

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

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SECRET PRESSURES

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R.D.P. There is very much by way of pressure upon the brethren and I suppose the extremity of our brother in this city would draw attention to that. We live in days in which we know what it is to have great pressure upon us. As in all these things it would be in mind that we learn God in them. We were watching a potter at work recently, and whilst we are familiar with the idea of a potter's wheel and the skill of his fingers, with the formation related to that, what I noticed was that the first thing the potter does is to exert pressure. If he wants to enlarge a vessel he first exerts pressure on the clay.

There is very much pressure, not only that which is known generally by the saints, such as upon our dear brethren who are suffering in their bodies, but in the secret lives of the saints which we perhaps have disregarded so far as spiritual enlargement is concerned.

There may be pressure in our experiences which we would rather keep to ourselves, regarding it perhaps in a negative way as something to be ashamed of. But I would like to encourage us that this pressure, this secret pressure, in addition to what is known publicly, is intended of God, as under His hand, to yield enlargement with every one of us.

I read of Jacob because I think you get an example of it in him - pressure in his own life in relation to facing up to moral exercises.

One of the areas in which we feel pressure, specially perhaps when we are younger, is in facing up to moral issues. This is not something that we usually speak about very much, but I believe it is something that God is allowing and ordering in our lives that we might be enlarged spiritually. So Jacob, who had known what it was to be a deceiver, and also what it was to be deceived, comes to a point in his life where he gets a sight of Christ typically in Joseph, and his life is revitalised and he starts to move in a different direction, in relation to his country and his place. Now I believe that that movement with all of us will bring certain pressure upon us. As

he moves relative to his country and his house he has to face up to the moral issue concerning Esau.

In the scripture in Kings this woman is under pressure as to resources. I think she felt that she did not have the resources to meet the needs of the testimony. She was a poor widow woman who had reached extremity due to the famine that was upon the land, and she is commanded of God to maintain the prophet. That is the position in which many brethren find themselves today, in fact all of us, that the prophet is to be maintained. This maintenance of things involving the prophetic line means that we need resources, and this woman was tested in her secret history as to what resources she had.

Finally in Corinthians I thought you get a lovely example of what it costs to insist upon the truth amongst the saints. Underneath you have the heart of Paul, who at this point in the epistle, because of his great love for them, confesses that he had almost come to regretting that he had written the first letter to them. Let us never underestimate, dear brethren, the pressure upon the hearts of those who help the brethren in relation to insistence upon the truth. If there is not that feeling for God and that feeling for the saints, as seen in Paul, let us not try to enforce the truth. It brings out with Paul, as with the woman, as with Jacob, that as accepting that particular pressure in secret from God, there is great enlargement in his own soul. The psalmist says "in pressure thou hast enlarged me", Ps 4: 1. The area of things in that Psalm is the place where God's glory is put to shame, that is the whole environment of what is around in mere profession and religiousness, and the psalmist has found pressure there; but then he says "in pressure thou hast enlarged me". It is not only 'formed me' but enlarged me. He says "Jehovah hath set apart the pious man for himself" (v 3). I think it links with that side.

A.J.E.W. What affects our spirits is the fact that the pressures that are being experienced are protracted. This is so in this city and southwards of us, also a brother further to the north - there are protracted pressures. But in Jacob's case there came the rising of

the dawn. Maybe that is something to stimulate us and affect us.

This must have been a protracted matter with Jacob. Apparently the wrestling was not brief. You feel how perhaps the Lord would bring something specific and definite in the deeper experience with the Spirit in what is being passed through.

R.D.P. It bears upon the exercises of many of us. It is so easy to come along to the meetings and have a certain link with the brethren and an outward link with the truth, but is there that vital, inward urge with every one of us that is seeking for my country and my place? Jacob sets out here how things are worked out experimentally in the very scene in which we are. He had gone on a long time, and many of us have gone on a long time with an outward expression of and connection with the truth, but maybe inwardly there has not been the answer to that vitally. God is very gentle with Jacob all through his life, and how gentle He has been with us! And how gentle He would be with the young people! He knows the pressures at work or at school, He knows the problems of being identified with the testimony, but what a time in our lives when we get a view of Christ, as with Jacob here, and we move our eyes towards another country and another place! Then if that is so, Jacob has to face up to the moral issue of Esau. And we might go a long time in our experience without really facing the moral issue. If we are to know what it is to have God with us at the present time in our individual experience, it means we will have to face the moral issue.

D.J.H. The issue does not get simpler, because Esau has four hundred men with him.

R.D.P. That is right, and the more we use human means to meet it the greater the problem becomes. The problem of Esau grew and grew in Jacob's thoughts until it became insurmountable. He says, I will send and tell him all about the riches and the wealth I have, I will go and show him how I have prospered in these material things.

These things have been in our minds. You know what it is at work or at school to try and get round the moral issue by presenting some other feature. But God is not being hard with Jacob, He is bringing him through the pressure to enlargement in relation to Himself.

E.C.B. Is there any real personality without this side? What you are saying as to our just going along with the outward side of things, perhaps avoiding the secret exercise, accounts for the lack of manhood to which we might confess. I wondered whether this side is not necessary if there are to be men here for the continuance of the truth.

R.D.P. God always has in mind distinction amongst His people. We do not want to be just persons who come to the meetings; if that is all it is, things will be heavy going, especially amongst the young people. Let us face up to these exercises as they are. Personality is to be developed. Why should there not be distinctiveness? Why should we settle for what is ordinary so that to those we are in contact with we are just unusual and do not do certain things? Whatever you may say about Jacob, ultimately God brings him to a point where he is more distinctive, not positionally but morally, than the greatest man in the land.

E.C.B. He was not actually any more distinctive there than he was in chapter 32, because he was a prince with God.

R.D.P. And as soon as he sets his face back towards the land, to his place and to his country, these great features of princeliness come out. For all those years he had gone under the name of Esau. His father said "who art thou", Gen 27: 18. He says "I am Esau", and that continued until God has to do with him and asks "What is thy name?", and he says "Jacob". And it is very easy in our individual lives to go on in Padan-Aram for twenty years while we get rich under the name of Esau and not admit we are Jacob.

S.D.K.R. Do you think that the struggle in Romans 7 is often what may almost give rise to a giving up? It is a facing up to a moral issue, is it not? Would you think that that might be something that we may feel almost too great for us?

R.D.P. I think so. We know that Esau was not right in himself and that ultimately God expressed His hatred for him, yet at this point in the history of Jacob he represents a particular moral issue that has to be faced. If there is to be power with God and with men it involves

that these things cannot be skirted any more. If Jacob had stayed in Padan-Aram in his business and lived his life in relation to himself without setting himself in relation to his country and his place he would not have had to face Esau. And unless we set our faces in relation to our country and our place we shall not have to face the exercises of Romans 7; we will be able to say what the chapter means and put it over with a singular lack of conviction, I presume, to other persons; but the experience of it produces personality. It involves personal experience with God.

A.J.E.W. It is very noticeable that Saul of Tarsus is not brought among the brethren until he has had three days without sight, neither eating nor drinking; as if that intensive side was necessary to develop the kind of personality in which he would take his place in the course of the testimony.

R.D.P. And God worked with him from inside. It was not the outside that influenced him; there came a point when he says he "took not counsel with flesh and blood", Gal 1: 16. I do not think any amount of trying to persuade Jacob would have got him out of Padan-Aram; it was the attractiveness of Joseph that set his face in a different direction. And for ourselves there is no substitute for a sight of Christ, not only what the brethren say, not only the truth as to it, but in our personal relations. Jacob had many sons and daughters, but when Joseph comes in he says "Send me away, that I may go to my place and to my country", Gen 30: 25. Every one of us needs that experience in our lives, that the reason we are moving the way we are is because of attraction to Christ.

J.M. Jacob had a certain valuation of divine things; he had a valuation of the blessing but sought to appropriate it in the power of the flesh. Is he to learn this deep lesson that the surpassingness of the power is to be of God and not from us (see 2 Cor 4: 7)?

R.D.P. I think so. We could view him as one who knew what it was to have a link with God but who had got away from the warmth of that into a settling down into his own things. And he became rich. Sometimes we may think, if we become rich, that God is blessing us

in the way we are going, but you cannot read too much into that.

There is prosperity and enlargement spiritually with us as God brings us to a point where we are prepared to face moral issues. We are not only nominally connected with things but inwardly are moving in a different direction.

A.A.B. It says "Jacob remained alone". That would link with what Mr Welch said as to Saul - "three days without seeing", Acts 9: 9. There is nothing and no one between Jacob and the man who wrestled with him. There is no natural influence at this point. He brought the family over but he remained alone.

R.D.P. It seems to me to be a very important thing that God had made known His disposition to Jacob earlier. He said "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places to which thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done what I have spoken to thee of", Gen 28: 15. What a wonderful thing that is! God had set Himself in relation to him. But then God brings him to this point where he remained alone. And I think the side of things that Mr Burr speaks of as to personality and prosperity individually is something which concerns us all, that if the testimony is to be maintained in our places it will not be by persons who only have an outward knowledge of the truth, thankful as we are for that, but by those who are formed in exercise, real exercise with God as with Jacob when he remained alone.

A.A.B. In the illness referred to we witness the reduction of natural energy. The personality to emerge is spiritual, is it not?

R.D.P. I think so; and these things are not set amongst us and left for a long time without it meaning to work out something for us; and the only way they are of profit to us is if we learn them in ourselves.

If there is pressure upon a certain member of the body let us take it to ourselves and see what it means, that God allows and orders these things. I believe there is a great deal of pressure secretly which perhaps we have not considered can yield spiritually. I think sometimes we may even be ashamed of exercises like Jacob's here.

A.A.B. "What is thy name? ... Jacob" would bring out that side, would it not? It is a great thing to know what our name is on the Jacob line. The Lord said to the demoniac "What is thy name?", "Legion", Luke 8: 30.

R.D.P. Yes I suppose it would be an admission of all that he was and all that he had been. And God knew him anyway. Jacob had been there and he had obtained a lot of possessions but he had not gained much spiritually for twenty years. But God was going to bring him back to the point where He had first disclosed Himself to him.

T.B. Do we need to be concerned that we might be preserved from shallowness? This has been quite a concern to oneself as to whether there is something of the depth of God's feelings in regard to matters. We so often just look on the surface rather than at what God has in mind behind it.

R.D.P. I think if there is one great feature that we need to be encouraged in at the moment, it is facing things as they are. God helps people who face up to things as they are and He will come and help us where we are. 'Till grace, what grace began, shall crown!' (Hymn 138). Now that is what is before us at the present time. If there is to be the maintenance of things to the end - "shall he indeed find faith on the earth?", Luke 18: 8 - it will not be merely in what is external but what is formed in depth in the saints.

T.B. There is nothing that takes the place of experience. When you think of all the experience in this hall today, it is very wonderful, is it not? And God is getting the result.

R.D.P. It is always very affecting to me to see the saints. God brings you to have a great respect for them. Whilst all of us may have certain peculiarities which perhaps we tend to notice, God brings us to have great respect for the saints, great respect for His work. And the more we have respect for it the more we will need to be formed in relation to what is inward and what is deep. And I think we need enlarging and to bring into currency these pressures that we have perhaps discounted as far as spiritual formation is concerned, not only to think of those who are in extremity of body

and those who are out of work or are having pressure in relation to their families in relation to the truth - we recognise these things as pressure which will yield something - but let the secret exercises of our personal lives be yielding something. "In pressure thou hast enlarged me".

T.B. Would Romans 7 develop experience but chapter 8 bring out what the personality is as before God?

R.D.P. I think so; and it involves the Spirit. If the great matter of personality referred to is to come out it involves the Holy Spirit. There is no other power, there is no other demonstration of it except by the Holy Spirit.

C.R.B. Is dislocation a very skilful, divine intervention that strikes at the roots of what we are naturally? The joint of the thigh involves power for movement naturally, does it not? But God dislocates that; so we find that we just cannot go on any more in natural strength because it does not take us into the enjoyment of divine things at all.

R.D.P. Yes. Well, Jacob had had very colourful experiences and had used his mind and his energy to bring about a very rich result as far as natural things were concerned. But what you find is that as he advances in relation to God - "thou hast wrestled with God, and with men, and hast prevailed" - there is a corresponding weakening in natural strength in relation to the things which have occupied us before.

E.C.B. Does Gethsemane bring out in great power what you have in view? Not that Jesus there was facing the kind of exercises that you are referring to in relation to ourselves, save that He was about to face the greatest moral issue of all. But He took three disciples with Him; and then it refers, especially in Mark, to His spirit and His soul. Would that bear on what you have in mind?

R.D.P. I think so. Mr Bellamy was helping us last week as to Gethsemane and the reference to "going forward a little", Matt 26: 39; Mark 14: 35. I think we have become accustomed to some extent in the last seven years to things bowling along; but there comes a point where it refers to the Lord as going forward a little. I

think with Jacob you get the sense that he was coming out of Padan-Aram at a fair pace and his pace begins to slow up as he gets nearer to Esau until there comes a point where he has to stop and wrestle with God. Maybe we have come to the point now where we are not exactly going along week by week but have come to day by day and hour by hour. In whatever subject we may speak of, Christ is always to be before us. Think of the tremendous pressure upon Him at that point: "My soul is very sorrowful even unto death", Matt 26: 38.

E.C.B. Is that why Paul in 2 Corinthians 1: 5 says "the sufferings of the Christ abound towards us"? That is not Christ's atoning sufferings but it is the spirit in which Paul met the Corinthian exercise.

R.D.P. Very good; so if there is to be the maintenance of things amongst us it must be by depth inwardly, which involves the soul, and the sufferings of Christ abounding towards us.

E.C.B. A danger at the present time is not merely that we should rest in things bowling along but that we should rest in somebody else bowling them along for us.

R.D.P. How many of us are quite happy to come along here and enjoy the way that the truth flows and would never think of making a contribution! Perhaps that is too blunt, but it is very easy to do it. I am not saying that everybody should be speaking, but what an increase there would be in spiritual surge if everyone was here alert on their seat to make some contribution to the way that God is moving amongst the saints at the present time. Perhaps it is so; but it seems to me that it is very easy to be lulled into a state of mind that things have gone on for a hundred and fifty years and so far as we know they always will. I think we have come to a point where the momentum of things depends upon what progress I make in relation to meeting God and prevailing with Him at the present time.

E.P. It is interesting that it is in the second epistle to Timothy that the apostle says "I know whom I have believed", chap 1: 12. I was thinking of that note that Mr Darby gives us about the revival that is in mind in 2 Timothy, of what was drooping (see note to 'rekindle' in

chap 1: 6) and the stimulation of that. The maintenance of that is in the personal knowledge of God, is it not? And this is the way of it.

R.D.P. I think so, "I know whom I have believed". That knowledge is vital at the present time. It is the remedy to any kind of settling down. Paul goes on to say "and am persuaded that he is able to keep" and so on; he is immediately moving on in his thoughts and affections to another day. We were saying the other week that there is no time in which there is not to be progress in spiritual things.

Maybe it is a little, maybe it is a step, but there is always to be progress.

E.P. No one could tell Jacob after this that he had not had to do with God, the very evidence of it was in the manner in which he walked.

R.D.P. Yes, everywhere he went. Jacob's heart begins to quake here. Somebody said in ministry that he was more afraid of Esau than he was of God. How many of us are more afraid of unfaced moral issues than we are of God? But I think that the thing that disarmed Esau was that he saw Jacob as no rival to himself; he saw a limping man who could not hunt, could not shoot, could not do any of the things that Esau excelled at, and you find that things are met.

V.H.B. Faith and the Spirit are the key to the whole matter, and what Isaiah says: "in quietness and confidence shall be your strength", chap 30: 15. That is my experience.

R.D.P. Well, it is good to hear someone speak from experience, because most of us, especially when we are younger, find a great struggle going on in relation to this Jacob line. And it is very easy, as someone said earlier, just to become depressed and give up and go back to Padan-Aram. But I think God would bring before us today that in that pressure He wants to enlarge us; not only to form us, but to enlarge us, to give us a greater scope.

E.C.M. Does facing the moral exercise that you are raising bring out the excellency of Jacob? I was thinking of the verse in Psalm 47: "He hath chosen our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved" (v 4).

R.D.P. That is very good. God is very gentle with Jacob all the way through and He will be gentle with us; He wants to bring us to His own end and He is going to do it.

A.A.B. Would it help us in relation to current assembly sorrows to see how Paul wrestled with the Corinthians in the first epistle and prevailed according to the second? He went through something himself between the two epistles. He was excessively pressed beyond measure "so as to despair even of living", 2 Cor 1: 8. All that has a bearing, does it not, upon assembly sorrows?

R.D.P. Well, some of us have had experience of laying things upon the brethren without having that underlying feeling for the saints.

What you get with Paul is that underneath, you may say, he was almost at breaking point as to whether he should have written that letter at all. You think of that! Think of the way in which the first epistle to the Corinthians flows with authority and power in relation to the expounding of the Lord's commandments, and yet in the second epistle he says "I have regretted it", chap 7: 8. You get some sense of the secret pressure of the apostle. He waited anxiously for news of them until Titus came, when the relief from the pressure he had been under resulted in enlargement in his own soul.

F.C.M. In that second epistle he uses the expression "I myself, Paul", chap 10: 1. Does that relate to the essential man, not the official. or formal in any sense, but the inward reality of that man and his affections and his committals?

R.D.P. Yes I think so. God gives us that view of Paul as well as the authoritative side; you get the feelings of the man, as if to give us an insight into the kind of man that God was using to help the saints at that time; and at the present time, for he would be typical of the whole dispensation. It is persons who know what it is to wrestle with God and prevail with God in secret. Paul shows how very real his exercises were. He says "I have regretted it"; almost as if there came a point where he would have recalled the letter if he could, because of his love for the saints. And yet love for the saints dictated that it should be written.

C.R.B. Do you think Jacob got such a great sense of the patience of God that He was prepared to spend a whole night wrestling? In the next chapter he is not prepared to overdrive the flock, even for one day.

R.D.P. I think so. We have perhaps had these exercises before, as to things moving on and committal, but maybe we did not approach it the right way, and the concern not to overdrive the flock that came out with Jacob would be the fruit of exercise with God in relation to this. Jacob becomes a softened man by his exercises to move in relation to his country.

C.R.B. Limping reduces the speed considerably but it means that every step is in keeping with the will of God, do you think?

R.D.P. Yes. The Lord never had to retrace one step; what perfect footsteps! 'Each holy footstep gave Thee fresh delight' (hymn 119).

A.J.E.W. Do you think that we reflect enough over the fact that the Spirit of God has been here for almost twenty centuries in constant patient labour in the midst of suffering circumstances of every character? Think of what has been necessary, in that sense, from the divine side for the production ultimately of the greatest vessel that creature conditions could yield. Is there not something to answer to that in the history of each of us with the Spirit of God and what He is bringing out at the present time?

R.D.P. I think so. So the assembly as the pearl is not to be a hard vessel, maybe shining and glistening, but formed in depth. If there is to be a reflection of Christ in what is formed it is not only what is outward but what is inward.

S.D.K.R. Does Hosea gives us something of what actually went on in the wrestling? It says "he wept, and made supplication unto him", chap 12: 4. Would that have a softening effect?

R.D.P. That is very interesting. He wrestled for the whole night "until the rising of the dawn". In a way that is like the whole dispensation. I suppose Hosea was speaking there of a particular circumstance; and in all our circumstances we would know to some

extent what that wrestling involves. It speaks of the woman in the gospel that "she knew in her body", Mark 5: 29. God allows Jacob to prevail; He could have finished Jacob at a blow but He allows him to prevail. And we can have power with God. That is a great thing. I would like to know more about that, to have power with God and with men.

D.J.H. Is it to bring out that Jacob is now prepared to see the thing right through? "He said, Let me go, for the dawn ariseth"; that is he recognises that Jacob is prepared to see the thing right through and therefore the issue can be brought to a conclusion.

R.D.P. I think so. There was still a way to go but he is set upon a path where ultimately he has to experience the matter of death. In all his experience in Padan-Aram, twenty years, there is no mention of any death coming in, yet on the path that he is now set upon he has to face death. That must always be the Christian way - the facing of death, whether literally or morally.

J.C.E. At the same time are these the things whereby men live (see Isa 38: 16)? I was thinking of Jacob being surprised that he had seen God and still lived. And with the woman, it was the question of her maintaining life. The same with Paul and the saints in Corinth. It seems to me that that is something we do learn, that whilst God is for us, yet there are certain features in us that He is against; pride and things like that.

R.D.P. I think sometimes as we have to be before God and confess, I am Jacob, we are almost surprised that we live to see the day afterwards. Because God is so great, and we have been perhaps so unfaithful, and yet God is so gentle with us.

J.C.E. We find that God is unexpectedly hard against certain things, do we not?

R.D.P. I think that is right. We could perhaps just say a word as to Kings. There is great pressure in this woman's soul as to resources, and we know something of that too. The word of Jehovah came to the prophet: "Arise, go to Zarephath... and abide there; behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to maintain thee". She was

hard pressed even to look after herself and her son, and now she had come under command to maintain what would speak of the vessel of the testimony at that time. Now let us face up to these things, dear brethren, as to whether we feel the pressure on our resources as to things being maintained. It is not just 'fed' but 'maintained'; not just a question of giving him something to eat but maintaining him. It involves the whole atmosphere of affection. and food whereby the testimony goes on. We know what it is in our localities to feel the strain of that, and sometimes we feel we do not have enough resources beyond what we have immediately to hand for today. Yet God comes in; He says "I have commanded" this woman to maintain you.

E.C.B. Resources is a different question from knowledge. We have a lot of knowledge, as you have suggested already, and one is often impressed, especially in revising ministry, as to how much ministry is just quoted, other people's line of things ready to hand, yet if there were the resources we would get things that were a person's own, do you not think?

R.D.P. I think so. This woman had something which she had very little appreciation of. What we have, what has come to us by way of knowledge, even some touches, are capable of infinite expansion.

Something that comes in in some remark that a brother makes is capable of infinite expansion if we were in the right spirit and had the right outlook. I am sure we could make a lot more of very little. Look what has come out of the Scriptures! For hundreds of years there has been food for the saints flowing by the use of the Scriptures in the power of the Holy Spirit. And what can come out just by being in the presence of the saints! yet maybe we are not always in the right spirit. This woman was gathering two sticks, she was thinking of herself and her son. It is not just herself but there is someone else there, a young person who might represent what is potential. Now what kind of outlook have we?

A.A.B. That is the whole point. Her outlook was transformed. In the first place it was to eat and die, but Christ makes all the

difference, does He not? John 6 is that we may eat and live for ever. That is the continuity and the maintenance line, is it not?

R.D.P. Yes. To eat and die is a very poor outlook, yet as Mr Stoney said, if we are glad to settle for just going to heaven when we die, that means we must have earth till we die (see Vol 3, p.98). And today, dear brethren, are we just settling down to eat and die? Are we just ready to fade out? Is our outlook in the place where we are that we will do what we can, but we can see no future? I believe that God would stir us up; maybe we are reduced to very small circumstances but He would show us that what we have is capable of infinite expansion until the day that Jehovah sends rain upon the earth. Outwardly there may be deprivation but inwardly there can be known resources to maintain things until the pour of rain comes.

W.J.W. We like to have a lot, but the Lord said to the disciples that if they had faith as a grain of mustard seed it would be enough.

R.D.P. Yes. I like this reference to a handful; it is just enough to pick up, nothing else. You pick that up and you have to be dependent after that. The idea of a handful in Scripture is very potential. After all, we cannot pick up more than a handful and we would not be able for any greater quantity. We shall always be kept in dependence. It does not say the barrel was filled up but that the meal that was there did not waste and the oil did not fail. I think we will always be kept in dependence every day that we are here. But it is a wonderful thing to have the assembly before us; that is what this woman had here.

C.C.I. Do you think the reference in John 6, the food chapter - "There is a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two small fishes" (v 9) - would be parallel to what you are exhorting us on?

R.D.P. I think so; it is that idea of what is small. Philadelphia has "a little power", Rev 3: 8. Sometimes you come to a meeting like this and would like to have a lot more before you and be able to pull it off this shelf and that shelf so that at least you could get through, but there is a handful of meal in the barrel and you say, Well, Lord, it is not enough. He says "I have commanded a widow woman there to

maintain thee". The prophetic word is to be maintained and God has commanded it. And if He has commanded it, it is possible.

J.McK. I was just noticing the interesting connection between the prophet's experience and the experience of the widow. There seems to be a good deal of concurrent experience. The prophet has the experience at the beginning of this section of the torrent drying up and at the same time God is working with the widow.

R.D.P. The pressure is upon both of them. In one sense I think the prophet here would have feelings like Paul. While he demands something from the woman, I think he would have feelings like Paul as to what he was demanding in such limited circumstances. But then the torrent, as you say, had dried up. Mr Burr has been speaking about what is flowing and available to the saints, but supposing, dear brethren, it dried up. What would we do? Supposing the torrent of freshness and power that comes to us by ministry dried up, and conditions came about where the torrent in its flow and its power was not available to us, maybe in our personal circumstances; would we know what it was to be maintained until the time when Jehovah will give rain on the face of the earth?

V.H.B. Is that the vital need of the knowledge of God? "I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee", Heb 13: 5. Do we believe that?

R.D.P. That is right; and an appreciation of what this meal and this oil involved. It may be only a handful and a little oil, but if you have that, what is infinite is there. Think of the youngest believer coming by the gospel to his sinnership and his acceptance of Christ as Saviour! What is endowed upon him is everything that God has for him. He may not appreciate it, and maybe some of us have hardly touched what has been given to us, but what God gives He gives absolutely. He does not give it every ten years, He does not give you a bit more as you reach twenty-one, He gives you everything.

G.W.B. It is enough to make a little cake for the prophet first; the divine portion is to be assured first of all.

R.D.P. How easy it is to lose sight of the fact that the little cake is to be first and for the pressure in our circumstances in localities to cause us to think a bit too much in some ways of ourselves. "Make me thereof a little cake first". She had some water for him, an appreciation of the divine provision to meet need, and maybe we shall go on preaching the gospel in relation to men's need right the way through, but have we an equal impression of what there is to maintain, the heavenly and spiritual side of the truth until the time when God sends rain upon the earth? And the little cake, whilst it was only little, was a whole thing and we need that in our places.

E.C.B. What do you say about the widow having to face the death of her son anyway? I was linking it with what you said about Jacob, that after Peniel he has to face death. What she had feared came about, but now there is power to face it. In fact the exercises before it does rain were quite considerable, were they not?

R.D.P. I think so. There is maybe more pressure later in the chapter upon the prophet too. I think it is true to say that the facing of death must be a vital ingredient of any part of our walk in God's things. I do not think we can go through without it. It may be literally we may not have to face it in ourselves, maybe the Lord will come, but morally it must be so, otherwise there will be no power.

E.C.B. It is of some interest that all this time a fairly insignificant man had been feeding prophets with bread and water - there was somebody who knew that there was enough resource at least to maintain the prophetic line. I refer to Obadiah; it comes in the next chapter; he hid a hundred prophets and fed them with bread and water, yet the woman said she had not enough resources.

R.D.P. Yes. How many of us even literally as to what is prophetic have felt we do not know whether we can maintain it. It is not only just a question of whether we have the meeting or not, it is a question of what power and life is entering into it. Are we going for weeks on what we had several weeks ago without a fresh sense of where God is at the present time? I think the prophetic line is vital,

not only the Tuesday night meeting but throughout the whole course of the calendar.

J.C.E. Do you think that part of her resource, which she happily used, was an obedient spirit? She had been commanded and when the prophet came along she was obedient to what he wanted to do. I just wondered whether that was an essential thing with us.

R.D.P. I think so. There were some very good features about this woman. And there are some wonderful features about the saints, but we fail in faith sometimes as to what tomorrow will bring. This woman could not see beyond the next meal and yet God comes in and says, I have commanded the widow woman to maintain thee.

There is no mention of when He spoke to her, there is no mention of what He said to her, but there is a willing and obedient spirit with her.

J.C.E. I suppose we can assume that as God commanded us to support the testimony He will enable us to do so.

R.D.P. Yes; and there was not only command, there was demand.

He commanded the widow woman to maintain him and then the prophet demands something; in other words, it is a question of whether we shall be able to comply, to be able to come in in relation to that line of demand. "Make me thereof a little cake first". Many have given up the thought of the assembly, many have given up even the thought of a little cake. You may say, my conception of it is very small, I feel the breakdown, but I have an impression of the wholeness of the assembly. We must have that in every place.

T.B. Is it important to be vital in regard to the meeting for ministry? I find this is where I am greatly tested. How can we be vitally maintained in it? I realise there is ample resource in the Spirit but find I have nothing when I go there.

R.D.P. These are exercises which enter into our experience. I think it is a question of putting ourselves in the way of what God is doing and being identified with real exercises. I do not think that means that we have to take up some point and beat it around, but God speaks in relation to what is actual in all our places. Now that might involve that He will come in in a word which does not appear to have

any reference to specific matters, but I do not think we shall really know much of what is prophetic unless we are actively involved in the actual state of things amongst the saints and the glorious prospect that is before the saints.

C.R.B. Is it important to see that there is a barrel? She may not have thought there was much in it, but the barrel was there and the cruse was there. Does it bring out the way that we would respect what God is doing in every locality? There is the barrel and there is the cruse, and as there is faith there will be enough there to keep the saints going in relation to what is infinite until the day the rain comes. We do not want to discount a locality, saying there are only a few brethren there. The barrel is there, the mind of God, the barrel and the cruse are there wherever the Supper is being rightly maintained, do you think?

R.D.P. I am sure that is right. There is sufficient there for things to be maintained throughout the whole course of the dispensation. I often wonder what would have happened if many localities which were closed down under a certain line of things had continued, where things would be in those places today. It is very easy to interpose man's mind and man's will and put in what is obvious and what is logical in certain things, but I do not think that enters into the Christian's pathway at all. But does that meet what you say?

C.R.B. Yes, I think we are far too much inclined to revert to logical ways of doing things. What God does is infinitely beyond us, is it not? The meal and the oil involve what is infinite. We can never fathom the greatness of Christ or the resources of the Spirit personally. But we can be assured that, if the Supper is rightly maintained in a place, God will preserve the barrel and He will preserve the cruse.

R.D.P. Yes, and the little cake is forthcoming. All the ingredients were there for the cake. As Mr Taylor said, it would be the humanity of Christ in the presence of sin (see Vol 28, p.370). And that was involved in the making of the cake. It is not only in relation to Christ where He is, beyond the struggle, but He has been here in the

circumstances in which we are. I think what our brother said as to the prophetic word is testing. But then, are we as tested today or on Wednesday night as we are on Tuesday night? On Tuesday night we may have to give a word if someone else does not, but then on Wednesday night the meeting will go on anyway. Are we as concerned on Wednesday about the prophetic word? If we had a sense of what the prophetic word was, we would be exercised as to it in every meeting.

E.C.M. Was that brought out in Elijah when he was at the point of giving up? The word is "Arise, eat!", 1 Kings 19: 5. And the cake was put at the head of Elijah, baked on hot stones too. It seems to me that the principle of the cake goes right through.

R.D.P. Yes, he needed the cake later. Elijah himself fell short of the resources for the day and he was tested in his own spirit, in his own experiences too, and he thought he was the only one left.

E.C.M. It was put at his head, as though God would remind him afresh of the thought of the assembly, the whole idea was there.

R.D.P. Well, let us be maintained in that, however small the conditions. This woman was enlarged as facing the pressure. It says "she, and he, and her house". All you had before was "me and my son". There is an enlargement in apprehension of what is involved in the maintenance of the prophet at the present time.

E.C.M. I think it is encouraging, because there are so many meetings which are small, just two or three brothers perhaps. It is a test to go on week by week, but I am sure what you are bringing out is to encourage us to go on.

R.D.P. I think that God has commanded the maintenance of the prophet and I think that would apply to every place and it would be an exercise to every individual. She thought she could not do it, but what God brings out is that she has the resources but it involves obedience and sacrifice.

H.A.H. These were the ingredients of the oblation, were they not? It is said of it that "it is most holy", Lev 2: 3. Is it in view of the

maintenance of holy conditions for the word of God?

R.D.P. I think that is right. So what goes into this cake, in a sense, is infinitely precious. If we have some small yet whole conception of what the assembly is, especially in its local bearing, what you are holding is something very precious.

J.C.E. Everything has to be in view of the appearing of the Lord. I was thinking of what the prophet said here: "until the day that Jehovah sendeth rain upon the face of the earth!". Think of the Lord coming down like showers on the new-mown grass and what it will mean, that He comes to take up His rights. Everything is in view of that. I suppose, if we do not have that in mind, things become rather a round of exercise and the whole point in view is lost.

R.D.P. I think so. If we kept our eyes up a bit more, things would become clearer to us. God said to Abraham, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art", Gen 13: 14. I think perhaps to some extent that answers Mr Broughton's exercise, that if we were looking a little higher and a little more afar, we would have an expansion in our souls as to what God is doing today.

E.C.B. Have you time just to enlarge your remarks as to the prophetic ministry and the prophetic word proceeding in relation to our assessment of the state of the saints? For my own part I think that is the whole underlying question in regard to the ministry meeting. Many of us can give words to solve problems, take actions that we think will solve problems, but solving problems does not actually touch state.

R.D.P. It is a very exercising line. First of all the ministry meeting is not a question of being able to air knowledge. I appreciate that sometimes we are tested, we may have to meet things in responsibility, but I think God would help us as we are concerned as to where we are actually today. And that is not just a question of commandment; it involves the feelings of a Paul, it involves the grasping in our measure of the concept of what God is doing and where things are moving to, and it involves wrestling with God. But I think it is an exercise with the brethren. It is a very interesting thing

that the maintenance of things here at the present time is crystallised in a sense by what is prophetic.

W.T.A. Do you think that the test is often with the prophet? I suppose few prophesied as much as Paul, and yet it brought him into a path of suffering in his devotedness to Christ and the assembly.

R.D.P. That would be right. I do not know what I could say further. It involves more than knowledge; it involves a sensitiveness as to what God is doing currently. We cannot have that by slackness or lethargy.

H.A.H. So while it is very exercising, does it involve some understanding of what Paul says as to the way things work - "grief according to God works repentance", 2 Cor 7: 10?

R.D.P. I think so; it involves what is exhilarating as well. There can be no greater stirring up in our souls and emotions than if we get the sense that God has made His mind known. It may be something very simple. I remember Mr Walkinshaw telling us once that when John said "It is the Lord" (John 21: 7) it was a prophetic word. He was able to point out where the Lord was at that moment in relation to their state; all he said was "It is the Lord".

E.C.B. In the scripture read in Corinthians everything is according to God. Paul may have been an instrument, but everything was brought about by God, where things may safely be left.

R.D.P. Yes, I think so.

LONDON

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Key to initials

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“BY THE WAY OF ITS OWN BORDER”

R.D.Plant

'I.Samuel 6: 9-12; 2 Samuel 11: 6-11; 1 Kings 21: 1-4 to "spoken to him";

Philippians 3: 9-14

I was thinking, dear brethren, of this expression, “by the way of its own border”. It refers to the movements of the ark, and I think it would refer to the way the saints move properly at the present time.

It involves a suffering way, it involves a way out of the world. Here it becomes a matter of speculation as to the way things would go. I would like to encourage the brethren. We have known something of the sorrowful movements involved in the carrying, you may say, of the ark by the way of its own border. I think it involves something that cannot exactly be defined; it would be difficult to find "by the way of its own border" on a map of Palestine. You would not be able to tell me exactly what it meant although you might have an idea of the area it was going to, yet you get a sense as you read the words that there is something very profound in it, that there was a certain movement that went "by the way of its own border". When we think

of the movements of Jesus we find that He always moved by the way of His own border. How men would have loved to have made the Person of Christ, as represented in the ark, fit into the system of things that existed at that day. The size of the ark was two-and-a-half cubits by one-and-a-half cubits by one-and-a-half cubits - all halves. It did not fit into the Jewish system; it does not fit into the imperial system or the metric system. As we become attracted to the One who did not fit here at all we shall see the glory and distinctiveness of Christ. The Pharisees were always trying to find out whether they could make Him fit into some facet of their religion, but there was no part of the way in which Jesus went which fitted into the way of men's thinking at all. And so it is today. Do not be surprised, dear brother or sister, dear younger one, if you find, as a lover of Christ, that you do not seem to be able to find a niche in the system of the world. It was never intended to be, and the Person of Christ never fitted either. "By the way of its own border" would echo a thrill in the hearts of His own.

There had been largely a history of unfaithfulness in the priesthood in the early part of the book of Samuel, culminating in God removing the official priesthood and the ark being taken into captivity, into the house of Dagon the Philistines' god. I believe that has happened in our day; in a certain sense the ark has been taken and stood publicly at the side of idolatry in an attempt to adorn it. As far as the world is concerned the ark has been taken and it is merely an object of curiosity. We are coming to a time of the year when you may say the Ark, as men regard it, is being regarded with curiosity, when men will devise all kinds of stories around the birth of Christ, but they will largely miss the glory that Christ has come into this scene in which we are, and in perfect manhood has carried through the will of God. If you go round London you will find many parties, many Christmas trees, many cribs; but what did our hymn say this morning? 'Love in Thy lonely life' (No 235). There was no sympathy or support for Christ when He was here; there was no room for Him when He came in; there was no room for Him when He went out. He

always moved in distinctiveness: "by the way of its own border", and I believe that is to be known today.

So what shame has come into the public profession, even into our own experience, when the Ark has been taken in one aspect through unfaithfulness and stood by the side of what is idolatrous.

Yet you find that God acts for Himself, and let us be assured of that. We have the evidence amongst us that in those circumstances God has acted for Himself. Let us be restful in it. Let us not be too occupied with what other persons may be doing, but let us rest in the fact that the Lord knows those who are His, and He knows what exercises of soul there are in individuals, and He knows of the love for Him that there is in many hearts, and He knows of the respect there is for the Ark, however it may be held at the moment, and He can act for Himself. I rest in that, dear brethren. Many here have loved ones who are held at the moment in a system of idolatry. Let us remember that God can act for Himself. We have to be prepared for our part, but I think it is a wonderful thing to see the ark moving out here, and the question is raised of where it will go. It is good to look at the saints as those who have moved in this sorrowful yet glorious way, "by the way of its own border". When they of Ashdod came in in the morning the idol had fallen down, and then it was broken to pieces, just the fish stump of it left. They do not tread on the threshold of Dagon to this day - superstition, Mr Taylor said of that (see Vol.52, p.263). All that was left in that idolatrous system was superstition. There is what is very close to superstition in what is around us in what we have left; let us make no mistake about it.

When persons tell some of the saints who have sought to move rightly that unless they leave those who seek to move in the light of the assembly and remove to another position they will be lost eternally, that is superstition. Make no mistake about it. The devil is at work to attempt to destroy the very foundations of the preciousness of the work of Christ in souls, but let us be assured that our salvation does not rest in whether you come to this room or that room; it rests in the precious blood of Jesus and in the purpose of God. It is amazing how persons can be disturbed as to their eternal

salvation. Let those things be seen for what they are - superstition; and it is a sure confirmation that there is only the stump end of Dagon left.

Well, let us be encouraged in the greatness of this movement that goes forward. It involves the truth, it involves the Person of Christ. The Lord says "I am the way, and the truth, and the life", John 14: 6. Some of us have known times when we have regarded the truth only as various points of doctrine, but the truth involves the Person of Jesus. You cannot be in the truth with a hard heart, you cannot be in the truth if you are a political person or if you are following your own way. Pilate says "What is truth?", John 18: 38. Can you understand something of his dilemma? Faced with the One who was the truth he says "What is truth?" Do you ever feel like that? How many persons there are around us that we love, who say at the present time, What is truth? Oh! if they could only see that the truth is Jesus. The truth involves His Person, it involves His work; as the hymn -writer says, 'Christ's person, His work and His glory' (No 53). It involves that there is a testimony at the present time to the place where Jesus is. Jesus said "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free", John 8: 32. I like that little passage in Mr Evershed's piece, referring to the signpost he found:

'Without the way there is no going,
Without the truth there is no knowing,
Without the life there is no living'.

It is all in the Lord Himself: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life", all features which have come under attack in the present phase of the testimony.

So have we seen these milch kine in our localities? Have we seen the way that the saints have moved instinctively in relation to the testimony at the present time? Have you moved with it? Have the younger ones here? Do you come here just because you always come and your parents come, or have you some sense of glory, beloved young one, in your soul, as to the way the present testimony is moving? Peter speaks about "the present truth", 2 Pet 1: 12.

How important that is! There is that which can be spoken of at the present time as "the present truth". There is that in the saints which moves instinctively. We have a lot of knowledge of the truth, but we shall never be able to replace this blessed instinctive movement.

We have had to come to respect, and maybe we still need to respect more, the instinctive movement amongst the saints.

Sometimes we get impatient because things do not go quickly enough for us, but through many exercises we have come to acknowledge instinctive movement amongst the saints. I think it would be true to say that there was hardly ever a time in the previous decade when God did not give some indication through one of the saints voicing a concern which, if we had listened, would have preserved us from much. Maybe you can trace that in your place, that if we had listened, if we had had more patience, if we had had more respect for one another, we would have been preserved from much.

These milch kine go straight forward on the way to Bethshemesh. The calves were at home. There is no driver on this cart. I wonder how many of us here would like a little book of rules. Do you ever feel like that? As going to work or coming into the meeting we find that certain things test us. We do not like being tested and it would be very nice to have a little note of what you should do in certain circumstances, but it is very much more testing to be dependent every time and every day and at every step, as to what we should do. In some senses we have missed those rules, but we have gained Christ. Oh, let us ever, in our experiences, value the fact that the Ark is now moving, without outward guidance, and which way will it go? There are those who have watched and said "if it go up by the way of its own border... if not, then... it was a chance". Is the movement of the saints in these days a chance? Is it a chance we are together, dear brother and sister? Dear young one, is it a chance that there is something moving in your locality by the way of its own border and not moving into the world? Let us see that there has always been this thought of a way. Throughout the Scripture you will find it. Paul was one who persecuted those who

were of the way (see Acts 9: 2). I think there always will be this "one high way". Many today will say that there are many ways of reaching the end. It is true that persons will be secured in the end but they will not be secured because they followed their own way; they will be secured because of Christ's work. There is only one way of faithfulness at the present time and it involves what is instinctive and it involves affection for Christ.

I move on to the second book of Samuel because I think there you get a further instance of a person who moves "by the way of its own border". You notice that all these instances involve the way of death. I was interested in that in the reading, that this way involves that we go through to glory by way of death. If it is not literal it involves what is moral, and the kine that went on the one high way were sacrificed. What is sacrificial is vital. The whole basis of Christianity is sacrificial. Think of the sacrifice of Christ! How could you ever expect some kind of easy religion when you have the great example of the sacrifice of Christ? not only the sacrifice at the end but a sacrificial walk. This matter of death morally needs to be faced. "By the way of its own border" involves the way of death but it involves glory too.

Here you have a lovely example in Urijah. It is interesting that in the genealogy in the New Testament Bathsheba is not mentioned. It speaks of Solomon as of "her that had been the wife of Urias", Matt 1: 6. How God loves this man! How God loves, in our places, those who are moving "by the way of its own border"! Here in this man you get faithfulness par excellence. He is a simple brother, not in itself something to glory in, but what a wonderful thing if we can remain simple as to Christ! We progress in knowledge, but this man, typically in simple affection for Christ, says, How could I do this? "The ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in booths; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields: shall I then go into my house?" What a wonderfully simple thing, dear brethren! I think there is always the feature of what is simple connected with "by the way of its own border". One thing I think is simple is the reading of the Scriptures. The Scriptures are

something which any person can pick up and get immediate simple help from. You may say, We interpret the Scriptures and we understand that certain things have to be viewed in their context. It would be right to read the Scriptures contextually, to get the setting of them, but it is also right, in God's wonderful wisdom, that you can pick up the Scriptures and open a page and can read it simply and accept it for what it says. How fine that is! There is always the way for what is simple. Let us be preserved in it.

Here David had fallen into sin and was trying to hide his sin by making use of a brother who in simple devotion was one whose name was to go down in God's treasury. Do we realise that God loves what is simple by way of devotion and expression. Let younger persons not be afraid of giving simple expression. You do not need to use the terms that brethren maybe seem mostly to use.

Simple expression; simple faith; simple trust; simple faithfulness: I think that is what you get with Urijah, and God writes his name in His book, one of the men in history who have gone down in God's book. We were speaking recently of those who were written down on David's honours list at the end of Samuel, the mighty men that he had (see 2 Sam 23); God has had that throughout the dispensation.

You may be able to think of the mighty men He has had in your locality. As far as the world is concerned they are probably unknown, but as it says on Mr Darby's tombstone: "As unknown, and well known", 2 Cor 6: 9. God knows His men, He knows those who have stood in simplicity and faithfulness. It involves "by the way of its own border". It is the way to glory. Urijah was coming to the end of his life due to the callousness of David's thoughts and his mixed motives at this point. It meant death for him but "by the way of its own border" meant that it was through death to glory. What an assemblage it will be when the whole of God's work is seen together! Some have died young, some have gone on to the fulness of years, some have been tested by martyrdom, some have been tested by conditions like we have today, some have lived for Christ, some have died for Christ; how many have gone "by the way of its own border" to glory! I look for that moment when we shall see momentarily the

whole of Christ's work standing upon the earth. "The dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain", 1 Thess 4: 16,17. How much room there will be left for those who are not His own, when you think of all His own, raised and changed! How great it will be! There will be no lack in numbers. He will have preeminence in all things - pre-eminence in quality, pre eminence in numbers, pre-eminence in glory. Dear brethren, are you attached to Christ? You cannot approach these things from the outside. If you approach them from the outside you may have done what David did, gone to your own house at this time, but the instinctive lover of Christ is governed by another Man in another place.

I move on to Naboth, another one who I think exhibits this feature of "by the way of its own border". Naboth had an inheritance and someone else wanted it. I would address this especially to those of us who are younger. One thing that marked Naboth was that he valued the inheritance of his fathers. There is an expression that every man has his price, and I would like to ask every one whether that is true of us in relation to divine things. To Naboth it was not just a vineyard that Ahab wanted; it was not that the vineyard that Ahab would give him would not produce better on a natural line of things; but what Naboth valued was that it was the inheritance of his fathers. I would like to ask every one of us here whether we have a real appreciation of the inheritance of our fathers. There is much of great value that has come down to us at great cost. Do we have a right valuation of the inheritance of our fathers? Do the young people here have that? I do not like to address the young people pointedly, because they face much at the present time, but the potential and the wealth there is amongst young people is tremendous. In possibly the most difficult age that has ever been on the earth, possibly the most materialistic and antiGod and wicked age of the dispensation, the young are growing up in conditions where every influence and every kind of proposition is being put to them. "If it seem good to thee", Ahab says, "I will give thee its value in money". Could you take the value in money, dear young brother, dear young sister? What money value would you put upon the

inheritance of your fathers? What value would you put upon the assembly in the place? You say, I can see something of its overall value but what we have in our place is very small. I do not think this was a big vineyard, but it meant everything to Naboth. Does your local assembly mean everything to you, beloved young brother? Have you got through to the conviction that it is not just a question of what you do on Sundays but that heaven is interested vitally in what happens in the local assembly? I would encourage us all that we might get some greater appreciation of the inheritance of our fathers. It involves what has come down to us; it involves the hymns that we have in the hymnbook, the expressions of faith that have come through pressure and through years, sometimes, of sorrow; but there is something that together is the inheritance of our fathers. I believe that Naboth here was activated by a jealousy that was from God, that he would not give up even a corner of his inheritance. He would not give it even for an outwardly better one. Are we like that? As you go along the road that goes by way of its own border to glory does the grass sometimes seem greener in the next field? I wonder if there is anything better to you than the love of Jesus as known in the local assembly. I would encourage all of us, as getting before God, to ask Him to give us an impression of the inheritance of our fathers, to give us a fresh impression of the loveliness of Jesus, something of His sweetness, something of what He has done for you. But more than that, to fix your eyes upon Him where He is.

Paul says "I know whom I have believed", 2 Tim 1: 12. Do the young ones here know that? Do you know whom you have believed? You say, I know the facts of my salvation, I know that if I trust in the work of Jesus I shall be saved. That is wonderful, but do you know whom you have believed? What does the hymn writer say?

'Jesus! our Saviour, Shepherd, Friend,
Thou Prophet, Priest, and King,
Our Lord, our Life, our Way, our End,
Accept the praise we bring'. (No. 54)

Have we progressed to that, dear brethren? Have we progressed in God's river from our ankles to our knees and to our loins (see Ezek 47)? Have we reached the point when the love of God has affected us inwardly? Naboth said "Jehovah forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to thee!" There is a call for those who in simple faithfulness value what they have in the place where they have been set.

I finish with Philippians because there I think you get a lovely setting of Paul the Christian, the believer, the lover of Christ. You do not get much by way of doctrine in Philippians but you get lovely expressions of the way Paul was in relation to his Saviour, and the way he walked on this earth on which we are in relation to another Man in another place. Paul says "I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord", chap 3: 8. Would that that echoed more in our souls! With every advantage at his feet he could have been the greatest man of his time as far as Judaism was concerned; he could have had everything he wanted; yet he says "What things were gain to me these I counted, on account of Christ, loss" (v 7). Oh, dear brother and sister, there is no substitute for Christ. With all knowledge, with all that we may gain by way of ministry - and I keep stressing this as something I have found for myself - there is no short cut to the knowledge of the truth. I believe we arrive at the knowledge of the truth by way of affection for Christ. It tones us in our souls, it gives us breadth and experience, gives us feelings within; and Paul, who came under the personal touch of Jesus, says "on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord". "By the way of its own border" involves persons moving like that; it involves, as he says here, the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death". Again you get the way of death; the way of glory is the way of death. He says "Not that I have already obtained the prize... but I pursue". The ark, of which we read in 1 Samuel, was a long time before it reached its final resting place; yet God goes on in patience with the efforts of those people, sometimes unintelligent, sometimes needing further adjustment; it

was a long time that the ark remained in the house of Abinadab and then in the house of Obed-Edom, and much sorrow and exercise was connected with it. What a long time "the way of its own border" has gone on! And Paul here says "Not that I have already obtained the prize"; and then "one thing". Again you get the simple line - "one thing". The man in John 9 says "One thing I know" (v 25). If we know one thing we know something. If it is only one thing it is a glorious thing if it is in relation to Christ. He says "one thing forgetting the things behind, and stretching out to the things before, I pursue, looking towards the goal". The goal would be Christ in glory. You cannot walk "by the way of its own border" unless your eyes are fixed on Christ. If your eyes are fixed on circumstances you will go off the path. It is easy to become a bystander at the side of the way. But Paul's eyes are on the goal, "for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus". We are going to glory, dear brethren! I look on to that day. In some reality I can say that I am waiting for the time when we will be with Christ in glory. I know I can say it as doctrine because it is known, but I think sometimes in our experience we are arriving at that, that soon we shall be with Him in glory. What a moment! The hymn writer says:

'When all Thy saints now scattered far and wide
Shall be without one shade of variation
All like Thee, Lord, united by Thy side! ' (No.421)

When the whole of God's assembled work will break into the praise of the Lamb; when that touch will come, as Mr Darby says in 'The Endless Song', 'From one heart, divinely prest'. What a day, dear brethren, when the pressure will be over, when the time of sorrow will be over, when the time when what is natural which becomes such a pull to us will be gone! We shall be with Christ in bodies like His own and we shall know in glorious reality what the sunshine of His presence will be.

Dear brethren, let us be committed to "the way of its own border"; let us be kept from the way of the world and let us respect what is instinctive amongst the saints, for His Name's sake.

LONDON

17 December 1977

"LORD, SAVE ME"

E.C.Burr

Matthew 14: 30-31; "and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand"

I suppose that in the experience of the disciples and Peter himself, this had not been quite an ordinary day. We have reference to "one of the days", referring to the time of the service of Jesus here, and I suppose that this day had been as extraordinary as other days on which Jesus was here. After all, it was not every day that you would

see a man, as to external appearance like other men, going around and healing the sick and making the lame walk, making the deaf hear and making the blind see, restoring people to life and feeding multitudes. I do not suppose you could call any of these days ordinary, but in that every day was extraordinary, this day had been much like the others. Jesus had been out in the desert teaching and speaking to the crowds and great crowds came round him. He would not send them away hungry and He found what they had, and with what they had five thousand people were fed. Then, I suppose, it did not seem anything extraordinary to the disciples when Jesus commanded them to get into their boat and go away to the other side. He went up above to pray and He sent them away to the other side. I do not suppose there would be anything extraordinary in that. They would be accustomed to His movements and accustomed to the way He would do things unexpectedly, Himself doing something and going somewhere and giving them instruction to go somewhere else. I do not suppose the day seemed any more extraordinary than any other day. The experience into which they entered in the storm on the sea I do not suppose was any different from any other day either.

I say these things, beloved, because what I want to draw to your attention is that today may just be an ordinary day to you, just a day like other days. After all, we all, the older brethren and the younger brethren together, have a certain pattern of our lives and the Lord's day is just like other Lord's days. It is a bit different today.

Just as this day that these things happened to Peter was a bit different from other days, things are a bit different today; there are many more brethren together. Brethren have come from a lot of places, and you meet brethren whom you know well but may not have seen for some time and you appreciate the links that we have with one another - as we sang at the Supper this morning: 'Yet bound by closest ties'. We are here in the enjoyment of that and in that sense the day is a bit different, but it is just like the Lord's day: we have had the Supper and a reading and now we are having the preaching. It is just a bit different from other days but in substance

much the same things go on. But on this day, just as it might be for you today, something happened to Peter that had never happened before. It could be that, this afternoon, something could happen to you that has never happened before. What happened to Peter was that, as he had never been struck before, he was struck with his need; and the one great essential in the preaching of the gospel is that people should be stirred up to a sense of their need. I believe that the root cause of the departure of many from the truth and from the gospel is that they did not embrace the gospel out of the sense of their need. They embraced it out of having become accustomed to it and because the other people who went to the meeting were accustomed to it; because these were the things that were talked about and they got to know the language and that kind of thing.

Beloved, whoever you are, young or old, in the end the fact that you have embraced the gospel because you have become accustomed to it will not save you. What will save you is that you embraced the gospel because you needed the gospel. That is what saves sinners, that they embrace the gospel because they need the gospel, and I seek to preach the gospel here this afternoon in view of the salvation of sinners. Those who are believers already always enjoy the preaching, but the gospel is preached with a view to the salvation of sinners - may I add, for the improvement of saints but for the salvation of sinners. There was once a bishop, who was asked by a young man for advice on how to preach, and he said to him, I'll preach as if I'll never preach again, and as a dying man to dying men. That is the way the gospel is preached in relation to need. It is preached as by a dying man, as if it was the last thing you had to say to anybody. When you are faced with the fact that soon you yourself might be among the dying men, then what would be the last thing that you would have to say to people who remain? And if you know that people are dying, what is the last thing that you will have to say to them? The last thing that you will have to say to them is something about their soul and about your Saviour. Another man said, in another day, Let us preach as those who know our own souls and our own Saviour. Beloved, that is the basis on which the gospel is preached: it is preached in relation to the need of the heart and of

the soul, preached beyond need even, but preached in relation to absolute and unqualified necessity - and that was the state of Peter in this chapter. He was beginning to sink, and it may be that there is someone here this afternoon who is beginning to sink, not beginning to sink into the sea of Galilee but beginning to sink under the overwhelming weight of a conscience which condemns you before God. One thing my mother used to tell me when I was growing up - she was Scottish and learned a lot of the things she told us in Scotland - was that a guilty conscience needs no accuser. That is true. The preacher need not accuse to a guilty conscience. The preacher need not bring things home to a guilty conscience, yet the preacher's function is to stir up the conscience. The preacher does not work initially in relation to the affections, he works in relation to the conscience because the conscience awakens men and women and young people to a sense of need and thus drives them to the Lord. Beloved, when you have been driven to the Lord and have called out "Lord save me", then you will know that you have been saved: not saved because you know doctrine, not saved because you can preach doctrine, but saved because you have found the necessity of the Lord as you began to sink.

Now it may be that this afternoon there are those here who need to make this cry now. They need to make it for rest in themselves. We take account sometimes of the distress into which people get, nervous, mental and all that kind of thing, disturbed and anxious and not really knowing what the cause is. It may be that they have not found that they needed Christ, and if they had had Him, then they would have found what settled their peace for ever.

Beloved, if you are in any sense disturbed or restless or unsatisfied, you are beginning to sink, but as you begin to sink it is not too late to cry. What overwhelms people in the end, what the conscience eventually has to bring out into the mind and heart of man, is the fact that man has offended against God and in God's eyes is a sinner. If you ask people in the world what sin is they will say the things that are not acceptable with the customary morality of the day, or something like that. People in these days will not even have an

absolute standard of what is moral. I do trust that our beloved young people, and the older ones too, are not corrupted by the tendency to dilute the sense of what is moral that is prevalent in the present world. If any beloved persons here are so corrupted, then what you need to cry is "Lord save me", and you need to cry it urgently because once the enemy has got advantage over you by diluting the sense of right and wrong he has an advantage which he will play to the uttermost.

If anyone finds that the enemy is getting an advantage over them in regard to what is right and wrong, cry now "Lord save me". It is not too late. You are only beginning to sink. There is time still to cry out to the Lord to save you.

The light of the gospel and the light of God brings home to the heart of man that man is away from God and has offended against God, has done things which are disagreeable to God, and that God is the final arbiter of right and wrong. I just use again an illustration which I have used before, for sometimes illustrations are effective, especially if they are in every day language, and every day things.

You often find as you find here, that there are lights up towards the ceiling. There is a light up there. Suppose it was lowered towards you. As it was lowered towards you things would be manifested in you that are not manifested in you when it is about twenty-five feet above you. While the light is that distance above you things are not manifested as they would be if the light was nearer to you, but bring the light nearer and things will come out. Then as the light comes nearer, suppose that it is not just the light in the ceiling but that it becomes the light of God. There the light of God comes, and instead of it just being the light which illuminates the room it is a light that shines into your conscience and reveals things there exactly as they are. The one essential feature of the preaching is that people should be brought into the light of God and see themselves exactly as they are. You will not have any more excuses to make then, no more things to be covered up, no more reasons given, no more half-truths to conceal what was done on this occasion or that occasion, no more wriggling away, as it were, behind the trees of the garden in

order to conceal what has been disagreeable to God. There is yourself and the light of God and no escape. You know you are as it were caught, I could even use the word cornered, the light of God shining in your conscience and you there unable to escape from that light. It reveals you to yourself as you are in the sight of God. Suppose that this afternoon you were actually, to your own immediate apprehension, in the light of God instead of realising you are just sitting in a room here as the preaching of the gospel is going on, what would that bring out in your soul? Would it bring out that you could look into that light with unhindered gaze? If it would, then you no longer need to cry "Lord, save me", unless day by day, but if it brings out that there are things inconsistent with the glory of that light that shines on you then you need to cry "Lord save me". And save me from what? - save me from the penalty which must come upon me on account of the condition in which I am, because if God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, He must have the authority and capacity to judge evil and to put it away from His sight. The One who is of purer eyes than to behold it must have the capacity and the power to put it away from His sight, and that for ever; and one day He will do that. One element in the gospel that is most frequently left out in these days is preaching about eternal judgment and about hell. One is not here to preach about these things, but they are real, and the eternal judgment of God against sin is something that those who die not believing the gospel will have to face and will have to endure for ever in the place which God has prepared for such persons.

But God is sending out the preaching in order that people might be saved and that they might be saved from the penalty of their sins. I shall say more about what you may be saved from, but you may be saved from the penalty of your sins. As soon as Peter cried Jesus was there. As soon as he cried out "Lord, save me" it says "immediately Jesus" - Jesus was there: Jesus - God Himself having come into man's condition, God manifest in flesh, in order that He might undertake the resolution of these questions of sin and of sins, of right and wrong and of good and evil which lie between God and

man, which demand an answer from man to God. Jesus has come in to resolve them when it has been shown in the history that is set out for us in the Bible that man is completely unable to resolve these questions himself. Give him the most favourable conditions, put him in Eden, say, You can do what you like except this, and he does the thing that he is forbidden. Put him under law 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not', and the things that he 'shall do' he does not do, and the things that he 'shall not do' he does. Put man under kings and he rebels, first of all choosing a king who never could reign according to God. Put him under judges and he does what is right in his own eyes. Set him in the land and he uses it for his own advantage.

Send him into captivity and he blames God. All these things bring out the actual state of man, who can do nothing to save himself.

Man must cry "Lord, save me". Beloved, have you cried that yet? Have you cried "Lord, save me", feeling the necessity of Christ to the soul, realised when the soul knows that it is a sinner? Have you felt the absolute inescapable necessity of having Christ, having Jesus? It says "Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand". See, immediately there was the cry, there was the answer.

Jesus had come, as I say, into the condition of man, man as he was - sin apart, not knowing it and not doing it - Himself coming into man's condition in order that He might undertake every thing that lay on man on account of man's sin and man being away from God. He had come into this condition in order that He might bear what would resolve the whole of these issues between God and man, and for that purpose it was necessary that He should die, that He should shed His blood. The shed blood was a token that His life was given up, and the blood makes atonement for the soul. He Himself bore God's judgment on the cross, bearing it where you and I should have borne it. He is there as a propitiation for our sins in order that God's righteous wrath against sin might be fully met, but He is there as a substitute for everyone who believes that He is the propitiation. Beloved, have you found Jesus like that? Do you believe that He was there meeting for God everything that God's righteousness required, meeting the whole thing from God's side in relation to the departure and iniquity of man? As you believe on Him can you say

that He was there in your place? "*He* is the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world", 1 John 2: 2.

The righteousness of God being "towards all" is "upon all those who believe", Rom 3: 22. You may have Christ as a substitute for your sins if you believe that He bore the wrath of God in order that all that God is might be met in regard of what you are in your sins. The gospel as it comes conveys to you that Christ is available to you this afternoon, and He is very, very near to you. I do not need to go over a catalogue of sins in the hope that one of them will strike a spark in your conscience that that is the point at which you need Him. All I need to do is to urge you to get into the presence of God and find there what your actual condition is and what the necessities of your soul are. Immediately you discover what the necessities of your soul are you will cry "Lord, save me" and you may well cry it because He *can* save you, and you may well cry it because He is the only One who *can* save you. "Neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved", Acts 4: 12.

You can be saved in the power of our Lord Jesus Christ as you believe on Him.

I wonder if everyone here has had, at some time, some personal relationship with Christ in relation to his sins. I am not speaking about knowing the gospel or knowing the doctrine or knowing what the brethren hold, or anything like that; I am speaking about your personal transactions with Christ. Let me say this, that you can scarcely be one of the brethren unless you have had the reality of this transaction with Christ. If you are to know what the reality of that dignified title is, it requires that you have first had to do with Him as the One who can save you. When Peter cried out, immediately Jesus stretched out His hand, and as you cry out "Lord, save me" immediately He will stretch out His hand. He will stretch out a hand to you that no longer bears the marks of His sufferings, but a hand which has borne the suffering, hands which were once nailed to the cross in order that, there, He might bear the judgment of God and all that was due to me and to you, bearing our sins in His body on the tree, nailed to that cross. His hands now, in spite of

what some hymns may say, no longer bear the marks of His sorrow and His suffering, but the hand that He stretched out to Peter was the hand that was about to go to the cross and be nailed there. The hand that He will stretch out to you is the hand that was once nailed to the cross, now to be taken account of in a body of glory in which there is no mark or defect. The hand that He stretches out to you is the same hand that was once nailed to the cross and beloved as you cry "Lord, save me" and as He stretches out His hand, you will have the sense of infinite love being extended towards you. As He said to the woman, "Neither do I condemn thee" (John 8: 11), He says that as He stretches out His hand. You cry "Lord, save me" and He will stretch out His hand and will say "Neither do I condemn thee". I have not gone on to read of His chiding Peter about being of little faith; I do not want to speak about that. The least amount of faith that cries "Lord, save me" will bring salvation. He stretches out a hand that was once nailed to the cross, having borne judgment there. He bears these marks no more. As He went into heaven He stretched out His hands in blessing, and it is in a hand stretched out in blessing that He would answer the cry of everyone, "Lord, save me". That cry does not come from a sense of knowledge but from a sense of need. Persons who have accepted the gospel because they knew that they needed it are the persons that will go through.

The persons who will continue in the testimony of the Christ, the persons who will stand here, who will remain here, who will confess His name, who will confess that He is Lord, they are the persons who will keep the fire burning that we spoke about last night - persons who have embraced Christ out of need.

Jesus will save you from the penalty of your sins; certainly He will do that. The day when He will be manifested is yet to come, the day when He will take away the sin of the world is yet to be known.

He will save you also at the present time from the power of sin. How many of us, even believers, have felt the power of sin and have felt ourselves beginning to sink, even as believers? The way out of that feeling of beginning to sink, again, is to cry "Lord, save me". Do you get into a situation of temptation? Perhaps you got there

through your own fault. Perhaps you thought things did not matter and you went on a step further and a step further and a step further and you found that you were beginning to sink, that you were about to do something you knew was wrong. The thing to do is to cry "Lord, save me", and if there is more than one of you in it, cry it together, "Lord, save me", and you will find that Jesus stretches out His hand and you are saved from things of whose guilt you may never feel you can shake yourself free. He has borne the guilt of our sins before God, but you may have things on your conscience because you did not, when you might have cried "Lord, save me".

One thing that we need, and I would say one thing that beloved young believers need, is the knowledge of when we are beginning to sink, and the courage then, out of necessity, to cry "Lord, save me".

What a tragedy it is to see the lives of young believers ruined because, when they might have, they did not cry "Lord, save me" and find that Jesus stretched out His hand and they were clear of the temptation which was beginning to overwhelm them. Let me tell you this out of my own experience, beloved young people, that the rate of progress of temptation is geometrical; that is, every moment is a multiple of the previous moment. Temptation progresses in geometrical progression, not just arithmetical with a little bit more added and a little bit more. Temptation proceeds geometrically. I am sure all the young people here understand old maths, even if I do not understand modern maths. Temptation proceeds with each moment a multiple of what the preceding moment was. Then cry "Lord, save me" before you have got deeper into the thing than you feel you can be delivered from. Even however deep you are, when you cry "Lord, save me" you will find that He stretches out His hand. He has stretched out His hand in goodness and in blessing, for not only has He died for our sins and shed His blood to make atonement before God, but through Him God has poured out the Holy Spirit. He has given the Holy Spirit to those who believe, out of the goodness of His hand, the hand that was outstretched.

He has given the Holy Spirit in order that we may have power to live here for Him, in measure to be like Him. How little we are like

Him, but He has given the Holy Spirit in order that we might be here in some measure of the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, known and manifested in testimony. We await the day when this corruptible will put on incorruptibility, but in the power of the Holy Spirit we have the power to keep ourselves pure and free from sin even in this present mixed condition in which we are.

Well, beloved, I did not want to be long. I do not really preach long at the end of three day meetings, for the brethren have been together for quite some time. All I want to do is to leave some impression on your soul that necessity, necessity of conscience or necessity of circumstances or necessity of temptation, might drive you to Jesus, and if you will cry "Lord, save me" you will find that immediately Jesus will stretch out His hand. Beloved, He would stretch it out to you.

GLASGOW

23 April 1978

THE CHILDREN'S HOPE

Scripture tells us that the believer's hope is "an anchor of the soul, both secure and firm". It is secure because - like a ship's anchor made of strong and flawless materials - it will not in itself fail; it is firm because of being perfectly grounded so that its hold cannot slip in any way. Christ Jesus, a glorious Man in a glorious place, is our hope and we are always looking for His coming to take us to Himself. Meanwhile this hope does not make us ashamed in our outward witness and should purify us inwardly even as He is pure.

Whereas our mortal body links us with a passing scene, in pulling on the anchor of hope set before us we find ourselves in spirit in the secret of God's holy presence. Jesus is there who once suffered and died on the cross at a place called "Skull" in order that we might have our secure and eternal place with Him in glory. He entered there for us as "Forerunner", a word meaning one who hastens ahead to search out and prepare a suitable place for others. How this dignifies even the youngest of His saints!

Mere human hope is neither secure nor firm. Many people will say that they hope to be saved and go to heaven. In saying this they are either ignorant of God's word or, far worse, disbelieve it. The simplest or youngest believer has no need or right merely to *hope* for forgiveness, justification, salvation and heaven. But he *knows* that his sins are forgiven for the name of Jesus; that every one that believes in Him is justified; that he is saved by grace through faith; and that he is waiting to go to be with the Lord, a more scriptural thought than going to heaven.

A young student, brought under the power of the word of God, told the preacher that he hoped he was saved, but if he had any difficulty could he come and see him. Next morning he called saying that he could find no proof of being saved. The preacher pointed out that the student had not asked for a proof of his readiness to see him - why then should he look for a further token of God's readiness to bless? How about the reader? Do you take Him at His word that whosoever believes on the Son has life eternal?

J.C.Evershed