

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 5

July 1973

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OUR RELATIONS WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

A.J.E.Welch

Acts 7: 55, 56; 10: 19, 20; 20: 8

No doubt the thoughts of many of us have lingered a good deal over the emphasis that has come among us in the past two weeks as to the Holy Spirit. The Lord would strengthen our faith as to what the blessed Spirit is immediately able for. We have often quoted the comforting word that John gives us, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world", 1 John 4: 4. But in this remarkable book that we have read from faith can seize the extended proof of what is here in the Spirit. The need is real as we read the scriptures to seize the bearing of whole sections of scripture, whole books of scripture; if we take the scope of this history in the Acts the impression is left of a course of things that is totally dominant over everything that stands against it. In the course of the history the Roman power, the civil powers, come into expression from time to time, (Luke reminds us of such things in his histories), but where do they compare with the history of the testimony of God as it takes a triumphal course through these early years of the time of the Spirit? Where were men like the men that this book brings forward? Where were the human agencies that would produce men like Peter, John, Stephen, Paul, Timothy and many more? All this stands related to the presence and work of the Spirit, and the Spirit as we know Him is the same Spirit. Speaking with reverence, the passing of time and the change of outward circumstances do not change the blessed Spirit; He is the same Spirit of whose manifestations we read so richly in this book. Where is all this going on? Is it in public evidence? In general, it is not. It is going on very largely in the secret histories of men and of local assemblies. Not all is secret, of course. God shows from time to time, especially in this matter of Stephen what the Spirit is equal for in our testimonial relations. That is not just in what is said, but in the kind and quality of manhood that is called attention to by the circumstances that arise.

Stephen was a remarkable person, for he was not an apostle. It is something to be thought about that such a remarkable manifestation of the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Jesus in suffering, was according to divine wisdom not brought out in one of the apostles. No doubt it was brought out later in the apostles who suffered martyrdom, but at this point it was brought out in a man who is said to have been full of the Holy Spirit. He was a man who is thoroughly in control of the whole situation as it affects him. So that it says he "fixed his eyes on heaven", a remarkable expression calling attention to something that Stephen did; he "fixed his eyes on heaven", a man in remarkable composure in suffering. How could it be? He was a man full of the Holy Spirit. Luke records that fact as if he would say to us, that is enough. If that can be said of any man, that is enough. That man will stand in any situation if it can be said of him that he is full of the Holy Spirit. And what ensues in Stephen's case just brings it out. I am impressed with the bearing of this on our individual histories. Things assembly-wise were not, it would seem, developed much in Stephen's time. This incident would reflect the depth, the distinctiveness, of this man's history with God. He would have learned the distinctive way in which Christ had been set forth in Peter's testimony, God having made this Jesus "both Lord and Christ", Acts 2: 36. That is a fine expression which conveys to us the settled commitment of the blessed God to what is established in an exalted Christ, involving that there is no change up there. The Spirit coming from an exalted Christ would further involve that which does not change down here: it is a Person of the Godhead who is here with divine power and divine grace to sustain everything as God Himself would have it to be.

I call attention to Stephen to bring out the side of individual history, the place that an exalted Christ and the Person of the blessed Spirit are to have with everyone of us so that we are made equal to the exigencies of the testimony if the Lord should leave us just a little longer.

Peter in chapter 10 represents a remarkable adjustment, and the scope of the chapter is most affecting in reminding us how God

is working, how He uses agencies which are at His disposal. He coordinates everything, so that the tiniest detail of event fits into place. Things are going on in men. This is not a public exhibition of what is taking place. Great things are going on in men: great things are happening in a house, the house of Cornelius, a committed house, reminding us of the place that a house is to have. Peter was in a house where he could go on the housetop to pray; that is something to be borne in our minds, how the normally restful, peaceful circumstances of our households are to be used, and how the Spirit would come into them. He went to the housetop to be free for the Spirit to affect him, and Peter was deliberate in doing that, as the history shows. It is a great need for us, beloved brethren, to be definite in seeking opportunities that the Spirit might affect us, that our links with Christ may be built up in the reality of undisturbed and undistracted communion with Himself and with the Spirit . Peter clearly had a real understanding, of that, and it laid a basis for a great deal that followed.

So the Spirit comes into this matter with Peter. "Peter doubted in himself what the vision which he had seen might mean". What do things mean, dear brethren? If a word comes to us, if the Lord comes in among us, if there is some fresh disclosure as to the truth, or some fresh and choice disclosure of glory of Christ, what does it mean? We are intended to be affected by all these things; things that happen are to affect us. They are not working out in the public view, in this connection. There is the public side of what is sustained in righteousness, and sustained in confession of the Lord's name, and in faithfulness to His word, under the eye of men, and before the authorities. But these things are going on in the relatively secluded relationships of Cornelius's house and Peter's history. Where are we looking for the fruits of the Spirit's service? Among those who love Christ. Fruits of the Spirit's service appear in lovers of Christ coming to light as the word is preached, too, but things here focus on the way Peter is being affected by the Spirit in view of this remarkable change in the course of the testimony, for which Peter is being fully and carefully prepared. This is a great adjustment for

Peter; there is a new extension of God's working in men as the testimony goes out to the Gentiles. In Cornelius's house the Spirit falls upon those who are present, evidencing the full thought in the mind of God, and making way eventually for the Pauline testimony and all that comes into it.

So it says, "as Peter continued pondering over the vision". How pleasing that was to the Lord! He pondered over it. "The Spirit said to him, Behold, three men seek thee; but rise up, go down, and go with them, nothing doubting, because I have sent them". The whole situation is falling into place; not a detail is out of place, but Peter is to be brought into full sympathy with what God is doing in the course of this magnificent testimony by this touch of the Spirit upon him. We are to realise, dear brethren, how the Spirit is here in charge of things in the most intimate way, having to do with matters, having to do with saints and having to do with servants as they are dependent in this service, to carry everything forward in its due place. There is a noticeable emphasis in this section of the book on the accuracy with which things are presented; we note the clarity of the impressions that come to Peter and the accuracy with which (as in chapter 11) he goes over the impressions he received. Notice the precise correspondence between what the Spirit relates in chapter 10 and what Peter relates in chapter 11, showing how Peter had an accurate grasp by the Spirit of the whole situation as he had been shown it. Peter fills certain key relations in the testimony at this time of which we have read. Are we ready to go forward intelligently in the peculiar moment in which God has set us? We are to be clear as to what He has in mind, understanding that the situation that has arisen is not an emergency situation from God's viewpoint: He has His hand over it, and the Spirit being here, He may be relied on to keep us clear and accurate and safe as we go on in what is precious to Him.

I read of Paul in chapter 20 just to touch the remarkable unfoldings of the heavenly side in this beloved servant. What a vessel of the Spirit Paul was! In the word "where we were assembled" the 'we' conveys the conscious tangibility of something

in which Luke personally had his place; "we were assembled". Paul's ministry had taken a productive course. What a traveller he was. How widely the word and the influence of that beloved servant was in divine ordering spread through this continent of Europe, the south of it anyway. It is very instructive to see how the Spirit spreads the testimony, especially in Paul, and how local assemblies are secured, though not without conflict. Let us fit that into our own time the Spirit of God, though it be not an inaugural time, is holding to the great thought of the assembly, and of local assemblies, in which there is something in tangible expression of what the Spirit would maintain in true assembly character to the end. This was a very auspicious company, according to what is related earlier; different brothers are named as being present in Troas, and the circumstances here are worthy of close study. Mr Taylor reminded us that Troas has a prophetic bearing on the whole end of the dispensation, so that the raising up of Eutychus would encourage us as to young people and what God is able to do even yet, and do quickly. I mention that in passing, but this scene at Troas is a most stimulating scene as to the way in which God will cause things to reach a finish that affords something for Himself. "And there were many lights in the upper room where we were assembled". It reminds us of the auspiciousness of these assemblings. There is nothing here according to the record of which man's world took account; the point is what such an occasion is under the eye of heaven. One seems to detect, in reading the scripture, a certain sense of delight with the Spirit as He indites it calling attention to this occasion and what was taking place, who was there and how the Pauline ministry was taking its course.

So the Spirit, dear brethren, would lead us on to that, to what we can rightly speak of as assembly ground. We will not disregard the public conditions, feeling them rightly, as the Spirit Himself feels them, but understanding that God is going through with His every thought, to secure it against what is contrary and to secure it in its own true character because the Spirit of God is here in the assembly.

These things are to strengthen us, to stimulate us, and to urge us on in our links with the Spirit, to be ready under His hand for whatever the testimony may yet bring. May the Lord help us in that, for His Name's sake.

London

13th March 1973

THE TESTIMONY OF GOD

P.H.Buchan

1 Timothy 2: 4-6; 2 Timothy 1: 8-10

It is on one's heart, as the Spirit of God may afford help, to call attention to the testimony of God as it is presented in the glad tidings; for what God is going to display in all its glory in the world to come, He first presents in testimony to men, and that in view of their blessing. It is a wonderful thing to think of this testimony going forward in our time; it is the only thing that can meet the needs of the human heart. So you can understand the importance of the testimony of God being presented. Someone may ask, "What is the testimony?" God's testimony stands related to a blessed Man in Whom He has found absolute satisfaction and Who affords Him infinite delight - unalloyed delight God has found in one Man. And in that Man, all that He has in blessing for man is available. Wonderful to think of that! "Our Saviour God ... desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. For God is one, and the Mediator of God and men one, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, the testimony to be rendered in its own times." And we are in a moment when the Spirit of God is presenting in testimony all that is available in blessing for men, all that is in the heart of God! Think of the blessedness of it.

As we reflect on who God is, the incorruptible, invisible, only God, Who, it says, "only has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen nor can see," 1 Tim 6: 16. Think of the infinitude of the blessed God. Think of who He is in the glory of His own Being, the eternal God. "Heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee," 2 Chron 6: 18. God is a Spirit and as a Spirit He is everywhere. Think of eternity, think of space. As we think of these things, how small the mind is - incapable of taking it in - but God bounds space, He bounds eternity. So everything is under His eye. We cannot evade having to do with God, the eternal God. Such a God is a Saviour God - wonderful thing! - dwelling in light

unapproachable and as to His essential Being we will never be able to fathom who He is, for God, as to the glory of His own Being, will ever remain in inscrutability. But the wonderful thing is that He is a God of love and He desires to be known in all the glory of His own love. While we cannot approach God in absolute Deity, He has approached us in a Man. That is the testimony God is presenting to men, a Saviour God. Oh, think of it - "This Man", think of the greatness of it. "This Man receives sinners," Luke 15: 2. Thank God for that. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God," Rom 3: 23. On account of the sin of one man, sin entered into the world and death by sin; thus death has passed upon all men for all have sinned.

Did you ever raise the query in your mind, Why do we die? Death is God's penalty on account of sin, and sin is lawlessness and that - the assertion of my will against God - demands the necessity of that penalty. Think of what sin is. We may trifle with it, but sin is no light matter. It is not merely an ugly word on page of scripture. Sin is a vile reality and the punishment, the penalty, of sin is death. How is all this to be met? Just in a Saviour God. God has devised means by which His banished one may not be expelled and the glad tidings is the means. I can understand Job saying, "Oh that there were arbitration for a man with God as a son of man for his friend," Job 16: 21 - one "who should lay his hand upon us both," Job 9: 33. Job says there is not an umpire between us; but that is just what God has provided. He has come in in a Man. Think of that. "Our Saviour God desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, for God is one, and the Mediator of God and men one, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself." Is there anything more attractive than that a Man should come out from God, as to His Person none less than "over all, God blessed for ever," Rom 9: 5, but coming within our range in manhood, just to take up the whole question of our guilt and responsibility, bringing in in Himself all the moral excellence requisite for taking up all that we are vicariously, and discharging it in a way in which God has been absolutely glorified in relation to sin. Is it not worthwhile knowing

such a Saviour? Oh how attractive Jesus is! I can well understand these persons saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them". Think how near, how very near, God has come as Saviour God.

Just look at Him in Luke 7. There is a woman there, a sinner of the city, who knowing that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, came in behind Him, carrying an alabaster flask of ointment of myrrh and, it says, she began to wash His feet with her tears and she wiped them with the hairs of her head. She kissed those feet and she anointed them with the myrrh. Do you think that the Lord was indifferent to that woman's need. Think of the attraction of the Saviour. Only He can meet the needs of the human heart. He alone can meet the whole question of sin and that woman, instinctively, I believe, as the result of the work of God, says there is no other who can meet my need. And she ventures into the heartless atmosphere of the Pharisee's house, and there, behind Jesus, those tears fell on those blessed feet. What a refreshment to Him! This is not mere history, dear friends. I call attention to it because this is the way God is working out subjectively the truth of the gospel. Have we come into the gain of it? Think how that woman valued those feet. And there is Simon, quite indifferent; he says, If this Man were a prophet He would know what character of woman this is, for she is a sinner - think of that - if this man were a prophet. "The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus," Rev 19: 10. Think of the blessed Holy Spirit of God here, bringing forward in testimony and in grace and power the truth that God has come in in a Man in Jesus, just to meet us in all our need. So turning to Simon He says, "Seest thou this woman?" Simon, just look at this woman, He says. I entered into thy house, thou gavest me no water: this woman has washed my feet with tears. Thou gavest me no kiss, but she from the time I came in has not ceased kissing my feet. Thou didst not anoint my head with oil but she has anointed my feet with myrrh. For which cause, He says, her many sins are forgiven. Oh precious thought! Her many sins are forgiven; for she loved much.

The gospel is to secure a personal living attachment to that blessed Man Who has come in on behalf of God to save poor sinners such as you and me. I am very much concerned about our dear young ones, that they may have a personal transaction with Jesus. He is just as available tonight as He was then and He is prepared to meet us in all our need. This is vital because it forms the informal link with this glorious Person, but that link, once established develops an affection for Jesus that can never be broken. There is a link established in love that goes through to eternity. That is what the gospel is for - to secure an answer to the way God has come in in Christ in the salvation of man. How precious that is. I love to reflect on this because scripture says she loved much, but he to whom little is forgiven loves little, Luke 7: 47. Have you some sense of the immensity of what you have been forgiven? I think I can align myself with Paul. He says "Faithful is the word, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first," 1 Tim 1: 15. Can you ally yourself with Paul in that? I can understand why Paul was such a lover of Christ because, once this initial link is established in the conscious sense of forgiveness, there is a love promoted that can appreciate the glory of the Man who has met us in all our need. There were those present there who said, "Who is this who forgives sins?" That is God's prerogative to forgive sins.

But Who was there? Little did they realise that He who is over all, God blessed for ever, has come within the range of man. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not reckoning to them their offences, 2 Cor 5: 19. Not that they are not recorded, because all those sins I have committed have already been recorded in heaven but I can look to the blood of Jesus as the means by which my sins are gone for ever. They are gone for ever before God. You can understand then the infinite preciousness of the blood of Christ; it will never lose its eternal value and efficacy before God. It will ever remain eternally the basis on which forgiveness of sins has been based. That is a wonderful thing. Now we can understand how

important this initial link with Jesus is. They say, "Who is this who forgives sins?" Little did they realise God was there.

But I was going to remark, "What about those sins?" If they have not been met they are recorded in those books above. Perhaps you did not realise that God keeps records in heaven. All those sins are recorded. He is not imputing them, thank God. It is not the day in which God is imputing sins, but they are recorded and they will stand as a witness against you in that day if you appear before the great white throne. Why not then have this personal transaction with a living Man and have those sins removed in the value of the blood of the Lamb? I love to think of that. He has gone to Calvary. He Himself has borne our sins in His own body on the tree, One who was infinitely perfect. Think of the perfection of the Man. He who knew not sin, God made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Think of what was entailed in that transaction. Was it a light matter that He who knew not sin should be made sin? Think of the absolute perfection of Jesus. Think of the stainless perfection of a Man who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth, and yet He became the sacrifice for sins to meet the whole sin question and remove it before God. Forgiveness is available for everyone here tonight, even the youngest. Oh, dear young ones, I plead with you. Just have a personal transaction with Jesus. It becomes infinitely delightful. I can speak from experience. Nothing has afforded me greater joy than from early childhood to know personally a living Man whom I can address freely and to know that love from which I can never be separated. Oh what a friend we have in Jesus. Having gone into death, having been delivered for our offences, He has been raised for our justification and now a risen Man is the witness to the settlement of the question of our sins for ever. Think of being justified before God, and being justified, we have peace with God. You see the blessings that are available, not merely forgiveness, not merely justification, but the blessedness of conscious peace with God and the gift of the Spirit; for, "this Jesus has God raised up ... having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God ... he has

poured out this which ye behold and hear," Acts 2: 32, 33. Think of the Spirit of God here as witness and affording testimony in the consciences of men to the fact that there is a Man in heaven, Who is being presented tonight in testimony.

Now Paul says to Timothy his child, "Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor of me His prisoner but suffer evil along with the glad tidings." Are you prepared to identify yourself with the testimony of God? What a privilege! There was a young girl who got blessing on her death bed and while perfectly happy in the consciousness of forgiveness she turned to her sister and said, 'I have one regret that I can never be identified publicly now with the testimony of Jesus. 'Oh', she said, 'cleave to Christ'. That is it. Cleave to the Man. "Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor of me His prisoner." Are you prepared for the limitations that this may imply. The question of separation from evil constantly comes up, but do you recognise the Lord's authority? Are you prepared to come now under the authority of One Who has complete rights over us? He has established those rights. He has rights in creation but think of Him going into death to establish rights in redemption. The knowledge of that secures a person eternally for His pleasure and as we are subject to the Lord, we will have one desire and that is to be found here, giving place to the Spirit so that there are reproduced now the moral features that were seen in Jesus. It may be in suffering. "Suffer evil along with the glad tidings according to the power of God who has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works," oh no! It is pure, simple grace that God has taken us up for eternal blessing. "Called you to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, when ye have suffered for a little while, Himself shall make perfect, stablish strengthen, ground," 1 Peter 5: 10. You want to be in the gain now of what ,God has in blessing for us, "not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which He has purposed in Christ Jesus." The Holy Spirit is engaging us with Christ in His present position there, a glorified Man in final conditions, and God is operating to conform His people morally with that glorious Man. I can see the importance of being found here in the testimony,

simply setting forth the glory of the Man Who is exalted above. That is soon to come out in public manifestation in the world to come. Presently the testimony is in suffering but oh the blessedness of enjoying in fulness what God has available to us in the glad tidings.

So it says here, "given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time but has been made manifest now by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ who has annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings." What fulness there is. "Who has annulled death." Some of us have had to race the reality of death, a very solemn and affecting thing, but this blessed Person has complete control over that domain. Christ died and lived again in order, it says, that He may rule over both dead and living, Rom 14: 9. There is a Man in complete control of the domain of death. If we are called to face the actuality of death, and some here have experienced that, think of the blessedness of only passing out of time into the immediate presence of One who has loved us, to share the blessedness in His very presence and the consciousness of that love that was witnessed in going into death. Wonderful thing! "Who has annulled death and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings". All this has in view a system of life. God has life in view for man, not judgment. Think of the fulness of the glad tidings - "brought life and incorruptibility to light by the glad tidings", because He is going to have a system marked by love and what is morally incorruptible.

That is working out today in a vessel that loves our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption. Oh may we have some insight into the greatness of what is available to us in blessing in the glad tidings that, as identified with the testimony here publicly, and as giving place to the Spirit, we may know something of the reality and the blessedness of a system that is incorruptible and in which there are incorruptible affections operating. God is going to secure this in His people because He must have an answer to Him who has glorified God in death.

May it be so for His Name's sake.

Grangemouth

22nd April 1973

FAITHFULNESS

SUMMARY OF READING with A.A.Bellamy

Numbers 12: 6-8; Luke 12: 42-45; Acts 16: 12-15

We might encourage one another on the line of faithfulness from these Scriptures. Faithfulness is not a gift; it is within the scope of every one of us to be faithful. It is not quite the same as faith, though linked with it. Faith is light in the soul from God. Faithfulness means that we are true to the light that God has given us. Paul says three times in writing to the Corinthians that God is faithful. This is a great stay to the soul, and we can always retreat from the arena of our own unfaithfulness into that of God's faithfulness.

Moses has the divine commendation that he was faithful in all God's house. A great deal of the failure which we all have to acknowledge is because of the loss of the sense of being in God's house. Moses' faithfulness has two bearings, first, in the construction of the tabernacle there was no departure from the pattern (this we must be vigilant about constantly), then, second, his conduct was becoming to the presence of God among His people when he took the tent and pitched it outside the camp. "Faithful in all my house" involves detail - how easily we may pass over things which we regard as minimal, but the greatest attention to detail is called for on account of the charge that is committed to us. Hananiah had the charge of the city, Neh 7: 2; he was a faithful man and feared God above many. We can only be in fellowship on that principle.

There is plenty of garbage around with which we could occupy ourselves but the psalmist says, "Dwell in the land and feed on faithfulness", Psalm 37: 3. In Numbers 11: 4 the cry is, "Who will give us flesh to eat?" That was what the people wanted and it says God "gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul," Ps 106: 15. The quality of manhood in Moses is related to his appreciation of the manna - "the man Moses was very meek." We need to cultivate the taste for the manna - Christ, in Whom every

feature of faithfulness is seen in its moral greatness. Jehovah speaking mouth to mouth with Moses really gives the explanation of his faithfulness. It is not merely a strong personality meeting all opposition, but a man in conscious links with God. We cannot be in the testimony without something which corresponds to that.

The Lord commends the faithfulness of the saints in Philadelphia more than that of those at Ephesus. The letters to the assemblies are interesting in the references to faithfulness - "be thou faithful unto death," Rev 2: 10; "Antipas my faithful witness", v 13; and then in regard to Laodicea the Lord Himself takes up the matter because of the unfaithfulness of what professes His Name and speaks as the "faithful and true witness," Rev 3: 14.

Moses seems to be beyond his dispensation in his intimacy with God. God has the prerogative to give light to any one beyond the dispensation in which they live. David and Abraham also experienced this, but what about ourselves? What impressions do we have now of what is eternal, outside the whole order of time? When we have to do with God this is what we experience. The Lord has much to open up to us, not in the way of revelation exactly, for the word of God was completed by Paul, but the truth takes on a vitality and freshness where the state in our souls is equal to it. This was the secret which enabled Moses to bear with these people for forty years in the desert and eventually to come to be recognised as king in Jeshurun. Yet how severe God was with His servant - allowing him to see the land but not to go into it. Behold then the goodness and severity of God!

These chapters, 11 to 16 of Numbers, are most encouraging despite the terrible exposure of what the flesh is. To think of these two men who stood against the majority in bearing witness to the characters of the land in chapter 14, and then to think of coming into "the land of your dwellings", chapter 15, is most stimulating. In many localities we are down to very small numbers, yet there is a kind of tenacity and a consciousness that we belong to the assembly, which is indestructible. No one is thinking of giving up. The number of persons is not the point. Would you not rather have a handful of

faithful persons than a hundred unfaithful persons; or a thousand, or ten thousand? Let us get our standards right. The Lord's Supper is the crux of this matter. We are thankful if persons come to the preaching but the test of their fidelity is whether they partake of the Lord's Supper. How a believer can regard lightly what the Lord said "this do in remembrance of me" is hard to understand, yet many do.

The Lord's coming in Luke 12 is not a dispensational idea - "if he come in the second watch and come in the third watch", verse 38, is repetitive - I am coming to you. What does He find? Who then is the faithful and prudent steward? The line of continuity is important because some have had the thought that past history should be cancelled and that there should be a new beginning. This supposes that we can produce a revival as required. You might use Nehemiah to support this idea, that is the responsible side, but you cannot fit it into Ezra. Ezra sets out the sovereign side, Jehovah stirring up the spirits of certain persons with a view to the revival. No man can produce that - God must act initially. That in no way reduces our responsibility, indeed it increases it. God has acted and we have to align ourselves with what He has done. Who is the faithful and prudent steward? The Lord is raising the challenge.

There is the added quality here of prudence, spiritual prudence. "Holding gain to be the end of piety" will lead quickly to Laodicea, but "that I may gain Christ" will lead to Philadelphia. Prudence means that you calculate spiritually, not as in John 6 where there seemed to be so little for so many, but you gauge the capacity and minister accordingly. The prudent and faithful steward gives the measure of corn in season. But where does he get it? "He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed" to "succour him that is weary," Isaiah 50: 4. This bondman is blessed because he was doing this. It is persons who are doing such things who become more serviceable to the Lord; in Antioch "as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting" the Holy Spirit spoke. In Luke 24: 34 "they were gathered together and saying the Lord is risen indeed", then He was there among them.

Lydia is a peculiar sample of the work of God in refinement. She sets out quality subjectively, and humility. She does not claim to be faithful but leaves the judgment whether this is so with the brethren. This has no doubt a bearing on the sisterhood but it also has a wider bearing on the whole matter of what is subjective amongst us at the present time. The Lord opened Lydia's heart to attend to the things spoken by Paul. She would be a woman of action. The Lord is reviving and stressing the great importance of what Mr Taylor ministered as to the household supporting the assembly. Her household being baptised indicates a clear-cut severance from the world. What will there be for God in any locality if there is not separation from the world? How subtle the world is! How easily it can come in! A new dress or a new motor car might become an idol in your heart and come between you and the Lord Who bought you. Lydia would not have to make any last-minute adjustments before letting Paul in. Our houses ought to be open to such inspection if we are faithful to the Lord. Lydia was found by the river which connects with what is universal, for all the rivers run into the sea, Eccles 1: 7. You can well understand what the local assembly became in Philippi, what it was to Paul and what it was to heaven, with persons like this composing it.

Edinburgh

23rd March 1973

THE GRACE OF CHRIST

R. Johnston

Philippians 2: 19-21; Acts 7: 55-60.

I would like briefly to say a little about these two persons: Timothy, who was a young man, and it should be stimulating to young persons that the features of Christ, the Spirit of Christ, can shine out in them as well as in those that are older; and Stephen, who no doubt, was a young man. He comes on to view at a very critical time in the history of things in the assembly, and his time in the testimonial scene in that respect, publicly, is very short, and yet what shines out so wonderfully and prominently is the grace of Christ.

Timothy was a young man who needed stimulation, as many of us do, to get into things, to take on our responsibility to carry out things for the pleasure of Christ. So, Paul says to him, "Rekindle the gift that is within thee". He needed help to do this, as many of us do, to rekindle what has been in us but may be lying dormant at the present time. But there is in us what is wrought on by God, and we want to take account of that and not make little of what we have, little as it may be. It is the work of God and God would have us make use of what He has given us, and make it available in the testimony into which di vine grace has called us. So that Timothy is called upon here. As Paul says, "I hope to send Timothy to you shortly that I may know how ye get on". Think of the apostle's feelings in relation to these Philippian saints. What a wonderful assembly it was, and yet the apostle's desire was to see how they were getting on. It is a wonderful thing in a locality when you have got persons who are desirous to see how the saints are getting on. There has been much in the way of turning back and going away back as it says in John 6; those that went away back and walked no more with Him. How the Lord feels these things; how the Lord felt them at that time when He was here in His manhood, and yet the beloved apostle had to send Timothy to the Corinthians. Why did he send Timothy to the Corinthians? It was because he set out the features of Christ, the Spirit of Christ. He could have sent Titus there, who was perhaps a

little bolder and maybe more strong, a little stronger in the way he would present things; but he sends Timothy, and he sends Timothy here - at least he is about to send Timothy - to see how the saints are getting on. Why? Because he had no one like minded. There was no one like the apostle. Think of the Spirit of Christ that was set out in the apostle. In every move that he made, his attitude towards the Corinthians was that he should move toward them in the Spirit of Christ. And he recovers things on that line, and I think, beloved, we will be able in our localities to recover things if we are able to display the Spirit of Christ. God is looking for that.

God delights in this wonderful feature of the Spirit of Christ. I do not think we can define what the Spirit of Christ is; rather it is something that is demonstrated. I do not think we can put into words what the Spirit of Christ really is, but I think we know it when we see it displayed and demonstrated in persons. So the beloved apostle was just that; he wanted to display to these persons wherever he went the Spirit of Jesus Christ. So he says that he has no one like him, no one like minded who cares with genuine feeling. Think of the genuineness that entered into Timothy's desires to see how the saints were progressing in their souls. That is how we want it at the present time, we want to see the dear brethren progressing, moving forward in the truth, because the time is short for our entering into these things; but the Spirit of God is able to provide us with everything that is needed in order to get us into them. And so we have persons as examples for us, who set out these features, and he says, "All seek their own things". Think of that, how it must have affected the apostle when he said that "All seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ". Think of the beloved apostle at the end of Timothy, when he could write to Timothy about the persons who had turned away; he says, 'All have left me. Luke alone is with me. Demas has loved the present age'. Well, the apostle felt those things, and we feel it when persons turn away. But think how much more the Lord must feel it when persons turn away and walk no more with Him. So Paul felt it, but then he is encouraged in what he has in Timothy, and so he is looking for this kind of a feature to show

itself in one and another. The Lord is looking for it, you might say, currently, that this feature that Timothy displays should be seen amongst us. So he has no one like minded, no one but Timothy that has the same kind of a mind as himself to see how the saints get on; yet Timothy was a very timid person. You might have thought Timothy would be afraid to move into these various assemblies, but he was equipped because he had the Spirit of Jesus Christ. So the apostle encourages Timothy to go on in it (that is what his epistle is all about), in a dark time to stimulate things in Timothy in order that there should be what would be available after Paul's departure for the continuance of the testimony here. So he says, "All seek their own things". May it not be the portion of any of us, all seeking their own things. We were saying already today that Christ is to be the centre. If Christ is the centre as David was, I believe that we will be maintained in the testimony faithful to Christ right through to the end because the apostle says in Hebrews, "Looking unto Jesus the leader and completer of our faith". These features shine out in the saints, (let us keep our eyes on that and not on the failing side because it is so easy to be occupied with the failing side in one and another), but what we need to do, I believe, is to keep our eyes on Christ, the features of Christ as they shine in the saints, and the grace of Christ as it manifests itself among us.

Stephen is a remarkable man. Think of that feature as it was seen in Stephen. He was a man full of things; he was full of the Spirit, full of grace; and he comes on to the scene just at a needed time, and fills out his service in humility and in lowliness and in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And so when the time comes that he is called upon to speak, he is equipped for it. He is prepared for it, and he is able to set out in himself what was set out in Christ, because what Stephen is doing in this indictment of his is leading on to Christ, and showing in himself that this kind of thing is to continue. It is to be seen in persons that it is a thing that is living. You can do what you want in putting persons to death, but you will never put to death the Spirit of Christ. That will continue because God will see to it that it continues in the saints. And so Stephen begins in his indictment

with the God of glory appearing to our father Abraham, and he finishes up by seeing the glory of God. What a wonderful thing that is that we get a glimpse of the God of glory and then we see the glory of God. It is that that feature is to shine out in the saints. The glory of God is shining in the face of Jesus . Where does that shine now? I believe it shines in the saints. And so of Stephen, after his indictment, it says that "being full of the Holy Spirit, having fixed his eyes on heaven, he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, Lo, I behold the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God". This is what brought out the hatred of the enemy, and yet what was really standing out prominently before them was the Spirit of Christ. Well now, I believe if we are to be effective in our movements among the saints it is as this feature is displayed. I believe we will effect more in the souls of persons if we can display the grace of Christ. We can, perhaps, have a thousand words. What Stephen says is very short but to the point in his indictment. He brings them right up to the point where they refuse the Holy Spirit, and then it says, "having fixed his eyes on heaven he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God". It was that feature which shone in Jesus that was being displayed before their very eyes. He sees Jesus standing, that is the way that the Lord Jesus is towards us in His attitude. His disposition towards Israel at this time remained the same. He was unchanged in His attitude towards Israel. He stood there available to them as a Saviour, and so Stephen sees all this, he sees the glory of God and Jesus standing at His right hand, and then he says - the Spirit of God goes farther, of course - said, "Lo, I behold the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. And they cried out with a loud voice, and held their ears, and rushed upon him with one accord; and having cast him out of the city, they stoned him. And the witnesses laid aside their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul".

Well, in the midst of all that, in the midst of this hatred, the Spirit of Christ shone, even to Stephen's death. You might say, how much like Christ he was. I suppose there is no other one that is

spoken of as Stephen is spoken of in this way. Think of the composure that there was in Stephen that he could kneel down and pray, saying, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". Only Christ, of course, could say, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do", but Stephen, as setting forth this wonderful feature that shone in Christ, could kneel down and say, "Lay not this sin to their charge". Think of the feelings that must have entered into Stephen's soul as he came to this point when he was to be stoned, and he could say, "Lay not this sin to their charge". Well, dear brethren, I believe these things are to be laid hold of by us. Think of the Spirit of Christ that shone in David when the enemy were doing their worst . Yet the wonderful feature of the Spirit of Christ shone out prominently in David, even, you might say, when Eliab comes to David and you might say, Eliab disdained David, and yet David says, "Was it not laid upon me?" 1 Sam 17: 29. That is what David says, "Was it not laid upon me?" In other words, David was carrying out according to the will of God what was put in his hands to do, and carrying it out in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. I thought that our hearts could be encouraged to lay hold of these things, to see that we make way for the Spirit of Christ in us so that we become increasingly effective amongst the people of God, and effective too, no doubt, in the world, because the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians was to display the Spirit of the new covenants, which is, I suppose, in one sense grace in activity, the love of God in activity. So, I thought we should be stimulated and encouraged to go on in these things, and may the Lord help us, for His Name's sake.

Toronto

30th December 1972

QUALITY

D.Freeman

Daniel 1:8-17, 20, 21; 6:10-12, 16-22; 9:20-23; 10: 11-12, 19.

I thought we might pursue the thought of quality, beloved brethren, in relation to Daniel, who is a good example for us. It says of Daniel that he continued. He has the interpretation of the dream which indicates reduction in quality - the image that Nebuchadnezzar saw had its feet partly of iron and partly of clay - but Daniel continues until the first year of Cyrus and the last verses that we read were his experience in the reign of Cyrus. The prophet Daniel is a very interesting book. Daniel lived to be an old man, so we have covered his whole life. God is interested in the whole lives of every one of us. He does not give us up when we get old but he is interested in us, indeed He carries us and bears us and I suppose the last years of our lives, can be times when there is great increase and furtherance of what is for the pleasure of God. I am thinking of Jacob, how he could speak of his age and what it was and what a knowledge of God he had! He was able to bless his sons concerning things to come, (Gen 49), and he was fully, we might say, in the light of God's thoughts. Maturity is seen with such men and it is surely to find its place with us. But then if we are young God is interested in us, interested in our resolves; and in a company like this, we have these times of our ages into which God enters in His grace. He knows the circumstances in which we are; indeed, the Lord Jesus Himself has grown up here. It is a wonderful thing to contemplate the life of Jesus, how He began as a babe, a dependent babe, then growing up as a boy (for we read of the boy Jesus): what pleasure He afforded God in those years! This is to be of interest to us; it is a word to us, and then there is to be full maturity, grown manhood. We read of Him beginning to be about thirty years of age. These stages of growth are seen in the divine family - the little children, young men and fathers. God helps every one of us in relation to these stages and I think it is important if we are young and when we are young to

come, like Daniel, to a right resolve. This he did in his heart - not in his mind - his mind was governed by his affections.

We read of David's affections when he was young and it might be a word to us as to our affections, our affections for Christ, for His word, for His people, for His testimony, and desire to hold ourselves for His pleasure, the One who has died for us and risen again.

These circumstances were not easy for Daniel, and one would not suggest that our present circumstances are easy; in fact, I think perhaps for us they are more difficult than they have been for those who have gone before. I think of my own younger days, when the days in one sense were easier; not that they were easy, but they were easier than the present time. "In the last days", the Scripture says, "difficult times shall be there", 2 Tim 3: 1. We live in these difficult times; they are becoming increasingly difficult. Mr Taylor warned us that conditions in the world will become worse and worse, but things amongst us, beloved brethren, are not to change. We are to appreciate what is of value to God, we are to be found serving Him like Daniel, continually, and it is a good thing to have a first day in relation to His interests, as Daniel did. Heaven was interested, God took account of him from the first day that he set his heart to understand. And so God is interested in the resolves of those who are younger; they may not be of much account to others, indeed we may not know about them. Who would have known of this purpose of heart of these young men, who were in their 'teens, I suppose? This would be a difficult age, a difficult time, but they recognised the divine claim; they recognised that they were not their own. If we are the Lord's surely we would be concerned to recognise the claims of the Lord Jesus; He has absolute rights over us; He has died for us; He has given Himself for us. We are not to live to ourselves but to Him who has died for us and been raised. This means that we cannot enter into things that are not pleasing to Himself. Men may come and say, 'You must join this association; you must read this book; you must go to this party; you must go to this function'; but what about your inward resolves? Daniel, it says, had "purposed in his heart that he would not pollute himself with the king's delicate

food, nor with the wine which he drank". He knew that there was another source for him, and the believer knows that he has another source in Christ on high. He has his food; he finds that food amongst the saints, and the Holy Spirit is life to him. He has another source from which he draws his refreshment and resource, and this is evident in his countenance. He is something different; he knows a different way to do things. Men desire stimulation for the flesh, entering into all that is unholy and displeasing to God, but we are to think that we belong to Another Who has saved us. We are going to be with Him and we want to be pleasing to Him now.

So Daniel begins in this way, with this resolve, that he would not pollute himself, and God helped him, and the results were seen, wonderful results in quality in a young man. God loves to bring young men before the authorities and before men to show what He can do. The world would show what it can cater to for the young and we see the products in his heart, and he stood firm, too, he stood firm to this day, and to the end he is still standing firm. There are those who would desire still to stand firm. The enemy seeks to get us to give up this and that, to reduce the standard here, there, and it is a gradual whittling away process until, we might say, there is nothing substantial left, and the answer that God is seeking is denied Him. We do not want to move on those lines, but rather to move on the lines of those who have a right outlook like Stephen, who increased in power and it was evident that God was with him, and God was prospering him, God was helping him as He was these beloved captive Jews, saints as they were in this past day in these difficult circumstances in the kingdom of Babylon.

Well, then Daniel is tested, and tests will come to those who desire to live piously, as it says. Let us not be afraid of that word "pious"; it says of Simeon that he was just and pious. God takes pleasure in piety. It says of the Lord that he was heard because of His piety. Piety brings God into our circumstances here. Faith brings God in, and the circumstances are never too great for God. God is greater than the circumstances; He is greater than our hearts, John says, and He knows all things, and we can persuade our

hearts, it says, before Him, 1 John 3: 20. God is greater than every circumstance that has come in and as we wait upon Him we can prove His mind, for the truth remains, the standard remains, and where is our faith? "O ye of little faith", the Lord said to His own. Well, they became strong in faith; Abraham was strong in faith and gave glory to God. The tests will come to those who desire to live piously, as it says, and this is the test. The enemy would seek to cause us to move independently. Think of his temptations to the blessed Lord Himself, and how He answered with a knowledge of Scripture. It is good to have Scripture before us every morning and to begin rightly at home on the line of piety, individually, and household-wise too, in family prayer and reading. How important it is that our souls should be built up in the faith and on the lines of piety so that God is feared. A pious man fears God and he does not do this or that because he knows is displeasing to God. He is marked by faith and he walks with God and he is dependent on God and he proves God in his circumstances; he gives God thanks. These are simple matters; they are basic matters, important matters if God is to be rightly represented here, and he was by these young men of whom it says they were "ten times better", that is, God is able to help us to fill out fully what is according to His mind because of the supplies that He loves to bring in to help us, and He will give the needed word for whatever the circumstance may be. The Holy Spirit will teach you, the Lord said, in that hour, what should be said, Luke 12: 12. He understands the circumstances; He will provide what is needed; He will build us up, too, in relation to what is needed so that we have nothing to fear, and the result is seen, and seen by others. Their countenances were "fairer" and "fatter" than the others. What a testimony that was to the supplies that God gives, to the grace that He would bring in! This is not a testimony to the literature of this world which would build us up in the wrong man, the man that has brought dishonour and grief to God, the world of which Satan is the prince and god, but rather to another world and the One who fills it, the One who went down into death that God might be glorified. Well, these features are to be reproduced in us, and it is to be evident, as it says, that their countenances were fairer and fatter in flesh

because of this simple food. A word of Scripture is of more value than innumerable volumes of this world's wisdom because it brings in Christ, and God's Christ is the answer to every need and circumstance among men. We think of the needs in the world, the war in the Far East, and all these conditions amongst men. What is the answer? God has the answer. The believer who is with God has the answer to it all. The answer is Christ, and He will soon appear. It says that when we see Him we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is, 1 John 3: 2; but in the meantime we are to be representative to men of what God's thoughts are, so that men can take account in us of that which is superior to what is in the world.

I pass on to the test that Daniel has, because we will be tested and we are inclined to be fearful of the test. The test comes; we may be persecuted. I do not think that what came to Daniel has ever come to us yet, but he was delivered. This is not just a story, you know; sometimes when we are young we think that this is just a story, Daniel in the lions' den, but this is a real circumstance about someone who was cast into this den of lions and the lions did not touch him. What is God saying to us in this? He is pointing to the kind of man that Daniel was, how he was with God, and God was pleased to deliver him. We read of his habits; good habits are important; how little we cultivate them, such as the habit of prayer. It says of the Lord that He went up into the mountain to pray. We see everything in perfection with the Lord Jesus and we need to learn from Him. "Learn from Me", he says, "for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest to your souls", Matt 11: 29. We need rest in the troubled world, in a troubled Christendom, and whatever the circumstances may be, we can learn from Christ. There is nothing we are caused to pass through that He has not been through before us and can help us in with the grace that is freshly ministered to us from on high. Well, Daniel is one who continues "as he did aforetime". He has good habits; he goes into his chamber three times a day, firstly in the morning, I suppose, early morning - it is important to pray in the morning. Do you pray in the morning? Perhaps we should not take these things for granted, but it is a

challenge to us as to whether we are marked by continual prayer. Daniel has these three opportunities - he is a busy man; we have an account of Joseph who was also a busy man. Some of us have busy jobs and God is with us in them, helps us in them, too, but then Daniel has time morning, midday, too, and evening, to revert in prayer to God. He does it continually, and no one is going to stop him. He is going to continue whatever the enemy seeks to do. Well, we know the enemy's attempt here is against Daniel, against his testimony - how inveterate the enemy is! - using this body of men to persuade the king to sign that whoever made a request of anyone but the king should be cast into the den of lions, and the reason was that they were after Daniel. And that is what the devil is doing, he is after the saints, after those who love God, he is determined to destroy them, he is the destroyer, and if he can, he is determined to destroy the testimony, but, thank God all his efforts will not prevail against the assembly because we know One who is greater, the great I AM. He says, "I am with you all the days until the completion of the age", Matt 28: 20. So He gives us the victory and God knows how to deliver the godly out of trial. Daniel had confidence in his God, and he was delivered because he believed in his God.

I want to refer to his outlook; I think that is very important. Three times a day he had his windows - not just one window; sometimes we say he had his window open but we need to read Scripture carefully - he had his windows open, all open towards Jerusalem; his whole outlook was directed to God's chief interest on earth. There it was in ruins, the nations had entered into it and plundered it, the vessels of God's house were in Babylon; they had been desecrated, and Daniel had stood before the king in association with the hand that wrote upon the wall with regard to the judgment of the kingdom. Daniel was there in correspondence with the hand, the fingers of a man's hand, and Daniel was able to give the interpretation. What were the feelings of his heart? Daniel was a feeling man, for he felt the conditions amongst the people of God at that time, felt that God's service and God's praise was hindered and he was there three times a day with his windows open toward

Jerusalem. He was not thinking of a better position in Babylon; God had helped him in Babylon, but he was not settling down there. No, he probably had a good house - I would not doubt it - one of the best in the city - but no, Jerusalem was his chief joy. Jerusalem was in his heart. "They shall prosper", as it says in Psalm 122, "that love thee". Daniel was one of those who were prospering because he loved Jerusalem, and he could love Jerusalem in difficult circumstances. Are our prayers assembly prayers, even individually? Do we think of what concerns God, His honour and His glory? How we should feel these things! Daniel wept; Daniel was before God in regard to the conditions amongst God's people. With us this is often the subject of conversation, but with Daniel it was the subject of continual prayer, morning, noon and evening, in relation to God's interests, as his windows were open toward Jerusalem. What an example he is of one who continues, and what quality was there in manhood, intercessory quality with God!

This brings me on to the final verses, for God is drawn to him and heaven is interested in him. We were speaking this morning with regard to the activity of heaven in relation to the saints. Heaven is interested in a praying man; the heavens were opened to Jesus as He was praying. How God takes account of His people here as they are marked by prayer, deliberate prayer! We need to be deliberate, for the enemy would snatch these opportunities from us unless we are deliberate. I am sure we pray too little, at least, one feels that without question. Mr Raven said that, if he had his time over again, he would read less and pray more. Well, we need to do both. Daniel read, and he prayed, and he continued praying. He did not give up. Keep on praying is the word. Pray continually - how we need to! - because the enemy will seek an advantage over us in an unguarded moment. We need to be with God and to draw continually on the resources that are available to support us and to support the testimony here. We will be supported on that basis. Daniel was a feeling man; his feelings were in accord with the One who is on the throne, and God served him, too, in relation to his prayers. The prayer of chapter 9 was in the reign of Darius; perhaps

it was uttered on one of the occasions referred to in chapter 6. As we know he was delivered from the den, but now in chapter 9 he goes back in his account to his prayer and the visitation that he had. God gave him to know that he was greatly beloved, and he was known personally above. Would not we like that? Daniel is seen as an individual whom heaven takes account of, whom heaven serves, and the priestly angel comes to him quickly with a quick answer to him. God has his contact here on earth in Daniel. Where is heaven's contact at the moment in relation to His people? God is going to see them through; the time is apportioned, seventy years. Daniel understood from the books that it was going to be seventy years and nothing could change that; it could not be sixty-nine, it could not be seventy-one. God is sovereign, and He does all things well, and He has measured all things according to His infinite wisdom and His love and His grace and His judgment. Everything is perfect in regard to God's timing. We might say, when we feel the conditions, "How long? How long?" Saints of God have cried, "How long?" many times, and God is affected by these prayers. He gives us to know how long, and Daniel continued, and he comes right through to the end, and he sees the return of the captivity, the answer to his prayer. God gives us to see the answers to our prayers, and He is affected by them, and He answers them quickly.

The man Gabriel flying swiftly touched Daniel about the time of the evening oblation. That refers to the oblation which accompanied the morning and evening lamb, which we read of in the law of Moses, Exod 29: 38-41, how the evening was to be in correspondence with the morning. There is to be no waning throughout the day, but full strength is to be continued to the evening as Christ is presented in the offering in the lamb, accompanied by the oblation. We see how the Holy Spirit can help a man like Daniel to be maintained according to the height of the divine calling, so that he can take up divine interests in an intercessory way. We need to be intercessors. Great men of God have been great intercessors; indeed, Daniel is referred to in one of the prophets along with Noah and another man, Job; Noah, Daniel and Job, Ezekiel 14: 14. God

said, if these three men were in the land and there were no greater men, we might say, who had more power in an intercessory way than these three men, yet He would not turn from His thought as to the people. A most solemn thing; God would not hearken even to such men as these, Noah, Daniel and Job, who would deliver but their own souls by their righteousness. What they represent, too, is the feature of patience. We read that the patience of God waited in the days of Noah, 1 Pet 3: 20. Think of that, God's patience waiting in view of the salvation, if possible, of men in spite of the terrible conditions that exist, and the more we are with God the more we will feel them and the depravity that marks the human race. What a model Daniel is for us! We have him here in these trying, testing circumstances, but he is committed, he is tested and tried, but God delivers him out of the den; but then he is maintained, too, at the height of the divine calling, prayerfully, as he intercedes for the people confessing his sin and the sin of his people. Notice that; he puts his sin there and he owns his part in the breakdown, the ruin that has come in. We all need to do that and to take it upon us, and then to confess the sin of the people, too. God will make us equal for that. We are not equal for these things of ourselves but we need the help of the Father's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to enable us to be equal to God's thought and desires for us.

There is more that could be said, but Daniel is to shine. God has wonderful thoughts for the saints. We are to arrive at His full thought for us, and as one has said, we are not equal to this of ourselves, but God is able to make us equal; so Daniel was served in view of his being equal to what was to be communicated to him and he was assured at the same time that he was one who was greatly beloved. Well, we surely are to know this. We were speaking earlier of John, how he knew the love of Jesus and he spoke of himself in that way. Daniel was lovable. Mr Taylor spoke much of lovability in the saints. Are we lovable? Are we such that the saints can love us? Heaven's tastes are reflected, he said, in the saints. Daniel is loved in heaven and he is given to know this. This is a very precious thing to know in spite of the suffering, in spite of

the pressure, and it is very great. Daniel feels these things with God, and he is made equal to what was to be communicated to him, and he is assured that in heaven he is greatly beloved. He is the subject, too, of divine visitations, and that quickly, the man Gabriel flying swiftly. What quality is seen there in Daniel! Then finally, the last word as to Daniel - I did not read this but I might add it - the word to him is, "Go thy way, Daniel; for these words are closed and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and be made white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand", Dan 12: 10. Then finally, "Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days! But do thou go thy way until the end; and thou shalt rest and stand in thy lot at the end of the days", Dan 12: 13. Well, Daniel is one who continues, one who has an understanding of God's thoughts, and as an old man, too, he is maintained in the light of these things; he is preserved right through. God's hand is upon him; he is preserved from the lion - how great the deliverance! - and he is given to know heaven's interest in him, that he is personally known in heaven, that he stood firm in the testimony here and holds the divine thought and that there is an answer in him corresponding to what God's thoughts and desires for men are. God's thoughts are seen in Christ, and the Holy Spirit is here to help us in relation to them, that we might come up to the divine standard. Everything has been conferred upon us in Christ, and there is nothing lacking from the divine side, but there needs to be this work, this formation with us, and we need to be committed to it from our earliest days, setting ourselves to understand, determining not to pollute ourselves, not to go the way in which God would find it difficult, we might say, to help us, to speak to us, but we want to be a channel through which He can serve His saints, for He loves His people, too. This would link on with 2 Timothy; the quality is to be there in a vessel, "sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared", as it says, "for every good work". May we all be helped, beloved brethren, at this time, for His Name's sake.

Toronto

24th February 1973

"FEAR NOT, THOU WORM JACOB"

A.B.Parker

Psalm 22: 4-6; Isaiah 41: 14-16

These scriptures have been pressing on my mind since we came together. It is very affecting that the Lord Jesus, on the cross submitting to the will of God and rejected by men, should think of persons who were delivered when they cried to God in their distress. We see that this was so, particularly in the book of Judges. The people sinned again and again and were delivered into the hands of their enemies, but when they cried to Jehovah He heard their cries and delivered them. Think of how often the compassions of God were moved in man's failing history - but for Him who had served so perfectly, there could be no relief. He felt it! He said, "I am a worm, and no man ... despised of the people". He had done nothing to deserve reproach - in fact, He was then fulfilling the will of God, yet no expression of God's appreciation could be uttered. How He felt it! "I am a worm, and no man" .

It helps us in our present circumstances to understand something of the feelings of the Lord Jesus - what it meant to Him to be rejected, crucified, made a curse and a reproach of the people with no intervention possible. Such was the will of God, and it was on our account. Now we are in reproach which, in one sense, is deserved. Yet, the despising and reproach which we feel most is not because of our unfaithfulness, but because we have judged evil and are seeking to stand for the truth. We have been unfaithful; we humbly recognise that and justify God for the heaviness of his hand in government upon us, but the reproach we suffer from those nearest and dearest to us is not because of our unfaithfulness, but because we seek to pursue righteousness. Let us, accept this reproach and sorrow humbly, as part of God's discipline.

In the second passage read, Jehovah says, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob". Jehovah was about to come in for Jacob. He calls him Jacob, probably because it is the name that denotes

responsibility and, no doubt, includes his failures, but it is evident that there is something in Jacob with which Jehovah can have a link. He is reproached and despised; he is a worm! God rebukes and chastens those whom He has taken up, but He will not allow others to despise them, with impunity. He takes account of it, dear brethren. We can thank God for the measure in which we have been helped to judge ourselves for our involvement in what was wrong. We contributed to it and supported it and were too weak to publicly condemn it. But does not the Lord feel it that we are despised because we have judged it and condemned it? I believe that He does. O, that we may get this comforting word, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob". Do not cringe under the title, Worm. God would take account of us as such - "thou worm Jacob". Let us accept it, feelingly and justify Him in using it! Then we may feel some sense of power coming in.

The power that Jacob is promised will be a devastating power for the destruction of his enemies. The power that we long for is to be more acceptable to the Lord in our lives here - both individually and collectively - and that our brethren may be wakened out of the snare of the devil for God's will. As we await this power coming in, may we be preserved in humility, for His Name's sake.

Brooklyn, N.Y.

8th May 1973

THE CHILDREN'S JOURNEYS

The Lord Jesus spoke of the way that leads to life and believing children as well as grown-up persons should be travelling in it. The meaning is that we are led into life now and not just that life is at the end of it. In describing his conversion Paul called it 'this way' because he was now in it with those whom he had before persecuted. It was like a wolf being led along with lambs, which will actually happen in the thousand years of the reign of Christ over the earth, and even a little child shall lead them!

Nowadays, whilst the Lord Jesus is not wanted by many people in this world, we need even more to be led in the right way. The Lord said that the Holy Spirit would guide the disciples and this is even better than being told the way. Indeed, in no other manner than this can we complete our journey of life and do even the ordinary things such as eating and drinking to the glory of God.

Do you know that the Bible speaks about sign-posts? Perhaps some young people have experienced getting lost and looking anxiously for the right road. In the Christian way one sign-post points to 'repentance', another to 'faith' and another to 'confession'. The same scripture speaks of waymarks which we put up at places we have reached with the Lord's help. Some of these are 'obedience', 'salvation' and 'thanksgiving', but perhaps the most important is the gift of the Holy Spirit who takes up his abode in the obedient believer. Have you received Him into your own heart yet?

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