

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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NEIGHBOURS

E.C.Burr

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We have referred in our hymn (No 226) to things which were in the mind of the Lord Jesus when He came to do the will of God. How much we can say as to detail would be a question of how far we have spiritual penetration into what the will of God is.

Various things are said in the Scriptures which suggest to us why He came and what He had in mind to do. One of the things referred to in the hymn is that His brethren were in His thoughts, and it is a very interesting reflection that Christ Himself has done the work which enables God to give Him brethren. He speaks in John's gospel of being alone: "ye... shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me", John 16:32. But as to external appearances He was alone, and God gave Him brethren; and one thing that I suppose we increasingly appreciate in these days is that God has given us brethren. I have thought for some time how the idea of brethren needs to develop in our minds and perhaps to some extent be uplifted. Mr Taylor sen never objected to the word 'exclusive' and it is a word we should hold to in its right meaning, because if it is diluted or entrenched upon the enjoyment of what brethren are tends to diminish. The idea of brethren needs to be very closely related - that is brethren as together - to our standing as Christ's brethren; and while there is a point from which our affections extend towards all believers, we do have, in these days perhaps particularly, to hold securely in our minds the framework within which the substance of the truth can be worked out. Divine thoughts are not to be worked out promiscuously, they are to be worked out in relation to established principles that God has Himself set out; but one thing that God has done for us is to give us brethren, a very great consideration for us. It says in Psalm 68 that He makes the solitary into families (v 6). That is something else He has done, God has put men in families; persons who would otherwise be solitary, persons who might even on the basis of the scripture in 2 Timothy 2

be solitary as naming the name of the Lord and withdrawing from iniquity, God has put them in families and they prove the blessedness of relations with one another. It is interesting that the Psalm should say that He makes the solitary into families because, as we all well know, the family is an organisation, if I could use that word for want of a better, in which many things are worked out; many exercises, sometimes differences, arise and they have to be resolved according to the principles that belong to the family; many joys and pleasures are shared, and we rejoice greatly with one another in the family feeling and the family setting; we should be very thankful for family feelings.

Then another thing that God has done is to give us neighbours and I would like to say a word about that. It is interesting that although God prescribes in the Decalogue that a person should honour his father and his mother, that is not actually presented as one of the great commandments of the law. The two great commandments in the law are first that you should love God with all your heart, and soul, and strength, and understanding, as the Lord's words are recounted by the different evangelists (some use different words from the others but what is in mind is that we should love God with all that we are). But He does not then say, And you should love your father and mother or your children, but that you should love your neighbour as yourself. I find that interesting, and I think that the Lord intended in it to bring out something for us that we should learn and in which we should grow. You might have thought that when asked which is the great commandment of the law one might have said "Ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Lev 11: 44) - certainly that is one of the great commandments of the law; but there are two commandments, that you should love God and you should love your neighbour as yourself. I think that God has so arranged things that we are set in neighbourly relations with one another, and He looks to us to see that this commandment is fulfilled, that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. I do not think there is much difficulty among the brethren, nor would one ever expect to find it, in loving God with all our heart, and soul, and strength and understanding, however

much we may feel we fall short in our obedience to such a commandment; but the other is that thou shouldst love thy neighbour as thyself I suppose we are all tested as to that, all challenged. The interesting thing is that this man says "And who is my neighbour?" as though the very thought had never occurred to him. Although well taught in the law his mind had never reflected on this commandment so as to be able to locate where his affection should fall: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The parable that the Lord speaks then is familiar to us, the children know about the One who is spoken of as the Good Samaritan. They know there was a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and that he fell among thieves, and they know about the levite and the priest that passed that way and were able to do nothing for the man; and in a sense were rightly able to do nothing for the man because they, upholding the law, or at least many principles of the law, were unable to come near and touch him, the man himself being, I suppose, in an unclean condition, if only on account of his injuries, to say nothing of his moral state. Then a certain Samaritan journeying came up to him and poured in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast and took him to the inn, and said to the innkeeper, Take care of him. All the children know that. But Jesus says, Who was neighbour to him? And he said, He that shewed him mercy. What this parable brings out primarily is that Christ Himself has come into a condition where He can be man's neighbour in order that He might be loved by man. It is always good to read a scripture carefully so that we begin to understand just what the Lord is saying. We read through this and we say, Who then was neighbour to him who fell among thieves? And we are left with the impression that this man was his neighbour. But this point had been brought out in order to elaborate what is in the second of the great commandments - that thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The parable is an answer to "And who is my neighbour?", and the neighbour is actually Christ who has come into man's condition where He can come up to him in order that being man's neighbour man might be able to love Him. What a remarkable level on which neighbourly relations are set, that they are in relation to the condition in incarnation in which Jesus has come, in order that providing

healing and refreshment for man He might be the object of man's love. This is how things are set in this parable. It is not so that we might have abstract ideas about what neighbourliness is and that sort of thing, but it presents to us that Jesus Himself has come into man's condition where, as it says in the King James version, "he came where he was" (Not that I particularly set up that version as against Mr Darby's, but sometimes it has words that give you a close impression of the reality of things). He came where he was, and that is what Christ has done, He has done it as man's neighbour, in order to show man mercy, but in order that He might become the object of man's affection. This parable does not just demonstrate what it is to be kind to one another, or what it is to be philanthropic, or do merciful deeds, or that kind of thing; what it demonstrates is that God in Christ has come into conditions where being man's neighbour He can be the object of man's love. That brings out to us, I believe, the fulness of what is involved in this second of the great commandments, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Then you discover that there is really no difference between these two commandments as you think of them in relation to God, because you love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and strength, and understanding, but then you also love God who has come in to your condition to be your neighbour drawing near to you - coming up to him, pouring in oil and wine coming up to you so that you might discover that the One who showed you mercy now becomes the object of your love. I have often thought that our minds do not dwell enough on the thought of mercy. It has too little place in the service of God, and yet in Romans the nations are to "glorify God for mercy". chap 15: 9. We, beloved, are among the nations, and therefore there is a right place for response to God in relation to His mercy in the service of God. Not that we are dwelling on our sins and our history in relation to which His mercy has operated, but His mercy glorifies Himself and the nations glorify God for mercy. As the brethren well know, mercy is one of the things that is brought out in the truth on its highest level in the epistle to the Ephesians, and it should have more place with us in the service of God. But what is

brought out here is that the One who showed mercy is the One who has come into a position where He could be loved by man.

Now this having been set out by way of example in a way that carries conviction to the soul of the youngest – that is that if someone has drawn near to you when you were wounded and half dead, and has healed you and revived you, and put you in a position of safety and of care, and you learn to love him – you begin to get some impression of the standard of love which we are intended to have towards others who may be our neighbours. It is the level on which we love God in Christ as having shown mercy to us that our hearts are intended to extend toward our neighbour by way of love. This is testing, challenging. We think of our local brethren as to whether we are loving them as being ourselves on this level; not loving them on the level on which I value myself to myself but loving them on the level on which we love God as having drawn near to us in mercy. As I say, if you follow the parable through, it begins, "Who is my neighbour?", then, Who do you think is your neighbour? Who was neighbour to that man? He was the one who came up to him and healed him and provided for him, God, as I say, in Christ coming into man's circumstances in order that being man's neighbour man might love Him. And that beloved, I believe, is the level on which we are intended to have neighbourly feelings in relation to one another. Let us search ourselves whether that is so. We value the brethren in these days, we value them as brethren; do we in fact value them as neighbours, do we value them on this level and love them on the same level as we love the Lord our God with all our soul, heart, strength and understanding? Do we love our neighbour like that?

Now Leviticus brings out that you do love your neighbour on this level. There are three references in chapter 25 to thy brother growing poor, and in two of them it says, "if thy brother grow poor beside thee". That is to say your brother is your neighbour. "If thy brother grow poor, and he be fallen into decay beside thee", and "if thy brother grow poor beside thee". Now how are you going to act in relation to that, in relation to your brother who is your neighbour,

especially if he has grown poor? Poverty has many manifestations. You only need to look round the world to discover that. It can manifest itself in demonstration of the flesh, of what is natural, of everything save the grace of Him who being rich, became poor, in order that by His poverty we might be enriched (see 2 Cor 8: 9). Think of the way in which, beloved, One according to Luke 10 has come into the position of our neighbour; He has come into conditions of poverty. And what has been displayed there? Nothing but the infinite perfection of what He was in Himself. He never ceased to be lovable on account of His poverty, He never did anything that detracted from His lovability on account of the poverty into which He had come. We might say with reverence that He had come into a position where He became poor beside us; where, though rich (everything that is God's is His by right as God), yet He came into a position where if He needed a penny, He had to ask one of His disciples to show Him one. See the poverty into which He had come, not desiring to spend anything on His own aggrandisement or increase or even to supply what might be needed in Himself. If it was a question of nourishment: "I have food to eat which ye do know (John 4: 32), He says to His disciples who had gone away shopping. He had come into a condition of poverty. Not that His riches had become attenuated or that He had in any way sacrificed that was incompatible with the source of those riches, but He came into conditions of poverty - as Mr Darby translates it in the French, He lived in poverty, He came into conditions where He was poor. What an example to us, beloved! How do you regard Jesus as having become poor in that sense? Is not your heart attracted to Him? The heart, I think Mr Stoney says, is won by His humiliation. Has your heart been won by His humiliation? One who, if I may apply the word carefully, has become poor beside us, One who has come into conditions of poverty in order that we through His poverty might be enriched, but who in those conditions of poverty becomes infinitely attractive to the heart. That is how Christ becomes to us, beloved, in the poverty in which He was. How does this make you feel in regard to your neighbour, your brother who is beside you? You say, Well, they have grown poor, they are not getting on very well there, or he

is not getting on too well at the present time; we have exercise and concern about so-and-so, he does not seem to be what he was. Beloved, is your heart extended to him as it is towards Christ? not in any way palliating anything that may be incompatible with the glory of the One who is so infinitely attractive to us in His poverty; maintaining all that and yet displaying the same kind of affection as you have towards Christ Himself. Relations between brethren, and relations as between neighbours and brethren who are neighbours, are intended to manifest the same feelings of affection as were manifested in Jesus who showed mercy, and in the way in which we love the One who showed mercy thus we love those who are neighbours. These things, beloved, test us by their simplicity. Most of Christianity tests us by its simplicity, not by its difficulty and profundity; these things do not test us because we are then obliged to fall back on the Spirit for understanding of them, but it is the simple aspects of Christianity that are the most testing.

Moses says here "If thy brother grow poor". In the first place "If thy brother grow poor and sell of his possession, then shall his redeemer, his nearest relation, come and redeem". If you find that your neighbour has come under constraint or under difficulty, if in some sense he is under a kind of mortgage that someone has a charge upon, that someone could righteously demand something from him, that kind of thing, what then is to be done? The spirit of redemption is to enter into the situation, so that, as we understand it in our day, in virtue of the blood of Christ and what that effects before God in redemption we may in the spirit in which that blood was shed set our brother up in liberty from whatever may have hampered or be hindering him at the present time. Do you feel that someone is shut up and narrow? The spirit of redemption comes into that situation, the spirit of the way in which Christ met every limiting thing that lay upon man in the pouring out of His blood as already dead; as having given up His life to God His blood was poured out in order that there might be redemption. And the spirit in which a condition in which affection might otherwise be constrained is to be met in the spirit in which you apprehend what redemption is. Things are not

approached in Christianity on the basis of law or of the letter but on the basis of the work of Christ. I have often thought in relation to Galatians, where persons were standing on the law and were constrained by the law, of what Paul says in chapter 6. Does he say, Brethren, if anyone be overtaken in a fault turn to Exodus or Leviticus, turn up the law? O no, "ye who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest *thou* also be tempted" (v 1). That is the spirit of the neighbour. You can see it in Paul. Even, as Mr Darby says, that towards the Galatians Paul's approach is cold, yet you can see the spirit of the neighbour there: "ye who are spiritual restore such a one". And the Lord would look to us, beloved, to meet conditions that may arise amongst us in spirituality in the light of what He has done in redemption. Let us never get far away from the fundamentals of our faith. Let us never think that we can carry on, for instance administration, as if it was a separate thing from the work of Christ. We have no right to handle administration at all save in the fact that Christ has met every administrative issue between us and God in virtue of His blood. The brother or sister who forgets that they are where they are because they are redeemed is going to make no effective contribution to the present manifestation of the testimony. What is needed in difficult situations where there is poverty (and we all have our own descriptions of poverty; we may say, Things are very poor down there, or something like that) is in the spirit of the Redeemer. Not that we ourselves can redeem our brother but, in the spirit in which we have ourselves appropriated redemption, we can meet a poor condition in our neighbour, be it in someone else in the meeting, be it in another locality, the spirit of redemption will meet every thing of that kind. And the spirit of redemption is not only healing but it is contagious, and those who have proved mercy are those who will show mercy. Many things might be resolved if the spirit of Luke 10 was allowed to inform activity so that the spirit of loving because mercy has been shown became infectious in the situation; so that one who received mercy went on and displayed mercy and extended mercy. Think of the parable that the Lord Himself sets out in the gospel of the man who was forgiven much and then went and took

his neighbour by the throat, and the Lord says in effect, That is not Christianity at all. What is needed in those who have experienced mercy is that they show mercy. And beloved, much will be resolved in the spirit of neighbourliness if the principles of Luke 10 are fully established amongst us. The spirit of the inn cannot be experienced if rooms in the inn are isolated from one another; they need the spirit of neighbourliness in the light of mercy that has been shown, and the mercy that has been shown is on the basis of redemption. So you are reminded that if your brother has grown poor you are to act in the light of redemption.

Then it says, "And if thy brother grow poor and he be fallen in to decay". He has not only grown poor but he has fallen into decay. We all know what kind of thing that is, how, once the spirit gets down to a lower level, then one thing after another is allowed to drop; it may be you grow poor through worldliness and you soon find that falling into decay follows on it. Just admit a little bit of the world and you will find that falling into decay follows almost on the heels of the poverty. If you fall into legality or something like that you will find that the spirit of decay begins to work, just as it did in Galatia. "Then thou shalt relieve him", that is to say you take the burden off him, whether it is the burden of worldliness, or the burden of legality, or the burden of whatever it may be, even if in Galatia it is the burden of false doctrine, relieve him. And how will you relieve him? It says, "then thou shalt relieve him", that is you do not put extra impositions upon him, you help to see whether the burden that is upon him can be taken off. How we long, beloved, to meet conditions of poverty that exist amongst us at the present time. And poverty exists in the midst of unexampled richness; the general level of what the Lord is ministering among the saints at the present time is unexampled in its richness. I say nothing to qualify what the Lord has given through beloved men in the past, men whose names are on our tongues all the time; but what the Lord is giving the saints actually to enter into at the present time is unexampled in its wealth, and in the midst of it there are here and there isolated pockets of poverty. And what the scripture says is, If your brother be fallen into decay relieve him.

And the relief is shown I believe in the epistles: shown in Corinthians, in Galatians, in Colossians; the way situations might be relieved is shown even in the epistle to Laodicea - "And to the angel of the assembly in Laodicea write... I counsel thee to buy of me", as the Lord says there (Rev 3: 14,18), relieve him by the counsel that the Lord brings in.

Then it says further, "And if thy brother grow poor beside thee, and be sold unto thee, thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: as a hired servant, as a sojourner, shall he be with thee; until the year of jubilee shall he serve thee"; that is to say that if for any reason brethren become, as it were, indebted to one another, owing something to one another, a situation which might easily arise. It says, "Owe no one anything, unless to love one another", Rom 13: 8. You may find you get into bondage through failure to love one another, then what you have in mind is the year of jubilee. I do not think there is any objection in principle to anticipating the year of jubilee. I hope there is not because, if there is, most of the brethren would only have one in their lifetime. If you came into things when you were quite young, before you were twenty, you might on the span of three score years and ten just get in two jubilees in your lifetime, because they are every fifty years. But the spirit of the jubilee should be with us all the time. It says, "until the year of Jubilee shall he serve thee". It may be, beloved, that what we need in times when we are rightly affected by the history through which we have been, feeling the oppression and smallness of all that is current around us, in which we have had our own sorrowful part (and our part in it never ceases to make us mourn that we should have contributed to such things) yet the spirit of the jubilee is that in which persons will be released. It says in a most affecting word in verse eleven: "that fiftieth year". It is almost as if, as Moses wrote it, he savoured the words on his tongue like good wine, he took "that fiftieth year" on his palate and began to savour it, to discern what quality was in it, what taste, what flavour! What a vintage, "that fiftieth year"! Beloved, are you cherishing it in that spirit? "That fiftieth year" - do you long for it? Or are you still counting, twenty-

eight, twenty-nine, thirty, and so on. Some have not time for another twenty years; the Lord would have us to be in the spirit of the jubilee now, the spirit in which persons are released, sent back to enjoy their inheritance. There is no question of enjoying the inheritance on your own; the whole idea of the inheritance in the Old Testament is collective, and if one person is not enjoying it, one part of the inheritance is not enjoying it, if there is any hindrance or holdup or anything of that kind, to that extent the whole of the land suffers and the whole of the people suffer. What characterises the year of jubilee is that normality has been reached universally.

Now in Luke 5 the Lord gives the disciples (of course He gives them much else in that section too, nobody could exhaust one scripture in applying it for one purpose) and to Peter in particular what I think amounts to some experience of what it is to be redeemed, and relieved, and in the year of jubilee; he has such that he cannot himself contain. And what does he do? They beckoned to their partners in the other ship. Think of that, beloved! We have such richness that we want our neighbours to share it as well. I commend to the brethren beloved Mr Taylor's reading at Andover on this scripture: "they beckoned to their partners who were in the other ship " (see N.S. Vol.43 p.488). Is that beckoning spirit with us, beloved! Are we beckoning to our neighbours? Are we in the spirit that the Lord has given us so much that not only can we hardly cope with it ourselves but we want our neighbours, our partners in the other ship, to share it with us? Have we that spirit, beloved! That is the spirit which Peter responded to. Of course he says as we know, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord". The Lord says, Peter, you will be catching men; your history I have dealt with, I am the Redeemer - if I may continue the spirit of Leviticus 25 - but you will be catching men. I think the implication is that Peter, you will need your partners in the other ship to deal with the men as well. Whoever could deal with three thousand souls in one day? Suppose that happened in Nostrand Avenue, three thousand people were converted one Lord's day afternoon? You would need your partners in the other ship. I think if one or two people were converted one

Lord's day afternoon - you would need your partners in the other ship. Every locality needs its partners in the other ship. It is the ship nearest to you. The idea of beckoning in this scripture is just a nod, that is all it is. It suggests that our relations with our neighbours are near enough for us just to be able to give a nod and we are all sharing together in the bounty that the Lord is providing. Beloved, what this makes of neighbourliness! What first comes into your mind when someone says to you, 'the nearest meeting'? What comes first into the minds of a lot of brethren is a question of administration; your mind goes to 'the city nearest to the slain man'. That is the way our minds work. Why have they become accustomed to thinking in relation to our neighbours administratively! It never used to be in Mr Taylor sen's day. Only on a very rare occasion did matters arise in which the nearest meeting, the neighbours, had to do anything. Nowadays I am surprised that a matter arises in a locality and someone says, I thought our nearest meeting would have taken the matter up. Beloved, it would be wholly abnormal for the nearest meeting to take it up. The spirit of the neighbour is the sharing of blessing; it is the redemption, the relief and the jubilee. The spirit of the neighbour is one that is responding to the beckoning of one's partners in relation to a haul that only the Lord could provide, but which in His grace you have been given an opportunity of helping to bring to land. One is surprised as to why it should be that, if we think of the nearest meeting, our minds tend to be coloured by what is administrative. Beloved, we owe it to our neighbours to be towards them in the spirit of the way in which the Scriptures speak of what is neighbourly; and the way in which the Scriptures speak of what is neighbourly is enriching, and supplying, and supporting, and helping, and bringing in what will release from any spirit that is not wholly consistent with what rightly belongs to the present day. If you discover that your brother is growing poor beside you, he is falling into decay - it does not matter what the decay is, it does not tell us, therefore we are given liberty spiritually to discern what poverty and decay are - the response to that is redemption and relief and the jubilee.

Beloved, one wonders how often these things are tried. Are they tried very often? or do we love administration more than anything else? I do not think that when it says the Lord loves the gates of Zion, He is thinking just about administration. I suppose that thought would enter into it, but the gates of Zion are access into the sovereign mercy of God, the place that God loves, on the earth, you might say, better than anything. When the Lamb comes to the earth He stands on mount Zion, the place where sovereign mercy and divine love are manifested; the gates of Zion are the way into that. Of course they involve administration, but administration in the Scriptures is intended to be administration of bounty, administration of supply, administration in grace and fulness, and the heaping on of one blessing upon another. Grace upon grace is divine administration, the spirit of Leviticus 25 in regard to our neighbour.

Why do we not try these things more? Why is it that we cling to administrative methods and procedures, that we have to look up ministry that tells us how this, that or the other ought to be done, when the Spirit is here, and the Spirit is the spirit of the Christian dispensation in a day when God is active in grace. If one is susceptible to the movements of the Spirit one would scarcely need to look up ministry in regard to what is administrative, and yet you find ministry is quoted, and this book is quoted and that page is quoted, and then you are required to construe how this goes with that, and that goes with this, and so on, when it may be that the spirit of the neighbour would resolve everything. It may be that the response to one another in love on the basis of ourselves having proven mercy would show that no matter how difficult the neighbour was you would show him mercy. If the person who lives next door to you came along and upset you, what would you do? Would you go back and upset him? You would hold tight on yourself, the more provoked you were the tighter you would hold on yourself. You would say to yourself, 'I must not respond to him in the spirit of the flesh, I must manifest the spirit of Christianity. Is that not what we all say in regard to the person who lives next door to us? What about our neighbours in the more spiritual sense, beloved? What about our neighbours in the nearest meeting? What about our neighbours in

our own meeting? Do we then take tight hold on ourselves and say, 'I cannot act out of the spirit of the day, I must act in grace'. Well, beloved, these things flow from the Scriptures.

As I say, the hymn that we began with suggests that one thing, and I am sure it is right, that was in the Lord 's mind when He came was that He should have brethren. But having brethren as a result of coming into a position where He was man's neighbour, He has given us not only brethren but neighbours. The Scriptures probably have more teaching and practical instruction that bear on how to live with your neighbours than on anything else. Let us take it up, let us reflect on it. Do not be governed particularly by anything I have said. I trust what I have said has been in the power of the Spirit and led by the Lord, one would count on that; one would abhor speaking in the flesh or politically, but if you have the idea of the neighbour in your mind, take it away and reflect on it. What does it mean to be neighbours one to another? May the Lord just help us to pursue it, for His Name's sake.

BROOKLYN NY

23 August 1975

WHAT IS LITTLE

E.M.Walkinshaw

Proverbs 30: 24-28; 2 Kings 5: 1,2, 14; Luke 12: 29-32

I expect you will have noticed that I desire to speak of what is little. I suppose it is becoming to God's testimony; there is nothing large or spectacular about it but it is held in secret in smallness. Men like what is spectacular but God works in His testimony in smallness, and I think He would have us in our character to correspond with that. So that I read from the book of Proverbs because it speaks of four things little upon the earth, and they are exceeding wise. How much we need this, dear brethren, today; wisdom is said elsewhere to be the principal thing. These four things little upon the earth are like the saints, and the characteristics that they have are to mark the saints. "The ants, a people not strong" - we tread on them and use the various means that man has placed at our disposal to destroy them. But Scripture speaks well of them: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise" (Prov 6: 6) might be a word for us, how in regard of divine things we tend to be sluggish and casual, the things of God rather than our life becoming a kind of side line or incidental occupation. The ants are not like that; they are busy, occupied and wise, they provide their food in the summer. How necessary it is that we should be engaged in this way at the time of harvest. God has visited His people to give them bread, and that word applied frequently of recent days is I think true. Are you as diligent as the ants to provide your food in the summer? Or will it be, if the winter comes, there is none provided? We should in wisdom be taking up what the Lord has placed at our disposal at the present moment, energetically pursuing it to be built up in our souls. So the ants are very little; another man, presumably wise, said that if they were as big as men, and their wisdom increased proportionately, then they would destroy the human race. Think of God in His word drawing our attention to such little creatures, not only to indicate to us the characteristics that are proper to His people on the earth but to encourage us to be marked by such characteristics. We learn

from nature: "Does not even nature itself teach you?" 1 Cor 11: 14. The Lord Jesus said, Look at the birds, consider the lilies. We are to learn from these simple scriptural illustrations, and I think the ants indicate to us those that are energetic in obscurity with a view to providing their food. Now this word 'little' is applied to Jesus; in Matthew 2 He is called 'the little child' some eight times. Think of the Person and who He was, dear brethren, the One that created the universe, the One that stretched forth the constellations in their courses, brought every thing into being and upholds everything by His power, yet content to be here in the limitations that manhood imposed upon Him and be called 'a little child'. How wonderfully He sets out the example of being hid! Granted it says in one place that He could not be hid; but the Lord Jesus as a lowly servant-prophet here never courted publicity. He was always content to be in obscurity and in littleness here. So God's testimony, I believe, is enshrined in the heart of those that love Him in the presence of opposing forces, and yet held and cherished in littleness and obscurity. Would you like to be in that? Man is ambitious, always seeking the first place, always looking for something spectacular, always wanting, to use common parlance, to make a splash; that is right out of accord with God's testimony at any time, and especially when it is in ruins publicly. It is for us, dear brethren, to be content to go on in littleness. Jesus says to Philadelphia "thou hast a little power", although, as another has said, He would lay the emphasis on the word '*power*' and not on the word 'little'.

Then "the rock-badgers are but a feeble folk, yet they make their house in the cliff". What a resource we have in Christ! Is your resource there? Do we lean upon Him or do we turn to other resources? The Spirit of God would direct us to Him, as Moses the man of God said, "Lord, *thou* hast been our dwelling place in all generations", Ps 90: 1. No matter what the generation is, sometimes apparently outwardly prosperous, sometimes everything adverse, but nevertheless "*thou* hast been our dwelling-place in all generations". And it is so with our generation, dear brethren; whatever the difficulties that may confront us in seeking to maintain

what is due to the Lord, He is our resource. Let us ever turn to Him and, as the man of God said, "number our days, that we may acquire a wise heart", Ps 90: 12.

"The locusts have no king, yet they go forth all of them by bands". We know that this has been applied to the saints as under the control of One who is absent; they have no king outwardly and yet they go forth by bands. Who controls them and how? It is a simple illustration of the influence of Christ though absent, but they go forth all of them by bands. Looking for His coming to take them to be for ever with Him - is that your outlook? Is that the outlook of every young man and young woman here? They go forth all of them by bands.

Then the lizard: "thou takest hold of the lizard with the hands, yet is she in kings' palaces". How simple to think of that, so available, so easily found if needed and yet in kings' palaces, marked by the dignity and royalty becoming to the saints, little things and yet things exceeding wise. Beloved, let us take our pattern from them.

Then we have a little maid taken captive. What an exploit! I remember during the war reading of the victory of certain armies. Taken captive was Field Marshal this and Lieutenant Colonel that and Brigadier somebody else. I never saw in all the list of their accomplishments any reference to a 'little maid'. The status of these great men is of no interest to heaven; the *men* are because they are men but their state means nothing; but the little captive maid is recorded by heaven as having been taken prisoner, and she waited on her mistress. What an example for us, dear brethren, appearing on the page of Scripture and then being left off never again appearing. What a spirit to mark the testimony, no vindictiveness! Had I been in that position I would have been tempted to say, He has taken me from my home and my family, I know not where they are, he has only got what he deserves as a leper, why should I give him the remedy? But the spirit that marks the little maid: "would that my lord were before the prophet that is in Samaria". She knew the secret of the link of the people of God with their God, and although in

a distant land she showed the spirit of it in obscurity. I say heaven records the captivity of such a person, 'a little maid', and the result was that this great man who was a leper had his flesh again like the flesh of a little child. It reminds us of the little child Jesus - how wonderful! In God's ways the things that we think are great, the things that we would write down, the things that historians would record, are never recorded by heaven; heaven has respect for moral greatness, and this little captive maid was marked by moral greatness, the spirit of the testimony in captivity. Mr Raven said that in a certain sense we have all been carried into captivity; we have to accept the humbling fact of the breakdown, but in that captivity, dear brethren, we can be marked by the spirit of this girl. Are you marked by it? A little child was taken by Jesus to indicate the character that should mark His disciples (see Luke 9: 47). So this person is that, she is never again mentioned in Scripture but she will assuredly have her place with Christ in the kingdom, without any question, as will all such. Others appear like that; in the next chapter there is a young man with the prophet and he is rather frightened at the enemy; the prophet prays "Lord open his eyes". He opened his eyes and he saw the mountain full of chariots and horses. They protected the little captive maid as well as the prophet - those that are with us are more than those that are against us - God is with us where there is lowliness and simplicity and acceptance of the situation in which we are and in which in littleness and obscurity we are prepared to bear testimony. May our hearts be encouraged like this, dear brethren. I think in God's ways we shall see something of the extension of the little child; I believe there are many that are held up by a pride like the pride of Naaman, unwilling to go down. Have we not all been like that? I have, unwilling to go down. Naaman the great captain of the host' In a simple appeal his servants say, "My father" (evidently he was on good terms with them and they with him) "if the prophet had bidden thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he says to thee, Wash". If you are dirty you wash, you do not indulge in some great exploit, the power to wash is there. Then went he down; that is the hardest possible thing I have found in my experience. I believe, dear

brethren, that many who have seen that they were in error, in the 1972 issue in particular, are unwilling to go down. If we are to come into God's testimony each of us must go down, and we must become in our flesh (that is in substance, not the wicked flesh) like the flesh of a little child. May God give us the grace to come to that, dear brethren, and to see that it is proper and comely to God's testimony at all times and specially at the present moment.

Now the Lord in Luke is speaking to His own in the context of not being anxious: "And ye, seek not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, and be not in anxiety". This is very testing, it tests our confidence in God, because most of us find that anxiety gets in the way, pressures of modern life, business becoming more difficult. Even an occupation under a master is becoming increasingly difficult and I think we shall find that for most the days are becoming more difficult; even those who might appear to have an easy time in retirement find things in the way, there is no doubt about it, because we do not escape God's discipline. So the Lord says be not in anxiety; it hinders our part in the service of God, it hinders our committal to and freedom for His testimony; and yet I find many things pressing on my mind that cause anxiety. Do you find that? When we are younger it is not so noticeable but as we get a little older, I suppose with more responsibility, we are liable to become more anxious. The Lord says "be not in anxiety; for all these things do the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that ye have need of these things; but seek his kingdom, and all these things shall be added to you". Your Father: seek His kingdom. We have already had reference today to the word 'seek': "ye seek Jesus", Matt. 28: 5. Do you seek Jesus? Do you young people find Him attractive? One says in the Song of Songs: "On my bed, in the nights, I sought him whom my soul loveth", chap 3: 1. Later it says "I found him". Would the Lord disappoint any soul, especially a young soul, that is seeking Him? The angel, you might say in the eyes of men something spectacular, descending from heaven looked like lightning and his garments white as snow; he was sitting, I

suppose in contempt at the pride of the Roman empire, yet approving those two women there - "ye seek Jesus".

O beloved, let us seek Jesus the crucified One, let our affection go out to Him, spend more time with Him so that we might be formed in our affection for Him. It has often been noted that in Christianity in a certain sense you get everything for nothing; in another sense you get nothing for nothing. So seek the things that are above where the Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. He is the centre of a wonderful spiritual order of things, the centre of it and the life of it. So your life is hid with Christ in God. Presently the day of display will come; today is not the day of display, today is the day of obscurity where things are hidden and cherished in secret, available of course, and the glad tidings goes out, but nevertheless the testimony in its power and intrinsic worth is held in secret; but "When the Christ is manifested who is our life, then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory", Col 3: 4. What a prospect, dear brethren! The little captive maid will be there, and Naaman will be there, I have no doubt about it, and so will many others who have been content to be here in the testimony of Jesus in obscurity; they will have their place there, accurately placed by the King in that day.

These scriptures are brought forward for our encouragement, not just as history, not just to tell us about one little person who did exist as recorded in the Scriptures, but to give us an impression of the kind of person that God approves - a person's moral worth. The Lord would encourage us to take account of these four things little upon the earth, then of the little captive maid, and then of the little flock, for that is what we are, dear brethren; our hymn book is 'for the little flock'. We would like to be at any rate in that character - a little flock. "Fear not little flock, for it has been the good pleasure of your Father to give you the kingdom". In due time we shall be there shining in our Father's kingdom, as the Lord says elsewhere as to the saved, but in the meantime let us go on content to be little in the earth and yet exceeding wise as deriving our wisdom from Him who is made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and holiness and redemption. May the Lord encourage every one of us to seek

Him as the crucified One, and to seek the things that are above and to come in some greater power into His testimony and into His praise for His glory.

EDINBURGH

14 June 1975

BEING SENT

A.J.EWelch

Isaiah 6: 1-9 (to 'Go')

The desire of every heart true to Christ would be that this wonderful dispensation should have a fitting finish. In one sense we are assured that it will, but we would be concerned to fit into that finish in some sense of real contribution to it, to be in the closing up of things, not as distant spectators but as actively usable of God, to fill out in substance what His thought is. I have been impressed with the thought that we reach in this passage as to one being sent, a great active principle with God, one which is peculiarly to appear in this time of the Spirit, that men are available to be sent of God. It is an active and an operative idea, that something is afoot which relates to the divine glory in the great extent of it and God delights to disclose to us that He has His means of bringing men into what He is doing as being, according to His thought and His wise way, necessary to the filling out of what is for His satisfaction.

We see how this whole idea of sending is brought out remarkably in the way the divine economy itself is at work. The Son was sent: wonderful indication of the glory of Christ in filling, speaking with reverence, His own distinctive, operative place in this great economy of love and power. He was sent, as He Himself says, "the Father who has sent me", John 8: 16. And the Spirit is here in our time as being sent, sent of the Father in Christ's name, sent by the Son from with the Father; a touch of the distinctive glory of the Spirit, filling out this wonderful time, which is peculiarly His time, as in a subject relation to both the Father and the Son. It lends great attractiveness to this whole evidence of what is rightly submissive and subject to the will of God. Think of the way that the Spirit is here, sent in relation both to the Father and to the Son, His service in that sense expressive in an active sense of the oneness of the Godhead. What a touch we get as we see this wonderful matter gloriously filled out in the Son and the Spirit!

But then the Lord sent out the twelve, as we find it, for example, in Luke 9; He directed their service and imparted to them the manner of it. In the following chapter He sent seventy, showing how the Lord is enlarging things by using this particularly active and attractive principle of sending. Then "There was a man sent from God, his name John" (John 1: 6) - a remarkable appearance of what was of God at the time when God was signally intervening, that He sent a man to go before, in that sense to open the way for Jesus. And as we come into the Acts we yet many an evidence of the same thing: the way in which Peter was sent, the way in which the Lord, in the very first touch that He gave to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, could say as to the nations, "to whom I send thee" (Acts 26: 17), the authority of Christ entering into that, but the availability of the servant, only newly converted, the Lord imparting to Saul of Tarsus that he is to come into this great matter of divine sending, to be a signally usable vessel in the hand of the Lord.

Well now, in this prophecy of Isaiah we get this remarkable array of glory disclosed to the prophet. The detail of it is not in mind at the present time but rather the extent of it. "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" What a sense the prophet is given of divine supremacy in the midst of what was so testing for him. He sees a display of divine glory: "the whole earth is full of his glory!" The question would be whether we have any such view as this of the divine glory. Have we seized the whole scene in our hearts and minds in relation to Christ, the glorious King? Is our outlook the full extent of the divine outlook in these things? Are we narrow in our thoughts of what God is able for? Are we restricted in what we conceive in our prayers and our thoughts as we have the testimony in view? "The whole earth is full of his glory!"

But then there is something to be done. A prophet is needful to be used of God at this critical time. When he is sent, the message with which he is sent is in one sense a discouraging one; it intimated that his voice would not be heard. But nonetheless he is sent, as if to show us that God is proceeding on His way in gracious appeal and distinctive and definite testimony as to what His mind is. The

end of the dispensation is to be marked by that, that there is the clear and distinctive testimony to God and what His mind is. There may seem to be very little response; there may, in fact, be very little response, but the testimony is to go out and the prophet is drawn into this by this remarkable vision. Then the word is "And one of the seraphim flew unto me" with "a glowing coal, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar". What a purifying touch this is! If this man is to speak, if any one of us is to speak, how shall we speak? As having lips that have been touched by the glowing coal from off the altar, meaning that divine judgment has had to fall upon Christ. A necessity for the divine judgment to come into expression in this definite way is brought, so to say, to hear upon us that we may rightly speak, not to make anything of the man that has been brought under judgment at the cross vicariously in Jesus, not to bring forward any mere human principle or anything which man as such, away from God, calls great, but to speak with this touch which has the holiness of God in view.

So, beloved brethren, how do we serve and how shall we serve? Will it be in any sense in human ways or human methods, or with words which derive merely from what is commonplace? We would speak under God's hand with words taught by the Spirit, "communicating spiritual things by spiritual means", 1 Cor 2: 13. How much is wrought by speaking! It is, so to say, the main way in which God causes His mind to be opened out in the circle of His saints, that something is said and the truth is set forth, prophetic impressions are set forth, by speaking. So, how shall we speak? There comes a time to speak, a time to present what is of God, a time to go forward, not to hold back, despite the glory of what we stand related to and the essentially holy character of it at every point. It is not a time to hold back; there is the coal from off the altar to be applied to the lips that we may speak in holy ways of holy things, that the touch of power may not be diminished through any intrusion of that which has had to be judged and set aside in the sacrifice of Christ. "Behold", the word is, "this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin expiated". And he goes on to say,

"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" What an appealing word that is, what an appeal there is when there is something needful to be done, and there are many things needful to be done. "Who will go for us?". The prophet, faithful man as he was, prepared man as he was, says "Here am I; send me". The emphasis, as we have often been reminded, is on the word 'send'. He is not going without divine sending. Great as the need may seem, much as he may have appreciated what the need was, he is not going forth without the sending. And, dear brethren, I believe we need to fit in, as remarked earlier, to the conclusion of this remarkable time, understanding that everything is to be under divine regulation and control, that God has much that is to be done. And He loves to use men, not exactly angels - He has the angels, myriads of them, and in certain respects He uses them constantly - but think of what man is in the thought of God, as able to serve and able to speak with purified lips, and able to set afoot what is of God in its own distinctive character. So the word would be "Send me". It brings home to us, dear brethren, the need in our time of being under the authority of Christ, moving fully in the will of God, moving in the control and regulation of the Spirit, that we may be available to God in respect of His greatest things and greatest thoughts, fully available as being in the gain of the divine sending in respect of whatever matter may yet be afoot. May there be something for God out of this, as we attend to His word and see what may yet need to be done in view of the closing up of His interests here. For His Name's sake.

LONDON

17 February 1976

THE CHILDREN'S FOOTSTEPS

The aged apostle John wrote a short and beautiful letter to a family of children with their mother. In it he said how glad he was to hear that some - perhaps all - of the household were "walking in truth". We can be sure that heaven, too, looked with pleasure on footsteps, small and larger, in such a path. The children not only spoke the truth, but also in their whole conduct they wished to be true to their knowledge of God as Father. His commandment is that we should love one another. We do not exactly need a command to love Him, but do so because He has first loved us and sent His Son to die for our sins.

Peter, a fisher of men, became also a shepherd. The lambs and sheep of Jesus became scattered in various countries so he fed them and led them together in their spirits by writing them an epistle, or letter. In it he told them to walk in the steps of the Master, so that they would not just follow one another but would go in the same path as the Good Shepherd who went before them. The word "model" used there by Peter about the Lord meant at first a writing from which to copy. Our danger is to copy from our own copy, or that of someone else!

The steps of the faith of Abraham are also an example to us. Perhaps the first one was 'obedience', others 'patience', 'prayer' and 'praise'. In fact the Lord Jesus said that Abraham rejoiced greatly in seeing "my day". How much greater this day must have been to him than the days of Ur, where he first lived, and the days even of Egypt. There he would have seen the Pyramids - already old by then, and great works of man - but really only tombs and monuments of dead kings. But Jesus is the King of kings and is living to the ages of ages.

As believers we have to "make straight paths for our feet". We sometimes stray, however, because we just follow our own feelings. Imagine three persons walking in a line, one after another. The first of them is *Fact*, because the truth is in Jesus and the work that He has completed; then comes *Faith*, looking closely and lovingly; lastly

Feeling follows and is thus kept lively and true. Fact can never go astray, but if faith looks back at Feeling, what happens to them both?

J.C.Evershed