

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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CONTENTS

Things As They Are	F.E.Raven	1
The Preaching	N.T.Meek	8
Finishing The Course	J.G.Wain	12
Blessing Others	J.P.Wheeler	15
The Children's Favour	J.C.Evershed	17

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THINGS AS THEY ARE - GOSPEL ADDRESS

F.E.Raven

John 12: 23-50

The object of preaching is to present things as they are, otherwise preaching would hardly be worth the effort; it is the privilege of the preacher to enlighten all. It is a great mercy for people to be able to see things as they are, for man generally lives in a vain show and deliberately shuts his eyes to the reality of things as they are. The gospel shows us things as they are. God has given man every means of knowing things as they are, according to Him. The apostle Paul was sent to open men's eyes that things might be apprehended as they are by the gentiles, that they might receive forgiveness; the blessing of Abraham had arrived at the gentiles in Christ Jesus.

It is a great thing to have the eyes opened to see that redemption has been accomplished in order that the gentiles might receive the Spirit. If you apprehend the position, you receive the promise of the Spirit. When man takes God and Christ into account there is a turning to God. One thing must be recognised, that it has pleased God to come into conflict. It is not the first time that God has come into conflict. He came into conflict with Pharaoh, and with Amalek with whom He would make war from generation to generation. There is now that under the heavens which is in deadly opposition to God, and with which He will make no compromise.

Men are entangled in that. But God has interfered in grace to deliver men from the entanglement from which they have neither power to deliver themselves nor desire to be delivered.

The enemy is described in Scripture in very strong terms; it is expressed in one word - the world. Men are fond of the world but the world is hostile to God. He that will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. The world is a system in which certain principles prevail. It is a curious thing that the principles of the world have never changed, though it has been going on for the past 6000 years. Its principles are "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2: 16); they have not altered a bit. You need not go to a heathen country to find these, they are found in this country. Indeed, I do not know how a natural man could have enjoyment if he had nothing to minister to his lusts. Many would say, life would not be worth living.

Now, God will have no compromise with these principles. The terrible power of them is that the god and prince of this world can maintain by them his hold over the souls of men and keep them in bondage. The world may become more refined, more expanded and more attractive, but its principles never change, and men's hearts are becoming more entangled in the world system. But with God no peace is possible. He will only have hostility to it. But His grace has come in to deliver man from this fearful entanglement. God has often been pleased to make Himself known as a deliverer, and in the future a Deliverer will come out of Zion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob; but now, in a much larger sense, God has been pleased to make Himself known as a deliverer in regard of all men.

The gospel has come in to make things clear so that men may be delivered from the enemy. God's purpose is not effected till man's heart is free from the domination of the world. The Lord Jesus says "Now is the judgment of this world ... and I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me". The time will come when the judgment of God upon this world system will be manifested. He will no longer tolerate its existence but will bring it to an actual end. The book of Revelation is largely taken up with God's judgment of the world

system. He will have no rest until it is broken up, and it ought to be broken up. God has no war with men but with the god and prince of this world and with its evil principles.

People are mad if they do not take God into account. If God has been pleased to set Himself against the world system there must be good reason for it. It is in God's purpose to bring that system to an end, and for that reason Christ gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this evil world according to the will of our God and Father. In 1 Timothy 2 we have the position laid down on the part of God: "God is one, and the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all" (vv 5,6). God presents Himself in the light of a Saviour to all men, and Christ Jesus is presented as the Mediator between God and men. It was true when Christianity began, and it abides true now. I am attempting to make clear the position. Many may say, I do not contradict it, I have often read it. But surely, if you take in the position, it must have some moral effect upon you. There are two principles: grace on the part of God, and the love of Christ, and if you apprehend these, you must be affected by them. Whether or not you are affected will not alter the position. God did not consult anyone but acted on His own account, and Christ is the Head of every man; no change in this can be made by men, it abides on the part of God.

God has made known His mind. He would have all men to be saved, saved from bondage to the world. He has looked at men as they really are and set Himself to be a Saviour to men. How has He done this? By the introduction of a Mediator who gave Himself a ransom for all. He is pleased to present Christ to men as the blessed expression of His love, as One who gave Himself a ransom for all, that God might proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all. Christ is a point of attraction that men might be attracted by the grace presented in Him. Divine love is beyond all thought. How wonderful that Christ should take up all that lay upon man that He might become to man a point of attraction. He was lifted up, the expression of the love of God. It is the way of perfect wisdom. The position is there, it will all come out publicly some day. God would

have all men to be saved. The Son of man has been lifted up that the love of God might be expressed and the souls of men attracted to Christ. If you put a plant in the light of the sun the light will draw it to itself. The reason is that there is great power of attraction in the sun. So Christ is presented as the point of attraction, that men being drawn to Him might receive living water. Christ gives it to him that is athirst, but every one that gets it must receive it from the hand of Christ.

Do you recognise the position, that Christ is accessible to every man on earth? I am the head of my house and every member of my household can come to me for advice or help of any kind. I am accessible to every person in my house. Well, Christ is the Head of every man, and is accessible to every man. God would be unapproachable by man if Christ were not Mediator in order that God might be accessible and that men might repent and turn to Him. God presents Himself thus that you might be affected by Him and that He may give you the gift of the Spirit. When Christ was here upon earth God was accessible to every man. There never was a moment like it. A sinful woman could come to God. The woman with the issue of blood could touch the hem of Christ's garment, for God was accessible to every kind of person. Indeed, one reproach levelled against Christ was "This man receives sinners and eats with them", Luke 15: 1. The prodigal is brought back and the father eats with him; that is God's answer to the reproach. God was doing that Himself. What difference would there be between sinners in the eye of God? The different measures of responsibility in men made no difference to God; He was equally accessible to all. It is all more plain now. If the man Christ Jesus were not God, then He could not be the Mediator.

There is a distinction between the world and men; you get in Scripture the expression "all men". God would be Saviour toward all men, not toward the world, but He would deliver all men from the world. God has not changed His attitude. He would have all men to be saved. That is the first element of the position. God is one in regard to men universally. I would not make you turn to God if I

could, it would be too great a responsibility. Your own responsibility is to accept the position. It is not mine to make you, but I would earnestly press you to accept your responsibility and to turn to God in Christ that you may receive what Christ gives, and that is living water. He says "I will give to him that thirsts of the fountain of the water of life freely" (Rev 21: 6) - that is, gratuitously. His only demand is that you shall ask, and if you apprehend the position, the practical result will be that you will ask of Christ; and He will surely give. The Lord said "If thou knewest the gift of God ... thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water", John 4: 10. What can be more wonderful than Christ coming in divine love to bear all that lay upon man, that poor gentile dogs like ourselves might receive the gift of the Spirit?

A person might say, What about judgment? Men are sinful. But that is all met. By this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that believe are justified from all things. Christ could not have been Mediator unless He had given Himself for our sins. He was lifted up that righteousness might be accomplished, and in Him there is redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is thus the point of attraction for all men.

When He was here upon earth He filled the hungry with good things but the rich He sent empty away. The rich wanted nothing from Christ and they got nothing. The same is true now. God is a Saviour-God, and the Mediator, the Man Christ Jesus, is there. Nothing is altered. A rich man may say, God, I thank Thee I am not as other men, etc., and he is sent empty away, but on the other hand the hungry are filled. If you come hungry or thirsty, then Christ will give you living water. I would to God that all apprehended the position, that they might turn to Christ and receive the promise of the Spirit. Faith means that you apprehend the position, and if you receive the Spirit from Christ you are divinely rich. You have durable riches and righteousness.

THE PREACHING

N.T.Meek

1 Corinthians 12: 31

Now I would like to refer to this scripture in Corinthians as to desire in relation to gift. I trust the Lord will help me to speak about it rightly. There was quite a lot of gift at Corinth; more, I suppose, than in some places. It had come from an ascended Christ as an endowment to the assembly here, and He had not given too much. I think He would give more if there were more desire on our part, and I would like to appeal to brethren to desire gift. Why? For the honour of Christ and for the blessing of His church here. It is needed. Thank God for what there is! I say that without qualification, but I do see a need especially for gift in the preaching. Now many of us are pressed into service in this day, in the preaching. We are not preachers; we know it too, most of us, but we get the call to preach and we find some scriptures and we get through them, and the Lord is very gracious and the brethren too. But I feel that there is a need for gift in the preaching. I am not saying it is not present in embryo, but what I would like to stimulate is a desire to be able to serve better in the preaching.

The preaching was especially on my heart, but it would extend to other services too, to the gift of teaching, the gift of laying out clearly what the truth is and how one part of the truth is related to another; but I am especially concerned about the preaching. What I would say to those of us (and most of us are like this) who are asked to preach is this: preach as well as you can and ask the Lord to give you more ability next time. Do not take it up lightly. You might feel satisfied, when you have finished, that you got through and you spoke for half an hour and what you said was the truth; but it may not have had quite the conviction and appeal you would have liked, and you were conscious that the Lord was worthy of a better presentation. Tell Him that next time you think He is worthy to be spoken of better. He is. That is what you think really, but take it up seriously, because it is a great matter. There is some soul there maybe, some young one, who is not saved yet; and if I preach and

fail in the preaching through lack of devotion to it, then there is a responsibility on me.

"Desire earnestly": there is a certain yearning in you that is reaching out for more. Why should you not serve the Lord the best you can? Why should there not be the gift of an evangelist among us distinctively? I do trust, dear brethren, that we will not lose the gift of the evangelist, nor the gift of the preacher (there may be a slight difference, I know). Seek to develop in the ability to preach appealingly, to speak of the Lord Jesus and what He has done for you and what He has done for those who are listening to you. Let the vision of His worth and His work and who He is and His worthiness come constantly before you so that you can present Him in a worthy way. If there are only a few there, let the gospel be at its height. Let it be worth the angels listening to. If someone comes outside, passes the porch, let it arrest them; you do not know who is hearing. Preach, if it helps you to preach, as if there are a hundred people outside the window; but give of your best, I would say, in any service. I feel that there is a need amongst us in relation to the preaching, and I would like to deliver myself about that.

Now I am not saying that everyone is going to be outstandingly gifted, but I think there is room for gift through devotion, through someone saying that the Lord is worthy of it. Why should it not be, dear brethren? We are not to be lax about the preaching, or about the teaching, or about the Tuesday meeting; we are not to be lax about any of these, but my special burden was in relation to the preaching. I would plead especially with young men who have begun to preach and who are feeling their way and are taking it up seriously, devote yourself to it. Do not take it up as a casual matter, it is worthy of your devotion. It is as if you were sitting an exam, you want to put in all that you have into that exam, you want to get a distinction - that is not a wrong desire in your exams, to get a distinction. Paul did that, he got distinctions, he advanced beyond nearly all his contemporaries. When the mark sheets were put up, Paul's name, Saul of Tarsus, was at the top you can be pretty sure. Paul is saying to us here, by the Spirit, '*You desire the greater gifts*'.

I think the Lord would honour those desires and He would give us ability; I am sure He would. It is for His glory; it is not to be used as a plaything, it is not to be used for our own aggrandisement or for anything of that kind.

Desire the Lord's approval. He will appraise your service, He will comfort you when you feel that you do not preach very well. He will still encourage you to go on, spur you on as it were; because most of us know that our preachings are not of a uniformly high level, and sometimes we feel that we hardly drew any water in the meeting, we almost feel that we beat the air. I would say, dear brethren, that in this service especially, the Lord would stimulate desire for gift. May the Lord help us in all these things, for His Name's sake.

From Address at BUCKHURST HILL

31 December 1977

FINISHING THE COURSE

J.G.Wain

2 Timothy 4: 7-10 (to 'Thessalonica')

I believe the Lord would appeal to our hearts as to the completion of our course. We expressed in our hymn 'That when our earthly course is run' (No.399), and I think we should be freshly concerned that we might finish well. Our sister has finished her course, and finished it well; we can say, simply, with honours. I believe that the Lord would exercise us, as He has me as to how we will finish our course. Paul speaks of 'having combated the good combat and finished the race, and he says, kept the faith. Our sister has done just this. The course was not an easy one for her but in faithfulness to the Lord she has kept the faith and her course is completed. The Lord would speak to us now, we the living who are here, as to the completion of our course. Some of us may have to feel that it has been a little devious so far; perhaps, on looking back, not as we would have wished it to be; but we have the rest of our time, however short that may be. Dear brethren, I believe it is short, for the course that we are on, this race in the path of the testimony, will be terminated quickly when the Lord Himself descends with a shout, that triumphant moment when all His own will be caught up to meet Him.

The scripture tells us, in Hebrews, that the way that this race will be run is by fixing our eyes stedfastly on Jesus (see chap 12: 1,2); this was characteristic of our dear sister. Let it be more characteristic of us, dear brethren, more constant with us, that we should have our eyes on the One who has gone before. This course was started when she put her faith and trust in the glorious Saviour who died for her. We are not here to eulogise our sister, although there is so much in positive features we can take account of, and for which we thank God, but we rejoice in the faithfulness of the love of Christ, for we owe everything to Him. He has been into death and removed the sting of death; He has tasted death that we might find it just a passage through to glory, which was the experience of our beloved sister. One thing that remains with us locally is a sense that her course was completed.

This is our second bereavement in a brief time. What impressed us about our beloved brother who is now with the Lord was that his course was completed; indeed he used these words: "I have finished the race". What a wonderful thing that is! that the course is completed, and we can say completed in glory. Now may we be strengthened. Paul has to speak here of conditions of departure which he felt, and which we feel. He speaks of the reward of which we have sung; and we can rest assured that the reward will be full for our sister in her faithfulness; in the presence of much that was distressing to her she was faithful to the Lord and to His claims, and in the maintenance of what is right and in holding to the faith, and the reward is hers. May we qualify too dear brethren. Paul says that we need to be diligent: "Use diligence to come to me quickly". I believe at a time like this the Lord would remind us that there is now no time to be lost, the time is so near; let us be more wholly committed to that glorious Saviour and to the precious truth that He has recovered us to. It speaks of one here who had forsaken Paul; not that he had turned from the Christian faith, not that he had ceased to trust the Saviour for his eternal salvation, and trust that precious blood for the cleansing of his sins, but he forsook Paul; and if Paul was forsaken or departed from - and by that I mean the teaching that Paul was specially given to bring out, the commission that Paul was given as to the glorious truth of the assembly - we leave the very best. The Lord would concern us to be more fully committed to the wondrous fact that there is a vessel, at present incomplete, but there is an expression of that vessel that is to be the counterpart of that glorious Man. Our sister loved that truth; she cherished what the assembly is for Christ, and what it is for Christ at the *present* time. May we be strengthened in this so that we may be preserved in this path and not be diverted, but in fresh devotedness and committal we might take note of the example our sister has been. May we in fervency and steadfastness commit ourselves to this, the greatest privilege we have on earth, in the short time that may be left to us here. I am sure the course of our sister stands as a witness of encouragement and help; she has been that to many; let us learn from this so that we may be here at the present time more in

the enjoyment of these great and most precious things, for His Name's sake.

Word at a burial

TUNBRIDGE WELLS

17 August 1979

BLESSING OTHERS

J.P.Wheeler

**2 Corinthians 9: 6,7 (to "heart"); 10: 1 (to "of the Christ");
1 Peter 3: 9 (to "blessing others")**

I thought of these scriptures in regard of our beloved sister's testimony. Our beloved sister partook in a very deep way of spiritual blessing in her own soul and it went out to others. It says in Peter "but on the contrary, blessing others". It is a wonderful thing to be enjoying the sunshine of God's blessing so that it goes out from oneself to others. Our beloved sister thought of others; with every one who passed through her care I am sure she sought to have a word about the Lord Jesus. She never failed to use those words the name of the Lord Jesus; they were precious to her, May we all come into blessing as being under His control.

So these scriptures show the spirit of blessing. Paul goes on to mention the word 'righteousness' it is right, it is a sound principle, the principle of blessing; it says at the end of verse 9, "his righteousness remains for ever". Then in 1 Peter 3 it goes on to say the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous" (v 12). It is a right thought and a right spirit to be thinking of blessing, blessing for others. There are those in this room that our beloved sister has spoken to about the Lord Jesus since they were young, and there are others to that she put her whole self into praying and yearning for - that they might be in the path of the Lord's will at the present time. She mentioned the names of some of those here. Paul says "I myself, Paul" - he put everything he could into that, his whole self was in that expression - "entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of the Christ". I seek to take these things to myself.

Word at a burial

TUNBRIDGE WELLS

17 August 1979

THE CHILDREN'S FAVOUR

When the Lord Jesus was here on earth He welcomed little children to come to Him. He took them in His arms, laid His hands on them and blessed them 'abundantly' as Mark records. This shows the place of favour that the younger ones have in Christianity, and God begins often quite early to touch their hearts and make way for Christ in them. It is also interesting to recall that, as a babe, Jesus was Himself taken into the arms of Simeon in the temple at Jerusalem. But in that case it was Joseph and Mary who received the blessing. They must certainly have felt highly favoured in being entrusted with the holy Child. Now we, as believers young and old, are entrusted with the witness to His name, since He is not now here personally but is glorified at the right hand of God:

As we grow up and realise in some way that God is speaking to us we begin to wonder how it is that we, being sinners, can be in His favour. This was evidently the feeling of one such who was in deep distress of soul. She said to her friend 'I am afraid God will never accept me'. 'No, He never will in yourself' was the unexpected answer. Then seeing the look of blank astonishment that this reply caused, her friend said again 'He never will - but He has accepted Christ!' The word of scripture is that God "has taken us into favour in the Beloved", that is Jesus.

In this country there are certain houses owned by the Queen and known as 'grace and favour houses'. As monarch she can allow anyone she chooses to live in them. No doubt those whom she favours in this way have rendered to her or to the country some service that makes them worthy of her choice. But the grace of God is unmerited favour. It shows itself in the fact that His present attitude to the needy sinner is quite apart from anything favourable in the sinner. Queen Elizabeth I once wanted to attach conditions to a free pardon but she was met with the response, 'Grace that is fettered by conditions is no grace at all'. It has often been said that divine grace is righteous because the work of Christ satisfies God, silences Satan and saves the sinner. Do you enjoy this grace?

J.C.Evershed