

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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THE HOLY CALLING

GOD'S FOUNDATION

THE LORD AS WRITER

THE HOLY CALLING

2 Timothy 1: 6-10; Numbers 25: 6-13; 27: 1-6

A.C.C. I want to bring forward two thoughts found in 2 Timothy.

First, in this meeting, the holy calling, and later, if the Lord will, God's foundation. What I have especially in mind is the footnote to 'rekindle' (see note 'd' to 2 Tim 1: 6) which bears on the conditions in which we are at his time in the history of the testimony. This footnote reads 'to revive, rekindle what is drooping ... The whole subject of the epistle is energy in the darkening state of the assembly'. What is particularly in mind is the energy required for the maintenance of the holy calling. It is a holy calling, and already Paul was concerned for the maintenance of the standard of it. With the pressure of what is around us, there is a tendency to be lax and to lack the energy that should mark us. Phinehas was one who was marked by energy and jealousy for God to protect the holy calling.

The daughters of Zelophehad manifest energy to take up the inheritance.

My concern is that there should be more energy with us to maintain things in their proper character. I trust that the Lord will use these meetings to stimulate and promote more of this energy with us. The enemy would use the conditions around us to suffocate exercise. The lukewarm, self-sufficiency of Laodicea is the complete opposite to the energy which Paul was seeking to stimulate in Timothy. The holy calling suggests what is priestly, and it is of prime importance for us now that, despite the conditions that exist publicly, we should not lower the standard in our affections or in our practice of what relates to the holy calling or to any other of the great items of the truth which we profess to hold.

J.H. Do we get this energy by feeding on good food?

A.C.C. No doubt that is so, but it comes back to our valuation of the things we have come into in the goodness of God. What is my estimate of them? Am I prepared to act in view of their preservation according to their proper nature and character?

D.E.B. Paul was jealous in relation to the Corinthians that their thoughts should not be corrupted from simplicity as to the Christ.

Phinehas was marked by that same kind of jealousy. We need to have an appreciation of what is holy and right in order to be marked by that right aspect of jealousy.

A.C.C. It is a question as to how God regards matters. We can count on divine help in maintaining what is according to the divine mind.

J.W. What is in accord with the divine mind is not only what God has brought in to meet the present situation, but relates to what He has had before him from the beginning.

A.C.C. Yes. Then God has supplied us with the resources, in the spirit of power and of love and of wise discretion, so that what is according to God might be maintained.

V.E.W. The apostle is marked by zeal, purpose and energy despite his prison circumstances. He was superior to the prison in his links with divine Persons and the saints.

A.C.C. Talk is of little value if the truth is not manifested in reality, but we have been divinely equipped to maintain things according to their proper level.

D.E.R. The proper level seems to be linked with the apostle himself, for it is he himself who is particularly the test here. He, the Lord's prisoner, his chain and his glad tidings are still the test today.

A.C.C. What you say is right. Even in prison, Paul was setting out energy. Onesiphorus was marked by it too. Vitality and power marked Paul.

D.E.R. Laying hold of Paul's glad tidings would stimulate that energy and faithfulness.

A.C.C. The tendency is to be ashamed of Paul, but he was not ashamed. There is no need to be ashamed, which is why he brings in the great matter of Christ having annulled death and brought to light life and incorruptibility, to strengthen us for the maintenance of the testimony.

J.R.W. It says "who has saved us". Would an appreciation of what God has done for us stimulate us?

A.C.C. It ought to stimulate us to more energy in relation to the holy calling.

D.J.H. What we are saved for rather than what we are saved from is more in mind here. God has done everything for us from His side, but the question is our answer to it.

A.C.C. Quite true. His purpose and grace have been made known that we might enter upon the holy calling, but energy is needed for it to be maintained in accordance with its quality and intrinsic value. In Numbers, Israel had come to the last encampment: 2 Timothy is the last encampment for us. In it are Paul's final instructions as to how we are to regulate ourselves in regard to divine things in the difficult times of the last days. In Numbers 25, Phinehas acted to defend the holy calling. In 1 Cor 10, Paul refers to six incidents in Israel's history, but Baal-Peor is the only one following the experience of the brazen serpent, which relates to Romans 7 for us. The enemy would level himself against that experience. He could not curse the people, but he seduced them and that is what he is attempting to do at the present time. But one man rose up in his jealousy for God to defend the holy calling.

D.J.H. Phinehas "rose up from among the assembly", in contrast to the grievous wolves that Paul warned the Ephesian elders about, who would rise up from among their own selves.

A.C.C. Phinehas had no commandment from Moses for this action, so it falls to each one of us to act to maintain the holy calling.

D.E.R. Paul's glad tidings involve not only salvation from the destroying angel and the passage of the Red Sea, but going through the experiences of the wilderness to reach the land.

A.C.C. The holy calling has all that in mind - to reach the inheritance.

G.C.B. What would help us to take things up in energy, rather than sitting back?

A.C.C. It is simply a question of our love for the Lord and our valuation of divine things, so as to be prepared to maintain things here according to Him.

V.E.W. Phinehas' action was priestly in character, and he comes into the covenant of the priesthood.

A.C.C. He gets God's approbation and secures the everlasting priesthood.

J.W. The holy calling is God's sovereign matter, and love for God Himself would stimulate faithfulness to it on our side.

A.C.C. The calling involves association with Christ-like Aaron and his sons. They were associated with him in the service of God.

J.W. It is a question of whether we value being associated with Christ, but to be in the conscious enjoyment of that requires a suited state.

A.C.C. So the call to each of us is to stand up for what is according to God. At the end, there will be greater tests as greater powers of seduction operate to neutralise our valuation of holy things.

J.W. The thrust of the enemy in Numbers 25, as today, is to get us to associate in a social way with persons not going on with the truth.

A.C.C. That is just it. While Balaam could not curse the people - God defended them from that - he must have given out his doctrine (as it is called in Revelation 2) before he went home. Israel was not conscious of what he was doing with a view to their seduction, but alas he was successful and they accepted these invitations, and became joined to Baal-Peor.

D.J.R. So even a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

A.C.C. How important therefore that we should always keep in mind that our calling is a holy one.

E.F.W. Phinehas rising up from among the assembly suggests that he did not go off on an individual course, but that he had some impression of God's love for the assembly.

A.C.C. He acted in view of the salvation of the assembly, but matters have to be met by individuals who value it, and love it for Christ's sake.

T.J.H. Phinehas' genealogy is traced back to Aaron the priest.

A.C.C. His action was an abnormal one for one of the priestly family. He is not generally viewed as militant in Numbers and Joshua, but the sight of the man in his audacity leading this woman into the camp stirred Phinehas to act with an energy which should mark us in relation to divine things.

W.G. Paul speaks of his jealousy to espouse the Corinthians unto one man as a chaste virgin. His motive was love for Christ in ministering to them as he did.

A.C.C. He valued what the assembly is to Christ and was prepared to war accordingly. His jealousy is also seen in 1 Corinthians 10, where the children of Israel are said to be types of - not, for - us.

Amidst the increasing corruption of Christendom, is God's jealousy marking us in maintaining a walk at its proper level?

J.W. Phinehas had a sound judgment of the evil.

A.C.C. We must have that. We start by judging ourselves, and then we shall have power and energy to meet any evil which may arise.

D.E.R. How do we arrive at a sound judgment of social links with persons not in fellowship? It was not that Phinehas was lacking in grace, as human sentiment would say, but he was motivated by love, love that the assembly should be maintained in its purity for Christ and that the saints should arrive at their inheritance.

A.C.C. Exactly. Israel joining himself to Baal-Peor was a challenge to God's rights and Phinehas would allow nothing to interfere with those rights.

A.McS. Is the holy calling maintained by the truth of the kingdom?

A.C.C. Yes. The kingdom is involved in the gift of the spirit of power, and of love, and of wise discretion, so that we should be marked by divine jealousy for the preservation of the holy calling at its proper

level. The awful insipid lukewarmness and lack of exercise that characterised Laodicea would be what there might be for God in these latter times. We may come to the meetings and assent and take part, but my concern is that there should be vitality and energy to hold divine things at their proper level.

J.H. Phinehas acted on the instruction to slay everyone his man who had joined himself to Baal-Peor.

A.C.C. Soto preserve what is due to God, we must face what would interfere with what He should get from his people.

R.H.B. In this incident, the people had some realisation - they were weeping - that what was proceeding among them was not right and not in accordance with their status as the people of God, but they were impotent to do anything about it.

A.C.C. So action is called for. The question then is how much divine things mean to me and what I might do, or not do, in view of their preservation.

R.H.B. What is holiness and how do we become holy?

A.C.C. Holiness relates to the divine nature, being closely allied with love. On one hand we are made holy, but on the other, we are called to be holy as He is holy.

B.E.S. It is important to maintain holiness and the divine standard in marriages among us. If all of us, both old and young, do not maintain this standard, we cannot be surprised if what prevails in the world should come in.

A.C.C. If nowhere else in the world, the marriage bond - a divine institution before sin came in - should be maintained by the brethren at its own proper level.

V.E.W. Romans 7 involves an indissoluble bond with Christ. In principle, Phinehas was in the gain of that bond, and it is what motivated and energised to act as he did.

A.C.C. We should allow nothing which would interfere with the service of God.

G.C.B. Phinehas had no mixed motives but had God's interests wholly before him.

A.C.C. He was governed by what was due to God and the preservation of the assembly. It devolves on each one of us to be faithful in this way.

J.S.G. Use of the javelin by us would be insistence on the word.

A.C.C. And no compromise, and to show our judgment clearly.

J.S.G. The sequence of these chapters involves the recognition of the Spirit, and there is power in the Spirit to insist on the divine word, as we are firstly governed by it ourselves.

A.C.C. No seduction or temptation can in any way succeed as we look to the Spirit. In our day the enemy is seeking to seduce us and to stifle exercise by compromise and eating of idol sacrifices.

J.S.G. We ought to be careful as to every detail of our lives - but you have more in mind as to eating of idol sacrifices.

A.C.C. It is in contrast with the Lord's supper, and it is the Supper which should determine our circle of fellowship.

Q.P. Twice in John 17, the Lord speaks of his own being not of the world as he was not of the world.

A.C.C. The Lord could regard his own as being abstractly not of the world, but it also involves the responsible side. In these days the test is how far we are practically not of the world.

T.J.H. The idea of the heavenly calling is referred to in Hebrews 3.

A.C.C. The heavenly calling in Hebrews is in contrast to Israel's earthly calling. For us, the holy calling is emphasised in days of neutrality and compromise.

R.H.B. What you are urging on us is that there should be a practical answer in us to what God has done in calling us.

A.C.C. Yes. I am endeavouring to stimulate exercise and energy, so that we do not settle down and accept a standard that might be acceptable in Christendom, but that the divine standard of behaviour

should be maintained, which involves being prepared to sacrifice ourselves.

B.E.S. There are matters which belong to divine sovereignty and have to be left in God's hands. But we cannot leave everything on the ground of waiting for the Lord to act. There are matters which He has committed into the saints' hands to take up.

A.C.C. There is a good deal of leaving things to the Lord, or to others, to take up, but sharing in the great privilege of the Lord's supper and association with Him in the service of God should help us practically to defend the holy calling and allow nothing that would interfere with it. Associations, and association with people not in fellowship, was faced long ago, but can come up again.

J.R.W. Your reference to the Supper being the standard of fellowship is helpful. But this act here was blatant and brought out the need for a javelin.

A.C.C. A javelin is not a priestly instrument, but Phinehas was prepared to use it to meet this serious situation, which called into question God's rights. His use of the javelin brings out the thoroughness of his judgment of the matter and of it needing to be met without compromise.

J.W. Evil is judged by separating from it.

A.C.C. That is right: separation is a very effective weapon.

J.H. This matter became public, but it must have been there in secret beforehand.

A.C.C. But a bold Phinehas was there to meet the situation. The point is whether you or I are prepared to stand like he was.

D.J.H. One's tendency is perhaps to wait for someone else to act, but it might be me whom the Lord would use at any particular point.

A.C.C. As partakers of the holy calling, it devolves on each one of us to be set for the preservation of the divine standard and to allow nothing personally, householdly or in our localities which would interfere with the service of God.

D.E.R. We can understand our responsibility to take up matters of compromise arising in our own localities, but help us as to situations we may hear about in other localities.

A.C.C. That is a big question. Our first responsibility is to deal with household and local matters: matters further away are more difficult. We have learned the wisdom of waiting upon those on the spot, but you nevertheless carry your judgment about the situation.

Now with the daughters of Zelophehad, it was not a question of meeting evil, but energy in relation to taking up the inheritance.

J.W. The exercises of the end of Numbers were in view of God's people taking up their inheritance and the need to be in a suited state to do so, as these daughters were.

A.C.C. They belonged to a half-tribe, which suggests that they might not have had much encouragement in their exercise. Half the tribe was staying on the wilderness side, but they belonged to the half that was going over.

J.W. Their energy is seen in their overcoming what was seemingly disadvantageous to them.

J.S.G. Our business is not with others, but to go in ourselves for the maintenance of the truth that will liberate us for the enjoyment of what God has in mind for us.

A.C.C. We need stimulating to go in for what belongs to us. It must be delightful to heaven to regard a few people in a locality going in for the heavenly land. Moses could see that these daughters had a good case, so he brought their cause before Jehovah. It must have been delightful to Him to have these women claim their inheritance, so He says they "speak right". Their father was not one of the band of Korah, he was one of the 600,000 who had died during the forty years. His daughters would be a stimulation to us, for we have not yet come into our inheritance practically, but we have the light of it and the Spirit would give us to enjoy it at the present time. Then further light comes in and these daughters accept the restriction of being able to marry only within their own tribe. It is remarkable that

the exercises of these women in regard to their inheritance should find a permanent place in God's statute book.

D.J.H. This passage shows that if our hearts and minds are set on the inheritance, we can be assured of divine support to help us into it.

A.C.C. Very good.

GOD'S FOUNDATION

2 Timothy 2: 7-8, 15-21; Numbers 34: 102, 12; 35: 9-15, 22-28

A.C.C. I thought we might get some help in this meeting as to the legality of the ground we have taken in relation to Christendom.

Whatever current teachings or opinions might be, the firm foundation of God stands, and everything is to come into alignment with that. No one has any ground for meeting unless the legality of the position can be established. In days of break-up, and other fellowships having been set up, it is of particular importance to establish that we are acting in alignment with God's foundation. I read in Numbers about the borders of the land because, as we are able to establish the legality of the ground we have taken, we shall experience the assembly as a sphere of practical salvation, as suggested in the cities of refuge. Everything for God has been established on the basis of Jesus Christ raised from among the dead, and the firm foundation of God relates to the resurrection of Christ. All believers - ourselves too - should look into the foundation on which they are, as to the legality of it, for we should take nothing for granted.

J.W. A right moral foundation must underlie the legality of the ground we take.

A.C.C. Certainly. Without assumption or pretension, we should be able to fix our position in relation to the great ecclesiastical system of which we form part outwardly, as taking a place outside the camp.

J.R.W. To establish the legality of our position, what criterion applies?

A.C.C. Following the moral principles set out here is the criterion. Righteousness is the first, and, if you follow that, you are on the way to establishing the legality of the position, or, perhaps we should say, the ground, which we are on.

B.E.S. The question is whether we are on this right ground currently. It is not enough to claim that we were on this ground in the past, nor

is there any successional idea connected with it.

A.C.C. Absolutely! Everyone should examine for themselves the ground they have taken up and the principles they are following.

D.E.R. This is an individual matter. As you follow these principles, and I do, we shall be together, with others also, and therefore we can reach what is collective.

A.C.C. We must begin with what is individual and the collective will follow.

K.J.S. Please say more about the foundation being linked with Christ risen. If a foundation is not right, the building will not stand.

A.C.C. No matter what has happened in the break-up of Christendom, God's foundation stands because it is founded on the resurrection of Christ and hence cannot fail.

J.W. Christ's resurrection was a selective one because of the moral worth that marked him.

D.J.H. Why does it not go on to His ascension and glorification?

A.C.C. His resurrection was on earth, where the breakdown is, but despite that, there is that which remains unshakable, but we must be in line with it for there is no right ground apart from it.

L.W.B. If I am to be morally in accord with it, separation from what is iniquitous - such as saying that the resurrection had taken place already - must take place. We need help to judge what is iniquitous.

A.C.C. We may assume to have done that, but it is not a question of having done so in the past, but of where we are today.

D.E.R. As established in the fact that God's foundation remains, despite the breakdown, the question is whether each one of us is practically in accordance with it.

A.C.C. Christendom proceeds without exercise as to that, but my concern is to be that what I am associated with should be in alignment with the foundation.

J.S.G. Are Paul's glad tidings one of the ways to keep us in line with the divine thought?

A.C.C. Paul's glad tidings involve authority. There must be authority with God's foundation, yet some have gone away, disagreeing with certain ministry or a certain action, and set up another company. What authority have they for doing that?

D.E.B. It would be dangerous to suggest that we are the only ones that are right.

A.C.C. We are not suggesting that, but there is an obligation on us to depart from what is iniquitous and to identify ourselves with others taking the same moral route. We can be restful that the Lord knows all that are His. There may be others meeting on Lord's day morning to break bread, but we leave them with the Lord and we are not in competition with them.

D,E.R. There cannot be two minds in heaven about any matter, but we need to be assured in our own souls that we are found in relation to the divine mind for all.

A.C.C. There is only one foundation and only one right moral way.

Q.P. The presentation here of the Lord as Master, or Despot, requires subjection on our part.

A.C.C. Every one who sits down to break bread should accept that, but we may be too casual and may merely go on as we have always done. We need conviction as to our position.

G.C.B. What is iniquity?

A.C.C. Aiming at the mark and missing it and not being in alignment with the foundation arrived at by following righteousness, faith, love and peace.

G.C.B. The mark is the divine standard in doctrine and practice.

A.C.C. Some may miss it, but, as was said just now, God has not two minds about anything. He has one mind. Why do all believers not have one mind? Because they are not on the scriptural ground and the moral path to it.

R.H.B. There would be general assent to the need to withdraw from iniquity, but where does the line fall between vessels to honour and vessels to dishonour?

A.C.C. Vessels - persons - are not to govern us, for we may go astray through following persons, but principles are to govern us. If persons do not observe the principles, you have to separate from them. A restatement of these well known truths should revive our appreciation of the fact that there can be no controversy as to the rightness of the ground we have taken as regards Christendom.

J.R.W. Is there any link between the seal here and the sealing of the Spirit?

A.C.C. It is the divine seal and God will allow no one to break it. The Spirit would ratify our conviction that the ground we are on is divinely established.

J.R.W. Please open up what you said about not being in competition with other believers as we gather.

D.E.B. As to that, we should be thankful to see other believers meeting together and preaching the Gospel.

A.C.C. You might be thankful for that, but you would be sorry that they are not with you, if you have the realisation that you are on divinely accredited ground and that you would not go anywhere else except where you do go. You would not go anywhere else, would you?

D.E.B. That is correct.

A.C.C. So that while you do not condemn other believers, the fact that you would not go anywhere else means that you have a judgment of their position and that you know you are on divinely accredited ground.

V.E.W. Does God's sovereignty enter into this matter?

A.C.C. Sovereignty enters into the Lord knowing those that are His. The other side of the seal is practical and should be taken up by every one. The Lord has only one mind for all his people, so that if

one is converted and receives the Spirit, His mind for them is that they should be livingly in the assembly.

J.W. The point of this chapter is that, in a day of breakdown, there is only one right course for every believer.

A.C.C. That is a fact. I believe that to be so as to the ground I am on, not, of course, that you would broadcast your convictions.

L.W.B. What you are saying is set out in the book by Mr Biggs, titled "A Christian's Path in Days of Difficulty".

A.C.C. It is a good book, but I trust that the Spirit will give us some impetus today to follow the unchallengeable ground of following righteousness, faith, love and peace.

V.E.W. It was the sovereignty of God that gave some of us light and brought us out of religious systems.

A.C.C. I came from one such system over 60 years ago, but I want to be on the right moral ground today. Divine sovereignty gives light as to the assembly, but that light is for all His people everywhere.

D.H. Aligning ourselves would be like the Egyptians regulating themselves by Joseph's commandments.

A.C.C. Our responsibility is to align ourselves with God's word.

C.J.B. The name of the Lord is a strong tower and in crises, as we align ourselves with that Name, we prove the power that is in it.

A.C.C. As naming that Name we are obligated to depart from iniquity.

B.E.S. We claim to be on this ground, but practical difficulty sometimes arises among us in dealing with iniquity when it occurs.

A.C.C. There cannot be two right sides in any matter, so we need to come back to principles. Above all, righteousness must be our leader.

B.E.S. The word of God needs to be brought to bear on every issue in order to enlighten us as to right and wrong.

A.C.C. If two parties arise, will must be at work instead of bowing to God's word. Now at the last encampment, when they were not yet in the land, God describes to them what their external border with the world around would be when they reached the land. That is our position. We are not yet actually in the land, but we are to be governed by divine light as to others.

J.W. The way into what is collective and the enjoyment of it, which the land would suggest, is the route of 2 Timothy 2.

A.C.C. God delineated the border with a view to there being no mixture between themselves and the worldly nations around.

J.S.G. The same border should apply to all believers.

A.C.C. God has only one mind for all believers, but many do not recognise the border.

D.J.H. As being "not of the world", there should be a clear distinction between us and it.

A.C.C. Let us maintain that clear distinction without compromise.

R.C. Separation is attractive as we have before us what we are separated to, not only from.

A.C.C. We are separated to have part in great privileges, but it is God Himself who has deter mined our external borders.

J.H. Why was this instruction given to Israel before they went into the land?

A.C.C. We have nothing literal now - apart from the loaf and the cup - but we are to hold in faith and principle the ground which we are about to come into actually.

B.E.S. The western border was very straightforward - everyone could see where the great sea was - but the detail of the other borders had to be worked out in exercise. They were not to choose where the border went, but they had to work it out and make it evident where it went.

A.C.C. We may be slow at drawing the line between us and the world. Let us not be afraid to declare where our border is and not be

marked by Laodicean compromise and lukewarmness.

J.R.W. A brother locally prays every Monday evening that we might keep the enemy out.

A.C.C. I would say "amen" to that prayer. Let us keep the enemy out and stay within our own border, for in our land are cities of refuge, places of safety.

J.W. We have obligations both to the Lord and to our fellow believers. As the principles set out in 2 Timothy 2 are maintained by us, there will be a place of refuge for others to come into.

A.C.C. When Christianity was set up early in Acts, a city of refuge was there for persons to run into, and God would have such a sphere now. He has only one mind for all his people and He would have them come into the sphere of refuge now.

D.E.R. To be in the sphere of present practical salvation and to stay there, is the way to be preserved ourselves in the testimony through to the end.

A.C.C. Outside the city, you are in danger from the avenger of blood. But a man might run in who had no right to be there. Such a case had to come before the assembly, as in Matthew 18. Matthew 16 is the structural side of the assembly, but Matthew 18 is the judicial side. The assembly had to judge whether the man-slayer had a right to be there, but rescue of the man was primarily in mind.

The assembly is a great sympathetic body in which present salvation is real. For the matter to be settled, the assembly has to judge, and to judge righteously in accordance with the foundation, but with a view to salvation of the offender.

B.E.S. The assembly is to judge, not by what it likes or chooses, but according to the word of God.

A.C.C. Judgment is to be based on established principles.

A.McS. Would the mind of Christ help us to do that?

A.C.C. It is not exactly that the assembly knows His mind about any current matter, but the assembly has His thinking faculty, can think

as He thinks. As we do, we can judge with a view to rescue from the hands of the avenger of blood.

R.H.B. It is in view of securing a place where God can dwell complacently among his people.

V.E.W. As based on the firm foundation of God, the assembly is the greatest court of appeal.

A.C.C. Someone will say that we cannot find the assembly today, but we should hold to the light proper to it and act accordingly. But unless we are in alignment with God's foundation, on moral ground, we shall not arrive at the truth of the assembly. If not, we shall be governed by preferences and prejudices and end up setting up another company and mistakenly thinking that the Lord will join us.

J.R.W. We should encourage one another then not to get into danger by going outside the limits of the city of refuge.

A.C.C. All parents should instruct their children as to the danger outside but that there is safety in the assembly, and in the homes too, as divine principles are followed.

Key to initials

C.J.Brodie, Ealing; D.E.Burr, Redbridge; G.C.Bywater, Buckhurst Hill; L.W.Burton, Merton; R.H.Brown, Barnet; A.C.Craig, Chippenham; A.Cumming, Spaldwick; J.S.Gray, London; W.Grosse, Edinburgh; D.Hawgood, Bexley; D.J.Hutson, London; J.Harvey, Barnet, T.J.Harvey, Barnet; A.McSeveney, Cumnock; Q.Poore, Portsmouth; D.E.Remmington, St.Albans; D.J.Roberts, Gillingham; B.E.Surtees, Felixstowe; K.J.Samways, Buckhurst Hill; E.F.Woodford, Dorking; J.Wright, Redbridge; J.R.Walkinshaw, Bexley; V.E.Wraighte, Gillingham

THE LORD AS WRITER

A.C.Craig

John 8: 1-11; 2 Corinthians 3: 1-3, 11-18; Revelation 3: 12-13

These scriptures present the Lord Jesus as a writer. He is also the great speaker and all that He says will come to pass. The heavens and earth shall pass away, but not "My words". He is the great speaker but He is a writer and I want to bring out something as to what that might mean, alongside of His being the great speaker. He is the great writer. I think the intention is that we might understand that the result will be indelible and permanent, and what the Spirit would mean by drawing attention to Him as the writer.

It is unique in a way that He should be so presented in this activity. I read this first scripture to bring that out. This case has often been referred to. There is not any question about the guilt, and these opposers, seen in the Pharisees, believed that they had a good case and that they would find a way out and they would have Him say something against Moses and find fault against Him. But they did not reckon of Whom they were having to do with. Twice He stooped down; twice He wrote on the ground; twice He lifted Himself up. All these things should leave an indelible impression on us.

They did not reckon on Him stooping down: they thought they had Him cornered. They thought they had Him straight against Moses and there was no way out for Him. They did not reckon on Him stooping down and all that that means.

You think of Him, who He is, presented in this gospel, the blessed Son of God, coming into the world. I suppose it has often been said, the stoops are into manhood and into death. That is quite true, but you think of Him coming into manhood, what that would mean; that they did not accept. When you think of all that was represented in Christ, there in manhood, everything for God was in Him. He was the point of reference for the whole universe, nothing outside of Christ. That was the first stoop which they did not understand and they would not accept Him. It was the first stoop

that put them all out; not the second stoop, not that, the second stoop retains the woman. The first stoop put them all out putting Himself up He said to her, "Woman where are thine accusers?" They had all gone. As coming into manhood you think of who was there; the blessed Person of the Son of God. Not only that, all were eliminated, every other man from the eldest to the last, what an elimination. Mr Darby said they went from the eldest, who had the most to lose. The point is that they all went out. Christ coming into manhood is God's answer to everything and virtually, as I said, the removal of every other man. But He stooped down. That was the answer, which they did not expect Him to do; come into manhood.

He writes with His finger on the ground. That finger had written something before. That finger had written "Thou shalt not commit adultery". He is not writing that now. That was written, graven on stone; the same finger, the same Person had written it. Now he is writing again, He has come into manhood and He is not writing the ten words; He is writing something else. Coming into manhood, He is not only the eliminator of every other man, but He is God's answer for every other man. Oh what a stoop it was in manhood. What might He be writing? It might be something like this: "the law was given by Moses, grace and truth subsists through Jesus Christ".

They put up Moses against Him. Ah, but He would say, I will come in now on the line of grace and truth. What a wonderful thing. When God wrote the two tables graven on stone, they were not written only on the surface, the writing was engraved in. That is what God is after, an indelible permanent result. You will not find it by the law; that was proved. Nevertheless it was graven in stone. What a writer He is. What distinction He has. Think of Moses coming down with two tables of stone and finding the golden calf there. There was nowhere to put the tables. He could not bring them into the camp, they were not in a state to have them. In Deuteronomy 10 there is a very distinctive thought in the two comings-down of Moses. God says to him, when he had broken the first tables, Hew for thyself two other tables and I will write upon them; the ten words as before, but before you do that, make an ark of wood; a glorious divine Person, God over all blessed forever. In this chapter we have an ark of

wood. He said to the opposers further on in the chapter, "a man who has told you the truth"; that was the ark of wood. Moses came down the mountain the second time and put the two tables of stone into the ark of wood. There they were - in John 8, a man that has told you the truth. It impressed me, that before he went up the second time and came down, the ark of wood was there; that is unique. In the history of it, he had to go up the second time and it was the second time that God wrote on the two tables which he took up; then he comes down, then the ark is made and all the furniture is made; the light had come out about it, but the articles had not been constructed. That is historically, but in Deuteronomy he goes up the second time leaving the ark of wood here so that when he comes down the second time, there is a place to put the tables. That is the incarnation. All was resident there in Jesus as coming into manhood: "Thy law is within my heart". But when they continued asking Him, He lifted himself up, notice that, lifted himself up. I would love to have been there. Think of the dignity of that, the majesty of it, the compelling power of it, stooping down and lifting Himself up, no-one assisting him, think of the grandeur of it. He said "Let him that is without sin first cast the stone at her". That is what they would have done, the message they would have conveyed. It says "And again stooping down He wrote on the ground". What might this writing be? It might have been something like this; Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. The woman is included. The second stoop retains the woman. It is the second stoop that retains us in the divine presence, the second stoop into death. Notice it does not say, writing with his finger. A remarkable fact, both in Exodus and Deuteronomy, when the record is being given, as to the two writings, the first says it was written by the finger of God, as here, an exact correspondence between Exodus, Deuteronomy, and here - "He wrote on the ground". It is a question of Christ going into death and all that that means. It is not only a question of His finger. He is coming into manhood and going into death; not only His finger, but the blessed glorious Person Himself and all that that means, going into death and that is what retains the woman. And lifting Himself up the second time- two stoops, two

writings, two lifting Himself up. That is divine testimony. We are in the realm of what is great. This chapter is what is great. Lifting Himself up, seeing the woman He said "where are those thine accusers, has no one condemned thee? and she said, No one Sir. He said neither do I condemn thee". Think of that beloved brethren, think of the grace of it. As I said, this second lifting Himself up retains the woman. Retains her for what? What has she been retained for? You do not get any more than that, "neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more". That might not be much, but it is something, she is retained. She is retained for taking on the glory of the new covenant. He will write again. For the moment she is retained that she might go on to glory. That is why I read in 2 Corinthians 3.

The Corinthians were Christ's epistle. There they were in the first epistle, not much maybe, but do not forget "neither do I condemn thee go and sin no more". In the second epistle, Paul presents the Lord Jesus as writing, writing an epistle and the Corinthians were Christ's epistle. Not with ink but the Spirit of the living God. Think of that, what the saints are as coming under the skilful, deliberate, determinate hand of Christ, in bringing about a permanent, indelible result; something that will last, because the elements of the new covenant will go right into eternity. It may have a present practical bearing on our spirits, our dispositions, the glory of the new covenant, but the elements of it will go into eternity.

Think of the wonder of it. The Lord Jesus will continue this attitude that He has taken up of writing, of putting things down, and the Corinthians were that. They made a good start in the second epistle, they had answered to Paul exercising them about the man who had been dealt with. They had been exhorted by him to show him grace, lest he might be swallowed up by over much sorrow, to get something working amongst them in regard to the disposition of God, get some of the divine feelings working lest he be swallowed up with over much sorrow and assure him of your love. What God would have in any place, no hard spirit, none of that carried forward, all has been eliminated in the Lord stooping into death, but rather that there

might be the exhibition of what is proper to the divine disposition, lest he be swallowed up by over much sorrow, assure him of your love.

What kind of reception should there be with us, what feelings. The chapter goes on, as I read, to the shining of the glory. Moses is depicted as coming down the second time. 2 Corinthians 3 is not Moses coming down the first time. It is the second time with his face shining, not aware of it, no doubt. He had to put a veil on subsequently, for it is that that the apostle is referring to. After speaking about their being Christ's epistle, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God on the fleshy tables of the heart. You think of that woman's heart in John 8, think how soft it would be and you think of how ready it would be to take on the divine writing. And, dear brethren, if we maintain a hard legal spirit, there would be no material for the Lord to write on, but stimulating amongst them this kind of thing, of divine feelings. There would be the capacity to take on the writing and to take on the glory, the glory of the new covenant, Moses coming down with his face shining. Really Paul is using that in this chapter, the second coming down. But he is not using it as a pattern, he is using it as a contrast because he brings out what the new covenant really is, surpassing what marked Moses when he came down the second time. Even there it was a ministry of condemnation, but that writing on the ground "The law was given by Moses, grace and truth subsist by Jesus Christ", "Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world", changed the whole thing. Paul is using Moses as a contrast to the superiority of the glory of the new covenant, that where righteousness was demanded, righteousness is now ministered. Think of the blessed God, the goodness and greatness of His heart. He ministered righteousness, does not demand it. That is the new covenant, that is the surpassing glory. We are intended to take that on. How wonderful it is, the Lord is writing, all in view of us taking on the glory of the new covenant.

The glory of the glad tidings in chapter 4, the glory of reconciliation and new creation in chapter 5.

That is what I want to speak about now, the glory of the new covenant and the glory of new creation. That is what He is writing on

the overcomer in Philadelphia. He is still writing. It is not now the glory of the new covenant, but beyond that. He is writing the great thoughts of God, the great eternal thoughts of God. He is writing them on the overcomer at Philadelphia. You say, what had he to overcome, everything is so fine at Philadelphia? (It is not you know!) There is this - see that no one take thy crown. The Philadelphian overcomers were in danger that someone might take their crown and Christendom is set to seizing our crown, it will take away our best; take away all those last years of wonderful ministry regarding the truth of Christ and the assembly and the worship of God, all these great matters. That is our crown and we are in danger of losing it.

So He says "I will write upon him". I wish that I and you were more available under the hand of this blessed Writer, that something might be written on us and I hope that he uses this meeting to impress us indelibly, permanently, with something as to His own activities in these latter times. "Make a pillar in the temple of my God and he shall go no more at all out and I will write upon him the name of my God" and so on. These are God's great thoughts, God's eternal thoughts, because it says, I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem. That term, "the new Jerusalem" is not the millennial Jerusalem. That is not the city coming into view in the millennium; that is the city coming down as a bride adorned for her husband. That belongs to the scene of eternity. These are God's best thoughts, God's great original thoughts, the glory of new creation. That will never need reconciliation, it did not need redeeming, did not need reconciling; they belong to God's purpose, God's great thoughts that have been written on the overcomer of Philadelphia. We come into that, dear brethren, and give ourselves to Christ, the divine writer in the unique position, bringing about according to His mind something permanent, something indelible. These great eternal thoughts." I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God".

Wherever did she learn that, were had she learned - the coming down, every time she is presented in this book - three times - she is presented as coming down where did she learn that? She learned

that in John, she learned that from that blessed One stooping down. What a wonderful thing, coming down out of heaven. Where has the assembly learned to come down? She learned it from Christ. He will leave that impression upon us, dear brethren, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from my God and My new name. I do not know that anyone could tell you much about that, except the one who has it written on them, the overcomer of Philadelphia. But the Lord is writing. You can be sure He has not given us up and we all should aim at having something written on us by this divine writer, something of these eternal thoughts. Firstly, the glory of the new covenant and the glory of new creation. We should know something about these things as coming under the hand of Christ. Tomorrow morning we will profess to come under His hand, will say all the right things - I am not saying aught against that, but what reality is there, what am I absorbing, what am I taking in as the blessed Son of God comes in amongst us and carrying on His great finishing work, the great work of beautifying the saints to be suitable to Himself. It is by way of the new covenant and by the glory of new creation.

May there be something in these words He might use for our encouragement, for His Name's sake.

BARNET (*all day*)

13 January 1996