

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 272

November 1995

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"SHALL THE PREY BE TAKEN FROM THE MIGHTY"

FAITH AND HOPE

"I AM COMING TO YOU"

John 14: 18; 6: 45; Genesis 44: 18-34; 45: 1-5, 12-15

J.McK. In Genesis 45:15 we reach the point where Joseph's brethren talked with him. There is an immediate link enjoyed in the communion between the brethren and Joseph himself. I wondered whether we could link the process involved in reaching that with what we have read in John's gospel. What is characteristic of the Lord at the present time is expressed in verse 18 of chapter 14, "I am coming to you". That is, the saints are very much in the mind of Christ during the waiting time. He is a Man of great affairs. He, finally, will have the key position in the whole universe of God, but at the moment what is prominent in His mind is those that are His. "I am coming to you" is characteristic. Now, what is characteristic of the saints in the waiting time is what we have in chapter 6. The Lord's words are very beautiful. "Every one that has heard from the Father himself, and has learned of him, comes to me". That is characteristic of the saints. We have thus what is characteristic of Christ and what is characteristic of the saints; and the result when you put these two things together is that the distance between Christ and those that belong to Him has been reduced. That is what happened in this section in Genesis. My thoughts are not formed too clearly but I think that in the history of Joseph's brethren we have those who, particularly Judah, might be seen as having learned from the Father. I think he received most help from seeing the affection of Jacob, and the beautiful statement that he makes in chapter 44 is really the result of that and is full of fresh affection forming the key to the recovery to direct relationship with Joseph. The brethren should be free as coming today from the realm of privilege. Our affections should be softened so that we are free with one another and full of the spirit of enquiry.

D.B.B. Judah had already brought about, you might say, the unfolding of Joseph's heart because of what he found linking in his heart with Judah in the way that Judah takes upon himself the blame.

J.McK. Well, what we need is for our affections to be engaged, rather than simply have our minds affected, by the truth. I think that is the way we reach what is vital in the realm of the assembly. You can tell sometimes, by his expression, that a brother's heart is moved as he is speaking and that is the evidence of what is vital, and is what affects Joseph.

D.B.B. He had begun to know the father's heart. It was what affected Jacob that now began to affect Judah. Before he had been with the others and they were not too worried about the father's heart, but now he is beginning to know that and express it.

J.McK. So let us see how much that meant to Joseph! And how much does it mean to the Lord that some of those to whom He comes are responding with a more active and ready affection than before. I am impressed with this verse in chapter 14. It is very brief and it is very simple. He says, "I will not leave you orphans..." He had been with them; He had companied with them; they had relied upon Him for everything; and now He was going away, and His word is, "I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you". Not, 'I will come'. The truth of His coming is deep in the heart of every true believer, the truth that the Lord, the One who was rejected of men, despised, cast out of this world, is coming again. That is the hope of every true believer. But there is more than that. He says, "I am coming" so that in this present period, whilst we wait for that great event, His attitude is that He is coming to the saints.

M.M. You spoke of the affections. Is it interesting that before the Lord says that, He says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments"?

J.McK. The Lord is looking for affection, is He not? The activity of His own heart would draw that out. This expression, I think, is full of affection: "I am coming to you". It gives a great impression of how much those persons mean to Him.

D.J.W. What is the connection between this and the other aspect at the end of Matthew when He says, "I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age", chap. 28: 20?

J.McK. In the scene of testimony, from one point of view, the Lord is constantly with us: "I am with you all the days" so that those who are faithful never lack the sense of His nearness to them. But from another point of view, the Lord has gone on high, and from that place of exaltation, you might say, the sweetness of these words comes: "I am coming to you". He could have sent others and we know that we have proved a lot of help from those whom He has sent, servants who have come from Christ have ministered to us and have stimulated in us affection for Himself. However, there comes a time when the Lord says, I am not sending another. He says, I am coming, "I am coming to you". But what did you have in mind?

D.J.W. Is Matthew 28 the responsible side in which He supports us in what is testimonial? He speaks about preaching to the whole creation and so on. Is this the privilege side? Is this the saints' view, not now as needing support exactly, but an orphan character? Is it a question of affections?

J.McK. It is the spiritual side, I think, of our position. Thus as we gathered this morning, we gathered in the place where He is not. We sang that:

"For as Thine own we are feeling Thine absence,
Though we delight in Thy glory above." (Hymn 164)

There is something in the heart of the saints that apprehends the greatness of Christ in His position above. Now the great answer to that is "I am coming to you". That is not simply to the place where the saints are. The place has significance according to Luke's gospel, He came to where the disciples were: but the place is not in mind in John's gospel.

P.H. Would you say a little more as to this being characteristic? You are not thinking exactly of a time or an event, but this is something that is going on all the time?

J.McK. That is what I thought. It is His attitude. "I am coming". That is, you might say, whenever He is free of other things, His affection and His direct movement will revert to the saints. I think that is the attitude of Christ at the present time.

R.D.P. When the Lord was here it seemed that His communion with the Father was almost constant. I wondered whether it was ever intended that the saints should feel that they were orphans or whether what He is saying is, "I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you". I used to think that but it is almost here that He would not leave us to that condition. What do you think?

J.McK. It is interesting that you have put it that way. His affection for them was unending. I think the Lord's love being constantly active would confirm what you say that the saints should never in that sense be left to feel deprived.

B.B. Is it right to say that it is the ones in whom the Father and the Son have made their abode? He says later on in this chapter, "and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him", v 23. Is it to these people that He comes?

J.McK. And for whom His love is unending. We sang the hymn

"Thou ... canst not cease to love" (No.156).

If that is so, then His heart is towards the saints in a constant and undiverted sense, the One who holds the universe in His hand, the One to whom the government of all things belongs, His heart is towards those who belong to Him. And so He says, "I am coming to you".

R.D.P. It is very interesting to see how scripture presents it. I was thinking of Peter as to the saints. He says, "To whom coming...", 1 Pet 2: 4. Again it is a constant thing. When the bridegroom comes in Matthew, it says, "the bridegroom came", chap 25: 10. It is final in that sense, but during the waiting time it seems that the Lord's coming to us is to be known all the time. It is not just on Lord's Day morning.

J.McK. It is a constant movement towards them and what it would result in as apprehended on our side is that He has drawn closer. If the pressure is increasing publicly, if things are becoming more difficult, let us realise that the Lord is drawing closer. "I am coming to you". "How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us and not to the

world? v 22. The world does not yet see Him and yet the truth is that He comes and as He comes, He takes His own place among His people.

R.D.P. You referred this morning to "He shall appear to those that look for him the second time...", Heb. 9: 28. That will be literal but I wondered if it was also current, that it is to those who look for Him that He appears.

J.McK. It is interesting. That also is characteristic of the saints: they look for Him. We ought to be looking for Him in every situation.

D.J.W. The question Rebecca asks bears on that, "Who is the man?", Gen 24: 65. But he lifted up his eyes. He was looking as well.

J.McK. So that Rebecca's eyes and Isaac's eyes met. She was looking: he was looking. I think that the outlook that we have gives character to us. If it is for Him that we look He "shall appear to those that look for him the second time..." I suppose you could say, Well, we have seen Him before; but we are going to see Him again, and I think there is a link in this because characteristically, in every situation, persons who love Christ will look for Him. His attitude is towards us. He says, "I am coming", as if He would give the assurance of love that He is not far away.

D.B.B. Where does the Comforter fit into this?

J.McK. Well, He never leaves us. What do you have in mind?

D.B.B. Does He not make these things real in our hearts: sometimes we can get away in our affections? The Lord drew alongside the two going to Emmaus, and they did not recognise Him. We are sometimes like that, are we not?

J.McK. What happened to Joseph's brethren was that their affections were jaded. The things they did were so heartless, were they not? Their conduct indicated that their affections were astray and, of course, we do not need to look very far for that in our own experience. But what we are speaking of now is the directness of

the appeal of Christ's love that would give this assurance, "I am coming".

M.M. Could you help us as to what you refer to as characteristic in relation to the Lord's coming to us and the unique way in which He would make Himself known to us in the breaking of bread?

J.McK. That is a distinctive occasion. It is an occasion when we realise the immediate link we have with Him, but this characteristic coming may be proved at any time. "I am coming to you" as if the Lord would say, whatever the testings are - and John's gospel is written for the last days - when the pressure would rise. He does not make much of the pressure. He does not stress, as Matthew does, the hostility of the scene around, but he is writing in view of the last time and in that situation records the Lord's own word, "I am coming".

R.D.P. I was thinking of Laodicea: "I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me", Rev 3: 20. That seems to me to be a slightly different setting from the Supper. You read the expression in Genesis as to Joseph being at home, when Joseph came home (chap 43: 26) and Joseph was still there (v 14). I wondered whether that side of things in Laodicea, "I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me" is something that the Lord would desire constantly. That was not just a visit was it? It was coming home.

J.McK. The Laodicean condition is, as we have often been reminded, heartlessness as to Christ. What is creeping into the public situation religiously is a formalism that does not allow affection. Orthodox religion is so bound up in watertight compartments that it does not allow affection to be expressed. In the midst of that condition we see the overcomer, the Lord values such very highly.

R.D.P. The Supper seems to me to be something special because there is an announcement showing forth the Lord's death. But even before the announcement there is the remembrance, the calling of Me to mind, involving the public side of things.

J.McK. And then that great occasion is marked by His incoming as the saints are gathered. We may prove His presence, we may prove the assurance of His constant love as He comes into an area where He is honoured. That is what happened this morning. I think that one of the things such movements would awaken in our hearts is a desire for more alertness. How will He come? He may come in a different way. The gospels prove that. "He was manifested", it says, "in another form", Mark 16: 12. He may come in a different way but we have the assurance that He will come. I think this is really the guarantee that what is of God will be carried through to a glorious conclusion. The Lord is occupied with those that belong to Him in these days. Let us settle that in our minds! The saints are very precious to Christ.

P.H. As you say, *He* comes of Himself, of His own volition. Do you think we come as having been drawn?

J.McK. It brings us on to chapter 6 and this beautiful verse: "every one that has heard from the Father himself, and has learned of him, comes to me". The consequence of the Father having done something in a person's soul is that he moves towards Christ.

P.H. Do you think Judah was very affected by the father? He had not at first realised what affection the father had for Joseph. He had learned something of the father that he had never learned before.

J.McK. The brethren had a perception early in their histories of the fact that Jacob loved Joseph more than all his sons. The evidence of it was that Jacob made him a coat of many colours and the reason given was that he loved him more than all his sons. Judah and his brethren knew that right from the beginning, but they were not really affected by it. They knew it only as a statement of fact, thus the heartlessness of their action when they took that coat, the very thing that expressed the father's distinctive affection, dipped it in blood and sent it to him. They did not even take it to him. They sent it by the hand of another. Now that indicated a remoteness which does not belong to the family of God. I am sure what you say is right that it

was when they began to be recovered in their affections to the true value that Jacob placed upon Joseph recovery really took place.

D.J.W. I was thinking that these movements involve an affinity. When Joseph wept upon Benjamin's neck, is that the affinity there was between his own and himself in its full expression?

J.McK. That is why I wanted to read that passage because I think the great objective is that all distance is removed and the immediateness of the link is fully realised. As to Benjamin, his neck is referred to, that is the devotion of an affection that was, you might say, uninterrupted between himself and Joseph. His appetite is also mentioned: he was able to take in five times more than the rest of the brethren. Then finally we are told that Joseph's brethren talked with him. That was the great objective in the whole matter that distance should be removed and that there should be freedom of communion realised between the brethren and Christ typically.

R.D.P. So that I suppose it would have been true typically to have said of Joseph that "I am coming to you". That always marked him in relation to his brethren. It is unqualified: "I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you". He never wavered from it. He never changed even though they became distant.

J.McK. So that "Thou ... canst not cease to love". That was Joseph, however they treated him and however distant they became as far as he was concerned. It meant much that he knew them but they did not know him; as it says, there was an interpreter between them.

Joseph would have felt that and I suppose the Lord feels every element of distance, the need for an intermediary, a messenger, one that can interpret His mind to us. The Lord feels that situation.

Revelation would prove that He felt anything that caused Him to gird Himself about and assume a degree of distance between Himself and His own.

D.B.B. Jealousy would destroy every relationship and it was only as they came to know the father's heart that things were starting to be restored.

J.McK. Well, in these days how can it be that we shall hear from the Father Himself? "Every one that has heard from the Father himself...". The note says "It is what is received directly from the Father. I add 'himself' that its immediateness may be felt, which is the point of the sentence."

R.D.P. How do we learn from the Father Himself?

J.McK. Well, we were in His presence this morning. Is it not so that in the presence of the Father we get an enriched appreciation of the glory of Christ?

R.D.P. I think so. I was thinking of Joseph's brethren again. They knew very little of the father when they sold Joseph into Egypt but they had learned more of the father when Judah says he will stay as a bondman. It was very similar. They were willing to sacrifice Joseph but he was not willing to sacrifice Benjamin.

J.McK. There was a point beyond which he was not willing to go. He began to consider the effect of his actions in regard of others. He said, If I do this, the effect on Jacob is going to be very serious. Now that practically is something we need to learn. We need to learn to be unselfish and more considerate of others in respect of how we may act. It was all part of the education of these brethren, particularly Judah, who expresses it as a representative man. Here he is representing the principle of recovery among the saints. I do think, as we go on Lord's Day by Lord's Day, the privilege of engaging in God's service is a wonderful one. We find ourselves in the Father's presence. Surely we learn something from that experience.

D.J.W. It is interesting in that connection that we do not get Benjamin's side. He does not appear to say anything. We do not know how he felt about being taken by his brethren down to meet Joseph. There seems to be a very intimate, subject state in relation to Benjamin. It is more that he was in the enjoyment of things than what he said.

J.McK. That is right. He expressed it in himself without the medium of language. Sometimes we say so much that what is real is a bit

obscured. But Benjamin was not like that. I would love to be more like Benjamin in that sense that what is really of God and has a pure link with Christ - Benjamin having the same mother as Joseph - is allowed to express itself more.

D.J.W. What is emphasised is life, that his life is bound up with his life. That is Jacob and Benjamin.

J.McK. Life and affection are very closely linked, are they not? Hatred and death, I suppose, go on together, and life and affection go on together. I think you see that worked out in the histories of these men.

P.H. Does Benjamin represent the purity of the work of God in each one?

J.McK. It has often been said that he was not involved in the crime. He did not act against Joseph, did he? It is fine to locate something in your own soul that came from God and has not acted against Christ. I think this passage in John 6 is clearly a reference to what God does: "Every one that has heard from the Father himself". Peter had a revelation from the Father, did he not? The Lord says, "Flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee". Neither had He disclosed it Himself. "But", He says, "my Father who is in the heavens", Matt 16: 17. How much that meant to the Lord Jesus that He identified in that man something that came from the Father.

P.H. We ourselves may not know exactly what is working in us: we know something is. Something is drawing us; something is working; but it is the Father. Initially we ourselves may not be conscious it is the Father, would you think?

J.McK. I am sure that is right, but then the effect of it would be evident because it would be true to itself and, according to this passage, what it will result in is that you come to Him. That is, you are characteristically moving towards Christ.

M.M. Would there be something of this coming out in the preaching of the word - hearing from the Father?

J.McK. You preach in faith, do you not, as to what God is doing? Is that what you mean?

M.M. I was thinking of how the Lord speaks in Luke 15 as to the way the Father's feelings come out there.

J.McK. God as a Father is looking out towards His creature and there is the welcome that the Father gives to the returning son. So that God in His grace is known in full blessing in this relationship.

B.B. Why does the Lord quote this scripture in this verse? "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God".

J.McK. I do not know if I could answer that. Divine teaching is a very extended subject. It is as if God would take on the education of the people Himself and the Lord immediately links that with what the Father is doing in the present dispensation. I think it is very impressive to see the interest and the expenditure and, speaking very simply, the time that divine Persons are prepared to spend on the saints. If the Lord's constant occupation is His own - "I am coming to you" - the Father is engaged, we may say, in the matter of teaching - "learned from the Father Himself" - and the Spirit also is constantly committed to the service of the saints in drawing their attention to Christ. Each of the Persons of the Trinity is engaged with the formation of the saints in what is pleasurable to Themselves. We are in the presence of what is very great.

R.D.P. It is very interesting that in John the chapters that relate to the Spirit refer to the Spirit as sent by the Father and also as sent by Christ. There are the two sides there, and they are linked here: "learned of him, comes to me". In the history of Joseph, it is the way that Joseph is glorified in the eyes of his brethren, but also how Jacob comes into his place. The whole thing is built together. I wonder if this teaching, "taught of God" and "learned of him", means teaching not exactly through our ears, but in our hearts. I think if God teaches us what we prove is His work in our hearts. We do take things in through our ears but God's teaching I think is in our hearts.

J.McK. It links with what we often refer to as an impression. I think we need impressions and they are often not easy to express in words, but it is something that happens in the soul as a consequence of knowing that we are having to do with God. I think impressions come into the service of God and I believe that they are formative so that they affect us throughout and, although never able to explain it, there is a difference, something has happened that causes us to be more responsive and more ready to move towards Christ.

A.P. I was thinking about John 14 where the Lord says He was coming again and He says, "and shall receive you to myself", v 3. It shows that there is movement on both sides if you receive something.

J.McK. He says, "I ... shall receive you to myself", not exactly to heaven, so that what is in mind is the immediate relationship between Christ and His own. It links very much with what we are saying because Joseph at the point where we finished reading is in close and direct relationship with his brethren. "I will receive you to myself". They came to Joseph's house and he was still there. In other words he was really waiting for them to move in relation to himself. That is John's gospel. The work of God in John's gospel gravitates towards Christ.

P.H. The discipline of the famine was all part of God's teaching. It taught them something, did it not? God teaches us through perhaps very drastic circumstances at times, but His teaching is in it.

J.McK. We referred to that yesterday that God is able to use deprivation to cause persons to turn to Himself and that is practically what happened. The light of Joseph's dreams, of course, preceded everything. That is very interesting in the light of what we are saying because in the first of those dreams Joseph said, "My sheaf rose up, and remained standing, and behold, your sheaves came round". Now, that links with what we are saying as to John 6. They heard from the Father and they came. "Your sheaves came round about and bowed down to my sheaf, Gen 37: 7. That is practically what

was worked out through a long history of experience. But the divine conclusion was reached.

R.D.P. It is not exactly the circumstances themselves that enlarge us as to God. I was thinking of the scripture that says, "In pressure thou hast enlarged me", Ps 4: 1. Not 'by pressure' but "in pressure". It is as if God allows certain circumstances that in some way in them we are enlarged in the knowledge of Himself.

J.McK. The enlarging is what God does, is it not? The pressure is what He brings about in view of generating exercise, but the enlargement is of Himself.

R.D.P. It was not the pressure of these accusations and so on with Joseph's brethren itself that made the difference to them but it provided the environment in which their hearts could become true, and the truth comes out in them. So that we hear no more about the circumstances, the cup and Benjamin's sack. That has all gone, has it not, in the reconciliation?

J.McK. So that Joseph says, "And now, be not grieved, and be not angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither, for God sent me before you to preserve life". In other words, do not let the past in any sense overpower you in regard of the greatness of what the work of God has resulted in.

R.D.P. I wondered whether it is important for us to be able to distinguish circumstances that God allows us to pass through with all their detail from what we have learned of Himself in them. The matter of Joseph's cup in Benjamin's sack is never referred to again. Those circumstances were part of what God allowed that He might know their heart. Sometimes we are occupied with a set of circumstances and keep speaking about it for years and miss what God has done. It is a bit like Revelation "Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking", chap 3: 20. C.A.C. says it is not the knocking we are to hear: "if any one hear my voice", so the knocking in a sense can be left and forgotten, but the voice is the important thing.

J.McK. The wilderness, as we have often said, has no part in God's counsels. It did form an important part of His ways. But once the

wilderness journey was over, it was behind them and was not in any sense to be a snare or to prevent their entrance into the great things that God had in mind for them.

D.J.W. Is it in your mind that, typically, Judah had heard from the Father? He says to him as a result of Jacob saying, "Go again, buy us a little food ... For had we not lingered, we should now certainly have returned already twice. And their father Israel said to them, If it is then so, do this: take of the best fruits...", Gen 43: 2, 10, 11, so they went as coming to Joseph with something to take.

J.McK. The progress of his exercise is very interesting. He begins, as others have reminded us, by holding on to what Joseph himself said. He said to Jacob, "The man did positively testify to us..." certain things, chap 43: 3. So he held to what had come from Joseph, and then having had to do with Jacob, learning something of the depth of that affection, he says, I am prepared to commit myself to this fully. In principle he lays down his life for it. He says, "I will be surety for him", chap 43: 9.

P.H. It was almost unbelievable to Joseph to see this worked out in Judah, so that he could not control himself. 'Is this really Judah, speaking like this?'

J.McK. Effectively he is laying down his life for the brethren. There is something here that is very beautiful, the man is totally committed to the thing. Judah says, I will be surety for the lad. In other words, you hold me responsible, and I cannot go back to my father unless he is with me, "lest I see the evil that would come on my father".

Here are recovered affections in a beautiful and refined sense and Joseph responds to that.

P.H. It is wonderful to see selfless features being worked out, is it not? It is only God's work, is it not?

J.McK. It is fine to see this degree of committal when a man has learned from the Father.

R.D.P. It was Judah who intervened in a little way when they sold Joseph into Egypt. He says, Let us not kill him; "for he is our

brother, our flesh", chap 37: 27. I wondered if that was the true work of God. It is God's own work that He develops in us, is it not? The rest of the brothers did not voice that, but it is Judah who said, "He is our brother, our flesh". I wondered if there was something very fine in that. There is something for God to work on, and He develops and brings it through great sorrow. I think Judah had lost two of his own children in the meantime and that is part of the history that leads up to this. Now he yields himself up.

J.McK. He quotes Joseph, "My lord..." - he submits himself - "asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a brother?" So both these relationships and the affections proper to them are now fully restored in the heart of this man. So Joseph says, "Put every man out from me!" Now, this is the realm of privilege. It is like John 20 "and the doors shut where the disciples were", v 19. There are certain things excluded and now there is the disclosure of love in an atmosphere that knows no restraint.

M.M. All the moral side has been dealt with. We sometimes sing:

"All question of our moral stain
Thou didst resolve..." (Hymn 347)

so that when we come to the realisation of that, we are absolutely free in the Lord's presence and He free with us.

J.McK. So he says, "I am Joseph". That is the first thing he says. He does not say, 'I am Joseph your brother'. That is not the first thing. "I am Joseph". There is something that remains in the distinction of Christ that we must always hold to. Then he says, "I am Joseph your brother" and "Does my father yet live?" It is wonderful to prove that the Lord is free and the saints are free.

There was a measure of liberty here this morning and we are thankful for that. We look for it to increase. There should be nothing to intrude on these refined and special relationships. All that we have been saying indicates that God is bringing out something special from the present dispensation that is going into eternity and it is going to go in on the basis of refined affection. If God has made

Himself known in His heart, then there is an affectionate answer to that in the realm of the assembly.

R.D.P. The famine went on. God's ways, His government continue. That is the time we are in.

J.McK. But in the inside place there is plenty of provision as it says "and after that his brethren talked with him". That is, not only is Joseph free - that is clear - but his brethren are free too. I think we should look to experience more liberty.

D.J.W. What would the conversation be about, do you think?

J.McK. It is like Elisha and Elijah. It is beyond Jordan. It says, "... they went on, and talked", 2 Kings 2: 11. What would it be about? I cannot answer that question and I do not think we could define the subject of such conversation. The realm of privilege, I think, knows no constraints.

D.J.W. In the earlier section he covered the question of the famine and he sums it up by saying, "and thou shalt be near to me, thou, and thy sons, and thy sons' sons", Gen 45:10. Do you think it would be a conversation relating to what the father had to do and had done in the family? It is a wonderful thing to go over what God has done amongst the saints.

J.McK. It is possible to go over what God has done without making much of the problems. The results from the exercise appear, but we are not to be held back by any sense of involvement in past history.

P.H. The hymn says, "Of all Thy sufferings talk" (Hymn 270). That might enter into it?

J.McK. It is a holy subject and I am sure will represent food for us as to how much the privileges we enjoy have cost to secure.

R.D.P. I was thinking of John: "I have yet many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now. But when he is come, the Spirit of truth, he shall guide you into all the truth", chap 16: 12, 13. And when they go up to their father, they tell him about Joseph's food and it says, "And they spoke to him all the words of Joseph", chap 45: 27. Is it really the language of the Christian circle?

J.McK. Although they could not bear them then, you mean there is an extended area where our capacity will be increased for the enjoyment and participation in these things? What we sung this morning,

"We should be part, through Jesus' blood"

Hymn 88 is very fine, not only that we are brought in and blessings are conferred, but we are part and that is really what Joseph's brethren proved.

BIRMINGHAM

14 March 1993

Key to initials

(Birmingham unless otherwise stated)

B.Bodman; D.B.Bodman; P.Hazell, Preston; J.McKay, Woodstock;
M.Matthews; A.Plant; R.D.Plant; D.J.Willetts

"SHALL THE PREY BE TAKEN FROM THE MIGHTY"

John McKay

Isaiah 49: 24,25 (to "shall be delivered;"); 26 (from "And all flesh..."); Job 42: 1-6;

Psalms 49: 7,8; Psalm 139: 7; Hebrews 9: 11,12

We live, dear friend, in a world that is sadly troubled as a consequence of the intrusion of sin. Satan has gained the advantage in a public sense in the world around us and this question, raised by the prophet, is a very appropriate one in the day in which we live: "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?" What a question today! People are held by many things: held as a consequence of their own conduct, as a consequence of the limitations of an outlook warped by the intrusion of sin, struggling with problems which are far too great for them to handle. Nations indeed are at a loss to know what to do to establish law and order, moral chaos abounds. What a gloomy picture this world is! It is held in the grip of a power that man cannot control. "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?" The message of the gospel - and it impresses me today - is that the victory has already been gained.

Do you believe that? I believe it because of the truth of what we sang in our first hymn:

"The mighty God who dwelt in light
Unreached by mortal eye,
As Man came forth the foe to fight,
And won the victory." (Hymn 153)

The message I have tonight is a simple one and that is, that the work has already been done. There is nothing for you to do. You may be conscious of the pressures that exist amongst men because none of us are immune from them. We are all conscious of the conditions

through which we move and in some way or another we may be held in the bondage that Satan loves to impose. "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty? 1 21and shall he that is rightfully captive...?" - note that, "rightfully captive". If you have been committed to a course of sin, then the dominance of this power must be acknowledged. The bondage of Satan over the human race leads to sin. Why? Because it challenges the rights of God in a man's soul. A rival principle comes into the life of a person challenging the supremacy of the God with whom we have to do. That intrusion has happened in the life of every one here. Thus you have been rightfully taken captive. "For thus saith Jehovah: Even the captive of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible..." Oh, do not minimise Satan's power! Do not minimise the foe who is out to spoil that God has in His creature, to spoil it not simply in a temporary sense, but to spoil it permanently so that God shall not have you as He wants you for His pleasure. God's word is "the prey of the terrible shall be delivered ... And all flesh shall know that I, Jehovah, am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer the Mighty One of Jacob". How good it is to know 'that when men could do nothing, God has come in of Himself and done everything to secure man's absolute, complete, and eternal deliverance. What a gospel we have! The world is dominated by sin. It is held in the grip of something that is greater than any government, greater than any army, navy or air force. Greater than any power that the forces of men can muster. God has intervened and has gained the victory, and He has done it in Christ.

Now, what is needed is that this victory shall be established in the life of every person in this room. As far as God is concerned, the work is done. The real challenge of evil in the universe of God has been met by Christ. I think it is wonderful that God waited four thousand years before Jesus came. The challenge of evil had been made by the intrusion of Satanic opposition to God, described early in the scriptures, invading the garden of Eden, spoiling what God had brought in for His pleasure and man's pleasure too. Satan spoiled all that. Yet God waited for four thousand years. Over that period sin developed, showed itself in its true character, developed

to a level where it was seen to be what it was. We spoke yesterday of the book of Job, and of what God says about the sea, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further", Job 38: 11. God allowed things to develop until man's independence showed itself at its height, I suppose, in the Roman empire and at that time Jesus came! One who was to bring about the complete emancipation of man and was to reassert divine supremacy where the challenge of evil was. Christ came in view of doing God's will that God's supremacy should be reasserted in the world that His hands had made. 'I have glorified thee on the earth' these words were spoken by Jesus as man. We have the testimony of scripture that the One who did the work, the One who went to Calvary's cross, will ultimately deliver up the kingdom to him who is God and Father that God may be all in all.

What a triumph! This is part of the gospel that as far as God is concerned where the intrusion of evil happened, there Christ has gained the victory and divine supremacy has been reasserted. What is needed then is that in your life, in your soul and in mine, it may be reasserted too.

And that is why I read at the end of Job. This man, Job, had been through such a struggle in his life. Maybe that is like you. How long have you lived? How long has the struggle been? Have you come to the conclusion, as Job did at the end of this long history saying "I know that thou canst do everything"? Have you come to that? People are struggling. They are trying one antidote and another. They are trying many alternatives to solve the problems that exist, and the fact is that the answer lies elsewhere. It lies in what God can do. And if we are to be saved, any of us, the answer lies in what God is able to do. Job comes to it at the end of the book. He says, "I know that thou canst do everything, and that thou canst be hindered in no thought of thine". Going on to say, "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee" as some sense of the greatness of God entered his soul. If any one of us is to come into blessing some sense of the greatness of God needs to enter the soul. Testimony is rendered to His greatness! There is testimony all round to the greatness of a mighty

Creator. God has not left Himself, Paul says, without a witness. The witness remains: God's eternal power and divinity is testified to. But then, having heard about it, having seen His works, at some point there needs to be a glimpse of His glory: "but now mine eye seeth thee: Wherefore", Job says, "I abhor myself". The principle of repentance enters into that. Job says, As far as I am concerned, I am not adequate for this. I "repent", he says, "in dust" - that is, he acknowledged his own condition - "and ashes".

I want to speak for a moment about the ashes. It is a very interesting reference. Had he just said, I repent in dust, there would have been no hope, really. It would have been the end. As far as men are concerned, that is the end: "For dust thou art; and unto dust", says the word, "thou shalt return", Gen 3: 19. That is what man is. He is mortal. He has a limited span and that is the terminus as far as this condition is concerned. "I... repent", he says, "in dust and ashes". Ashes means that the fire has done its work. Job repented in the light, really, of the finished work of Christ. I trust that every person here has done that. You do not repent simply in the light of your own history. That is a very negative thing. Because of what your history has been, because of the intrusion of what was against God in your life, the judgment had to be borne but the testimony of the gospel is that it was borne by another. It was borne by none less a person than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the only One who was able, the only One who was great enough, the only One who had the power. If we are aware of Satanic power, let us think about the power of Christ, the One who as an invader went into Satan's domain, binding the strong man and releasing those who were held in bondage under his power. More than that, He underwent the fire of God's wrath against the principle of sin in the universe. What a Saviour we have! He who did no sin. In Him, scripture says, sin was not. There was nothing in Him that could incur judgment. If He was to bear the judgment, it was on account of others, and we have testimony in the scripture that He has borne it on your account and on mine, on account of all who put their trust in Him. The fire of divine judgment was there at the cross of Calvary.

The rejection of man was one aspect of the cross, solemn, indeed. Not only was man sinful and doing his own will as away from God, but when God drew near in grace, man rejected Him. That is the enormity of man's sin and yet at Calvary, on Golgotha's hill, outside the city of Jerusalem, nearly two thousand years ago, my Saviour, crucified by the hands of wicked men, endured the wrath of God against sin. Those three hours of darkness, who can tell? Who can use language that is fitted to describe the solemnity and greatness of what took place in that condensed period of time? Jesus bore the judgment. The fire was unmitigated as the ashes suggest. It has done its work. And the Victim remained. Alive upon the cross, the judgment borne, He commends His Spirit to the Father. He did not die under the judgment of God. He was great enough to sustain that judgment and go through. My Saviour! Is there anyone greater than He? The work done, He commends His Spirit to His Father, and goes into death itself in order that the penalty that was due to sin might be completely and finally removed and the last barrier to God's thoughts in blessing taken out of the way. Paul says, "The last enemy that is annulled is death", 1 Cor 15: 26. The Lord Jesus has removed it so that God is absolutely free to conduct Himself propitiously towards the human race. That is the greatness of God's glad tidings. So Job repented in dust and ashes. I trust that everyone of us has repented in the full light of the finished work of Christ because if that is so, forgiveness is ours without question. The Man who did the work is now in glory. God is absolutely satisfied with the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a mighty Saviour. And in this the day of God's grace, in spite of the fact that Satan's power is just as real out there and is just as real in your life, we can tell you that the work has been done. The work is finished and it is finished to God's eternal satisfaction.

I have read these other passages just to speak briefly of how scripture refers to the great work of redemption. Psalm 49 says, "For the redemption of their soul is costly". Ponder that, dear fellow-believer. Think about it! You have put your trust in Christ. Have you considered what it meant to Him, what it meant to God, that you

should be secured for Him, not only for time but for eternity? "For the redemption of their soul is costly, and must be given up for ever". What was given up was the life of Jesus! How precious to God it was, that green spot upon the earth! Never had there been on this benighted earth a life like that, the life of Jesus! The Old Testament refers to the oblation, the fine flour, the kind of humanity that sprung up upon the earth in Christ. It was real manhood here amongst men, in a sense undistinguishable from others. If you had seen Him in the streets of Galilee, it might have been that you would not have noticed any outward difference, and yet how different in character was the manhood that was there, fine flour mingled with oil, the grace of the Spirit was upon everything that He did. And if you or I were to be secured to be divinely blessed, that is what had to be given up. Oh what it meant to God! God has been deeply concerned about your sins and mine, more deeply concerned than we were. The matter was costly. I think we little apprehend the greatness of what God had here in the life in flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus. He responded in detail to everything that God's will required of Him. Mr Darby says something to the effect that every faculty in that humanity responded to the impulse that the divine will gave to it and then ceased in a tranquillity in which self had no place. That was Jesus. That was the Man in whom God had pleasure. And that was the life that had to be given up. Can we take it in? Dear fellow-believer, can you take in the great cost involved if you were to be secured for God? "For the redemption of their soul is costly, and must be given up for ever". God will never again have a man in conditions of flesh and blood like that. The Lord took His life in a new condition. He lives above eternally a Man for God's glory and pleasure, but never again will there be on the face of this earth a life like the life of Jesus. It was given up and it was given up for ever.

Psalm 130 says, "with Jehovah there is lovingkindness". You have proved that, have you not, loving-kindness? How good God is to men! How good He is creatorially! How much pleasure He gives to man! How much blessing man enjoys, perhaps largely away from the One who confers it, God's loving-kindness! But, he says, "with

him is plenteous redemption". This is the immense resource that God has as a consequence of the work that has been done. What a triumph in the face of the prevailing power of Satan in the world: "plenteous redemption". Is your condition such that it cannot be met? God has a resource that is sufficient, the death of Christ. John's epistle says, "and he is the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world", 1 John 2: 2. God has been propitiated as to the great challenge of sin in the universe. The work of Christ is sufficient to remove every trace of evil. Can we take that in? It is a wonderful fact and it is abundantly true thus with God there is "plenteous redemption". All those of us who enjoy it would commend it to any who do not share the benefits and blessing that God has brought in as a consequence of the victory gained in the death of Jesus. It is a "plenteous redemption". Let not Satan magnify your past in such a way that he makes it greater than the work of Christ because, as far as God is concerned, that work has met the whole challenge of evil. He is satisfied and the Man who did the work lives above.

In Hebrews it speaks about the entrance of this Person into heaven: "nor by blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, has entered in once for all into the holy of holies, having found an eternal redemption". "An eternal redemption": the redemption is costly; the redemption is plenteous; and the redemption is eternal. Never will the work done be challenged. It abides in its efficacy for God's eternal pleasure and delight and the Man who did the work is inside. The holy of holies here is really a reference, typically, to the conditions in heaven, and one thing about the holy of holies is that there was no sacrifice made there. If you look into the typical scriptures, you will find there is no sacrifice made in the holy of holies. That means that the work done was sufficient. Christ is there, and it is what Christ is for God's eternal pleasure that dominates the scene. The Man who did the work has gone in and God has abiding pleasure in Him. Does that not stir your affections? I believe we had a glimpse today as in the Father's presence of His delight in Christ. As we were saying we can learn from the Father in

that atmosphere. He is taking pleasure in the Man who effected the work that was needed to be done. But the work is over. The sacrifice is made, no more to be repeated. In the Jewish system sacrifices had to be made over and over and over again. The fact that it was made again meant that the previous sacrifice was not adequate. That is not so in Christianity. The sacrifice has been made, as the scripture says, once for all, and the One who has done it has entered in "having found an eternal redemption". I say, dear brethren and friends, that God in the gospel has an answer to all the problems that afflict men. Men cannot meet their liabilities. Every nation is struggling under debts, burdens, things that they find difficult to bear. God has met the greatest liability in the death of Christ. Men are worried that resources are running out. People speak to you about the environment and all that goes along with that and what underlies it is that they have a feeling that natural resources, as they describe them, are failing. As far as God is concerned, He has a plenteous redemption. There is plenty of resource in the work of Christ to meet every condition. And the other thing that worries men is that they cannot get things on a permanent basis. Things are always changing. Men cannot rely on things to stay as they are. The passage of time deteriorates things. God has an eternal redemption. God has the answer to every problem that afflicts humanity. Come into the light of it!

Anyone who is not a believer in the Lord Jesus will find as putting trust in Him today that their whole like and outlook changes as coming into the experience of divine blessing in the soul. May it be so, for His Name's sake!

BIRMINGHAM

14 March 1993

FAITH AND HOPE

Paul White

Hebrews 11: 1-3; Colossians 1: 23; 1 Peter 1: 6-9

These scriptures speak of faith and two of them speak also of hope - two of the fundamental principles of Christianity, both necessary for accepting God's word, for salvation. The first scripture I suppose gives us a definition of faith, "the substantiating of things hoped for".

Faith relates to the future. We do not need faith to think of the past: we know what has happened. Each of us knows what happened yesterday or the day before or whatever time in the past.

For the present we do not need faith either. We know what the present is, that we are here. But for the future we need faith because there is uncertainty. We do not know what the future holds and therefore we need faith and hope, I think the challenge for each of us is what is our hope and in what is our faith? In Scripture faith has two general meanings, the first as a reference to the whole belief of Christianity, what the Scriptures are about, often referred to as 'the faith'; but also faith which is each individual's belief, belief in something, belief in Someone, and that is what I would like to address this evening with you what your faith is, what do you hope for and in whom do you have hope?

There is nothing more vital. The whole of God's approach to man is based on faith and faith is necessary on the part of each person in listening to God's word in the glad tidings. Faith is

something that God has given. Not only has He given the Lord Jesus Christ, not only does He hold out the hope of salvation, but God - thank God for it - has also provided faith: He "has dealt to each a measure of faith", Rom 12: 3. So God has not only provided the solution in our Lord Jesus Christ, but He has provided the means for acceptance. But the exercise of that faith depends upon you.

Faith in itself is not the way to salvation. If I give you something, it is not because you will accept the gift but because it is something that I want to give. So it is with God. He has given: He has given the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus has given Himself: He has given His life in order that there might be salvation. But faith is the act of acceptance on your part and only by exercising faith can you avail yourself of the benefit of the gift. If you are offered something and you do not accept it, then it is of no use to you, you do not benefit at all from the gift. You are not given something because you accept it, but your act of acceptance is what gives you the blessing, the benefit. And so it is in the glad tidings. God is offering you salvation. He is offering you hope and something in which you can place your faith, but your benefitting depends on your acceptance. That is where faith comes in. You need to lay hold of what God is saying in the glad tidings, what is contained in Scripture. It is not what I say but what God has had written for us in which you can place your faith.

The writer of the Hebrews, generally accepted to be Paul, speaks much in this chapter 11 of Hebrews, known as the faith chapter, of many well-known names from the Old Testament of persons who relied upon God. They had faith in God: they depended upon Him. And that is what faith points to: it is something or Someone on whom you depend, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. God is presenting the Lord Jesus Christ to you in the glad tidings as the One on whom you can depend. There are many things in this world in which we may be said to have faith. I suppose people in general have some kind of faith in God even though they may not realise it. They depend upon each day coming, they depend upon the sun rising, they depend upon the weather, they depend upon air

and food, all kinds of things which they have come to accept as continuing because from their experience they know that they have happened in the past and they expect that they will happen in the future. But many people do not realise that it is God's providential goodness that brings these things to them and they carry on, perhaps not realising that the One in whom they should have faith has made all this possible. But God does not desire that we should be ignorant but rather that we should have knowledge, and having that knowledge places upon each a responsibility to respond to it.

What will you do with the knowledge that you have? Everyone here knows the truth, knows the glad tidings. I am sure everyone could stand here and say something about the faith that they have, about the Lord Jesus, about His death, about His blood being shed, His resurrection, and all know the terms of the glad tidings. But the question is, do you believe them? Have you placed your faith in them? It is all very well being able to recite our faith and talk about it, talk about the beliefs that we have, but we need to be certain that we do believe these things, believe that the Lord Jesus has died, that God has given Him and that we need to accept Him for ourselves.

Our brother last week in preaching said there were two great lies that the enemy put out. One was that we do not need salvation because we are so good, the other is that we are so bad that there is nothing that can be done for us. But I think there is another lie that the enemy would put out and that is he would cast doubts into our mind as to the veracity of our faith, the veracity of that in which we believe. All of us, I am sure, have at some point in our lives accepted the Lord as our personal Saviour. But the great thing is to continue being sustained in our lives here by the faith that we have, and that is often a test. We often speak of continuance being the test, the proof of reality. I suppose it is really a proof of the strength of our faith, whether it is weak or whether it is strong, not to produce credit to ourselves but rather to the One in whom we believe because it is He who has done everything and upon whom our hopes are centred.

Paul was one who had absolute conviction. The writer here has absolute conviction in the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who was able to save him and the One who could do everything for him. Paul had great adversity in his life as did many others of the writers of both the New and the Old Testaments, great adversity, probably more than any of us will ever face. We live in very favourable times when we do not have a government that is opposed to Christianity, or opposed to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ but is broadly supportive: but things were very different in the times of which we have read when governments and people were antagonistic towards Christians. Paul was one who prior to his conversion was such an antagonist and was no doubt a great test of their faith. It would have been very easy to give up perhaps: it is perhaps very easy for us to give up. We tend to be swayed by numbers and perhaps think that we belong to a company which is relatively very small. And that is true. Throughout the world there is a very, very small percentage of the world's population with whom we have fellowship and the enemy, I believe, would use these things to discourage us and to weaken our faith. But God would reassure us, the Lord Jesus would reassure us, that these things matter not, what really matters is the link that we individually have with Himself.

If you go back to the outset, there were twelve persons that the Lord chose and they became the nucleus of believers in Himself. From that grew the church. There has been a lot of breakdown and it is easy to be introverted in our thinking and narrow in our outlook as to persons who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. But there are many who do believe in Him. We meet persons in our daily lives, people who have bright links with the Lord. Those who believe in Him are vast, many myriads. But the light that has been given to each varies and we are very blessed - we often say this - in the light that we have, again no credit to ourselves. It is in God's goodness He has brought each one of us into a degree of light. That light also brings with it responsibility that we should answer to it and that requires faith. God would give each of us the faith that we require to continue.

We read in Colossians. Paul there speaks of abiding "in the faith founded and firm, and not moved away from the hope of the glad tidings". We are to be maintained in the truth and the brightness and the vigour of the glad tidings and the Lord would recall each of us to the committal which we made to Himself when we placed our faith in Him for the first time - may be trusted in the Lord for the first time perhaps much younger than we are now.

Some of us can clearly remember the brightness and the peace that came into our souls then. But that may have dulled, and I suppose with some of the Colossians that was so. Paul writes to remind them of that faith and to encourage them to maintain it, the brightness of what was there. The One in whom we have placed our faith has not changed. He is the same Person. Nor has our need of Him as our Saviour changed, a Saviour not just from our sins but in our daily circumstances. The Lord Jesus lives for us, the One who would be with us at all times.

We spoke in the reading of the One who would enter into our lives, into our circumstances with us, who would go through trials with us, who would go through pressures with us, and Peter, where we read, speaks of "the proving of our faith". These things test us and God uses them to strengthen our faith. It is like a muscle as it is exercised and tested, it strengthens, and that is so with faith too as we prove the Lord; going through trials with Him, we prove that He is a support, One who never shirks, never leaves us, always there when we need Him, and that strengthens our faith, strengthens the dependence, the reliance that we have upon Him. Who else can we rely on? Is there anyone you know in the world or whom you can rely implicitly for anything that may happen tomorrow? Is there anyone else in the world, any leaders of countries who are totally reliable and dependable? I think not. As you go through history, you find that people were there at a certain time, no doubt placed there by God at a time to be relied upon and to steer countries, people and nations, through particular crises of their history, but they have all failed. Even those in scripture failed in some way or another. The types, as we say, all fall short in some regard, but there is One who

is dependable and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He can be relied upon at all times. He will never fail us. He will never turn away.

There is no problem too great, no difficulty too extreme, no test too trying for Him, but He will be there to support and help and guide and lead. We read in Isaiah last Lord's Day of the different titles that the Lord has, "Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace", Isa 9: 6. What a Person we have to do with, One who would cause us to bow in awe, surely, the One who created the heavens and the earth, the One who spoke and creation came about! What power we have inherently in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Even over death. We were touched by that this morning. We spoke of it in the reading: "love strong as death". It does not say love stronger than death; it says, "love strong as death". I suppose it was not the Lord's love that brought Him out of death but His moral power, His moral superiority. Death had no claim on Him because He was morally beyond sin. There was no claim that death had upon Him. His love took Him into death, His love for you, His love for me, and it was equal to the might of death, but it was the Lord's moral power that brought Him out of death because death had no right to hold upon Him. Satan had no hold on Him: He was sinless. The Lord's love when He came out of death was as strong as it was in taking Him into death. The same love today is as strong for you, dear friend, as it was then, and that love will remain strong to the end of time. The Lord went that way for you, He went that way for me and we can avail ourselves of what He has done, avail ourselves of the value of His death by placing our faith in Him. That is the act of acceptance of what the Lord has done for you, to place your faith in Him, and that faith brings with it hope.

Faith brings about hope and hope relies upon faith; they are inextricably linked. We all have certain hopes, I suppose, for the future, hopes even for things in this life that will happen or things that we hope will not happen, but these things are all passing, and it is hope for our eternal destiny, things that are unseen that are really important, those which are lasting, which are eternal, that will go through beyond the span of life here. Life is short, three score years

and ten and perhaps longer, but a short time relatively speaking, even in the history of the world compared to eternity as nothing. But the great hope of each one here, I trust, is that our future is linked with our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are told, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are the most miserable of all men", 1 Cor 15: 19. I think we can see that as we look at men and women round about that those whose lives are taken up solely by things in this scene are not really happy people. They may have a veneer of happiness, a superficial happiness, in their lives, but when you enquire more carefully, you find that there is an emptiness, a hopelessness deep down. I believe many people if they think at all, reflect at all, realise that there is a void there which must be filled.

They turn to all kinds of things, different religions and beliefs and all kinds of activities, many motivated by Satan in some way to fill a void, in the soul, but there is only one thing that can really fill that emptiness. Man was so created, I believe, by God that there is something in each one that can be filled only by the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why God has had the glad tidings proclaimed right through to this very evening so that if there is a void in your life, if there is an emptiness there, I can tell you that there is one thing that can fill it and that is acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will come into your life. He will come into your circumstances. If you repent He will link on with you where you are regardless of what your life might be or what you have been involved in. I do not know, but you know what your life is like, but the Lord will not come in in judgmental way but will link on in love and out of concern for you, and will join with you and seek to support and help you and strengthen your faith in Himself.

There is another divine Person, the Holy Spirit, who likewise joins His help to our weakness, One who will support and sustain our faith. He is indispensable to the believer and He is available to you.

All you need to do is to make way for Him to come into your life and He will help strengthen your faith. Without Him our faith may fluctuate or grow weak, but as we give Him a place in our lives, our faith is maintained in strength. That has been the experience of

each believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Many here could speak more ably of it than I and if you have doubts or concerns or wonder how your faith may be improved or how you might receive the Holy Spirit, there are many here who can help and guide you in that, but there is no better guide than in taking the Bible and reading portions of Scripture and praying to the Lord, praying to God that you might receive help and in that you will receive power from the Spirit also to understand and to learn.

I will just touch briefly on Peter. I suppose here we get a sense of the preciousness of faith. How valuable it is! Gold in these times was regarded as the most precious metal. It was the ultimate in terms of expressing value and it is used here by Peter to try and put some relative value on faith. It is beyond estimation. But I suppose Peter makes an effort to try and give a valuation of faith. It is one of the most precious of God's gifts because through faith we have access into everything that is contained in Scripture for us. Faith as we read of it in Hebrews 11 was the commodity, if I can express it in that way, that those of the old dispensation had. The promises were held out to them in faith. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and others put their faith implicitly in God - without question, without doubt, without any reasoning because He is God and who can question God? Who can ask what He does or why He does it? He is the Potter, the One who can shape and form in any way that He pleases, the One who created everything that we see around us, created each of us. We belong to Him. We are not our own "for ye have been bought with a price", 1 Cor 6: 20. Have you a sense that you have been bought or do you feel you do not belong to anyone? How sad it would be if any in this room felt like that, that they belonged to no-one, that no-one was interested in them, that noone cared about them. There is One who cares about you and that is the same Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has paid the price for you and desires you for Himself and wants to have you where He is, wants to have you for Himself throughout eternity and by relying on Him in faith, you avail yourself of what He has done.

Peter speaks at the end of this first letter of being steadfast in faith. He speaks about, "Your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist, steadfast in faith, knowing that the selfsame sufferings are accomplished in your brotherhood which is in the world", chap 5: 8,9. So it is that we can be a support to one another too. We are not left alone. We have others with whom we can link on and we thank God for the goodly number that we have here available to us. Faith can be used to encourage one another. Again we have reference in the scripture to encouraging "each by the faith which is in the other", Rom 1: 12. So we can support one another. It is something that we perhaps need to do more of. When one is weak in faith, others are strong in faith and we can support and help one another and that is what fellowship is about. If it is about anything at all, it is about mutual support and help. The fullest support, of course, would come from divine Persons, but in the assembly there is an atmosphere and a fellowship which is intended to be supportive in a way which would help each one. We will need that dependence and interdependence to the end of the dispensation. Malachi speaks of "... they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another", chap 3: 16, I think that would mean by way of encouragement. The disciples after the Lord's death were in a single place, in a room together, with the doors closed through fear of the Jews, and I suppose that would mean that they were drawn together by their common faith, common belief, in the One who had died. That same Person is the One in whom each of us has a common faith. The uniting bond that we have, our faith and the Spirit, the one divine Person who would link us all together as a body of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the One in whom we have hope.

I trust that each of us might have our faith strengthened, not just in Him for salvation, but also for the maintenance and continuance of the testimony here. To bear testimony which would bring credit on our Lord Jesus Christ because there is a responsibility upon each of us to do justice to Him and to bear witness, to bear a testimony to Him, in a way which would not bring

any discredit on the Lord or on the testimony. We need strength for that and we need the Spirit's power too to help us. It is available to us. It is there divinely provided for us. We need to exercise faith to lay hold of it so that we can have the strength of that faith rewarded by having hope, true hope, in awaiting the Lord's return to take us to be with Himself. May that be the portion of each one for His Name's sake.

KIRKCALDY

12 February 1995