

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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ORDERED GOVERNMENT

A GREAT ONE

THE SPEAKING OF JESUS

FORGIVENESS, FREE, FULL AND FINAL

ORDERED GOVERNMENT

Eric Burr

Judges 21: 25; 2 Samuel 8: 15-18; 2 Samuel 20: 23-26; 1 Kings 4: 1-6

I suppose it would be generally felt that there is a certain parallel between the history of the book of Judges and the present time. In Deuteronomy the people had come to the borders of the land. In Joshua they had come into the land and had begun to inherit it, although they never inherited it all: just as with ourselves, there remained much land to be taken possession of. I remark incidentally in relation to that that I think we would do well to be before the Lord for His raising up of gift among us which would further the saints inheriting more of the land: there is much left to be taken possession of. It is anomalous to put it this way, but just reflect on how much you do not know in spiritual things. The Spirit would desire to lead us into the fulness of the things that God has prepared for those that love Him.

The book of Judges is a book of conflicts and difficulties and problems. They arise all over the land: hardly any two incidents occur in the same place. It is interesting to work through the book and see what is happening here and there, until we have in this last verse - and we have it elsewhere in the book as well - that "there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes". It is remarkable that the Spirit of God should say that twice in one book. If things continue like that, they are on the way to complete decline. Politically of course it is current in the world that everyone should do what is right in their own eyes. Some of the things that people in their own eyes think right are disgusting, and the manifestation of the liberty of the flesh and spirit of man in such things should be repulsive to everyone who has the Spirit of God. I just add that the epistle to the Ephesians says that there are some things that are not even to be named among us (see chap 5: 3). Let it be so!

But looking more widely, looking even into the present state of the professing church in this country, you can see clearly that there is the expectation that everyone will be able to do what is right in their own eyes. Therefore the public structure of things breaks up, and groups who think alike meet together in houses and elsewhere and they do so until something arises which divides them. It results from everyone doing what is right in his own eyes. There needs to be authority beyond what is right in my eyes if there is to be cohesiveness in a company of believers in the present day, authority which is other than my own. I am not, therefore, saying that we must submit to what anybody else says or thinks or to what is 'correct' at any moment, but the great thing is that there should be that degree of authority among the people of God which ultimately has the effect, although not by the authority in itself, that it holds the people of God together. There is nothing more destructive, either to fellowship or to the structure of a Christian company, than that the democratic spirit should take hold in it, and I take the liberty of warning the brethren against this. There are in a sense two sorts of danger: one is that the older men who grow up and have some knowledge of history and of the truth differ over things and therefore they divide from each other or they go on together in a state of underlying dispute - that is one state of things, and that is dangerous - and the other, at the other end, is that young people, not properly taught and instructed in the truth, do not know how to make up their minds as to what is right or wrong, and things break up from that side as well. The fragmentation of things is really there, potentially, at the end of the book of Judges. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes and you wonder what could be done about it.

What I would like to say to the brethren this evening is this, that God begins to work in that situation to bring about ordered government. Now, the book of Ruth intervenes before we have the books of Samuel. It is interesting to reflect that the book of Ruth overlaps with the book of Judges and at the other end with the first book of Samuel. It begins in the days when judges ruled. That was manifestly before everyone was doing what was right in his own

eyes because the judges actually ruled. And the last word in the book of Ruth is David, an indication that the book has something to do with the background of the whole of the history up to the time when David reigned. It is not so much in the principle of redemption which is in the book of Ruth. Bear in mind in following the book of Ruth that it is not Ruth who is redeemed; it is the inheritance that is redeemed in order that it might be clear of obstruction so that everybody - not just Ruth - everybody, in principle, should be able to enjoy the inheritance of God. Ruth is well spoken of amongst us, but a more significant person in the book of Ruth is Naomi. Throughout the book Ruth is fairly passive. She just does what she is told: at one point you could say she is completely passive because she is told to lie down and she does so. But there is in the background someone who has in her mind the reality of the inheritance of God, and the person who matters in the book of Ruth, apart, of course, from Boaz, who comes in in the latter part, is Naomi. It was she who heard that "Jehovah had visited his people to give them bread" (chap 1: 6) and things run on to the redemption of the inheritance, taking it out of the hands of the man who was incompetent to redeem it. You might say, in New Testament language, "the redemption of the acquired possession", Eph 1: 14. That is a very fine thing to arrive at and it is introduced in the epistle which bears on the highest levels of the truth: "the redemption of the acquired possession".

But why I refer to Naomi is partly because in the situation which exists now in 1 Samuel, what comes to light is especially valuable in women. On the other side of things, on the official side, things die out one after another. Eli is pretty infirm at the beginning of the book, but it is not long before, when bad news is brought to him, he falls from his chair and dies. The priesthood officially is then defunct. In that situation there is Hannah. And what does Hannah have in mind? Hannah is praying to God for a son in circumstances in which God's government had hindered her having a son. Think of that! It says that "Jehovah had shut up her womb" (1 Sam 1: 5) and she had no children, and she cries to God that she might have a child. It is a great thing to understand how to pray against the background of the

government of God as it affects you. But here is Hannah, accepting the government of God, and really what she represents is the state of Israel at that time which has no hope except expiry. As soon as Hannah dies, the line would be finished. But Hannah prays and she gets the son. Chapter 2 is presented as a prayer but what she finishes with is that "he will give strength unto his king" (v 10). I know it says that He will raise up the poor out of the dust and set them among the nobles and so on - but "he will give strength unto his king". That is what Hannah was looking for in a day when everyone did what was right in his own eyes. She is looking for God's king. She is looking for ordered government in a public state of chaos, and, following the chaos, uncertainty.

If we go on in the book, just to refer to another woman, we find in Phinehas' wife another quality which in the sorrow of the day is mourning over the fact that things seem to have come to an end. You can see that she would rather they did not come to an end. But the public order of priesthood is finished. There is nothing to expect from Eli. The succession to the priesthood should be in Eli's sons, and they are morally unsuitable to fill it out: the priesthood is, therefore, dying. But Hannah brings a little boy along to the priest and God speaks to that little boy. And where is the priesthood then found in Israel? The priesthood is found in a little boy who wore a linen ephod, and you have the principle of priesthood, not in what is public, but in a little boy who ministered to Jehovah in the house of God. If the brethren will pardon my borrowing an expression that is current in the present day, I think it is in Samuel in an ephod that you see the green shoots of recovery, that God is going to bring something through because He already has something begun in secret and small, He has in Samuel what is competent to fill out, or will become competent to fill out, the position of priesthood in Israel.

Samuel never exactly becomes the official priest, but the priestly and moral quality in Samuel is manifest at its highest, not in his anointing the king - that was an official duty - but when he says, "far be it from me that I should sin against Jehovah in ceasing to pray for you", 1 Sam 12: 23. Think of that! Have you ever taken the

ground that you would stop praying about things? "Far be it from me that I should sin against Jehovah in ceasing to pray for you". There is a priest in moral quality in the midst of Israel in a day when everything was in decline.

And things are in decline. I am not speaking about our day; I am speaking about Samuel. Things are in decline in this book, and the Philistines come up and make war. Eli does not know what to do about it. There is nothing official that can do anything about it. The people revert to the ark - and I speak reverently about it - as if it were a charm. They are going into battle and they do not know how to win and they say, 'We will take the ark in'. I suppose they went back in their folk-memories to a day in Numbers when the ark set forward and they said, "Rise up, Jehovah, and let thine enemies be scattered; And let them that hate thee flee before thy face" (chap 10: 35) and they thought that the ark would do that for them again. But there was not a moral state in Israel which would allow the ark to have that kind of victorious place amongst the people. God is going to work in the nation itself in order to bring about something by way of ordered government that will bring His people through to touch the highest points which are touched in the Old Testament. When the ark is taken in battle, the Philistines take it and put it in the house of their god: we all know this history. These books are very well-known to the brethren! If they are not, read them. But when the ark is taken, there is another woman just alluded to, Phinehas' wife, and she mourns that the glory is departed from Israel because the ark of God has been taken. You might wonder what hope there is. What hope is there?

But Samuel is there, not only in the moral qualities of priesthood but also as the prophet. Everybody knew that Jehovah had appointed Samuel as prophet in Israel and not a word that he spoke fell to the ground. We have some of his words given in this book and they are very trenchant and very sad, but everybody knew that there was a prophet there. And on the way to the establishment of what I speak of - and I think the brethren will understand the expression - as ordered government, you have in an inconspicuous

way a priest and a prophet, not in official capacities, but those qualities are there. That is paving the way for what God is going to do.

The people in this book want a king. It is interesting that in Deuteronomy God anticipates that the people will ask for a king. He does not say, 'When I appoint a king over you'; He says, 'When you want a king, you will appoint the one that I choose' (see Deut 17: 14,15). It is fairly clear to me that God allowed the people to choose Saul in order that something might be learned, negatively, about what ordered government did not mean. Saul was discovered and brought out and in due course was anointed king by Samuel. God allowed him to do it: God, in fact, gave him directions as to how he would find Saul.

Certain characteristics come out in Saul. You might have hoped that when a king was appointed - it says there was no king in Israel at the end of Judges - ordered government would be there. As Saul's history unfolds, you begin to get impressions of what is not required in ordered government. Beloved, some of these things come very near to us. Where does Saul's history begin? As far as we are told in the Scriptures, it begins with the loss of the asses, and Saul is charged: you go and find these asses. The first thing that comes to light is that Saul is not competent to do something that he was commanded to do. You will never have ordered government on that basis. He was told to do a job and he could not do it. He hunted everywhere and he could not find an ass anywhere. Someone else found them and took them home to Saul's father and a message was brought to Saul who was getting distracted by this time, and they said, 'Do not worry: the asses are found'. But the characteristic in Saul was that he was not competent to do what he was charged to do. There will never be ordered government in the presence of incompetence.

Now, another characteristic of Saul was that Amalek came and fought against Israel and Saul took up arms against them but he was not willing to complete the thing that God had laid on him. It is not now that he was incompetent, because he had dealt with so much of

the Amalekites that he could easily have dealt with the rest, but what does he do? He spares the best of the cattle and other things and he spares Agag, and there is the man who had been challenging Israel walking gaily - think of that! - and Saul is not competent to complete what had been charged upon him to do. Ordered government will never come about if things are left incomplete, because things will drag on and on, and unless Samuel had come in prophetically and dealt with the Amalekites, they would have continued to be a thorn in David's flesh when David comes to the throne. Ordered government depends on completing what is required to be done. There will never be ordered government if things are not completed. If things are to be completed, there must be competence in the first place and a willingness to see them through to the end. What does the Lord say to the church? - "I have not found thy works complete before my God", Rev 3: 2.

Another thing in Saul's history at this time is that he is impatient. He cannot wait. Samuel says, 'You wait seven days', and as the days go on, you can see impatience building up in Saul. 'Let us get this finished, we want to get on with something else'. Samuel comes and he says, 'What has happened? Why did you not wait as you were told?' 'Oh well', Saul says, 'I have good reason, a good excuse'. Saul was apt to blame other people too. There will never be ordered government where there is impatience. Impatience always leads to the wrong conclusion and to mischief. It always leads to my pressing my view in the circumstances. Ordered government is not compatible with impatience. But Samuel, prophetic man that he was, is severe on him for being impatient. Is not that the chapter in which he goes on to speak about self-will being "as iniquity and idolatry", 1 Sam 15: 23? There will never be good ordered government where there is impatience. If there is impatience and inability to see things through and to complete them, everyone will go on doing what is right in his own eyes. And as soon as the seeds of that exist, it will spread like weeds.

And on another occasion Nahash the Ammonite comes up and will make a covenant only on harsh terms and the people wept. And

this reached Saul's ears. What did Saul do? Did he, in the spirit of ordered government, take the reins and put things right? Saul took an ox and cut it in twelve pieces and sent it round to the tribes of Israel, and he said, 'Anyone who is not for Saul, I will do this to his oxen as well'. Ordered government is not compatible with threatening other people it is not sustained by a threatening spirit.

I have just touched lightly on these incidents in the history of Saul because they suggest to me things by which we may learn if we are to understand that God intends there to be ordered government in the present time. He intends it to be under Christ, but He was working it out with men of like passions with ourselves, and the characteristics to which I have referred are in Scripture and are there to be read by anyone who reads the Bible, and they will see that ordered government did not come about by those means. And God says, 'I have rejected you. I am not having My government in the hands of men like that, men incompetent, men who cannot see things through, and, above all, I am not going to have My government in the hands of those who threaten the rest of My people'. God therefore begins on another line. He says, "Go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite; for I have provided me a king among his sons", 1 Sam 16: 1. He is going to have a different kind of king one day. It is clear from the history a little later in this book that David was keeping the sheep. Jesse has the first seven brought in and Samuel says, 'Is this all of them?' as if he could not recognise the potential for ordered government in any of those men. One thing that comes out later in one of them was jealousy. David goes down to the host and his brother says to him, 'Well, what are you doing here? Who have you left those few sheep with in the wilderness?' He was jealous of him because he thought that he had come down to get some prominence in that family. 'Have you just come down to see the battle?' he says. God will never have ordered government in the hands of men who are jealous - jealous for God, but not jealous of one another.

David is anointed king. (I just remark this in relation to David: David is often before us as a shepherd, is he not? But if you study

David's history, how much shepherding in it is recorded? When he is first anointed, he is a shepherd. When he brings the whole people to disaster at the end of the second book, he says, "but these sheep, what have they done?" (2 Sam 24: 17), and in between there is hardly an allusion to anything of a shepherd character in David. Psalm 78 gives him the shepherd character but he did not always display it. When the people were scattered before Absalom, where was the shepherd? The people were here, there and everywhere. Where was the shepherd? It teaches us to take scriptures as a whole and not to build up things from particular verses.)

But David is taken up and he goes down to the battle. This history is well-known. I am sure that parents still teach it to their children. The story about David and Goliath has become proverbial, has it not, in the language? David goes down, and there is somebody challenging the people of God. He defied the armies of the living God. And what is going to happen about that? One thing that David knows is that this threat to the people of God can be dealt with only in the power of God. It is no good David running up to Goliath himself and saying, 'I'll take you on', or something like that. He says, "I come to thee in the name of Jehovah of hosts", 1 Sam 17: 45. That is, the man under whom God is going to initiate ordered government begins with the sense that the only power is that of God. Paul learned this too, that "the surpassingness of the power may be of God, and not from us", 2 Cor 4: 7. David goes in the sense of that power. Ordered government for God is found in those who are willing to submit themselves to the power of God as the only resource in the circumstances and the only resource for them.

As you go on through David's history it comes to light very early that when a problem arises he prays about it. He enquires of Jehovah. (It is always necessary to bear in mind in the Old Testament that there is no man perfect: I think the only man in the Old Testament of whom nothing adverse is said is Daniel, but there is no man perfect. Therefore, if one leaves out the imperfections in a man in order to bring out some positive qualities, the brethren will understand). David is dependent on God. He enquired of Jehovah.

He says, 'Shall I go up?' and God says, 'Go up'. He says, 'Shall I do this?' God says, 'Do it'. The second thing required for ordered government under God is prayer. When we are preoccupied with a particular problem we find it difficult to pray and leave the matter with God. David comes before us as a man who prayed. He enquired of Jehovah. It is as if, if something came up, David just started praying. He did not wait for the prayer meeting. It is as if, for instance, when he went to bed and something came into his mind, he would pray. We can all do that: I like doing that. If something comes into your mind, just talk to the Lord about it. You lie in bed and you say to the Lord, 'I need this done for me. I need help in this or that.' The next thing required in a man under whom God is going to have ordered government is the dependence which comes out of prayer. And that is a characteristic of David.

As I say, I do not go over all his history, but I draw attention to a couple of other incidents. When Saul was in the cave he was hostile to David, and David sees the moment of advantage and goes in and cuts off the skirt of Saul's garment. As soon as he had done it, his heart smote him. Why? Because he knew he had despised the anointing of God's king or, if I may say so, he had despised the anointing of the people of God. I say, in order to bring out the positive aspect of it, that ordered government according to God is where the anointing in the people is fully respected by those who have anything to do with them. You never disparage the brethren. It grieves me a bit when I hear brothers and sisters referred to in, what seem to me, disparaging or casual terms. Beloved, you are cutting off the skirt of someone's garment. I am not saying we must be formal all the time, but beware of the language of the world which is dismissive of the qualities of the people that you are referring to in order to inflate your own importance. Let us have respect for the anointing in one another. That is David's character.

The following chapter, which is known almost by heart by everybody, is about Abigail. Samuel dies. David's guardian and leader has gone. But there is Abigail - Mr Lyon used to talk about her as the product of Samuel's ministry and perhaps she was. We

do not have too much of Samuel's ministry, but Abigail brings in to David, when he is set on murdering people, the grace that will save the situation. It has often been said in regard to that chapter that they were both coming down. It says Abigail came down and David came down and we talk as though they were both humble. The only humble person in that case was Abigail because David was coming down muttering to himself, 'You see if I leave any of those men alive in the morning'. That was not humility. The spirit that will put people to death unnecessarily is not according to the ordered government of God. David comes down and there is Abigail bringing in, as we might say, a ministry of grace, and she says, "for Jehovah will certainly make my lord a lasting house" (1 Sam 25: 28) and everything will come right, David; and in the day when He slings your enemies out of the hollow of your sling, there will be nothing on your conscience about this. That is another contributor to ordered government amongst the people of God, that there should be nothing adverse on the conscience of those who seek to assist in the administration of it.

Consequently in the next chapter when Saul is again at David's mercy David has learned grace and he does not now go and cut off the skirt of Saul's garment. He takes away the cruse of water and he calls to him from over the mountain. He says, 'Saul, isn't this yours?' And so much is Saul touched by this that he says "Is this thy voice, my son David", 1 Sam 26: 17? There is a man who has learned to deal with the situation in grace, the great characteristic of the ordered government of God: You do not wonder, therefore, that Mephibosheth comes to light when David is full of grace towards him. He says, 'You will have a seat at the king's table'. That is the place. It is not only the place where the king ate; it is the place where the king administered; and Mephibosheth could learn there the reality and blessedness of what ordered government according to God was.

Now, these are positive characteristics. I have referred to some negative characteristics and let us keep them negative. Let us look at the positive side of those coins and maintain that side. Let us

not fall into the other side! Let us learn from David's history that, if you have begun by learning that the only power is that of God, you go on in dependence and in respect for the anointing in the people of God, and you learn grace when it is ministered to you from someone who has only your good at heart; you learn to act in grace and you begin to gain ground.

After that, we know the history of 2 Samuel. A great part of the book is taken up with the history in relation to Absalom - I do not dwell on that. Ordered government failed there and it fell into the wrong hands because David had allowed himself to digress by his own passions. Things will be fatal among the people of God if men allow themselves to be diverted by their passions. But in the end God sorts all those things out and Absalom dies and you come substantially to the end of the second book of Samuel. There are these lessons to be learned in it that, out of a situation in which everyone did what was right in their own eyes, God is bringing about ordered government.

That is why I have read the two sections in 2 Samuel. Clearly in these two chapters David had power over the land and he was able to establish a government of his own. You can be quite sure that David established it on the principles that would maintain the order of the kingdom under him. He has Joab over the host and a chronicler and priests and a scribe and a man in charge of the executioners and the runners, and his sons were chief rulers. He has an ordered administration established. This is provisional government: it is not final government. Why do I say that? Because Joab is there. A day will come when in the beginning of the first book of Kings Joab's true character is exposed. He wanted a different king from what God wanted. What a thing to want! He wanted a different king from the man that God wanted. But Joab was here: it was a provisional time, but there was ordered government, and it is clear that the king's writ ran and that ordered government is there.

I read from chapter 20; comparing it with chapter 8, there are only such changes as might have come about, in the ordinary course

of events. (We are familiar with this kind of thing. The government in this country is elected for five years, but in the ordinary course of events there are changes.) Most of the people are still there. You would not have expected David's sons to be still among the chief rulers: Absalom for example had given a bad example and he was dead. There were these minor changes, but the impression you get is not that there had been a clear-out in the cabinet but that ordered government was there and it was maintained with only such changes in the personnel as were required by circumstances. Ordered government was there but it was still provisional. If we follow these things through, out of the history at the end of Judges when everyone did what was right in his own eyes, it was now impossible for everyone to do what was right in his own eyes because there was an administration that maintained the order of the kingdom. One thing it included in the person of Benaiah was discipline. Benaiah was not looking for people to execute but the executioners were there. That underlines that the principle of discipline is essential to ordered government: it is essential to ordered government in the assembly. The principle of government was there, and the principle of discipline was there in the person of Benaiah. He is a man with a great reputation which goes back a long way. He could do very great things. He could take on problems that no-one else could tackle: even in bad weather he could do great things. But he is there and the principle of discipline is there in the ordered government of the kingdom, but it is still, as I say, provisional.

That is why I read in 1 Kings 4, because Solomon now has established ordered government in finality. You will notice that it is expanded: some of the people are still there; Joab is not there now, but the same priests are there; and Benaiah is still there; and other people have been drawn into this government. And it says, "Azariah the son of Nathan was over the superintendents", and the next paragraph of this chapter brings out what the superintendents of the kingdom were actually involved in. It says, "And Solomon had twelve superintendents over all Israel; and they provided food for the king and his household: each man his month in the year had to make

provision". You can see that ordered government now covered the whole of Israel and the whole of Israel was at rest and at peace. Nothing brings about peace and settlement like ordered government, and Solomon had finally established it, David's greater son, the Lord's anointed, and he has now established a system of government which is a foreshadowing of the world to come. Read Psalm 72: get Psalm 72 into your soul about what the world to come will be like under Christ. You will finish up, as the Psalm does, by blessing God that there is ordered government there, the provisional side ended. In the provisional side there are things done and people there who you might, in our rather detached and superior judgment, say ought not to be there. Why did he give Joab that job? you would say. But things are provisional unless you go on to the end. You find that Solomon has established a different man over the house and Benaiah is not now over executioners and runners. Benaiah is over the host. He is now over what will maintain order in the kingdom as a man who understands discipline, and he maintains it. And priesthood is there. And superintendence is there. And the whole country is covered by this ordered government which foreshadows the establishment of things in the world to come under Jesus, crowned with glory and honour. These things are very blessed and they have instruction for us at the present time. And if we feel any danger that might arise from everyone doing what is right in his own eyes, let us bear in mind that God has in view a Man to whom He is going to commit the government of the universe, and we shall be blest with Him in it. Well, may the Lord help us!

ABERDEEN

11 September 1993

A GREAT ONE

Anders Lidbeck

Psalm 110: 4; Hebrews 7: 1-4

Beloved brethren, I just had a simple thought to say a few words about the One who is great. It is quite a subject in the world that we are in to draw attention to someone who is great. Scripture refers to One who is exceedingly great, and in a very simple and appealing way, by saying "Now consider how great this personage was". Beloved brethren, we are going to meet the Lord tomorrow if He has not come for us before then. Have we realised the greatness of the One who is coming to see us, and the One who has a desire to have an opening in our hearts to receive Him? He is presented in the Scriptures in types. The one who met Abraham, as we learn from Genesis 14, was able to meet him and sustain him with bread and wine and to provide what was needed. The writer of the book of Hebrews refers to him as the King of righteousness, then also King of Salem, which is King of peace. There are two prominent features

in this world that have not been more misused than righteousness and peace. Men try to achieve peace on their own basis without righteousness, and some might think that they would be able to reach righteousness without peace. But there is One, beloved brethren, who fills these offices in a glorious way as the writer indicates: "Now consider how great this personage was". He compares Him, so to say, with Abraham, the one who had met Melchisedec, and yet He is the One who has brought to light life and incorruptibility. We have become God's righteousness in Him, all on account of the pathway that Jesus has taken. He is the King of peace; He is the King of righteousness; He has made a righteous basis for man to be in the presence of God and approach Him in the value of what Jesus is. He is referred to as the King of righteousness. It is a wonderful reference. We think of Him often as the King, but here the writer is full of the greatness of Christ, and he says simply, "Now consider". I think it is the voice of the Spirit at the present time to draw attention to Christ in this simple, and outwardly, we might say, feeble way. He does not relate Him to anything that has its origin in man; he is very accurate, he refers to Him as "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but assimilated to the Son of God, abides a priest for ever". O, beloved brethren, the office the Lord Jesus has taken up He will never give up. He will always remain a Man. Yet. in manhood He will always remain a King. We might look upon Him in that way; He will one day publicly take up the position of the King of kings and the Lord of lords; everything will be subjected unto Him; every knee shall bow, every tongue will confess. But what a blessing, already now, to be able to respond to the Spirit's word: "Now consider how great this personage was". It is as if the writer has not found words enough to express the greatness of the King of righteousness and the King of peace. Beloved brethren, What did it cost Him? It cost Him to go to Jerusalem, it cost Him to go to Calvary, to go into death, but death could not hold Him. He is the King; He is the first-fruits out of death. Think of the greatness that belongs to Him. The writer is not able to embrace it so he just says, "Now consider". He leaves it to each believer, to each Christian, to

take hold of the greatness: "how great this personage was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth out of the spoils". Think of the joy of Abraham rendering the tithe to Melchisedec on a quite different level from the way Jacob put the terms up to God - I will give the tenth of everything. It comes from a willing heart, a man of faith: how different! Here it says, "Now consider". Boys and girls, Have you considered the greatness of Christ? I think that is what the Spirit of God is aiming at at the present time. There is so much in the world around us that would contradict the King of righteousness, the King of peace. Men in their universal meetings, - in Rome or Brussels or wherever - meet to consider how to reach peace, and to sort out problems generally in the world, but it is bound for destruction without the King of peace, without the King of righteousness. He is the Alpha and Omega; He had the first word, He will have the last word; let us just bow to Him. Then just another simple thought from the Psalm; the two scriptures really go together. Here it is divine speaking; "Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent". There is nothing more contradicted at the present time than divine speaking. God has spoken from the outset, from creation. He has laid down the law so to say in creation from the first day till the seventh day. He ordered these things; man has done nothing else but try to disrupt it, but God will not repent; He will not change His mind on account of our unfaithfulness, No, He will go on. He is the One who has carried out all in righteousness, the One who has accomplished peace. Christ is the King of righteousness and the King of peace, and God will not repent. It is as if to say, He does not give in to any thought of ours that would refer to weakness. So let us just have a simple touch of Him and His greatness. He has a desire to come to His own. We assemble in a world where He is rejected. It refers to the chief priests, the scribes demanding to know from His disciples about His doctrine. The enemy is after the testimony of Christ and all that the Lord Jesus has begun both to do and to teach; he will always be at that. Now in the midst of the darkness the writer says "Now consider how great this personage was".

It was just my simple thought, beloved brethren, that we might get our eyes open to the greatness of Christ, because He is the One who has a desire to come to His own, but He is looking for the features of righteousness, He is looking for the features of peace. Jesus refers to a son of peace, one able to enjoy what the Lord has accomplished; everything is there, open for us, and He has led the way. What a Man He is! So the Spirit says "Now consider". I think that is the word by the Spirit of God in these latter days, to remind us of the greatness of Christ. We are not able to explain it in a natural way or in a human way, I think that is why it says "without father, without mother, without genealogy; having neither beginning of days nor end of life". The greatness of the Person of Christ is beyond us. The "Word was with God", and it draws out worship to Him on account of His greatness. We do not know the writer of the book - not that it really matters - but it is contained in the Holy Scriptures, and it is the Spirit's voice at the present time, now when the rights of the Lord are so violated or contradicted. Man tries in every aspect, in every circumstance of life, to annul them, and bring them to nought, but the Lord will have the last word. It says "to whom even the patriarch Abraham". Think of that, the man of faith, the father of faith. Paul refers to walking in the footsteps of our father Abraham's faith in uncircumcision (see Rom 4: 12}. Think of the greatness of a man like that. Certain persons in the gospels claimed their genealogy even back to their father Jacob - "Art thou greater than our father Jacob...?" John 4: 12. That is what they claimed on a natural line. Here is One who is far greater - "Now consider".

Dear friends, just let us fill our hearts so that we are able to receive Him tomorrow, and have a sense of Him as the King of righteousness and the King of peace. May it be so for His Name's sake.

LONDON

18 December 1993

THE SPEAKING OF JESUS

Anders Lidbeck

John 4: 25,26; 9: 35-37; Acts 9: 3-5

Dear friends, I just had a simple impression of One who is speaking. It is a very current thing to be able to follow one who is speaking, because it relates to what is going to be announced, and when someone comes up, great men in this world, they try to announce their own doctrine. But here is One who is speaking in a different way, and He would speak to each one individually. We hear of persons addressing thousands over the radio to announce their ideas, their politics, finance or even religious thoughts. But here is One who is speaking in a different way. Scripture speaks about One who has a desire to speak to every man.

So I read about these three different persons - we know the name of only one of them - a sister, a brother and Paul. We do not know the name of the one in John 4 nor in John 9, but the speaking of Jesus is so important, and He presents Himself in such a glorious way. The whole section which refers to these persons is well known. But I just had a touch of how Jesus has a delight to reach each one of us tonight: "I who speak to thee am he". Dear friend, have we heard the speaking of Jesus? He is able to touch our hearts, come into our circumstances, to fill our hearts, to fill our minds, in order that our ways might be changed. That is why the Son of man came to save that which was lost. We had really one end in life without Jesus, and that was death. Man deserves nothing else but death as away from God but He has come into this sphere in order to take up our case before God. He is the One, dear friend, who can deal with our sins; no one else can deal with our sins. This dear woman came out to draw water, and she realized she did not want to continue to do this. "Sir, give me this water", she says, "that I may not thirst nor come here to draw". Men in the world draw water from different kinds of sources, and it does not give any joy; it never brings out the greatness of the One who is speaking. He is speaking today; that is

a tremendous thing, having died He yet speaks. Divine speaking is different, and Jesus says in a simple way, "I who speak to thee am he" - "I who speak" the greatness of the speaking of the Man of God, the Word become flesh, the Son of God here, the Son of man, all the glorious titles Jesus has, and He spends time with this woman. Think of twelve going away to get provisions for thirteen, leaving Jesus alone; that was in the ways of God. They left Jesus to get provisions for what they were going to do, and He finds one single soul. O, dear friend, the gospel is preached tonight in order that Jesus may speak to you - "I who speak to thee am he". Think of the strength, the power, the joy in these simple words, as if to say, I would just like to have a few minutes with you; I have just one or two questions to raise with you in all affection. She refers to having drawn from things that did not satisfy her heart, and Jesus says to her, "Go, call thy husband, and come here" (v 16). There was just one simple thing. Think of the gracious way Jesus is touching her: "I who speak". Dear friend, have we heard that speaking? Have we heard that appeal of Jesus Himself touching us, drawing near? He can walk along with us for a certain distance. It is touching to read Luke 24 - we often draw upon it - Jesus made as though He would go farther (see v 28), as if to say, I would like to have another word with you, I am not giving you up even if you have become weary, so downcast because of what has taken place, all that you had thought of has not been brought about. They say, We had thought He would restore the kingdom, and He would tell us all things. The woman says here, "I know that Messiah is coming" - she was quite confident - "who is called Christ; when he comes he will tell us all things". Dear friend, she was on the way, there was something there, divine grace had opened her heart, she was prepared to listen. What a blessing to listen when Jesus speaks. I am touched by this - "I who speak to thee"; it is a bit different from the man in John 9; it is "to thee", He had a straight word for her. There was something Jesus wanted to clear with her. Dear friend, Jesus wants to clear everything with us; He wants to attend to every broken heart, every broken spirit and every breakdown on our side; Jesus would like to have a word with us. God has a right to speak; man thinks he can

ignore it when God is speaking, but sooner or later he will realize that he must listen. Paul says, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father's glory", Phil 2: 11. "I who speak": who can interfere with the affection of divine speaking from Jesus Himself?

I go on to John 9, a very instructive passage for us to draw upon; it is about a man who had to suffer. It is most remarkable what the Spirit of God brings out about the man; what a testimony he was! It is not now I who speak to thee, but it is rather, I who speak with thee. That is nearness. The Lord Jesus knew that there was something moving in his heart, there was something there that welcomed the speaking of Jesus. I have often thought about when Jesus heard that they had cast him out; that would have affected Jesus. The man had stood up in the religious world against the leaders, the teachers, the Pharisees, the scribes, and he was defending Jesus, he was standing in reproach on the side of Jesus. "Jesus heard that they had cast him out". It is touching when it refers to this, Jesus being who He was, Son of God, come down from heaven. He was here the Son of God, as if the greatness of God was shining, and yet it says "Jesus heard". Someone might have told him, or there was a report in the crowds, but "Jesus heard that they had cast him out". The world did not want this man. Why did they not want him? He was reflecting something of Jesus, the One who was speaking, and Jesus says, "he that speaks with thee is he". O, dear friend, have you been speaking with Jesus in this way? Have you been able to confide in Him in every aspect, been able to draw from Him in view of worship and response? The gospel has that in mind; the blessedness of sonship, we are sons by faith. Think of the wealth of the glad tidings. Jesus is able to touch this man. His parents failed, it was too much for them to stand up against the crowds, they wanted to have the status, the condition that they were used to amongst the Jews, and they say, Go and ask him. There was something there, they wondered over their son, and yet this man in such a wonderful way is able to bring out the touches of Jesus. "He that speaks with thee is he". O, dear friend, how near

Jesus as a Man is able to touch our hearts! He is a glorified Man, He is in heaven, He will always remain a Man, but all His glories as the Son of God will still remain. He is the One who will for ever remain the Same - "Yesterday, and today, and to the ages to come", Heb 13: 8. Think of how a Man like that, dear friend, will fill eternity! We shall be with Christ, we shall be at home with the Lord. That will not be a dull time, He will, we might say, lead things on, He will be the great Musician. Think of all the saints singing together, hearts that have been redeemed by Jesus. He that once has spoken, everything will be gathered round Him; all attention will be brought to Jesus, He that speaks. O, dear friend, that speaking is still going on. He is touching our hearts. He has a desire to sit down and to draw out, so He just says, "Thou, dost thou believe...?". How simple! Jesus would not say that to just anyone; He knew, being who He was, that the man was ready for it; he had gone through a lot of suffering, and Jesus felt for him, and having found him - "Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him". You can just see how Jesus would be going round the crowd looking for one particular man who had gone through difficulties, who had been ill-treated. "Jesus ... having found him": that is another wonderful contemplation in the Scriptures, Jesus finding persons. Heaven finds certain persons, they found one man who was equal to carrying the cross of Jesus, not in this gospel but they found Simon a Cyrenian to carry the cross of Jesus (see Luke 23: 26). Think how careful, how anxious, heaven would be for any service like that. Dear friend, has He found you and me? Are we able to respond to this finding, able to have, we might say, private conversation with Jesus - "he that speaks"? O, dear friend, may we take heed to this, and answer to this, that it might give joy to His heart.

I finally thought of Paul, you might say, the great one who was able to carry forward the truth and ministry, but even him Jesus had to touch. There again it is a bit different from the man in John 9. Paul here says "Who art thou, Lord?". The man in John 9 just says, "And who is he, Lord". He was at a distance; here the sovereign grace of God was working: Who art thou? I think it indicates that

Paul knew straight away that he had to stop; he realised the seriousness of the occasion, he realised that God was coming in to stop the course he was on. "Who art thou, Lord?" he says. He gives up all his own ideas. I remember my father often saying that when we take the name, Lord, as to Christ, do we really understand what it means, that our own will must go? There is only one Lord, He is the One who has been made both Lord and Christ, every other will has to give way. Paul realised that here - "Who art thou, Lord?". He admits and accepts the lordship of Christ straight away. He had a pathway to go yet, but with an opening in his heart on account of Jesus speaking to him. The voice said simply, "Saul, Saul": he is named twice; it is grace upon grace out of heaven. It is important to see that both here and later on, when he records it, it is a light out of heaven; the light that met Paul had its origin in heaven. Dear friend, the gospel that comes out now is light out of heaven; it comes from a glorified Man. The Saviour who is above is light out of heaven. How different when you look around in this world, evil increasing, darkness increasing, man beside himself when realising the evil, and able to do nothing about it. In the part from which I come we are in a great danger from the east, the borders have opened, and people generally in Scandinavia speak about what comes from Russia; it has been a nation that has been within limits, but now it is flooding into the west; the darkness was compact. But here how different, a light out of heaven! That is the only thing that can absorb the darkness down here, and that is what struck Paul - "Who art thou, Lord?". O, dear friend, he gave way straight away, he realised his time was up. We know from later on, when he records this occasion, there is expansion. The impressions that were by the light from heaven filled his soul and by the Spirit of God it expands. He is true to the light he was given so he is given more; he is able to widen his experience. Jesus just says, "/ am Jesus". O, dear friend, how personal! How beautiful! How touching! Even the greatness of Paul in all his independence, in all his evil activity, could not stand against "/ am Jesus". The Holy Scriptures refer to that in the end: I Jesus, I Jesus. Have you thought of that, the nearness of the Saviour Himself? It is not only the fact that He will see that everything will

end in glory to God, for everything is in His hand, but He wants us to realize that already now, and to get the joy of this - "I am Jesus, whom *thou* persecutest". O, dear friend, may we just have a simple impression of this speaking from heaven, light out of heaven and of "I who speak to thee am he", and "he that speaks with thee is he". May it be so for His Name's sake.

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FORGIVENESS, FREE, FULL AND FINAL

I have read that in every European language the words which express forgiveness and pardon all imply an absolute gift. One wonderful feature of God's pardon is that it is free; our faith needs to be nothing in payment. It is not a good works or goodness in us that make God willing to forgive us neither does the evil make Him unwilling to do so where there is repentance. How majestic it is for Him to say, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake", Isa 3: 25. Love is the motive and the work of Jesus is the abiding basis.

Another wonder is that forgiveness is full. Wherever God pardons He pardons all - every single sin however dark or deep, although He does work upon our consciences so that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin", 1 John 1: 7. The fact that some of our responsible sins remain in our minds and even become more hateful to us does not imply that they are still on the conscience and unforgiven. God will "abundantly pardon", and the simpler faith is, the more fully will this be understood and enjoyed.

Forgiveness is also final, a free gift that cannot be recalled. For it to be maintained does not depend upon the believer and there cannot be the blotting out of sins today and their being written down again tomorrow. The witness of it in our souls and its enjoyment may vary, but God gives to the obedient believer the free gift of the Holy Spirit who keeps our own spirits bright in the appreciation of all His blessings. We may say with king Hezekiah, "thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back", Isa 38: 17.

Another passage of Scripture rejoices that God casts sins into the depths of the sea (see Mic 7: 19). This is a most comforting word-picture for our souls. Many amazing deep-sea salvage works have been carried out successfully in our time, but no one, not even the devil himself, can ever raise the sins of a pardoned sinner! Sadly, however, at the end of time, the sea will give up for judgment

the unrepentant dead which are in it. But, "blessed they whose iniquities are forgiven", Rom 4: 7.

J.C.Evershed