

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 97

April 1981

Contents

"LET NOTHING BE WANTING"

COMMITTAL

THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

THE CHILDREN'S REMEMBRANCE

"LET NOTHING BE WANTING"

Colossians 1: 24-26; Ephesians 3: 1-21

A.A.B. What was stated yesterday as to the twelve superintendents of Solomon, that "they let nothing be wanting" (1 Kings 4: 27), has since grown in one's mind and was confirmed largely by the experience this morning. I wondered if we could consider how that comes into expression in Paul. It could be traced in others, in Peter and John, I suppose in measure in every true minister. The verses in Colossians seem to extend the thought a little. Paul speaks of filling up what is behind of the tribulations of Christ. He seemed to be extended in suffering and then in his service manward. It was given to him to complete the word of God, but he says "the dispensation of God which is given me towards you". We have therefore Paul's service manward in the communication and delivery of what was committed to him; he had an administration, things were laid upon him. So we have him extended in suffering and in service. In Ephesians 3 is really the culmination of his ministry - "all the counsel of God", Acts 20: 27. It is a very compressed thought, but it is greatly extended in chapter 3 of this epistle. So we see Paul extended in the exercise of his gift, and how, in being extended, he turns to prayer, being unable to bring the saints any further; and in bowing his knees to the Father we see him extended in the service of God. In Romans 12 he is alone in the doxology but in Ephesians 3 we are brought into it as in the assembly in Christ Jesus. These are waters to swim in!

E.C.B. These scriptures refer explicitly to the mystery; in fact, that is largely the substance of the scriptures you have had read. Have you something particular in mind as to that in regard to Paul letting nothing be wanting?

A.A.B. That is exactly what was in one's mind. In your prayer you used the word 'acme'; it is the pinnacle of Paul's ministry that is our concern. At Corinth he was limited because the state was such; he had a measure to reach them - God gave him that measure - not to

over-reach them, but nevertheless to reach them on moral lines. But in Ephesians he is writing to "the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus"; there is a capacity and a state which is capable of taking on what was entrusted to Paul. The mystery is really the key to everything.

E.C.B. As the scripture was being read I was thinking of the familiar verse in Romans 16: "as to which silence has been kept" (v 25), as if it was all in the divine knowledge but waited a day for its full exposition.

A.A.B. And that is the day we are in, is it not? There never was a day like it before and we must not lose sight of this and the greatness of the assembly. We are not to take our bearings from the breakdown, nor even from the consideration of matters involving judgment, save that judgment may be by way of approval - there is judgment in Philippians 1: 10, judging and approving "the things that are more excellent".

A.J.E.W. We were impressed last weekend with the fact that this reference to the mystery in Ephesians 3 leads into two lines of thought: the administration (v 9) - that is something which, we might say, comes from God - and then the response in the latter section of the chapter which is towards Him. I wonder if that links with what you are thinking.

A.A.B. It does. I trust we may be deepened in what you refer to in Ephesians 3. But I think the importance of being extended in suffering is great; if the truth of the mystery was to reach the saints it reached them by means of the sufferings of Paul testimonially. The testimonial sufferings have been referred to in relation to these verses in Colossians and Paul was concerned to fill up that which was behind of the tribulations of Christ in his flesh. But you could say something about that.

A.J.E.W. Only to confirm the point that you make, that his reference to the completion of the word of God is linked on with the sufferings and an evident feeling that suffering needed to be taken on more, something in which he gives a lead.

A.A.B. Yes; the commanding principle, I think, in his life was that what had been entrusted to him should reach the saints, and whatever that entailed he was prepared for. He refers to his sufferings in writing to Corinth, but apologetically. He says you have made me a fool in boasting. But there they were. One feels so measured by it. How comfortable our Christianity is generally!

J.C.E. In our own circumstances we do not have a measure of suffering by any means such as Paul had, but we have what we speak of as limitations. They are not intended to limit the extent of the work of God but rather the reverse, are they not?

A.A.B. That is right, I think. I am not saying that there is not suffering among the brethren; there is. But these are testimonial sufferings that Paul speaks of: "sufferings for you". Of course Paul is Paul, there is no other quite like him, but it is only just to see that there is such a thing as letting nothing be lacking on that line. One has to turn against oneself in the ability often to evade suffering publicly.

A.H.M. The testimonial sufferings are sufferings that we can take on, are they not? whereas the Lord Jesus undertook the atoning sufferings and no one else can do that.

A.A.B. Yes, that is important. Peter witnessed the sufferings of the Christ in testimonial character.

J.M.W. Would a verse in Acts 20 support what you are saying? Paul says "But I make no account of my life as dear to myself, so that I finish my course, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the glad tidings of the grace of God" (v 24).

A.A.B. Yes, that is appropriate. You see how far on Paul is, that his life was not dear to him. We have to know what is meant by losing our lives, and hating them too. "He that loves his life shall lose it, and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal", John 12: 25.

D.J.H. Are you connecting this with what we had yesterday - the word of the cross - as applicable to us?

A.A.B. That would come into it I think, but there is more than that here; it is the word of God, the opening up of the whole mind of God and light as to God and as to His purpose.

D.J.H. I was thinking of the application of the word of the cross on our side, as taking our place in the testimonial sufferings that we have been referring to; would all that is in the word of God for us then open up?

A.A.B. Yes I think so; in that sense there would be nothing wanting. 'Nothing wanting' is an extensive matter to consider. Of course we need it ourselves; the man of God is to be complete, "fully fitted to ever good work", 2 Tim 3: 17. There is nothing wanting in the man of God in that sense; but then to reach on to what is for God and see an order of things in which there is nothing wanting, an eternal order, and to know that it is extant. This little word 'now' in Ephesians 3 is very significant: "now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the assembly the all-various wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages."

D.A.B. Paul says in relation to Ephesus that "a great door is opened... and an effectual one, and the adversaries many", 1 Cor 16: 9. Has he these things in his mind? There was a need for conflict in view of this way that was opening up being put into the possession of the saints.

A.A.B. Yes, and he himself was in circumstances of limitation. We have the acme of his service as being in those circumstances in prison.

E.P. What would you say is the motivating power to take this on?

A.A.B. Love.

E.P. Yes, I can understand that. Could you say how that works out? Love would be a great general matter, the knowledge of God I suppose, but do you think that there might be some specific features of that love that would help us?

A.A.B. I think what is towards us is the first thing: "*We love because he has first loved us,*" 1 John 4: 19. That I think is the motivating

power, that the holy love of God affects us, it is towards us. Paul uses the expression 'towards you'; we have what is towards man, in that sense. But then there is what is to God· it is still love, love in response.

V.H.B. Does it link with the Lord's words in John 16: "In the world ye have tribulation; but be of good courage: I have overcome the world" (v 33)? That is followed by chapter 17.

A.A.B. Yes. The understanding of that would be behind us, I think, in what we are seeking to reach, that so far as the world is concerned, as John says, it knows us not because it knew Him not.

C.B. Love at home first.

A.A.B. Yes, chapter 1, then away from home in chapter 2; now chapter 3 as we have often noticed is a parenthesis. It seems that his mind was to exhort, according to verse 1 of chapter 4, but then being such a vessel of the Spirit Paul's mind is turned into what is contained in this parenthesis.

E.C.B. In 1 Kings 4 to which you are referring, it does not appear that commandment of any kind was given to the superintendents.

Solomon had them just as he had princes. I suppose it was some apprehension of the scope of Solomon as king that led them to work in unfolding and bringing into effect everything that characterised the kingdom; therefore it starts with appreciation.

A.A.B. Yes exactly, the sense of obligation: "a necessity is laid upon me", 1 Cor 9: 16. He was not a spare time man; most of us have been that, we do a little when we can, but Paul is wholly committed as having a necessity laid upon him. Now the spirit of that would be conveyed in what reaches us through him, would it not?

E.C.B. Yes; and would you think that Epaphras - I think Mr Darby has described him as not a gifted man - is on this line? He is evidently bound up in love with the Colossians where he was local, but he prays "that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God", Col 4: 12. He is turned to prayer within his own scope.

A.A.B. Yes, that is instructive, how he turns to prayer, as Paul does - the truth conveyed in his prayer. Truth comes out in the prayers of Scripture and in the songs of Scripture.

E.C.B. You referred to the words in Colossians: "I rejoice in sufferings for you", and in Ephesians 3 he beseeches the brethren not to faint on account of his tribulations for them. Could you say something about that as bearing on the aspect from which we enter into these sufferings at all, because it seems almost as if Paul would spare the saints.

A.A.B. Well, it is just a touch. Verse 13 is a complete verse and it shows Paul's consideration for the saints that they should not faint through his sufferings. It shows the tenderness of Paul in the course of unfolding what had been entrusted to him, that for a moment he could turn aside and beseech the saints not to faint through his tribulations. I think it is very affecting.

A.H.M. I was wondering whether something more could be said as to Mr Welch's remark, that the principle of suffering is something which we need to take on more.

A.A.B. Well, we will ask Mr Welch to enlarge on it.

A.J.E.W. He speaks of that which is behind of the tribulations of Christ. There was evidently something lacking, as you have remarked, and it seems to affect the spirit of Paul in the sense that he is accepting a fuller line of suffering himself and giving a lead in this matter among the saints, because surely the wifely side of the assembly's relations to Christ involves that she has, not only a full appreciation of, but a full part in, the sufferings which what is of Him occasion.

A.A.B. Yes. In that way she is suitable to Christ - the bride, the Lamb's wife. So the whole vessel, so to speak, comes in there, what the assembly has been as a suffering vessel. Many of our sufferings are comparatively minor, but there are some of our brethren as we know, not very far away, who are under actual persecution; they go in fear of their lives; and the privations are another feature of suffering. Paul was deprived as he wrote to the Corinthians; he

speaks of nakedness, and hunger (see 2 Cor 11: 27). Think of him writing an epistle in those conditions of deprivation. At such a cost the truth of the mystery has reached us.

J.S.G. Do you see any link with the reference to 'generation' in Isaiah 53 which follows "He was taken from oppression and from judgment" (v 8)? The footnote to 'oppression' refers to having the moral force of detention or constraint. I wondered whether several references in that chapter would involve this kind of suffering in the Lord's case, and whether there is an allusion to the continuation of it morally in the reference to generation.

A.A.B. Yes. That chapter concentrates our attention upon Christ the Sufferer and the offerings: His soul made an offering for sin. But with the sin-offering there is the oblation in Isaiah 53. It is that kind of manhood which is needed for suffering. You see it in Paul, his spirit is not disturbed by the imprisonment: "I, the prisoner in the Lord", and "I Paul, prisoner of the Christ Jesus". It does not take much to get our spirits disturbed in suffering, but the consideration of what you speak of in Isaiah 53 greatly helps us; it is food for us.

W.H.S. Is the expression of Paul here in Colossians "Now, I rejoice in sufferings for you", calculated to affect the saints? Most of us get doleful if there is anything in the way of suffering or even anything on our spirits, but he says "I rejoice in sufferings for you", as if he is totally buoyant and above the circumstances.

A.A.B. Yes, and the compensation for suffering is glory; they are related matters. "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us", Rom 8: 18.

D.L.S. Would that expression "which is your glory" in verse 13 fit? The apostle seems to be suggesting that the line of suffering, in himself at any rate, was a mark of favour for these Gentile believers.

A.A.B. "Which is your glory", yes. I think it is to counteract the tendency to faint, that we should see that in Paul's sufferings there was something in which we can glory.

D.L.S. Is it not so that, throughout the dispensation and the time of the recovery, so much has come in the way of suffering?

A.A.B. I think that is right. And in the recovery there has been suffering; the men of God - there is no doubt about it - understood Paul's intelligence in the mystery. Paul's intelligence was Paul's intelligence; it was Paul's, but he says "by which, in reading it, ye can understand my intelligence in the mystery". It puts a premium on reading.

E.C.B. Would you think that verse 13 is an example of what Mr Darby describes as 'Paul's abrupt style' (see note to Rom 10: 1), that the ultimate objective of "my tribulations" is that the saints might understand what their glory was?

A.A.B. I think so; and he has no need to enlarge on them as he does to the Corinthians. It is very wonderful to see how Paul hastens to hide himself in this chapter. The greatest thing was revealed to him. He speaks of the revelation of the mystery, and then he hastens to hide himself; "To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given". Partially, he does it in referring to the apostles and prophets; he says "it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets"; that involves others. The apostles have gone but the prophets remain; and that is how, I believe the revival began and took place and continues.

E.C.B. Would you think that Paul's reference to announcing "among the nations the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ" might raise with us the question whether in preaching we let anything be wanting? Not that we can cover the full scope of Paul's glad tidings every Lord's day evening, but we should preach, as you were suggesting earlier, not from the background of breakdown and weakness but in relation to the fulness.

A.A.B. That is clear, I think, that his allusions to the glad tidings in that verse, and earlier to "the administration of the grace of God", involve that he would allow for the truth of the mystery even to come into his glad tidings. The glad tidings is the greatest thing; it includes the truth of the mystery.

H.A.H. It involves that administration would be at the level of the glad tidings and the grace of it in the assembly, does it not? One has concern - and I heard of an instance of it in an interview only this week - that there is sometimes a lack of the spirit of grace. We sing the hymn 'No reproach, no condemnation' (No 321) and yet might approach one another as if there were.

A.A.B. Well, it is "the administration of the grace of God", Paul says, "which has been given to me towards you". And then later: "To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given". It comes to Paul and through Paul to us - grace, and power too: "according to... his power".

D.A.B. We do not have this other letter that he referred to in verse 3. I was just thinking that we need the Spirit to enter into the fulness of what Paul outlines in this chapter.

A.A.B. I think the fact that he says "briefly" means that it was brief; but chapter 3 is not brief, it is the matter in the greatest possible depth, the mystery He is not writing briefly here; this is the letter we have. It is wonderful, is it not? We must not miss the mystery.

D.A.B. I was thinking of the way that he had perhaps taken this occasion, as you say; as it is in parenthesis it was not immediately before him as he took up writing to them, but in order to give us the fulness of what may be ours.

A.A.B. I thought that, and that in the principle of it he is letting nothing be wanting. He could have held it back, but he did not. He held back nothing of what was profitable. That is a great concern in the publication of ministry I think, the printed ministry at the present time if I may say so, that nothing that is profitable should be held back. There is plenty of what is profitable but it should not be held back.

E.C.B. I am very glad of that encouragement. The counterpart of that is that there should be a readiness to receive it and to read it, is it not?

A.A.B. Yes, that is true; and as I said, there is a premium on reading. It is not everything, but Mr Lyon said to me in my youth, If you do not read before you are forty, you will not read after. I did not take much notice just then, but I found that to be true. Read and ponder and keep; things will grow in the soul like that. So there is the revelation of the mystery and the administration of the mystery. Not the mystery of the administration - alas, that has to be thought of, but that is not here; it is the administration of the mystery. Now there is something for the angels and principalities in that connection.

E.C.B. Perhaps you would say a bit more about what we are to understand by the administration of the mystery, because as you read straight through there, it almost seems as if creation has been in view of these things being observed in the assembly.

A.A.B. Yes, it seems that: "who has created all things" - that is really the expanse, I think - "in order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heaven lies might be made known". The mystery is made known to Paul and the apostles and prophets, but this is something made known, "the all-various wisdom of God", *through*, "through the assembly". It magnifies our conception of the assembly as an administrative vessel.

E.C.B. Do you think Paul was striving to reach this in Corinth in chapter 1 where he speaks of Christ as God's wisdom and of His being made to us wisdom? Is he seeking to strengthen the Corinthians in relation to the administration of the mystery?

A.A.B. Yes, it would be in his soul as much as it is here. He is unfolding, he is extending himself, I think, as a minister here. It is a wonderful contemplation to see a minister extended.

J.C.E. There was another way in which he was extended; he speaks of 'all saints' so much. I wondered if sometimes in our thinking there is something lacking; in our prayers maybe it is not easy to form an apprehension of all saints, or of all men for that matter, but it is to come more and more into our affections and prayers, do you not think?

A.A.B. Yes. This is all to broaden us, to give us in our apprehension "with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height". I think we feel oftentimes how restricted, how withdrawn, we are; that is not so in this chapter; it is the expanse really.

E.P. Does the initial touch that the Lord gave Paul colour what he has to say here, and is it carried forward throughout his ministry? The Lord said "Why dost thou persecute me?" when He was speaking about the saints.

A.A.B. Yes, it is; that is the tender side of things, is it not? - tenderness in administration. Solomon was young and tender, probably the greatest administrator personally that has ever been - Moses, too, but in the wilderness - but Solomon at the zenith of his power, not only typically, but personally, what he was as a king and a judge. There was not a case that he could not adjudicate upon, but so tenderly. He needed a sword; we do too; David needed it, but it was not to divide.

J.S.G. Do Paul's feelings come out when he says "Who is stumbled, and I burn not?", 2 Cor 11: 29?

A.A.B. That is it. In this very epistle he comes down to the feelings of a child; a child is not to be provoked (see chap 6: 4). He is feeling for the children. Well, we do not want to make too much of Paul; this matter of administration, the administration of the mystery, requires the assembly.

T.J.B. Do we see the side of extension that you are speaking of in the reference to enlightening all? I was thinking of what entered into Paul's ministry in the way of enlightenment, and of what you said earlier as to Paul being able to take the saints no further, that when it comes to a question of what is bestowed upon the saints in verse 16 he bows his knees to the Father that *He* might give.

A.A.B. Yes, I think what you referred to in connection with enlightening all is consistent with what was referred to just now as to the gospel. Paul would enlighten all "with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery". He would do it. If he met a man on the street he would do that. I do not know whether we look at

men, those around us, like that. If our souls were fuller, if we were bathed in this matter of the mystery more, what testimony there would be! But the assembly is required, it is a necessity; not only the creation but the assembly.

E.C.B. In the letting of nothing be wanting you have referred to Paul being extended. Do you think that in the working out of things and in service, the saints have a part in extending the servant? I have wondered sometimes whether that may have been lacking in a meeting, and thus the saints have not received all that they might have done. Do you think that is so?

A.A.B. Yes I do; I think it is evident that in what Paul ministered he was affected by the environment in which he was. Now at Ephesus he writes to "the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus". That is an allusion, not simply to their status, but their state. Hence there was there the capability of receiving and liberating Paul, I think. He is so free, is he not, in certain environments?

E.C.B. It is what was referred to earlier as a great door and an effectual "opened to me", 1 Cor 16: 9. I have wondered sometimes, speaking quite practically, whether in meetings such as this, the saints, that is really to say the brothers, could not contribute more by way of extending the servant. You have served a long time; I have in fact noticed in your own ministry occasions when I thought that more might have come out of what you began with than did come out.

A.A.B. Well, I think that we do find that. Did not Mr Stoney say that he knew the state of the saints in a place by what the Lord gave him for them? I do not know that I could say that. But there it is, it confirms what you say.

J.C.E. Do you think on this line of what might be lacking we need to know how to pray more intelligently? I was thinking of the man who went at midnight and said "let me have three loaves" (Luke 11: 5), because the testimony had reached him and he needed something to sustain it with.

A.A.B. That is very interesting. That passage shows what happens among friends. Someone does not want to be disturbed, but the

knock comes at the door and he says, I want something, I do not want it for myself, I want it for someone else. It is like the servant in Genesis 24, it was not for himself, it was for another. So he gets up and he gives it to him.

J.C.E. I was thinking, too, of the women that came out from Galilee with Jesus and ministered to Him. The sisters can take comfort from that, that the Lord will reveal to them what is needed, or they will find out what is needed in the course of the testimony, just the same as those women did.

A.A.B. Just so; they had substance.

R.W.F. In connection with what was said as to extending a servant, it says in Proverbs 27: "Iron is sharpened by iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (v 17). Is the point there, not so much the hardness of the iron, but the maturity of manhood which will bring out the truth?

A.A.B. Yes. "Counsel in the heart of man is deep water, and a man of understanding draweth it out", Prov 20: 5. What readings we would have, dear brethren!

D.J.H. Is that what Paul has in mind when he says "Our mouth is opened to you, Corinthians, our heart is expanded"? He says "Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your affections... let your heart also expand itself", 2 Cor 6: 11-13. Did he want the Corinthians to expand so that his expansion could be used to the full?

A.A.B. Yes, that is right. Move on: Rome, Corinth, Ephesus; that is the route. Move on into Ephesus. What are the weather conditions? It is raining at Corinth, it is cloudy at Colosse, it is overcast in Galatia, but there is shining in Ephesus, shining from a cloudless sky. Is anyone asleep? Well, do not shout at him, but give him a word as you go by; "Wake up, thou that sleepest", Eph 5: 14.

C.G.H. Does the administration of the mystery largely reach the saints now through gift?

A.A.B. That is true. I think it is to be in all the saints too. Gift is a provisional matter, it will not go into heaven; the assembly will. So the great thing is the assembly and its administrative glory, finally as a vessel of glory Godward, but firstly it is administrative glory, the administration of the mystery. Every occasion of administration should bring into our minds the august character of the assembly, especially where judgment is required, not of evil only, but the judgment and the approval of excellent things. Take a scripture like Daniel 7: 9; "I beheld till thrones were set, and the Ancient of days did sit: his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was flames of fire, and its wheels burning fire.

A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him; thousand thousands ministered unto him" - that is a million - "and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set". It is a scene of judicial glory; that should be in mind as we go to the care meeting, should it not?

E.C.B. Very much so. Lower down (v 14) it says "And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom"; we are immediately directed in our minds to the mystery of the Person of Christ. The administration of the mystery bears on what we speak of as administration, but it also bears on "they let nothing be wanting", does it not? It is the spirit of 2 Corinthians 3.

A.A.B. I thought that; "they let nothing be wanting". So that matters are rounded off; the throne that Solomon made, it says, "was rounded behind", 1 Kings 10: 19. It had steps; you arrive at judgment, not by taking steps two at a time but step by step; and then the throne was rounded behind, there is nothing projecting; it is the completion of the matter in that sense.

E.C.B. In the secular world administration properly is giving effect to policy in the best way. Now if for policy we substitute the purpose of God - the giving effect to the purpose of God in the most effective way currently - that would be the administration of the mystery, would it?

A.A.B. Yes, I think so; and then the recognition and application of divine principles and the avoidance of expediency. Finally the thought of nothing being wanting, I think, is fully seen in what the prayer leads to, especially the last sentence of Ephesians 3; there is nothing wanting now in what is to Him.

J.C.E. Do you think that the corresponding exercise to let nothing be lacking would be that nothing be lost, as the Lord said. I think we are in danger of letting things slip away from us.

A.A.B. Yes, that is another great principle, that nothing should be lost. That comes in in relation to the feeding of the multitude, so we need the hand baskets to take it away with us on a journey.

E.P. Do you think that the whole matter of administration devolves upon the fact that things are going to work, otherwise they may be set before us as a plan sketched out, but the administration of that makes the thing practical and workable.

A.A.B. And that requires power. There is "the power of the Spirit" (v 6), and "according to the working of his power" (v 7), and then "strengthened with power" (v 16) and "according to the power which works" (v 20). If things are to work power is needed, active internal power. The old illustration of the steam locomotive is suitable; it is not the steam that comes out that is doing the work; that may create the noise, but the power is in what is within in the boiler and in the cylinders. That is how the thing works - active, internal power.

(Revised by the Editor and not by Mr. Bellamy - with Christ 18 February 1981)

London

18 January 1981

Key to initials

(All local unless otherwise stated)

A.A.Bellamy, Buckhurst Hill; C.Beale; D.A.Burr; E.C.Burr; T.J.Burr;
V.H.Browne; J.C.Evershed;R.W.Flowerdew; J.S.Gray;
C.G.Hitchcock; D.J.Hutson; H.A.Hutson;
A.H. Munster; E.Palmer; D.L.Stewart, Edinburgh; W. H.Shephard,
Bedford; A.J.E.Welch; J.M.Wallach

COMMITTAL

John Mitchell

**Exodus 21: 1-6; Ruth 1: 15-19 ("until they came to Bethlehem");
Acts 15: 36-41**

I want, dear brethren, to say a word about our committals. I think the closing days would call for renewed committal on the part of every one of us, and from a certain standpoint the only consideration in such a committal is the consideration of love. In the passage in Exodus, as well as in that in Ruth, there is in fact an invitation to the person concerned to go back, or to go away, to go free, but in the face of such an invitation there is a committal on the part of the Hebrew bondman and on the part of Ruth that is really a committal in love; that is, there were no other calculations or considerations.

There was no mixed motive, there was no question of something else attracting them except the attractiveness in love to whatsoever the persons were. That is what will stand, that kind of committal that knows no other calculation but that of love. Though thankful for what there is in the way of committal, anything else is a danger because if there are mixed motives, mixed considerations in our committal, other things having the real pull with us, that can, as we see in the verses in the Acts, end in disaster. I believe the Lord would raise with us at this time, as with the one who speaks, the question of the purity and the calculations of love, and whether that alone is entering into our committals to the Lord and to the testimony.

There was no question in regard to the Hebrew bondman. He had a right at that time to go free. Today we hear a great deal about man's rights, and particularly man's rights in liberty and in freedom; great societies are set up and there is great expenditure of effort, time and money in relation to setting persons free, as it is said. But over against that, what we see in the Lord Jesus is a Man in the committal of love saying "I will not go free". On the mount of transfiguration the Lord could have gone back to the glory, something that those of us who are a little older used to hear a good

deal about in our younger days. But you see there the true Hebrew bondman coming out. He says "I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go free". For him there was no other calculation but that of love. He loved his master, his wife and his children. In relation to the Lord Jesus that would be His love for His God, His love for the assembly and His love for the saints severally; He loved every one of us. So in this committal we have a standard of love that is exceedingly high. It has been seen in the Lord Jesus Himself, the One who truly did not go out free. What it meant for Him as He set His face to go to Jerusalem, as He came down from that mount! Enoch is typically the life of Jesus up to the mount of transfiguration, and that ends in his translation: "he was not for God took him", Gen 5: 24. A similar thing is said of Noah: "perfect amongst his generations. Noah walked with God", Gen 6: 9. But Noah is the life of Christ from the mount of transfiguration to the cross, and Noah in type went through death, and that likewise is what you get in the Hebrew bondman. His committal was a committal to that, and as the word is, "and that the death of the cross". What a death was the death of Jesus! These are basic matters, matters that we need to contemplate and which should never be far from our considerations. They are matters that enter into the moral fibre of the saints and into our committals in these times in which we are. They would enter into our relationships with Christ, our relationships in the testimony and our relationships with the brethren, and would develop a moral steadfastness among the saints, that no matter what may come in to deflect, what powers, what forces, what attractions, there will be that steadfastness morally in going through in the testimony.

This bondman says "I will not go free". It also says "But if the bondman shall say distinctly". There was no question about the distinctness, and there was an unequivocal committal, on the part of the Lord Jesus. There were no indistinct things. There are times when things are a bit indistinct and they cause a good deal of concern among the saints, but time generally shows what matters are. I would encourage the brethren that we should be clear and unequivocal in our committals to Christ. He was, if I may reverently

say, clear and unequivocal in His committals to us. There was no indistinctness about it; He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem knowing what was before Him and all that it involved. What His committal in love involved for Himself, what sufferings, what sorrow, what pressure upon His spirit! yet, according to the type, He said distinctly, I will not go free. Now the question as to ourselves is whether that character of committal is with us, or whether there are any other calculations entering into our committals to the testimony - and there may be so me. Some may say, I am there because my family is there. Well, in a certain sense you are thankful for the salvation at least for the meantime that that involves. But as difficulties come will that hold you? Maybe your family will come under some pressure. What is going to govern you then? I appeal to each of us that our committals should be purely the calculations of love for Christ. Then we will not so easily change. His love is unchanging, it never alters, it never diminishes. It is not like ours - as the hymn writer says 'Our love is oftentimes low'. His is always the same towards His saints and He would look for that steadfast character of committal among ourselves. I think we can see it among the saints; thank God we can see it among some of the younger brethren! You can go to fellowship meetings and there are those that you see there time after time. What is inward with such the Lord knows, but at any rate there is some evidence that there is the kind of steadfastness of committal that knows no other consideration or calculation except that of love.

Then it says "and he shall be his bondman for ever" - for ever; that is, there is no drawing back. The writer to the Hebrews says that God has no pleasure in him who draws back, but he adds "But we are not drawers back", Heb 10: 39. I would like to encourage the brethren that there should be no drawing back; it says here that he shall be his bondman for ever. Of course in regard to the Lord Jesus personally we have to read into this, as we have been taught, the extension in Aaron with his garments of glory and adornment. His service now is not exactly the bondman's service except of course that He is committed to serve, and He has served His saints well

throughout the dispensation, throughout all the ups and downs of the testimony, throughout all the failures that have marked us. Who has served like Jesus? And He serves us still. Thank God for His service to us, His service as the great High Priest, the One who is in the presence of God. There is another delightful thought in that; God honours this character of service, He clothes it with a heavenly glory that is proper to it. Such glory is being worked out in this present scene. Paul speaks in Acts 20 of the way that he had served the saints, and there is a great need of that, dear brethren. There always is a need of service among the saints, that character of service that knows no calculation except that of love, that is not looking in any sense for recognition or anything of that description but serves out of genuine and devoted love for Christ and therefore love for His saints. Paul exemplifies that character of service as he serves among the Ephesians and he brings it out there: "these hands" - think of the way he had served them there, think of his tears. And God clothes that - worked out as I say in circumstances of pressure, lowly circumstances here with a heavenly glory appropriate to it. There is a connection with what we get later on in Aaron the high priest and the way in which he is brought in and clothed with these garments. God can clothe what is pleasurable to Himself with the very best thoughts. What is intended is that God's glory is to be expressed here, and I think it can be expressed in the way of this committal to the Lord Himself and to His saints, not necessarily what we speak of as levitical service, but service.

Stephanas was a servant; he and his house did just what was needed to be done (see 1 Cor 16: 15), and there is always a lot to be done among the brethren, but persons to do it are always in short supply. There is always more to be done than there are those to do it, and therefore the great encouragement is that we should commit ourselves, as it says of Timothy who would care with genuine feeling how the saints get on (see Phil 2: 22). May we be encouraged along this line.

In Ruth it is a question of our committals to the testimony. You may say that the Lord is the testimony and that is true, but it is the

Lord Jesus characteristically among His saints. Again there is nothing in Naomi that attracted Ruth on the natural line; everything on that line would have encouraged Ruth to go back, and Naomi does not invite her to go with her. There is no invitation; indeed the invitation is to go back. Naomi realised what the future meant for that young woman. She realised that on the line of nature there was no future whatsoever. These are sobering considerations, dear brethren, and yet they are the calculations of love, and I believe they have been manifested in measure amongst the saints in these times. One often thinks of the practical matter of the number of young sisters in relation to the number of young brothers. These are matters that we should feel keenly, and be sympathetic with our young people about, and with the character of committal that is prepared to take up a position where, according to the line of nature, there appears to be no such future as might be desired. Yet there was that which was attractive in Naomi. It is the widowed character of the assembly. It is the line of what is poor, of what is outwardly of no account in this world. It is the line of which there is nothing except what is of God, what is of Christ Himself. Yet despite there being no encouragement Ruth comes out like the Hebrew bondman in the distinctiveness of her speech. She says "Do not intreat me to leave thee, to return from following after thee" "Do not intreat me" - as much as to say my mind is clear, my committal is quite distinct, there is nothing that is going to turn me aside. Then she goes on to say, "for whither thou goest I will go... thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried". "There will I be buried" - there is no doubt typically that Ruth had an outlook beyond the grave. She had an outlook on the great unseen world of things; therefore the seen character of things had no appeal whatsoever to her. What a challenge that is to every one of us! She was attracted to what could be witnessed to in testimony, what she saw there, what may be outwardly small and poor and weak, but in that she saw a great and glorious unseen system of things to which she was going to be connected, and that involved that she was going to be with it and committed to it as long as she

was here, and indeed right on, as she says, even to her death and her burial.

The brethren know we have sorrowed over some burials in the last week or two. How wonderful it is nevertheless to think of the victory, to think of the fact that, as you look into an open grave, Christ has been there! What feelings this brings into our spirits, and to know that He went there for me and He went there for you; and as you contemplate that He has invaded that domain it brings a sense of victory into your soul and brings on to view the order of things which is on the other side of death into which we can enter in spirit and taste something of at the present time. Would that we were more attracted to that order and not to the order of things that is here! On the external side there is not much to link on with in the saints. A person who is not devoted to Christ would see nothing in the position at all. Thank God for those who have seen something in it and who have committed themselves to it! May these committals be firm, may they be steadfast, may they be strengthened and may they hold us as the days go on and as they may get more difficult; may they hold us in what is pleasurable to Christ.

I want just briefly to say a word about the verses read in Acts 15. It is a very sorrowful matter because it shows that even a prominent position in the testimony of itself will not hold us. That is something that we need soberly to consider. Barnabas was a man who had a very good history; there was no question about that. I speak very carefully about a man such as Barnabas. Nevertheless the Spirit of God has recorded this matter, and He has recorded it for our help.

There comes a point in the testimony when the strength of Barnabas's committal to what is Pauline is tested and it does not stand the test, and that is a very serious matter. As others have said, the test in the testimony always surrounds that which is peculiar to Paul. Persons may be prepared to go a certain distance, prepared to commit themselves to certain things, but when you come to the Pauline level of ministry and the detail of it, you find that they are tested, and the sad thing is that quite a number fall away. That

has been the history in our times. Every one of us here knows what that is in the practical working of it out, and there has come a test and we have had to commit ourselves to the great truth of the mystery and the working of it out, through Pauline ministry, the great truth of the assembly.

There comes this point when Barnabas defects through natural relationships and influences. What a sad thing that is! John Mark, a young man, found the way testing, and the way is testing. It involves service day by day. It involves that character of committal in the Hebrew bondman: "he shall be his bondman for ever". It involves today, it involves Monday, it involves Tuesday and so on, and then next week if we are left here, for who of us can say what a week or what a day may bring forth, never mind a week? But if we are left here it will be the week after and the week after, and there is a need then to go on steadfastly in what is true, in what is right, in what is of God, in what reflects God in testimony here. John Mark was not equal to that, and not only so, but Barnabas, great man that he was, came under his influence. You might say that you can understand young men turning aside but would that no one in this room turns aside, young or old. Think of the words of the Lord: "Will ye also go away?", John 6: 67. There have been many that have gone away; it is a great sorrow that so many with whom we had links in the testimony have gone away. I trust we carry the sorrow with us all the time. Paul would have felt the defection of Barnabas. He was at one time a son of consolation, and yet when it comes to this test he is not equal to it. The word is that "There arose therefore very warm feeling". I am often struck with that when I read it. It arose between these great men in the testimony - and they were great men.

Barnabas was a great man; he had a great place in the testimony, and yet there arose very warm feeling between them. What a sorrowful thing that is! The result is that "they separated from one another; and Barnabas taking Mark sailed away to Cyprus"; not exactly, as we often say, that Barnabas went out of fellowship, but for the moment he had turned aside out of the main line of divine

operations; he went away to Cyprus. Later Paul on his journey passed Cyprus on the left hand (see Acts 21: 3).

These are very exercising matters; every one of us should examine our committals and see the basis of them and judge ourselves so that there should be nothing of self or natural feelings or natural relationships or anything else of that character entering in to corrupt or to weaken our committals to the testimony. Paul on the other hand "having chosen Silas went forth"; I think Mr Taylor said he had congenial company. There is great need for congenial company in the ministry. In the next chapter Paul takes up Timothy. I suppose that Silas and Timothy would have been a very great comfort to Paul. I wonder if in these days we could comfort the Lord in the way of our committals, and in the way of being free to be taken up by Him in order that there might be congenial company in the ministry. The result is that the testimony takes a great forward leap. The scientists in these days speak of quantum leaps, that is that things are progressing rather slowly and then suddenly something opens up and there is a great leap forward. That is like this chapter 16 of Acts, and it comes down to our day, the result of congenial company. In these verses you find a certain beauty about what is coming to light in that company. Think of Paul consulting with those that were with him as to the divine direction, as to the way in which they should go. I think there is a great need for the saints to be drawn together in affection, in committal, in devotedness to the furtherance of the testimony in view of there being movement forward. Something that I find exercising - I say it because I have come to it by observation - that where there are prolonged difficulties among the saints there is a tendency for brethren, particularly younger brethren, to be disaffected. Therefore there is a great need of there being unity in the ministry and in the testimony in view of the saints being held together, particularly in regard to the heavenly levels of the truth, so that there might be a clearance of any disaffection that may come in. What a sorrowful thing it is if persons are tending in these days to turn aside! You may see just a little tendency, a little carelessness, a little looseness - a very concerning

matter. May we each one of us take it home to ourselves, dear brethren. May we be really concerned that there might be happy and congenial relationships in the ministry, and congenial company in view of the furthering of what is of God, and in view of the saints being protected and held in relation to the most glorious levels of the truth. May the Lord help us on these things for His name's sake.

MAIDSTONE

13 December 1980

THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

D.Andrew Burr

Revelation 1: 9-19; 4: 1, 2 (to "in the heaven")

I have an exercise, beloved brethren, to say a word as to the presence of the Lord amongst us. I suppose that none of us would be here if we did not think the Lord was here: that is a simple truth, but I think it has sober implication. If we gather here on the ground that the Lord is here, that we would be elsewhere if that was where He was, and we would not be here if He was not here, it raises with us a sobering exercise.

I did not read the scripture to imply exactly that the Lord is moving amongst the saints at the present time in the way of judgment in which He was moving here, but this One whom John saw is the same Person who is moving amongst us at the present time. John notes the garments that the Lord was wearing and His girdle - to use a common expression, He was dressed for this occasion, suited to the circumstances in which He was, but I think John had a much more distinct impression of the Person whom he

saw than of the particular attire in which He appeared. It is that same Person who moves amongst us now. There was a time at the beginning of the dispensation when there were apostles and when things were maintained in a degree of order by what was apostolic.

The prospect of an apostolic visitation was used by Paul and John to bring about a correction of matters that were not right. We do not have apostles now, but we have the Lord. The Lord's presence was known then and the Lord is not deterred by the failure that there is in the professing body but, true to His promise, where there are two or three gathered together, He says "there am I", Matt 18: 20. That is primarily a matter of great joy and comfort to us all, as I believe it was indeed to John when he apprehended the fulness of this manifestation towards him, but it does have a sober side.

The Person presented here as the Son of man has "his head and hair white like white wool, as snow". He is presented not only as the Son of man but as the Ancient of days - a mysterious reference to His Person which we should never forget; it is a glorious and divine Person whose presence is known amongst us. He is the Son of man, but then He is also the Ancient of days. Think of how it refers to it in Daniel 7; in one place it says that the Son of man was brought to the Ancient of days, but later on He is the Ancient of days. So that this Person who is in our midst is God; although the Son of man, nonetheless the glory of His Person is never overlooked, particularly by John. By the Spirit, in the Scripture, when we have a reference to His manhood we have it followed interestingly and in varied ways by a reference to His Person. Here we have an allusion to His being from eternity; He has an eternal and un-commenced existence, but that blessed One is the same One who is known to us as the Son of man.

What I wanted to refer to particularly, however, were the other features that are noted about Him, His eyes, His walk, His voice and His mouth. These are things that are associated with the presence of God amongst us and the presence of the Lord Jesus amongst us. As I say, that is the ground we take and, as it is the ground we take, we have to be prepared to make the circumstances amongst us

consistent with the presence of such a One as this. He speaks with the voice of many waters; that is, He speaks with authority. I suppose that if we were truly conscious of His speaking we would be unquestioning as to His authority. Sometimes He speaks very clearly but there appears to be a question as to His authority. When we have a sense of His presence the authority in His voice is unmistakable. John heard a great voice a "voice as the voice of many waters"; that insistent, penetrating, carrying, voice of power that should command our ear. For the Lord, I believe, does speak like this amongst us, not necessarily in correction, but in many ways. His voice is distinctive; it is unlike any other kind of voice, and His voice is to be heard. Then there is the word He speaks: a sharp, two-edged sword. There are other swords spoken about in the Scriptures; there is the sword of Goliath, and it says that there is none like it - the might of death. But then there is this sword, the sharpest of all, as it is said to the Hebrews: "sharper than any two-edged sword", Heb. 4: 12. It is the penetrating effect of the word of the Lord, and it penetrates and divides and discerns amongst us. I think that we also prove that; and we must be prepared for the Lord to speak in such a way.

What I was particularly impressed with was His walk and His look. It is evident from His address to Ephesus that He is not simply standing among the candlesticks, but it says He walks "in the midst of the seven golden lamps". That is His characteristic disposition amongst us. He says to John that "the seven lamps are seven assemblies", so there should be no mistake about it; that is, that the Lord's presence is known in our localities. It is known here and it is known everywhere in them. The Lord is walking about amongst the saints. And as He walks about He takes account of things with "his eyes as a flame of fire". He takes account of what He finds, of what is in localities; of the personnel in localities and of the relationships between localities. Nothing escapes His eye - nothing. And everything that comes under His eye comes also under His appraisal. Of course it should be for our encouragement, because not one thing that is good escapes His notice. He says to Ephesus

"I know thy works and thy labour, and thine endurance". He had seen, too, the way in which they took up matters of exercise amongst them: "thou hast tried them who say that themselves are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars". Then He takes account, too, of the personnel. He is not only looking at those upon whom His judgment falls but looking upon everyone. "Thou hast a few names" He says to Sardis. And He says to those in Thyatira, "the rest... as many as have not this doctrine"; He notices them. Everyone comes under His scrutiny; those who can be commended He commends, but others He also speaks of directly. He does not name any individuals, except for one martyr, but nevertheless individuals are clearly under His eye. He refers to 'those' in various places, "those who say that they themselves are Jews" (chap 2: 9) and "those who hold the doctrine of Balaam" (chap 2: 14); these are things that He notices as He moves about amongst the saints. He notices also the relationships between localities and He looks for them to be in order. Sadly, in some degree, they are not in order, and the Lord notices that; He sees the facts and He sees the reason, and He sees the exercise that is amongst the saints, and He is ready with His word; the matter is His. It is He who walks among the seven golden lamps and it is His eye that sees; and nothing that we might bring to bear upon any matter compares with the two-edged sword that goes out of His mouth. What a comfort it is that we can leave these matters to the Lord! He takes account of them, they have not escaped His notice since the day of their inception, and they do not escape His notice now; and the Lord is taking account of them as He moves in the midst of seven golden lamps. I do not think He is threatening now to take a lamp out of its place, that is in the background, but He is looking for things to be according to and consistent with His presence.

Then He looks at localities; I find that a great comfort, that He looks at this locality. I believe that we can say very simply that there is much that is pleasing to Him. It is a comfort also that He takes account of every exercise that we carry. There are varied exercises but the Lord takes account of them with His eyes as a flame of fire.

Nothing is hidden from Him; He takes account of every matter. He takes account of the way in which exercises are carried, whether they are carried in mutuality and brotherly confidence. He takes account of the spirit in which things are carried, and of our desire that things might be pleasing to Him. If there were any lack of such a desire, or of a spirit of brotherliness or mutuality, He would see that too. He takes account of our relationships with one another; He sees if they are normal, He sees if they are not normal; and if they are not normal He sees why they are not normal. He sees how we are with our local brethren, He sees how we are with other brethren, He sees if we are consistent or if there is any discrepancy. No doubt the brethren see these things as well, but the Lord sees as He moves about in the midst of the seven golden lamps. It is a sobering matter to be reminded of this. Is every matter consistent and rightly established and rightly based amongst us? Is there a desire with us to make way for this One in His movements in majesty and in glory in our midst?

The effect that this had on John was very sober. I suppose, speaking very simply, it was something of a shock to him to see the Lord whom he knew like this, but the Lord laid His right hand upon him. The Lord would give us strength and courage as He moves amongst us, as He finds those who are serving in the kingdom and patience in Jesus; He takes account of us and His desire is that we might be strengthened by the assurance of His presence and of His observation of every matter and of the way that every matter is in His control - the seven stars are in His hand. Nothing is out of His hands and He would have us assured of it.

I read in chapter 4 because that is a different setting in which His presence is known. It is the same voice, the same Person, not now moving judicially amongst the assemblies but speaking from heaven, calling John to have his place in that sphere of things above where Jesus is. What a blessed thing that is! I believe the Lord would bring the atmosphere of this place amongst us as He moves amongst us, that we might find that, although He appraises every matter judicially, His prime concern is with the spiritual enjoyment

and prosperity of the saints. It is the same voice that he heard in chapter 1 that he hears now saying "Come up here, and I will shew thee the things which must take place". John was removed from the scene of judgment in which things amongst the nations were going to be resolved - not taken away while there were matters of exercise still to be worked out in the assemblies - but, as the scene of judgment moves to the sphere of the nations, John's place is found alongside Christ in glory. As Mr Darby said and Mr Taylor so often quoted:

'And see! the Spirit's power
Has ope'd the heavenly door,
Has brought us to that favoured hour
When toil shall all be o'er' (hymn 74).

I find great comfort in this scripture; it was the same voice, the same impelling, penetrating, carrying, powerful voice that had first called John's attention to the Lord as He moved amongst the assemblies in review of everything amongst them; and it is that same blessed One who would call him to have a place in the sphere of things where He is at home, and where our eternal place is assured. May our hearts be more directed to these things. My desire is that the saints may be set free from burden, as seeing that every matter is in the Lord's hands, and that we might find that our portion is to be with Him in the sphere of things where He would have us with Himself.

LONDON

17 February 1981

THE CHILDREN'S REMEMBRANCE

At the beginning of his long prophecy Isaiah sorrowed over the fact that God's people had forgotten their God days without number.

Sadly, they had in fact forsaken Him. Even an ass would remember his master's crib where there would be the needed food and shelter, and also a welcome. When Balaam's sheass spoke to him with man's voice it was to make him remember how faithful to him she had always been. These animals are honoured in Scripture. You will recall that Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding upon an ass and her colt. If a firstling, that foal had to be ransomed with a lamb - a token of its value to its master. Our great value to God is shown in the fact that the Lord Jesus, the Son of man, gave His life a ransom for all who believe in Him.

The Lord Jesus, at a time of very deep feeling because of His betrayal, asked His disciples to remember Him during His absence from the world by breaking the bread and drinking the cup. Then the apostle Paul, who had not known Jesus except in glory, received the expression of the same loving request to all His own until He shall come again. The first day of the week, the resurrection day, thus became the Lord's day when the Supper is taken by Christians as the Lord desired "in remembrance of me". Neither Paul nor we ourselves could recall the Lord as the early disciples could, but faith can be assured of His presence at the Supper, when taken rightly. His presence is realised through the Holy Spirit who dwells within.

A favourite Bible story with the young ones is that of Joseph. There came a time in his history when the continuance of what is called the testimony, or witness, of God in this world seemed to hang by a single thread. That thread was the poor memory of Pharaoh's cup-bearer. He had for two whole years forgotten Joseph's pleading request to him, "Only bear a remembrance with thee of me when it goes well with thee". If he had not at last remembered Joseph, the dreams of Pharaoh would not have been interpreted, nor the bumper grain crops of seven years of plenty stored up for the seven lean years. In the end many people would have starved including, it

would seem, Jacob and his family. Read and learn Genesis chapter 40 verses 14 & 15. Is the Lord still waiting for you to bear a remembrance of Him?

J.C.Evershed