

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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Contents

THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

THE SPIRIT'S SERVICE

SUCCESS

A WORD FOR THOSE WHO ARE DEAF

THE CHILDREN'S TRUST

THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A.J.E.Welch

Revelation 3: 22

Our hymn to the Spirit prompted me to read this verse, which, as we know, is addressed separately to each of the seven assemblies.

What it is in mind to say has doubtless often been said before, but I truly believe that the Spirit's voice for the moment is of immense import in these present times. It is a very remarkable thing that the seven letters, each containing the word of the Lord to one or another of these seven churches, embrace a very great variety of conditions, from the gravest departure in some to the richest promises and conditions acknowledged as pleasing to the Lord, particularly in Philadelphia. We have the apathy of Protestantism, and the idolatry of the false bride, but the same Spirit, in an expression couched in the same way in each address, is presented as an answer to the situation. This affords us a very distinctive sense of what is divinely and absolutely to be relied upon. We might say that absoluteness of reliability must of necessity be linked with a Person who is Himself God. The scripture read in fact uses that simple title, the Spirit, which we have been led to understand is a particular reference to His Person, His glory, His right as being who He is. What a comfort this is, dear brethren, in the midst of rapidly changing circumstances, which in the public sense, and in the religious sense, mark this present time peculiarly; in the midst of it all we have the Spirit, the same Spirit, having been here since Pentecost. He came at Pentecost in a way which always affects us, in the cloven tongues as of fire, as if to give a guarantee of the maintenance of a right judgment of everything in the midst of the tide of evil that would flow right down the dispensation. What a comfort it is to know the Spirit in this sense. But it is noteworthy that the word is addressed to him "that has an ear". The Lord has helped us in reading the epistles to Timothy in which - in the second one especially - the necessity for coming into things personally and individually has been before us in view of the assembly. Let us not fall short of the assembly in saying

that; let us hold dear what relates to Christ and to the assembly. But the way into the real experience in depth of that is the basis in 2 Timothy 2 of departure from iniquity and a path which each of us, severally, as with God, must take.

So here it is, therefore, "He that has an ear". The word is addressed to each of us. The letters are addressed to the assemblies and the Spirit is speaking to the assemblies; it is "what the Spirit says to the assemblies" in the plural, so that the bearing of His speaking is very wide. Our interest would be, in some sense, correlative with that; our interest and concern would be wide and embrace the assemblies, in the plural, ever cherishing what is so dear to Christ's heart in the living expression of features that He can approve and describe, features that He can name. This section of the prophecy is marked, as we know, by the Lord naming things and by His use of the expression "I know thy works". The Lord knows things, is scrutinising things and naming things, but the Spirit comes in as the unfailing resource in all these circumstances. He would engage us with what is divinely precious so that we may be moving on lines which assure, to the heart of Christ, the condition of things here in the assemblies that delights His heart, and furnishes scope for God to be glorified under His hand in the service of praise and in the course of the testimony.

So whilst the word is so simple it is very penetrating: "He that has an ear, let him hear". Shall we not be marked off, dear brethren, in these times when what is precious to Christ is being relinquished by so many, as persons who have an ear to hear? Shall we not be alert to the Spirit's voice, and not only alert as to it but concerned as receiving it in grace from time to time to bring into expression what that voice might convey? We know that what the Spirit's voice conveys is infinitely pure, and infinitely applicable to the times in which it comes and the conditions in which the assemblies may be found. It is a very simple point, but I believe it is a very weighty point at the present time that the voice of the Spirit be heard, that we have, an ear to hear. Let each of us be concerned for this in

definiteness and exercise of heart, in love for Christ, for His Name's sake.

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THE SPIRIT'S SERVICE

E.C.Burr

John 16: 13-15

What our beloved brother has said in relation to the words of the Lord Jesus Himself in regard to our hearing what the Spirit says, led my mind as we have sat here to these verses, being again His own reference to distinctive functions of the Spirit in the time of Christ's absence. I wondered whether these three things do not embrace the fulness of the Spirit's service in the present time; that is to say, that He will guide you into all the truth, He will announce to you what is coming and He shall glorify Me.

There are other references, very distinctive references, especially in the first epistle to the Corinthians, as to the functions of the Spirit - the greatness of the Spirit's service in chapter 2, where He searches the depths of God, where there are things that are known by the Spirit of God, and where He makes known to us the things that are freely given to us of God - but I wonder whether they are not an enlargement of what Jesus speaks of here, and therefore whether if we reflect on the activity of the Spirit we would not find indications here of what the service of the Spirit will be.

The first thing that Jesus says is that the Spirit of truth would guide them into all the truth. Now this, I take it, is not merely the informing of the minds of the disciples and of ourselves in this the Spirit's day. The Spirit certainly does that; the Spirit is, indeed, the nourishment of the renewed mind. The Spirit is not the nourishment of man's mind as it is, but He is the nourishment of the transformed mind, the mind which has been the subject of the work that is embraced in the gospel in its fullness the Spirit is the nourishment and the food and the filling of the mind that is thus transformed. But I believe that His guiding us into all the truth bears on more than knowledge; that is, it bears on more than objective knowledge, as we speak of it. It bears on our actual entrance into the things which the Spirit knows about and which He communicates to us. There is no

other means of our entering into them than by the Spirit of God.

There are things that the natural mind does not perceive, but there are things that are spiritually discerned and for spiritual discernment we need the activity of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the activity of the Holy Spirit is indispensable in spiritual discernment. I have rather thought of this in much the same way as the children of Israel were guided through the wilderness by the cloud and the fire, not with a view to their remaining in the wilderness but to their entering into the actual possession of the things that God had prepared for those that loved Him in that day and the things that God has prepared for those that love Him in this day. The Spirit guiding us into all the truth is, I believe, to bring us into the actual possession of the things which are presented to us in the Scriptures, things which in themselves are spiritual but substantial. They are things that are not seen and are eternal and this service of the Spirit is to bring us in reality, one hesitates to say in actuality, into those things. I think that Jesus indicates here that the Spirit is going to unfold more things than He had Himself unfolded, because He goes on to say that He "shall not speak from himself; but whatsoever he shall hear he shall speak".

That is to say, there will be the continuous leading of the Spirit, the guidance of the Spirit, into all the truth. The guidance is an interesting subject in itself, because it has in mind more than just leading; that is to say, we are not left just to follow the Spirit, although that is right - the Spirit leads in chapter 8 of Romans, it is right to follow the Spirit - but I think that guiding has in mind the Spirit's care and the Spirit's direction, the sense of "This is the way, walk ye in it", Isa 30: 21. I think if there is a tendency to stray, then the Spirit would bring us back. He would guide us, and as He guides us He would show us the way and illuminate things for us so that we may the better be able to know where we are going and what the objective is. All these things, of course, require that the Spirit is actually free among us, and I suppose we would all endorse the fact that the Spirit is free among us; hence we are able to touch things in spirituality at all.

Then Jesus says "He will announce to you what is coming".

This, I think, is another distinctive service of the Spirit and it is a service that only One who is Himself God can fulfil. Man cannot announce what is coming; if man does that he speculates: if the Spirit announces what is coming, He knows. The Spirit "will announce to you what is coming". I suppose that may be a particular aspect of the service of the Spirit which is perhaps least experienced by us. There are certain major things that the Christian anticipates of which he already knows, which the Spirit would continually keep before us, most notably the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, but 'what is coming' bears on the history of the testimony. If you look at the beginning of this chapter you will see what kind of history the testimony was going to have, a kind of testimony and history that we ourselves know very little about in the mercy of God, but the Spirit will announce to you what is coming. And His announcing it is connected with His guiding us into all the truth, so that we may, as it were, have prior information about what is coming and be guided in relation to that. I suppose we need a distinctive sensitivity to learn from the Spirit what is coming. It is one of the distinctive services of the Spirit that Jesus mentions here and I suppose it has gone on from that day until this. The question is whether we are sensitive enough to discern the Spirit's announcing what is coming, because as He announces it He prepares us for it.

We may ourselves have a certain discernment by the Spirit of what may be coming; then we would take that to the Spirit and seek His confirmation of it, or His adjustment in relation to it, because one important thing for the course of the testimony is that the saints should not be going on without direction and without guidance, in the direction in which they are going.

Then Jesus says "He shall glorify me". Now that is a service that the Spirit never fails to undertake. I believe that at the present time this is a service that the Spirit would be particularly delighting in. "He shall glorify me"; that is, as one of the hymns says, "The Spirit would keep Him before us, Our living and glorious Lord" (No 53).

That is what the Spirit would do, He would keep Him before us; and

I suppose that as we hear what the Spirit says it would tend to turn us away from occupation even with the situation in the breakdown and the state of individual saints and even of companies, and turn us towards Christ Himself so that we may be occupied with a Man who has never broken down and who will in the end restore what He took not away and bring in everything according to God, and the Spirit will glorify Him. What a service the Spirit thus delights in! You would feel that if the assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3 had been occupied with what the Spirit said as to the glory of the Lord Jesus, so much failure in history would have been averted. How could one leave one's first love if one were listening to the Spirit glorifying the Lord? One might go on, but I just refer to these verses. We sat here a few moments, no doubt wondering what else the Lord and the Spirit might say to us, but following what our beloved brother said as to hearing what the Spirit says to the assemblies, I wondered whether this indication by Jesus as to the normal services of the Spirit would help us, as we reflected on them, to anticipate what the Spirit might say to him that has an ear to hear.

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17 March 1981

SUCCESS

E.Palmer

Acts 8: 29; 13: 2-4

I have an impression as we have sat here together, beloved, that success is immediately related to the activity of the Spirit. Naturally speaking, it is fair to say that we are not unfamiliar with our own failures. These two scriptures came into my mind as we have had the blessed Person of the Spirit before us, and I believe that we would be encouraged in relation to this matter of success in seeing that it is immediately connected with His activity. This success is not for our sakes but for the Lord's sake. I wondered whether we might therefore be stimulated in the desire to have closer communion with the blessed Spirit.

It seems in chapter 8 of the Acts no singular thing that the Spirit should speak to Philip: the account seems to flow so smoothly and the verse that I read just says "And the Spirit said to Philip, Approach and join this chariot". Philip in his relations with the Spirit immediately responds and what was providentially arranged in regard of this particular Ethiopian man is guided, as were the activities of Philip in relation to him. It says later that "Philip, opening his mouth and beginning from that scripture, announced the glad tidings of Jesus to him", and may I simply say, with complete success. I believe this matter would certainly raise exercise with us all, for I can see that, as our beloved brother has said, the Spirit is essential; we cannot do without Him and there is nothing done without Him either. Therefore I would encourage my own heart and yours, beloved, that we might be more deeply concerned as to our links with the blessed Spirit. What a basis there is in the souls of the saints through the work of Christ, that One who is the Spirit of God should be free to have to say to those redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, suited persons for communications by such an One as the Holy Spirit!

This in chapter 8 is individual; in chapter 13 the Spirit is free to speak in the assembly. I think we could say very simply that this is not unknown to us. I believe the speaking of the Spirit in the assembly is a present experience with us - wonderful grace, but nevertheless an up-to-date experience. Moreover we would like to maintain it so and, therefore, there are two features to be noticed here: "they were ministering to the Lord and fasting". That is to say, they were occupied with what was for the pleasure and satisfaction of the Lord, not themselves, and there was the disallowance even of what is legitimate to man. Now I believe those two things provide a moral state in which the blessed Spirit is free. And so it says that as they were doing this "the Holy Spirit said, Separate me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them". They laid their hands on them in that assembly at Antioch and the Holy Spirit sent them forth with the result that that mission was marked by success. They came back to that same assembly and there related to them the details of what happened, and it was successful.

Well, beloved, I believe that we should find encouragement, exercise maybe, but nevertheless encouragement that, as the blessed Spirit is present among us at this very moment and we are aware of it, we may be concerned to give Him more place individually, and we might know what it is to give Him more place as we seek to move together in the light of the assembly, because what is in mind is success.

May the Lord bless the word.

LONDON

17 March 1981

A WORD FOR THOSE WHO ARE DEAF

(This was published now many years ago and written, I understand, by my grandfather. The need for its message is still apparent. Editor)

C.E.Burr

In moving about amongst the people of God one is increasingly struck with the number of those who are afflicted by deafness, and we should be greatly lacking in the grace of our precious Lord if we did not feel deeply for them. What tender movements there were with Him as to such! How He sighed and then relieved! We have no doubt been impressed with the spiritual significance of this, but we must keep in mind that they were actual cases which the Lord relieved and which the Spirit of God makes use of in the Holy Scriptures for our instruction.

It has often appealed to oneself when listening to precious ministry which is calculated to move the heart, that this one and that one hears nothing of what is said, and were it not that another kindly interpreted to them or passed notes, as well as finding the hymns or scriptures for them, they would know but little of what the Lord is bringing before His saints for their edification. Then, too, in the prayer meeting, not knowing what is said in detail in prayer, they are unable intelligently to say Amen. Above all, who else can estimate the lack for such on the Lord's day morning? One knows that such are present and glad to be there to enter into the spiritual gain of what is unaffected by their limitations, but we who are able to hear our brethren speaking to the Lord Jesus about His great love, or speaking in praise and adoration to God about His dear Son and about His own purposes of love and grace, about His home, His rest, and of the place which the saints have with Christ before His face, appreciate a little what a loss is theirs who hear nothing of all this in a physical way.

It may be that you are afflicted in this way. At one time when your hearing was good, with what relish you were present at all the

meetings, following with keen enjoyment and interest all that was said, supporting with your "Amen" the prayers and thanksgivings which were uttered, profiting much by the various meetings; but there came a time when it became a definite strain to catch what was said, and you wished those who took part would speak a bit louder and more distinctly; and then perhaps you ceased to hear altogether, until you may have questioned in your own heart whether there was any good purpose in continuing to go regularly to the meetings; you may even have stayed away. My heart moves much toward you. I feel your loss intensely. I would that one could do something to relieve it. May the Lord in His grace pour into your heart much of His own compassions and love, so that as the stillness increases all around, you may more and more enjoy that precious intercourse and communion with Him, compared with which all else falls into the shade.

But to go back a little to this supposed suggestion of staying away from any one or other of the gatherings together of the saints of God. I would speak with all tender regard for your great loss in not hearing your brethren when they speak, but why should you also be deprived of seeing them whenever you can? What a joy it is to look upon the saints. How much else we see as we go through the world. What a lot there is that is an offence to those who know something of what is suitable to God. Hence what a cheer to look upon one's brethren, one's spiritual relatives, the family of God, to watch their faces as they speak together. How we see them light up with joy and holy animation! Why should one deprive oneself of the benefit of this because of the loss of another valuable faculty?

Then, too, the sitting together with those we love in Christ and who love us, the hearty shake of the hand, the affectionate greeting: what warmth there is in it! We may well attend to, and participate in it, as often as possible. I have frequently heard it said of a meeting where large numbers have been together: It is good to get together and to see each other, apart altogether from what is said; and many who are deaf continue to come, and express themselves in similar terms, although, as they say, they hear but little.

We all know something of what family life is, the various occasions when we in our home circles are found together. Perhaps some have left home and are married, having homes of their own.

Yet how we love to see them, how they love to come from time to time to enjoy the original circle. Suppose one of them was stone deaf, would they keep away because of this? - the thought is intolerable, love could not stand it. Were one so to act, how it would affect the rest. How they would miss them, and no doubt go after them, giving them to understand that they cannot bear that they should stay away because of this infirmity, but that it should be a greater reason why they should be present to get all that they can.

And not only to get, but to bring, and impart that added warmth and affection which cheers, and gives courage (see Acts 28: 15).

Beloved brother or sister, as one in the family of God, you have your part in what belongs to that family as much as others, and you can bring your measure of divine love into it. How the saints are cheered and encouraged by your continued presence amongst them! How it supports and stimulates them if you come! Perhaps you are where things are very weak outwardly. How they need you on every occasion so that you may impart strength to their earnest desire to continue faithfully witnessing together for the sake of Him who loved them and gave Himself for them; they cannot bear the thought of giving up. I have known of one aged sister coming regularly and being often the only one with just one brother. Were you in a place like that, would you not wish to do all you could to cheer and support such a one? thus ministering the grace of Christ to one of His own. I am continually impressed with the feeling, how much in every meeting depends upon the spiritual state of those who come, their nearness to Christ. The tone of the meeting is determined by this. I remember one very aged, deaf, and almost blind sister who unquestionably was a valuable asset to her meeting, the tone of which was always raised by her presence. She said she could always tell when it was a good meeting.

What valuable Levitical service is open to such, yea, what priestly service, may we not say? The Lord said of such a one who

filled the house with the odour of her ointment: "She hath done what she could".

May it be yours to find abundant opportunities to support the testimony of our Lord in this adverse scene, as knowing the heart of Him who ever acts in wisdom and in love, and who makes no mistakes, but puts each in the place He would have them in, and furnishes them with all the necessary material, and provides the occasions for the use of that material.

I would not close without a word for any who may chance to read this who are not afflicted in this way. With what tender care Christ has watched over you. How many of His dear servants He has used to water the tender soil of your heart so that it might readily yield fruitfulness to the shining of the Sun of righteousness. There are those about you maybe to whom He would use you are a little aqueduct to convey some of the precious streams of living water from our glorified Fountain Head. This too would prove valuable Levitical service. Perhaps you are accustomed to sitting next to a personal friend in the meeting, or amongst those who are your natural relatives, but there may be one of your spiritual relatives in another part of the room, sitting all alone, and to whom you could perform a little act of service by passing on to them a little of what you are able to hear. May the Lord Jesus Christ Himself guide and richly bless you in all you do for Him and His own.

THE CHILDREN'S TRUST

The dividing of the Bible into chapters and verses was not inspired but it is of interest that the middle verse is said to be verse 8 of Psalm 118: "It is better to trust in Jehovah than to put confidence in man". It will be easily seen that at the centre of this verse is a very precious and intimate name by which God was known to His people Israel. Although of course we can usually rely on persons with whom we have to do day by day, we can *always* trust absolutely in God, known to us now as Father. The expressions 'to trust' and 'to have faith' are alike in many respects and yet there is a distinction in the language of the Scriptures. The very faith in God which we have by His gift should cause us to trust in Him in respect of the many details, sometimes very small, of everyday life at home and at school. All these matters are of interest to our heavenly Father who in His care considers even for the sparrows and indeed for all nesting birds.

The words "I will trust in him" express very simply and beautifully the full dependence of Jesus in His pathway on earth. According to a prophecy in the Psalms He was made to trust from the earliest moments of His life here and so is a model for every child as well as those who are older. Graciously the Lord appeared with His head and hair white like wool to His bondman John in the Revelation. If therefore any older persons should read these words they can be encouraged that the Lord knows all about age although He was cut off in the midst of His days. Paul, who so closely followed his Master, was brought face to face with death itself, probably more than once, but he trusted "in God who raises the dead".

A striking example of simple confidence in God is that of an old widow, poor but pious, living in a rather lonely cottage. One day she found herself with nothing at all to eat. She opened her Bible at random and was struck by the words in Psalm 50 that the mighty God claimed for Himself "the cattle upon a thousand hills". Later, before going supperless to bed she again turned to her Bible; it

opened at the same place and she re-read those same words. After a short while there was a heavy knocking at the door. In those days herds of cattle used to be driven on the hoof very long distances to town markets, and a drover had called for help because one of his bullocks had fallen into a pit near the house. As the old widow was unable to help, the drover killed the beast and hurried on with the rest of his drove after telling her to do the best she could with the carcass. A villager was able to dress and sell it for her so that she thus proved the truth of that scripture in a very practical way. How she must have given thanks to God for His mercy! Do you?

J.C.Evershed