

A
WORD
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GOD SECURING HIS OWN PLEASURE

THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST

PRECIOUS CHILDREN

GOD SECURING HIS OWN PLEASURE

Acts 9: 1-20; Psalm 68: 6; John 15: 16; Isaiah 40: 12-17

J.McK. I thought we could converse together about this well-known incident in Acts 9, but, as we do so, bear in mind the references in the other passages, particularly to see how God acts in view of securing what is for His own pleasure. The divine initiative is something that should always be for our encouragement. Those of us who know God realise that His power is in our favour. I have suggested the passage in Isaiah to give us an impression of the greatness of the God who acts in the supremacy of His power so that we might apprehend the unlimited character of what He can achieve and see how that bears on us in our circumstances. I think there is a certain principle in the way that God acted in bringing in Saul of Tarsus that bears on the way each of us is to be in His testimony in the Christian dispensation. The word in Psalm 68 is that God maketh - or as the Authorised Version renders it, 'setteth' - the solitary in families; that is, persons who are solitary, whom He secures for Himself in a complete and direct sense, He then sets in a family. Thus He brings Saul into the presence of the brethren in Damascus and he finds relationship with them there. In John 15 the Lord says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and have set you". The idea of divine setting is something that gives us at once the suggestion of divine initiative and at the same time a touch of what is pleasing to the One who acts in supreme power. I think we need this in these days because it is very easy for us to reason circumstantially, very easy for us to feel that we are in the testimony simply because of a certain sequence of events, and not to realise that, if we are rightly in the testimony of God, we are in it because He Himself has done something.

R.J.C. Divine sovereignty is in your mind, is it not? God acts for Himself in view of what would be for His own pleasure in the testimony.

J.McK. I think so. We often speak about Acts 9 and the wealth of blessing it meant for Saul, but I think we should think more of what it meant for God, that He was introducing this trophy of His grace and setting him in a particular environment. If we think back to the detail of what was provided in Exodus for the tabernacle in the wilderness, one of the available materials was stones for setting; that is, the stones were available and then they were brought in accordance with God's mind into what was pleasing to Himself.

R.J.C. It says, "Go, for this man is an elect vessel to me". Would that emphasise what you are saying, that he was taken up by God to be for God in view of the testimony here? This would in a certain sense be distinctive but it would enter into each one of our histories. The Lord has something in mind for each one of us.

J.McK. I think the principle of it enters into the experience of every one who is rightly in God's testimony.

J.R. Is it significant that the Lord is prominent in this scripture in Acts 9? - "the disciples of the Lord", and Saul owns Him thus. The Lord is active throughout this section; His initiative is prominent.

J.McK. His initiative is clear and Saul of Tarsus is brought to it in his own soul that Jesus is Lord. It is wonderful to see on the one hand the great scale upon which God operates. The passage in Isaiah 40 is majestic in its language and should give us some assurance in these days. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out the heavens with his span, and grasped the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in a balance, and the hills in scales?" The soul is impressed with the greatness of the One of whom we sing as the God of the universe (hymn 62), yet that same God acts in our circumstances in order that we should know His subduing power and come, as Saul did, to the direct acknowledgment that He is Lord.

J.R. What precedes this is, "He will feed his flock like a shepherd: he will gather the lambs with his arm" and so on: the tenderness with which He deals with each one!

J.McK. He is equal to both: the detail of circumstances that call out His consideration and care and the wider scene that involves His supreme power. We know a God whose power is greater than any power upon the earth.

D.S. Why do you think that the Lord allows it to go to such an extent as this? It is almost on the brink of a disaster, is it not? Is it to bring out what you are saying, that it gives us to see that He is not taken by surprise in any event?

J.McK. That is right. In saying that it was almost a disaster you mean it looked as though the power of Satan was to gain complete advantage here. How often we have felt that about the testimony - reduction in numbers, reduction in representation in localities, apparent outward weakness. Has God lost control? Far be the thought! His initiative remains and in His own time He intervenes in a way that is far beyond our expectations.

W.L. So He acts for His own pleasure. Do you think Paul was intent that the Corinthians should learn that lesson when he says, "But now God has set the members, each one of them in the body, according as it has pleased him", 1 Cor 12: 18?

J.McK. That helps because the note to that is He has 'set for himself'. The divine initiative has in view what is for the divine pleasure. But it is the same God who acts in the wide scale of the universe. Another has spoken of Isaiah 's broad measure; we get that in this passage and I thought it formed a suited background from which we could view the great actions of God in determining our own position. What a privilege it is to have any part in His testimony!

W.D. Our brother should have completed the other scripture in 1 Corinthians 12: 28, should he not? God has set gifts in the assembly. Paul graduated for that, did he not?

J.McK. So that if we are in the assembly rightly we are there not only because He has set us there but as He has set us there. That involves His perfect knowledge of the quality of His own work in each person.

W.D. It would give us to respect the members and respect the gifts, recognising that God's sovereignty has entered into it.

J.McK. That is right, for if we refer again to Exodus, these stones for setting were actually put into the breastplate. The two onyx stones were put on the shoulder pieces - the strength of the support of the great high priest was to be known - and then there were twelve stones arranged according to the divine mind in the breastplate itself. Every one of them was different; every one was of intrinsic value; every one was permanent; typically every one had the support of the heart of Him who is the great Priest. It is wonderful to get that impression of the mind of God for us, that we have a place in Christ. My exercise today is as to whether we have realised how that bears on our immediate circumstances. What a moment it was in the history of Saul of Tarsus when he was taken up and God put him in the divinely chosen position.

A.C.C. Twice it says about the stones in the breastplate that they are to be in their settings and I wondered if Saul of Tarsus saw a stone in its setting in Stephen, his face shining, reflecting the glory of Christ. He was extracted from where he was and put in a proper setting, do you think?

J.McK. I think that is right. The work was proceeding in Saul who is referred to at that point as a young man - that is, he was potential in view of the divine system, but at that moment he was taking account of one who in his own setting was prepared to go out of sight in submission to the will of God. It was a wonderful exit that Stephen had.

A.C.C. Yes. I thought that his face was radiant with the glory that he was looking at; that was really a reflection of Christ coming out in Stephen. It was an unusual setting but there he was in the will of God.

J.McK. What burst on to view for Stephen was the fulness of the light that governs the present dispensation, that there was a Man up there in the glory.

N.J.H. It says in that scripture in Exodus 28 "enclosed in gold shall they be in their settings"(v 20). Should there be a testimony to God in the way we are set together?

J.McK. I think that is right as we are together having first experienced a transaction and direct link with Christ Himself. I believe that what is needed in restoration and healing in localities is that our personal link with Christ should be strengthened. I think that is the answer to many problems. Mr Raven said that you must have Christ before you have Christian fellowship. What happened to Saul was that he was isolated. He was made, in the language of Psalm 68, "solitary" and for three days he was in direct touch with none other than Christ Himself, and I think from that point of view he was introduced into the assembly in Damascus. The gold in the setting involves that he was together with the saints there in view of the enhancement of God's testimony.

T.M. I was wondering if this light out of heaven brought the first glitter of shining from Paul when he said, "Who art thou, Lord?".

J.McK. Well, what is stressed here as we have often said is the source of the light: it came from heaven. The greatness of the dispensation came into evidence at the time of the death of Stephen. The Man up there is the representative of the power that exists in the divine system.

R.S.R. When Saul of Tarsus said, "Who art thou, Lord?", the Lord might have said, 'I am the Lord of glory'. Why did He say, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest"?

J.McK. I believe to enhance just what we are saying, the personal side. It is the directness and simplicity of the link that the Lord intended should be formed between Himself and this distinctive vessel.

R.S.R. Is that why Revelation ends, "I Jesus" - our personal intimate relation with Christ?

J.McK. Well, I think this is an area where we need help. I do not in any sense speak critically of my brethren: I speak as exercised

myself. It is an area where we do need help, the directness of our own links with Christ. Paul never lost that and even when writing later, particularly to the saints in Corinth as to collective responsibility, the establishment of what represents Christ in the locality, notice how often in that epistle he refers to his personal link with the Man who arrested him here.

R.S.R. So that the voice was directly to Saul of Tarsus. Those journeying, according to the footnote, heard a voice but it was unintelligible to them; it was something direct to Saul of Tarsus.

W.D. What do you say about the meeting in Damascus which is the background to all this? There seems to be some relation in the conditions there to what the Lord was working out with Saul of Tarsus, would you say?

J.McK. Yes, you are thinking of Ananias?

W.D. Yes, and the fact that he is not prominent in the history of this event, as if the Lord had prepared the environment for the servant.

J.McK. There must have been something very precious about those few in Damascus. It was from one point of view to protect them that the Lord arrested this great representative of Satan's power. All the hatred that had built up in the city of Jerusalem was really embodied in this man and his thrust was intended to damage what was of Christ. Instead of that God turns the whole thing to His own advantage, taking Saul, having isolated him first, making him solitary. In the beginning of the epistle to the Romans Paul speaks of himself as "separated to God's glad tidings", chap 1: 1. It is a very interesting expression as if God took him aside from everything, from what he was nationally, socially, educationally. He separated him, making him solitary before introducing him into Damascus.

J.R. Do you think there is a danger of living in the fellowship, enjoyable as it is, without realising first of all the importance of individual links with the Lord Jesus to be established and then maintained?

J.McK. I feel that. The practical advantages of the fellowship are wonderful, but that will not hold us. What will hold us is the link we have with the Man who, having been seen by Stephen, spoke directly to Saul.

J.R. We preach in the glad tidings the importance of an individual transaction with the Lord Jesus. If we have a beginning, that is how we begin, but then that has to be maintained and deepened.

J.McK. It is a truth that can be illustrated throughout Scripture, secret history lying behind responsibility among the saints of God. Go right back to men like Moses, David, Jacob: all these are examples of what we are saying, but the force in my mind of this incident is that it is in the Christian dispensation. Why did the Lord act in this way? He could have acted differently and brought Saul in immediately, but for three days He had him on his own.

J.H. You feel this 'alone' experience is necessary in view of being sent. I was thinking of the man in John 9. They cast him out: he had this one experience before he was set in the family. There are other examples which I suppose in a certain sense would remind us of the Lord. Does it not say of Him, "I sat alone", Jer 15: 17?

J.McK. That is right. Mr Darby says somewhere - I think in one of his letters - that the Lord Jesus was at once the most solitary and yet the most approachable of men. We need to learn by that. He lived, as He tells us in John's gospel, "on account of the Father" (chap 6: 57); it was the governing principle in His life.

W.L. After this Saul went to Arabia.

J.McK. Yes. Writing to the Galatians he says, "I took not counsel with flesh and blood ... but I went to Arabia", chap 1: 16,17. I believe that throughout the whole of Paul's ministry he never lost the awareness of his vital link with Christ.

W.L. In going to Arabia do you think he learned the necessity of this individual link apart from human influence altogether?

J.McK. It seems to be important and, if we remember the greatness of the God who has taken us up, it enhances the grace that we all

have proved.

G.C.McK. Does this individual link and experience which each one has with the Lord provide the basis for a true bond between us? Ananias says, "Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus that appeared to thee". There is a link immediately in practice.

J.McK. Ananias had experienced some direct communications too, had he not? Unless we know what this direct link means, there is bound to be something that will cause abrasion between us. But Ananias, although a little intractable - "I have heard from many concerning this man" - is adjusted. However long we have been in the testimony we should always be willing and prepared for that.

Indeed we should see the necessity for it. So that how I am among the brethren is not in any way to cause friction but rather to result in benefit in the growth of these family relations.

R.J.C. It is interesting that the three days come between what the Lord says to Saul and to Ananias. The Lord says, "Enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do", but then the three days intervene which confirms what you are saying, that Saul works out in a certain complete way his own personal links with the Lord and then Ananias is prepared and Saul is ready.

J.McK. So they were brought together by the action of the One of whom we speak. They were really set in family relations having been made solitary first.

J.R. If each one of us is maintained in a personal contact with the Lord Jesus, we will fit perfectly together, will we not?

J.McK. I believe so. Most of us have come into things because we have been brought up amongst brethren and that is a tremendous advantage. We should thank God for it because it has protected us from so much. At the same time there needs to come a point when I am isolated from all that and when I learn that it is only as having to do directly with God that I can be rightly in accordance with what His will is.

A.T. I was wondering if what is seen here could be seen with each one of us in our localities. Ananias firstly says, "Behold, here am I, Lord", but then he says, "Saul, brother". Do you think that the experience of having to do with the Lord firstly sets him in proper relationship with Saul as a brother? Would that confirm the family side?

J.McK. Having to do with Christ makes way for new relationships. Having never been related to this man before, he had heard about him and what he heard was not complimentary; but now, having had this experience with Christ, he can take up a position of affectionate relationship that is suited to the assembly.

D.R. I wondered if there was a danger of our trying to reach Christ through the company whereas the company is reached through Christ. Is that how it works out in this chapter?

J.McK. I believe that epitomises my exercise. Mr Raven's statement is so simple: you cannot have Christian fellowship without having Christ first. I think there is an order in that. Solitariness in our own relationship with Christ will result in strength as we are gathered that cannot be achieved any other way.

D.R. I think it delivers us from what is ecclesiastical. If we make too much of the company it makes it ecclesiastical. 2 Timothy 2 so often quoted, is not a place; it is a path, and in that path we find those like ourselves who are in affinity with Christ.

J.McK. So that another example of what we are saying is worked out in the history of Peter. Peter was destined to have a great place among the saints collectively, but the background to that is what is recorded in John 21 involving a manifestation of Christ and the repeated challenge, "Lovest thou me?". That underlay his service among the saints collectively. Then, as the history unfolds in the Acts, you have the incident in chapter 10. Peter needed to be brought aside from all that was going on among the saints and, on the housetop, as in ecstasy, again to experience these solitary relations with the Lord Himself so that he should be maintained in the pathway of God's will among the saints. I think there is a

principle here that seems to run throughout the whole of Scripture but that seems to be particularly emphasised in the day when collective privilege is uniquely available to us in the assembly.

A.C.C. It says in chapter 26, "taking thee out from among the people, and the nations". It seemed to grip him right from the start, the divine intention in his being extricated: "to whom I send thee", taking him out first.

J.McK. It was essential that every other influence should be destroyed so that Paul should be free from every other claim in view of acknowledging the supreme claim of Christ.

A.C.C. I wondered as to the way our young people come into fellowship - perhaps just sort of graduate, not much perhaps in the way of outward evidence or manifestation - whether at home we should make it our business to ensure that the younger people have their own links with the Lord and their own private history.

J.McK. I am sure that is a good exercise, but the initiative here is with Christ Himself. That is very wonderful, is it not?

E.S. Peter was always able to go back to an early impression of what the link with Christ meant - "to whom shall we go?", John 6: 68. There were those going away, but Peter knew that his life and those with him was in the words of life eternal that came from the Lord Himself.

J.McK. Yes. He says, "we have believed" - that is he had faith - "and known", involving an immediate experience in his own history, "that thou art the holy one of God". He saw Christ as the centre of the divine system, the One who was anointed, and that proved an anchor in difficult days.

J.R. "Behold, he is praying"; Saul had individual contact with God, I suppose. Prayer giving conscious link with God is individual, is it not? Most important, is it not?

J.McK. I think so, and what would come into his soul was a sense of divine supremacy. We tend to think so much of what men do; the whole scene through which we move is dominated by what men do,

and the impression in the soul of the greatness of God is sometimes eroded and we need to get back to it constantly.

A.A.B. I was thinking of what Mr Darby speaks of as the strongest bond between human hearts - 'absolute consecration to Jesus'. That would be an individual matter, would it not?

J.McK. Yes, truly it would: -

'That Thou should'st take delight in me,
Yet be the God Thou art,
Is darkness to my intellect
But sunshine to my heart'.

The God who is so great has acted in relation to my circumstances in view of setting me in relation to His testimony. If I become aware of that I will not leave that testimony. I am not in it because of my links with any particular group of persons; I am in it because God has done something.

J.D.N. Would that be experienced by the patriarchs, particularly Moses at the time he had to sit by the well? Did Abraham, Jacob and Joseph all have this experience prior to their service?

J.McK. Yes, all these men demonstrated what we are saying. Scripture abounds with it. Remember Jacob and his experience the night before he met Esau. God would prepare him in that struggle when He touched the joint of his thigh for right links with his brother.

W.W. Is the service of Ananias important? Not only did Paul have this personal link with Jesus but Ananias said, "that thou mightest see, and be filled with the Holy Spirit". There is need for every one of us to be certain that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God and filled with the Holy Spirit. It would involve the displacement of all that I am as after Adam.

J.McK. I think so, and what made room for that, of course, was Saul's obedience. He submitted and, therefore, became the kind of vessel that, speaking very carefully, the Spirit of God can link on with. The Spirit operates, as we have often said, in the environment of faith. He is not assertive in His action, and if we are to benefit

from His presence and service we come into it on the principle of obedience to Christ.

D.R. Would you say something about verse 12 in that way? How would this happen - "has seen in a vision"? It was not now the Lord; it was a question of Ananias. Would this be part of the three days, do you think?

J.McK. It would almost seem like that, as if in the experience of his own personal relation with Christ there was some intimation that the Lord was going to bring him into an area of relationships.

D.R. It seemed to be a part of the divine confirmation in Saul's soul that he had seen a man called Ananias. His personal dealing with the Lord seems quite attractive. Ananias also: "here am I, Lord"; but then Saul has this vision. I would like you to say something about it.

J.McK. I do not know if I can say much. Would it link with what Paul says later in chapter 26: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision"? That directly refers to his experience as having seen Christ, but it might be more extensive, perhaps?

D.R. He sees because of what Ananias does. It says here, "Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he should see". So that as we reach the company through Christ we will come into a sphere of enlightenment where divine things are known and we begin to understand them, do you think?

J.McK. We come into a sphere where we realise that we benefit from the service of another. Another feature that shines in this great vessel, Paul, is his respect for the brethren. Now what we are saying here today in stressing the independent link that he had with Christ in no way would destroy that but rather serve to enhance it. As he became close to Christ he would begin to realise how much the saints meant to Him. Those whom he had been persecuting, those whom his wrath had been focused against, he realised that they were very precious to Christ, and this communication indicated that he was to find immediate benefit from the service of one brother.

G.A.B. Saul's commission is something which the Lord seems to reserve to Himself. He says, "I will shew to him", but it is this matter of relationships which is committed to Ananias. Is it not a very precious privilege we have, to deal with one another and establish these relationships?

J.McK. That is right. Paul says later, "by love serve one another", Gal 5: 13. I think, even as Saul would have an appreciation of this brother through whom he was to receive his sight, so Ananias having been in touch with Christ would have an appreciation of this distinctive vessel. They both learned something about one another through having to do with Christ.

J.R. Ananias had maintained his link with the Lord Jesus. He said, "Here am I, Lord", and he was prepared to be adjusted, was he not? His link with the Lord Jesus enabled him to accept adjustment, which is an important matter.

J.McK. Always, I think. So that as long as we are here, subjection to Christ will have that effect. I am subject to the One who is supreme and it is no longer a question of pressing my particular view of a matter but of submission to Him.

J.H. Do you think in that sense in Acts 9 we have a remarkable example of "the power which he has even to subdue all things to himself", Phil 3: 21? He had power to subdue Saul of Tarsus; he had power to subdue Ananias. How tenderly He does it! It is remarkable how these brothers would get a sense of divine supremacy. When you think of the Spirit, it is "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world", 1 John 4: 4. We need to carry that thought with us.

J.McK. That is right. So as we were saying, Saul of Tarsus, as he was here, submits immediately. It says later, in chapter 26, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision". There needed to be a response on Saul's part. There was what the Lord did and it is evident He took him aside for three days and that this experience was unique in his history; but then he says, "I was not disobedient". Now it may be that the Lord has been seeking to draw us aside; it may be the Lord has been seeking to establish these direct relations

with us. Is there in response the willing obedience that follows that? He had seen something; it was not simply submission to a command. Many of us suffer from the problem of legality because we think that all that we have to do is to be obedient to a command.

W.G. Is there some sense in which the supply of divine grace which comes from Christ so affected Paul that the same grace would apply when he met Ananias? There would be the expression of this grace in all that Paul would do because he found it in Christ.

J.McK. So he learned it practically in the service of this brother and was then able to show it, something that hitherto he had opposed. What an adjustment took place in the life of this man! Those whom he had been persecuting he found were acting for his greatest benefit. He refers later to those "who were also in Christ before me", Rom 16: 7. One thing we need to learn is respect for the brethren. We look around a room like this and value the experience with Christ represented here. We need to learn from one another in that respect.

G.C.McK. Would you say a little more about God acting for His own pleasure in all this? I notice in Isaiah 40 the reference to the burnt offering: "And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering". Is there some line of thought there for our souls as to the greatness of what is going to be for God's pleasure as we are introduced into this system?

J.McK. I think so: the grace of it, that God, although our blessing is involved, is primarily acting for Himself. Can I think of my place in the local company that way? Not as the result of circumstances or because of a sequence of certain events but because God is doing something; not only acting in His supremacy but doing so because He wants to achieve the ornamentation among us that this idea of setting involves. That is how I am to be in relation to you and to all my brethren.

R.S.R. I quoted recently something which I treasure. Another has said that the Lord Jesus took Saul of Tarsus from the ranks of the

enemy and made him His own Field Marshal. That was a great stroke, was it not?

J.McK. Well, he was to be given responsibility among the saints. If in any measure we are entrusted with that kind of responsibility, our anchor is to be the immediate link we have with Him who gave it to us. This is what will keep us, nothing else.

R.J.C. There was a time when Paul was solitary again. He said, "At my first defence no man stood with me ... but the Lord stood with me", 2 Tim 4: 16,17. This is something that goes through everything, does it not? What you are saying is vitally important, that we find our place in the company through this; but though we may not have company, this link goes through. The Lord will stand by us.

J.McK. Even as writing to the Ephesians in the opening up of the greatest light that Paul is entrusted with involving collective blessing, he says, "I Paul, prisoner of the Christ Jesus" (chap 3: 1). and "I the prisoner in the Lord" (chap 4: 1), as if in the light of the greatness of his ministry involving collective relations among the saints he never lost the sense of what this immediate link with Christ was.

R.J.C. In that scripture in Timothy he says, "May it not be imputed to them". We see the full effect in Paul of his own personal link with the Lord and the way he had been reached himself.

A.C.C. When Ananias said to him, "Saul, brother", he is already getting the taste of the family, being introduced to the conditions and atmosphere that belong to the family in Damascus.

J.McK. Yes, it did not take long and he would fit in quickly; it says he was with the saints in Damascus certain days - an undefined period. There would be in that a wealth of practical enjoyment of affectionate family relations.

R.S.R. John in Patmos must have experienced something of this. He had a broad outlook but he says "I became in the Spirit on the Lord's day", Rev 1: 10. Then in chapter 4: 2, when he heard the voice: "Immediately I became in the Spirit". It shows the possibilities.

J.McK. Once the Lord takes a hand things move quickly, do they not? I think our faith should be equal to that where conditions may not be ideal at the moment. We look for a quick change because the Lord in dealing with persons can act just as quickly as He did in this incident.

R.J.C. Have you something in mind about verse 20?

J.McK. "He preached Jesus that he is the Son of God". I do not have anything in particular in mind. It is the greatness of Christ that formed the subject of his message. He was not proclaiming a doctrine, not proclaiming a creed. It was Christ in glory that had revolutionised his whole outlook. What does the poet say? -

'Marvel not that Christ in glory
All my inmost heart has won;
Not a star to cheer my darkness,
But a light above the sun'.

That was what had happened in the experience of the man and therefore when he preaches it is the Person that he actually speaks about.

R.J.C. Does the Son of God give character to a whole order of things for God? Was Paul taken up in view of that?

J.McK. It would link with what we are saying as to what was for God's pleasure. Paul would be brought in through divine action in view of being among the saints for God's pleasure and he had an appreciation of Christ, the One who was supremely so.

D.R. Do you think verse 20 is the result of what he tasted in the family? It has been said that Paul obtained the light of the Son of God among the saints at Damascus where these family conditions were. They were a persecuted and despised people, yet they understood the family conditions that the Son of God involves, what Christ meant to God. Saul must have drunk that in, do you think?

J.McK. That is very interesting. He learned more about Christ as he came among His people and we have often said that our privileges are greater when we are together.

W.L. It has also been said - I just make this remark for the exercise of the brethren - that verse 20 happened after Paul's return from Arabia. He went to Arabia and came back to Damascus.

J.McK. Well, certainly his apprehension of Christ was developing very rapidly and that is something for which we would all share a desire, is it not?

H.B. I suppose the Son of God involves the whole purpose of God.

J.McK. That is right, and the Man exalted is supreme and the centre of a world where nothing is out of accord with God's supremacy.

H.B. Is there not a beautiful outline of the work of God and His sovereignty in Saul of Tarsus? He comes to the knowledge of Christ, then he receives his sight, is filled with the Holy Spirit, and then he preaches the Son of God.

J.McK. He is progressing rapidly.

J.R. Is not this linked with the Lord Jesus, the basis for the receiving of the Holy Spirit? Ananias was the means. Is not that what the Spirit links on with and promotes and maintains?

J.McK. I think submission to Christ is essential if the Spirit is to be received.

J.R. And to be in us ungrieved would depend on maintaining our link with the Lord Jesus.

J.McK. I think that relation needs to be kept consistently clear, otherwise the Spirit is grieved, because He is here to make much of Christ. John 15 bears on Acts 9, because the word of the Lord there is, "and have set you that ye should go and that ye should bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide". So that the initiative for service which was worked out in Paul's life stemmed from his direct link with Christ. His place among the brethren collectively stemmed from it, but then his service stemmed from it also: "and have set you". None of us, I trust, would attempt service on any other principle.

A.C.C. It seems a contradiction of language, "and have set you that ye should go", but it strengthens your point that there must be the

individual side of our links with the Lord before there can be any success in service. Do the early chapters in the Acts bring it out in connection with their being set and then they are being fruitful in their service?

J.McK. The setting must come first. "That ye should go and that ye should bear fruit" is a tribute to the quality of God's work in the servant; that is, that he is prospered, but the divine initiative is the first thing.

W.W. Does the thought of being set involve establishment? As set, there would be a certain fixity of purpose and then you are set in a particular situation. The setting in Antioch in Acts 13 is where you have the local assembly, and it is from that setting that the Holy Spirit says, "Separate me now Barnabas and Saul". He is commissioned from that setting.

J.McK. That is how it bears on a local company. The idea of what is fixed is helpful. There is the side of what God does in that and then there is the exercise of my being maintained in consistency with that. So earlier in John 15 we have the idea of abiding in Christ. The exercise of the servant is that he abides in Christ.

G.A.B. 1 Corinthians 12 speaks of God having set certain in the assembly: first apostles, and so on. Paul would be one of these. The footnote is interesting: it says, 'set for himself'.

J.McK. That just confirms that God is acting entirely for His own pleasure. That I come into it and am richly blessed through it is because of the abundance of His grace, but primarily He is acting for Himself. "I have ... set you that ye should go and that ye should bear fruit" - fruit is for God. It is not exactly for my enjoyment or even for the enjoyment of the saints; it is for God.

G.A.B. It is interesting that it is in the context of the body that you have this. It is functional and an organism that is working. Relationships are working all the time.

GLASGOW

25 August 1990

Key to initials

(all Glasgow unless otherwise stated)

G.A.Brown, Edinburgh; A.A.Brown, Grangemouth; H.Brown, Kilmarnock; R.J.Campbell; A.C.Craig, Airdrie; W.Dickson, Edinburgh; W.Grosse, Edinburgh; J.Harthill, Grangemouth; N.J.Henry; W.Lamont, Cumnock; G.C.McKay; J.McKay, Woodstock; T.Munro, Grangemouth; J.D.Newberry, Airdrie; J.Renton, Edinburgh; R.S.Renton, Edinburgh; D.Robertson, Cumnock; E.Steedman, Grangemouth; D.Steven; A.Taylor; W.Wallace.

THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST

John McKay

1 Timothy 2: 1-7; Exodus 12: 3-11; 16: 13-19; Joshua 3: 3,4

We have spoken together of the wonderful intervention of divine power that secured the apostle Paul in view of God's testimony. Largely we are here because of what came through that distinctive vessel. His ministry was unequalled in the quality of it, calling attention to Christ in heaven, to the fact that His body was upon the earth, to the greatness of divine purposes in love for the saints. The climax of that ministry was reached in the city of Ephesus. In itself that was a tremendous triumph for God. It was the seat of idolatry, the place where that goddess was said to have fallen down from heaven, the centre of Satanic power religiously. In that city Paul's ministry reached its climax as divinely sustained. It is very interesting that Paul leaves a young man in Ephesus. Timothy was a young man and he was left in the place where Paul's ministry reached its height. Now that has application to us in a sense because, although not living in apostolic days, we have been born in days when the testimony of God, so distinctively established, needs to be maintained without modification at its true level. That was the task that was put on Timothy. It was a daunting task for which in himself he was not equal, and thus as Paul writes this epistle he highlights things that would be of cardinal importance in the experience and ministry of this young man if what is of God was to be preserved. That is why I have read from 1 Timothy 2 because into this passage Paul brings this distinctive reference to the uniqueness of the Man Christ Jesus. I want to speak about the Lord Jesus, His uniqueness in the whole universe. In this passage Paul refers to God as our Saviour God, One who has in mind the blessing of the whole of humanity. The breadth and the scope of that needs to enter our souls. He proceeds to speak of God being "one, and the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus". Dear brethren, if things are to be maintained at the divine level it is not through an academic knowledge of the truth but by an appreciation

of the Man Christ Jesus, by an appreciation of His distinctiveness, the One who is described here as the Mediator of God and men.

The statement firstly is that God is one. We need that to be reasserted in these days. "God is one". Men speak glibly of alternative religion. What does it mean? There is even an attempt to give this conflict which is pending in the Middle East a religious flavour. Over against all that we have this clear statement in the scripture that God is one. Let us believe that! Really it is an allusion to all that the Old Testament covers. How precious God's relationships were with His earthly people! Then coming on to the Christian dispensation we have the fulness of divine revelation when he says, "and the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus". The only way that we shall ever know God is in Christ. His uniqueness: who could speak of it fittingly? Mr Darby says, if you refer to the Synopsis on this passage, that 'there is but One. To think of another would be to snatch from Him His glory and from us our perfect consolation'. There is but one, one Mediator. I wonder if He has the place of pre-eminence in our hearts that He should have? There is nobody like Him in the universe of God, "the man Christ Jesus". Paul is not here referring to His official position. He does not speak about the Christ, the One who has official glory; he does not speak about the King; he speaks about "the man Christ Jesus" as if he would draw out the affections of Timothy in relation to the One who alone holds this key place in the universe of God. For a Mediator is needed. We spoke in the earlier reading about the majesty of God. He remains God of the universe, unapproachable, "whom no man has seen, nor is able to see", 1 Tim 6: 16. It is still true. As some impression of the greatness of God comes into our souls, what we find is that a Mediator becomes absolutely essential and only one Person can fill that place. Job asked for a daysman to lay his hand upon God and upon men. Moses, I suppose, in the Old Testament is typical of the mediator, and what we are told about Moses was that "the form of Jehovah doth he behold", Num 12: 8. Christ was greater than that. It was not simply that he beheld it; He was in Himself God over all. The deity of Christ needs to be re-

asserted. Upon it depends our eternal salvation. Only He could take the place of Mediator: "For God is one, and the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus". Does He have the place that He should in your life, in all your affairs, in your local meeting, in your thoughts for the future? Does He have this key place? The Man Christ Jesus will never cease to be the Mediator.

We read in 1 Corinthians 15 that He gives up the kingdom. There will come a moment in the history of the universe when everything will be subordinated to Christ and He will hand all over to Him who is God and Father that God may be all in all. But, blessed be His name, He will remain the Mediator. In eternity He will remain a Man and we shall need His service still. We have Him now, the only person in the universe of God who qualifies to have such a title: "the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus".

When He was here the question was asked, "Art thou the coming one? or are we to wait for another?", Matt 11: 3. Christendom around us, the religious profession, is largely waiting for another. Let it not be that we allow in any sense that there should be another. John the baptist - great man that he was, the forerunner of Christ, the one of whom the Lord Jesus said, "there is not arisen among the born of women a greater" (Matt 11: 11) - at one time when in prison sent messengers to Christ with a message like that; "Art thou the coming one? or are we to wait for another?". What does the Lord say? Go and tell John what you see, what is happening. There were persons who actually witnessed the distinctive power of the operations of Christ. That was the divine answer to any alternative that man could provide. Oh, let us not in any sense be prepared to make way for another. I feel the importance of this lest others should again have too much place among us. History shows how easily that can happen. It was when Moses was on the mountain top that the people said, "this Moses ... we do not know what is become of him", Exod 32: 1. They were conscious of distance in their relationship with Moses and immediately the opportunity for an alternative arose in their minds. The implication is that somebody else was going to take his place

and what ensued was idolatry. There is no alternative in the whole universe of God to Christ: "the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus". Then Paul says, "who gave himself a ransom for all" - God justified Him in the sight of the universe - "the testimony to be rendered in its own times; to which / have been appointed a herald and apostle". Testimony is rendered to the fact that there is no alternative to Christ. It is like the beginning of John's gospel which speaks of Christ as "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him", John 1: 18. The declaration is full; it is complete, and it is in the Person of Christ. That is another unique reference to Him who is the Mediator. None else could declare God; none else could show forth that glory; and the Lord Jesus has done it, having moved into that unique position in the bosom of the Father. He remains there as the One who is the declarer of God. As another has said, the declaration holds whether any get the benefit of it or not. It is not revelation bearing on certain persons, but declaration, bringing out the uniqueness of the only One who could act in such a way, that is Christ.

These well-known Old Testament passages raise in typical language the question of our own appropriation of what is in Him. We need help as appreciating His uniqueness, to appropriate for ourselves what has come within our range in this glorious Man. In Exodus 12 the people are in Egypt under the shelter of the blood. The lamb had to be slain and the word is that they are to take a lamb. It is a very interesting suggestion. I wonder if we have all done that. There is no suggestion of shortage here. There were evidently plenty of lambs available. Food in the book of Genesis is in short supply and the administration of the true Joseph is needed to make it available. But when we come to Exodus, it seems that there were plenty of lambs available. The test is as to whether the people are going to appropriate it. What is in Christ for us needs to be appropriated. Paul speaks in Romans 3: 24 of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus - that is, the redemption is there. You might say that God's salvation is available in Him, but then he says also "in whom we have redemption", Eph 1: 7. I would like to encourage us

all to be among those who appropriate what is in Christ for our benefit. We will not get the benefit unless we do it. The lamb had to be taken and it was in the house for four days. How the affections would be drawn out of every person in that house by the perfection of that creature. Then it had to be slain. The death of Christ is a tremendous reality. Our blessing eternally rests upon it but the lamb was not only slain, it was roast with fire. The intensity of the divine judgment against sin which Christ bore brought out His perfection and that becomes the food of the saints. Then it says, "neither shall ye break a bone thereof", Exod 12: 46. Let us make sure that what we are going on with is a whole Christ. Christendom is full of the appropriation of certain features and the exclusion of others. What we have is the privilege of appropriating a whole Christ; that is, we take account of His deity, His manhood, His virgin birth. If the virgin birth of Christ has a slur cast upon it, the whole of our blessing is undermined. These things are being challenged in the area of Christendom around us. How needful it is that we should appropriate a whole Christ. The people as eating the lamb are ready to move: "And thus shall ye eat it: your loins shall be girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand". Are we ready to move? One day we are going right out of this scene, never to return. Morally we are to be clear of it already as feeding on the lamb roast with fire. Let us be encouraged that not only are these things objectively in the One who is unique in God's universe but they are to be appropriated for our benefit. As Mr Darby comments in one of his letters, all that Christ is, He is for me! Thus we sang:

'Thy fulness, Lord, is now for me,
All my fresh springs are hid in Thee'

(Hymn 281)

Let us appropriate what is available, being enriched by it, and let us find in result that we are in God's testimony in a way that is more pleasing to Him.

In Exodus chapter 16 we have the manna referred to. It is Christ as food for wilderness circumstances. If we are rightly in the

testimony of God we have left the world as a system. It no longer has domination over us. What is going to sustain us is divine provision for wilderness circumstances. Does God not know the circumstances that we are in? The manna is the divine answer to the need. The people were marked by weakness but there is an abundance of grace that provides in order that they should be built up. Notice the reference here to the voice of Aaron. When Aaron spoke to the people "they turned toward the wilderness" (v 10). The only thing to keep us out of the world is the voice of Christ. It is not to be a question of adhering to brethren's requirements or regulations but rather of hearkening to the voice of Christ. It was the voice of the great priest. What a touch of sympathy that gives! And as they responded, turning towards the wilderness, the glory appeared. The God who has redeemed us in Christ is fully able to provide all that we need to take us right through the wilderness in a way that is in keeping with His own glory. So it says that the manna was on the face of the wilderness, "something fine, granular, fine as hoar-frost, on the ground". It took the shape of the wilderness. It speaks of Jesus as He was in the days of His flesh. I believe that we have much to learn yet as to what God found in Christ as Man upon the earth, those thirty-three and a half years so distinctive, so unique. Read the gospels for they are an abiding testimony to an order of humanity that had never been seen on earth before, manhood that has now become the food of those who will as divinely exhorted appropriate what is available. Let us do it, dear brethren! Let us take the omer and let us fill it! Let us appropriate what is there so that, in spite of the fact that it is still wilderness, we shall come to realise that there is something available that we can rest in. We are not yet in final circumstances; we are still on the way. Exodus 16 gives us the first reference in Scripture to the Sabbath. God's rest is secured in Christ and in some sense we are to reach that before we are finally taken out of this scene as conscious that God has provided it for us.

At the end of the wilderness journey, when we come to Joshua 3, we find "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth". The

ark comes into view in the wilderness. It was not there at the Red Sea. What is stressed at the Red Sea is the rod of Jehovah, the breaking of the power of death in view of the release of the people for Himself. But what comes into view in the wilderness is the ark of the covenant, typical of the distinctive leadership of Christ. In chapter 3 of Joshua the word is, "When ye see the ark ... and the priests the Levites bearing it, then remove from your place, and go after it". It is wonderful to realise that the Man of whom we have said so much, who holds our affections, is the Man by whom we will gain entrance to the final order of things which is the divine mind for our possession. God has in mind that the saints, experiencing as they do so much pressure in wilderness circumstances, should enter into rest. It says in 1 Chronicles 17: 9 "that they may dwell in a place of their own, and be disturbed no more". You think of God speaking like that about His people. He knows the pressures, the difficulties and the struggles, but what is in His mind is that we shall have a place of our own and be disturbed no more. The Man who is going to lead us into that place is none less than Christ Himself. "When ye see the ark" - think of how the children of Israel would keep their eyes upon it! It is only Christ that can lead us into the area of privilege. We are on the eve of the Lord's day. What is before us is entrance into a realm of which the world knows nothing. We shall reach it through our link with Him. Let us be ready!

What is in mind in Joshua 3 is the conquest of the Jordan. The river overflowing all its banks at the time of harvest indicates the intensity of the opposition calculated to prevent the people reaching the final inheritance that God intended they should have. What happens is that the ark goes forward and, as the feet of the priests touch the waters, they recede so that the people go over. What a powerful, distinctive movement it was, but what was needed at this point as at every point on the way through was that the people should appropriate it and reach the land. Dear brethren, everything that is for the blessing of the whole universe is in Christ, but it is only those who appropriate it through the grace that God Himself gives who get the full benefit. May we do so and realise that not only is He

distinctive in the whole universe but He is absolutely indispensable in the life of the believer.

GLASGOW

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PRECIOUS CHILDREN

There were doubtless many children amongst the Christians who received the epistles of Peter. One of the first things he wrote about was that they all had been redeemed, or bought, by the precious *blood* of Christ "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot". The believers, on their part, were to love and to value each other in word and in practice. The gift of the Holy Spirit would help them in doing this and to each would be the *preciousness*. In his second epistle Peter wrote about the precious *faith*, connected with the precious *promises* which help all who enjoy these things in an increasing way.

Everyone knows that a precious thing is not only valued for what it is, but also because of its usefulness. Thus in many parts of Scripture we read of children whom God valued because there could serve Him in some way. Even as a babe Moses was "fair to God", which means that his great work was already foreseen in heaven. One thing that parents think of in faith at household baptisms is that their child may be converted and become useful in time to the Lord. Have you answered to your baptism?

J.C.Evershed