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BEING SERVICEABLE

J.Renton

Genesis 22: 1-3; 3: 12-16 (to "my brethren"); Exodus 3: 2-4; Isaiah 6: 1-8

I desire to speak about being serviceable. It is not my intention to speak about service or serving. Serving involves activity, and serving can even become an objective, unduly so, but being serviceable is a state. In Paul's second epistle to Timothy, which was written for the very day in which we live, when there is departure from the truth, breakdown and confusion Paul wrote about being serviceable as a vessel to honour. There are vessels to dishonour who attach the Lord's name to what is unsuitable to Him; that is dishonouring to Him. Christendom is the great house, as Paul speaks about it, and we are all part of the great house. When we speak about Christendom we are not to think of something outside of ourselves because we are part of it; we are part of the great house, but it is possible to be a vessel to honour in the great house. "In a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also wooden and earthen; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.

If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, (in separating himself from them) he shall be a vessel to honour", 2 Tim 2: 20, 21.

'Separation from evil God's principle of unity' was one of the early tracts written by Mr Darby. Remember, it is separation from evil, not separation for separation's sake but separation from vessels to dishonour, from persons who are dishonouring to the Lord. It goes on to say, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified" - sanctified means set apart for God's holy purposes - "serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work". May everyone of us here desire to be serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work. There are those who have a judgment about what is wrong but feel they ought to stay in it to help others. That is not God's way; it is not the way that Paul indicates in the second epistle to Timothy. He says, "in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour" and he will be "prepared for every good work".

I have read of persons in the Old Testament, each one of whom said "Here am I"; that is the attitude of serviceability. I would like every one of us here myself included, to be concerned to be in the state of being serviceable. Abraham was a mature man who learned to know God, and one whom God knew. God could say about him, "I know him" Gen 18: 19. He was one in whom God had confidence, whom God could trust. It says here, "God tried Abraham, and said to him, Abraham! and he said, Here am I". He was a vessel to honour sanctified, serviceable, prepared for every good work. What was the good work he was going to undertake? What was the purpose of it? God asked him to do certain things for His own pleasure; God wanted to have pleasure in every movement Abraham made. If we are to be serviceable, the first thing to have in mind is, serviceable to the Master, serviceable in view of the pleasure of God. It is not just doing something that I want to do. We were referring somewhere recently to anyone who may say, I think I could make a good missionary; I think that would just suit me, to go out to some foreign country and be a missionary; I think my qualities would just be filled out in that kind of work. That is the wrong way round. It is a question of being serviceable for divine pleasure, waiting on indications from the Lord what to do, not taking the initiative as to what I think I ought to do, and so with less matters than becoming missionaries. We often have things the wrong way round. But Abraham said "Here am I"; he was in that state of being serviceable. He might have shrunk from what was committed to him but he did not.

As you read these verses you can think of Jehovah looking down from heaven and watching Abraham in every move he made and every step he took. It says, "Abraham rose early in the morning". He might have waited until the afternoon, or the next day, but no, "Here am I", serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work in view of divine pleasure. He "rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up and went to the place that God had told him of". "On the third day

Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar". I believe that in every movement Abraham made in this section Jehovah had pleasure, in fact God saw in Abraham's movements and Abraham's feelings how He Himself would feel when His beloved Son was here. How remarkable that Abraham was serviceable in view of filling out something that was for God's own pleasure. "Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said, My father! And he said, Here am I, my son". Think of the affection between Abraham and Isaac! It is all typical of the Lord Jesus and of His sacrifice. Abraham was serviceable and prepared to sacrifice in view of the divine pleasure and God's own satisfaction. What an objective to have before us! Is it not worthwhile being serviceable in view of yielding some pleasure to the heart of the blessed God? What a privilege we have! Is it not worthwhile being a vessel to honour, facing exercises of separation, of sanctification. We are to be sanctified persons. A sanctified person will know how to be separate. It is not a question of obeying certain rules of separation, but if I can view myself and continually think of myself as a sanctified person set apart for divine pleasure I will know how to be separate when I ought to be separate, and to be in this state of serviceability. Abraham was serviceable in view of the pleasure of God. Joseph was serviceable in view of the welfare of his brethren, and his brethren were far from being all they ought to be. Abraham was a mature man, over one hundred years old, a man who had learned God over many years; Joseph was a youth of seventeen, a teenager we would say in present day language. He "fed the flock with his brethren; and he was doing service with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought to his father an evil report of them". These are among the very persons that Joseph, at the age of seventeen, is prepared to be serviceable to with a view to seeking their welfare.

Joseph was available; he was sent out from the vale of Hebron, from the enjoyment of his father's love, to seek the welfare of his brethren. This exercise lasted over twenty years. Jacob said to him, "Go, I pray thee, see after the welfare of thy brethren, and after the welfare of the flock; and bring me word again". Joseph never brought word again; he was the victim of his brethren's animosity,

sold into Egypt; he did not even see his brethren after this for over twenty years. He had a long time of suffering. Did he give up the service because of the difficulties? No, he did not. He had certain light in his soul; Joseph was conscious of his father's love. It is good for every one of us to be conscious of being loved, not only loved by your parents but loved by God, having a place in the heart of the Lord Jesus. In principle that was Joseph here, he was conscious of being loved. What sustained him in all his sufferings, including being in prison, was the sense of his father's love. Another thing that governed him was the light he had in his dreams. He had light as to his brethren eventually coming round, and he had in type light as to the exaltation of Christ and Christ having His true place among His people, and the light of these things sustained Joseph over twenty years of exercise he had to go through. When Joseph saw his brethren after these twenty years it says he remembered the dreams which he dreamt (see Gen 42: 9). He did not remember the ill deeds of his brethren, he remembered the light he had in his soul, that in spite of what did not look promising at all, his brethren were going to come round. Then he served his brethren with remarkable skill. The wisdom with which he operated with regard to his brethren came from the love he had for them. Wisdom is the form love takes in certain circumstances. Joseph knew when to be severe because he spoke harshly to them, but he was not all severity; he acted with them in grace; he gave them money back in their sacks. The fact that they had their money back affected them more than the severe speaking; they were in consternation when they saw they had their money back. That is Joseph acting in grace, there was a balance of severity when needed, and grace when needed. Sometimes in dealing with our brethren we are severe when we ought to be gracious, and sometimes we are too gracious when we ought to stand for righteousness. In working amongst our brethren we need wisdom, skill, and that was Joseph's dealing with his brethren. We need to learn it from Christ Himself. Joseph is typical of Christ.

When he was asked in chapter 37 "What seekest thou" he said, "I am seeking my brethren". This is Joseph serviceable, you might

say, in relation to his local brethren, in relation to improvement of conditions in bringing in love and unity. They were a disunited family; they had four mothers and there was contention and hatred.

Joseph is with God and in the state of being serviceable and never gives up the securing of his brethren according to God. Are we all prepared to be serviceable for God's pleasure as with Abraham, but prepared to serve our brethren, seeking the welfare of our brethren? Paul was prepared in Corinth not only to spend but to be spent, even if in the more abundantly loving them he was less loved (see 2 Cor 12: 15). Oh, we need this attitude. The Samaritan said to the innkeeper when he left him two pence, "whatsoever thou shalt expend more", Luke 10: 35. We hear sometimes - I have said it myself - I have done my bit, I have done my share. We need to be prepared to spend and be spent, not only what we think would be our share, but be like Joseph here in seeking the welfare of our brethren.

We come now to Moses; he sees the thorn-bush burning. This made an initial impression upon Moses. He speaks later of "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush", Deut 33: 16. He never forgot this impression of Jehovah in the thorn-bush. It would be a common sight in the wilderness to see a thorn-bush in flames and in just a few moments finished, but what attracted Moses' attention was that it was not being consumed; it was burning and burning and burning but it was not being consumed. It is a type of God being with His people, contrary and difficult as they are. Read the Book of Numbers and you see the difficulties, the rebellion, the murmurings, they even tempted God in the wilderness journey, but God remained with them, the cloud remained with them. It is remarkable to know that God is continuing patiently with His people. God was severe, many perished in the wilderness, in fact all who were numbered in chapter one perished but Caleb and Joshua, and a new generation came into the land; but "I Jehovah change not" is what we read in Malachi 3: 6, which may refer to the bush: "I Jehovah change not, and ye, sons of Jacob, are not consumed". God does not change his purpose regarding His people; He does not change His mind about

them because of the difficulties and the way in which he has to contend with them. This is involved in the bush burning, and in the light of it Jehovah calls "Moses, Moses! And he said, Here am I". He is serviceable. But what was committed to him was a responsibility, and when responsibility was put upon Moses he was not prepared for it. He brings forward reasons why the responsibility that God was going to put upon him should not be taken up by him. Are we not like that sometimes? We can find all sorts of excuses why we should not be serviceable in taking up responsibility. It was a great responsibility Moses was to undertake; he was to be responsible for two million people for forty years, but he was so reluctant to take it up that God became angry with him. There is innate with some of us a slowness to take on responsibility locally. You might say Moses had a very low thought of himself, and so he had, and we all need to have, we all need to be aware of our nothingness, but if God lays a responsibility on us do not make too many excuses. I would encourage anyone here on whom the Lord lays responsibility to answer to it. That is the lesson we learn here with Moses. He is immediately serviceable in saying, Here am I, but when the responsibility is laid upon him he is not so sure. So let us search our hearts to be prepared to be serviceable for we ought all to be prepared to take on some responsibility. It has been said, rightly I believe, that if we are not prepared to take on any responsibility we are hardly in fellowship, because fellowship involves some share of responsibility taken on by us.

Now Isaiah, in the verses we read, "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up". What a sight it was for Isaiah to see Christ exalted! Then he saw seraphim standing above him and each had six wings. Seraphim are not real creatures, they are symbolic, I understand. "Seraphim were standing above him: each had six wings; with twain he covered his face". What is suited to be serviceable to the Lord these seraphim set out. Each had six wings but they were not all used in flying; with two they covered their faces, they are to be out of sight. Oh what a lesson this is to learn! In the light of the exaltation of Christ, one who is serviceable has to be as

far as possible out of sight. We were reminded the other day about John the baptist; he sets this out. They sent from Jerusalem, from the centre of the religious world, and asked who he was. Art thou the Christ? He said "No", only "the voice of one crying in the wilderness", John 1: 23. In principle he was covering his face. Paul said, in the light of the glory of the mystery that was committed to him, "To me, less than the least of all saints", Eph 3: 8. The seraphim with two of their wings covered their face. They were to be out of sight in view of the exaltation of Christ. We spoke earlier about service and how ambition to serve might govern us; let us learn this; with twain they covered their face. With twain they covered their feet; they were not occupied with their activity, it is a question of the exaltation of Christ. To be serviceable rightly has to be in view of Christ being glorified, of Him being presented, not the one who serves presented; as far as possible he is to be out of sight. "And one called to the other and said, Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!". Then it says "and the house was filled with smoke. And I said, Woe unto me! for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts. And one of the seraphim flew unto me, and he had in his hand a glowing coal, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he made it touch my mouth". There is the answer in the glad tidings, in the application of the death of Christ. Notice this seraphim took the glowing coal with tongs from off the altar. Only One could meet these glowing coals and the suffering and the cost involved, and that was the Sufferer, the Lord Jesus Himself. But the application of it is the answer to what we are according to the flesh. So Isaiah says here, "I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? And I said, Here am I; send me". The emphasis is not on 'me'; it is not 'send *me*', it is '*send* me'. It is a desire to be serviceable on the part of Isaiah. Now I trust there may be, with the young and all of us, begotten in our hearts and minds a desire to be serviceable to the Lord. We can all do something, for God's pleasure, in taking on responsibility, in seeking the promotion of the Lord Himself and His interests.

Another who said, Here am I, was Ananias. When Saul was apprehended on the Damascus road he was led to the house of one called Judas; and then the Lord spoke to Ananias, and Ananias immediately said, "Behold, here am I, Lord", Acts 9: 10. He was serviceable, one who knew the Lord, who knew His word and was prepared to answer to it. But Ananias has to accept adjustment.

That is another important matter. If we are to be in the state of being serviceable we have to be prepared to accept adjustment.

Ananias' thoughts were wrong. "And the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, here am I, Lord", and the word was to "Rise up and go into the street which is called Straight, and seek in the house of Judas one by name Saul, he is of Tarsus: for, behold, he is *praying*". He is praying; that should have helped Ananias, but Ananias thought he knew better than the Lord. He tried to adjust the Lord; that is how strong we can be in our ideas. Do not let us make mistakes. We think we know better than the Lord sometimes as Ananias did. He says "Lord, I have heard from many concerning this man" and so on. "And the Lord said to him, Go, for this man is an elect vessel to me". So Ananias was prepared to go, having accepted adjustment. Being really serviceable often means that we have to be prepared to be adjusted in our thoughts and outlook. Ananias was only about a day late in his information, but he has to become adjusted by the Lord; the Lord is prepared to adjust us. We need to be adjustable if we are going to be serviceable. May the Lord help us to be more serviceable, for His sake.

TORONTO

10 January 1981

GRACE AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF MERCY

F.E.Raven

2 Kings 6: 8-17; Hebrews 12: 18-29

We get a great many striking incidents in connection with the ministry of the prophet Elisha. He stands out as one of the conspicuous figures in Scripture. We do not read of many prophets in Israel; they were found more in Judah. We find two conspicuous prophets however in connection with Israel - Elijah and Elisha.

There was a great difference between them; Elijah came more on the ground of law; that is, to recall the people to what was due to Jehovah. That was much the character of Elijah's ministry, and to a large extent he failed. It had one end in view which was very important; that is, it asserted the rights of Jehovah, but at the same time in regard to the people it failed, and they got no deliverance by it.

Then the ministry of Elisha came in, and the people time after time got deliverance by it. The oppressors of the people then were the Syrians. The children of Israel were under different oppressors at different times, sometimes the Philistines, then the Syrians, and at other times the Assyrians. At this particular time the Syrians were their great oppressors. The prophet Elisha was warning the king of Israel again and again where the camp of the Syrians was, and in that way he escaped the enemy. My object in reading this chapter is to show the effect of the man's eyes being opened. I cannot conceive anything much more important in the present day than that a man's eyes should be opened.

The servant of the prophet was distressed because the chariots and horses of the king of Syria were round about him. He looked at things with natural eyes and was distressed, and one can well understand it. I suppose he thought, and properly, that the prophet and all the people in the city were no match for the horses and chariots of the enemy. The prophet prayed to Jehovah that He would open the young man's eyes, and when his eyes were opened

he saw there were horses and chariots of fire round about the prophet. There were chariots and horses round about the city but they were horses of flesh. It was man and the power of man that was round about the city, but round about the prophet there were horses and chariots of fire. Everything was changed in a moment.

Surely chariots and horses of fire were much better than chariots and horses of men or flesh, and that was what the young man saw.

How completely his thoughts must have been changed in a moment on getting his eyes opened! Then he saw things according to God, but before his eyes were opened he had seen things according to man. He had been terrified by the power of man, not only in regard to himself but in regard to his master. When he sees things according to God he is terrified no longer.

I think this is intended to convey a great lesson to us. Whatsoever things happened aforetime were for our learning. That is the principle of what is recorded in the Old Testament. It was not written for the sake of the contemporaries but for our learning, and it is important that we should get the benefit of it. What I want to come to is this, that instead of looking at things naturally we should be able to look at things according to God, and for this purpose we must have our eyes anointed with eye-salve that we might see. The great thing in the present day is, instead of looking at the world and the power of man, to see things as they are in the eye of God. I would like to come to this myself. You see the power of man here in a variety of ways and its wonderful influence. It undoubtedly has a certain effect on us. I believe it would be a great thing for us if our thoughts were withdrawn from that and our eyes anointed with eye-salve to see what there is in the present time in the eye of God.

There are things which are not seen by the wit of man. You can depend upon it there are many things not taken in in that way but which are existing before God.

God has been pleased in His great grace to us to make these things known, and these are the things which are in the purpose of God's will to establish for His own eternal glory. I do not think any man with sense could conceive that God is glorified in the existing

state of things. I would pray for the saints, and I am sure we can pray for one another, that our eyes might be opened, as the eyes of the prophet's servant were opened, so that we might not look at the chariots and horses of the king of Syria but at the chariots and horses of fire which are round about the testimony of God.

In the epistle to the Hebrews we read: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire". Here the object of the kingdom is stated, i.e. that we may serve God with reverence and godly fear. Then it is a kingdom which cannot be moved. The reason is that it is a moral kingdom. When you get what is right morally it cannot be moved.

People generally understand what they can see, they can understand the kingdoms of this world, but the kingdom of God is not like these. I think the kingdom of God will have a public character in the kingdom of the Son of man. It will fulfil what is spoken of in the prophet Daniel; that is, that in the days of the Gentile kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom. Then the kingdom will be the kingdom of the Son of man, but it will have a public, not simply a moral character. Now we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved. It is a moral kingdom; it exists in moral characteristics. It is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Now the kingdom has its own object; I think it is to give us the sense of security. The believer in the power of the Holy Ghost down here gets the sense of security, and I will tell you what I mean by security. He gets security from the power of evil. There are many forms in which evil might come to us. There is moral evil and there is spiritual evil. Man may come under the fear of death at the present day. He may come under the influence of spiritual terror and under the fear of man and under the fear of evil. The kingdom of God is established in regard to the Christian that he might have security from the fear of evil. If I know what God's attitude is towards me in grace, then I am secure from the fear of evil. I do not fear what man may do unto me because I know what God is towards me. Fear of ill comes to us to a large extent from man. The Lord is my

helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. The object of it is that we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

When God delivered the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt He brought them into a place of security with Himself in order that they might serve Him with fear. Exactly in that way the grace of God has come to us. The kingdom of God is established in the heart of the Christian in the power of the Holy Ghost to bring us into the sense of security that we might have no fear of evil and be at liberty to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. I think Christians to a very large extent are in bondage to the world and to man. They are not set free from the influence of the fear of man. It is a great thing to be free from the fear of man. The apostle says in Hebrews 13: "be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (vv 5, 6).

Now I pass on to another point. When we can serve Him acceptably, God instructs us in His mind and will. It says "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire ... but ye are come unto mount Sion". The children of Israel were brought to the mount that might be touched and that burned with fire. The reason was that God was dealing with a people in the flesh, therefore He set to work to awe them into doing His commands. That was the only way by which God could act upon man in the flesh, and they were brought to blackness and darkness and tempest, to all that was terrible to the mind of man.

Now if you could entertain the idea of such a people keeping the commandments recorded in the book of Exodus, they would have been morally apart from every other nation on the face of the earth. They would have been found under the favour and blessing of God on the one hand, and they would have been a testimony to all the world on the other hand. In a certain sense every right was protected. God protected His own rights, and every right, even down to that of the slaves. If the people could have carried out all these injunctions they would have been a testimony to God in the presence

of the whole world. Well, they all failed, for the fact is that awe does no good to people. They may be awed for the moment but it passes off. It is not an influence which remains. Flesh can be awed, it was sometimes awed in the presence of Christ, but such an impression is not permanent. In the case of Israel the wilderness was a witness for forty years to their perversity, and the end of their history is before us at the present time. They have been carried captive beyond Babylon on account of their perversity in the wilderness.

Beloved friends, we have come to a different order of things. We are come unto mount Zion. What we need at the present time is to have our hearts impressed with the grace of God, and if our hearts are not impressed with God's grace we cannot see very much. I see Christians doing their own will a great deal, and what it proves to me is that they have never been deeply impressed with the grace of God. We need to be very much affected by divine grace. I see people with their eyes in every direction, their attention carried away by the least controversy. If I am affected by the grace of God, then I shall be attentive to that which God has to say to me. I can say that for myself I am very much interested to see what is for God; I do not care much about what is for man. Politics do not interest me. I notice what is going on in a kind of way, but the fact is this, it is all immoral. I mean it is all expediency and overreaching and covetousness. All these principles come into politics and I have no pleasure in them; they cannot endure. A man must be a maniac who thinks that the world as it is can satisfy God, or that politics can bring about a state of things which will be pleasing to God.

Now the first principle to which we have come is mount Zion. It is not in the wilderness like mount Sinai but it is in the land. God was dealing with Israel on the footing of responsibility which is connected with the wilderness, but He makes known to us the secret of His purpose. Mount Zion is that which God will surely establish; it represents to us the sovereign mercy of God when all had failed in connection with responsibility. God takes man up first on the principle of responsibility, and when everything failed on that footing, then it is that God says, I will act in the sovereignty of mercy.

Sovereign mercy is not the same thing as grace. I could present the grace of God to every person on earth, and so I could the kingdom of God. I could go to anybody and everybody and could tell them with certainty the attitude of God toward men and the purpose of His testimony in grace, that they might be here for the will of God, because every man upon earth ought to be here for the will of God. But I could not go and tell everybody of the sovereign mercy of God. In Christianity you find one person chosen in a family; or again, God may take up an entire family. I have known many families in which every member was converted, and others in which, perhaps, only one person had turned to God. He acts in the sovereignty of mercy, and that is the principle which is represented to us by mount Zion.

Time after time everything down here upon earth has failed on the footing of responsibility, and we have to accept the right of God to act in the sovereignty of mercy. If you take what men have made of Christianity, all is on the principle of responsibility. What has it become? So obnoxious to Christ that He says "I will spue thee out of my mouth", Rev 3: 16. But God presents Himself to us as giving effect to His own purposes and acting in the sovereignty of mercy, and every Christian has to accept it, It is not for me to attempt to reconcile the two things, the making known of God's attitude towards men in order that every man may be here for God's will, and the sovereignty of His mercy

Now we come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. It brings this before me, that there is that where every promise and purpose of God is maintained to His glory. That is the great thought to my mind of the heavenly city. There were promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to David. What came to pass was that Christ came who was the heir of every promise. Christ was rejected and cut off after the flesh. Where are the promises of God now? I believe they are established in a glorified Christ, and the promises are maintained in the heavenly city, that is the church.

In 2 Corinthians 1 we read, "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us ... was not yea and nay, but in

him was yea. For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (vv 19, 20). Whatever promises of God there are, they are all established in Christ. He is the confirmation to us of every purpose of God. Mark the words "by us". It is in the church that the promises are held. Then the Spirit is the earnest of the promises. He has given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts, so that all the promises of God are maintained in that way in the heavenly city, and when the heavenly city is displayed, then it is that all the promises of God will come to light.

Then we have come to an innumerable company of angels, the universal gathering. This gives the thought of the greatness of God's hosts. They are for His pleasure, and God does not act by hosts of men. He has His own hosts, angel hosts, which do His pleasure.

Men have their means of acting, but there is that which is outside man and man's power. We have come to myriads of angels, the universal gathering. It is by angels that God will interfere when He sets to work to bring out His purposes.

THE CHILDREN'S THOUGHTS

After a gospel meeting one night a man was asked by the preacher if he was saved. His reply was 'I will think seriously about it'. He said this quite earnestly and it was certainly better than blank indifference or unconcern. In fact many might have thought the answer satisfactory, but it was far from that because time is too urgent to put off a decision on such a vital matter. What, I wonder, would he have thought of a drowning man when hailed and thrown a lifeline saying 'I will think seriously about it'? What would he have thought of a child or young person in an extreme state of illness making such an answer when offered the only sure remedy? Maybe the man did not realise his danger and that 'procrastination', or putting the matter off, is the thief of souls. The scripture is plain: "behold, now is the well-accepted time; behold now the day of salvation".

In the ancient days when the great judgment of the flood was about to come upon the earth God saw that the thoughts of men's

hearts were "only evil continually". Scripture reveals, touchingly, that this "grieved him in his heart", although one man, Noah, found favour in His eyes. After the flood it was again said that the thought of man's heart is evil from his youth. In spite of this however God said that He would not again curse the ground on account of man. This could only be because Noah had offered up burnt offerings as a sweet odour of rest, looking forward to another Man whom we know as our Saviour, the Lord Jesus.

To Israel God said through a prophet "I know the thoughts that I think toward you ... thoughts of peace". It is easily understood that God's thoughts are in every way higher than ours just as the heavens are higher than the earth. Moreover the unrighteous person is called upon to forsake his own thoughts and turn to his God. He will abundantly pardon. We could never know God's mind for us unless He were to reveal it by His Spirit. Israel as a nation has to wait for the blessings of God's thoughts to be made good to them, but believers on the Lord Jesus Christ may now enter into and enjoy the things that God has prepared for those who love Him, however young we may be. These things all relate in some way to the person of the Christ. When He was here He welcomed the little ones and spoke of His Father's will concerning them, and that their angels are always before the face of the Father. Do you thank Him for this?

J.C.Evershed