

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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Contents

"A SAVIOUR, WHICH IS CHRIST THE LORD"

TREASURE

THE SERVICE OF SONG

THE CHILDREN'S VESSELS

"A SAVIOUR, WHICH IS CHRIST THE LORD"

F.E.Raven

Luke 1: 26-38, 46-55; 2: 25-35; 24: 44-49

All will recognise that, whatever may be the effect which God produces by the preaching, the one subject of preaching is Christ. It therefore behoves the preacher to bring before his hearers something about Christ. I dare say all here would say, We know a good deal about Christ; but there may be something you do not know, and which it is important to know. I want to bring before you something which may add to what you know about Christ; and everything about Him is so important, because He has something to say to everybody; there is no man upon earth on whom Christ has not a claim. He died for all, and if so, it is clear He has a claim to be regarded by all.

In the last passage I read it speaks of repentance and remission of sins being preached in His name; it therefore behoves one to seek to put before hearers what His name imports. Certain things may be done in the world in the name of people of authority, of the king; people have some idea of what the name of the king imports. Name really implies that which God sees fit to set forth in any person. In the early days of Scripture, when they gave a name to a child there was a prophetic import in it. Abraham meant 'father of many nations'; Isaac 'laughter'. I might refer to other names; there was an import in them, and that was that which God saw fit to set forth in any particular person who was designated by a name. So it is in regard to Christ; His name indicates that which God is pleased to set forth in Him. We see in Luke the beginning of Christ; not of His Person, because He is Son of God; but the beginning of His coming in as man, and that is the point of moment to us. We want to understand what Christ is as man.

Now what we begin with is that He was born of the Holy Ghost, not after a natural manner; and by reason of this very fact He is called the Son of God. Everything connected with the birth of Christ

was miraculous. He was announced beforehand by the Holy Ghost, and when born, He was to be called the Son of God. Scripture says He was reputed to be the son of Joseph, but in truth He was the Son of God, born miraculously of the Holy Ghost. That is a point of great moment; He was unlike every other man. Now, such an One must of necessity take precedence of every other man. All this comes out in the announcement of the angel to Mary. He is called in Scripture the Head of every man, the Beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. Therefore I do not think that anyone is justified in leaving Christ out of his reckoning.

People do not leave the exalted people of the country out of their reckoning; nothing can be more unwise than to leave Christ out, for no one can really be so important as Christ. Apart from anything which Christ has accomplished, by the very fact of what He is as born into this world by the Spirit of God, He is the first among men.

Now I am going one step further in regard to that; the resurrection from the dead declared Jesus to be the Son of God (see Rom 1: 4). He was a man begotten by the Spirit of holiness; then He was raised again from the dead, having died in order to accomplish redemption, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness. How important it is for everyone of us that we should take Christ into account!

Now I will say a little as to what was spoken in connection with the birth of Christ. The song of Mary was prophetic, and so was the song of Simeon. Mary's song brings before us what would be consequent upon the birth of this Child; and it shows that everything would be turned upside down. God would remember the promises to the fathers and prove Himself faithful; but in the world everything would be turned upside down. He has filled the hungry with good things but the rich He has sent empty away. The mighty are cast down and those of low degree are exalted. So it was in connection with Christ; the mighty were passed by, the great in Israel were put down from their seats and those of low degree were exalted. Peter, James and John, poor fishermen, were exalted and the mighty put down. A revolution came to pass in connection with the birth of this

Child. I do not doubt it will come to pass in a far larger way, for the song of Mary celebrates the principle of divine dealings. God does not act according to man's thoughts. Do not think much about the rich because God sends them empty away. In regard to God, it is better to be hungry than rich; He fills the hungry with good things spiritually, far better things than the rich possess. I refer to this in connection with the thought that with the birth of Christ everything was to be revolutionised.

Now with Simeon we get much the same thought. Simeon had the Babe in his arms, and he says "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace... For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people" - now mark: "a light for revelation of the Gentiles". There was a revolution! The Gentiles had been hid away from God, lost in idolatry, very much like the prodigal in Luke 15 who had gone into the far country and was hid away from his father. Now, Christ was to be a light to bring the Gentiles into view. Then He was to be the glory of God's people Israel. The utterances of Simeon are prophetic; you cannot understand them any other way.

I desire to give you a thought of what Christ is in regard to God. Christ is on the part of God, the centre of a system, round whom and in regard to whom every family will be grouped. There are saints in heaven and earth; the thief was to be in paradise; Abraham and Jacob and many another are in heaven; but whether saints or angels in heaven, or Israel or the nations upon earth, all will be grouped around the One whom God has made to be the blessed centre of the divine system. God has made known to us His purpose in regard to Christ, that every family, whether in heaven or on earth, blest of God, will be grouped around God's blessed centre. The Old Testament closes with the prophecy that the Son of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; that will be the centre of God's system, just as the natural sun is the centre of the solar system. Christ is the head and centre of the moral universe. I have no doubt that that follows necessarily upon the birth of Christ; it was the wonderful intervention on the part of God to bring a Man in, miraculously born

of the Holy Ghost, so that He should be called the Son of God. I do not go into the antecedents of Christ; you have to go to the gospel of John to find them; I only refer now to His birth.

Some here may not have thought of these things very much; but it is worth your while to bestow a little consideration upon Christ. I am far from wishing anyone here to accept what I say; but what I have said is based upon the scripture I have brought before you, and it is in the power of everyone to look into Scripture and see whether these things are so, whether Christ was not born in the miraculous way I have spoken of, and whether Mary and Simeon do not predict these wonderful revolutions in connection with His birth. There is no one more attractive to me than the aged Simeon; he was allowed to remain here until the child Jesus was placed in his arms; then he said "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace". He was not going to depart in fear and terror but in peace, according to God's word. Do you not think there will be a day when Simeon will have his part with Christ? Surely so; he will have his part in that vast heavenly company which will be grouped around Christ as the blessed centre of God's moral universe. I want you to take Christ in in that light; to think not only of the material universe but of the moral universe, composed of families in heaven and on earth, and Christ the blessed centre and beginning of them. God has presented Christ to us in that light before that universe is brought into display.

Soon God will bring it into display, and everything here will be revolutionised; the mighty will be cast down from their seats and them of low degree exalted; all that will come to pass assuredly in the ways of God.

I want to pass on to the last chapter, verses 40-49. Here we get Christ risen, and the Lord takes the place of expositor to the disciples; He expounds to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. What an important point that is! and how it confirms what I have been attempting to bring before you; that is, that all those Scriptures, from beginning to end, pointed on to Christ as the blessed centre and beginning of God's system. Everything was to be fulfilled in Christ. It was not simply that He was coming as

the Head of Israel; that is a very limited idea; my point is that the Scriptures speak of Christ as the beginning and centre of God's universe; everything was to be grouped around Christ. You will find this even in such a book as Leviticus. I used to think that one of the dullest books; but when I saw that Christ was the subject I found it a very interesting book. The feast of tabernacles in Leviticus points on to what I have spoken of, the grouping of every family in heaven and on earth around God's blessed centre. What the Lord brought before His disciples' minds in this chapter was confirmatory of the angel's announcement to Mary, and of the light that was given to Simeon by the Holy Ghost.

I want you to have Christ before you in that light, because it is that which gives import to His name. Apart from what I have sought to bring before you, you cannot understand the import of His name; His name implies that He is the centre of God's moral universe. Now, repentance and forgiveness of sins are preached in His name. God has made Christ to be the centre of the moral universe; for the moment it is hid, but God intends to make it manifest, and in it He will turn everything in the world upside down. All that people esteem to be great will be brought low, and what they think little and contemptible in the world will be exalted. What is spoken of in Scripture is the world to come, and Christ as the beginning and centre of that world. Now the point for you and me is that, before this comes to pass, God addresses Himself to man. The Lord gave injunction here as to what was to be preached to men. God has a voice to man at the present time, in Christ; He has set forth Jesus to be a mercy-seat. Before He changes the face of the world and brings in what He has purposed, He has a voice to man, and that is what we get in the commission which the Lord spoke. Christ had to suffer to accomplish redemption, to maintain and discharge every right of God in regard to man. Man lay under the judgment of God; sin had brought death into the world; Christ had to take up the rights of God, and that is what He has done in redemption. That is the meaning of the death of Christ.

The One who was born of the Holy Ghost was not subject to death; He could not be holden of death; but He entered into it, tasted it in the grace of God, in order to maintain and discharge God's rights. He became a victim; He gave Himself a ransom for all. Thus it behoved Christ to suffer. But it was not only that He suffered; He could not be holden of death, so He rose from among the dead the third day. If He had not risen from the dead we would not have a Man. A man is not a man without a body. The Lord says "a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have". He made manifest that He was still a man, risen again from the dead. The Lord impresses upon the disciples the reality of the resurrection. He had suffered, redemption had been accomplished; the rights of God had been vindicated and discharged; every penalty under which man was by the righteous judgment of God had been borne in the death of Christ; everything had been met according to the glory of God. Christ was risen; and now, as a consequence of that, on the part of the One who is the beginning and centre of the moral universe, the announcement goes out broadcast of repentance and remission of sins in His name.

I would ask you, Would you not care to have a part in that system of which I have spoken, that system of blessing? That world of blessing is going to take the place of this world which is passing away. God is going to bring in a system of which Christ is the Head. Everything will be enlightened with the light of God and will take its character from Christ, from the One who is meek and lowly in heart. Would you not care to have a part in it; would you rather be entirely outside of it? If you are outside of it you will be in the dark, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. If, on the other hand you are in that system, you will be eternally blest according to God's purpose in Christ. God has ever had the thought of blessing; He began to speak of it from the beginning. It was the substance of His promise to Abraham. God's purpose was to introduce that Man in whom He could make His blessing good, and that Man has been brought in; He has suffered, He is risen and is coming again, and the world to come is going to be established in Him. In the meantime

God addresses Himself to man, and that word is in His name. If it were not for His name God could not address Himself to man except in judgment; but in His name God approaches man to make known to him the claim and right which Christ has in regard to every man.

There is not a single person here on whom Christ has not a claim.

He died for all, paid the price for all, and hence it is that repentance and remission of sins are preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the most guilty spot in the world; they had crucified Christ; their guilt had culminated there.

They had the greatest opportunity and were guilty of the greatest crime, and there it was that the testimony of grace began.

Now has that ever come home to you as light? There is forgiveness of sins for you tonight so far as God's mind is concerned. I do not think God has any other mind in regard to man at present. God makes manifest His mind in regard to every man, and His mind is forgiveness, so that no man should come into judgment. But that does not relieve man from the obligation to repent. Repentance is a moral obligation under which man lies.

Repentance cannot be vain if remission of sins be in the mind of God in regard to every man; but every man is under the obligation to repent; that must be the beginning of blessing. Man must come to his bearings. If my child has sinned against me I cannot be on terms with him until he has repented. Man is man, and God is God, and until a man recognises the right of God to judge, and that he himself is amenable to the judgment of God, it is impossible that any man can be on terms with God. One great object of the gospel is that man may come down from his stilts, that he should see things according to the truth and recognise his position according to God; that is, as amenable to the judgment of God. Now all that is possible.

If there were no forgiveness a man might say, It is no good, whether or not I shall be judged, I will just remain as I am, I will eat and drink for tomorrow I die. But the truth is that in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who is the blessed centre of God's system, God has been pleased to make known His mind, and His

mind is forgiveness of sins in regard to every man, that man may be encouraged to repent, to accept his true place in regard to God. In a piece of machinery, if any part of the machinery is out of its bearing the whole thing comes to a standstill. So really man, as far as he could, would bring everything to a standstill; man has brought confusion into the machinery of God's world; he has got out of his bearings. Well, repentance is that a man should be brought back to his bearings; to recognise God's right to judge, and that man, as God's creature, is subject to the judgment of God. It is a wonderful thing when a man is awakened to recognise his true place as a creature in regard to God. Until that takes place everything is false and distorted in man's mind; he is like a madman, sees nothing in its true proportion. When the prodigal came to himself he viewed God (I speak reverently) and himself in true proportion. He recognised the father as the father and that he had sinned against him, and then his thought was to come to him as a suppliant. Now that is what God would have in regard to every man. He will never relieve man from the obligation of repentance. If God did not insist upon it there would be nothing right. But God has granted to man the opportunity of repentance because He has been pleased to make known His mind in regard to man, and that is forgiveness.

What do you want forgiveness of sins for? Some would say, That I might not come into judgment. That is all right; but you want forgiveness in order that you may be attached to Christ, who is the centre of God's universe. I believe that to be the great end for which forgiveness of sins is needed on the part of man. I do not want to be left outside, like a wandering star going on to destruction; I want to become attached; and forgiveness is presented to man in Christ's name that he may become attached to Christ by the Spirit of God, that he may no longer be a fragment, going on to destruction, but be attached to Christ, the blessed head and centre of God's universe.

That world will take the place of all which is going on around. Scripture is full of it from beginning to end; Moses, the Psalms, the prophets, the New Testament, all are full of that universe which is before God and which is centred in Christ, around whom every

family in heaven and on earth will be grouped for blessing. People are lost until they are attracted to Christ. Christ has become a point of attraction, a kind of magnet, in order to attract to Himself by the grace which is presented in His name. The power of attraction is in Christ; He is the lodestone to attract to Himself all those fragments that are going on to perdition in order that they may be attached to Him for eternal blessing by the Spirit of God. That is the object of the gospel going out into the world. But all the goodness which God may be pleased to bring before you in Christ can never relieve man of his obligation to repent in regard to God, for the fact of man being out of gear has brought the machinery into confusion, and man must come to his bearings, recognise God, and the right of God to judge, and his own position as subject to the judgment of God. When a man comes to himself he is thankful enough to find that in the mind of God there is forgiveness of sins, not simply to him but to every man upon earth. I should not like to think that there was forgiveness of sins in God's mind in regard to certain people only, because it would be difficult to be quite sure that I was one of those particular people; but when I know that God has but one mind in regard to all men, I have no doubt on that score, because I enter into that which is in the mind of God in regard to all men. That is what you will do if you accept the opportunity which God has been pleased to grant to every man; that is, to repent in regard to Himself. The subject of the apostle Paul's preaching was repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I do not know where all here stand in regard to these things. I beg of you to take into account Christ and that universe of blessing of which Christ is the centre. It is impossible that you should have part in it except you receive forgiveness of sins; but it is presented to you in the name of the One who suffered and rose again from the dead, the blessed Son of God, born of the Spirit through the virgin, coming into this world that He might suffer, but in resurrection declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness. Mere natural amiability or anything of that kind will not do for God. Amiability is only skin deep; if you get beneath it you will

often find a most determined will. Honey or leaven will not do for God; He searches the heart and He will have reality, and man must come to his bearings morally in regard to God. But there is forgiveness with Him that He may be feared. The first thing in the soul, properly speaking, is the fear of God; but you do not stop there; you get the knowledge of what is in the heart of God toward all men. I would that every man on earth might have it. God would have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

May God grant that none here may be outside. Outside will be darkness and weeping and wailing; the great thing is to be inside God's blessed system, which, in a sense, is a mystery now, but which in due time will be manifest. Scripture speaks to us about the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then everything which is hid now will become manifest. This world will be turned upside down like a man turns a dish upside down; God has power to do it in order that He may make manifest His system of which the Son of God is the beginning and centre.

TREASURE

J.Strachan

Matthew 13: 36-52

I think it is interesting that believers can be regarded as householders with treasure. It is open to each believer to be a householder with treasure, and help is afforded, in this section of scripture, how to become such, not to be someone who is impoverished but someone who has something that is valuable.

Treasure refers to what is valuable, something that you have and want to have because of its value. In regard to spiritual things we have to learn from Christ what the idea of treasure really is. There is what is generally available. God is very large and beneficent in His thoughts in the gospel, and the seed has been spread abroad in that sense. It is available for men, and those who believe get the benefit of it. Some may stop at that and we may be amongst those who stop there, content with the benefits that come to us by the gospel.

But there is more than that available. I would like just to press that on our hearts, dear brethren, that there is more available than what comes to us initially if we want to go in for it.

In the first section of this chapter the Lord sat by the sea and there was that spread out there which was available for all. Then He went into the house and there were those who came to Him in the house and enquired. If we are on the line of enquiry from the Lord in this private situation, which is suggested in the house, there are wonderful possibilities of becoming possessors of treasure. So they came and enquired and first of all they wanted the parable of the darnel of the field expounded to them. They did not want it to remain a parable, they wanted the exposition of it. We do not want things just in parables, we want an exposition of things so that we understand them. The Lord protected things by speaking in parables, but then if there are those who are interested He would expound what they really mean. Are we among those who want to understand what the Lord would expound to us?

So the first thing is this parable of the darnel of the field in which there are two classes: the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one, and they looked very similar. To outward appearances the darnel was very similar to the wheat. Well, we just have to leave things like that. There is what is real in believers and

there is what is imitation, and it is not a matter of trying to uproot the imitations. The Lord indicates that publicly things are to be left to go on as they are. That is how things stand publicly in Christendom; there is what is real and what is imitation going on together and the imitation you just have to leave. The Lord will deal with that finally at the completion of the age; He will deal with all that side of things in judgment, but for the moment the instructed believer can just leave it in the Lord's hands. The sons of the kingdom represent what is real, and the outcome will be that they will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. There is shining connected with persons who are real, shining that is known at the present time in testimony and will be seen in display in the kingdom of the Father. Our business is to go on in testimony, in representation of our Father who is in the heavens, in the consciousness that the Lord will adjust everything perfectly when it comes to the time of display. I say that because there is no treasure to be found in attempting to adjust a situation that the Lord has indicated, should be left alone. No treasure is to be found in trying to improve things in Christendom; you just leave things as the Lord instructs us to leave them.

Then the Lord goes on to enlarge on certain other matters that are very near and dear to His heart. He says "The kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure hid in the field, which a man having found has hid, and for the joy of it goes and sells all whatever he has, and buys that field". This treasure is hid. Divine valuables are, in that sense, not spread out to public gaze; it is a question of what is hidden and what the Lord Himself would bring to light. We have to learn from Him what He counts as treasure; not what men count as treasure but what He counts as treasure. This is evidently one thing that He is speaking about that is very near to His heart - treasure hid in a field. His operations are proceeding to bring that to light. It is a wonderful thing to think about, what the Lord has down here on the earth that He is bringing to light in the way of treasure. We would like to understand something about that - I would at any rate and I am sure many others here would too. Would that all believers desired to understand what the Lord is bringing to light that He

regards as treasure, what He has in His people, in His saints down here, that He regards as treasure. So you may go into a place and the Lord would say, I have My people in this city, I have treasure here. What a thing that is! to go into a place and be conscious that there is a part of the treasure of Christ there.

Historically we can see how it came out in the book of Acts, how Paul went to certain places and the treasure came to light in those places. At Philippi, for example, there was a woman called Lydia of whom it says "whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16: 14); that was part of the Lord's treasure, somebody who listened to the things Paul had to say and not only listened to them but was prepared to attend to them, to put them into practice. That means a great deal to the Lord, that there are persons who are prepared to listen to Pauline ministry and put it into practice. Then the jailor came to light there, the man who was converted and of whom it says he rejoiced with all his house; not only a man secured but his household also. What treasure you see in a believer and in his household being secured, a little bit of territory for the Lord, a little bit of treasure brought to light in this field! The Lord has a right to operate in regard to the whole field; He has a right to operate in regard to the whole world if He wants to; but then there may be an area in which He is definitely and distinctly operating at a given time and that is where the treasure is. You get the suggestion in Genesis 2, in the stream that flowed forward and surrounded the land of Havilah, that territory where the gold was. There is where the gold is today, the treasure the Lord is bringing to light.

Then as Paul went on some believers came to light at Thessalonica. He was briefly there with them, and he wrote a letter to those persons, "to the assembly of Thessalonians in God the Father". How that would mark them out, that they had a place in the affections of God the Father. Persons in a place who are in the affections of God the Father: could you be in any greater heart of love than that? How it would distinguish persons in such a place. Then at Corinth the Lord said He had much people in the city. The

Lord said by vision to Paul "Fear not, but speak and be not silent; because I am with thee, and no one shall set upon thee to injure thee; because I have much people in this city", Acts 18: 9. What a city that would be under the eye of heaven! You see the treasure coming to light, treasure according to the mind of Christ. Then as Paul came to Ephesus what treasure would be there. We often refer to the epistle to the Ephesians, but there was something in a sense greater than the epistle to the Ephesians and that was the assembly at Ephesus. What treasure was being brought to light for the heart of Christ in the way He was operating right through His beloved apostle. Well, that is just to give us some idea of the character of thing that the Lord has in mind.

Then to bring it down to our own day, it is to see persons who are going on with love for the Lord, with love for the truth, and appreciating what He has given through the ministry, especially the ministry of Paul. How much it all means to the heart of Christ to come to a place and see there persons of such character. That comes down to our own day; there may be only a few, because the Lord speaks in this very gospel of two or three. Think of it coming down to such small dimensions! but it is the real thing. It is the treasure which the Lord is expending so much to secure. How much the Lord is prepared to expend in order that what is according to His heart might be secured.

Then the Lord goes on to say, "the kingdom of the heavens is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls; and having found one pearl of great value, he went and sold all whatever he had and bought it".

What a wonderful thing it is to think of the Lord Jesus finding one pearl of great value, something that He was prepared to give whatever He had to secure! Think of how much it could be said that Christ had, and He was prepared to give it *all* for this one pearl, He valued it so much. What is it that Christ values so much that He was prepared to give all whatever He had to secure it? What is it that is so valuable to Him? It is the assembly. Christ "loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it", Eph 5: 25. He loved it so much that He was prepared to give Himself, not only what He might have

but *Himself*. That is the value of the assembly to the heart of Christ. There is only one. When men find a precious jewel, and it is unique in character, not another one like it, they give it a name. No doubt everybody here has heard of a name given to a precious jewel that someone has found. Now the Lord would name this pearl of great value. He speaks of *the* assembly and then He also speaks of *My* assembly. What He says about it here is to bring out the intrinsic character and quality that belongs to it that means so much to Himself. There is nothing else like it. Do we realise that there is nothing else in the universe like the assembly? There are divine Persons and they stand by Themselves, but then there is what They have worked to secure in the realms of men and angels, and there is nothing to compare with the assembly - one pearl of great value.

Have we realised that? Have we come to see treasure of this character, treasure *par excellence*? That is what we have been called to have part in, and that is what we want to understand something about. We want to understand it, not just be nominally in it, but to understand what it is, its value, its value to the heart of Christ, and that we ourselves have been called to have part in it.

"And having found one pearl of great value, he went and sold all whatever he had and bought it". Do we understand how the Lord values the assembly? That is His chief interest, as another has said. Do we value it enough to make it our chief interest? Hence it comes down to how we work out the truth of the assembly in our local meetings. Can we see things being worked out in our localities as related to this thing that is of so great value to the heart of Christ? At each one of the gates of the holy city there was one pearl. It was the same character of thing no matter which gate you went to; it would not matter which locality you went to, the same character of things would be seen. There would be persons walking in the light of what the assembly is in its essential value to the heart of Christ.

The next thing we come to is this seine: "the kingdom of the heavens is like a seine which has been cast into the sea, and which has gathered together of every kind, which when it has been filled, having drawn up on the shore and sat down, they gathered the good

into vessels and cast the worthless out". Now things are to be worked out in regard to what is living. What comes from the sea, these fish and so on, are living things and it is a question of how we are going to work the matter out in regard to what is living.

Everything that has life in it according to God is regarded as worthwhile, to be discerned as having value. Moses speaks about Zebulun and Issachar, that they shall suck of the abundance of the seas and of the hidden treasures of the sand (see Deut 33: 19).

They are treasures to be drawn on and to be gathered up. What is worthwhile, the good, is to be gathered into vessels. That must work out in our local meetings. We get the idea from the Lord of what the treasure is that is hid and that He is bringing to light; we get the idea of what is so valuable to Himself in the one pearl. Then we are to learn to sit down and seek to work out how the good are to be gathered into vessels so that everything that is of value is gathered up and the worthless cast out. Hence the need exists for discrimination. The man who was seeking beautiful pearls was able to discriminate, having found one pearl of great value; so we have to learn from Christ how to discriminate. The good has to be gathered into vessels. There is a place for the good, a place in local meetings where the good can be gathered into vessels, and they are to be a part of the thing. That is the idea, that they are so valuable that they are to be part of the thing itself. Now I wonder if we all feel that, that we are so valuable that we are to have a part in a living way in what is being gathered into vessels, that there is to be nothing lost that is of value. They were deliberate about this, having drawn the seine on shore and having sat down. It is a deliberate matter that requires time and consideration, requires application and exercise, so that the matter is worked out to secure the result the Lord has in mind.

Then the Lord goes on to say "Have ye understood all these things?". Well, that is a challenge, dear brethren; have we understood? Do we understand what the public position is? Do we understand how we are to comport ourselves in the public position? Do we understand something about this treasure that the Lord is securing in persons in localities? The Lord means to secure material

for the assembly. Do we understand what this really means? Do we understand that He has what He so much values in this one pearl, the assembly? Do we understand something about what the assembly is according to divine purpose? We are so accustomed to thinking of the assembly in days of brokenness and decimation, but what a thing it is to get a view of what the assembly is in its essential unity and oneness for the heart of Christ according to divine purpose. Then do we understand something about the good being gathered into vessels, what is living being secured and gathered into these vessels? how divine thoughts will be worked out in a way that is according to the mind of Christ in our localities? I believe the Lord would say to us, "Have ye understood all these things?".

Then the Lord says "For this reason every scribe disciplined to the kingdom of the heavens is like a man that is a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old". Now we have to follow things carefully: "every scribe disciplined to the kingdom of the heavens". It means we have to be exercised and diligent and apply ourselves to things, not to be casual or careless. These things are so valuable that we have to be diligent and actively pursue them. If we are to have treasure, to be like a householder with treasure, then we have to take the way that the Lord indicates. It is a path of discipleship, a path in which we have to follow Him, a path in which we have to be disciplined. We need to be careful, be accurate, be exact in things; a scribe would be accurate in regard to everything.

We have to follow things accurately and in detail so that we do not miss anything of what the Lord means us to get. That is how a believer may become like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old. What treasures we can acquire on this line! The teaching opens up to us as we follow what the Lord has in mind, Pauline teaching particularly which he opens up in his epistles. Are we prepared to go in for it? Even Peter said about things that Paul wrote that some are hard to be understood. But you do not give up; you are like this scribe that was disciplined, you are prepared to follow the line that the Lord is indicating and acquire treasure.

These things that are new, and the old too; the Old Testament may

appear like a sealed book, but the Lord does not mean it to remain like that. As we have the New it provides the key to what is in the Old. If we take the chapter we were reading earlier (1 Kings 4) where the creditor is coming and the woman has only a pot of oil, what does all that mean? You need the New Testament to understand it, but as you have the key to it in the New, then the whole matter opens up and you get understanding that what is in mind is the Holy Spirit, and the great resource there is in the Spirit.

From other things too in the typical teaching you begin to acquire something of these treasures, treasures that have been placed there centuries ago and yet God was looking on to our time. We have been brought in, secured to form part of this wonderful vessel the assembly, and these things were put there for us. How wonderful is divine wisdom! Do we value these treasures, something to be pursued and understood. It is a great thing to apply our minds in a right way to divine things. "Think of what I say, for the Lord will give thee understanding in all things" Paul wrote to Timothy, 2 Tim 2: 7.

We want to think about things and the Lord will give us understanding in all things. We will not get understanding if we do not think about them, but let us think about them, dear brethren, and have something to bring out. Let us be like this householder who could bring out of his treasure things new and old. He would be very careful about where he brought them out, because you do not cast your pearls before swine - there is that principle in scripture (see Matt 7: 6) - but then where you have those who can appreciate treasures you can bring them out in a suitable setting. The Lord was speaking about these things in the house; there is the house aspect of things where these treasures can be brought out. Let each one be concerned to be a householder who can bring them out. I would love to be a person like that who can bring out something of these treasures new and old.

You will remember the magi who came to do homage to Jesus in chapter 2 of this gospel; it says that they opened their treasures and offered to Him gifts - gold and frankincense and myrrh. You can see the choice character of things that is in mind. A householder

who has treasure can bring things out that will minister to Christ in that way; that would be the prime thing in mind, that you have something that will minister to the heart of Christ; then also, dear brethren, that you will have something to bring out amongst the brethren, something that will contribute to the spiritual wealth in the divine treasury. There is a divine treasury among believers here on earth, and you think of persons with substance in a company where the divine treasury is, who are able to bring things out to contribute to the wealth of all. Well, that is a very wonderful thing.

Meantime we are very conscious that the treasure is in earthen vessels; these things are so valuable though they are in earthen vessels. We are reminded of that in some of the things our dear brethren are going through, that there is the breaking of the vessel; but the treasure is there and it is coming out. We are caused to appreciate things that come into expression from dear brethren who are going through sickness and pressure, who may be just facing dissolution; but the treasure is there, treasure that is going through into eternity, there in earthen vessels. O, how great it is! I believe, dear brethren, that the Lord wants each of us to understand things and to acquire treasure so as to be able as a householder to bring out of our treasure things new and old. May the Lord bless the word.

MAIDSTONE

30 August 1980

THE SERVICE OF SONG

G.H.S.Price

Upon the Red Sea's eastern banks
Is raised - as Israel's gathered ranks
 The flush of victory know –
A song to God, who clave the sea
To set a ransomed people free
 And Pharaoh's hosts o'erthrow.

The people blest 'neath David's reign,
Find joy to sing, in glad refrain,
 To Him who is "The Same".
How rich the anthems of those days,
From vessels formed for God's own
 praise,
 By kings who feared His Name.

But soon the voice of song is hushed;
The people, by the river crushed,
 As captives only toil.

No songs their victors just to please,
The harps hang silent on the trees,
 Upon a foreign soil.

Yet still, as faithful to His word,
A kingly heart again is stirred
 By God who orders all;
And, through His governmental ways,
The choirs in Nehemiah's days
 Sing praises on the wall.

But richer, fuller, swells the praise,
As heavenly hosts their tribute raise
 And join with one accord
To celebrate, as here on earth,
The glorious truth as to the birth
 Of Jesus Christ the Lord.

We wonder as we hearken now

To notes that make our spirits bow,
 And stand with feet unshod
For on that night of deepest woe
Ere out to Olivet they go,
 A hymn ascends to God.

In Philippi, 'tis night once more
And men lie on the prison floor
 For truth they have confessed.
With fettered feet, but spirits free
They're praising God adoringly
 And men around are blessed!

E'en now in days of dark reproach
Where Satan's power would feign
 encroach,
 And all response erase;
Within th' assembly there are heard -
As by the Holy Spirit stirred -
 The endless songs of praise.

The whole creation soon will sing
The praises of the heavenly King,
 And every conflict cease.
The earth at rest beneath His hand,
His Name adored through every land,
 The glorious Prince of Peace!

At length, when time its course has
 stayed,
And every dispensation made
 The yield which God had planned,
The universe at rest will be
And give to God eternally
 The fruit of His own hand.

Composed on the train on returning home from Macduff

2 January 1952

THE CHILDREN'S VESSELS

In the days of the prophet Elisha there came to him a poor woman who was not able to pay her debts. She was afraid that her two young sons would be taken from her and sold as boy-slaves. All she had in the house was a pot of oil which, as you will know, is a type of the Holy Spirit. Although already in debt she was told by the man of God to borrow even more - as many empty vessels as possible! This would make her debts seem greater! Thus we sometimes find that when we become anxious about our souls our troubles seem at first to get worse. But the woman's oil had to be poured into the vessels which her boys brought to her and it was then sold to provide enough to pay the debts and to meet the future needs of the household. For us this means that there should be more and more room in our human vessels for the Holy Spirit to shed abroad in our hearts the love of God. When the boys went round handing back the various vessels to those who had lent them: what a story of God's grace they would have to tell!

Scripture teaches us that believers on the Lord Jesus are "vessels of mercy... prepared for glory". The Lord will be wondered at in them for they will be displayed in a coming time in the immense variety of God's handiwork. Human potters have through the centuries made very beautiful and valuable vessels out of the varied clays of the ground. But God's "earthen vessels", our bodies, precious in themselves, are to hold an even greater treasure - the knowledge of His glory seen by faith in the face of Jesus Christ.

You will remember the story of Gideon and his three companies of a hundred men each. Like the light of life in the believer, each man had a lighted torch inside an empty pitcher. When this vessel was broken the light shone out very clearly. So it may be that some children and young people who read these words are weak, ill or handicapped in some way, yet the light of the personal knowledge of the Saviour can shine out all the more brightly for others to see.

When the Israelites were in the land of God's promise they were to bring of the various firstfruits of the ground in a basket, lay it down humbly before Jehovah and worship Him. The basket is a type of the Christian as a vessel containing the blessings which God has so freely given to us in Christ and by the Spirit. These are not just for our joy but rather as a means of glorifying the God who has provided them. He is not a God afar off but is present to our spirits as we worship "in Spirit and truth". The Father seeks such worshippers. Are you one?

J.C.Evershed