

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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WISDOM

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The references to wisdom in these scriptures would have been noted. Wisdom is a great matter with God, and wisdom is a great matter in our going forward together in what is for God's pleasure in the assembly. The assembly affords a sphere of superlatives. Nothing subsists there under God's eye for His pleasure that is not in some sense distinctive, and what is found in His beloved saints, in love and in serviceability, is to contribute to that. There were elements in the tabernacle system that were not subject to specific direction in detail. Moses had the pattern, and it is wonderful to think of Moses passing on the pattern to these skilled workmen. What consultations they would have! Moses had the pattern; Bezaleel and Aholiab and others with them prepared the detail. The materials in mind, which we read of in other connections, are singularly attractive: gold, silver, copper, stones for setting, and wood for carving. "Artistic things" and "artistic work" are in view, and all suggests what is attractive in God's sight. It would appear that these matters were to be entered into through wise-hearted men. We read of that; "he has filled them with wisdom of heart". These men had the capacity to adorn things. There would be no question of any change in the dimensions of the ark, the table, the altar or the curtains; all that was laid down. But there was the skill of the craftsmen, brought in and made full room for by Jehovah, and Moses directed accordingly. Though Moses had the pattern, there was that which gave scope for singular skill on the part of the workmen.

There is a voice to us in this, beloved brethren, as to how we find our part in the many choice elements of the service of God, viewed in its widest setting, inclusive of what is in the testimony and how we contribute to it. We would be in it as persons who are wise-hearted. How much enters into the way in detail in which we do things, the detail of what we bring in, the detail of the way we have to

do with one another and speak to one another. There is a great work going on, and the saints are the subject of that work. God is the originator of it, the Lord is the prime glorious builder, but He has those whom he uses. In some sense He would use any one of us, but how ready are we to bring in this fine touch spoken of very attractively in this passage as "artistic work"? How do we have divine things in our minds? How are impressions being formed in our minds of the glory of Christ, of the glory of God, of the greatness of the Father, of the Son and of the Spirit? What is the character of impressions developing in our minds? Can we bring them out into expression, and find something formative in the saints which results from their expression? Can we identify something choice, fragrant for God, as His praise is expressed? Are we careless about these things? Shall we not, dear brethren, give of our very best? In considering for God we shall recognise that He is not without thought for what in its character is adorning. We were reading of a bride adorned, "adorned for her husband", Rev 21: 2. Divine things are so attractive; there is nothing to match their attractiveness, whether we speak of the divine Persons distinctively and personally, or whether we speak of the divine glory as having the whole scope of Godhead before us. Who could match the attractiveness of all this to true hearts? What kind of an answer are true hearts, wise hearts, to furnish? Think of the refinements - spiritual, heavenly refinements - of what belongs in the assembly.

The psalmist in Psalm 45 speaks of what he had composed. How do we compose things and present them? How do we speak to God, indeed how do we think of God? There is scope left for true hearts to exercise this feature of wisdom, to bring in points of holy detail which match the divine glory, and which represent, as they are brought into expression, something peculiarly attractive in the sight of heaven. Would we not desire that, in love for Christ, the features of adornment appear? It would find expression in so many ways - the way we speak to God, the way we address the Lord Jesus, the way we speak of Him together, the way we regard His interests and pray for them, the way we hold His interests in the care meeting.

Those interests have a glory about them, not to be thought of as if they were, so to speak, business details, but precious, because wise hearts are at work. May our hearts be the wiser. The Spirit would help us to bring out into expression this feature of wisdom, to know what is suited to God. The priestly side enters into it, but I am speaking of what belongs to the structure of things in the divine dwelling in the wilderness; there is something there which bespeaks the skill, the workmanship, the artistry, of those who as wise-hearted have skills that relate to the divine pleasure. The work of God is not cast in a mould, it is so varied and takes so many choice characters. They always are choice characters, for God's own work never has any other feature than what is pleasurable to Himself; but it is so varied. Sometimes you look round a meeting like this, or a local meeting, and you say, what fine features of God's work - a beloved elderly sister long in the testimony, maybe over ninety years of age, a beloved brother who has sustained deep pressure and shows in the very way he comes into the assembly the choice refinement of God's work. You look for such to be marked by this artistic side of things. I do not use that word fancifully, nor in any sense in which it is humanly employed, but there is something which is artistic in the divine realm which reflects the beauty, and I might almost say the ingenuity, of God's work. It brings in something fresh, distinctive and attractive, without any clumsy feature, but adorning. It may be an expression in what is voiced in the assembly, or as we converse with one another; in conversing with one another we affect one another perhaps more than we sometimes realise, and God's work is going on in the midst of it all.

Then we have this remarkable wise man, Solomon. What a singular and very attractive view of Christ he gives us! His concern is for the house, a divine dwelling, suggestive in many respects of finality. Solomon had received the pattern from David, who received it from Jehovah; there was a pattern. Solomon caused the labour to proceed until the point was reached when the house was finished. What a man he was! Now we see him here as the centre of a great administration all working, working in wisdom given of God,

confounding every other character of wisdom that might have been there. How wise he was in the matter of the two women and their sons (see 1 Kings 3); what a simple answer he gave, and yet what depth of wisdom entered into it that no life should be lost, and that what was right should be reached. I am just thinking, dear brethren, of our administrations; things need to be done, that there might in some sense be a shining of an administration under Christ which is replete with wisdom. In saying it I realise how far I fall short of it. Sometimes we introduce things in detail which just do not match the situations which really belong in the assembly. How do we administer? The queen of Sheba found something the like of which she manifestly had never seen before. She says "the half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me". She had seen it. You will understand how I apply this; have we seen Jesus, that glorious Person, as the centre of a whole administration in which in our several places we belong? It is a wonderful thing to see. You come to the care meeting wondering what might be raised; I know something of it, I suppose we all do. But we are to see Christ, and an administration under Christ; He is the supreme administrator, and we are to be in relation with Him. He is head of the assembly. That involves wisdom, resident in Him. Can we draw upon it?

I want to bring out from this, precious figure as it is, just the sense of a single glorious administration. In it everything fits; things are graded; not all those who have a place in it fill the same rank or have the same function. There are gradations there, but what the queen of Sheba saw was the complete thing working. What a wonderful thing to get a view of! How marvellous the world to come will be, when the Lord Jesus comes into the place which is His due, the place of which He gloriously is worthy! Every detail in what is administered will fall into its place, no uprising will be allowed to persist, but everything will come into due order. I think we should think of, and speak more, of the world to come, as the scripture says: "the habitable world which is to come, of which we speak", Heb 2: 5. Sometimes we speak a good deal of the disasters of man's world, particularly the moral disasters of man's world, but let us see the

moral perfections of a scene of things under Christ. What a subject for conversation and contemplation, to strengthen us in the sense of our need of wisdom in the assembly now, and so to strengthen us that we may be ourselves built up in the wisdom we need. I believe the Spirit would use this figure and the impression it left with the queen of Sheba to show the particular glory of a working administration. "Happy are thy men". Would we not love to be in this sense Christ's men, in His administration? There may be many lowly places to be filled in it, as well as places higher up the scale, but wherever it be, down to the lowest point, think of what it is to be part of an administration under Christ. Things have to be worked out, the divine mind has to be brought into expression; care is necessary to ensure that the truth is maintained, and that error is exposed and if need be dealt with. All these things arise, but over them all is to be the glory of the Administrator who shines out in uniqueness as the One who can hold everything in the created order of things in its due order for God and for His pleasure.

When we come to Paul and Corinth we are made to marvel at the wisdom that the beloved apostle showed. As we take the two epistles as a whole we realise the immense complexity of what had developed at Corinth. In the parties that were there and all the detail that entered into them, all the feelings that no doubt arose between them, what a complex situation existed! We marvel, in reading these letters, at the feature of wisdom in Paul. He defers certain things that would have to be raised until elements of the truth of a basic kind have been laid down, not proceeding immediately to the grave sin, although it was there. He lays a basis, in what he sets forth, to meet the underlying condition; he lays the axe to the root of the tree, bringing in the truth of the cross and holding to it, knowing nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (see 1 Cor 2: 2). What held him to that? We could say that the Spirit of God held him to it, and that would be true, but it is just another mark of the way in which the Spirit gave Paul wisdom in respect of what he opened out. How we need this, dear brethren! There are a lot of things to be worked through. How easy it is to be clumsy, to leave wrong impressions,

maybe to leave unnecessary feelings. What a need there is to be wise in such a situation! How wise Paul was, and how wise those of the house of Chloe had been in presenting the facts, showing them to Paul. You can see how wisdom from God enters into the situation, and it is to shut out the wisdom of men. That is negative, but we can approach it from the positive angle as having some appreciation of an administration under Christ. What is said of the wisdom of man is, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world, that he may put to shame the wise". There is no scope for what may appear to be expedient. How often affairs go on in man's world on the basis of expediency, convenience, or individual profit; it is not to be so in the assembly. We need wisdom from God; we need to recognise the necessity to check in our own being the elements that might suggest solutions which appear on the face of them naturally to be valid solutions, but in fact are nothing of the kind. They come not from God, not from Christ, not in the Spirit, but from my own mind devising something which may appear to present an answer to the situation. Oh beloved brethren, going back over a hundred and fifty years, what disasters there have been through the mind of man. The supposed wisdom of man, coming in! The test of true wisdom is, where is its source? There is wisdom in the saints, thank God for it, and wisdom in those who thankfully serve the saints, we thank God for that, but what is the source of it? It is to be from God.

So Paul's word here is very reassuring to us; he says "Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom from God". He is made other things, too, but I do not touch on those tonight; the great point in my mind is that He is made to us wisdom from God, and as we approach a situation in the sense of that how everything is changed. Christ made to us wisdom from God I understand to be an allusion, at least, to His place in headship, not spoken of as such because of the character of the letter in which this comes, but involving our recognition of Him as the One from whom all true wisdom must come. Christ is made to us wisdom from God; He has the answer to any situation. I believe Paul had it from Him without doubt. How often we have thoughts as to things, and even devise solutions,

when the real answer is just to get on our knees and get to the Lord and find that He and He alone has the solution, and a complete solution, for He never does things by halves. We may fail fully to grasp His mind - how often we have done it - but His mind involves the complete solution, and according to the light that the scripture gives us, much was achieved at Corinth, for the time anyway, despite the conditions that had come in there. There was a condition reached there such that Paul could write so feelingly in the terms of the second letter. Beloved brethren, wisdom is available to us. We feel our own poverty in respect of it, but the divine arrangements in the assembly involve a great administrative order of things which is to function gloriously and reflect the greatness of the One whose administration it is. Christ, gloriously, is established in abiding manhood at the head of it all, the spring of the whole working arrangement which God has for His satisfaction. May we find our place in it and adorn it. Our first scripture would lead us to answer to what is prescribed of God and yet set forth something that distinguishes the distinctive preciousness of God's work in each one of us. For His Name's sake.

TORONTO

October 1982

PROGRESS TOGETHER

E.Palmer

Numbers 21: 17-20; Philippians 3: 9-14

I would like to say a simple word of encouragement as to progress, and progress together. We know that the book of Numbers is a wilderness book, but the people of God are viewed in it as making progress toward the divinely-purposed objective. I believe that to have this in our hearts is calculated to give us a very great and wonderful outlook, and something to work to together, because the land of God's purpose was ever in the heart of God and certainly was in the heart of Moses although he was excluded from actually entering into it.

My simple concern, beloved, is that in all the exercises of the wilderness we might not fail to keep God's objective before us and work to it, and, as working to it and counting upon the Spirit, to make progress together. I am sure of this, that it is no thought of God that His people should be held up. I believe that Satan would have that in mind for the adversary would seek to hinder at every point possible but the Spirit of God is greater than he is, and as we count upon the Spirit I think we would be helped together to make progress, because this is the progress of God's people. It is beautiful to see in verse 17 that Israel sang this song - a people dignified by God and viewed as an entity. Let us hold to that, dear brethren. Let us not be diverted to anything less, because the wonder of God's grace is in it and the magnitude of His operations active that it may be so and that we should be conscious of this dignity. The work of Christ lies behind it and God's own purpose that His people should move on, make progress, into the realisation of the wonder of what lies beyond death and to have part together in that which ministers to the divine pleasure.

So I have read this part of Numbers. A lot of history has preceded it. The significant 21st chapter is where there are moral matters arrived at in regard to the condition found among the people

on account of their murmuring and because of the effect of the bite of the serpent, but in the presence of that there is the divinely-provided, all-sufficient remedy. I believe we are inclined to be detained on account of what we discover consequent on the bite of the serpent, but let us be occupied with divine sufficiency to meet it, for it is found in Christ Himself. He is the all-sufficient answer to what is discovered on account of these fiery serpents, that which results in death, but the answer is in Jesus made sin for us: "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up, that every one who believes on him may not perish", John 3: 4,15. I think the setting there is to perish in the wilderness, and people who perish in the wilderness make no progress, I need not say, into the divine purpose. But Jesus was lifted up, and life eternal - that is an order of things to which death has nothing to say - is in view for the people of God.

Then this great matter of the Spirit comes in, this important passage in the holy writings that has been used by God to liberate our hearts in regard to response to the Spirit: "Israel sang this song, Rise up, well! sing unto it". I do not go into the detail except to say that, immediately after this liberty with the Spirit, there is this list of places that indicate the progress the people made. We read the names through; each one is a move forward towards the land of God's purpose. Of course Satan is against it - you may be sure of that - so let us not be marked by any kind of lethargy in regard to the activities of Satan. There was the attempt by Balak in hiring Balaam, of which, I suppose, the people knew nothing. It seems like that, but God Himself entered into the matter in all the details of it. But then subsequently we know that there was a corrupting influence through Balaam in regard to the propensities of the flesh. We are all prone to it, for the flesh is still in us; so let us avail ourselves of the help of the Spirit to keep sin in the flesh in the place of condemnation in accord with that which has been so perfectly worked out in the death of Jesus. Let us therefore avail ourselves of the Spirit so that we give no place to what is corrupt. Let us not be either beguiled or enticed by what is not of Christ, for Satan is set against what is of Christ, but

the Spirit is available that it may continue and progress in the saints according to God's own thoughts.

Now Paul speaks of what is individual, but progress is in his mind. We may say, Progress for Paul? Yes, progress for Paul. He speaks about how he stands before God: "that I may be found in him, not having my righteousness, which would be on the principle of law, but that which is by faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God". What kind of righteousness is that? The righteousness that suits God in every detail that belongs to it. That is how the believer stands. It is verily the truth, the truth of God. Let us go in for it; Paul did. "To know him" - that is Christ - "and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death". Paul desired that everything to which the death of Christ had to say should be brought to bear upon himself - a deep exercise that, but a very wholesome one and very productive, for he says "if any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead". The resurrection from among the dead is a condition of soul where every moral issue is settled and a new order of life opened up in which God has in mind that His own should enter and make progress now. Then Paul says "Not that I have already obtained the prize, or am already perfected; but I pursue, if also I may get possession of it, seeing that also I have been taken possession of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not count to have got possession myself; but one thing - forgetting the things behind, and stretching out to the things before, I pursue". This was a man making progress: "I pursue"; and then "looking towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus". He is looking towards the goal, he has a sole objective, and this will surely result in progress.

Let us have this wonderful objective, counting upon the Spirit that we may pursue and go on individually; we shall then find great help in moving together progressively towards the thoughts of God for His people.

LONDON

6 December 1983

LIFE

C.G.Hitchcock

John 1: 4,5; John 15: 13-15; 1 Timothy 2: 1-4

I have had a great deal before me today the thought of life and it may have been noticed that the scriptures I have read all contain the thought of life, and in each of the scriptures in the original there is a different word for 'life'.

In the first scripture a closely-connected word appears in the first element of our well-known word 'zoological', but what is exactly in mind here is an original word which we find transliterated in the girl's name Zoe; in the second scripture the word appears in the first element of our word 'psychological', and in the third scripture the word appears in the first element of our word 'biological'.

It is a great thing, beloved brethren, to have before us the person of the Lord Jesus Christ continually. In what I have read in the first scripture we have the thought that "in him was life". That word for life is the great general thought of life, from the life of God to the life in the humblest plant, a wonderfully wide general truth, the word for it constantly used in the gospel of John. John does use another word, but this word I speak of he employs time and again, it is the perfect and abiding antithesis to death.

Now our brother who has already spoken has referred to the need of being engaged with what is beyond death. In that realm beyond death we have the great, valuable, gift of God to enjoy, the gift of life in His Son, and all that goes with it, for there will be a universe taking its character from the life that is in the Lord Jesus

Christ. That blessed One has been into death for us, dear brethren, and we could not have the life I speak of apart from what has been effected in that death, which has closed for ever through it the first order of man, which came under the power of Satan and brought in sin and death. That old order for faith has been closed for ever and there has opened out before our spiritual gaze a great vista of life, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the head and centre. God grant that we may be more and more engaged with that blessed Person in whom there is life. Our life is in Him, hid with Him in God.

Now, dear brethren, the work of God in our souls has been necessary that the life of that One, which, when He was here, was the light of men, should - but now from Him in glory - enlighten our very beings. There has been of necessity this fundamental work in our souls, for the darkness of man by nature apprehends not that light. So how thankful we are that the blessed Spirit of God, having worked in us initially, prepared the ground for our reception of the glad tidings, whereby God has introduced us all into the sphere of light, life and liberty.

Now I want to speak about what we have in this 15th chapter of John: "No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends". This thought of life is connected with breath, with animal life, but when seen in man, man is superior to animals, for God had breathed into Man's nostrils the breath of life (*zoe*) and Man had become a living soul (*psyche*). Brethren, do we care for our living souls and value what lies before us through having been brought through grace to the knowledge of God and to the prospect of being in His presence eternally in the glory of sonship? How the Lord has loved us and what feelings! He has laid down His life for us; He has called us His friends - a beautiful relationship: how dignified! Think of Abraham, whom Jehovah called "my friend", Isa 41: 8. What delight God had in Abraham's faith! What pleasure He had in communion with him, telling him what His thoughts were for the future, the blessing that he should have, the seed in Isaac, which typically was Christ!

So the Lord has spoken of us as His friends and has laid down His life for us. A Friend indeed He is to us. We were under death and He has laid down His life for us and there has been brought to light through the gospel life and incorruptibility. Through grace, beloved brethren, this is our portion, all because the Lord Jesus has laid down His life for us. Life in this scripture is the idea of a rational mind, a mind that can reason, a soul that can feel; what the Lord's feelings are for His own! How beautifully scripture speaks of the thoughts the Lord had for those whom He called His own! How His soul went out to them in love! That life of His was given up in death, His life for His friends. He calls us no longer bondmen, though we have to remember there is that relationship; we are His servants and the apostles could speak of being bondmen. Nevertheless the Lord says here "I call you no longer bondmen... but I have called you friends" - beautiful thought!

Now I will speak of the third scripture: "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made for all men; for kings and all that are in dignity, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all piety and gravity; for this is good and acceptable before our Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth". How necessary it is at the present day, when we see the state of things in the world, that we should be urgent in our prayers. But, beloved brethren, let us at the same time rest our souls in the knowledge that God has all in control. People are agitated and concerned and fearful and some are anxious about nuclear warfare. But as to those of us who through the grace of God walk in the light, we know that the Lord is coming for us; we shall hear His assembling shout and shall be caught up to meet Him in the air. So while down here we can be restful and peaceful. This scripture speaks of our leading a quiet and tranquil life. The thought of life here is the life that we live; men not only live, but they lead lives; a man has a manner of life. Let us ask ourselves, as a test, What sort of life am I leading; collectively, what sort of life do we lead? Let us give our minds to our way of life and I am sure that, as we do so with the Lord before us, we shall be

relieved of anxiety and shall be found moving more earnestly in unity of spirit and outlook. In the Lord's wonderful speaking to the Father in John 17 He could say of His own; "that they may be one as we". And then in leading this life we can freely enter into the desires of God: "that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth". It would tend to move our souls evangelically - we should think of others. We have been much blessed, we have much light.

What about poor souls around who are grovelling in darkness some of them whose wants are felt but seldom uttered? Through prayer and interest in persons cannot some of these wants come out into the open, to be met by the glorious gospel of God? The Lord often met expressed needs. May God bless His word.

LONDON

6 December 1983

THE CHILDREN'S SALVATION

Professor Simpson was a Scottish doctor who found out the secret of how to save his patients from feeling pain when they had to have severe treatment. This was his best-known discovery. When, in his later life, a young friend asked him what was his *greatest* discovery, he answered at once 'That I was a great sinner, but that Jesus was a great Saviour'. He may not have had the privilege of childhood in a Christian family as do so many who read this page. Perhaps in the course of his work his conscience had become more and more uneasy as he faced the reality of having to do with the God who had given His creature such a marvellous body, soul and spirit. At all events he learned that this most personal of all questions touching time and eternity was answered for him by the sin-bearing work of the Lord Jesus, and he accepted it by faith.

This incident relates to just one of the many who have found the way of salvation. It is open to all men, women and children. Salvation is without price - but not without cost which we learn in pondering the atoning work at Calvary. True, a greater sinner may

very likely have a greater estimate of the Person and work of the Saviour. The wicked but repentant robber taken to paradise gave a personal testimony of Jesus as great as that of Peter, John and Paul and in similar words. He said "... but this man has done nothing amiss". But the cost of his redemption was the same as that for a child - even for a child too young to be able to know the need of a Redeemer.

Jesus said, "for the Son of man has come to save that which was lost". This is one of at least twelve different reasons that the Lord gave for having come! In our daily life there is constant need of salvation, both from things that are evil and for things that are good. To be obedient in believing on Jesus and in confessing Him as Lord makes way for the Holy Spirit to be received. He brings understanding of what is harmful to the Christian on the one hand and on the other that which will help spiritual life. Our histories may not always be pleasant or comfortable but there will be the prospect of finishing our course with confidence. On an early visit to Germany I travelled sometimes fourth class on the railway. There were distinct disadvantages in this, but one had the same expectation of arriving safely as if one had travelled first class!

Are you in the joy of salvation all the day long?

J.C.Evershed