

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 53

August 1977

Contents

ESTEEMING THE PEOPLE OF GOD

PLEASING GOD

STRENGTHENING

THE CHILDREN'S GUIDE

ESTEEMING THE PEOPLE OF GOD

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1 Corinthians 3: 16-23; 2 Corinthians 4: 5,15; 1 Kings 3: 5-15

I suppose one of the greatest needs that exists amongst us at the present time is to have a right regard for the people of God. In a day of manifest breakdown, when failure has come in amongst the people of God in the way it has, there is a tendency for us to view them in a way that is not right. So I thought that we might be helped in looking at Paul's reference to the Corinthians here as to how the saints should be viewed at all times. It is not Paul writing to the Ephesian saints - those that would be in the gain of the heavenly calling and the heavenly inheritance and position, those who were walking according to the full thought of God - but it is Paul writing to the Corinthian saints, those that were perhaps in what we might term a low state. If the saints are in such a state I think Paul would help us to see that our regard for them is not to lessen in any way; they are the people of God, they are God's inheritance. We must ever view them in that way, beloved brethren. Paul could say to them "all things are yours". I think that he was affected by their being the assembly of God which was in Corinth. We must ever view what is in our local companies as being that, being linked with the supremacy of God. What exists in my locality, even though in weakness, is linked with the great thought of God; it is the assembly of God even if it is in a few weak vessels. If there are a few persons that have received the Lord Jesus and gather together, providing conditions whereby the Lord can come in and take up His rights, "where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt 18: 20). The Lord Jesus had an assembly in Corinth which belonged to Himself. We must view the saints thus, beloved brethren, otherwise we will not be able to feed them and help them and nurture them along. I think we learn that lesson from Paul. Paul was able to help every man; he could become all things in order to gain all (see 1 Cor 9: 22). If the Thessalonians needed a nurse Paul could become that, and we see

how quickly they grew through the wisdom and skill of Paul in ministering. We must view the saints as they will be in eternal conditions, the body not yet changed, the body of glory not yet received because the Lord has not come for us, but it says "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is", 1 John 3: 2. Then I believe it will be easy for us to have an appreciation of each one of the saints of God as we see them clothed in their bodies of glory. But think of the moral work of God that is in the believer that is always to be taken account of by us and appreciated. Paul would help us on that line in these verses that I read in the first epistle and the second epistle: "all things are yours". I think God would speak to us as to our behaviour in regard to all that has taken place, especially the way in which servants took advantage of God's people. The servant is never to be above those that he serves. What skill Paul had in service amongst the people of God! Who could have gone into Corinth like Paul? What a man he was! What a servant! He was one who was prepared by God. Think of the time heaven spent on the preparation of Paul for service. What a vessel he was "an elect vessel to me" the Lord Jesus could say, Acts 9: 15. The Lord personally imparted the feelings that were necessary for Paul to minister. What great light was given to him from heaven, light I suppose that eclipsed everything that any servant ever had: the truth of Christ and the assembly, and what the body of Christ was to be here in the scene of testimony as belonging to the Lord Jesus. I think all this was instilled in the feelings of Paul so that he always had a right regard for the people of God even in days of crises and failure. God would help us to get the saints before us as they are in His gaze. One did not have the privilege that many of the brethren here had to be constantly with Mr Taylor, although one was with him a few times, but I distinctly remember him saying that you will never be able to assemble rightly with the people of God unless you get God's view of the saints. Have we sought to do that? Have we sought to get near to one another to see the personal link that each believer has with God and with the Lord Jesus? Have you ever sought to see how persons have received the Lord Jesus? We have been speaking about receiving the Lord Jesus as Saviour, that is,

faith becoming operative in persons. God grants to each a measure of faith we are told in Scripture (see Rom 12: 3), as though it is the gift of God; but then faith is to be put into use so that persons begin to use it Godward. And as Christ comes on to our view faith enables us to lay claim to Him as our Saviour, and also enables us to repent towards God; that is, we have some right regard for the holiness of God and all that is due to Him as God, the supreme, majestic Being that He is, a righteous and holy God. We have some sense of what is due to Him and we repent as to what has come in in ourselves that keeps us away from God, sin in all its awfulness, lawlessness against God and against His Christ. Thank God for His sovereign work in new birth which we were speaking of in John 3, what God has done from His own side. It is not that we had anything to do with it; God cares for us and has operated sovereignly in new birth in the believer. Therefore the groundwork is laid for the reception of the Lord Jesus sovereignly by God. It is not that I have been able to come to some judgment through human concentration and ability to sort out things and come to a conclusion that I should be here for God, but God simply holds out Christ as an object of faith to persons to be believed on. It is God's answer to man in sin. The need of man is such that he is incapable of answering himself. Man has the power to sin and serve sin, that is what is innate in man, but God in new birth provides an area in man that is ready to listen to Himself. So we receive the Lord Jesus as Saviour initially, but then we have an appreciation of Him as the One who gave Himself for us; as Paul would say, "the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me" (Gal 2: 20) and we desire to know more about the Lord Jesus. And He helps us in our knowledge of God; He could say "He that has seen me has seen the Father", John 14: 9. Therefore if we want to know something of the greatness of God, the revelation of God as Father, it requires that we have a holy, precious link with the Lord Jesus. Now I would view every saint of God in that light as having received the Lord Jesus and I would observe through their walk that they have received the Spirit of God. Therefore we are never to lose that regard for any of the saints of God, no matter what may come upon them. Conditions may come in to discourage us and cause us

to weaken in the pathway of faith and not be as sincere in our walk as we should be, but nevertheless we must not lose sight of the eternal condition that belongs to the people of God in spite of low conditions that may come in.

The Corinthians apparently became obsessed with certain persons that were serving amongst them and Paul moves to set them right. He says that a servant is not to be above those that he serves, he is to serve as a bondman. And he says "all are yours"; that is what I would like to draw attention to in both these passages: "all are yours". So whether it is Christ or the servants or the ministry, whatever it may be, it is yours; God has given it to you to help you to become established in your links with Himself. So Paul is saying here that God is caring for you. It is a corrective epistle; it is not Ephesians, the revealing of great light, the state in the saints being such that great light can be unfolded as to the enjoyment of the heavenly inheritance. The view in Corinthians is that the saints may be guided into the thoughts of God. But first of all we must value those whom God has given us to guide.

One feels that through the 1960s there was a lack, largely in the servants, of right regard for the people of God, and the Lord Jesus has personally taken servants to task in this matter. Some that were available in purity in the 1950s have been set aside because of this. One would be careful in saying that but I feel that it is so. The Lord Jesus would say to such, Come ye apart and rest a while (see Mark 6: 31). I would look for any servant who is recovered to have a right regard for the people of God, and as a result you would be able to trust them. Some servants of the Lord who are able to lead and guide the people of God have been recovered recently and what I would look for, as one meets them again, is that they have a right regard for the people of God. They would say that we are yours. I would say that Mr Darby is ours, Mr Raven is ours, Mr Coates is ours, Mr Taylor is ours. Is it not so beloved brethren? We have their ministry, given as light from God to guide us into the truth. Thank God for it; thank God for persons who have been able to understand the truth and assimilate it in such a

way that they can break it down and help others into it. Thank God for the servants that we have at the present time. Do we regard them? Do we claim them as ours? Do we claim their ministry as ours? One has heard of certain localities that refuse ministry of servants at the present time. I would think that such persons would be treading on dangerous ground, not claiming what belongs to them as provided by God.

So Paul says "all things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things coming, all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's". Oh what fine language that is! Paul is wholly right in his links with the Lord Jesus, serving under His hands in such a way that he would be just available to the saints to help them. Think of the holy desires of Paul. His motives were pure. Are our motives pure as we serve the people of God? What would we desire today as God would speak to us? - that we all would be brought into line with God's desires for us. What are God's desires? They are pure, beloved brethren. God does not desire the death of any; He wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (see 1 Tim 2: 4). This is not a gospel meeting but the gospel is the basis of all that we have. The desires of God are pure, and what I see in these two passages in Corinthians is that Paul's desires were pure. The Lord had to search Peter at the end of John as to what his motives were in service. "Shepherd my sheep" is what the Lord said to him, if you love Me. Peter was searched I suppose to his very core as to what his motives were in serving the Lord Jesus. But Paul has such a regard for the people of God that he would say, Everything is yours, and he seeks to give them what belongs to them. We have been speaking of the rights that the people of God have that they can lay claim to. Paul is seeking in the Corinthian epistles to help the saints to lay claim to every right that belongs to them. He says, You are an assembly of God; he is addressing the same persons here telling them that "all are yours", the same persons that he spoke to in verse 1 where he says "And I, brethren, have not been able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly; as to babes in Christ". Just

because they were not acting spiritually at this time does not alter Paul's regard for them, he is addressing them according to their eternal position, what they were as having received the Lord Jesus and being in Him. Paul says, They are the people of God, and he would seek to bring them up to the Ephesian level in his ministry. That is what I see through this section. He says "Do ye not know that ye are the temple of God...?" What language that is, seeking to bring them to something. He says "Do ye not know that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any one corrupt the temple of God him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye". He would preserve them from becoming mere professing Christians, persons that would become sects, persons that would resort to what would be on a party level having a man as their head.

So, beloved brethren, if nothing else registers with us at this time, let us always have God's view of His people. Let us hold in our hearts that everything belongs to them. The rights that they have are given to them by God. Let us help one another to lay claim to every right. Let us know the full meaning of what it is to be the children of God, that it is ours by right. Think of what attaches to the assembly as being sin apart, as coming out of the side of Christ, not being linked by natural birth in that way. We were speaking about being born again being generative, that is, you can trace its roots back to God. The idea of lineage comes into the thought of born of God; that is, you have had your beginning in Christ. What a beginning it is, a pure, holy beginning! God would have us maintained on that line. Therefore if we fall to what we might call a low state, God in faithfulness would bring a word in through a servant that would correct us. May we always be ready to receive adjustment on that line. It has often been said that spiritual persons are quickly adjusted; and we are always in need of a word of adjustment. We should look to God that He may be free to bring in such a word that we might quickly get on to the line of growing by the true knowledge of God.

In the second epistle, chapter 4, Paul is using pretty much the same language. I suppose the saints now are on their way to being adjusted. Paul is able to review things here in order to establish them. He does not just give ministry as light and let it go but would personally guide and lead and help persons. He would become all things to all men; whatever the need, he would get down to the level of the persons involved in view of helping them. It is not that Paul would link on with a person's sin, that is not the point, but he would get near to them in view of helping them, in view of establishing them and bringing them up to the great thoughts of God. Do you know what God has available for you? It says "Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love him", 1 Cor 2: 9. Do you know something of the love of God? I think we are limited as to what we know of it. I suppose the gift of the Spirit would be one of the great proofs of God's love. It has been said to be the divine kiss. Think of God kissing us through the gift of the Spirit, in that way giving us the power, a divine Person indwelling believers to hold them for Himself, to hold them in their link with the Lord Jesus. As receiving the Lord Jesus we never get to the point where we are beyond the need of Christ. But the Spirit would help us to draw on all that there is in the Person of the Son, the anointed Man of God, the Man that would do everything for God here. Dost thou believe on the Son of God? That would be the question. Do you believe on the Lord Jesus? that is first, but do you believe on the Son of God? Paul says that "all things are yours", everything belongs to you. As belonging to the family of God, God makes everything available to you. Think of the Father that God is. Think of your own personal father, everything that the father has is made available to the children. Many have had children here, you desire that your children would grow, come into the gain of life. But we want to have more than natural desires for our children; we want to have desires that our children might find their place in the family of God. Yet how much we fail on this line. But God is gracious, God is merciful. If we cast ourselves on the mercy of God our families will be preserved; and we cast ourselves on God too continually that we may prosper

and grow as being in the divine family, the greatest of all the families. We were speaking of the distinction of that family over against the other families; we have been favoured to be found here in this dispensation where Christ has been revealed as the Son of God.

The other families had some indication of it through the prophetic word from God that Christ was in the thoughts of God and would come forward; therefore as our brother suggested this afternoon, Simeon was in the gain of all that light, he would see the answer to all the prophetic ministry that came out from God as to Christ, as to the thoughts that God had as to the Lord Jesus. As he took the holy Babe in his arms he could say, "Lord, now thou lettest thy bondman go, according to thy word, in peace", Luke 2: 29. Oh what feelings would come out. You think of John the baptist too, the link as we have been taught between the Old Testament and the New; he would say, You have a favour of belonging to a family which I do not belong to, I am only a friend of the Bridegroom. He could say "He must increase, but I must decrease", John 3: 30. What feelings he had in regard to the Lord Jesus, He had too conscious knowledge of the favour that would rest upon persons who would be in Christ and who would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is our favour to be in that time, and certain rights are granted to us by God because of the dispensation in which we are and the light that has been given to us by way of testimony linked with this dispensation. Every family of God is established on the basis of answering to the light that is given in its distinct dispensation. What makes the family of God that we have been speaking of - that is the assembly - so great is that it is the one that has been established as having a link with the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. So Paul would say "all things are yours", everything belongs to you. God has given you the greatest, you might say, in that He has given you Christ. This is the greatest of all the dispensations because Christ has been given and the Holy Spirit has been given as the gifts of God. We are in the possession of the double portion. Beloved brethren, let us view one another in that regard and hold one another thus in our affections. I think we will find that it will be easy for us to merge together as

brethren and we will provide the Matthew 18 position where Christ can be amongst us in the midst.

I read in Kings because I believe the feelings in Solomon are akin to those that were in the beloved apostle Paul. Think of Solomon coming on the scene following the reign of David. How would you have liked to follow such a reign if God chose you to come forward as king? What a reign the reign of David was. Think of what David set on in his affection for the house of God, all that he provided for the building of the house that there might be a suitable place for the divine dwelling on the earth. And think of David as the one that set on the service of God, the service of praise. He has been said to be the man *par excellence* in the sight of God because of the tender, precious, holy feelings that he had for God. Now Solomon is to follow up that reign, and what you see as he comes on the scene as king is that he has a right regard for the people of God: "a great people", he says. God put His trust in Solomon with regard to the leadership of His people in such a way that He would give him whatever he desired. He could have asked for the riches of the world, he could have asked to live eternally. This was in a dream, God speaking to him, allowing him to find out what his motives were as to his desire to lead to great a people that had been led so rightly under the reign of David. What a man Solomon was here, one who was little in his own eyes. Paul was that. As Saul of Tarsus he had authority to persecute the saints. He must have had great sway with the authorities at that time to have letters in his pocket that would enable him to persecute and put to death. the people of God. But Paul is adjusted by receiving the God-given view of Christ, so that in his service amongst the people of God his very name is changed to Paul which means little. That is Solomon here, little in his own sight, being dependent upon God for wisdom to guide and lead so great a people.

So one feels the need, beloved brethren, of just instilling into our hearts a right regard of the people of God, no matter what their state or condition is Paul would not flatter any man. What ministry come out in the first epistle to the Corinthians through his

faithfulness, not seeking to lord it over the saints or exploit them or take advantage of them but seeking to lead them on in the great things of God to be what they were as the assembly of God in Corinth. Is that not our desire, beloved brethren, as we serve so great a people? What would our desire be today for everyone here? - that we might grow in the knowledge of God and find our place happily amongst those that love the Lord Jesus in incorruption and who delight in the fact that they have a right to be children of God and to be in the divine family. What a right we have to God as Father! The Lord Jesus would help us to take up that right in John 20: "my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God" (v 17). The Lord would help us on His departure to take up that right to worship God. He said "I ascend to my Father and your Father". I think the Lord would liberate us today that we may not be bound in our feelings for one another. I believe that the sphere of eternal life comes into expression as our feelings for Christ and for one another are liberated. We should love one another as Paul loved the saints at Corinth. Even though we are not yet perfected there is that in the believer which is going through eternally and which can now be taken account of and appreciated. May we ever have that view of God's people so that we can assemble together as brethren under the headship of Christ and receive instruction from God. For His Name's sake.

BROOKLYN NY

26 March 1977

PLEASING GOD

R.S.Renton

Luke 3: 21,22; Genesis 13: 14-18; Hebrews 11: 5,6; 1 Thessalonians 4: 1

I have it on my heart, beloved brethren, to speak about pleasing God. We live in a world where men seek to please themselves. I suppose there never was a day such as the present when men devote themselves to pleasure; when men combine together to seek conditions where they may work less to gain the maximum pleasure for themselves. In the midst of these conditions, what it must be to God to have those down here who please Him. Would you like to be numbered amongst them? Would you like God to look down on you and say, That man, that woman pleases me? I know the reaction. You think you are too weak, you think you are too small and too insignificant to please God in any way. I want to show you, if the Lord helps me, that your pleasing God is not beyond you.

First of all, I want to speak of the Lord Jesus. What better subject, what better theme can any servant present to the people of God than the supreme moral excellence of Jesus? I have selected this passage from Luke's gospel for two reasons. One is that Luke presents the meat offering, and another is that the Father's voice calls attention *personally* to Jesus, signifying His own heart's satisfaction in Him. The meat offering is a very interesting offering. You will remember the ingredients - fine flour mingled with oil and frankincense. The fine flour, which Luke depicts for us, is the evenness and the perfection of the life of Jesus. Oh, beloved brethren, as I think of Him in this way, I think of the hymn (No.230):

'We wonder at Thy lowly mind,
And fain would like Thee be'.

There was the evenness without any predominant or salient feature in His character, all gloriously, supremely perfect, for as He walked here amongst men, grace, humility and love found full expression. In this part where we have read, "And it came to pass, all the people

having been baptised, and Jesus having been baptised and praying", Luke presents to us the model in Jesus; as Peter says in another connection: "leaving you a model that ye should follow in his steps", 1 Pet 2: 21. Jesus in Luke's gospel is a model of dependence; He says "I do not seek my will, but the will of Him that has sent me", John 5: 30. I sometimes think of the feelings of the priest, as depicted for us in Leviticus (chap 2: 2), with the fine flour which was mingled with oil and the frankincense; he puts in his hand and takes out his handful, which would represent the measure of his appreciation of the excellence of Jesus. We read "and he shall take thereout his handful of the flour thereof, and of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense". Who could fully assess the fragrance of the holy life of Jesus in perfect manhood here but God Himself? With every other man there is a predominant feature. If you think of Paul, there was energy and zeal - that was characteristic of the man. If you think of Peter, you think of one with ardent affection; that was his predominant feature. In John you have a man of tender sensibilities and abstraction of thought. With Samson there was strength. If you think of Solomon you have wisdom as an outstanding quality. But with Jesus all was gloriously even and perfect, and the Father just delighted to have His Son down here in perfect, dependent manhood. So the heaven was opened. It says in Matthew that "the heavens were opened to him" (chap 3: 16) - to Him; Luke says "the heaven was opened" - what a sight! the heaven opened upon a praying Man. "And the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form as a dove upon him", finding complacency there; and then we have "a voice came out of heaven, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight". The "Thou" is emphatic, not 'this' but "Thou". On the mount of transfiguration Peter, not knowing what to say, said "Rabbi, it is good that we should be here; and let us make three tabernacles, for thee one, and for Moses one, and for Elias one. For he knew not what he should say". Then the voice said "This is my beloved Son: hear him" (Mark 9: 5-7), calling the attention of others to Christ. Oh, to have heaven's estimate of the Lord Jesus! You may say your estimate is small; we all would increasingly desire to grow in our apprehension and in our appreciation of Jesus. I

commend to my brethren Mr Darby's Synopsis on Leviticus 2. You will find your soul nurtured as he delineates the features which marked Jesus. I could quote to you but I will not and I would ask you to get out the Synopsis and turn to Leviticus 2 and your soul will be satiated. If you do not get a quickening touch, get to the Spirit and ask Him why not. "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight" - "in thee", as if the innermost feelings of the Father were fully expressed in His delight in Christ. Where every other man had proved a failure, where every other man had come short of the glory of God, the Father's eye could rest complacently in Jesus - "Thou"! This would relate doubtless to the Lord's private life of which we are told nothing - those secret eighteen years. What intimacy, what wealth, what glory, what supreme moral excellence shone out, what infinite delight for the Father's heart! "In thee I have found my delight". Beloved brethren, that was absolute. The Father's full delight centred in the Son. What did we sing in our hymn? -

'No thought of His e'er moved apart from Thine'.

let us feed on that, dear brethren -

'Each holy footstep gave Thee fresh delight;

Perfect expression of Thy will divine

Thou hadst in Him - come forth from glory bright '.

You will remember what it says in Colossians: "for in him all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell, and by him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of his cross", chap 1: 19,20. Let us so be occupied, for this should be our staple diet, beloved brethren, feeding on the moral excellence of Jesus. In the next chapter it says "For in him dwells" - suggesting complacency - "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are complete in him". This would relate to Christ where and as He is in glory. Might I ask you, beloved brethren, a simple question? Do you want anything other than Christ? The Colossians wanted Christ but evidently thought that philosophy and vain deceit would add to what they had. Oh to have our souls just satisfied with the glory of that Man! If that were so, what stature would develop with us! What

praises would flow from us! What wealth when we gather together for the service of God! What light would unfold in our reading meetings! What prophetic power in our ministry meetings; the temple would function, everyone alive, everyone spiritually vibrant. May the lord help us that it may be increasingly so! Here was one Man, and the Father's full delight was vested in Him.

Now I want to speak of Abraham to show that if we are pleasing to God He will make it abundantly evident to us. Here in Genesis.13 we have Abraham and Lot. It says that Abraham was rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold (see v 2). There was no difficulty with the silver and the gold, but the controversy arose about the cattle. "And Lot also who went with Abram had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land could not support them" (vv 5,6). There was strife between the herdsmen of Abraham's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. But how magnanimous Abraham was! He says to Lot, let there be no strife. The land is before us: if you take the left, I'll take the right; if you take the right, I'll take the left. Beloved brethren, how magnanimous are we? Are we mean, niggardly, demanding? Abram might have said, Well, of course, I am your uncle and I should really have the preference. No, he was a man of principle, he was a spiritually wealthy man, he was a heavenly man characteristically. He says, You take the choice; I'll take what is left. And that pleased God. In our actions among the saints and in our daily work, God is looking on for He has a perfect assessment of everything and He can tell us when He is pleased with us. Would you like to have that sense? I certainly would. Would you like God to give you that assurance that in your walk, in your deportment, in the way you carry yourself, in the way you speak when you are so different from the general run of things, God may say, I am pleased with you. So it says "Jehovah said to Abram, after that Lot had separated himself from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that thou seest will I give to thee, and to thy seed for ever". Oh, Abram would say, I did not expect this! You see how God can come in for the comfort and the stimulus and

for the encouragement and the benefit of His people. It says in the Proverbs, "When a man's ways please Jehovah, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him", chap 16: 7. What can God not do, beloved brethren, if we are pleasing to Him? What would He not give us? God is not niggardly; He does not dole out in small portions. He makes this proposal to Abram when he had acted in this way as if to say, Abram, I am delighted with what you have done. Then He says "Arise, walk through the land according to the length of it and according to the breadth of it; for I will give it to thee". What is the reaction? Abram moved his tents. He was not told to move his tents.

The confirmation had come from God Himself of His pleasure in Abram in the bountiful way he had dealt with his nephew, and it says he "dwelt by the oaks of Mamre" - in a stable position - "which are in Hebron" - that is Colossians where the glory of Christ is brought before our view, range after range of divine glories. And it says "And he built there an altar to Jehovah". So God gets his full portion. That is in chapter 13. In chapter 14 he met the subtle suggestion of the king of Sodom who said "Give me the souls, and take the property for thyself" (v 21). Abram says "I have lifted up my hand to Jehovah, the Most High God, possessor of heavens and earth, if from a thread even to a sandal-thong, yes, if of all that is thine, I take anything" (vv 22,23). Abram would take nothing from the world, for he was independent of the world and its system; as I said, he was characteristically a heavenly man. And so he acts nobly, fortified as he was by Melchisedec the priest. Then God immediately speaks to him, as it says: "After these things the word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not Abram; I am thy shield, thy exceeding great reward", chap 15: 1. If there had been any suggestion in Abram's mind that he had lost something by not taking the property - I am not suggesting that there was - God says "I am thy shield"; I am your protector; I will stand by you; I will support you; I will enrich you; "thy exceeding great reward". God Himself his reward - what recompense! And then we read "And he led him out" (v 5). I was interested in what Mr Taylor says (see Vol

51, p.214) that Jesus led him out. Jesus unquestionably. Think of being led out by Jesus. What a compensation! And He says to him "Look now toward the heavens, and number the stars" - in the previous section it would be the earthly family; now there is a heavenly family coming into view - "if thou be able to number them. And he said to him, So shall thy seed be! And he believed Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness" (vv 5,6). Oh how pleasing this must have been to Jehovah, to see one man characterised by faith, renouncing all the overtures that the world could offer, and God coming in supportingly and saying "I am thy shield, thy exceeding great reward".

In chapter 17 Jehovah says to him "walk before my face, and be perfect" (v 1). God makes a covenant with him, and then on that self-same day Abram puts into execution the covenant of circumcision - that self-same day. And would there be approbation from God? What greater than that three heavenly visitors should appear to him (see chap 18)? In chapter 22 God applies a test to him. It is good for us to remember, beloved brethren, that we are all under test. There is a classic by Mr Taylor, "Divine Trial and Exposure" (see Vol 87, p.65); it is good for us to read it betimes. How we match up is a question - we cannot say much. This is the final test to Abram, and when he answers to it God says "By myself I swear... that, because thou hast done this, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, I will richly bless thee, and greatly multiply thy seed, as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is on the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves" (vv 16-18). What a sense of divine approval must have possessed Abraham! And then we have in the parenthesis "And Bethuel begot Rebecca" (v 23) - that is the assembly coming on to view. Well, dear brethren, I cite these passages to indicate that when we please God there will always be abundant evidence of this fact from God Himself.

Now in Hebrews we have Enoch. It says of Enoch in the historical setting that he walked with God for three hundred years.

He was sixty-five years old when Methushelah was born and he walked with God for three hundred years. What a wonderful thing! Mr Taylor said he would say reverently that Enoch selected God as his travelling companion (see Vol 77, p.371). What intimacy Enoch must have known during those three hundred years, and what possibilities for us in our day! Think of walking with God! It does not say God walked with him but that he walked with God. He must have been morally right and God must have delighted in his company. What communion, impartation and communications Enoch would enjoy during these three hundred years! I believe Mr Darby said that he had enjoyed unbroken communion for forty years, but Enoch walked with God for three hundred years, and he was not. He must have been missed. "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death". I believe verily that there are persons today who will not see death. Maybe all of us here will not see death. Beloved brother and sister, let that be a stimulus, for the Lord is certainly about to come, we are on the very eve of our translation. What consternation will beset this world when that takes place. "And he was not" - maybe young sisters not at the office, young brothers not at their posts. This will take place and I believe beloved brethren, when the church goes, God will immediately send a working of error or strong delusion and men will believe a lie. But for us who love our Lord Jesus, what it will be to be in scenes of unsullied bliss, just to behold the face of Jesus. Mr Darby pens in hymn 79 verse 8:

'There with unwearied gaze
Our eyes on Him we'll rest
And satisfy with endless praise
Our hearts supremely blest'.

I think that will be it, for we shall just gaze and gaze on His blessed face. That moment is imminent, dear brethren; it may be to-day. Someone said, If anyone said the Lord may come tomorrow, he is a wicked bondman. The rapture should ever be in our affections for it is in the Lord's affections, and He is just waiting the Father's time - the patience of the Christ - and then all the saints will be together

without one shade of variation. You look at the breakdown and it breaks your heart, and I do not think there would be a family in this company without some sorrow, and the Lord brings in sorrow after sorrow to mellow our spirits, to break our wills, to make us ready for that moment when we shall see His face. Oh just to be, as was said in the reading, pliable in the Lord's hands. What can He not do with us if we are in that state of simple dependence, just waiting for Him? - not only waiting but watching, which is more active than waiting.

So it says of Enoch that he "was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him". It could be viewed as a type of the church being translated but this is the point I want to refer to: "for before his translation he has the testimony that he had pleased God". Beloved brethren, might I make an appeal to you? Might I make a suggestion to you? This is one individual singled out, and before his translation he has the testimony that he had pleased God. I wonder, could this tribute be rendered to you or to me? Would there be a desire engendered that it may be so? God says, as it were, Enoch, I love your company; I want you up here. He has been up there for how many years? Thousands of years. "Before his translation he has the testimony that he had pleased God".

Now in closing I want to refer to this passage in Thessalonians. I could hear someone say, I can understand Jesus being in every way pleasing to God, but I am not Abraham and I am certainly not Enoch. This letter was written to the Thessalonians, who I should think would be weeks old in the truth as some of us have been years: ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty - yes, fifty years in fellowship. How humbling to think of it! You would not speak of it boastingly; I would not, for how little I have to show for it and yet how quickly God can act; but some of us must be very, very slow learners. Here is a young company, and Paul in writing to them says they are "in God the Father" (chap 1: 1). What a place they had in the affections of the Father and of Paul as he writes affectionately to them! "For the rest, then brethren, we beg you and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, even as ye have received from us how ye ought to walk and please

God". Now there is a very interesting footnote: 'I do not say 'to please', because then pleasing God would be a distinct object. Here it is rather 'to walk so as to please'. The point is, the 'how', that is, the manner of doing it, not that it ought to be an object, however true that may be'. Well beloved brethren, I feel tested as I read this passage. Believers a few weeks' old, "how ye ought to walk and please God, even as ye also do walk". And if anyone can say, Well, I think I can put myself into that category, I think I walk so as to please God, what does Paul say? "That ye would abound still more". As long as we are here, dear brethren, there is always room for increase, there is always room for development. May we freshly place ourselves in the hand of the Spirit of God! What better hands? Submitting, committing ourselves to Him that the work in our souls may be deepened, that we may enter into a greater realisation of all that into which we have been brought; and it may be, while we do not realise it, we will be found here pleasing God. May the Lord help us! There is always room for expansion, and if we have been on a line of self pleasing may we, with the object for our affections of Christ in glory and the presence in power of the Spirit down here ready to help us, dedicate and commit ourselves to be here more for the divine pleasure, for His Name's sake.

KILMARNOCK

26 March 1977

STRENGTHENING

Luke 22: 39-46; 1 Samuel 30: 3-6, 18-25; Ephesians 3: 14-19

J.McK. The brethren will notice in each of these passages the references to strengthening. It might be profitable for us to enquire as to how divine strengthening comes in in view of reaching (we speak carefully) divine objectives. We begin, of course, with perfection, in the manhood of the Lord Jesus Himself. Luke's gospel is outstanding in the touches given as to His humanity. At this point He is on the mount of Olives, and we have the unique touch that an angel appeared to Him from heaven strengthening Him. It would seem that, though He is always unique, there is something for our instruction in the way that the Lord Jesus was in circumstances in which He needed strengthening in view of reaching the divine objective. In David, we have a man who, chosen of God, often rises in his history to a type of Christ. I am thinking of him today as a type of a believer in whom the Spirit of Christ shines. At a time when the enemy seemed to have gained advantage he strengthens himself, and that results in a full experience amongst the saints of recovery of what is precious according to God. Ephesians 3 gives us the collective side of our experience, the way that the Father's Spirit comes in in view of our reaching the highest level in response to God Himself.

A.R.D. It is attractive to realise that the power of God is available as we seek to answer to His thoughts for us.

J.McK. And to see that the circumstances of the testimony are by no means outside divine control. We often tend to think about the present circumstances of the testimony of God as being the result simply of a sequence of events. There is nothing further from the truth. Throughout Scripture it seems to be part of the mystery of God's ways that He works out His greatest thoughts, undiverted, in circumstances of outward weakness. If in His ways He has reduced us to a point where that weakness is felt, as we receive it from Him we will prove the strength that He brings into the circumstances, so

that we reach divine objectives. Not that we feel ourselves sufficient for them, not as enfeebled either, but as divinely strengthened. That is how God's end is reached in the saints.

A.R.D. Paul knew something of this when he said "when I am weak, then I am powerful", 2 Cor.12: 10.

J.McK. Yes. The Lord says to Paul there, "my power is perfected in weakness". The Lord Jesus was speaking to Paul then of something that He Himself had experienced. Luke 22 is the perfection of Christ Himself in a condition of manhood. He knew what it was to be in a situation that needed divine strengthening.

J.A.T. Do we really prove this strengthening as we submit to the ways of God and His present ordering, as the Lord submitted to the will of God in the garden? David was in the gain of that.

J.McK. I think that is right. It is testing for us. Many of us would like to see our circumstances different, to see many more in our localities to strengthen the testimony of God. That may come, in His mercy. But let us see that the circumstances are not simply the result of human failure but are of divine design, so that into them may come an experience of power that would not have been known otherwise. I think this steadies us.

R.D.P. Strength and power are peculiarly for the earth, are they not? I think Mr Stoney said that they were for the earth, enjoyment was for heaven.

J.McK. The very fact of strengthening means that there is something there to be strengthened. We should realise that it is not simply an intervention of divine power. God could do things that way but He chooses to strengthen what is already available for Him in His testimony. How precious this makes the saints to us! Think of it in Christ, God strengthening Him in view of His being undiverted at the moment of supreme test. The immense issues of the work of redemption were at stake.

D.J.W. Do we need to experience this from moment to moment? Samson said, Strengthen me this once! We cannot rely on past

experience. Is that the idea of prayer - dependence for that strength to come in?

J.McK. That is right. God does not supply us, at the beginning of our Christian history, with all that is needed to carry us all the way through. He intends that we should draw day by day, hour by hour, on the strength that He gives. We need to be divinely strengthened to have anything to say to the things of God.

A.R.D. Is it dependence that should mark us if we are to expect the divine support?

J.McK. It is, and also subjection. The Lord is dependent here, but He is also subject. Those two things go together.

K.G. Daniel, in chapter 10, went through very real testing and exercise, and he spoke twice of finding no strength in himself. Then, after the voice had spoken with him, he said "I was strengthened" (v 19). He was dependent on the source of strength and he received it.

J.McK. The scripture there says, "Then there touched me again one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me; and he said, Fear not, man greatly beloved; peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And as he was speaking with me I was strengthened, and I said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me". That would mean that even to receive a divine communication we need to be strengthened.

C.A.G. What is in view in this strengthening? It does not stop at the strengthening of an individual, does it? I was thinking of the last two verses of Ephesians 3, which are the climax. All these things relate to our being together, in the power of the Spirit, in the service of God in the assembly. 1 Corinthians 12 tells us that "God has set the members... as it has pleased him" (v 18), we being baptised in the power of one Spirit into one body. We are acted upon in a way that makes us amenable to being blended together - in a sense of weakness but being strengthened in power.

J.McK. Yes, and the experiences of the saints individually all contribute to that. The wealth of experience in the body of the

brethren has been developed in situations of testing, which make us find where divine supplies are. Therefore we are not strangers to that as we come together. Surely what we reach, as together in the assembly, is greater; it must be so.

C.A.G. It is greater because it is the result of the Spirit's operations over a long period.

N.T.M. Does a scripture like this show that every circumstance has its value? I was thinking of your earlier remarks as to God arranging things so that the need for being strengthened might be known by us. We need to get the gain of every circumstance that we may be in. It may just be sickness; it may be much more than that, it may be assembly sorrows. Would it be in mind that there is something to be reached in every circumstance?

J.McK. That is important. Sometimes we tend to think of discipline as entering into any reducing exercises amongst us. Whilst that might be so, and we would be rightly exercised about it, at the same time it may be that God has brought us into circumstances in order to prove Him in a way that we have not known Him before. You look around among the brethren and you see circumstances of extraordinary testing. Of those who labour amongst us in ministry, many are affected by weakness physically. That is not without significance. To vessels marked by human frailty divine supplies come. The strengthening touch of the hand of God is seen. This in itself is entirely beyond the reach of man. Man does not understand things that are done this way, therefore he despises what is small, what is weak or outwardly insignificant. Yet this is the way God has chosen to carry through His richest thoughts.

T.B. Does the thought in Hebrews 12 (v 7) enter into this? "Ye endure for chastening, God conducts himself towards you as towards sons; for who is the son that the father chastens not?" If we saw it in that light would it help us to endure the chastening?

J.McK. Certainly that would help us as to matters involving God's discipline and His ways with us. I was thinking more of the general circumstances of the testimony, which were really of divine design,

so that in this mysterious way God is carrying through in quality something that answers to His own greatest thoughts. In Exodus 20 there are references to the greatness of God - the thunderings and the flames and smoke of Mount Sinai, and the sound of the trumpet exceeding loud - all to emphasise the greatness and glory of God Himself. Then immediately God says to Moses, Tell the people "An altar of earth shalt thou make unto me" (v 24). That is the way that Jesus has come in, in circumstances of outward simplicity and weakness, and yet it is the same God. He says, if I have drawn near to you this way, this is the way you are to draw near to me.

N.T.M. So that the God that we shall know and serve and, speaking reverently, the God we shall enjoy eternally, is the same God whom we are to learn and prove now in a way that, in a sense, would not be feasible eternally. Yet what we are to learn of Him now is to become of eternal value.

J.McK. Yes. So, how precious is the life of Jesus! It was a life untarnished by sin, unaffected by alien influence, unspoiled, and here coming under extreme testing. Satan had already been defeated by this glorious Man, One who had been led by the Spirit in the wilderness and who had returned as free in His heart, the devil overthrown completely. But here, in Luke 22, another testing circumstance arises; it says "And going forth he went according to his custom to the mount of Olives". This is unique to Luke, that He goes according to His custom; that is, He goes a tried, a proven way. This is the way the Lord Jesus had lived. John 6 tells us that He lived on account of the Father. Therefore at a time of testing He goes according to His custom.

K.G. Is that why it goes on to say, after He was strengthened, that He prayed more intently? Is not that really affecting? I wondered if it linked with what you said at the beginning, the objective? It was that which was really upon His soul, which He would be so absorbed with, as praying more intently. I wondered if it linked with the exercise that was raised with us in London as to prayer (Col 2: 1) and the fervency of it.

J.McK. Yes, the need is to be sustained in it. You see, the circumstances are not changed; the Lord is strengthened in them. The change really comes in the power of sustainment in the vessel. It says that the angel "appeared to him". It does not put it as though it were a public intervention. It is an appearance to Him. There is a need with us of a secret sense that God is coming into the circumstances in which we are and strengthening us in them. The circumstances remain the same.

D.J.W. Have you any impression as to it being an angel? Is that still a current service?

J.McK. It would be in the sense that scripture speaks, that they are ministering spirits sent forth on account of those who will inherit salvation. I think there is a difference between the angelic service here and that in Matthew 4, when the lord returns from the wilderness, when angels came and ministered to him. That is after the victory is won and Satan is defeated. The Lord returns, free in His heart and spirit, and angels ministered to Him. But here, in Luke 22, He is in the very circumstances of testing. And that is where we are. The Lord is a model for us here. In Luke the Lord takes the disciples as far as He can; it says they followed Him. "And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw"; that is, a man's measure. He is within range. It is not the mystery of His Person, though that always remains, but the reality of His manhood. The disciples stand aside, as it were, unequal in themselves forth is test, and yet contemplate - a Man who was perfect in it.

R.D.P. A stone's throw is a man's measure of strength, is it not? It is not a defined length, it depends on strength, and here there were none of them able for it. They would be literally near, I suppose, to one of the greatest moments that had ever been known on the earth. The lord was going through in His Spirit what was to be borne in His body, but they were not able for it, although within reach of some measure of understanding what it meant.

J.McK. The compass of the testimony of God at this point is in one Man, Christ. If it were possible to have diverted Him, then Satan

would have gained a complete victory. Now we may see things reduced dear brethren, - indeed we do - to a very small compass, but is God's power diminished? Have His thoughts changed? Has His power to sustain His people altered? Though the disciples were unequal for this, as you say, the Lord is very gracious. It says "coming to the disciples, he found them sleeping from grief". It is another touch that is unique to Luke's gospel. It gives a motive for their sleep. It says it was from grief. It is for us, dear brethren, to realise that, although things appear to be weak, divine strength is available in view of divine standards being maintained. The Spirit of God would freshly assert the greatness of the humanity of Jesus amongst us. What these disciples actually saw was a Man who had been unspoiled by Satan's power and entirely unaffected by alien influence. John's first epistle begins, "That... which we have seen with our eyes... and our hands handled, concerning the word of life". I believe it is a standard of unalterable moral quality that needs to be adhered to by persons who are seeking to be committed to God's testimony today. The divine standards remain.

C.A.G. That is important, and specially today. We should realise that the present time is one of finality, and divine thoughts are about to come to completion in the assembly. All these things relate to that, do they not? We are not to be occupied with the weakness and with what is around. The thing is to be occupied with what God is doing in completion, is it not?

J.McK. I am sure. We are to see that God's thoughts were carried through to completion in one Man. God is not departing from that.

C.A.G. All depended on Christ here at this point - the assembly for Him, the assembly for God; everything was dependent on Christ.

N.T.M. In Ezra the commandment is that the foundations of the house are to be solidly laid "with three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber", chap 6: 4. That is a recovery view of it, is it not? The row of new timber might link with a fresh appreciation of the manhood of Christ. I do not think it is specified elsewhere.

J.McK. So that the suggestion of the humanity of Jesus, you mean, is brought in that sense, into the recovery. God will always retain before Him what speaks of the humanity of Christ, the condition which had to be laid down. The golden pot that had the manna (see Heb 9: 4) is retained before God.

N.T.M. I wondered if recent events, and the way that some have failed, throws into greater relief the distinction of Christ. Perhaps this row of new timber has come on to our view in a peculiar way since 1970. It seems that the Lord has brought every other man down in our view - whether of gift, or ability, or that kind of thing. Really we are just left with Christ, and it is something on which we can build again and on which things can be set up in a firm and solid way in our own souls.

J.McK. Christ is the great foundation stone for God. Those disciples actually saw the Lord Jesus in these testing circumstances, and they saw Him strengthened in those circumstances. John says "we have seen with our eyes... and report to you". We are the recipients of that report. Perhaps Isaiah 53 is an extension of the report. The tender sapling: what timber was growing, growing up for God in circumstances which yielded nothing to it - "a root out of dry ground". He had flourished in those conditions and yet He comes to the end of His pathway and, as Psalm 102 says, prophetic of Christ, "He weakened my strength in the way" (v 23). What does that mean but what we are speaking of? The Lord was brought into circumstances where He felt weakness. It is instruction for us. He felt weakness; God did it and then strengthened Him in it.

N.T.M. The Lord is the model for us here. We cannot think of an angel strengthening God. We can think of an angel strengthening a man. Speaking reverently, what was strengthening to the Lord Jesus can be strengthening to us.

J.McK. That is right. It gives us some impression of the divine valuation of the saints. It is not simply an intervention of power externally but the strengthening of what is there. That is what is carrying through things for God today.

J.A.T. Would this inspire confidence with us, too, as to the present priesthood of Jesus, the One who was tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart (see Heb 4: 15)?

J.McK. Yes, you mean that His word comes with a touch of sympathy? According to Hebrews the word of God and the priesthood of Christ always go together; that is, the divine will is asserted. Thank God for the assertion amongst us of what is the divine will. That is what Christ was committed to, the will of Another. If that is asserted there is the touch of strengthening of His priesthood, of One who has been in the circumstances. As was said, the Lord says to Paul "my power is perfected in weakness".

J.A.T. We all need confidence in God, but confidence also in Jesus, in that He understands the circumstances that we are passing through at any moment because He has passed through them. We need to understand this, and it would strengthen us. The young - well, all of us - would be strengthened in speaking simply to the Lord Jesus who has been here. The reference "God... saith to the snow, Fall on the earth". (Job 37: 6) affects us as being God's testimony to Jesus in His purity on the earth.

J.McK. Very good. There is a touch of His sympathy here in that it says the disciples were sleeping from grief. The Spirit of God knew that they were feeling the circumstances. God knows how the saints are feeling circumstances. In ourselves we are unequal for them but He intends to teach us that He can carry us through. As divinely strengthened we shall reach the objectives. We will not need to apologise for the truth or modify divine standards. God would make us equal for what His thoughts are.

J.A.T. That is helpful, because there was a time when the truth was being reduced to suit our moral state. But the Holy Spirit is here to make us able.

J.McK. In Luke 22 the truth is expressed in Jesus, in a Man. It has been said that the light is what God was in Christ; that is, to "know thee, the only true God", John 17: 3. The light of the revelation was shining through Christ. Then "Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" is

the truth; that is, what man is in Christ. That becomes the test. In Luke 22 it is brought into circumstances where persons like ourselves saw Him in a situation of testing. The truth, then, is the standard, and it is expressed in a Man.

T.B. Was the Lord here wanting the disciples to see what He had in mind for them that they might take on the same features?

J.McK. Yes, and what He has in mind for us. He takes the disciples as far as He can. The pressure side is not stressed here. This is not Gethsemane. This is the mount of Olives, a question of a spiritual experience related to a heavenly realm of things. The Lord says, I want you to join in this. It is as if He is giving them the secret of how they were going to be sustained after He had gone. His link with the Father sustained Him. Our link with Christ will sustain us.

A.R.D. Is it subjection to the will of God, as shown here, that is the secret of His power in weakness? As you were saying, it is not only dependence but submission: "not my will" be done.

J.McK. Yes, and there is no modification of that will. The vessel is made equal to it. In Psalm 40 the Lord says "Behold I come... to do thy good pleasure". The will of God had been expressed already before Jesus came. There was no modification in order to make the objective easier to reach, and it is to a known will that the Lord Jesus is subject. So He takes the cup from His Father. When men came to take Him they were but the instruments of the divine will and the Lord submitted to that. But He took the cup from the hand of His Father. This is the Man we love, dear brethren. This is the Man who has been this way for us, and He has exemplified the way that the testimony of God is to be maintained throughout the dispensation.

N.T.M. The gospels, specially John, are strong meat for us to feed upon, the very best and greatest thought for our contemplation.

J.McK. As has been said, we are tested as to how long we can be sustained in speaking just about Him - the Lord Jesus. We are very quick to see how a situation may affect us.

K.G. Do you think, if we are not sustained on this line of affection, devoted to Christ, we may, as in the Samuel scripture, become embittered by the circumstances that God may order? But is there not recourse in recovery, in the strengthening?

J.McK. At that point in David's history he had come a long way from chapter 16. David represents a believer in whom the spirit of Christ had shone. He was greatly tested by the reproaches of his brethren. He had been tested by the infidelity of Jonathan, one who loved him and who was committed to him: As to his affection for David, Jonathan was exemplary. It says he stripped himself. He was prepared to make sacrifice in relation to David, a man in whom the spirit of Christ was. Yet there came a point when Jonathan went back into the city. How testing that was to David! There is something in this that answers to our own experience. Persons who have been committed, who have been prepared to make sacrifice in relation to God's testimony, come to a point where they turn aside. At that moment David shone. It says, they "wept one with another, until David exceeded", 1 Sam 20: 41. If persons turn aside, dear brethren, let it not be said that it is because of any lack of the spirit of Christ amongst us. David shone in representing the spirit of Christ to Jonathan and yet Jonathan turned aside. David does not rebuke him; he accepts the situation of rejection. Then David had to meet Saul. Saul was an opposer. What shines in David is the spirit of Christ in the way he met the opposition. He says "Jehovah forbid that I should stretch forth my hand against Jehovah's anointed!", 1 Sam 26: 11. Let us be careful how we speak of those who are recognised to be Christians, persons who belong to Christ. David was very guarded in his attitude towards Saul. So he was preserved all the way through to this point; yet in Ziklag it appears to be complete disaster, everything appears to be gone. How testing!

K.G. It says "his God". There is what he had in experience, do you think?

J.McK. It says that David strengthened himself in Jehovah his God. Again, it is the strengthening of something that is already available to God in the testimony. It is only one man, but he knows God, and he

strengthens himself in God. The recovery had not happened yet, the conflict with the Amalekites had not been waged, but David is strengthened. Is that so in all our localities, dear brethren? David is strengthened.

N.T.M. Would you say how we do that?

J.McK. The Lord's custom, spoken of in Luke 22, gives us the key. David had consistently reverted to the presence of God - a proved, a tried way - so he does it again. David had proved God before he was anointed - against the lion and the bear, involving secret history with God. God had come in for him. And now, in this time of testimonial crisis, David proves the same God that he knew then. I do not want to enlarge on the disaster here. There has been enough of it, dear brethren, but I would emphasise the ability in one man to strengthen himself in God. Do you not covet that?

N.T.M. I do indeed. I would like to know more what it is for someone to strengthen me. But does strengthening oneself show a certain inherent power in the believer, that he knows a source that he can draw on?

J.McK. It is really Christ in the saints. If Jesus was strengthened in Luke 22, what kind of man is God going to strengthen now? One has said that the level of our blessing is in Christ; therefore the level of our testimony must be that Christ is in us. There is no weakening of that standard. What is expressed in David is the spirit of Christ. There is a certain personality in David when the difficult situation arises; he turns to God and is strengthened.

R.D.P. It was a critical situation. David not only received strength but the whole position was saved. After a catalogue of disaster it says "but". We can thank God for the 'buts' that have come into the recovery. Things could have gone to pieces: there were persons so embittered that they would have stoned David here, but - and from that point things begin to move again, from one man who had recourse outside himself, where everything around was disaster.

J.McK. Then, as strengthened, David comes under divine direction. He might have said, There is a certain sense of strengthening; I will

go ahead now and do what is right. But he seeks divine direction and calls for the ephod. It is important that the strength that may come in is used under divine control. There is a distinction between knowledge and wisdom. With knowledge you know what is right, wisdom applies that knowledge in a way which God can support. David might have said, I know that God is against the Amalekites, Jehovah will have war with Amalek, He has been against them since Exodus 17, I will just go out and pursue them. Instead he calls for the ephod. He seeks guidance in view of the strength that had come in from God being rightly used, not only for his blessing but for the good of all Israel.

A.R.D. David is marked by recourse to God, even after the sin with Bathsheba. In Psalm 51 he gets to God in abject weakness and humility and repentance, and he finds strength. At the end of the Psalm he speaks of offering up bullocks to God.

J.McK. We have been helped to see that David is a man in whom failure is seen but who always finds in God the power for recovery. Thank God for persons in whom the power of recovery has been seen in these days. It is not that we have not failed but we know the God who has the power to recover us. As recovered, it may be that we shall be instrumental in the recovery of others. In this section David goes through to a complete victory. We cannot say what God will yet do. Let us not be unbelieving as to what God may yet bring about in the testimony. Let us be, rather, in the mind of God, to see what His thoughts are about the saints.

C.A.G. God's thoughts are going through in totality. We need to keep that before us whatever happens.

J.McK. And to see that any strengthening and recovery that comes in is for the benefit of all the saints. This statute (v 24) is an outstanding one: as his share is that goes down to the battle, so shall his share be that abides by the baggage: they shall share alike". Shall the recovery, in which you and I have part, become sectional? The spirit of Christ in David refuses that. If God has helped, if He has strengthened, it is for the benefit of all His people,

wherever they are. You say, They were not equal to coming along with us? Perhaps they fell out of the testimony a long while ago. David says, Their share is going to be alike. If God has blessed us, His blessing is in relation to all Israel.

C.H.H. You referred to David's regard for Jonathan. It is remarkable that in 2 Samuel 1 David links them together: "Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their lives" (v 23). We would have made a distinction.

J.McK. Yes, we would have done. It seems that David took account of the qualities that had shone. There must have been certain quality in Saul for God to anoint him. You say that he was the man of the people's choice; but God anointed him. David says, I will respect that.

C.H.H. It is a lesson to me as to my attitude towards brethren I used to walk with. I might think differently of some than I do of others. David does not.

J.McK. David laments over them., that even in their death they were not divided. Apparently David thought that by then they would have realised that their links together were not according to God.

In Ephesians 3 we see the particular bearing of divine strengthening in view of our experience in the service of God. The Spirit of God is acquiring a greater place in the experience of the saints. He has a large part in what proceeds after the Supper on the Lord's day. We know Him first as the Spirit of the Lord, in relation to the service of God: "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty", 2 Cor 3: 17. The next verse brings in His power of transformation, so that we become like Christ. Then we know Him as the Spirit of adoption, bringing our experience up to the level of belonging to the divine family, - a touch of divine generation. Then, as the service proceeds, we know Him as the Spirit of the Father. I think that is a very fine touch. It comes in towards the end of the service, the Father's Spirit strengthening us in the inner man, "that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts, being rooted and founded in love, in order that ye may be fully able" - fully able - "to apprehend

with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height". It is an area to which the flesh is unequal. The Spirit of God causes the saints to be equal to anything in which Christ Himself leads.

BRISTOL

23 November 1976

Key to initials

TB - T.Broughton, Richmond: ARD - A.R.Davies, Bristol: CAG - C.A.Gray, Helston:

KG - K.Green, Cardiff: CHH - C.H.Heale, Worcester: JMCK - J.McKay, Sunbury:

NTM - N.T.Meek, Malvern: RDP - R.D.Plant, Birmingham: JAT - J.A.Turner, Chippenham: DJW - D.J.Willetts, Birmingham.

THE CHILDREN'S GUIDE

In the beautiful Mohawk Valley in America there is probably still a board, set up on posts, with the following words painted on it:-

Jesus said. 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life'.

Without the way there is no going.

Without the Truth there is no knowing.

Without the Life there is no living.

No doubt the Christians who placed the board there were anxious for themselves and for others to have the certainty of divine guidance through life. They may have known too that the Lord spoke especially of the way to the Father. This was a privilege not for the apostles only, since one of them, John, who heard those words of Jesus has written to little children because they have known the Father. Our Father is occupied with very great matters and is always deeply interested in our progress in the right paths of the Lord. Therefore He is never too busy to listen to our needs and to share with us His great thoughts.

We often speak of the time still to come when a little child shall lead the beasts of the field, even those now wild and dangerous. Maybe there will be many such flocks, proving for a thousand years the power of God to banish the effects of sin. But in every case those who lead will need to know the way to go! How much more important it is then for us all to know the way of salvation and the path of truth in a time when the wisdom of God still allows much evil in the world. But the same wisdom has given us a guide in the Scriptures of truth and the Lord Jesus said that "he that follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life".

He who has promised to lead His people with His eye upon them may need to test our obedience and earnestness to know His will. There may be difficulties for us. But learn a lesson from a guide-dog I have often seen leading his blind master in the busiest part of the City of London. He knew only the right way. However once he came to a road barrier under which he himself could walk, but not

his master. He had the intelligence to wait until someone came up and moved the obstacle, when master and dog went quietly on their way. Are you learning to wait patiently and in hope upon God?

J.C.Evershed