of Bethesda. But, there is no 'ism', no position, that can bring you salvation in relation to your never-dying soul. The only One who can do that is the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ personally. That was the position here and all these persons were lying there waiting for the water to move, waiting for the angel to come, waiting for something to happen. One of these was this man "who had been suffering under his infirmity thirty and eight years". That is a long time. He was lying there waiting. Presumably he was crippled and could not reach the water, and the Lord Jesus comes alongside him and says, "Wouldest thou become well?". How long have you been around the Christian company? How long have you known what it is to be in a condition of things where you are not really able to fully participate in the whole thing? The Lord Jesus would say to you today, "Wouldest thou become well?"; do you want to not only be saved, but do you want to feel well? Do you want to come into the full joy of Christian life? Do you want to know what it is not only to have salvation as some distant thing, or something that is on paper, but do you want to know the blessings as an inward truth by the Holy Spirit? The man says, "Sir, I have not a man" - beloved, the gospel would present the Man for you. The Lord Jesus says to him, "Arise, take up thy couch and walk. And immediately the

man became well, and took up his couch and walked: and on that day was Sabbath". The man "went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well". No position in Christendom, no ecclesiastical position however distinguished, no building, no church can ever bring you into soul salvation and wellness; the only One who can make you well is Jesus. That is the truth. I am not saying that we do not have a responsibility as to our walk down here because we do, but the first thing in becoming well is by contact with Christ.

Someone said to us once, 'You do not find the Lord Jesus through a company, you find the company through the Lord Jesus Christ'. You become a person who has had to do with Him, and the man said it was Jesus who had made him well. How many persons in this room could say that - 'It is Jesus who made me well'?

I read of the woman in Mark who had a flux of blood twelve years, a state of things which was draining her life away. If this condition had gone on she would have died, and for a long time she had suffered from it, and suffered much under many physicians, and had spent everything that she had. She had found no advantage from it, and then it says, "but had rather got worse". Even the best that man could offer had been of no advantage. If we turn this into a spiritual context, there is nothing that man can do, despite his best efforts, and despite everything that money could buy, that could bring peace to a troubled soul. There is nothing of that kind that you could spend your money on and your time on that will make your soul well. You may feel that you could try becoming a better person, and that if you committed yourself in a different way or to a different company, it would bring you joy, peace and satisfaction. Beloved, you could spend it all to no avail. The only thing that will bring you these things is if you have to do with Christ. She says, "If I shall touch but his clothes I shall be healed". What a wonderful thing that is. Does that appeal to any one here who feels their life is draining away, and spiritual life, spiritual energy, and enjoyment is still missing, and that spiritually you are not well? Beloved, today, if you will have to do with Christ alone, you can be restored, not only for safety, but to wellness. I commend that to you. It was Jesus who made her well. The only One who can make you well is Christ. You say, 'I have a problem, I have difficulties in my life'. Others concerned for you might try and help you, thank God for that, but the only One who can make a difference in relation to your soul is Christ. The only way that I can find peace and fulfilment and joy is through the

Lord Jesus Christ personally.

I read the last scripture in Revelation - it does not involve a person, it involves a place, one of the assemblies that the Lord Jesus addresses Himself to in Revelation, the last one, the one that marks the last days of the church's history here, Laodicea, lukewarm, full of pride and arrogance and all the things that tends to mark religious presumption everywhere. It is a company and sometimes we have situations and difficulties that come up in the Christian company. Some may say that what such and such a place needs is this or that, and what they need to resolve matters is this or that, or they need to follow this advice or that advice, and all these things. Beloved, as it is with the persons, so it is with an assembly, the only way that it will become well is to make way for Christ. I say that very simply because we may try many remedies for all these things, but only Jesus can make you well. In divine things, whether it is a person, whether it is a situation, whether it is a company, whatever it is, it is only as we make way for Christ that it can be remedied.

I commend this to you. We have spoken about the One who fills the highest glory, but He has a desire, that One who fills eternity has a desire, that you might not only know what it is to be safe in your Christian life by faith in the work and Person of our Lord Jesus, but that you might be in the fulness and enjoyment of it. You will only get that by having to do with Himself. The Lord of glory would have to do with me, would have to do with you. Make Him your Friend. The hymn writer says:

Jesus! Our Saviour, Shepherd, Friend,
Thou Prophet, Priest, and King,
Our Lord, our Life, our Way, our End,
Accept the praise we bring. (Hymn 54)

These are very real things; make it real to you. It was John Newton who wrote that hymn, one with a long history away from God, who knew what degradation was in his early life until God touched his heart through the Lord Jesus Christ, and he became devoted to Him for the rest of his life. May such be the message and the song of each one, for His Name's sake.

Walton on the Naze

28th September 2008

THREE QUESTIONS

Alan A Croot

Genesis 3: 9

Matthew 8: 27

Acts 16: 30

We have read three extremely important questions. I would like to speak a little about who asks the questions, about why the question is asked, and what the answer is to each.

We will begin in Genesis. I have not read the scripture that surrounds these verses. I do not wish to take them out of context at all, but, even the youngest will know and understand the setting in which these questions are raised. The first one: Man, Adam and Eve, in the garden of Eden, having sinned, having eaten of the tree that God said Man was not to have eaten of. Man is there in the garden, that garden of Eden, planted with the very best that God could provide for His creature and, having set Man there in the midst of it, God comes to speak with Man and He asks him a question. God Himself asks this question. Now I believe God would still ask this question and He would ask it of every one of us and He is asking it now, "Where art thou?"

Why does God ask? It is not that God did not know where Adam was. We know that God knows where you are, where I am. There is nothing hidden from God. God asks this question, and He would ask it of you and me tonight, for each one of us to contemplate; where do we stand before God? God says, "Where art thou?" Adam does not explain where he was hiding; that was not the point. God is asking this question to establish where you are in your relationship with Him. How do you feel as God asks you the question? Consider it. There are two people alive in the world, only two, and God, the Creator of them, asks the question. There are not many places you can hide.

It is not like sitting in a class of thirty children and the physics teacher says, 'Who can tell me the law of ...?' You can often duck the question then, can you not? But it is not like that. You cannot avoid this question. You may say, sitting in your chair, 'I do not have to answer it'. My friend, you have got to answer this question. One day you will have to answer it, and I suggest you pay attention to it today. It is very important. This is the first question asked of Man after sin had come into this world, and sin is still here and sin will stay here until the Lord

Jesus comes to claim His own and until eventually this world is rolled up and done away with. "Where art thou?" God asks this question that man's conscience should be exercised and He would ask it tonight. You may be able to tell me, 'I am sheltering under the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and He is my Saviour'. What a wonderful position to be in! That is an answer which God loves to hear. He would like all men to be able to answer this question in that way. I wonder whether you can. What would you answer to this question? Adam does not answer it directly, does he? But what he goes on to say, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I feared, because I am naked; and I hid myself", is an answer. Do you feel like that? Where are you in your soul? Where are you in your relationship with your Creator, the One who could say, "And God created Man in his image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them", Gen 1: 27. Who more important than God could ask you a personal question today? Think about it. What answer can you give to God?

Now we will just touch on Matthew's gospel. In Matthew we have very different circumstances. You may like to consider for a moment the four thousand years that have intervened between these two questions and what had happened. Each of us is very privileged to know something of what has happened in between. There may be those in this room who could recount all the Books, for instance, that come between Genesis and Matthew, and maybe some that could tell you much of the history from memory that goes through each. Everybody here could tell me, 'Well there was Abraham', and it says of Abraham that he walked before God. And there was David, a man who fought battles for God in a wonderful way. There was Jonah. He tried to get away from God when God asked him to do something, but God had His own way with him. We could all say something, under God's grace, that He has given us to teach us from the things that have intervened. Now we have the disciples accompanying the Lord Jesus here in this very world in which we are. They had been with Him for some time at this point and they are with Him, as you know, in a boat on the sea in Galilee. They had seen very wonderful things which the Lord Jesus had done in His power which no other man had ever been able to do before or since. These men had been wonderfully impressed by the influence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. They knew it. They accompanied the Lord Jesus because they had learned to love Him. They accompanied Him because He had called them out of what they were doing to go with Him and they had gone. Can you imagine One's

call so powerful that you leave behind what you are doing? Some of the men were fishermen, and they just left behind their nets, their boats, their parents and they went and they followed the Lord Jesus Christ. Think of the power of the call of the Lord Jesus. He still calls today and He is calling you and me.

But let us come to our question. These men are there in the midst of a storm in the sea in a tiny boat and they think they are going to die, and they call upon the Lord Jesus in their need. It says that He awoke and He says to them, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then, having arisen, he rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm". How wonderful, but what does this rouse in these people's hearts? What does it do? The question comes, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" These men had seen lepers cleansed - an incurable disease healed, you may say, in a moment. They had seen blind people given sight, they had seen demons cast out, they had seen water turned into wine. These men know of the power of the Lord Jesus already; so this question is asked by people who knew Him well, who have been with Him, but still they ask it. It is wonderful to contemplate and I would encourage you to think about all three of these questions for as long as you can remember them. "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" He is a Man like no other man. What does the hymn-writer say?

The mighty God, a Man become!

(Hymn 34)

This was none other than God here in a little boat on the sea of Galilee in the country of Israel; there was a Man asleep in a boat. How close God has come to you and me! How could He have come closer than to come as a Man, a perfect, holy Man? These men knew He was different. They had learnt that in the Lord Jesus there was something they had never seen before. Have you seen it? Have you been brought to marvel and ask a question like this, "What sort of man is this?" Think about it, contemplate it. It is worth contemplation till the day you die and you will never regret minutes, hours, days, maybe years spent in contemplation of the answer to this question, "What sort of man is this?" Why did they ask the question? They ask out of sheer wonder! They have come to know something of Jesus. You may say they thought they knew Him, and then they find that the very universe is obedient to His word. What about you, dear friend? What about me? He could address the clouds, He could address the sea and in a

moment there was calm.

We read at the beginning, we just referred to the scripture, of God creating us in His image. How much rather, do you think, we should be obedient to the Lord Jesus? What does He desire us to do? He desires us to come to know Him, to contemplate Him, to put our trust in Him. These men put their trust in Him. Would you not put your trust in a Man like this? Is He not attractive to you, One who has so much in His grasp, so much in His hand, and He wants to give you the very best of what He has got? He wants to share it with you. He wants you to enjoy it as well. You can be a co-heir along with the Lord Jesus. How wonderful is that! What more could God do for the Man that is created in His image than to give him to share in what the Lord Jesus enjoys in sonship before Him?

The answer to the question, "What sort of man is this?" is that it is God Himself who was there, but it is not an answer which, in a sense, finished there. That is absolute fact, but you could go on thinking many, many things that are answers to this question. Here is a Man who is holy, untouched by sin, untouched by the ravages of this world, here in flesh and blood conditions, but not a sinner. Here is a Man of whom it says that no guile was found in His mouth, 1 Pet 2: 22. Here is a Man who in every step and moment of His life fulfilled God's will in perfection, a wonderful, holy Man.

Let us move on to the scripture in Acts. Here we have very different circumstances. Again we know the scripture. We have two men, who both love the Lord Jesus. We see them taken, beaten, their backs are bleeding from stripes which had been inflicted upon them, they are cast into a jail in very horrible circumstances, and their feet chained to the stocks. What was the result? There were two men singing praise to God. I do not know whether that prison had ever heard anything like that before, whether those walls had ever taken account of anything like that before. I suggest probably not. Here were men, men who had committed themselves to the Lord Jesus, men who could give you an answer far better than I could as to "What sort of man is this?". They knew very well what sort of Man the Lord Jesus was. Their faith and trust was in Him, and we know that as they were there undaunted by all that man had tried to inflict upon them it did not manage to stop their enjoyment of the Lord Jesus and His love, of speaking of Him and of His greatness, of their trust in Him.

The earthquake comes and it says the doors were opened and the foundations of the prison shook, and it was open for all of them to go out. The jailor comes, the jailor who had been charged with the responsibility of keeping these men safely, and it says, "And having asked for lights, he rushed in, and, trembling, fell down before Paul and Silas. And leading them out said, Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?" This is asked by a sinner. It is asked by a man who becomes conscious of his own state of soul. It is as if God asked him, "Where art thou?" Ah, we do not know how God had spoken to him. He must have thought to himself, 'These prisoners are very different to every other prisoner I have ever had'. He must have been thinking about that. We do not know how God had spoken to him, how He had prepared him for this, but this question is asked by a man who is a sinner, and I would urge you, dear friend, to think about this question too because each one of us in our natural state and away from God are sinners. This is a question which is very, very pertinent to every one of us, "what must I do that I may be saved?" Why did this man ask? Because he recognised his need; he could see it. He wanted a share, something of the joy and life that he saw in Paul and Silas. There was something there in these men which he had never seen before, something that he wanted a part of. As you see someone who has their faith and trust in Jesus, what do you see? You see somebody who has peace, somebody who has joy. Maybe you know what it is like to have it in your own heart. I wonder what others see when they see you. Do they see something like this jailor saw in Paul and Silas? If you were unjustly treated and taken and put alongside other men and locked up, would they see in you something that was seen in these men, Paul and Silas? Would it be such that others in that prison would say to you, "what must I do that I may be saved?" What a testimony there is here to the Lord Jesus and to His work in these two men! He asks because he too wants to share what it is like to be a forgiven sinner. I trust, dear friend, that you would like also to know what it is to be a forgiven sinner. I hope every one of us would have been able to give the answer, from experience, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house".

Now we know that that does not mean that just because the jailor believed all his house would be saved, but it is for the jailor to believe and all his house to believe individually and then they would all be saved. That applies today. It is not sufficient just that mother and father believe. You need to believe yourself. Now, you may say, it is not that I do not believe. This is worth again a lot of contemplation, what is

meant by "believe on the Lord Jesus"? There is more to this, dear friend, than simply saying, 'Yes, I believe that Jesus was here and He suffered for me'. There is again the rest of your life's contemplation worth thinking about believing, believing on. It is just not 'Believe', it is "Believe on". I think we need to take on the gospel, take it on. One has said that we need to search it out, and these things are worth searching about, search into the glad tidings, search into the Lord Jesus, "What sort of man is this?" Think about Him, search after salvation and see how much there is in "believe on the Lord Jesus". Make it your own and nurture it, and you will find as you believe on the Lord Jesus that everything He has done becomes important to you, and every aspect of it is vital to your salvation because this is the Man who has given His life for you, taken up that perfect, holy life, laid it down upon the cross when He was made sin for you and for me, the Just for the unjust. It has only happened once. It only needed to happen once. Scripture says, "even as by one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death ... so also by the obedience of the one the many will be constituted righteous", Rom 5: 12,19. The Lord Jesus having taken your case and my case upon Himself, having been made sin for you and for me, has borne God's judgment - God's wrath upon all that we have done - that you and I should go free. Well may we ask the question: "What sort of man is this?" 'The mighty God, a Man become' to take up your case and mine in love that you and I should go free.

Think of those women who came to the tomb in which the Lord Jesus was laid. What did they find? They found the stone was rolled away. They found the tomb empty. You may ask the question again, "What sort of man is this?"; One of whom it says in the Old Testament that God would not "allow thy Holy One to see corruption", Ps 16: 10. He would not allow the Lord Jesus to remain there in that grave. The hymn-writer says:

Up from the grave He arose.

He has risen out of that grave never to go that way again, taken up from this world, taken up to be crowned at God's right hand with glory and honour, a place that no other man could take, no other man could access, but the Lord Jesus is there at God's right hand for you and me. He would like you to have a portion with Him in that place of glory and you share in it, something of the greatness of the place that He has as God's beloved Son as we enter into the privilege of sonship, having put out faith and trust in Him, having been taken up by Him like we were this

morning, taken in the enjoyment of sonship into God's own presence. What a wonderful Man He is! 'Believe on Him' is a very deep thing, it is a detailed thing in one way. In another way it is very simple and links very much with what we sang in our hymn,

Simply trust Him, that is all.

(Hymn 439)

Well, I have not more to say, but I would trust that we will remember these three questions, that we will think about them, we will think about who asked them. We maybe put ourselves in some of those questions, we will think about why they were asked and think about the answer. "Where art thou?" Let us never forget that this is a question God asks of each one of us. And then the men that accompanied the Lord Jesus; "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" Then a man whose need becomes so apparent to him that he simply says, "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?" May we all be able to answer these questions! May we take them to ourselves and may we think about them, and may we each be found as those that have put our faith and trust in this wonderful Man, One who has shed His precious blood to save us, the One who is now seated at God's right hand. May it be so, for His Name's sake.

Sunbury

23rd November 2008

THE LORD JESUS AS SHEPHERD, NEIGHBOUR AND FRIEND

Bob Gray

1 Samuel 17: 40

Luke 10: 33-35

John 15.13-16, 26-27

These scriptures speak of the Lord Jesus either typically or directly. I would seek help by the Holy Spirit to speak about the Lord Jesus as a Shepherd, and as a Neighbour, and as a Friend. He is all these three things, and many more. The scripture presents things in such a way that we can take account of the Lord Jesus in a particular way; that is, we can think of Him for instance as a Shepherd. It might be said that we should begin by speaking of Him as a Saviour. In one sense that is right, because that is where our conscious spiritual history begins, when we come to know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. But what I have found, and I think others here would confirm it too, is that the Lord Jesus began to look after me a long time before I thought about Him. When I was still thinking of things like cars, football, lots of other things, He was looking after me. He was arranging things in my life, things I did not understand. And yet you look back and you see that His hand was there, like the one we read of this afternoon, Jacob. He said "the God that shepherded me all my life long", Gen 48: 15. You might have said to Jacob, 'Well, what about Padan-Aram, what about the time you cheated your brother?'; other things could be said about his early life. But Jacob looked back and he could see that God was watching him at every step; not to find fault but with a view to his blessing.

Now that is how I would like to present the Lord Jesus to you, as a Shepherd. We read about David. I just read that one verse out of this well known account, because what I want to bring out briefly is the fact that He is a Shepherd at all times. You might say that David was going into a very serious battle. Well, he was, he was going to fight Goliath, no ordinary enemy. We must understand that the opposition that the Lord Jesus met on our behalf was no light matter. The enemy He met was an awful one, a dreadful one. So here David was going down to meet Goliath, going down into the valley of terebinths. Now Goliath was big. If he came in at that door at the back of the hall, he would have had to bend his head away down to get in under the lintel. He was a giant, very, very formidable. He was armoured, he had a helmet of bronze, a spear, the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam. If that

giant had struck you once, it would have meant instant death.

Now, I am not just telling you an interesting story. I want you to understand the opposition that the Lord Jesus met when he had to do with Satan at the time of Golgotha, and at the cross. He met a dreadful foe, an apparently unbeatable foe. Jesus met him alone. Those friends He had taken with Him, the disciples, had come and had done well. He had disposed of them in the garden: He had said to some 'You wait there'; He had taken three of them on, and said 'You wait there', and He watched them. They were not all that far; Luke's gospel says that they were "about a stone's throw", chap 22: 41. I say reverently, they could see that Jesus was under awful pressure, that His sweat was as great drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. I want to convey to you that what Jesus did for you and me was real, and it cost Him much.

Another has said in ministry, that when Satan came to meet the Lord in Gethsemane and afterwards, he ventured everything he had. He did not want any mistakes; he did not want this opportunity to pass. What did Satan have? Well, he had the Pharisees for a start, they were fully with him. There was the crowd, they supported him. Eventually he had Pilate; he managed to turn him from his sense of duty and service. There were others, but his master stroke: he had Judas as well, one of the Lord's own friends and fellows. Satan had all that, and he brought it all to bear on the Lord. And last of all, he came himself; that is Satan. It says that: "then entered Satan into Judas", John 13: 27. I am speaking of what happened when Jesus, our Saviour, faced up to the whole question of sin and of sins that lay ahead of Him. He knew what that meant. He had seen it amongst men; He had seen the ravages of sin. And much more than that, He knew God's wrath, He knew God's hatred of sin, One who was "of purer eyes than to behold evil", Hab 1: 13. The Lord Jesus was carrying all that, when He met Satan first in Gethsemane. A wonderful thing to think of. He anticipated there what the sufferings of death and the judgment of sin meant. There is a great lesson book in that. He accepted all from the hand of His Father. A remarkable thing. In fact, Mr Darby goes so far as to say that the Lord Jesus went out from Gethsemane perfectly calm, vol 25 p301. The whole thing had been put to the test, and then He said, "not my will, but thine be done", Luke 22: 42. That is the Saviour we are speaking of, a Man who has been tested to the utmost, a perfect Man.

His perfection shone out when he was supposed to be under

trial, during that night when He was under pressure. It speaks of an officer abusing Him; they gave Him blows on the face. Remember when the apostle Paul, great man that he was, was under pressure, and one of the soldiers struck him. Just for a moment, he lost his spirit, and said "God will strike thee, whited wall!", Acts 23: 3. But when the Lord Jesus was smitten unjustly, he did not turn away in fear. No, He stood there like a Man, and He said "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me", John 18: 23. That was a perfect answer from a perfect Man under pressure. Now that is the Saviour whom we know, that is the Saviour whom we trust.

What about David in that connection? I read about him because David went through in type a similar experience with Goliath, with all the dread which that involved, and eventually overcame him. The point I want to carry forward is this, that David had his shepherd's bag with him. He never forgot the sheep. You might have said to David, 'that will be an encumbrance if you are going into battle - leave the bag behind'. But not David, he took it with him. And so did the Lord. I do not mean literally, He did not carry a bag, but what He did carry was His love. He carried His own in His heart when He went through it all. Remember the time when Peter failed Him so badly. Peter was hopelessly overwhelmed, as I would have been. Peter denied Him, with oaths and curses. He was as far down as he could go. It says of the Lord Jesus that he "turning round, looked at Peter", Luke 22: 61. That was the Shepherd - He had not forgotten to be a Shepherd. It says that "Peter, going forth without, wept bitterly". You see, it was like the lamb in the paw of the lion, but the Lord rescued him, the Lord turned round and looked at him. What did His look convey? 'You are wrong again, Peter'? No, I think rather that it conveyed that He had not forgotten him. He was still thinking of him, on account of what He had told him earlier. He had prayed for him that his faith would not fail, Luke 22: 32. That was the Shepherd thinking for His sheep.

Later on, He spoke to His mother after the flesh from the cross. I do not want to enter into sentimental detail, but the Lord was hanging on the cross, with all the weight of His body on his hands and His feet, hanging on the nails. From that position, He looked at His mother and said to her, indicating John, "Behold thy son", and said to John "Behold thy mother", John 19: 26, 27. I am saying that because it brings out that the Lord is never too pressed, or too busy, to care for His own, to think about them. And not as we do, a kind of a hasty arrangement; His

mother was placed in the very best place possible. She was put, as it were, into the family of John. He said to John, "Behold thy mother" and to Mary He said, "Behold thy son". That was the Shepherd, caring for His own. That is the Person we present to you, Christ.

In Luke's gospel chapter 10, we have the Neighbour. We only read a little part of this, we know it so well. This comes a little closer. You might say this man who had fallen among thieves was helpless. They beat him, and took anything of value that he had, and left him. Sometimes the Lord has to make things difficult for us before we come to realise how much we need Him. This man was lying in the road; it looks as though he had lain there for some time. Two others at least had passed, and had had a look and had gone on. He was not able to help himself. Then this person came. I wonder what the man thought. Lying there, he would be sore, maybe half conscious. He would hear the steps, I suppose he would see the shadow, then this person would lean over him and have a look. I am quite sure he spoke to him; he would touch him. What I am trying to get at is this, that the time comes in our lives when we *have* to do with the Lord Jesus at close quarters. The man went right up to him there; he would touch him, he must have done; maybe moved him a bit to take account of his wounds. There comes a time in our lives when the Lord Jesus takes to do with us in this way. One of the ways you will find out is this, that when you hear scriptures that you have heard many times, suddenly they take on a keener edge. They make you feel 'That is for me!'. It is not new; you have heard it many times, but something begins to touch your conscience, to touch your heart.

That is the Neighbour that I am speaking about, having to do with you, laying hands on you. Think of what this man must have felt. I do not want to be imaginative, but he would be sore, he would be smarting, his wounds would be hurting. You know how it is, when you even graze yourself. What does the Samaritan do? No lectures, he just poured in oil. That must have been tremendous - what a relief! He poured in the oil and the wine, and bound up his wounds. That is what the Saviour will do. Do you not feel you need Him? Maybe everybody here has a link with the Lord Jesus - maybe. I trust it is so. But if you have not, come to Him it is time you came. He is looking for you, He is looking after you, He is caring for you, He is close, and He wants to help.

The first thing the Lord Jesus does is to come alongside you, wherever you are, whatever you have got involved in. I am not

lecturing from a great height of superiority. We have all been young, and we have all done some foolish things in our time. But the Lord Jesus knows about them, and He is not reproaching. Do you know that? He is just looking to bless. We began with the hymn:

“Come unto Me,” yes, God Himself says, Come! (H y m n 252)

Well, the Samaritan came up to this man, and dealt with his immediate needs. I have often been struck by this “having put him on his own beast”. Have you ever tried to lift someone who is completely inert, who cannot help themselves? It is very difficult. The Samaritan did that, he lifted him and put him on his own beast and took him to the inn. If you commit yourself to the Lord Jesus, He will deal with you, He will meet your immediate troubles, He will bring in healing, He will bring in help, He will carry you. Think of this wounded man sitting on the beast, with the Samaritan walking beside him. What would he be thinking then? He would be beginning to think, 'What sort of man is this? He has done all these things for me, a person I never knew, and put me on his own beast, and he is walking'. Is that not a Saviour who is worth knowing? Surely! He “took him to the inn and took care of him”. You could write volumes about that, “and took care of him”. You look at everyone's face in this hall, you could write about every one “and took care of him”. That is me, that is you, that is every single one of us from the youngest to the oldest: “and took care of him”.

Well, here he is, he took two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, “and said to him, Take care of him, and whatsoever thou shalt expend more, / will render to thee on my coming back”. Two denarii - many interpretations have been given as to what that might be. I like to think of them as faith and hope. But anyway, whatever the interpretation might be, what the Samaritan says is, “whatsoever thou shalt expend more”. You might say, 'If I try to commit myself to the Lord Jesus, what will happen then? How will I get on? I am not up to it'. That is the thing that hinders many, 'I am not up to it. I would fail'. This is the answer. You are in a place of safety, with someone who has taken care of you, and at the back of all that lies, “whatsoever thou shalt expend more”. What about next week? and the week after? There is still more. God's giving is very full and very free. You may depend on it, as Jacob said, “the God that shepherded me all my life long”. Jacob was speaking as a man who had discovered experimentally just how much God had by way of resource.

In John's gospel the Lord Jesus speaks of His own as friends. I know that this is special; He was speaking to the twelve. But I think that we can apply it to ourselves. What the Lord Jesus says in the gospel is that He will take on the liabilities. That is the negative side, and many, sadly, are content with that. Their sins are forgiven - let me not take it away from them that they can put their head on the pillow at night, without a qualm. But there is more than that. What God wants, in Christ, is not only persons who are relieved of their sins. He looks for companionship. When God planted the garden in Eden, He put the best He had in it, "every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food" and He put man in it, Gen 2: 8, 9. What then? It says that He came down "in the cool of the day", chap 3: 8. He was looking for company. God looks for persons that He can keep company with, persons who are made fit. Christianity is a very real thing. I used to think of it, as a boy, as something like a museum, with a lot of interesting things to look at and talk about, that usually belonged to old people, or those who had gone before. Christianity is not like that at all! Christianity is a living system. Christianity does not preach dead heroes. It preaches a living Saviour - remember that. We preach a living Saviour.

Well, when the Lord Jesus was here, He spoke of His disciples in this dignified way, "I call you no longer bondmen ... but I have called you friends". What I wanted to touch on was what He said, "all things which I have heard of my Father I have made known to you". The Lord Jesus will bring us in to the greatest things. You may say, 'Surely forgiveness of sins is sufficient?' But it is by no means all that the gospel offers. The Lord would bring us into His own sphere of things, into His own links with the Father. He tells us the secrets. We used to sing:

Yea, He has told us the wonderful secrets,
Father of glory, once hidden from man.

What are these secrets? One of them would be that we who are flesh and blood, are saved and redeemed, blessed with sonship, an eternal, indestructible link with God Himself. It is a very dignified thing to which the Lord would bring us.

Well, these are some things to explore. I cannot set out all that the Lord Jesus would bring us into, as He has our confidence, and we His. So He says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and have set you that ye should go and that ye should bear fruit, and that

your fruit should abide". I know that this was said to the disciples, but I believe it includes us too, and remember this, that what we are engaged with in Christianity is eternal. People talk about life-changing decisions. A man may take a decision about a career, or marriage, or whatever. What about making a decision that will affect you for eternity? That is what Christianity is engaged with; it is something that is eternal.

Just a word about the Holy Spirit. "When the Comforter has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes forth from the Father, *he* shall bear witness concerning me". We have said already, and it is a very real thing, that we might fear failure, 'I am not up to it' and so on. What I would say from experience is that I have proved that the Holy Spirit is a present help, and is One to whom we can appeal at any time. In good times we can give thanks, and in bad times we can appeal to Him. We do get into trouble, every one of us does at some time or another. I know what I am talking about, to my shame: I should have known better. That is the time when we need God most. The Lord says through the psalmist, "call upon me in the day of trouble", Ps 50: 15. Do not be afraid to come to God, to call on Him at any time, because as John said in his epistle, "your sins are forgiven for his name's sake", 1 John 2: 12. That is what God is thinking, He is thinking about the fact that Jesus has taken away your sins and He always has a ready ear for you.

I trust these things will be for our encouragement, and that everyone here has, or will have, a living hope in the Lord Jesus as Saviour, for His Name's sake.

Linlithgow

10th May 2009

Jim D Gray

Psalm 51: 5

Romans 3: 21-26

Hebrews 9: 27

Genesis 47: 31 from “And Israel”; 48: 1-2, 15-16

The first three scriptures I have read relate to the common lot of men, that is, “in iniquity was I brought forth, and in sin did my mother conceive me”; and, in Romans 3: 23, “for all have sinned”; and then, in Hebrews 9, “it is the portion of men once to die”. That is the common lot of everyone in this room and you can do nothing about it as far as that goes, but God has a proposition to make to you. It is His glad tidings, and it concerns His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God requires righteousness. He cannot bypass sin or sins, and He has not. You and I could do nothing about righteousness. The whole of the Old Testament is a time when God gave man an opportunity to see whether he could establish his righteousness to the satisfaction of God by works of law, but he failed and we come into that failure. God says, 'I have a proposition to make. I have glad tidings. It is my glad tidings concerning my Son, the Lord Jesus Christ', and the glad tidings is that He has secured a righteousness that makes men and women, boys and girls, suited for His presence. It is a gift, and it is towards all. It is only “upon all those who believe”, but it is “towards all”. It is because He has given His only-begotten Son, in whom the matter of sin and sins was dealt with on the cross. “Him who knew not sin”, Christ, “he has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him”, 2 Cor 5: 21. That is available to you, friend, and to everyone in this room, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. So that is what He has to offer to you. “All have sinned”, but in Christ Jesus “God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood”. If you have faith in the blood, God can justify you.

Now then, in Hebrews 9, “it is the portion of men once to die”. That is true but Scripture adds more than that, “and after this judgment”. Our dear brother whom the Lord has taken will have to face the judgment too, and so will we all. I am not at this moment discriminating. The judgment is not in death. The judgment is in resurrection. “It is the portion of man once to die, and after this judgment”, the judgment is in resurrection. Scripture speaks about “the resurrection of the just”, Luke 14: 14. Does our brother have to fear the resurrection and the

judgment? No, he does not have to fear that. Why? He made Christ his Saviour in his lifetime and God gave him as a gift the righteousness of God. When he awakens in the resurrection, he has that righteousness. It is secured in time; it is valid for eternity. If I may be simple dear friends and brethren, it is like the visa to heaven. If you go to another country you need a visa. He has his visa secured in Christ here in time. His sins have been forgiven and he has a righteousness of God that is yours today if you lay hold of it.

Now I want to speak about Jacob. Jacob has a portion that is not the lot of all men. Where I have read, it is the crowning touch of the life of a believer. He worshipped on 'the top of his staff' (note). He finished as a worshipper. Our dear brother finished as a worshipper. His life included moments of toil. He proved what a toilsome life was. I want to allude to the fact that in his early life he went through bitterness. He never lost his faith in his God. He went through sorrow, deep sorrow. Not everyone has faced that kind of sorrow. I will tell you what I read in a letter written by a Christian brother who went through similar exercises in his early life. He says "feelings of unutterable pressure and loneliness, known only to those who have passed through them". In those moments, only one blessed Man can be with you all the way. Friends and brethren are with you, and that is a great comfort, but only one blessed Man goes all the way. That is Jesus. He found Him as his Friend. He walked with him through that valley and He brought him forth to green pastures. Our dear sister who has been with him is now going that way but Christ can be the Friend all the way to succour and sustain her in these hours of sorrow.

For this man, Jacob, at the close of his life is a family man. This scene is a family scene, the scene you would be acquainted with when our brother was sick, and here the son goes along with his two sons; a son and grandsons. He takes his grandsons into the presence of this dying believer. What did he want? He wanted to put them in an area where they would hear about God, hear about the God who had shepherded his father Jacob all his life long until this day. That was a characteristic of our brother; God shepherded him all his life long, brought him through, brought him through all the exercises of life, and there were many after the one I have spoken about. God brought him into blessing, gave him light as to the house of God, "Arise, go up to Bethel" (Gen 35: 1); that is the word to Jacob. He gave Jacob light as to the house of God which he followed through, and then as departing he desires that the generations that are following on may come into

blessing. He says, "bless the lads". What a heart he had for the testimony as every father, every grandfather, every brother, every sister would have for the generations coming on. Come into the Christian fellowship; come in to the Christian circle! He says, "let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the land!" What did he have in mind? Not that they would make much in this scene. We need our bread and butter to get through, we need to do our work, we need to exercise prudence. There is another life, dear brethren. Our brother knew another life. He had a link with a Man in heaven, a real and living link with a Man in heaven, forgiveness of his sins, and he received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christianity is real. Conversion is real. A real change takes place in the soul of a believer when he is converted. He lives in the real sense of the life of a blessed Man in heaven and he meets with Christians and he enjoys the life that is called eternal life. That is not future. There will be a future life with Christ, but this is a present thing. It is a sphere of life. You and I are living persons, but we have our life, a sphere of life that we live in. What sphere of life do you live in, friend? This dear brother that we are burying today lived amongst his family. That was one side of his life. He had a sphere of life there, but he had a greater sphere of life amongst the circle of Christians because he had a link with a Man in heaven, and what they spoke about was not the life in this scene. It is life that is to come, but not only life that is only to come, life that is present, knowing the blessings of what they have in Christ, "inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me", Acts 26: 18. What is this inheritance? For these persons here literally, Jacob had in mind they would enjoy the promised land, but for the Christian it is the circle of affection amongst believers where the presence and blessing of Christ is known, a peace that passes understanding, a bond that is not broken in death.. As belonging to the family of God we have a link together as believers that is not going to be broken. We can enjoy that living link now because each believer is in touch with the Man in heaven. It is a real matter. There is a real sense of joy in the soul, a real buoyancy. It draws you to where believers are. The Bible is not a dead book, you know. It is full of life. You are linked with a glorious, living Man and that attracts you to that sphere. You are drawn like a magnet to where life is. May it be the portion of all here today, for the Lord's Name's sake.

Edinburgh

11th June 2009

(At the meeting for the burial of Mr David Scougal)

THE LORD JESUS AS A BUILDER

John Wright

Matthew 14: 23-33, 16: 13-8

1 Peter 2: 1-10

I would like to speak of the Lord Jesus as a Builder, and of the structure He is building, and the material He has for building. In Matthew 16 He speaks of "my assembly". This is not the assembly from the point of view of what it is in heavenly relationships with Him, but it is what He is building here. It will soon be transported to heaven but at the moment what the Lord is building is here. It came into evidence at Pentecost and the Lord has been building and adding to it ever since. Is each one of us exercised to have part in that building? If it is His building, He will select the most suited material for it. He is not selecting any kind of material. Peter is an example of the kind of person He is building into His assembly. He was the leading apostle but he is also an example of the kind of material. The Lord is not building something that is attached to this world's system, whether it be religious or political, because He is rejected here. Men are building up a system, and they considered Christ when He was here as they said, 'He is not suitable for our building. He is worthless'. That is what they said; they cast Him away as worthless. So the Lord Jesus is not building up anything in connection with this world's system because He has no part in it.

The Lord Jesus also considered what was here in the world and He could not build that into what He was going to build. He could not build the Roman Empire into it, and He could not build the Jewish system into it, and He could not build the heathen darkness that enveloped the gentiles into it. So He began a completely new structure. The Lord Jesus felt it that He was rejected here; He did not find a home in the world; He could not because it was all so foreign to Him. Indeed it grieved Him in His heart to see what was transpiring in the world. He found comfort in His disciples and in that company of disciples there was the nucleus of what He was going to build.

In this section of scripture, the Lord is facing His rejection. The beginning of the chapter brings out that John the baptist was slain, that he was killed, and the Lord knew what was ahead for Himself, that he should be crucified and slain, but the Lord goes on with His service. He feeds the poor of the flock, and He puts His disciples through a testing experience. This was all preparation for part in the structure that He

was going to build and Peter brings out the kind of material for that building. You might say, 'Well, Peter failed', but he showed that he was in advance of the others when he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

It was a comfort that the Lord was on high. He was on the mountain praying and it is a comfort to us that the Lord takes account of us where we are and He is interceding for us. But these disciples were in a testing position; they were in this boat which was tossed by the waves, and the wind was contrary. It is not going to be easy if you are going to have part in what the Lord is doing. If you want an easy time here, you will not have part in this system. "But in the fourth watch of the night he went off to them, walking on the sea." He waited until then, the fourth watch of the night. He could have come in the first watch of the night; He waited until the fourth watch of the night. That was deliberate on the Lord's part. The Lord allows things to go on to test us. "And the disciples, seeing him walking on the sea, were troubled, saying, it is an apparition." He was going off to them but they did not recognise Him, and it is an exercise; do we recognise the movements of the Lord Jesus? His movements at the present time are not in relation to the world. He is going to take up His rights and take up the affairs of this world, but His movements at the present time are in relation to His own who are here and this scripture brings out His supremacy. He was walking on the waters, however rough they were. Is not the Lord Jesus supreme? Is He not above everything here? We often get troubled, we must admit, but they did not recognise Him; "they cried out through fear. But Jesus immediately spoke to them, saying, Take courage; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answering him said, Lord, if it be *thou* command me to come to thee upon the waters". I have known this, beloved brethren, in critical times in the testimony (and we are in critical days now), the Lord saying "it is I: be not afraid". And Peter says, "Lord, if it be *thou*, command me to come to thee". To whom can we go? In John's gospel, Peter says to the Lord Jesus, "To whom shall we go?", chap 6: 68. Not 'Where will we go?': 'To whom will we go?' Peter says in his epistle, "To whom coming, a living stone". In that epistle he is drawing on his own experience to help the saints, but have we come to Him, beloved brethren? "Go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach", Heb 13: 13. Peter left the boat and walked on the waters to go to Jesus. You might say, 'Oh well, he began to sink', but first of all he walked on the waters to go to Jesus. No one else in the boat did that, perhaps they would rather stay in what they thought was the safety of the boat. The one thing about Peter, despite his failings, was that he

had affection for the Lord and he would say, 'Lord, if that be thou, if that is where Thou art, I must reach Thee where Thou art. I would rather be with Thee than in the boat'.

And then he looked at the waves and he began to sink. He saw the trouble and he was afraid. I have often said to the Lord, 'Lord save me'. What was the answer? Jesus immediately stretched out His hand and saved him. Would Peter ever forget that experience? Would Peter forget it in all the troubles that faced him in the testimonial setting later? We need, beloved brethren, help in how to overcome. To be honest, I often feel very weak but He is strong. Sometimes the children sing -

I am weak but He is strong

- how true that is. His arm is there to stretch out and save us. The Lord had to rebuke them for their lack of faith and in His love He will rebuke us. He says in Revelation, "I rebuke and discipline as many as I love", chap 3: 19. They came to the realisation of who the Lord Jesus was through this experience.

In Matthew 16 we come to another experience of Peter's; this was a spiritual experience. Have you had a spiritual experience with the Lord Jesus? The structure that the Lord is building is a spiritual structure, it is a spiritual house. The assembly is a spiritual entity; it cannot be taken account of by sight. Persons have buildings and say, 'This is the house of God', but the structure that the Lord is building is a spiritual one and it requires spiritual persons. So the Lord raises the question here: "Who do men say that I ... am?" So, beloved brethren, what can we say about the Lord Jesus? What can we say as to who He is? 'Well', you say, 'the scripture says this about Him or that about Him', and that would be true, but what have you come to yourself?. You might say, 'Well this was a special revelation to Peter', and it was a special revelation to Peter, but that does not mean that we cannot arrive at something ourselves as to who the Lord is. We have meetings, there is ministry proceeding, and spiritual ministry would bring before us something of Christ, something for us to lay hold of for ourselves. Have I gained anything today as to the greatness of Christ for myself? We have an advantage over Peter. He had this revelation from the Father but as having the Holy Spirit we have the power to obtain things. Mr Raven helped us to see that we get things by the Spirit. We do not exactly get things from the Scriptures; we get things by the Spirit. Then we can go to the Scriptures to get the words to express what we have

got. It is possible to get the words without the substance of it. Peter made his confession, "Thou art the Christ the son of the living God". How delightful that was to the Lord Jesus to hear that, and He says, "flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee but my Father who is in the heavens". Then He says, "I say unto thee that *thou* art Peter". It is not exactly who Peter was, it was what he was. He was a stone for the building and he was a living stone. Then the Lord Jesus says, "and on this rock I will build my assembly". The rock is not Peter (as some people say); the rock is the revelation that Peter had as to the Son of God. Peter was not the rock, he was a stone for the building, and the Lord says, "and on this rock I will build my assembly". The Lord is building His assembly and He is looking for material for it, and He says, "and hades' gates shall no prevail against it". You might say, 'Well, why has all the ruin come into the church?' Satan has set up an imitation; the real structure is here and it is impregnable, it is Christ's building. Am I built into it? I need the Spirit if I am going to be built into it. Whilst every believer belongs to the assembly, I do not think that you could say that every believer is built into it; it needs the sealing of the Holy Spirit. I just raise this, beloved brethren, that we might be exercised about it, that we all might find a vital part in it.

In 1 Peter 2 he is helping the saints into the truth and he is drawing upon the experience he had. There are certain things that we have to lay aside; malice and guile, etc. But then there are things that we are to desire: "the pure mental milk of the word that by it ye might grow up to salvation". What does it mean "to grow up to salvation"? This cannot be eternal salvation. My own impression of this is that by 'growing up to salvation' you grow more after the stature of Christ. If Christ was rejected and cast away here, I shall be as well, and that will be salvation for me. But then there is not only salvation in what we are saved from but there is salvation in what we are saved to or for. We are saved to have part in this structure which takes character from Christ. He says, "if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good". Have we all tasted that? How good the Lord is! So we want to keep coming to Him, do we not? "To whom coming" it is not 'have come' but "To whom coming, a living stone, cast away indeed as worthless by men, but with God chosen". He is the Man of God's choice. It was not an arbitrary choice. God has made known the choice of His Man, this Man, because of the moral worth and beauty in Him. And then he says, "Yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ". And then

he goes on to speak of this stone as being the cornerstone, it gives character and strength to the building and it is, “elect, precious: and he that believes on him shall not be put to shame”. Later on he speaks of this stone, “which the builders cast away as worthless, this is become the head of the corner”. It is the Head of the corner, beloved brethren.

Well, I do not think that I should say any more. Do you want to be part of this building? Are you prepared to come under the Lord's hand and be educated for it? Are you attracted to Him, attached to the Lord Jesus, that you keep coming to Him and take character from Him? Well, may the Lord help us in it. Amen.

Anand, India

12th December 2008

