

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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“SITTING, CLOTHED AND SENSIBLE”

Luke 8: 35-39; Romans 12: 1-5; 2 Timothy 1: 7-9; 1 Timothy 3: 1-4

J.R. It is suggested that we consider the word "sensible" in chapter 8 of Luke and the same word in 2 Timothy 1 and "sober, discreet" in chapter 3. We have the extreme case of the demoniac found "sitting, clothed and sensible". It has often been said that from verse 26 of this chapter 8 we have the man and the woman and the child, the component parts of a local meeting, and this man is to take on responsibility, as every brother should, and, whereas he was restless, could not be subdued, he was subdued and "sitting, clothed and sensible". This word "sensible" seems to be an important feature to mark each one of us. We begin with this man. He is not long in the way. He is just newly converted, shall we say, but he has these three qualities. "Sitting" would be an important feature; "clothed", too, and then "sensible". He desires to go with the Lord when He departed, but the Lord says, "Return to thine house". That is, he was to fulfil responsibility in his own place; hence the need of this word "sensible", that is, having a right judgment, "sober", "of wise discretion". The same word is translated in a different way in these four scriptures, but I think the importance of being sensible needs to lay hold of us.

J.S. Would being subdued - he was sitting at the feet of Jesus - be necessary if we are to have this character of being sensible?

J.R. I am sure that is right. That is what had happened to him. It says they went to see what had happened to him. What happened was they "came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting, clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus". That is a very important attitude to have, no matter what comes in, whatever happens, to be able to sit "clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus".

J.M. Clothing would be external and would be seen by everyone, perhaps something that God had done for the man, but "sensible" is

his own state of mind.

J.R. Exactly. You wonder where these clothes came from. He wore no clothes, but here he is clothed. Where did he get them? It must have been clothing that the Lord could approve of. The first clothing was the coats of skin - was it not? - with which God clothed Adam. Adam and his wife were clothed in coats of skin so that Adam would not say to Eve, You are to blame, and Eve could not say to Adam, You were responsible. They were both clothed suitably. God Himself clothed them in coats of skin at the cost of the life of another.

J.M. I read that recently and was impressed by it. He did not just leave these coats at the roadside so that they would find them. He clothed them. They would fit beautifully.

J.R. They would be suitable to God Himself; and so this clothing would be suitable to the Lord. He is composed, he is of a right mind, he is sensible. This is the way to it as our brother is saying: "at the feet of Jesus" - "sitting, clothed and sensible". He would qualify for taking responsibility locally. He is apparently alone. He is in the testimony alone as far as we know, but he could have been the gathering point for others.

J.M. Are the two priests in the Old Testament who offered strange fire a helpful contrast to this? There was fierce activity and so on, something has to be done, whereas this man is not in that at all.

J.R. That is right. He is perfectly composed. What a change took place with this man! We are all like him - tend to be restless. Our minds work rove to and fro, here and there, and wander, but this is the answer for everyone who desires to help locally. It is to be sitting.

A.McK. The reference in verse 36 is that he is healed. It seems there was something deeper that had to be attended to before he could arrive at this position.

J.R. Exactly. It says in Mark that "no one was able to subdue him" (chap 5: 4), but the Lord subdued Him; He came under the Lord's authority. He would come into the kingdom in that sense.

A.McK. This would be the full working out of the gospel.

P.G. The Spirit would give you the ability to be suitably at the feet of Jesus.

J.R. He certainly would. We get that in 2 Timothy 1. What kind of spirit have we received? In Luke it is Jesus, and in Romans 12 it is God who "has dealt to each a measure of faith", and in 2 Timothy it is the Spirit, the kind of spirit we have received. All this would contribute to being sensible, "of wise discretion". It is important at the present time to have this feature of being sensible, "of wise discretion", "sober, discreet", of sound mind.

M.W. It would appear that the one and only thing this man wanted after this experience was to be with Jesus. He was not thinking about service or anything else like that, and then he gets under direction. Would you comment on that?

J.R. He was so satisfied, content to be sitting at the feet of Jesus. He was so happy in that setting that he wanted to be with Him wherever He went, but the Lord puts a man like this in the testimony and, according to Romans 12, in a locality, to work out things locally, to merge in the body with a measure of faith, a proportion of faith.

R.S.R. In chapter 10 it says of Mary, "having sat down at the feet of Jesus was listening to his word" (v 39). Do you think that the man would be ready for instruction and, being sensible, he would think rationally?

J.R. Surely he would. He gets his instruction: "Return to thine house and relate how great things God has done for thee".

J.S. Would that be a great contrast to what had marked him before? It says, "did not abide in a house, but in the tombs" (v 27). Do you think the Lord would indicate to him that he was to take up responsibility in a sober way in regard to his own house first of all?

J.R. Exactly. What a change there would be in this man's house! What a difference from what he had been before! - living in tombs, as you say, and here he is able to sit down and consider, weigh

things over with a sound mind - with discretion, to use another expression.

D.McG. At one point Paul lost his spirit and said to the high priest, "God will smite thee, whited wall" (Acts 23: 3) but he immediately judged himself. But when he is standing before Festus and Agrippa and was attacked and called mad he says, "I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but utter words of truth and soberness", Acts 26: 25.

J.R. Exactly: he was able to compose himself. We all tend to get agitated sometimes but we can return to this important setting. Maybe we do not sit enough. Maybe we do not contemplate enough, do not think enough, think at the feet of Jesus, instead of thinking our own thoughts. What a sobering, contented situation it is!

E.S. Is it a question of what influence we are under? It speaks of him as a "possessed man". We will be under one influence or another, but under the influence of Jesus we are restful, sensible, in accord with the peace, longsuffering, and other things that marked Him.

J.R. "In his shadow have I rapture and sit down" (Song of Sol 2: 3), the shadow of the apple-tree. It is the influence of Jesus. The man is under the influence of Jesus here. He had been possessed by demons and now he is possessed by the Lord Jesus.

E.S. The Spirit would maintain us in that. It is interesting that in Luke they were to remain in the city till they were "clothed with power from on high", chap 24: 49.

J.R. Quite so. They remained contentedly, happily.

N.J.H. There is a footnote to 2 Timothy 4: 5 that might bear that out: 'sober clearness of mind resulting from exemption from false influences'.

J.R. It is the same word, I think, with different translations. Say what you have in mind.

N.J.H. It is false influence of which we have to be kept clear.

J.R. Exactly, and the only way to be clear of false influences is to come thoroughly under the influence of Jesus, "at the feet of Jesus". Can we eliminate every other influence and sit "clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus"?

N.J.H. Is it also being clear of what intoxicates, what takes possession of the man?

J.R. Very good.

J.S. Would Paul have something of this in his mind after the conversion of the jailor? It says, "And they spoke to him the word of the Lord", Acts 16: 32. He would be submissive to the Lord in that way.

J.R. The subduing word of the Lord; quite so.

P.G. "The feet of Jesus" would be His walk here.

J.R. Quite so. There never were feet like His, and this man was sitting there. Paul said he sat at the feet of Gamaliel. It is a question of learning, taking on the features of Jesus, by sitting at His feet. It is a subject, learning condition. So in Romans 12 we have how we can fit in in our localities with a measure of faith. It speaks in verse 3 about a "measure of faith" and in verse 6 about "the proportion of faith". We all have a measure and we all have a proportion and we are meant to fit in together in the "one body in Christ". The "one body in Christ" is a universal idea, but it works out locally: "to every one that is among you, not to have high thoughts above what he should think; but to think so as to be wise". It is a balanced outlook so I can fit into my local meeting knowing my place in the body and leaving room for others having their place in the body. I have a measure of faith, others have a measure; so I "think so as to be wise". Again it is the idea of being sensible. There is a note - So as to have a sober judgment, 'to think soberly', as 'sensible', Luke 8: 35. It is thus each one of us as "sitting, clothed and sensible" can fit into the local company without clashing, without rivalry, just finding our place there.

J.S. Do you think that coming intelligently to present out bodies a living sacrifice has a bearing on this? It seems that, having learned how to yield ourselves to the subduing power of divine grace, we come to this point where we definitely commit our bodies a living sacrifice. The apostle is saying it is an intelligent service to do that.

J.R. Exactly. Really, I suppose, the man did that in a sense. As our brother said, instead of being possessed by demons he was possessed by the Lord and committed himself, his body being a sanctified vessel in view of the will of God.

R.S.R. Is it not a triumph for God that the whole man is secured? In Romans 3 all his members are awry - his mouth, his feet and his ways, and so on - but the man is secured for God.

J.R. Yes. In chapter 6 he yields his members, one by one. Yielding suggests the subduing grace and power of the Lord Jesus, but here he presents his body. That is the complete idea, as you say. 'Presents', as our brother says, is a kind of intelligent, priestly action.

R.S.R. Why is it "by the compassions of God"?

J.R. . I suppose that is what preceded in this epistle. The compassions of God come out, His mercy for us, His provision for us.

R.S.R. Do you not think it would be that God is compassionate towards us and the best thing we can do is to yield ourselves *in toto* for the will and pleasure of God?

J.R. It is the influence, the result of the appreciation of God's compassions. You mentioned the kind of state we were in in the early chapters of this book, but then the compassions of God come in and meet the whole situation.

P.B-n. Would it be the effect of sitting at the feet of Jesus?

J.R. I think so. What do you say about sitting at the feet of Jesus?

P.B-n. I have been thinking quite a bit of late about the restfulness and composure as under the influence of His love.

J.R. Exactly, that is just it. That was the man's base, you might say. He set out from that. He is to go to his house and testify and so on, but his base is sitting at the feet of Jesus, sitting clothed and sensible, and here he is fitting in in his own locality "so as to be wise", being sensible. He has a measure and others have a measure and it all fits in in proportion according to verse 6, "the proportion of faith".

P.B-n. Is it not very touching - "a living sacrifice"? I think that would be the effect, that you present your body a living sacrifice.

J.R. He is like an offering priest. The offering priest offered a dead sacrifice, but this is offering a living sacrifice. That is, the rest of my life is to be sanctified in view of the will of God.

J.G. Being wise seems to be linked with the control of the mind: "to think so as to be wise". Earlier it says, "but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" in relation to getting away from worldly things - "be not conformed to this world". Do you think the mind bears on what is "sensible"?

J.R. Exactly; the most important faculty a believer has is his mind, what he sets his mind on. Everything begins in the mind. All actions begin in the mind. Whether we move one way or another depends on the mind. We have in chapter 7, "I myself with the mind serve God's law", (v 25): that is the thinking faculty. The thinking faculty is in this direction: "I myself with the mind". Here it is "the renewing of your mind".

J.S. So when he says, "So then I myself with the mind serve God's law", do you think he has come to it that there is something in himself that will delight in God's law? What a change that makes from my own will!

J.R. In fact he says so. He says, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man", chap 7: 22. He identifies the inward man, which is the work of God. He comes this way and then he presents his body a living sacrifice. He regards his body as a sanctified vessel in view of the will of God.

J.S. It is as coming to that point that we find out that God's will is that I should have part in this "one body in Christ", coming to know my own place in it, but also to respect the place of others in it.

J.R. Exactly. That is where "so as to be wise" comes in. That is, I realise I have a measure, but then I reckon others have measures too, and the fitting in of it makes for proportions. It is a measure each one has, but then the proportion in verse 6 makes for one whole; it is a proportion of the whole. The human body is perfectly proportioned.

A.McK. Satan got in initially through the mind and then through the man, but the way back is the same: God gets the mind, then He gets the man again.

J.R. Exactly. I am glad of what you say about the mind because it is a most important matter. All exhortations are answered first of all by the mind: minded to fulfil any exhortation.

A.McK. In Philippians Paul says, "let this mind be in you", chap 2: 5.

J.R. That is the trend or bent of mind that was in Christ Jesus.

J.M. There are very great possibilities for the renewed mind. Our brother has just quoted Philippians 2, and also there is Paul's word: "leading captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ", 2 Cor 10: 5. I do not know what that scripture means to you, but I find it very difficult practically. Would you say anything about it?

J.R. Let us just read it: "overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God, and leading captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ".

R.S.R. "One body in Christ" would preserve us from independency, would it not? It says, "and each one members of the other".

J.R. That is right. That is true universally, but according to verse 3 it works out locally. It says, "For I say, through the grace which has been given to me, to every one that is among you, not to have high thoughts" - that is how it works out locally. We have the same thing in 1 Corinthians 12. It speaks about the human body, and Paul says, "Now ye are Christ's body" (v 27) - that is the Corinthians - not 'the

body of Christ', but of that character. So things work out locally. Do we not need this - "to think so as to be wise"? So in 2 Timothy we have the kind of spirit we have received: "For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion", and that is very much needed, of course, at the present time. With the church in ruin publicly we find our way, the way of righteousness, in the midst of the ruin, so we need very much this "wise discretion", 'a quiet, sound or sober mind' (see note to verse 7).

J.M. This is not exactly subjective. It is not a matter of our feelings which may go one way or another. Is it not important to be objective in our thoughts and feelings?

J.R. What do you mean by objective?

J.M. Well, when a matter is at stake it may happen that the brother that I like best is in the wrong: am I to be influenced by that? That is what I would call subjective. My feelings, my soul, lie towards him because he is a friend of mine. Objective means that I know what the truth is in spite of who is involved or my feelings. I cast myself in relation to the truth.

J.R. Very good. We were reading recently in 2 Samuel where Nathan puts objectively before David about the poor man's lamb. Then he applies it to himself. I see what you mean. It would involve going by principles. We are to go by principle and not be governed by persons - a very important thing too. "Wise discretion" would involve that.

G.McC. Is that confirmed in Galatians where Paul asks, "who has bewitched you", chap 3: 1? He brings in the antidote to that - faith in contrast to what had been brought in. There was a lack of principle because they were fulfilling the law instead of faith.

J.R. Exactly, "who has bewitched you?" "Ye ran well; who has stopped you ...?", chap 5: 7.

G.McC. The idea of "who".

J.R. Quite so. What influence have we come under? - a very important question!

P.G. The present occasion would be an evidence of living relations with each other and with divine Persons.

J.R. Yes, you mean this meeting, this occasion? Surely, and we need to be anxious to preserve these conditions. The enemy would disrupt all this. The Lord delights in the brethren being together, happily and in unity, but the enemy sees it and he will do his best to disrupt it.

P.G. We enjoy a good deal together.

J.R. We do indeed, but the enemy is out to disrupt it, so let us be watchful. "Wise discretion" is very much needed at the present time,

D.S. "Wise discretion" would be moving in the spirit of Christ. Principles are right - they must be maintained - but we need to be maintained in the spirit of Christ to persuade all the brethren.

J.R. It is 'a quiet, sound or sober mind'.

R.S.R. This would refer to manhood. "For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power", that is - if I remember rightly - the ability to do things.

J.R. It is "of power, and of love, and of wise discretion. There is a balance: "power ... love ... wise discretion".

D.S. "We entreat for Christ, Be reconciled to God", 2 Cor 5: 20. Your endeavour is to secure every man for Christ, every man for God. That is your objective.

J.R. Surely.

M.W. How do you read this? "For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice" - it is not 'cowardice' but "a spirit of cowardice". Now, can we read on: "a spirit ... of power, and of love, and of wise discretion", not the thing itself, but a spirit of it?

J.R. It must involve the gift of the Holy Spirit, but what kind of spirit is He? He is not "a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion", so we have the wherewithal in the Spirit. On the one hand at the feet of Jesus, "sitting, clothed and sensible", on the other hand, accepting the measure of faith God has given me, the

proportion of faith, and along with that we have this kind of spirit to help us in the day in which we are, a difficult day indeed, a day of public confusion, but He has given us this kind of spirit - "of power, and of love, and of wise discretion".

M.W. That is very helpful.

J.R. It says in Romans 8, "a spirit of adoption", small 's': "For ye have not received a spirit of bondage again for fear, but ye have received a spirit of adoption", (v 15).

J.S. Does it become in a way almost characteristic of the believer? God has given us these things. Does God look to us to weigh things over, as considering for Him, to look at things with a quiet, sober mind, and see how they are, not only in man's sight, but in God's sight?

J.R. That is most important, I am sure. Weighing over: again it is this idea of sitting, considering, weighing things up soberly, with a sober mind, "wise discretion".

J.S. I get the impression that at the feet of Jesus that man would have been set free from every influence that would have governed him up to that point. He would be under the influence of Christ. It seems to me that if we can weigh things over in the presence of God, this is what is in mind in this.

J.R. The influence of Christ is always available to us. The fact is that we do not resort sufficiently to that influence. We tend to come under other influences and that often causes untold damage and loss of brethren. The influence of Jesus is always available to us at any moment if only we would sit at His feet.

D.S-n. I was thinking of Abigail. She prevented David from acting rashly. The result was that he saw something in her; he says, "blessed be thy discernment, and blessed be thou", 1 Sam 25: 33. That should mark us not only as individuals but in our local meetings.

J.R. Exactly. Would David not have acted in haste? Would haste not have spoiled, caused untold damage, but she was of a sober

mind, "wise discretion", as you say, discernment, so much needed among us at the present time, balance, discernment.

P.B. I was thinking of the desire that the possessed man had to be with Jesus. Sometimes we would rather be there, but Jesus says, No, you go to your own locality. We need to maintain what is proper in our local position.

J.R. That is very good, but he was in his locality from the base of "sitting, clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus". He would not depart from that influence. He would exert that influence in his own place.

P.B-n. We have a mention in Isaiah of "a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment", chap 28: 6. Is that the same thought?

J.R. The same idea I am sure. That is what God can be to us if only we would sit in judgment. It is sitting in judgment, not acting hastily in judgment. I can see the importance of this sitting, soberly considering matters.

P.B-n. Paul says at one point, "but I think that I also have God's Spirit" in a matter of judgment, 1 Cor 7: 40.

J.R. Quite so. Regarding this matter of a small 's', I know that Mr Darby says in a note that it is difficult sometimes to know whether to put a capital 'S' or a small 's' at 'spirit' because the Spirit personally so forms the state of the believer (see Rom 8: 9).

E.S. "But to think so as to be wise": wisdom comes from above. That is where the Christ is; He is sitting there. It brings in the mind there too: "have your mind on the things that are above", Col 3: 2. This is all available to us, to maintain us, it is "peaceful, gentle", Jas 3: 17. Scripture often brings in wisdom: the poor wise man and the wise woman - Joab would have destroyed the city, but she went to the elders and the city was saved (see 2 Sam 20).

J.R. The Lord Jesus is "made to us wisdom", 1 Cor 1: 30. He is available to us as wisdom, if only we would resort more to Him for wisdom instead of acting on our own, sometimes impulsively! The Lord is available, His influence is available, at all times. His wisdom

is available for us if only we would take time like the man at the feet of Jesus "sitting, clothed and sensible". We have to get back to that, it is so basic, so important.

J.S. That wise woman went to all the people in her wisdom. Do we need to take account of the whole locality in that sense?

J.R. She is so wise that she gets the ear of Joab. It would not be easy to get the ear of Joab, but Joab says, "I am listening".

J.R.C. What is the bearing of what we are speaking about in relation to the "testimony of our Lord"?

J.R. It is not a "spirit of cowardice" - which, I suppose, was really a mild, gentle rebuke to Timothy who was overpowered by the ruin coming in - but this kind of spirit: "of power, and of love, and of wise discretion" which would cause us not to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. There is the wherewithal to commit ourselves to the testimony of our Lord, and me His prisoner Paul says; that would be in the limited conditions in which we are. What would you say?

J.R.C. Sometimes we have to confess that that is the very opposite of how we feel ourselves. I was thinking of what was said about David, there was to have been no male left in the morning. That is how he thought it was going to work and he has to listen to the word of discretion. I was wondering if the testimony, therefore, proceeds in the spirit of Jesus.

J.R. Surely. Paul says, "Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony" because we have this kind of spirit. We have the wherewithal in the Spirit and to be governed by that kind of spirit ourselves.

J.R.C. Do you think if we are proceeding on that line that the Lord comes in in relation to justifying what is involved in the testimony?

J.R. Surely. We would have His mind. the man "sitting, clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus" would have His mind, would have that subdued condition.

J.Sp. It speaks about those "who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do", 1 Chron 12: 32. Things had altered in

this epistle. Do you think we have to take account of the conditions in which things are to be done?

J.R. Exactly, hence the need of "wise discretion". Certainly power and love, but "wise discretion" is specially needed in the days in which we are, more so possibly than in the days of the pristine glory of the assembly before the breakdown came in. We need "wise discretion" all the more now in working out divine principles in a day of ruin. Is that in your mind?

J.Sp. Indeed. It was never intended that the assembly should be driven to the wall. I was thinking of what was said quoting from Isaiah about "the spirit of judgment": does it not go on to say '1or strength to them that turn the battle to the gate"?

J.R. Exactly. First of all it is to him: "to him that sitteth in judgment", in a day when the individual is so important. A locality is no more than the personnel in it. It is a question of each one - that is chapter 2. It says, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity ... If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work" (vv 19, 21). It is an individual day in which we are. That needs to be emphasised.

R.S.R. It is a question of right influence, is it not? You are calling attention to him that sitteth in judgment" and then to them, so that the "him", the person, would be influential in a right way.

J.R. The "them" would be composed of individuals who each sit in judgment, persons like that. Each one has this "wise discretion" and sits in judgment and then there is a company. That is what a locality ought to be. Alas! it is not always so, but that is what a locality ought to be.

P.G. That would involve sisters as well as brothers.

J.R. It would. Do not forget the sisters. They are sometimes examples to us. They sit; they sit and listen. The brothers are

responsible; they do all the speaking and may not always say what is right. The sisters sit and maybe consider more than the brothers do.

P.G. The brothers function in the public way, but the sisters are part of the soul of the company.

J.R. . Exactly, a very important part, and sometimes it is good to listen to what the sisters have to say. That would be in private, of course. They would not speak publicly, but it is good to consult them sometimes.

E.S. Perhaps everyone might not understand what it means to "turn the battle to the gate".

J.R. I suppose it has been applied like Matthew 18: "tell it to the assembly" (v 17).

E.S. The gate was the place of administration, and it was where principles were established.

J.R. Principles bring us to the gate, and then there is administration based on principles.

E.S. Would it identify the principle at stake?

J.R. Surely, but maybe they would be identified before. "But if thy brother sin against thee" (v 15); there must be something identified. "Tell it to the assembly" is really coming into another area, away from the conflict to another area.

E.S. The matter would be made clear so that we know what we are administrating in relation to.

J.R. Surely; that is important.

R.S.R. Does not to "turn the battle to the gate" suggest a right conclusion?

J.R. Yes, and the judgment that is passed would be definite and if it involved someone being withdrawn from, that person would know what he had to judge to be recovered. It would be a definite statement. It is not to be left vaguely. It is meant to be identified, as you say, and so if it sorrowfully involves somebody being withdrawn

from, he or she knows what he or she has to judge. It is in view of recovery, or ought to be.

J.S. When that point is reached definitely does it not need to be respected? There is a kind of illustration of this in chapter 4 of Ruth when Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there. Then "he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit down here. And they sat down" (v 2); he goes over things and something is definitely arrived at.

J.R. Exactly. So Matthew 18 comes down to two, or three - "where two or three" (v 20), but what these "two or three" arrive at has the same authority, or ought to have, as the assembly had in the previous verse. "Tell it to the assembly", and where the two or three arrive at a judgment, it has the same quality and the same authority, which is important to understand.

J.S. Was the Lord providing there for a "day of small things"? He says, "Again I say to you". The Lord could look down the dispensation and see that the assembly in its outward glory and dignity could not be seen as at the beginning, but the same principles are to govern.

J.R. That is very important.

P.B-n. Referring again to the gate, does it not emphasise the importance of the local assembly, I mean God's rights in a locality?

J.R. Yes, God's rights in a locality. It is a broken day in which we are. "If two of you": there may be only two persons who have the light of the assembly and desire to be governed by the principles of the assembly and desire to have the character of the assembly. That is the kind of day we are in. So I thought of this last scripture in 1 Timothy which refers to the qualifications for the overseer, and among these qualifications is "sober, discreet". I am thinking of the importance of elders in a locality. It says in 1 Timothy 5: 17: "Let the elders who take the lead among the saints". The elders are meant to function and to give a lead, not necessarily do the most speaking, but their leadership would be by example. It is most important that such persons should be sober and discreet, that such persons

should have a sound mind, to influence the locality rightly. Many have been lost by leaders in a locality exerting a wrong influence. How important it is that overseers (and while overseers are not appointed at the present time, they are a necessary component of a local gathering) should display these features - "sensible", "of wise discretion", "sober, discreet". They are not officially leaders. Leadership would be moral, but nevertheless it is a most important feature in localities that there should be right leadership of this quality.

A.McK. At the gate there was a well.

J.R. At Bethlehem there was.

A.McK. So that you would normally expect those who were administering to be marked by features of spirituality. The word to the Galatians is, "ye who are spiritual", chap 6: 1.

J.R. That is right: of that character. I can see the importance of this feature coming through in overseers, that is persons who are meant to be looked up to. It says in 1 Timothy 5: "Let the elders who take the lead among the saints well be esteemed worthy of double honour, specially those labouring in word and teaching". Elders are local; today they are not appointed. It is moral, but nevertheless there needs to be leadership of this quality in every locality - "sober, discreet", of a sound mind, "sensible" - no doubt acquired through sitting at the feet of Jesus, that kind of quality coming through, exemplified by those who give a lead in localities. How many have been lost through wrong leadership in localities!

J.M. One of the tragedies we can look back on over the years is when localities have been lost.

J.R. Responsible persons were not characterised by this feature of sensibility, weighing things up, investigating on behalf of the brethren, able to give a lead, able to set out what the situation is in a clear way to carry the brethren. Would that be important?

J.M. There is a tremendous responsibility on such persons who have led saints astray in such a wholesale way.

J.S. Making careful enquiry or investigation is very important. There is an obligation upon persons who give a lead in localities to do that.

J.R. Exactly. Anyone may say it is none of our business, but it is really, and the Lord would hold certain persons responsible. There is an angel in each of the seven assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3. In one sense every one is responsible, but there are some more responsible than others.

P.B. It says , "how shall he take care of the assembly of God?" (v 5).

J.R. Quite so, so that is another qualification, "conducting his own house well, having his children in subjection with all gravity". There could have been some breaking bread in the locality who did not have this quality: such did not qualify for eldership, did not qualify to be a leader or an elder, but I am thinking specially of "sober, discreet", this feature of wisdom in those who give a lead, to carry the brethren rightly, to influence in a right direction.

J.S. Would one thing that comes into this be accuracy in statements that are made? You are to consider whether things are factual and accurate.

J.R. Quite so; and then, of course, the importance of standing by principles and naming the principles involved in any particular matter.

N.J.H. The apostle does not permit any watering down of things. It says, "The overseer then must be", and as to those who minister: "And let these be first proved, then let them minister" (v 10). It is quite stringent.

J.R. It is stringent. It would be moral today. There is nothing official today, but nevertheless the feature of right leadership in every locality is very important, and right influence in a place. A leader might not necessarily say the most but he leads by example.

D.S-n. It says, "Let the elders who take the lead among the saints" (v 17) - among the saints.

J.R. Exactly, not 'over the saints'. It is almost like in Peter's epistle: "The elders which are among you I exhort ... shepherd the flock of God which is among you, exercising oversight, not by necessity, but

willingly; not for base gain, but readily; not as lording it over your possessions but being models for the flock", 1 Pet 5: 1-3: This is a most important feature for those who are older.

D.S. Overseers would lead to the feet of Jesus and you would find that you could not have features that were contrary to this overseership at the feet of Jesus, and also you could not move ahead of the Lord and you could not be behind Him.

J.R. That is right. The man in chapter 8 of Luke begins this way, and so would continue: "sitting, clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus". That feature goes right through these scriptures, I think.

A.A.B. As to the reference in verse 21 of the fifth chapter, "that thou keep these things without prejudice, doing nothing by favour", would the balanced mind we have been speaking of produce that kind of administration?

J.R. That is very important because these two features have to be judged with us: prejudice and preference. *Persons* come into a matter where often they ought not to come into it. *Principles* are to govern us.

J.M. I fully support what you are saying about those who are in the lead, but, in the assembly properly, it is not like in the established church where you have two or three who know what they are doing and the rest following they do not know what. One of the strong themes in the book of Proverbs, I understand, is that a young man might learn discretion. It is meant that this will go through the whole structure of the local company.

J.R. Quite so. We have had that, the man in Luke 8 and so on, but there is a special obligation on persons who give a lead, those who take on some responsibility, who have a measure of faith. A measure of faith may involve somebody taking some responsibility, maybe some feature of leadership or influence. I can see the importance of elder brethren or brethren who are looked up to being marked by this feature of discretion.

J.M. It is really a feature of the Lord's love for the saints to provide such leaders.

J.R. Exactly.

J.S. Do we have to learn this? You do not wait until you are fifty or sixty and suddenly take this on. We have to come through the learning process and it is a good thing if we start to learn early.

J.R. Surely, we cannot start too early. The man started early enough in Luke 8 and it is open to anyone young to present his body a living sacrifice and have this spirit of "power, and of love, and of wise discretion".

DUNDEE

28 March 1992

Key to initials

A.A.Brown, Grangemouth; P.Buchan, Kirkcaldy; P.B-n,P.Buchan, Peterhead; J.R.Cumming, Edinburgh; P.Grant; J.Gray; N.J.Henry, Glasgow; G.McCrone, Brechin; D.McGregor, Lochgelly; A.McKay,Brechin; J.Mather; J.Renton , Edinburgh; R.S.Renton Edinburgh; D.S-l, D.Scougal, Edinburgh; D.S-n, D.Steven, Glasgow; E.Steedman, Grangemouth; J.Strachan; J.Spinks, Grangemouth; M.Wood

MINISTRY IN EDINBURGH

(i) STEADFASTNESS

E.W.Johnston

Luke 9: 51, 59-62; Ruth 1: 14-22

I am thinking, beloved brethren, about the need for steadfastness. I feel the need to set ourselves related to the divine will and pleasure. In Revelation (chap 4: 11), it says, "and for thy will they were, and they have been created". We need to sit down and quietly think over our pathway - maybe up to this moment - as in the presence of God. There is infinite perfection in Jesus. To have our minds occupied with what has been expressed in Jesus will hold us, even the very youngest of us. Hebrews refers to an anchor both sure and steadfast (see chap 6: 19) and in this life of coming and going and swaying, a world of indifference, a world of casualness we need to be anchored. Casualness is a peculiar feature of this world, and we need to be steadfast in our minds in relation to what is for the divine will and pleasure.

We get here the perfect example in Jesus: "And it came to pass when the days of his receiving up were fulfilled, that he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem". Previous in the chapter there had been the expression of His glory, something to entrance our hearts and to hold them, presently (as it will eternally) in the midst of a world where there is the expression of man's glory and man's will. There is a certain hidden glory at the present time that is to be in the hearts of the saints. There was that hidden in the heart of Jesus – "thy law is within my heart", Ps 40: 8 - which related entirely and absolutely to the will of God: "Behold, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me - To do thy good pleasure, my God, is my delight", Ps 40: 7,8. In the day to come this whole world will be transformed when the dominion of Christ will take over the reins of government and there will be an order of things exactly and entirely for the divine will and pleasure. Meantime, it would appear that there is nothing related to what is for God's pleasure here

except what is in the hearts of the saints, but through all that has come in these two thousand years of this long dispensation, this narrow way has gone through. The Lord speaks about the narrow way and about the broad way. The broad way would mean man's will and man's opinions, man's mind dominating whatever they could. In the present day there seems to be a kind of think-as-you-please attitude, but God's mind and God's will is the narrow way. The Lord says, the narrow way leads to life; the broad way leads to destruction (see Matt 7: 13,14). We need to be simple in these things and to bring it home to young people that they should become attracted to Jesus, their minds settled. We get this perfect expression of it in Jesus: "he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem". There are wonderful results of this one Man here for the divine will and pleasure. In the garden He said, "not my will , but thine be done", Luke 22: 42. It meant that He would go to Jerusalem, face all the ignominy and shame and scorn and spitting and the cross itself; the will of God was carried through in its perfection and entirety. That has been absolutely established now that Christ is in glory, established immutably. God in the gospel is pointing to that Man in the glory and every heart should be turned to Him in relation to His will, His pleasure.

I thought about Ruth as an individual. We come to these matters individually. There was a famine in the land. God has allowed certain things but He has designed the infinite resources that we can enjoy. I want to encourage each one of us, the youngest too, that we can be steadfastly minded in relation to the will of God. We have to sit down: we have to consider these things. One of the prophets says, "Consider your ways", Hag 1: 6. That is each one individually. What way are we on? Is it the narrow way? Is it the broad way? The narrow way leads to life. What do you understand by life? Here, in Ruth, Elimelech and Naomi had gone away, they had left the land and gone to Moab. There was a famine there in the fields of Moab and death - the husbands had died - and the daughters-in-law came back with Naomi, a sorrowful woman. Deep down in Naomi's heart there were feelings after God and for the

gatherings of the saints, we might say - let us put it that way - where God would feed His people. God in His compassion was feeding them, giving them bread. We have known something of this, 'whose God is king' (which is what Elimelech means). Previous to that it says "every man did what was right in his own eyes", Judg 21: 25. But then God's will must predominate and we come under this benign, beautiful dominion, "translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love", Col 1: 13. That is a wonderful dominion! You young people, take it in. It is not hardness or demand but "the kingdom of the Son of his love" - a benign dominion, absolute and powerful, expressed even in the present time. One day it will come into expression publicly, but meantime the secret and power of the gospel and ministry are to bring us into His dominion, so that we are here related to the will of God - wonderful thing! Some of us have been brought into this and we appreciate it. Ruth comes with Naomi: she must have been attracted to Naomi who would express features of the hidden work of God in her soul. There is a hidden work of God in each of our souls, not in full expression although it would come out, but there is something hidden, and there was something in Naomi in these circumstances of depression and opposition. She was going back to Bethlehem which means house of bread. Think of God providing these things! - Jesus the Bread of life, this life in expression. She is coming back a sorrowful woman: "Call me not Naomi - call me Mara", bitterness: she felt the bitterness but there must have been something about Naomi. There is something in the older brethren and it is for us who are older to show something of the work of God, of what there is in the way of steadfastness of mind so that the young people can be attracted. We feel the responsibility of this. What is there with me? Is there anything with me that maintains steadfastness of mind in relation to the will of God so that God has something here in the way of an inheritance and at the same time there is something for us to enjoy, to respond to Him.

So here we have this widow-woman. There is what is of the character that says "I sit a queen, and I am not a widow; and I shall in no wise see grief", Rev 18: 7, but, quietly, powerfully,

unobtrusively, the work of God goes on in souls. Ruth here must have wondered at Naomi. Orpah goes back to her people and her gods and Ruth had evidently been considering. It is a wonderful thing to get down and consider things before God. There is nothing more powerful: the enemy is defeated when you are on your knees before God. You are in the presence of divine power, divine grace, divine love. These are wonderful things to experience but they are reality. Ruth must have seen something distinctive in Naomi. I have experienced it myself, not understood much, but seen something that attracts you - satisfaction, peace, steadfastly-minded persons who are related to the will of God. It says, "And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave to her" - wonderful thing: knowing little, but introduced into an order of things which would subsist in life. Then Naomi says, "Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back". Naomi was faithful she tested this young woman, and Ruth said'. "Do not intreat me to leave thee". These are beautiful words: we know the words; we have read them often. There is something quietly going on in this book. Another has said that there is quietness, and growth goes on quietly - the barley harvest and the wheat harvest - things going on quietly and silently. Ruth had come to something: "Do not intreat me to leave thee, to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people". But then "And when she saw that she was steadfastly minded". That is what I am trying to get at. It is the features of Jesus coming into expression in her: "And when she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she left off speaking to her. And they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they came to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and the women said, Is this Naomi?" There is a return by Naomi, coming to the house of bread. "And she said to them, Call me not Naomi - call me Mara". It means there was a humble spirit in her. Ruth had gone with Naomi and had come to the house of bread.

"So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, who returned out of the fields of Moab". (Jeremiah

speaks about the "arrogance of Moab", chap 48: 29). In the ways of Jesus, the lowly, humble spirit of Jesus, you are engaged with that blessed Man. He "emptied himself, taking a bondman's form" so that the will of God might be established here. It is persons with a spirit like Jesus who get the gain of a steadfast mind. And it says here, "and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of the barleyharvest", the expression of all that comes in as a result of Christ in resurrection! It comes into your life - a renewed order of things established for ever, an order of things that death cannot enter into, and Christ there and we enjoying things here, quietly it may be, yet quietly the silent growth is going on. So we have to set our minds to go steadfastly in relation to what is for the will of God.

Just a simple impression, beloved brethren! May we just think over these things and be helped for His Name's sake.

EDINBURGH

14 April 1992

(ii) RECOVERY

J.D.Gray

Job 33: 15-30

The way of moral death is a sore way. That is what this scripture brings out prior to bringing out the recovery for the sinner. It

describes, I suppose, what is literal in the decline of a man, but the Scriptures are moral teaching for us. God has His own ways to bring us to Himself. This scripture brings out that it is "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings on the bed" that God can intervene for our blessing. "Then he openeth men's ears, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his work, and hide pride from man". Thank God for the fact that He has entered into our lives by way of recovery. That is what our brother has been speaking about. He entered into the life of Ruth with a view to her recovery. "He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from passing away by the sword". God does that, but there is chastening.

I say again, the way of moral death is a sore way. That is what is seen in the chapter: "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed". That is the way that we have all been on at some time before God intervened in our lives to bring us to Christ, or when we have failed Him after having come to know Christ. If we have been on a selfwilled way it is a painful way. The pains that are introduced in this section - "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and with constant strife in his bones" - are the divine handling of us, the divine way to bring us to ourselves, "to shew unto man his duty". You will notice the note to that word 'duty' that it involves self-judgment. What a way it is to realise that "his soul draweth near to the pit, and his life to the destroyers". I think we can take account of this way which we have been on once recovery comes about. You can look back on it and see the divine hand working with us when what was proceeding was my soul drawing near to the pit, and my life to the destroyers. It is a personal matter. This book is personal. It is a young man speaking in this chapter in relation to Job after very much speaking in the book by him and his three friends. There is an appeal by the speaker for the messenger: "If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his duty". How he is appealing that there might be light shining for a man on this way, that he might be delivered! God takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner, and I am speaking in a moral sense mainly.

God takes no pleasure in that! "And his soul draweth near to the pit, and his life to the destroyers". It brings out for us as recovered persons the appreciation of the One who said, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom". That is the turning-point in the section. It brings out our own helplessness in the situation in which we are. Another has provided a ransom with a view to divine intervention in our lives. It sobers us all to take account of it because these are real matters which enter into the fibre of every believer to some degree or other.

"Then he will be gracious unto him". What an act of favour of God: "the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all", 1 Tim 2: 5,6. He is available for all. But this scripture brings out the personal side of it. That is what I want to bring out in what I may say. "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom": that is me. That is what you have to say: that is me. The duty of man is in relation to self-judgment, but self-judgment in relation to the cross, the cross of Christ, "Jesus Christ, and him crucified", 1 Cor 2: 2. Such a One as that was crucified. Scripture says of the princes of this world: "for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory", 1 Cor 2: 8. The wisdom that we find in this world will lead to moral death, but there is another kind of wisdom that proceeds from God. What a transformation! - "His flesh shall be fresher than in childhood; he shall return to the days of his youth". Fine days, the days of youth. Jeremiah brings that out: "when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land not sown", Jer 2: 2. The young believer is brought back to put trust in Christ. The pathway ahead is through a wilderness, "a land not sown" There are no roads in the wilderness. Life involves faith in God, but there is a freshness attached to it because the trust is in the One who has become the ransom. Appreciation of Christ is in the One who has been a ransom for me. It involves a freshness in the soul:

O, happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Saviour and my God!

"He shall pray unto God, and he will receive him with favour". That is the God that we have been brought to know: justified, received into the favour of God - that is Romans 5 - leading on through tribulation, endurance, experience, and hope, to the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit, the establishment, as another has said, of a beachhead in the heart from which God can operate to secure the whole heart, the whole being. So it goes on through Romans 8 - the power of life in the Spirit: "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (v 14) - to Romans 12, the body laid on the altar, prepared for the Christian pathway as appreciating the One who has become my ransom, who has delivered me. As the apostle says, "Who shall deliver me out of this body of death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord", Rom 7: 24. He is delivered; he has his "freedom from sin, and having become bondmen to God" his "fruit" is "unto holiness, and the end eternal life", Rom 6: 22,23. These are the blessings that energise the believer as he puts his body on the altar, prepared for a life of committal to the interests of Christ and the will of God.

So "He will sing before men, and say, I have sinned, and perverted what was right, and it hath not been requited to me; He hath delivered my soul from going into the pit, and my life shall see the light". That is the only true life. It is the kind of life that God has in mind for us over against the line on which we once were, brought into a pathway where the end is eternal life. And there is appreciation of the turning-point. What a word that is! - "Then he will be gracious unto him, and say, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom". May the appreciation of that ransom be ours to appreciate more so that we sing before men. The testimonial side comes out in singing before men: "and say, I have sinned, and perverted what was right, and it hath not been requited to me". "How that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5: 19): what a blessed ministry that was, the Lord Jesus Christ here on earth "reconciling the world to himself"! Then "the word of that reconciliation": how God would appeal to us! "Be reconciled to God. Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us,

that we might become God's righteousness in him" (v 21). That is the great divine end; the work of reconciliation has been established. We can lay hold of it and come into the blessedness of it, but it involved "Him who knew not sin" being made "sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him". Sin has never been overlooked by God. He has "condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8: 3) by the cross of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ had not only to bear our sins in His body on the tree but He was made sin. The cry that rang from the lips of that holy Man was "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", Matt 27: 46. It is a testimonial utterance too, bringing out that this blessed Man who had ever known the perfection of holy communion with His God should cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? " If He had not cried it, we would never have known it, but He cried it. It is written down for us as a testimony that it may affect our hearts in relation to the turning-point in all our lives as to the ransom. May the Lord bless the word for His Name's sake.

EDINBURGH

14 April 1992

(iii) FINALITY MORALLY

W.Dickson

Luke 8: 43-48

What I have to say may in substance be rather similar to what has been expressed. This woman had suffered this illness for a long time and it is suggestive, beloved brethren, of sin, not sins. As has often been said in teaching and preaching, the problem with believers is not exactly their sins, because the work of Christ is available and, owning that name, sins are dealt with. The great exercise is sin, this incurable disease that this woman suffered from. It has lasted a long time. It has lasted since the garden of Eden and will go on right until the Lord takes up His rights again, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world", John 1: 29. Wonderful it is that the Lamb of God is going to take away the sin of the world publicly. In a sense it is difficult morally for us to envisage it. We are so surrounded with sin, sins, and the effect of sin and sins that we can hardly grasp the thought of a scene where there is not a breath of sin. The Lamb of God is going to take away the sin of the world and there will not be a breath of sin in the whole universe. This woman here suffers, by application, from sin and so she touched the hem of His garment. It is a wonderful thing, to touch the hem of His garment. I suppose in the direct interpretation of it it would refer to what our brother has said. The point at which the Lord touched humanity would involve His ministry, His sufferings, His death. That would be the strict interpretation of the hem of His garment. The hem of His garment, however, and the sense in which it can be touched, is available now in the assembly. That is a great point. It is very sad when persons absent themselves from the gathering of the saints, when it is open to them to touch the hem of His garment with a view to healing and recovery. This woman had the faith to touch Him, and that word 'touch' is not just a finger-tip. The note tells you that. It is linked with the Lord touching the leper (see Mark 1: 41). She handled Him freely; in other words she put out her hand in faith. She appeared to grasp the import of what the hem of the garment

signified. The Lord said, "Who has touched me?" Could the Lord go round this company at this time and ask that question: "Who has touched me?" It is the act of faith, beloved brethren, breaking through the formidable obstacles that lie in the path, to touch the hem of His garment. Blessing comes to that woman: she touched and she was immediately healed. "And he said to her, Be of good courage, daughter; thy faith has healed thee; go in peace".

Beloved brethren, in moral matters - I am speaking in the sense of the whole scale of moral things, God's dealings with men and such things - the thought of finality has to be reached. There was a finality about the Lord's word to this woman which she would cherish: "Be of good courage, daughter; thy faith has healed thee; go in peace. That was consequent upon her touching the hem of His garment. I trust that we will be reminded in what has come to us tonight of the availability of the Lord personally to help us all, but also of the availability of the hem of His garment, as seen in the assembly, to bring in healing, peace and blessing. May it be so for His Name's sake! Amen.

EDINBURGH

14 April 1992

SIGNS OF CHILD-LIFE

The first sign of the birth of a babe is probably a cry. Perhaps the child shares, without of course knowing, in the sorrows of sin in the world. But the Lord Jesus spoke of being born anew, which means that God begins in persons, often quite young, an entirely new life. This helps to explain why growing-up children feel uneasy and unhappy when they begin to hear the gospel, but do not know the Saviour. When Samuel was first aroused he became quite distressed, but when he knew the Lord he was at rest and listened to God's word.

Scripture tells us of a boy, apparently dead, sneezing seven times, then opening his eyes. God was working with power and

perfection so that the boy should see things clearly. Many years later, when the Lord Jesus was here, He raised to life a young girl of twelve years of age. He took her hand in His and said , in the local language, "Talitha koumi, which is interpreted, Damsel, I say to thee , Arise". We read too that in a place called Nain there was another young person raised from death by the Lord Jesus. The Lord said to the young man, "Youth, I say to thee, Wake up", whereupon the lad began to speak and Jesus gave him to his sorrowing mother. Have you awakened yet?

J.C.Evershed