

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

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with J.B.Stoney (5)

THE HEAD

Colossians 1: 24-27

At the second reading we had, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me". Until Christ be formed in you there is no real progress. Now you start from Christ living in you, and necessarily you are interested in His interests. In Romans 6 you touch life in Christ for relief, and now you learn that He has His place in you, He lives in you, and now you enter into the circle of His interests. It is not now your own side - His grace to you. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin" that is your side. Here it is His side - "Christ in you, the hope of glory". It is not the hope of going to heaven but of appearing with Him in glory. As you see in chapter 3: "then shall ye also appear with him in glory". This is His side of things. The difficulty is to pass from our own side to Christ's side. Some of the most earnest Christians do not pass from their side to Christ's side. They like to hear of Christ in the ship - not on the water - though the latter is the place for the true heart, because it is where He is, the former is where He was. If you love Him you would like to be where He is. Look at Mary Magdalene. She says, "tell me where thou hast laid him; and I will take him away". She was not thinking of the difficulties. You may say she was ignorant. Affection is not always enlightened but it is always ready for enlightenment. Enlightenment does not give you affection, it tells you how to use it. It is very important to us to see where the Colossians were. The apostle writes, he had heard of their faith in Christ Jesus, and the love which they had to all the saints, and yet they did not know the mystery - Christ's side.

Then must we know Galatians 2: 20 before we come to this?

Certainly. I believe we do not make any advance till we know Galatians 2: 20.

There may be some here who were not present at our reading on that. Do you make it experimental?

Yes. I have lost the old man and got a better, not Adam but Christ. Therefore I am not trying to improve Adam because he is gone.

Is that Christ formed in you?

That is Christ formed in you. You get it in the type. Isaac gets his right place. There is a moment in the history of the believer when Christ gets His right place in his soul, and there is a great advance in him from that time. I do not say that he is altered. The flesh is like Jack-in-the-box, the same as ever, but it is kept down.

Are we to understand that Galatians 2: 20 is the starting point for progress?

Yes. When the truth came out first, it was shown that a great work had been effected which could not be improved. That is, your standing was effected by the work of Christ upon the cross; and then that there was also a new state; but though it was brought out most distinctly by the one used of God to bring it out, many contented themselves with the standing without the state. And they practically put standing for state.

Would standing without state be like a well-found vessel without ballast?

It is like the prodigal before he was clothed and brought into the house. He could not be in a better standing with his father but he did not enjoy it till he was fitted for it. You do not enjoy acceptance if you are not in the state for it. It is true of you but your state is not according to it.

You are not in the enjoyment of the love of God unless you are in a spiritual state. I have found it so.

It is the right way to prove all truth in yourself. If you put the left shoe on the right foot you soon find your mistake.

In Galatians 2: 20 then do I give up all confidence in myself as of Adam?

You have done with Adam. Practically "/ am crucified"; it does not say we. If you take the standing side, it is "our old man is crucified" (Rom 6). But your state is to be "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus". No one gets any blessing but through death. Some say that John 6 is once for ever. I do not agree.

Do you mean we must accept death?

I mean you must feed on the death of Christ. It is not merely feeding on Scripture but on Christ's death. That is John 6. The type is walking through the Red Sea.

I suppose Paul proved that Galatians 2: 20 was his normal condition.

Yes; he could say, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus".

Would you say a word about the state.

If you believe what God has done you have peace. God has raised Christ from the dead. You are justified. That is your standing. Your state consequently is described in Romans 5: 1-11.

Is Colossians 3: 3 standing or state?

In Colossians there is another subject. We shall come to that presently. Your state is that you are practically accepting what grace has accomplished for you. In Colossians you have died with Christ from the rudiments of the world. In Romans 6 you are dead to sin. In Colossians you are dead to the world.

The great point here is Christ's side of things: "Christ in you, the hope of glory". It is not the hope of salvation. If you turn to chap 2: 1, 2 you see your gain: "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God,.. in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". You see the Colossians had not come to this. They were on the ground of Acts 2. They were a godly company but they did not know the mystery. There is no revelation of the head in Acts 2. They had the

Holy Ghost, who could make them acquainted with Christ, but they did not know Christ as head.

Would you explain the order of the apprehension of the mystery.

I am coming to it. The first step is that you are brought into a new circle of things. That is Christ's glory. It is not about your side, it is "Christ in you, the hope of glory". Now we come to the great advantages. The apostle writes, "I have great conflict for you". He would not have had great conflict if there had not been great opposition. He knew that there was a very dangerous snare impending. It was a combination of man's intellect and man's religion.

The two evils we have already seen with the Corinthians and the Galatians have now taken another form - with the Galatians it was human religion, with the Corinthians it was human wisdom. Now with the Colossians they combine under the plea of contributing to Christ, to help in His service. We see this described in Christendom. No one would be accepted as a minister who had not both learning and religion. I said to a brother once, Do you see the Colossian snare among us? Yes, he said, I do; the moment you see sanctimoniousness or learning prominent, then the Colossian snare is at work.

Or any kind of mental activity.

Yes. Here the apostle was thinking of the gain, not of the loss. If you are occupied with the loss you have not seen the gain. "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". Is there any one with any divine sense who would not say, I should like to know Him? It is not some, it is all. Now you will know what "Christ in you" is.

Now would you like to know how to get it? Turn to chapter 2: 10; "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power". Here you get the race in which you are set. As you are complete in Him you cannot add to what is complete. What can you add to it? How can my religion or my learning add to it? This you must first and firmly receive.

What is the force of "in him"?

That it is standing. You are complete in Him. You may not realise it, but you are.

Does it bring in union?

You do not properly get union in this book. Only once the body is alluded to. In union you must reach the person where the Person is. Here you are only outside of the world. Life is the great subject here, it is Christ's life, and what His life leads you into. The first_ point is, you are complete in Him. If you are seeking the Head what must you learn? That you are complete in Him without any learning or religion of your own.

Is it faith laying hold of this?

Yes, first you believe it, but if Christ is your life if He is living in you, it must be so, for He is the head of all principality and power.

Do you mean that one is conscious of it?

Yes, I trust many would be able to say we are complete in Him. It is a Christian axiom.

We receive it in faith, I suppose, but we have the consciousness of it in the power of the Holy Ghost.

Standing, I always receive in faith, but it is made true in me by the Spirit of God.

Our brother's question was, How are we to realise it?

Only in Christ's life. We began with "Christ in you".

Are those the two points in John 14: "ye in me, and I in you" and "At that day ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in me, and I in you"?

It is John's way of putting union. How do we draw from these treasures?

In living His life, being directed by Him. The more He lives in you the more you enjoy His things. There is no difficulty when you see that you belong to another man, and that you are to do everything by

Christ. The more fully Christ rules you the better you will be in all your relations here. There is nothing about your family in the law. But when you are in Christ your household is ordered by Him.

There are only two epistles where you get this family circle. There is nothing about your family in Romans. You are to love your neighbour as yourself. That is the way to transact business. You do not attempt to alter the order of things here, you render honour to whom honour is due, you are not a citizen but a subject, you obey the powers that be. That is Romans. Here you are on different ground.

You are across Jordan in Colossians.

That will come out. Now if you read verse eleven you get the second point: "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ". You see our translators put in the words of the sins. You can understand a pious monk saying, Well, if that means the flesh, all my penance is worthless. So that probably he put the sins in the margin. The next transcriber put it into the text. The fact is you are complete in Christ.

Now you find that the old man is put away, the reproach of Egypt is rolled off. It is "putting off the body of the flesh". You do not require any of it; neither its learning nor its religion. We may say, Would not Christ use the body and mind? Yes, when He controls them. I have no doubt Paul was an accomplished speaker, but he was so reduced "that his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible", and yet doubtless he did more good than ever before. The power of God was with him. Paul was showing the Corinthians that what they were boasting in was not necessary for the Lord's service.

Is that why we do not get beyond Gilgal in Colossians?

Circumcision is different from crucifixion. In the latter the man is judicially ended before God, in the other he is put away.

What do you mean by not getting beyond Gilgal?

You are across the Jordan, and the body of the flesh is put away. You are not in Canaan, the heavenly places yet, you are only preparing for it. I remember Mr Darby asking me once where I put Colossians, and I said 'entering'. He did not agree with me. I wrote to him afterwards and said 'preparing to enter', and with this he agreed. There are three things - entering, possessing and dwelling. Here you are preparing to enter.

Does verse 11 mean I am cut off from the flesh as much as Christ is?

Yes. It is in His death. The body of the flesh is put off.

I do not see the difference between this and Romans 6.

In the latter it is crucified - judicially ended. In the other it is put away. You cannot use it. You mean practically put away.

It is no longer acknowledged.

It is the same death in both cases - the death of Christ.

Yes. Therefore it is "in whom", risen in Christ. The real thing is that the body of the flesh is put away. You can no longer use it.

You may now read verse 19 for another step: "And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God". You see one can be puffed up by his fleshly mind - "not holding the Head". You get hold of the Head individually. By two things you are prepared for this - one is that you are complete in Him, and the other is to put off the body of the flesh. I illustrate it in this way: A man emigrated with his friends, and as soon as they landed he said, Now, let us burn the ship so that there cannot be any retrogression. Now you see the force of "in whom" ye are risen. You must hold the Head. Presently you will see when you hold the Head. In verse 19 you have, "not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God". All your resources come from the Head. I could understand a philosophic man being charmed with all this if he had not to set aside his own head. Then in verse 20 you read, "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the

rudiments of the world". You see, in Romans you do not get beyond death with Christ from the man. Now, it is the same death but it is over Jordan. You are dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world.

Would this include the two forms you were speaking about?

Yes, you are outside of the world condition. You have not come to the heavenly places yet. If you are not apart from man you certainly are not outside of the world.

Then you cannot hold the Head unless you are outside of the world.

Certainly not. You could not know Christ as Head but at His own side. If you knew Him, you would be sure to know Him there.

Now you see that you are dead with Him from the rudiments of the world. Next turn to chapter 1. Read four verses.

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory".

Now, "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above". This shows that you are not there. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God". It is more correctly "but ye have died", but you have to learn it. You have to take that ground practically, and realise that you are outside of all here through the death of Christ. Hence we read, If ye then be risen. If you be dead with Him you must be risen with Him, and if ye be risen with Him, seek those things which are above.

Are the rudiments of the world in chapter 2: 20 all the mental and sentimental things?

It includes everything. You are clear of all belonging to this order of things.

Does 'if' imply a doubt?

No, it implies responsibility, because, you see, "ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God". Your life is in Christ. Christ is in you, and He is your life. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory".

Would you say Romans 6 is privilege and this responsibility?

Weil, I do not know how it is privilege. You start with the fact, but you have to carry it out.

But it is the reckoning of faith.

You can hardly call it the reckoning of faith. We are committed to death in baptism. The two things are very distinct. One is, you are to reckon yourself dead, and the other is, He has given you the Spirit of God so that you can mortify the deeds of the body. You may try to count yourself dead, but you are not.

What does it mean, then, in Romans 6?

Well, it is the same word as for imputing righteousness. It is imputed to you. You have to carry it out. How do you effect it? You first touch life in Christ for relief - "alive unto God" in (not through) "Jesus Christ our Lord".

You would not consider it correct to speak of the reckoning of faith.

No, I would not, because it is "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death". Nothing gives such laxity as people thinking they can reckon themselves dead by faith. If you walk in the Spirit you will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. If you reckon that you are dead in the sight of God by faith, I agree with you, but it is not true in your own sight by faith.

But then I reckon as God reckons.

Sad work if God saw you as you see yourself. Romans 6 is only a treatise. Romans 8 is your state, not Romans 6. You believe that the old man has gone in the sight of God, but you now want that the man should be gone to you practically.

I was talking of the step before that.

That it is gone in the sight of God. That is God's side. I want to come to your side. How are you free? "He that is dead is justified from sin".

Is that God's side?

No, it is your side. You cannot be practically dead to sin but by the Spirit of God. God has effected it for us in the cross of Christ. You are justified by faith. Romans 5 is faith, but Romans 8 is by the Spirit of God. God has cleared away everything from His eye in the cross. You say it has not gone from you practically. Well, yes; but God gives you the Holy Ghost, and now you can say "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death".

I once said to a young man, Do you believe that the old man is gone in the cross? Yes, he replied; I then said, If you were walking in the Spirit, would he be gone to you? He had to say, Yes, or he would have put the Holy Ghost contrary to God. That makes it plain. Faith lays hold of that which is true to God, and then the Spirit of God makes it true to you.

You would not get the Spirit except you had believed in Christ risen.

But you accept it on God's side. It is true for you, but it is also to be true to you. Therefore we read, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh"; and, "if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live". There is death to sin.

Then it is true to me. Yes.

So that we can say we begin with faith, but the power for continuance is by the Spirit.

You never lose the efficacy of the work of Christ. It is always true with God, and always true for you, but it is not always true to you but as you walk in the Spirit.

Do I understand that it is not by faith that I am in the power of Romans 8: 2, but by the Spirit of God?

Certainly. Now, if you turn to Colossians 3 you will see that you are in Christ's life. Now you accept circumcision. Read from verse 5: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth... But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, &c... And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all" (everything) "all in all". Now you come to the Head.

When you get there are you holding the Head? You are. Christ is everything then.

Is that union?

Not exactly. Union is not realised until you are brought to Christ where He is. Here it is the knowledge of the Head. It is a great thing to hold the Head, the source from which all grace comes. You practically accept circumcision, the whole body of the flesh is to be put off. Do you understand? A great many read this for practice, but it is more - that you practically accept all which has been done for you on the cross. The best illustration is Elisha's act when he got the power, he took up his own clothes and rent them in two. He not merely threw them off, but rendered them useless. There are two parts in the body of the flesh - lusts which you must mortify, and habits which you must put off. You have put off the old man and put on the new - where there is neither Greek (learned man) nor Jew (religious man) nor man of any kind. The apostle enumerates all kinds of men to show that you are outside of all. You have reached where Christ is everything and in all. I know a great many to whom Christ is chief, but it is far more to be able to say He is everything.

Does the 'where' take you into the new place?

It is not so much place here as that Christ is your life. Now you derive from the Head.

When you speak of a new place do you mean morally?

In a way you are on new ground. You have not come to heaven yet.

Is it the practical realising of verses 11 and 12 of chapter 2?

Yes, circumcision is accomplished for you. You have to accept what has been done for you. You accept it whole, not in detail. The body of the flesh must be put off, as Elisha rent his clothes. You refuse everything of the old man. I am timid in speaking of it, but my impression is that you do not get direction from Christ as Head except you are apart from everything connected with the old man. I used to look to the Lord to give me a word before I went to the meeting. I do not approve of this now. Very often I am like a blank sheet of paper. I have nothing to say, and often when a word does come it is something I know very little about. Some ask, What is the difference between being led of the Spirit and being dictated to by the Head? I do not think the Spirit ever leads anyone beyond his knowledge. One effective in speaking never advances anything he does not know. But if Christ is known as Head, the effect is that you get an idea of it at the moment. The fact that it suits the company shows that it is the Head. If the Head was directing the right hymn would be given out - a hymn is leading the assembly in praise. A hymn that would suit yourself would not suit the company. If you take part in the assembly you are supposed to be the organ or the expression of the assembly at the time.

Would it be possible to have a single eye unless we were in this place, outside of man?

I suppose not. In His light we see light. If you were directed by the Head to a hymn you would be assured of His support.

So we must not give out even a hymn without the Head.

Certainly not. Why do you say 'even a hymn'? The hymns are the most important part. I can often pray when I could not give out a hymn, because a hymn is praise for grace you have received.

But if the Head directs you? Then He supports you.

This applies to prayer too?

Of course. If you have any pressure on your mind, you will not pray, because you are not free.

You have been speaking of guidance or direction. Do you mean in the assembly, or in general?

I mean in Christ's own circle. Christ is the Head in relation to His own.

Of course, but "the Lord" would cover the whole of my life.

Quite so.

Do you draw a distinction between 'the Head' and 'the Lord'?

To be sure I do.

Then we read (12 to 16): "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God" (should read "Christ") "rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord".

Now you see what you derive from the Head. You will come out in quite a new way; all comes from the Head. First, sensibilities, then charity, then, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts - then you are called to one body necessarily - and then the word of Christ. These three verses tell you all you get from the Head.

You said 'necessarily'. Would you explain that. It takes in the whole company.

So this chapter is not individual.

It now becomes collective for the first time. But you learn it individually.

But in view of the assembly.

In view of the whole Christian circle. As someone has said, He is the Head of all the Gentile family. If you believe the fact that Christ is the

Head, a wonderful course will open out to you. He is Head, though you do not know it. How great a company we should be here tonight if we all had lost our own heads and Christ was our common Head.

Then if I hold the Head, I must take in all the Church of God.

Yes, the body of Christ.

HEAVEN'S ADMINISTRATION

A.J.E.Welch

Acts 3: 1-8; 7: 54-60; 9: 37-43; 10: 1-19

A.J.E.W. I have been interested in recent times in thinking of this wonderful history in the Acts, showing the glory of an administration which works from heaven. Our thoughts of administration - a rather familiar word perhaps - have sometimes stood connected with the meeting in different respects of negative things, but Scripture shows us that the administrative thought is connected with the wealth and variety of divine supply. This history is full of the positive workings of power and grace that entered into it. Much is asserted against a testimony so glorious, but in general the history serves to show the unerring character of what is administered from heaven, the Spirit having come and becoming available here in us and with us to afford the variety of support which is needful. But there are men, servants who are fully adjusted in their relations with what is up there, becoming effectively usable to further God's great positive ends in the assembly, bringing out the features of the dispensation in the way they move and speak under heaven's direction. Taking the whole history right through to the closing parts of it in this book we can see how all is organised not of man but in immense skill out of heaven, where Jesus is made (as Peter reminds us) both Lord and Christ (see Acts 2: 36). I thought we might gain something in thinking of Peter and John and Stephen, and of Ananias in reference to Paul, to see how suited vessels are acquired and taken up who become the reflection of what is above. The epistle to Titus, in speaking of practical matters, reminds us of things which do not further God's dispensation which is in faith. That perhaps is a way of expressing a little what is in mind now, that we have happenings on record which work out to the furtherance of God's dispensation which is in faith. We see how the whole position in the testimony is strengthened, enriched and widened out, sometimes by direct intervention of the Lord or of the Spirit, sometimes by the intervention of angels, but more usually through those whom God

takes up, such as these persons named - Peter and John, Stephen and Ananias. The wealth of detail in this history in the Acts has sometimes detained us a little from seeing the wider scope of what this book is about and catching something of the glory that enters into an immense variety of happenings which God uses to further His interests.

J.A.P. There are difficulties in each passage, but is your point that the supply heaven brings in is overwhelming in a right sense?

A.J.E.W. If that sense gets hold of us - the supplies out of heaven are overwhelming - it would immensely help us not to become discouraged or disillusioned by things that arise in a day of small things such as we are in. It is a wonderful outlook when we realise that what is up there and administered from there is entirely equal to every situation that arises. The point would be by way of challenge, Am I equal to it as coming under the authority and influence of the heavenly centre? Can I fill some little place in this grand scheme of divine activity which represents, taken in its scope, the bringing in of divine wealth and the application of it so that something becomes fruitful for God Himself?

R.C.H. Would you say more as to where we see that supply evidenced in Acts?

A.J.E.W. We have these three cases. Peter said "Silver and gold I have not; but what I have, this give I to thee"; that is on the principle of supply, and what according to God is available to bring in life. It is an immense matter that life should be asserted. There is this difficult case, a man who was lame from his mother's womb, and it is resolved by the disposing of what Peter can say that he has. There is something there of a substantial kind which represents how heaven is acting, bringing in through Peter the character of its actings; Peter is supported by John, not active in this matter apparently but expressing the kind of choice substance, gained in the constant experience of the presence of Jesus, which John suggests. When you come to Stephen he is furnished with all that he needs in suffering; he gets a view of a glorified Christ which

sustains him. When such circumstances arise God has a man on the scene who can, so to say, pour out the Spirit of Christ in the midst of intense suffering. In Ananias' case you have a man who is usable. There is no suggestion that he has great gift - we do not hear of him again so far as I recall - but there he was in Damascus, and the Lord could call him and say 'Ananias', and he responded at once. Here is a man who is in a simple way subject to direction, perfectly in liberty with the Lord (because he is quite free to speak of his difficulty about Saul of Tarsus), but there is something in that man in the sense of divine supply that meets the situation in the remarkable instance of Saul of Tarsus.

I just had an impression of the way that things are centred up there in heaven. The centre is where Christ is, free of every element of interference; there may be an effort at interference down here, but all is organised from the centre of things where the interference cannot come. To see in detail how different ones fit into the divine scheme of things is to my mind very instructive and appealing. It becomes a challenge whether features are in evidence under the Lord's precious touch in each one of us that are related actively to what heaven is doing for God's pleasure.

R.N.H. Would that be Peter and John going up together into the temple at the hour of prayer? They were going together in relation to heaven, do you think?

A.J.E.W. It is important that those two men, probably very different men in their natural characteristics (one can just judge from other features of the history), are working together. Peter knows when to speak, John knows when not to speak, just expressing it very simply. The situation is regulated in the Spirit; it is a very fine feature of what heaven is doing that what is available here is under regulation. There are great potentialities for the use of it, but the use of it is not to be haphazard and not to be out of control; the Spirit is here to assure the furnishing of grace and power that everything might be under control from up there, and what results are proved as a result of it! Think of this man, as it says, walking, and leaping, and praising God. What an amazing change, the kind of change that God could

find satisfaction in! The man is brought into life, a man previously, to all intents and purposes in the practical sense, useless; but now that man is coming into the temple as a priest in character.

T.E.D. The note links the 'together' interestingly with the end of the previous chapter; 'the Lord added together'. Is that the feature, needed to be understood, which would deliver me from any independent activity that I might engage in apart from what heaven is supporting?

A.J.E.W. I am sure that is right. Without in any sense being fanciful you can visualise the depth of Peter's exercises in these days. Think of his adjustment when he went out and wept after denying the Lord, think of the history of Peter; and yet there he stands, not only in this chapter but earlier too. It is most striking to see in chapter 2 that "Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke forth to them" (v 14). There is a touch of victory about that. Morally the whole Jewish system is brought down in the activity of these two men. What the Jewish system in the whole lifetime of this person could not do is done by a word from Peter concerning the Lord Jesus. This is how heaven's administration operates.

C.F.D. What you are saying about these servants, Peter and John, is very instructive to us. There are certain moral qualifications marking these men. We know that the Lord chose them to be apostles, but then there is a moral qualification that goes with that. Would Peter's own link with heaven, and heaven's administration proceeding from the One into whose hands everything has been committed, be evident in the fact that he says "Rise up and walk"? There was no question in his mind as to what the outcome would be; his link with heaven was such that he could just proceed to act for heaven. Is that the point with these men?

A.J.E.W. Very much. And it is right to say, is it not? that the same link with heaven is open to us. This is not just an apostolic privilege, the link with the centre of the whole wonderful administration is in Jesus up there, and we can get as close in relation to it as we may seek. We need not be remote from the centre of things. Peter was

not remote, I am sure, nor was John; in spirit they were in touch, as you say, with heaven. It is not here, I would think, a question of apostolic office; but rather the way in which the men as such, having their diverse history with Christ, stand in regard to the heavenly centre. How do I stand in regard to it? Is that not a question for us?

C.F.D. It is a real challenge, because our link with the heavenly line of things and with that glorious Man where He is brings into relief immediately my link with the Spirit of God. Would it show here that there was at this moment just an easy, free, unclouded relationship with the blessed Spirit, so Peter in a sense has immediate access to what is in heaven.

A.J.E.W. That is exactly the searching yet very attractive point for us. Although you speak rightly of the glorious Man up there, Christ exalted, that is not just a spectacle for admiration; it is an object for contemplation surely, but it is something that is to involve the administration of power even through ourselves. That brings the challenge.

R.N.H. You mentioned grace and power before. I was reading recently (I think it was Mr Raven who said it) that in order for us to bring the truth to bear on persons it must be preceded by grace. What we have here seems to convey that; these persons acted in grace and power, and the next section Peter fully speaks the truth to the men of Israel. Would that be the demonstration of grace and power in operation?

A.J.E.W. You are linking grace and power with the working together of Peter and John, which is a fine thing. Can we work together? That becomes a searching point sometimes. Here were these two men with very different histories, but they are together and they stand for something as being together. Later on, according to the later chapter, the man held Peter and John, as if they in a joint sense represent something which is of heaven. We are in a world that is full of discourse where you cannot find two men acting together like this, but we see it under heaven's touch.

R.C.H. You were saying a few moments ago that this is available to all of us. Would you say a little more about that, please?

A.J.E.W. Well, as normally here we would each have the Spirit and know an indwelling Spirit, and I trust we would be conscious as we speak together of the reality of the Spirit being with us as well as in us. The Lord uses both words. That involves divine power here, and that in ourselves and among us, in relation to Christ where He is. The apostles had a distinctive place as taken up by the Lord and specially nurtured and educated by Him, but here we see them coming out in the gain of the presence of the Spirit, the same Spirit who would link us in our time with the same administrative course.

G.D.P. Peter got something of that view in chapter 10, in the sheet coming down out of heaven.

A.J.E.W. I was thinking of that. As we read through this history with this side of things in mind it is remarkable to see how it comes into active expression to further God's dispensation which is in faith. It helps us to get a positive objective and prove a positive resource to pursue it, both of which are seen in the labours of men like those we are considering.

G.D.P. That would save us from drifting off to independent lines, as was mentioned.

A.J.E.W. Yes, precisely so. How vital it is that the regulation of things is something to which we are rightly subject. If we serve rightly we serve under Christ, we might say the Prince of the princes of the Levites, but whatever aspect of things it may be, submission to the Spirit, hearkening to His voice, being available in the exercise of His power, there is an element of regulation entering into it.

J.A.P. Would that be in some sense the force of the Name here, "Jesus Christ the Nazaraean"? The Lord Jesus Himself accepted that, He was in Nazareth. Peter says later, "Neither is there another name under heaven... by which we must be saved", chap 4:12. So the power now is in the Man who Himself accepted every limitation here according to God and glorified God in it.

A.J.E.W. In your use of the term 'Nazaraean' you imply that He, speaking with reverence, lived the life of a normal man down here, sin apart - a wonderful thing - and that really is what the divine administration would assert, that there has been a life here in man in total perfection, and that must be the standard against which everything is assessed. In that way heaven's administration is totally consistent in all that it undertakes and carries through. All these thoughts are particularly to help us at a time when we feel our weakness; we feel the need of strength in days when the testimony in an outward sense is in frail circumstances God is in that.

R.C.H. You were mentioning that Peter and John here were acting in the power of the Spirit. Do you feel our having that power available to us today would enable us to do what Peter and John did, or was that something special to them, that they were able to have this man rise up and walk?

A.J.E.W. I take it that the Spirit's power is equal to carrying through whatever may be in God's mind for us to carry through. We cannot overlook the broken condition of things in our time, but we can rightly be with God about it, and we can be assured that as the Lord directs things, and as the administration of the wealth of heaven proceeds, the Spirit will give adequacy of power to carry through any feature of activity that may be determined of God. It is not that I can stand up and say, 'I am like Peter was at the beginning', or 'like John was at the beginning', that is not the point. Administration out of heaven has the control and the ordering of things up there. We need to stand in reference to it. It would be a presumption for any one of us to claim to do just what Peter and John did, because Peter and John were answering to the Lord's mind, the Spirit's mind, in what they did - though that is open to us too. What may be needed to be carried through in our day is something which can be left very safely in the Lord's hands, and we would just seek to be available, according to the measure that God gives us, to fill out what the Lord may have in mind. That is the way the administration proceeds.

S.E.H. You are stressing the thought of God's dispensation which is in faith, and according to verse 16 it is "by faith in his name, his

name has made this man strong whom ye behold and know· and the faith which is by him has given him this complete soundness in the presence of you all". Peter indicates the importance of faith here, faith in His name, in connection with this man being made sound. What would you say about that in our time?

A.J.E.W. The dispensation, as we have quoted, is in faith; that is its whole character. There will be a time yet to come in which an administration of this quality will be manifest to all. Think of the world to come - what a magnificent thing to think about and speak about, the "world which is to come, of which we speak" (Heb 2: 5), when everything will be in perfect order and everything will be seen to be under Christ. What an administration that shall be! Faith would lay hold of that, and faith would lay hold of the fact that the glorious Person who will be in pre-eminence publicly then is for us, through faith, pre-eminent now. Not only is He apprehended by us in His pre-eminent position, but the knowledge of Him becomes in us power to carry matters through in reference to Him.

T.E.D. In Hebrews 11 each of those drawn attention to acted in accord with their link with heaven in their own peculiar time, and in the manner in which God helped them to proceed. There are no two alike that I know of in that list. Would that bear on what you are saying?

A.J.E.W. It does in a most distinct way, particularly in some of the things that are said in that chapter. For example, towards the end we have the reference to those who "quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword" (v 34), and lower down we have those who are "stoned, were sawn asunder, were tempted, died by the death of the sword" (v 37). In the one instance there is escape from the edge of the sword, and in another dying by the death of the sword. The unregulated human mind would say that is something of a paradox, but it merely answers to the fact that these men of faith acted in the light of what the divine thought was for the moment to carry forward the divine interests.

T.E.D. It is not for me to ask or say, 'Which do I want?' My desire should be, do you think, as in verse 4: "And Peter, looking stedfastly... " and then, "he gave heed to them". Is that not faith active in view of the moment and what heaven might do?

A.J.E.W. That is it. You see what Peter says: "Silver and gold I have not"; he speaks from his own viewpoint, which in a certain sense he had to do. The previous word was, "Look on us"; but then Peter takes up things in his own faith, and he pursues it on that basis.

R.N.H. These names here, the gate called Beautiful and Solomon's portico, seem to suggest a character of things which is over against what is earthly. Peter speaks as to silver and gold, the temporal side, and there seems to be a contrast in how these men proceed.

A.J.E.W. It corresponds with what we spoke of as the moral overthrow of Judaism. This gate of the temple, although it is part of the Jewish economy, has a name with a much wider bearing, as if to hint at something greater that God has in His mind.

Now Stephen is of course a great sufferer, and in suffering he uniquely brings forward the Spirit of Christ: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"; that is, the time is one of suffering. The testimony is in suffering circumstances because it is a testimony to one who suffered supremely, whether it be at the hand of men or under the mighty hand of God, but especially in this instance the former, the tribulations that stand related to the testimony of the Christ. You feel how heaven is supporting this man in a unique way, and he fills out the position with remarkable power and appropriateness, full of the Holy Spirit: "having fixed his eyes on heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God"; that is, he is livingly in touch with what is up there and he is able, although in somewhat different terms' to describe it: "Lo, I behold the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God". He is in the fullest touch with the divine centre of things in heaven, which becomes a basis of strength for him to accept suffering of an intensive kind in respect of things here.

S.E.H. Would you say this would be an actual, physical matter or something that he saw by faith?

A.J.E.W. This is taking place in the time of an exalted Christ and of the presence of the Spirit. This is not taking place in the days of the Lord's flesh down here, nor is it in the forty days when He would come in and say "Handle me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as ye see me having", Luke 24: 39. I take it that the intention is here to convey the wonderful impressions that Stephen gained as a man described as being full of the Holy Spirit and fixing his eyes on heaven. I think it would be difficult to draw a sharp distinction between what we may think we actually see and what we see by faith, because this is the time of faith, the time of the Spirit, the time of Christ exalted. He saw Him up there. You might raise a very similar question as to how Saul of Tarsus saw Jesus when He appeared to him out of heaven.

G.H. It says, "having fixed his eyes on heaven, he saw the glory of God". What is involved in that?

A.J.E.W. Well, we can not go further than Scripture goes. It would be difficult for us to define precisely that character of glory he saw, but whatever he saw he would say to himself, I have seen the glory of God. I suppose he had seen it in Jesus. He had seen a Man up there who, in all that shines into wondrous expression in Him, reflects the glory of God.

C.F.D. That helps us to get an impression of what his experience was. The Spirit of God records this for us as Stephen's own experience, that of a man full of the Holy Spirit with the heavens opened. The heavens were opened to Jesus (see Matt 3: 16); but here it is an interesting matter that to a man who was not an apostle, as you were emphasising previously, but a man who was full of the Holy Spirit, the heavens were opened and he had a distinct view of the glory of God, which I am sure, as you say, was really shining in Jesus.

A.J.E.W. How he was affected by it! We can see how the whole heavenly course of things is finding its reflection in a man down here

in suffering circumstances. While it may not be in the measure of what we see in Stephen, the suffering circumstances of the testimony are very real for many of the saints at the present time, and real in some respect, I would think, for most of us. Yet heaven is still active, divine administration is still working, and it is bringing out this Christ-like feature in the course of the testimony that is to yield so much for God. Stephen was the means of bringing it out for the moment.

C.F.D. If we could just let that get into our souls the fact that what he saw there at the right hand of God became reflected in a man in testimony - it opens up a wonderful vista for us. Can we be really reflective of what is heavenly?

J.A.P. The witness of Stephen was not lost, which is very fine in the sense that Paul got something, and the writer of this book; so these things are not lost and they are very real.

A.J.E.W. In the midst of suffering circumstances for Stephen, the greatest servant, I suppose, that God has had outside of Christ is secured, at least in his initial impressions. He clearly indicates that in speaking of consenting to Stephen being killed. There was something wrought in Paul here which soon comes to light and which the Lord still uses. His hand is over all that, He is just arranging every detail, but in arranging every detail He has those who can enter into the detail with Him and fruitfully for God Himself.

G.D.P. That is very helpful because Saul is with the disciples finally.

A.J.E.W. When we come to chapter 9, there is Ananias as one that the Lord can take up. Ananias was immediately there and available, and the Lord speaks to him and sends him, and he goes. He speaks to the Lord about his knowledge of Saul of Tarsus and is adjusted by the Lord in respect of it, and he goes forward and becomes to this man, the beloved apostle Paul as he became, an indication of just what the 'Me' meant which the Lord used in arresting him. Ananias would be an expression of the 'Me', he would learn the character of what was found of Jesus here below. The character of it was that despite all that Paul had engaged upon there was one who would

have been the subject of his persecution, who now says "Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me". Ananias really becomes expressive of the whole spirit of this wonderful dispensation.

T.E.D. That brings out, does it not? that the need is our being available for divine help. Do you not feel sometimes we are just on the verge of divine help, but we spoil it by the intrusion of our natural thinking, our own ideas, or the way we go about something. Ananias here is so submissive and amenable to the touch from the Lord that he does exactly what heaven would have him do.

A.J.E.W. I think that is remarkable because who of us does not need adjustment from time to time, especially as we engage in any little measure of service? It is almost as if the Lord would say to us, There is an adjustment necessary with Ananias but I can use him in spite of that; I can get him right and he can be used of Me in a way that rightly reflects the character of the whole administration up there. Is that not fine? I suppose we might even say justly, Just a simple brother in Damascus is signally used of the Lord.

T.E.D. In Judges a sister said "From heaven was the fight", but then she also says "The stars from their courses fought with Sisera", Judg 5: 20. She is thinking of the whole order in heaven, the stars are in their courses and they are working together. Now can I be in relation to that?

A.J.E.W. As remarked, I have been a little inclined to look at the detail of the Acts without grasping the magnificence of its wider bearing. You know how Mr Taylor used to say that it could be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit, which is a fine thing, but how are the acts of the Holy Spirit conducted? Men here are taken under the Lord's hand to pursue so much in His interests.

PLAINFIELD

22 October 1982

Key to initials

C.F.Dadd; R.C.Hesterman; G.D.Pfingst; T.E.Druckenmiller;
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MORE FOR GOD

S.N.Chapman

2 Samuel 19: 24-30

I would like to say just a few words, beloved brethren, but with one desire, that there may be something more for God amongst us. We are in the time when our King is rejected - they would not have this Man to reign over them - and what can we show as persons who own allegiance to this King? We have been reminded of Peter and John: "Look on us", Acts 3: 5. Beloved, when we are around can other persons discern - I do not leave myself out - that there is one who has full allegiance to the King? There is a great need amongst us for reliability and satisfaction. May I ask each one, my own heart included, are we reliable persons as here in the testimony of God and in the fellowship? Are we really reliable and are we thoroughly satisfied where divine wisdom and divine grace and sovereignty - as we have been reminded we are refugees - has operated to extricate us from the terrible ruin and confusion?

Now Mephibosheth reminds me much of Paul; he never forgot his history as taking humble ground. We cannot take any high ground today, beloved; we have to take humble ground. This is a time of great weeping, in the fellowship and the testimony. It reminds me of Paul speaking of Timothy's tears in the second epistle to Timothy where Paul is speaking about the ruin, and responsible persons extricating themselves from vessels to dishonour. Many of us, many of you here too, have known persons walking in the testimony happily, we thought, but where are they? Not only young ones but the old ones too; where are they? Were they satisfied? Were they reliable persons? Were they kingdom men and women? A kingdom man is one with the sway of God - in his soul and who yields full allegiance to God's King - full, complete allegiance. And, beloved, the wonderful joy of the fellowship calls for true allegiance to the fellowship. Whenever we go outside to anything contrary we are bringing the fellowship into it.

Now here is Mephibosheth: he remembers his position, a dead dog: "all my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king". That man is taking humble ground; and then it says of him he neither washed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes. What a sight! We are in the time of big show, beloved, this is not the time of display; we have not reached that yet, we are in sober times. Heaven is looking for humility with us; divine Persons' eyes are upon us as persons whom They have committed things to. And here is Mephibosheth in his love for the king, not only because he is king and rules, but because he had great affection for David. Do we really so love the Lord that we are prepared to look an unattractive sight amongst men but with our hearts set upon the King of glory in blessed anticipation of His coming into His rights? He will soon be coming into His rights; are we carrying ourselves testimonially in repudiating all the influences of the world around and its attraction and even its religiousness. We might find ourselves without many friends, without perhaps a telephone call from anybody for days; are our hearts set upon the glory and beauty of the King and are we truly reliable men and women and satisfied persons? We want to be satisfied Christians. Beloved sister, are you satisfied? Beloved brother, are you satisfied? Satisfied even with your brother sitting beside you? Are you satisfied with divine selection putting this brother beside you? Beloved sister, are you satisfied with your sister beside you? In the wisdom and the sovereignty of God we are placed together; let us be happy in it. Let us in our actions and testimony justify divine grace in taking us up. How much there is in the way of excess that divine love has provided for us.

So here is a man quite content even to be misunderstood; he was even slandered. David did not rise to the position of the true David. In some scriptures he is a type of Christ but here it is that David has received information in relation to Mephibosheth. Sometimes misunderstanding comes in, beloved brethren, but here is Mephibosheth, a righteous man, a kingdom man: he is unmoved. Alas, David has not made use of what the Lord has provided, as we speak of it in the assembly, divine principles the Lord has provided in

assembly matters between brother and sister and sister and sister. Divine principles require the mouth of two or three witnesses. David did not, he took what one person said. Now a witness is a person who sees and hears, not passing any opinion. Their only job is to see and hear and state the facts; there is other authority to come in and judge. That is true witness - to see and hear and state the facts. We want that in our assembly matters, just see and hear and state the facts. There is authority in the assembly to deal with the rest. But David accepted the first thing that came to him and he is saying to Mephibosheth, "I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land". We do not wish to be like David, to compromise; on no condition do we want to compromise. Stay by the facts and stay by the judgment of the assembly. The witnesses are not to have their judgment or any opinion; it is a higher authority to deliver the judgment and as good kingdom men and women we stay by the judgment of the assembly and support it.

But here is Mephibosheth, a satisfied brother. Oh, beloved, I would love from all of our hearts that there would be something for God for the rest of our lives as the result of all that we have had in the few days that have passed. As someone has said; "For the time past is sufficient" (1 Pet 4: 3), but now there should be a moving forward. And here is a satisfied man: "Let him even take all". Are we like that, beloved? How can he do that? On the basis of "since my lord the king is come again in peace to his own house". He can let everything go. And that is a man who is not defending his rights in any way. A brother or sister who is defending his rights is not a self-judged person. Let him take all, I am quite satisfied in other words, since my lord the king has returned to his house in peace. Now we want to have the presence of our Lord in our midst in His house, His house in peace. God is the God of peace as in all the assemblies (see 1 Cor 14: 33). We want to love one another, true brotherly love so that there will be peace and joy and satisfaction with each one. Each brother and each sister is to be satisfied, and then there will be a greater yield for the heart of divine Persons for the rest of our days we are permitted to be here. For His Name's sake.

NEW YORK

13 September 1983

THE CHILDREN'S FULL ASSURANCE

Paul's second letter to Timothy was sent at a time when the enemies of the Christian testimony were increasing. Some of these were confessed unbelievers, others pretended to be followers of Jesus but were actually unconverted persons. Timothy himself was by this time no longer a youth but amidst all the dangers he had been "fully persuaded". You will remember reading that as a child he had known the sacred letters and through them had become wise unto salvation. It cannot be too plainly said that children should be "fully persuaded" of the glad tidings which God gives faith to believe. No child should be content with just knowing about these wonderful things.

In connection with holy matters it is interesting that Paul, in writing to believers in Colosse, desired that they should have the full assurance of *understanding*. In that place a special danger amongst Christians was that they might listen to clever persons who sought to teach their own ideas instead of, or in addition to, God's revealed truth. Whatever these ideas may have been in detail they were not according to Christ. It was 'philosophy' or love of mental knowledge. To protect themselves and be useful as witnesses for Jesus the saints must keep assured in the faith of what God was making known of *His* mind especially through His servant Paul. In the Scriptures we now have all needed God-given teaching and have the Holy Spirit who enables us to be assured of it.

In the epistle to the Hebrews we are told of the full assurance of *hope* and the full assurance of *faith*. We often speak in a casual way of hoping for something which we are by no means certain of getting! But in Scripture the word 'hope' is used for an expectation that is sure and certain although its realisation is still future. Such is the coming of the Lord. Hope is likened to a ship's anchor which holds it steady in storm and calm. The anchor of our hope is both "secure and firm". It is secure because it is real to us or of 'good material', and it is firm because of the One in whom it is, as it were a 'good sea-bed'.

The full assurance of faith is connected in the scripture with our communion with God as made known in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This communion is largely in our prayers, and when we enjoy God's presence for His own sake it is greater than being able to ask for things. Do you ask the Father to confide His precious thoughts to you?

J.C.Evershed