

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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LIMITATION ENTERING INTO GOD'S WAYS

WEALTH

LIMITATION ENTERING INTO GOD'S WAYS

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J.McK. I wondered if we could find help and encouragement in seeing how the principle of limitation enters into God's ways with us in view of the reaching of His objectives. As we come together, many of the brethren know very testing circumstances, personally and in our households and localities. The situation generally is one of some difficulty. I think there would be encouragement for us in seeing that this is part of the wisdom of God's ways, and, far from working to our disadvantage, as limitation is accepted from Him it works out to great profit.

I read from Job showing that the principle enters into the great realm of creation; the reference particularly is to the sea, and God uses these remarkable words: "When I cut out for it my boundary, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed". The spirit of worship should enter our souls when we think of God using language like that.

Then in Joseph, described as one of the "king's prisoners", we have a type of the Lord Jesus, the One who came into circumstances of limitation such as we shall never know. Joseph was there as prospered of God, and we might see how the circumstances of Christ's manhood link with the reaching of divine objectives. Then Paul in Philippians says, "the circumstances in which I am have turned out rather to the furtherance of the glad tidings". Also David, great man as he was at the end of his life had to experience some measure of limitation, but what results is a great outflow of worship. He becomes a great contributor to the service of God.

I trust that the brethren will be free, because the truth is intended to bear on us in the real circumstances of life.

D.B.B. Paul at the outset was told how much he would have to suffer. It does not bring in any bitterness but great expansion, as we see from Philippians, that whatever the circumstances, he accepts them from God.

J.McK. I think what is needed is the perception in the soul of the greatness of the God with whom we have to do. The God who has designed, secured and conferred all our blessings is the God who acts in a certain way, and in our circumstances we are to recognise that He is supreme. What is happening in the world around us- and we should be a part of it - is that people are casting off restraint. In every sphere of life that is true, young people, older people, in every one of the social strata amongst men restraint is being cast off. I was thinking of the words of Solomon in Proverbs 29; "Where there is no vision the people cast off restraint" (v 18). "Where there is no vision": that is, where there is no real perception of the greatness of God the effect will be that restraint is cast off. Is that not true? I think therefore the need is to be preserved in our souls in some sense and acknowledgement of how great God is, the One who can bring a measure of restriction and yet can prosper us in it.

D.B.B. With Joseph God could have overruled the circumstances in a completely different way, but He acts, you might say, in view of Joseph getting the gain of what he was passing through in view of the release of his brethren.

R.D.P. Has limitation always been a test to man? I was thinking of the garden and the tree. Man was tested from the outset by limitation and the devil played on that, but God put no limitation on the tree of life.

J.McK. What man did not realise was that the restriction was for his protection. God was not withholding what was good but was asserting in that simple statement - "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat" (Gen 2:17) - His own supremacy. That is something that God will never relinquish in the life of any man, woman or child. In the prophet He says, "I am Jehovah ... and my glory will I not give to another", Isa 42: 8. So Job is instructed by God Himself as to the greatness of creation.

T.M. Do you think that, if we are going to be true to the fellowship to which we have been called, that in itself would impose limitations upon us as far as the world is concerned and will work out for our salvation?

J.McK. Certainly; and in recognising them we find, do we not, the faithfulness of the God whose testimony it is? There is an element of victory for God in working out the greatest things unobtrusively.

That principle can be traced right through Scripture. If man is going to do some great thing, if some major project is on hand, he clears the site and there is great evidence of what is going forward, great anticipation, great preparation. God does not work that way. He works out the greatest things in circumstances that, as far as men are concerned, are insignificant, but it is He who is working. I thought we should begin with Job because it is a comfort to see that God is supreme in regard of matters over which men have no control. God is bringing into Job's soul a sense of his own smallness. "Where wast thou when I founded the earth?" What He is really saying is, Job, much has gone on before and the source of all is the God of the universe, and if you have come to know Him in some measure, you have come into what others have enjoyed previously "all the sons of God shouted for joy". There were those who were sympathetic with what God had done and with His own rights in the realm of creation, a realm in which He has never relinquished His rights.

K.M. There is a majesty about these verses that causes us to worship in our souls.

J.McK. I believe that the element of worship is needed in every meeting. If we are to be in any occasion rightly, some sense of the greatness of God Himself needs to come into our souls.

D.J.W. What do you understand by these bars and doors in relation to the sea?

J.McK. Well, I am not able to open up the detail of this. I just thought that we should get an impression from it that God can control what men find impossible to control. In Birmingham we are a

long way from the sea but we realise that the sea is something that is outside the ambit of what man can actually handle. The point here is that God can handle it. Can we get an impression as together of the God who is supreme in regard of everything and that includes the powers of evil?

D.J.W. Are there two sides in it? The bars may imply restraint, but the doors seem to allow it to go into certain areas according to God's will. I was thinking of 2 Corinthians; "For the love of the Christ constrains us", chap 5: 14. In one sense there is a limitation, but it is a limitation of love.

J.McK. That is right. The idea of limitation is also the idea of control as far as God is concerned. He has resources and can use them. He says, "When I cut out for it my boundary" - majestic language! - "and set bars and doors".

N.T.M. God has used famines in His ways; in fact there is one in Joseph's time. I think there was ministry about that at the time of the depression. Limitation was forced upon men, upon the saints. God used the famine, used the shortage, to turn men to Himself.

J.McK. What is happening in this world today is that people are being brought under pressure, and they are realising that things are getting worse. It may be that, in His grace, God will use the situation to turn men to Himself, to find that He is the God of the universe, the God whose management of creation has never been relinquished. He can speak to men about it to impress us with what is far beyond creature perception.

N.T.M. At the time of the famine in Egypt everyone finally had typically to acknowledge Christ's supremacy.

J.McK. They were brought round to it by a process. It took time and it does take time, but ultimately God will ensure, as the poet speaks of it, 'supreme submission in my soul'.

M.M. Was the perfect control of the elements seen, when the Lord Jesus Himself was here to the point when they had to say, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?", Mark 4: 41.

J.McK. Such words convey the greatness of who was there in the person of Christ; it was none less than God, the wonder of the universe, God manifest in flesh. I think as a principle this idea of God's thoughts being worked out in circumstances of restriction runs right through Scripture. A few weeks ago in Worcester we had an impression which I still carry as to the greatness of what God opened up to Abraham. He said, "Look now toward the heavens, and number the stars, if thou be able ... So shall thy seed be!", Gen 15: 5. But how was that worked out? It was worked out in circumstances of great restriction in the history of Abraham. Sarah was barren, and you can see in God's ways right the way through the book of Genesis as He worked out in that family all that He had in mind, the principle of restraint and restriction ensuring consistent dependence upon Himself.

R.D.P. You referred to the scripture which speaks of where there is no vision. Is essentially vision to be linked with any sense we have as to limitation? Abraham was sustained, you may say, by vision through the times when, as it says, "who against hope believed in hope", Rom 4: 18. When things were almost impossible he was sustained by that. Is that important?

J.McK. And you have it with Moses too: "for he persevered, as seeing him who is invisible", Heb 11: 27. The same thing is there, the element of vision. It is something outside your pathway and greater than your own situation that preserves you in the circumstances in which you are.

R.D.P. This great matter of creation which we started with is interesting. It seems from Revelation that, even in a day beyond ours, God will use the testimony in creation in relation to working out His ways. There is always something in creation that is beyond us. It is as if that is an abiding testimony to God's ways.

J.McK. And creation not simply as an evidence of God's power historically, but of God's action currently, because He acts in it, does He not? The Lord Jesus said, "Consider the lilies how they grow", Luke 12: 27. How does it happen? God is active in these things and

faith gives place to it. Where faith is, there rises in the soul the spirit of worship that acknowledges God's supremacy.

P.H. At the end Job says, "but now mine eye seeth thee", Job 42: 5. Had he vision then?

J.McK. Well, he had heard about Him before. I think many of us have heard things about God. We live in a favoured day. Most of us have been brought up in circumstances of great benefit from that point of view, but there comes a day when on to the vision of the soul bursts some impression of the greatness of God. That is when we begin to make progress .

A.K.T. Have you in mind, in this thought of limitation, smallness of numbers in our localities? "For where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them" Matt 18: 20. The scripture gives us that illustration of how things can be restricted to such small numbers and yet the Lord be there .

J.McK. Let us see that that restriction is of God. It is not simply a consequence of man's failure. You may say it is a consequence of history and all that has come in through human failures. Rather let us see that it is a consequence of God's ways, that in His wisdom He is working out His testimony in circumstances of smallness. Our salvation practically is in the acceptance of that.

B.B. God says in one place where there is extreme limitation, "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former", Hag 2: 9. That is an uplifting thought in a time of pressure.

J.McK. There can be spiritual enlargement, can there not, where there is outward limitation? I think it is fine to see that the God we have to do with is supreme: "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further". You see the rising tide of evil in the world: God is great enough, He will deal with evil wherever it is. You see crimes being perpetrated on humanity, 'man's inhumanity to man', the violence of war and all that is going on in the world at the moment. God allows certain things in His ways but finally He will deal with evil. "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further".

J.W. In the previous chapter there is a verse that brings out the extreme limitation into which Christ came: "By the breath of God ice is given; and the breadth of the waters is straitened", chap 37: 10.

Does that give a clue as to what God is working out in this book as to the taking away of the first and the establishing of the second in God's ways with Job?

J.McK. I think it does and would bring us on to the passage in Genesis. What we have there is Joseph, a type of the Lord Jesus as we know, referred to as one of the king's prisoners. Let us allow the greatness of this afresh to impress us, that One who was none less than God, the God of the universe as we have been speaking of Him, He actually came Himself into circumstances that were restricted and, as in these circumstances of manhood, He went into the kind of restriction that that verse alludes to: "By the breath of God ice is given; and the breadth of the waters is straitened". The Lord Jesus said, "But I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it shall have been accomplished!", Luke 12: 50.

What feeling was in these words from the lips of One who Himself was not affected by the intrusion of sin. Why should it be that He should be restricted? Why should it be that He should be limited in any sense? Yet He knew limitation in a way that is greater than we shall ever know it.

J.W. One of the Psalms referring to Joseph gives us a sense of the feelings of Christ: "his soul came into irons" Ps 105: 8.

J.McK. That no doubt relates to this time when Joseph was confined in the king's prison.

D.J.W. Is verse 21 very touching in this subject, that in the limitation, suitable grace is given to meet that condition?

J.McK. "And Jehovah was with Joseph, and extended mercy to him, and gave him favour in the eyes of the chief of the tower-house". Think of the reality of the condition into which Jesus came, that He looked to God for everything. It says he "advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men", Luke 2: 52.

So that the God who rules the universe was providing, in the

circumstances in which Joseph was, that he should know prosperity. I read a remark in one of Mr Darby's letters the other day which impressed me. He said we need to be in the place of God's mind in order to prove His strength. I commend that to the brethren because I think it links very much with what we are saying. Joseph accepted the limitation. Christ came into limitation and He accepted that situation and proved God's strength in it.

R.D.P. Is it then an encouragement to see that these men like Joseph were not in the situation stoically? He obviously felt it; the iron came into his soul as was referred to. Speaking reverently, even the Lord Jesus went through those situations feelingly, did He not? - "but then, not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22: 42) and soon – just for our encouragement, because we do not find limitation easy. It is meant to bring out feelings in us. We are not to become stoical, but it is intended to bring out feelings and dependence and weakness and all these things that God can use.

J.McK. The very circumstances into which Christ came confirm that. In Philippians 2 it says He "emptied himself" (v 7). Now, surely, if we ponder that, it involved tremendous sacrifice.

R.H. Does it bring about the spirit of worship in us? I feel that, at a time like this, when we are talking of these scriptures, we need to be worshipful as to the greatness of who God is and yet the way in which He comes right down into our circumstances individually and, as you say, locally, wherever it is.

J.McK. Think of who it was who emptied Himself, none less than one of the Persons of the Godhead, coming into circumstances of limitation. That is involved in emptying Himself, 'taking a bondman's form', and, as it also says, "taking his place" - "his place" - "in the likeness of men" (v 7). In itself, as Mr Darby has taught us, that statement – "the likeness of men" involves dignity. God's thought was that man was a dignified creature. But then Christ having come into that, it involved a stoop. He became, as another has said, what He was not before; He took that place. But then "having been found in figure as a man", it says He "humbled himself, becoming obedient

even unto death, and that the death of the cross" (v 8). This all links with Joseph who became the king's prisoner.

D.B.B. It says later, "God sent me before you to preserve life", Gen 45: 5. The end is that life might be coming to light.

J.McK. Psalm 105 says "He sent a man before them"; then immediately, "Joseph was sold for a bondman" (v 17). It was not that he came immediately to the place of control, but he was "sold for a bondman". That is intended to appeal to our feelings and cause us to wonder at the way he moved.

D.E.R. Joseph's limitations came upon him because he was practically separate. Separation for us may involve limitation but our blessing lies in accepting it.

J.McK. Divine support will come that way. Again, if I may be allowed to repeat that phrase from Mr Darby's letters, we need to be in the place of His mind to prove His strength. He goes on to say that that is really the failure of Christendom. The great religious body is not in the place of His mind and therefore it is not proving His strength.

R.D.P. The word that was given to Paul, "My grace suffices thee" (2 Cor 12: 9), seems to enter into this because, naturally speaking, Joseph may have expected to be relieved of his imprisonment when he says to the chief of the sup-bearers, "bear a remembrance with thee of me" (chap 40: 14), but it says he "did not remember Joseph, and forgot him" (v 23). Some of our brethren go through this and sometimes may feel that things are lightening, something is happening, but in God's ordering He allows pressure to go on. I think Joseph brings out this matter very well because afterwards his feelings seem to become controlled while the exercise is worked out. Later he made himself known to his brethren; it is as if the exercises worked tremendous depth in his soul.

J.McK. So that it says in Psalm 105, "Until the time when what he said came about: the word of Jehovah tried him" (v 19). Now that is what you are saying, that it took time, a process of time. Think of those thirty three and a half years when the Lord Jesus was on the

earth, what compression it was, and yet from another point of view, what an extended period that in that time a divine Person should accept the limitations of manhood.

Rem. "And he was there in the tower-house" links with that. It was no make-believe; it was real.

J.McK. That is fine. It seems as if it is emphasised: "And Joseph's lord took him and put him into the tower-house ... and he was there in the towerhouse", as if the Spirit of God would just arrest us. It is almost like a hiatus, that something should actually register with us.

What is needed in meetings like this is not that we should necessarily be more informed about the truth but that we should get an impression that enters the soul as to the grace that brought Christ, Him who did no sin, into circumstances of restriction in order that others should be brought into blessing.

Ques. Is there something in the way that Joseph is prepared to listen to the exercises of one man, just the same as the Lord Jesus was prepared to listen to the exercises of one woman at Sychar's well and then speak to her about the Father?

J.McK. These two men both offended their lord. They were evil-doers, but they were put "into the tower-house, into the place where Joseph was imprisoned". Now, that is going to work out greatly to the advantage of these man. How close Christ has come in circumstances of manhood in order that we should get the benefit that flows from His interest, from His sympathy and from His power.

M.M. Is that what would help us to be assured that we are in the place of His mind that you quoted?

J.McK. It is there that we find His presence, do you mean?

M.M. We may go through a lot of soul exercise over this matter, may we not?

J.McK. I think so. The submission of the soul is a very fine thing. The poet refers to it: 'To claim supreme submission in my soul!' Do you know that poem? -

'But although His arm is power in the infinite expanse,

That same unerring arm is in control
To determine and to govern my *every circumstance* -
To claim *supreme submission* in my soul!

That was by Robert Fear, was it not?

N.T.M. Robert Fear, a brother in Kilmarnock, was in the invasion force on D-Day and it is said he went on the deck and wrote that poem:

'He hath fixed the set proportions of the oceans and the land
According to the details of His plan;
He hath "measured out the waters in the hollow of His hand"
And "meted out the heavens with His span".

He controls th' unconquered orbit of "the light that rules the
day"

And guides the myriad worlds that shine at night;
And brings forth the host of heaven by their numbers to display
The uncontested brilliance of His might!

But although His arm is power in the infinite expanse,
That same unerring arm is in control
To determine and to govern my *every circumstance* -
To claim *supreme submission* in my soul!

Yes! and though He counts the nations as "the dust upon the
scale"

And soars above their triumphs and alarms,
He remembers all about us - that our frame of dust is frail,
And holds us in His everlasting arms'.

J.McK. 'To claim supreme submission in my soul!' The God of the universe has that right in regard of every one of us. I was thinking of another verse, if I might be allowed to refer to it: "For out of the prison-house he came forth to reign, although he was born poor in his kingdom", Eccles 4: 14. Now that is Joseph. He was born poor in his kingdom, in circumstances of poverty. The Lord Jesus knew that too. He knew the restrictions of poverty, and He came forth from

that position to reign. So what these men proved was that the one who was going to rule was close to them.

D.E.R. That would encourage us because God's ways are not capricious but His love is behind them. It is all with a view to the securing of His purpose for each one of us and for the assembly, and what He has in view is blessing, and in His ways He may allow restriction and it is best for us to accept the restriction.

J.McK. Joseph says to these men, "Why are your faces so sad today?" That is a good question: here is a touch of sympathy from a man who has accepted God's will as to his circumstances and he is in it for the blessing of others, Christ is available for our help.

Ques. Is it encouraging to see with the cup-bearer that he is restored? He is able to give pleasure to God typically, give joy to God's heart. Is that the end in view, do you think?

J.McK. I think so.

D.J.W. Does this section show how it works together: "all things work together", Rom. 8: 28. The way the Lord is working with you and with me and with others all works together to build something up. I was thinking of Matthew 25; they said to the Lord, "when saw we thee hungering, and nourished thee ... or in prison, and came to thee?" (vv 37-39). It brings something out in the body feeling of the saints, does it not?

R.D.P. Do you not get a touch here with Joseph of the vision we were speaking of? He says, "Why are your faces so sad today? And they said to him, We have dreamt a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said to them, Do not interpretations belong to God?" He lifts immediately from the drab surroundings into a realm of things where there is no limitation. It is as if he draws strength from that and the thing goes on from there.

J.McK. It is the language, typically of the great Mediator. He is not calling attention to himself, saying, I can give you the answer. He says, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" There is a key in that,

in the typical teaching of It, that God was near to them in the person of Joseph and the answer came through him.

N.T.M. Is there any reference to the service of God in the cup here?

J.McK. There will be. You tell us.

N.T.M. The baker is full of himself but the butler is really thinking of God and His portion. Is that not something we should carry with us, no matter how small and few and weak we get?

J.McK. He had the benefit of Pharaoh in his mind, and the dream really testified to the fact that he was going to press the grapes into Pharaoh's cup. He was not thinking of himself, but it was only when he came into touch with Joseph that the whole thing became clear.

Ques. He was given his original position back. Why was that, do you think? He was not reduced in the ranks, was he?

J.McK. Recovery is a principle with God, is it not? The way that failure is met here is through Joseph. I believe there are many who have some apprehension of the truth but they do not really understand it because they have not the Person in view to whom it all relates. Mr Darby refers to some persons who have a knowledge of the truth but no knowledge of the Person who expresses it. These men found themselves in the presence of one who had done no wrong and he became the servant of those who had done wrong in view of their complete release.

P.H. Would you say that these limitations are not merely physical and circumstantial? One could suffer unjustly, be accused of having done something wrong which one has never done. We have to learn to bear injustices, would you say?

J.McK. It all links with what we have been quoting:

'To claim *supreme submission* in my soul!'

You are brought to say, If God has allowed this situation I will accept it.

N.T.M. In the prison would Joseph always show that it is better to suffer than to sin?

J.McK. He was imprisoned unjustly, accused unfairly, confined and yet uncomplaining. What an example! As we gather we are conscious of the pressures that are on the spirits of the brethren, but what shines through is the spirit of Christ in uncomplaining grace that accepts the whole thing from God. We are not to be governed by circumstances but be governed by God in them.

J.W. It is the sympathy of Christ that enables us to go that way; we could not do it of ourselves, could we?

J.McK. Joseph was thinking of the others. He says, "Why are your faces so sad today?" Now, he could have said, I have done no evil, why have I been put in this place of restriction? Instead of that he is concerned as to them and as to why their countenances are fallen.

R.D.P. Why is this so difficult for us to prove in practice individually? We see it in Joseph and it is fine to see it working out, but as soon as we find maybe there is a wrong accusation, we can find ourselves spending weeks, months, even years justifying ourselves and somehow we miss the benefit of these things.

J.McK. What you say is a real challenge. One of the things that has burdened me recently, if I may say so simply, is the danger of expending our energy on things that are not of great importance.

R.D.P. He could have spent all these years sending petitions. He seems to have accepted the total injustice. It is never mentioned again and, as far as we know, it was never put right. He was not brought out of prison because the accusation was withdrawn; it was for a completely different reason. It was as if he left it completely.

J.McK. The Psalm says "the king sent and loosed him". The time came when God released the pressure, but until then Joseph was prepared to accept it. It is like Mephibosheth who says, "Let him even take all, since my lord the king is come again in peace to his own house", 2 Sam 19: 30. What was governing the man was affection for Christ, purity of motive. What you say challenges us as to whether we expend energy on things that are not really too important.

R.D.P. I had a letter from someone who is still occupied about something that occurred many years ago, and there may even have been an element of truth in it, but he has missed practically the fellowship and the blessing for years because this thing has become an enormous obstacle in his mind, whereas to others it does not really affect the truth as such. It seems to be something that could easily be let go and yet obviously with this brother it is a massive thing. We need grace for these things, do you think?

J.McK. At bottom with many of these problems is our own reputation or imagined reputation. Joseph had none. He was in the tower-house as one of the king's prisoners and he was content to remain there until the time when it says "the king sent and loosed him".

D.E.R. The apostle Paul could have avoided being in prison in Rome, and Joseph could have avoided it too by just falling in with this woman's demands, but with Paul we see the motive which governed him; "For me to live is Christ", Phil 1: 21. It was love for Christ which caused him to take the part he did which in result meant that he was in prison.

J.McK. We should perhaps speak briefly of Philippians 1. Paul is writing to these beloved brethren in whom there was a unique work of God and he says to them, "But I would have you know, brethren, that the circumstances in which I am have turned out rather to the furtherance of the glad tidings". Now, they might not have understood that, but he says, I want you to know that that is so. I think it requires the spirit of Christ to accept restriction in this way.

D.B.B. Not exactly for his blessing but for "the furtherance of the glad tidings".

J.McK. It was for something greater than himself. He says, "so that my bonds have become manifest as being in Christ in all the praetorium and to all others". That is, it became perfectly obvious that, although it was a Roman chain that actually held him, what was really constraining him was his relationship with Christ.

D.J.W. Is it therefore necessary to have the longer view you referred to in relation to Job - "but now mine eye seeth thee"? Do we need

the longer view rather than the short term one? In the short term it seemed a very great deal of pressure, but the long view was it had "turned out rather to the furtherance of the glad tidings".

J.McK. That is right. He says also, "for I know that this shall turn out for me to salvation, through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ". That is, he is calling into view a whole system of help - "your supplication". If Paul had not been in these circumstances, the sympathy of these saints would not have been drawn out to such an extent. And then he says there is the "supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ", that is the resource from God's side that is pouring in to sustain this outwardly obscure and testing position.

D.J.W. I wondered if there was a wonderful example of this in the martyrs. Their martyrdom did not stop because their end was reached; it stopped because it was making more converts. Pressure was really bringing more to Christ.

J.McK. Well, God can turn things to His own advantage. It proves that God's ways are not man's ways. The whole principle of what we are saying today proves that, that God does things in a way that entirely perplexes man. Men cannot understand it and yet, His objectives being unchanged, God can work out His thoughts in circumstances of external restriction and difficulty. In Revelation 3 the Lord says, "I have set before thee an opened door" (v 8). That means that at one time the door had been shut. Those brethren had known what restriction was and the time came when the door was opened and there was a release from it, and that will be our blessed experience. There is no doubt about it.

A.K.T. Would 'the Spirit of Jesus Christ' have more emphasis on His manhood when here and the sufferings through which He passed?

J.McK. I think it would, the Spirit of that Man, the One who accepted the restriction and made room for God in it. Another has said that God was nearer to Christ than any circumstance, and although He was taken by wicked hands, taken by His foes and at one point made men's prisoner (we have spoken about Him being God's

prisoner; He was also men's prisoner) for a brief time. He accepted all in the light of divine supremacy. The supply of the Spirit of that Man is what is sustaining Paul as he refers to "the circumstances in which I am".

R.D.P. It seems also to give him a remarkable generosity of outlook; he even speaks about those who preach for envy and strife but, some also for good will. But then he says, "What is it then? at any rate, in every way, whether in pretext or in truth, Christ is announced". Is there not a very lovely generosity of spirit in that?

J.McK. He has a view of divine supremacy that will reach its own objective in spite of man's crookedness. He says, in effect, they might be doing it for the wrong reasons, but if Christ is preached I can see how God can use it.

R.D.P. He says in chapter 3, "As many therefore as are perfect, let us be thus minded; and if ye are any otherwise minded, this also God shall reveal to you" (v 15). There is a lovely spirit of generosity there. You may say, he could almost have made an issue at that point, but he says, God will reveal it. It is as if the tribulation had worked something with him which had resulted in the expansion of heart of which he speaks to the Corinthians (see 2 Cor 6: 13).

J.McK. And humility too. Paul is not centring all things on himself. Had he been, he would have said, I am restricted and imprisoned, I cannot preach any more, so things must stop. But he has the humility to realise that God can use others in this great work that He Himself is promoting amongst men. And that is still going on. We need to be subject to God's will and be in the spirit of humility that realises that He can operate on a wide front to bring about results for Himself. I think that is the way that we shall find divine support in the circumstances in which we are. Paul is referring to the circumstances in which he is. Your circumstances are not mine; mine are not yours, God knows them perfectly and He is able in them to work things out so that what is of Himself prospers.

N.T.M. In one sense death is the greatest limitation, but can we not learn from one another in our lives, our spirits and the way we are,

how to accept things?

J.McK. Well, the Lord Jesus learned obedience a remarkable thing! (see Heb 5: 8). We need to learn it too, do we not?

A.K.T. Paul was prepared to die that Christ might be magnified and in actuality he did die.

J.McK. That is right.

The passage in 2 Samuel 7 is well known to the brethren. We do not need to say much about it. David is adjusted at this point through the skilful service of Nathan. I have been impressed, as reading this chapter, that at no point in Nathan's communication does he correct David. He never says, What you are proposing, David, is not right. But in the skill that God gave he brings David round to the point where he realises that God is bringing in a certain limitation on him and indicating that Solomon is the one who is going to build the house. From one point of view David is being restricted; from another point he is being extended because he is going to see what God has in Solomon and that that will be extended for His own pleasure.

R.D.P. It says, "According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak to David". It is almost as if it was more than words that he communicated. He communicated something of what another has called the vision of the Almighty.

J.McK. You would like to be able to bring in a prophetic word that actually brings God into a situation. In a sense Nathan did not need to adjust David; God did it through the word and He brought in something that was greater than what David was committed to. So it says, "And king David went in and sat before Jehovah", that is, he took this place of restful tranquillity in the presence of God Himself and what comes out in his soul is remarkable. We are not able for the detail of this passage, but we could get an impression of what came from David as a consequence of his accepting this restriction from God. He becomes a wonderful contributor to the service of God. He begins to speak about what God is in Himself: "And now, Lord Jehovah, thou art that God, and thy words are true, and thou

hast promised this goodness unto thy servant; and now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever; for thou, Lord Jehovah, hast spoken it".

Ques. Is what he arrives at in Psalm 51 very remarkable? He ends with sacrifice.

J.McK. Well, it was a Psalm that began with repentance, but it ends on the highest note. Certainly here, although he no doubt felt the adjustment that was needed, as accepting divine supremacy in it, what results is an outflow of response that would not have been available otherwise.

BIRMINGHAM

13 March 1993

Key to initials

B.Bodman, Birmingham; D.B.Bodman, Birmingham; P.Hazell, Preston; R.Hutson, Bedford; J.McKay, Woodstock; K.Marshall, Rotherham; M.Matthews, Birmingham; N.T.Meek, Malvern; T.Moulden, Worcester ; R.D.Plant, Birmingham; D.E.Remmington, St.Albans; A.K.Turner, Rotherham; D.J.Willetts, Birmingham; J.Wright, Redbridge

WEALTH

John McKay

Galatians 4: 1-5; Deuteronomy 33: 23 ;

1 Corinthians 12: 12,13; Matthew 25: 14-29

I seek help from the Lord to say a word as to the present dispensation, a dispensation which is marked by fulness. This may be in contrast to what has engaged us in the reading but it in no way contradicts it. Outwardly the circumstances of the testimony are restricted; inwardly the position is a very wealthy one. I would like to attract you freshly today to prove the wealth that is available for you in Christianity. We need to be preserved from reading the Scriptures as simply a statement of doctrine. As we open them they apply to the one who reads them. Paul, writing to these Galatian believers says, "but when the fulness of the time was come". That reference looks to the present moment. It refers immediately to the incoming of Jesus, but it is a time, according to the great apostle, which is marked by fulness. Much that engages men is empty and hollow. In the beginning of Genesis we are told that, through the intrusion of sin into the universe, "the earth was waste and empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep", chap 1: 2. God has intervened to change all that, and the way He has intervened is to come in Himself in the person of Christ - "the fulness of the time was come". I believe it means that we are in a dispensation in which from God's side there are no reserves. God has made Himself known fully. He had been known previously, known to Abraham to David and to Joseph of whom we were speaking earlier, but when we come to Christianity He is made known in His fulness. There are no reserves. He is made known according to His own nature, His own rights and His own power in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the great Name of revelation. We have been baptised to it, dear brethren, and we are here today in the light of the fulness of the revelation of God.

So it says, "but when the fulness of the time was come". Think of God waiting until the time for it arrived! Really the whole period of

the Old Testament, some four thousand years, was for God, in a sense, a waiting time. All anticipated and looked forward to the great moment when, emptying Himself, Christ would come, taking manhood's form, here to be the full expression of what God sought and desired from men. But, dear brethren, He was to be more than that; He was in Himself the expression of the fulness of God: "For in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily", Col 2: 9. How great Christ is! How great the Person whom we know! How great the Man whom we love! "For in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily". That is what He was as a man in flesh and blood upon the earth. As another has said, Christ as here on earth, the body of a Man was greater than the whole universe. Solomon said to God, "the heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!", 2 Chron 6: 18.

Yet in Jesus we have on the earth the body of a man great enough to be the shrine of Deity. This gives character to the fulness of the time, the Christian dispensation into which we have been brought.

God was counting the years. He was also counting the generations. We read at the beginning of Matthew's gospel how He counted three lots of fourteen generations and we see how God had determined the fixed point at which there should be this wonderful intervention of grace, the wonder of the universe, that a divine Person should be manifest here in flesh and blood conditions. So the time was fixed, fixed by God.

But more than that was involved. It is also an indication of a development in the ways of God. It was not only the passage of years. It was that, when Christ came, the fulness of God's thoughts in blessing for men would be disclosed. So it says, "but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, come of woman, come under law, that he might redeem those under law, that we might receive sonship". What we have come to is the time of sonship. What is available to every believer in the present dispensation is sonship. Have you received it? We may plead with persons to accept the forgiveness of sins; that is only the beginning. God's thought is that man should receive sonship; that means that

man should be set up in dignity upon the earth in conscious relationship with God, divinely blest, and himself the expression of how God has been made known to him. Now is that like you? Is that like me? How measured we are as we think of the greatness of divine disclosure in the present dispensation!

I want to speak from these other passages of persons who in some measure came practically into the gain of divine blessing. I refer to Naphtali but I want to speak about ourselves because, if we refer to a scripture, it is that the bearing of it upon our own circumstances and experience should be felt. Naphtali is described in Deuteronomy 33 as "satisfied with favour". He was a man, like you perhaps, who was born into a household where there was faith.

I trust that all of us value that great privilege. His father was Jacob, a man who knew God and who proved God, and Naphtali had been brought in as a result of exercise. His name, if you refer to Genesis 30, means 'my wrestling'. Somebody had concern that this son was being born into the household of faith. Somebody has had concern about you. The younger brethren here today need to take account of themselves as the result of exercise in the household of faith, not simply in your own family but in the environment in which you have been brought up. 'My wrestling': that is Naphtali. Read what Jacob says about him in Genesis 49: he refers to him as "a hind let loose" (v 21). I think that connects somewhat with what we had earlier.

Naphtali knew something about restriction. He had been held back, just like that colt in the gospel tied at the crossway. Someone did that and prevented it straying. That is what happened with Naphtali. The moment came however when he was to be let loose. "He giveth goodly words", Jacob says; he became a contributor. I trust there is concern amongst us that we should become not only recipients of blessing but contributors in the area where the fulness of the Christian dispensation is to be experienced. "He giveth goodly words". Do not always be waiting for somebody else to provide what is needed in the local meeting. God will help in the provision of something that can be extended, "goodly words", not critical words, not words that are negative in their outlook and bearing but "goodly

words". It is an indication of a person who is living in the light of Christianity, that he can bring in something that is positive, and that is what is going to help forward others in the pathway of faith.

So it says he is "satisfied with favour". He is not looking outside the divine system for anything. He is "satisfied with favour".

"The act of favour of God", Paul says is "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord", Rom 6: 23. Are we satisfied with the portion that God has conferred upon us? I think it is because we enjoy these things so little that we divert so easily to other things which do not satisfy.

Naphtali was "full of the blessing of Jehovah". Persons are filled as they are maintained in conscious touch with Christ Himself. Christ was here the expression of divine fulness. John says, "we have contemplated his glory", but he also says we have received of His grace. He says, "for of his fulness we all have received, and grace upon grace", John 1: 16. Naphtali was a person who was filled by grace. I think we should be concerned to reflect more the greatness of what has been conferred upon us so that we become filled vessels, filled by grace. Consecration in the Old Testament, if you read in the law of the offerings, was the filling of the hands. That is that God provided something. He says, "none shall appear before me empty", Exod 34: 20. That was a divine requirement. Persons were not to appear before God as not being fully furnished with what was required. God says, I will fill your hands. It is a very interesting verse in Leviticus 6 which I was looking at just before the meeting. It speaks of the consecration of the priest and it says in verse 15: "And he shall take of it his handful of the fine flour of the oblation". "His handful"; that is, you are appropriating what is available in Christ for you. We sang:

'Thy fulness, Lord, is now for me,
All my fresh springs are hid in Thee;
In Thee I live; while I confess
I nothing am, yet all possess' (No.281)

The wealth of what is in Christ is available to the believer: "and he shall take of it his handful of the fine flour of the oblation". I wonder if you have taken your handful, yours, that is, that you appropriate

what is available in Christ. It would become formative so that your whole person, as with Naphtali, becomes "full of the blessing of Jehovah". Even as David said to God at one point: "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening oblation", Ps 141: 2. That meant that there was something in David that answered to the oblation, that answered to the worth and fulness of the humanity of Christ. This is available for every person who is born into a Christian household, which applies to most of us here. We are not to be as persons impoverished but to be here as wealthy.

We come to 1 Corinthians 12. This epistle is addressed to a local company and everyone here belongs to such a company. God has given us places in which to work out the truth and we are to rise to the level of what has been divinely proposed in our local settings.

So if you can put yourself in as a Naphtali, I think you can also put yourself in as one of the Corinthians, a person to whom such an epistle as this can be addressed. Paul says, "For also in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or free". As you look around you see many differences between persons. The difference between the Jew and the Greek was an emphasised one. The Jew was a religious man, the Greek an academic. They were poles apart. "Bondmen or free", you can look around in the world and see all these distinctions amongst men, the lower levels of the social strata right through to the upper levels, religious persons, able persons intellectually, persons inclined to commerce, persons inclined to leisure, all these things. All these are differences amongst men. The great fact is that God has found the answer in view of bringing about the elimination of all that is different and setting us together in relation to what is greater. "For also in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body". God has done that with believers so that all these distinctions that trouble men are removed. Are you not sorry for men, pursuing their own aims, with their fellow-men all having different aims, all struggling for different objectives? What confusion exists! God has the answer to it all in Christianity. It says, "For also

in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body".

That is what God has done. Then it says, "and have all been given to drink of one Spirit". That is our side and I would like to encourage us to drink more deeply in this sense: "given to drink of one Spirit".

Supreme satisfaction lies in this. I wish I knew more of it, dear brethren, but I can see that supreme satisfaction lies in drinking into one Spirit. It means that we become satisfied. Satisfaction is deliverance from the whole line of things that may have troubled us.

One of the dangers is that we get involved in party activity and party thinking. God has the answer to that and it is here, available, in the Spirit. We need to drink into one Spirit. It means that we are all satisfied with the same thing, with divine provision. You could not improve on divine provision. The setting of this passage is the new covenant, the best that God can provide, and yet how often we go off on a tangent, on our own course, disregarding the wealth that is available to us in the local company and in the assembly as indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God's side is that "in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body": our side is we "have all been given to drink of one Spirit". So that supreme satisfaction should mark persons who are in the light of the assembly. Is it so, dear brethren? I am rebuked sometimes as thinking of my own circumstances and perhaps being a little complaining in them when I hear a brother get on his feet and thank God for the wealth of blessing that has been divinely conferred upon us. How unthankful and how unappreciative we sometimes are of the wealth that belongs to the Christian dispensation! May we drink more deeply, dear brethren! As we come together at the time of the Supper and drink out of one cup, it involves the inward unity and satisfaction that belongs to the spiritual system. Let us not divert from it! Let us not get into an area that is petty, that is according to man relating to the differences which God by His Spirit has removed! The power of the Spirit is the only unity which God recognises. If we believe that, we realise that we cannot be united on any other basis than that of divine provision.

In Matthew's gospel, we have the parable which speaks of the man going out of the country and delivering to his bondmen of his substance. I want you to put yourself into this passage too, because in these days, Christ having left the country, our Master being absent, all of us are bondmen and in some way are called into the great matter of service. The Lord is absent but He has left certain things behind. This passage makes clear that what He has left behind is His substance. Is that not wonderful? His substance! The ownership of this substance never changes throughout the whole period of the Lord's absence. It is His and He is leaving it with the bondmen. His sovereignty and His perfect knowledge of the bondmen come into view because He does not give them all the same, He gives "to each according to his particular ability". The Lord understands each of us but He gives. Let that register with us all and with the younger ones here. The Lord gives, and what He gives is of His own substance. Now another thing that is very striking is that He gives only a little. None of these bondmen are given a great deal. It says, "And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one". He did not give a great deal, but He gave of His own substance. You might look around and say, Brother So-and-so has far more than I have. He has a little; it came from Christ. You have a little; it came from Christ. I am challenged by this, dear brethren, and I take this opportunity to bring that challenge among the brethren as to what we are doing with what He has entrusted to us.

What is very clear in this passage is that the Lord is giving no directions. You may say, I thought service was all on the principle of direction, and, of course, the fact that we have a Master means that we have to defer to Him in everything. But these men are left and the master is away. What is to be done? They had substance and what comes out is that the persons who know the Master act in a way that is wise and that results in prosperity and gain in their Lord's absence. Is this not a tribute to God's work in the saints? The increase that results is very wonderful. The sequel here is "And he that had received the five talents went and trafficked with them, and made five other talents. In like manner also he that had received the two, he also gained two others. But he that had received the one

went and dug in the earth, and hid the money of his lord. And after a long time the lord of those bondmen comes and reckons with them". The length of the time is what brings out the condition of each of the bondmen. How well do I know my Master? What would my Master do in these circumstances? I have something and, however small it is, it belongs not to me, it belongs to Him. Those who have the courage through knowledge of Himself to traffic with what they have produce gain, and the gain belongs not to them, but is available to the master on his return. I would encourage the brethren. Our measure is small and, as we said earlier in the meetings today, God works on the principle of limitation. You may be asked to serve in a meeting and you feel that what you have is so small. Only the Lord is able to make it adequate, and yet you find that among the brethren there is increase. This man who has five talents gains five others so that when the Lord comes back, what he says to him is, "Well, good and faithful bondman". Is that not fine? It was not the result of his knowledge or of his particular ability. It was the result of his faithfulness that brought the increase. Now, dear brethren, let us be encouraged to be faithful to Christ. How true He has been to us and at what cost. Let us be faithful to the Master in order that when He returns we may have such a word as this: "thou wast faithful over a few things". Look after a few things, dear brethren, in your local meeting, look after things that came from Him. They belong not to you but to the One who gave them. "Thou wast faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things".

Then to refer to that verse at the end: "for to every one that has shall be given, and he shall be in abundance". The bondman now becomes a reflection of the wealth of the Christian dispensation: "He shall be in abundance". How much have you, dear brother, dear sister? Do you sometimes feel empty? I must confess that I do. We should not do so because we are in the light of the wealth of the divine system. God has made Himself known without reserve in Christ. The fulness of God has been manifested in the glorious person of the Lord Jesus and we have received of His substance.

We should be as satisfied as Naphtali, drinking into one Spirit, finding satisfaction in the area of the assembly. Then as bondmen

we should be proving in faithfulness, in the absence of the Master, that we become wealthy so that when He comes back there will be something for Him. "But when the Son of man comes, shall he indeed find faith on the earth?", Luke 18: 8. Let it be that what He has entrusted to us may be preserved! Let us expend our energy in ways that are profitable, working with the substance He has given, and finding that gain comes on that line! May it be so for His Name's sake!

BIRMINGHAM

13 March 1993