

A
WORD
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GRACE - III

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R.T. We were speaking yesterday as to the grace of God that had appeared, and the fulness with which it has filled the dispensation with resources of grace to continue to the end. Today we may test ourselves as to how we are being formed by and making use of these resources. The scripture in Titus speaks of how we are to live in the present course of things. They are not going to change publicly; the present course of things is going to continue as it is. From the time that Paul wrote, the outward conditions and circumstances have not changed, but grace has come into them to affect us that we may be living piously, soberly and justly in the present time. The scripture in Luke would help us as to the kind of persons we are to be. The passage in Kings helps as to the use we are making of the resources that are available to maintain us in the enjoyment of what has come in in grace. We would carry in our minds the fulness of what we have received, grace upon grace. How is it affecting us? In the present course of things while we are awaiting another day, I think we are being formed in these features that are in keeping with grace. We remarked yesterday the warnings in the epistles as to falling from grace. Lack of appreciating grace would mean that we would be living in these worldly features it speaks of. But grace helps us to deny those things and to be formed in another character that has come in in the grace of God. I think the epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians would be in our minds as to how believers there had failed to make room for this grace, and it brought in bondage. Paul warned in these epistles of the danger of grace not having its full effect upon them. With these warnings in our minds, it may help us to take on these new features more readily in view of another world that is to be in our mind.

G.D.R. Do you think the word 'teaching' is to lay hold of us? Paul spoke of some that they were always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim 3: 7). Teaching coming into our places is essential, is it not?

R.T. Our brother spoke in prayer as to being receptive. The teaching could not be more attractive, as we were saying yesterday, in the way it has appeared - not appeared only for our admiration, as you say, but it would have an edge to it. It is to get into us and to be formative of these new features derived from grace.

C.F.D. Denying impiety and worldly lusts would seem to precede this positive line of things. Would it show that the principle of self-judgment is to be working in us to make way for what is sober?

R.T. I think that is what we would feel as we proceed. There is to be displacement. You cannot join the old with the new. Grace does not come in to improve the old man but for displacement. That was so at Corinth; Paul brings in the cross there, cutting at this line of things. So the teaching has an edge to it that displaces these features of self to make room for this new character that is all of grace and makes nothing of us. I think we would see that the working and teaching of grace has substantial effect which will find its display in the world to come.

D.M.W. Do you think that grace has to do with something that is very deep in our spirits. I was wondering if this does not go with what we had in Colossians - 'If ye then be dead with Christ put to death therefore your members.' Is this more the spirit of the flesh here - impiety and worldly lusts?

R.T. I think so. The law could have made an exterior change. You can get past law by compliance - if you comply with the law you will get through; but I think grace brings an internal change, a new character and something, as you say, that is deep and formative and soon to be at home in conditions of glory. It is good to keep that before us - as it says, "awaiting the blessed help". What grace has formed is soon going to shine in different surroundings, and it will be at home in them.

L.McF. It speaks of purification - "our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all lawlessness, and purify to himself a peculiar people; zealous for

good works." Maybe you could help us as to purification and how it is proceeding presently.

R.T. As our brother said, it is a deep matter. "Redeem us" means that He takes us out from that condition of things altogether. It is a new man, in Colossians coming into something new. These features are the substantiality of what grace is doing and it should lay hold on us that there is a new character about it. It comes out in these new skins, I think; the old skins would readily burst. The law cannot contain what has come in but the new skins, I think, are formed by grace in these features of "soberly, justly and piously". It is now individual persons, and, as we see later, it will be contained in a vessel, the assembly. So they are peculiar people, in that others cannot understand why you are living a different character. Someone has said that persons cannot understand a Christian if they cannot understand Christ, because what is coming out is Christ, is it not? He was a rejected Man here, so we understand that these features will never be accommodated in the affairs and circumstances and arrangements of the world. But in the present course of things, grace has come in and it gives the believer power to be formed in those new features. I think the Spirit has a great part in it, as we will see as we proceed in the reading.

H.G.H. It says, "our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all lawlessness, and purify to himself a peculiar people," that is, it is His own work. In order for us to be purified we have to have those dealings with Him, do we not?

R.T. Grace is all His work. Grace appeared and this is how it moved. As we were saying yesterday, it went to the cross, it tasted death, all that was involved in redemption. The appreciation of grace has a great emptying effect on the one hand; it empties of self, because grace makes nothing of self but everything of the Giver and that, I think, lays the basis in the soul for taking on this new character and these features that are formed by grace.

J.A.P. The island of Crete in the Mediterranean where Paul left this brother was a difficult place. He says of them in verse 12 of chapter 1, "Cretans are always liars, evil wild beasts, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true"; this brother had a difficult service. What you said earlier is helpful - the Lord is not going to change things here but I am to be changed, the Christian is to be changed.

RT. I think that is the beauty of grace, that whatever the present course of things there is grace to meet it. You see that particularly in Elisha's ministry, the difficulties that arose chapter after chapter; the water was bad, the situation of the city, all these things, but there was always something there to meet them. He did not change the circumstances, but Elisha brings grace upon grace into the circumstances that persons may live piously in the present course of things.

D.M.W. That shows the power of grace, does it not? There is great power in grace, because, in the midst of an adverse scene, the circumstances being really adverse to God, there is a deep work going on in persons. What power there is in grace!

R.T. Yes. As we were remarking yesterday, the throne of grace is above. The throne is not here, but above principality and authority and every influence that sin has introduced, and from that throne grace is flowing to us in the present course of things, to meet the needs of the moment. I think grace upon grace involves that whatever need arises day after day there is resource to meet it. Maybe we had some apprehension of that yesterday. Well, we are just tested as to how we are making room for it. We cannot join it to the old, otherwise the rent takes place. We can see that all around us; we have known it in our own histories too, but the new wine is in new skins and both are preserved together. There is the teaching of grace in that, as in Romans, teaching self-judgment, as our brother has said, that the old cannot be improved upon. Grace displaces and brings in something that is entirely new to contain the new wine. I think we may link it with Corinth; Paul says to them, "let your heart expand itself", 2 Cor 6: 13. That is a feature of these skins, that they can expand. Grace is not restricted and it does not break, but a

feature of grace is that it can expand. As grace upon grace is coming in in its fulness, these skins can expand and contain the richness and blessedness of what is flowing from the throne above. Corinth was joining the new to the old, they were reigning as kings. It is very affecting, I think, that in the epistle when they are reigning as kings he says, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus, that for your sakes he, being rich, became poor," 2 Cor 8: 9. Think of these persons reigning in all their pride as men after the flesh, and Paul presents a Man who became poor, He says, "that ye by his poverty might be enriched."

K.N.P. You spoke yesterday about the grace that came in the Man from heaven. Is that the type of man that would be represented in these new skins? It is a different order of manhood, is it?

R.T. Yes. You think of the Lord Jesus when He was here - how pious He was! It says, He was heard because of His piety, (Heb 5: 7). Think of Him living soberly and justly. He was in the present course of things, where He was tested, but think of the perfection of sobriety and piety that marked Him. Grace is flowing from Him now as He is crowned above, that something of these features may be marking us in view of the new wine being preserved, and us being preserved in the new system.

J.A.P. Would these allusions you make in Luke, and what the prophet brought in, be to the Holy Spirit?

R.T. Yes; I think we will see it more definitely as we come to the oil. I think the skins are the Spirit's work. They are certainly not what was there at Corinth - man in his pride - but new skins are, I think, the fruit of the Spirit's grace; so that what has come in in the way of joy and blessing in grace is preserved.

C.F.D. What is your thought about the garment?

R.T. Do you think we try to patch things? We cannot join grace to man in the flesh or the new to the old. How striking the language is - it will rend it! It does not suit. I think you see the working of that in Corinth and Galatia, the trying to join the old to the new and it brings in bondage, and worse than that, it says it causes a rent. I think we

see in Christendom that the whole thing has become rent, but in the Spirit's grace skins are formed that can expand and contain the glory of what has been introduced in the new system. What would you say?

C.F.D. I think that helps us. The new skins come to light in the preaching of the glad tidings. Persons take on this feature of what is new. They are indwelt by the Spirit - as you say we get that in the oil - but does it not involve complete repentance, so that the change is complete in us. It is not a halfway matter, we are to go all the way, do you think?

R.T. Yes I think it works out in the distinguishing of flesh and Spirit; the teaching of Romans comes into it. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" John 3: 6. You cannot join them. There is the question of displacement, so what comes about is wholly new and fresh in view of things being preserved. I think that is how grace would teach us. As you say, in the gospel it is being born again; there is something that is the pure product of grace, nothing of man in it.

H.G.H. Does the old garment represent the law? The Lord is speaking here to the scribes and the Pharisees. It is really the religious element which comes natural to us if we profess anything. We are really in bondage if we are still under law.

R.T. Yes; I think it applies to the law. Then it applies too as we think of Corinth and may apply to worldliness. It says, "having denied impiety and worldly lusts", - trying to join what is of grace with the world and with the law, as you said, and these other features, that cannot be joined. What is of grace is grace, not grace attached to law or the world or anything else.

A.S.H. In one of our hymns we have, "In Christ Jesus" - new creation, ... Old things now have passed away (hymn 37). There is no place for the old at this time; it is what is new set on and that is set on in Christ alone. Is that right?

R.T. Yes I think this is leading on to that, new creation, old things have passed away. Grace is not a veneer, not an outside coating,

but it is wholly new; it is deep, as our brother has said, and it is entirely new in its character. If you put the new wine into old skins what a disaster it is, the whole thing is confusion; it is lost and becomes a misrepresentation. That is what is abroad, Christianity is misrepresented, but the teaching of grace brings in new skins so that the new wine is contained and there is joy - and it says that they are preserved together.

G.D.R. Is not the working of the cross, in all that it involves basic to this? It is the finishing of the first order of man and out of death comes in the second.

R.T. Yes; I think so. The cross has cut at the root of the thing. Then we need the teaching of grace, and to apply it all the time so that the old does not resurrect itself and we do not try to join up the old with the new. I think grace upon grace is forming these skins and the skins are getting stronger, you may say, and richer, and the wine is pouring in more and more in its fulness as the dispensation is going on. So that as the dispensation increases in fulness, as I think it does, the skins are able to contain what is coming in in the Spirit's grace.

J.S. I was thinking of your reference to new birth. You get what is wholly new there of God, but it is "born of water and of Spirit," John 3: 5. Do you think the water is the moral element that we have to apply to keep things according to what God has begun in us?

R.T. Very good. I think that is part of the teaching of grace. The Lord brings that in in John's gospel to Nicodemus, a man who could not understand things. What you say is good - the water brings in the displacement in view of this other character coming in that can contain it. Have you some more to say?

J.S. We have nothing to do with that initially. It is all of God, but it is wholly new, woven throughout, but we have to maintain it in its purity. Is the water side of things our responsibility to keep things according to what God has begun in us?

R.T. Yes I think what we are speaking of today brings in our responsibility. Grace has flowed in its fulness and is still flowing in its

fulness, but how is it going to be contained? It requires that we give heed to the teaching, does it not - the teaching as to the water, as you have said, and the teaching of how the vessel would grow. As Paul says to the Corinthians, Let your heart expand itself. So there is the water in its initial features but then there is the Spirit giving growth and the vessels are becoming more pliable and larger so that they can contain the new wine.

E.F.C. Would you tell us what is meant by verse 39 of chapter 5? You have been speaking of the new wine and it is suggestive of the excess of grace and what is to fill the believer, but what about the old wine?

R.T. Well, what are you going to say about it?

E.F.C. I suppose it is a suggestion of what is Jewish?

R.T. I think that word "straightway" helps - it says, "no one having drunk old wine straightway wishes for new, for he says, The old is better." I think that is grace coming in that changes our taste. Initially we have a taste for what is old, and we tend to go back to it, but I think grace changes our taste. Have we not tasted that the Lord is good, Peter says (1 Peter 2: 3)? I think Peter is helping these babes to change their taste so that they may appreciate what is new and may desire to have skins that expand more. Paul was trying to get Corinth to do that, that the fulness of grace might be their present portion.

E.F.C. Would that be the superiority of Christianity over the old? We are apt to try to resurrect something of the old.

R.T. It is not 'straightway'; we do not come into it immediately. But have we not tasted that the Lord is good? There is grace coming in and so we begin to prefer grace, we begin to prefer what has come in in Christ - as you said, the superiority of Christianity. So we do not go back to law. That was Galatia. It is striking the word Paul uses, "ye have fallen from grace", Gal 5: 4. What happened was that sonship was lost and bondage was the result - "fallen from grace". I think the change would be grace coming in to help us to prefer it, always.

P.E.M. Paul was counting on Timothy to continue after he had gone, so he says to him, "Be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus", 2 Tim 2: 1.

R.T. That is very beautiful. It is a chapter that requires separation, yet that is how he begins it, "Be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus." So separation is not an arbitrary matter. Mr Darby wrote that pamphlet on separation and he wrote another one after it; he said he felt the need of it, Grace was the ground of gathering and the power of unity. "Be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus". You can apply separation, but separation is not a ground of gathering exactly, nor is it the power for unity; it is grace that forms these skins that can hold the wine. You may be separate and become a monk and isolated, and it becomes law really, but I think grace comes in to form these skins that can contain the wine and both are preserved together.

E.F.C. Would you say the motive for separation is attraction to Christ? We sometimes feel we have to drive ourselves away from something that is not pleasing to God, but the point is that if we are attracted to Christ we just automatically leave it, so to speak.

R.T. It is because we cannot have Him in mixed conditions, so we need to separate from the conditions in view of enjoying Christ. But then, as we said, the great point is being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; it holds us together, and it is the great centre and gathering point. That is by the way as it were, but it brings in this grace, the power of it, to form skins in which the wine can be contained.

J.A.P. Does it not say in Hebrews of the Lord Jesus that He was separated from sinners (Heb 7: 26)? It is one of the things said about Him, but in the gospels He was approachable. So both things are true. Is that right - we walk in separation but we should be approachable? He was accused of eating with sinners too, and yet He was separated from them. How do you work all that out?

R.T. Well, Mr Bellett in that beautiful book, The Moral Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, makes this comment as to the pathway of Jesus;

His holiness set Him apart from all, in His holiness He was separate from every man, but His grace made Him the servant of all. I think you see these things worked out beautifully there; holiness necessitates separation but in grace He was a servant of all.

G.D.R. Peter says in John 6 in answer to the Lord's probing, "Thou hast words of life eternal" v 68. I wondered if grace is not contained in His words in a current sense for us. That wonderful supply is coming through His words, is it not?

R.T. Yes; I think so. It is the teaching of grace. We were speaking of how it appeared but I think the teaching of grace goes through the dispensation. So as the increase of wine is coming in, there are the skins to contain it. You can see the skins expanding in the beginning of the Acts, can you not? People thought they were full of new wine, but what they were full of was the Spirit and there were new skins to contain what was coming in in its fulness.

K.N.P. It is interesting that it is plural. It is not 'a new skin' but 'skins'. I was thinking of what you were saying about the beginning of the Acts, because Peter stood up with the eleven at that point, did he not?

R.T. Very good. There was support and no jealousy, no rivalry. I am sure the apostles got on better together as they came into the gain of Christianity in the Acts than they had done before. Peter and John went up together; they were two new skins. He said, Not silver and gold, but such as I have give I to thee (Acts 3: 6). You see the power there of the new skins and the new wine, reaching out to the man with their hands and bringing him into the joy and blessedness of what they were the exponents of.

D.M.W. Do you think it was grace that strengthened his ankle bones?

R.T. Very good.

D.M.W. He did not want to let go of them, he wanted to join up with them. We see grace effective in moving that man and strengthening him so that he could praise God.

R.T. I think that is good. He took on the teaching of grace, you may say, as he laid hold of Peter and John, and immediately his ankle bones were strengthened. You see there the new skin; he was leaping, walking and praising God, the new wine in the new skin. The old was left behind entirely and he would not go back to it. The danger with us, as we said about Galatia, is going back; so the need of being preserved in the newness and freshness, and the elasticity to expand, as the fulness of what is in the dispensation comes into our hearts.

L.D.P. I was wondering about Paul and Silas in relation to the jailor if there is not evidence there of the grace we are speaking of; "Do thyself no harm," Acts 16: 28.

R.T. Very good. And how richly the jailor took it on, did he not? How richly he laid the table for them, as he took on the teaching of grace very quickly. I think Paul and Silas are fine examples of the new skins; men shut up in the prison wrongfully and chained beyond what was necessary, but there you see the new skins and the new wine. Had it been old skins they would have been rebellious, and they would have been irked and irritated and depressed, but I think there you see the new wine and the new skins. In the prison they were praising God with singing.

J.S. Seeing that they were with Jesus (see Acts 4: 13). They had taken on that character of man, do you think?

R.T. New skins. It is the effect of grace, and so there was new wine, there was blessing available and joy for others in the new skins. It is not just a preaching or a sermon, but it is the preacher and the preaching. The preacher augments the words. It is not a novice exactly, but the thing is augmented as was said earlier. Peter stood up with the eleven; there was something augmenting the preaching, the wine and the new skins. So there is not inconsistency. The gospel goes out from a realm of wealth and with the preacher there is the new skin and the new wine.

C.F.D. Do you think that comes out in the apostles in the early part of the Acts? Persons looked upon them and they recognised them

that they had been with Jesus. There was something shining out testimonially that marked them as being different, that was that they knew the presence of Christ.

R.T. I think they became like that because they preferred the new. They did not straightway prefer it. I think they had come to see that the new was better and they left Judaism, they left the other things that would have held them. In the man in John 9, you see the new wine and the new skin very beautifully, and these persons you have been speaking about begin to see the attractiveness of what has come in in grace upon grace in Christ, and there you begin to prefer it. So it says, No one straightway wishes for new, I think we become attracted, become charmed by the Man in whom grace has shone out, and we begin to follow Him. The persons that you speak of became followers, they preferred the new and they kept their eye on the source of that grace.

L.McF. Thinking of the assembly at Thessalonica - the short period of time Paul preached there - what came to light was these new skins. They turned to God from idols and to await His Son from the heavens (1 Thess 1: 9).

R.T. That is very beautiful. So that there is a testimony in the new wine and the new skins that they are waiting for His Son. I think that links on with what we are speaking of, that we are awaiting the appearing of our great God and Saviour. So in the waiting time there is something that will be ready for the appearing, there is the new wine that will be at home in those new surroundings.

S.E.MacC. Hannah provided a new coat every year for her son. I was wondering, in the way of expanding things, what can we do to provide new skin conditions for our brother, for one another, so that the new wine can be seen?

R T. You start with yourself, I suppose. There is nothing more affecting than the display of the thing. As the new wine is displayed in the new skin, as, we might say, in Jesus, it becomes attractive and persons begin to follow. To help others we have to display in ourselves that we are marked by new features; having denied

impiety and worldly lusts, we are living soberly, justly and piously. These are the new skin features, that there is what is compatible with the new wine and both are preserved. We want that in our localities, we want it in ourselves, but we want it in our localities that things are preserved. They were not being preserved at Corinth - things were held very loosely, the skins were not able to contain what was there. But we want to make room for the teaching of grace so that things are preserved in our localities in the joy that is suited to the grace of the dispensation.

K.A.K. I was thinking of the new skin. It is really linked with the recent death of an animal, is it not?

R.T. Yes. Go on.

K.A.K. The fact that death was recent would help us in the understanding of grace, would it not?

R.T. I think that helps us, so we do not go back. If we get away, as you say, from the death of Christ, pride comes in and man comes in and we resort then to law. It brings in bondage and bondage cannot hold the new wine. Indeed the new wine, sonship, in Galatia was being suppressed, it was not functioning because, as you say, we get away from the death of Christ, which makes way for the new.

K.A.K. So the effectiveness of the preaching on the part of Peter and later of Paul was really is they recognised the recency of the death of Christ for them personally.

R.T. It is always current, is it not? As we have in our scripture in Titus, "who gave himself". We think of that each week at the Supper. The Supper, I think, would help in these new skins, that we remember the death of the Lord. He died here, so how can we live in worldly things if the world has crucified my Lord. Mary was kept to it too, and you see the beauty of a new skin and new wine, as we were reading yesterday, in her. "Go to my brethren", there is the new wine pouring in and you see the new skins there able to contain it.

J.A.P. It is the first clothing in scripture, is it not? God clothed Adam and Eve in skins (see Gen 3: 21).

R.T. The thing is that they do not become old, they retain, as I said, their elasticity. The law and what was legal which was coming into Galatia, makes things very brittle, and things come up among us like that, and we get very brittle and things crack. I think grace brings in patience; the wine and the skins are preserved together. There is a great need for that, I think, that grace can expand as Paul was exhorting the Corinthians, Let your heart expand itself.

H.J.G. That would help us to appreciate the epistles; as was mentioned yesterday, they begin with grace to you and end with it. It would help us to consider that as we take in the epistles.

R.T. It is very interesting that grace is hardly spoken about in the gospels. It is not mentioned in Matthew, nor Mark, it is mentioned I think twice in Luke and may be twice or three times in John, and it is mentioned in all the epistles, showing the teaching of grace. There was a display of it in the gospels but the epistles bring in the need for being taught, that grace might be formative in us that we come out in the character of the Man in whom grace has been displayed in its fulness. So the importance, as we have said, of the teaching. That comes into this "straightway". We do not straightway wish for new but grace helps to change our taste and the teaching becomes formative so that there is a vessel compatible with the wine. The woman in Kings may connect very strikingly, I thought, with Galatians; she had known better times. She was a woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets, although they do not shine very well in the book, but she is there widowed and is coming into debt. Very sad that the believer, or, as in Galatia, the local company, should come into debt, come into bondage when all the time there is what can meet the whole position. It is a very striking feature of Elisha's ministry that he asks, What have you here? He does not bring in something from heaven exactly but He says, What is here? We have been furnished in the Spirit with something that will last through the whole dispensation, and what Elisha brings up time after time is, What use are you making of what you have been furnished

with? The commodities he uses are very simple, salt, oil, meal, wood, all things that were there, all that had been provided in grace. So we have been furnished with enough to meet whatever circumstances may arise if we make use and avail ourselves of what grace has provided.

A.S.H. It would be very encouraging to our hearts to make use of what we have. The woman said she had nothing but a pot of oil. In her eyes that was nothing, but the prophet makes much of it and we are to make much of what we have in that same realm. I thought too of the scripture in John 6: 9, "There is a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two small fishes". One could say, What is that among so many? Does that fit in?

R.T. It fed five thousand, and they went away satisfied, and more than that, they had some over. I think it is good what you bring in, that there was something there. We all have something, how are we appreciating it? He has given us richly of His Spirit. That is what Paul is bringing into Galatia, that there is a power there to maintain sonship. The woman was saying that the children were there and the creditors were there, and she was going to eat and die. Things have broken down, things are so small, but he says, What have you in the house? And she found she had enough to restore the privileges and joys of sonship and to be maintained for the rest of the time - live on the rest.

J.S. Is it true to say then that the Lord has fitted every local assembly with sufficient to see it through to the end?

R.T. Yes. I think in this setting it has been done in the gift of the Spirit. I think it is part of the fulness of grace that the Spirit has come from the ascended Christ. Because it says, What have you in the house? Elisha does not say that I will have to go away and get something else and bring it in, but it is what has come into the dispensation in the gift of the Spirit.

J.S. In applying it to the local assemblies, you get the thought of the house in the beginning of Acts. The enemy has been against the formation and expression of the local assembly. Do you think the

value of what God has placed there gives everything necessary to its maintenance until the Lord comes?

R.T. It is to function in sonship. Paul brings that so beautifully into Galatia "Ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus", Gal 3: 26. Then he says He has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father (Gal 4: 6). Paul would have Galatia to be functioning like Ephesus, would he not, as appreciating what is there in the Spirit?

C.F.D. So if there is the evidence of not employing what is available to us and our localities are reduced - and in some parts some localities because of conditions are having to cease - it is not because of the lack of divine supply. There must be some lack, may be on our side, in the appropriation of it, do you think?

R.T. Well, there is what has come in governmentally that we bow to. There are certain things in God's hand as to how things may be declining publicly, but I think there is also the sense here that vitality is to be maintained. The woman said that there had been better days she was in widowhood. She says, Thy servant feared God and now the creditor has come. Now, who is going to get the upper hand, the creditor or the Spirit? There is a way to it; she shuts the door. She says, What shall I do? She acknowledges her position, she states it as she sees, but Elisha does not accept her estimate about it. He maintains the sense that there is fulness to meet things, so he tells her how to do it. Shutting the door would shut out these features of doubts that may arise with us and the fear.

K.A.K. How do you understand the borrowing of vessels?

R.T. Well, if you have reached this kind of state you may need to call on your neighbours to help you. He says, "Go, borrow for thyself". We should not need to, but she had lost something, she had been careless. I think that comes into Corinth and into Galatia; they had been careless about things; and we do not have what we should have had. She did not have them, she had not appreciated what had been given her earlier on; she had been careless and lost something. So he says to go and borrow vessels, empty vessels. It

should not be necessary but we may need help from others to restore our faith and restore and encourage our hearts as to the blessedness and fulness of what there is there. What would you think about it?

K.A.K. I was wondering if it might be linked with the gospel - empty vessels?

R.T. He says, Go borrow abroad from all thy neighbours. We are thankful for neighbours in these days. Opposite to this, the ship was becoming overloaded and they called to their partners (Luke 5: 7); There were neighbours there to contain the fulness of things. Here in times of reduction we are helped through our neighbours. But I think she is helped eventually to stand on her own feet and to make use of all that is in the place that has come in in the oil. She had the oil but she needed her apprehension of it to be enlarged; our neighbours sometimes help us about these things.

G.D.R. Preservation of life in these two children is an important matter. That would also be in Elisha's mind, the preservation of what was potential in the locality. How vital that is! In another setting it says the situation of the city is good but the water is bad (1 Kings 2: 19).

R.T. Here, as to the children, she was writing them down, was she not? When we begin to get discouraged we write down the brethren. We say, We have only so-and-so, very few and they are not much, and we begin to discredit things. But Elisha maintains the idea of sonship. That is what Paul was striving at in Galatia. They were acting as children, they had fallen from grace and they began to get accustomed to things at a lower level, whereas Elisha here is bringing in, as Paul did, that in the Spirit there is grace and power to maintain things at their true level, whatever the outward circumstances in the dispensation.

L.McF. What is to be learned from the oil being in a pot, in a vessel - a pot of oil?

R.T. I think it is locatable. She could locate it, it is not held loosely; I think the Spirit is identifiable. What would you say?

L.McF. I thought of the local assembly, the idea of a vessel.

R.T. She says first of all that she has not anything at all in the house. There is nothing here, nothing in the meeting. If we speak like that there will be nothing. But who can identify not only the pot of oil but the potentiality. That is what Elisha is bringing out, the potentiality that was in the place in the pot of oil and in the sons.

J.A.P. It would seem that the places you mentioned twice in the first reading and this reading, whom Paul had to warn about faith, were helped - particularly Corinth, they answered. Perhaps in Galatia there was an answer too. Peter had responded to Paul's adjustment. And in Hebrews our brother Timothy was set at liberty (Heb 13: 23). It would seem that something worked to answer Paul's concern. Is that saying too much?

R.T. No, I think grace is working. Paul would alert the saints as to the fulness of what there is in grace. That is what Elisha is doing here. So he told her to borrow these vessels and says, Do not let it be few. She was a bit restricted and we get restricted, but the Spirit is not limited, He is not restricted, He has come from the glorified Christ. We spoke yesterday of the Lord bringing in the wealth of heaven with Him but so is the Spirit; He is bringing in the wealth of the glorified Man. So he says, Do not let it be few. And then he says, Shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons. Shut out these influences of doubt that would discredit things. And there she is shut in, herself and her sons and the oil, and what a potential!

P.E.M. "And set aside what is full", Elisha says. Would she now have a store to draw upon, and do we have a store to draw upon?

R.T. The first thing is that she meets debt. The liabilities are all met in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit helps us to meet that side of things in view of living on the rest. The Spirit's normal service is to bring us into the liberty of sonship; but He helps us to meet the debt.

E.F.C. So we have no excuse for spiritual impoverishment with the Holy Spirit available to us in our localities if we make room for Him, as well as in our personal lives. If we sow to the flesh we reap from the flesh nothing but impoverishment, would you say?

R.T. I think that is good. So he is encouraging this woman to sow to the Spirit. The oil takes on a new meaning and character in her eyes, does it not? 'Nothing at all but a pot of oil', but she comes to see that it not only meets the debt but she is able to live in the joy of the glory of Christianity.

L.D.P. Nehemiah would be an encouragement to us. He was one person who had an exercise and he was able to get the benefit of help that was available through others. I am thinking of his involving the high priest - he arose and his brethren. This is the element that was used to rebuild the wall and make things suitable for Jehovah.

R.T. I think Nehemiah was someone who appreciated things. He said, Our God will help us. If the Jews and these other ones were against him, he says God will help us. God helped them in the building Nehemiah speaks about. I think he is more or less the opposite to the widow, or is like the widow after she has these vessels filled and the debts paid, and like Nehemiah she is able to live in the triumph of God being for us.

G.D.P. That is one of the things that Paul introduced in Galatia - "to reveal his Son in me", Gal 1: 16. Is that not sonship?

R.T. Very good. Say some more about that.

G.D.P. I was thinking of how he himself had experienced the pouring out. He said, I am a Pharisee of Pharisees but he counted that all loss; did he not, pouring out the old?

R.T. Yes, I think so. I think Paul was trying to get them to shut the door at Galatia to appreciate what was there in the Spirit's grace, that "ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus", Gal 3: 26. Think of the door being shut and the oil being appreciated, "Ye are all God's sons". And then he says, He sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal 4: 6). There is living on the rest. The woman comes to appreciate that the debt is met never to rise again, and she is living now in circumstances that are superior to all the bondage that had been there previously. What a joy this woman must have had that she could live on the rest.

H.J.G. Would you say it is good to get the gain of the prophetic word, that is what we believe we are having these days. This is the prophet's word. He says, "pour out into all those vessels". She did not stop until they were all tilled. She had taken on the prophet's word, had she not?

R.T. That is encouraging for us. So the prophetic word is there to help us to appreciate what is there. As we said earlier, the prophet does not in this instance bring in something from a far country but he helps her to appreciate the divine furnishings that are there. And it says the oil stayed, there was not a vessel more and the oil stayed. It is still available for the next time, grace upon grace, whatever may come in. So the next time things come up she would know where to turn to, the oil is still there. So we learn where the resource is and how to make room for it, the oil stayed.

A.S.H. What is to be learned from the fourth verse, "and go in, and shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons"? What do we gain from that, closing the door?

R.T. I think it shuts out these elements of doubt. They said, We have nothing here, as you quoted earlier, but five loaves and two small fishes. These are the doubts, the door is open to doubts, but I think as you shut the door you shut that out and what she has inside the door is the oil and the vessels and her sons. So that, as you said, in that instance what they came to see was that things were in the hand of Christ. You shut out the feelings of inferiority that you may have, to appreciate the fulness of what grace has furnished us with.

K.N.P. Would the realisation of what was there in the pot of oil bring out what was there in the sons too, because it says, "they brought the vessels to her, and she poured out." There seems to be an appreciation of those that she maybe had not appreciated properly before, speaking disparagingly about them perhaps, but there is a great appreciation of them, "Bring me yet a vessel."

R.T. I think that is one great feature of the Spirit 's service, to elevate the brethren in our minds and our thoughts, that we clothe them with

sonship. As we said earlier in the meetings, Paul said grace to Corinth as well as saying grace to Ephesus. He would elevate the saints and their potential; if their state may be Corinthian think of the potential that was there! And she here through this experience sees them at their full potential, the sons living on the power that has been given in all the dignity and the wealth that belongs to sonship.

G.D.R. You quoted that exhortation of Paul to Corinth "let your heart also expand itself". Do you think we need to be strengthened perhaps in faith? Our brother has mentioned the smallness of a number of places and that is pretty general in this country, but faith would lay hold of what is available, what the Lord is able for in the workings of divine grace?

R.T. Yes. I think faith and grace that we have been speaking of go together. I trust we have been helped to see in these meetings that there is power in faith and there is power in grace. You see it, as was remarked, in Stephen, the power that was there in grace. And the power that is here in the Spirit to maintain things at their full level in spite of the surroundings. The husband is dead, you cannot bring him back, things are there but the creditor is kept out in the power that has been given us in the gift of the Spirit.

NEW YORK

4 November 1995

(i) PLEASING THE LORD

Jim Marshall

2 Timothy 2: 1-4; Hebrews 11: 5

I feel impressed with what has come before us in regard to the assembly and in regard to doing what is right in the sight of Jehovah. Josiah was young he was not a man, he was only eight years old. So what we are speaking about is open to us all, young ones, middle-aged ones and old we cannot exclude ourselves. Josiah is an example to us, especially to a young person, that he or she can

consider what would be pleasing to the Lord and seek to express our life in that way.

In Timothy, we have the desire "that he may please him who has enlisted him as a soldier", but, before that, he says "Thou therefore, my child, be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus." This is an old brother and he is speaking to a young brother. It is fine when there is a blending together between old and young; we see that in Timothy and Paul. Paul on the eve of his departure is concerned in regard to the continuation of things, so he speaks about "faithful men". There was one Man who was perfectly faithful. He could say, "I do always the things that are pleasing to him", John 8: 29. He always did what was right in the sight of God. I suppose doing what is right is that you are marked with righteousness and that is one of the things that we are to pursue "righteousness, faith, love, peace", 2 Tim 2: 22. We cannot make much of one at the expense of the other we need them all. Paul tells Timothy that he is to entrust what he had seen in Paul and what he had learned in Paul to faithful men. Our brother has referred to faithful men that we have known and they have passed things on. Paul's thought as to Timothy is that he is to be furnished with the qualifications to pass things on. Brothers to whom we have referred have passed things on they have been a real stimulus to us and still are because they were faithful men. They were able "to instruct others also". So that there is a continuation of what was expressed in the Lord Jesus and a continuation of faithful men.

Then Paul goes on to speak about a soldier. A faithful man would be prepared to take his share in suffering and he does not entangle himself with the affairs of life, but he pleases him who has enlisted him. I think we should realise more and more that the Lord has enlisted us and we should be persons who know something of what it is to suffer. There is not only suffering; that would be outside, but inside you have the recompense, inside it is joy and peace - all that your heart would yearn for.

I thought that Enoch was another who did what was right in the sight of Jehovah - "he has the testimony that he had pleased God."

We are so prone to please ourselves - self always before us - but oh! to be captivated with the desire and purpose of heart to want to be here pleasing to the Lord, to consider for the Lord in regard to the assembly and know something of what it is to have your part in that glorious vessel! So it says of Enoch, "because God had translated him; for before his translation he has the testimony that he had pleased God." The time is very near when the assembly will be translated. All that is transpiring amongst the saints, and in the world, is an indication that translation is very near and we would all wish to be among those who have testimony as being pleasing to God in view of it. We have an example of it in Paul and in Stephen, the quality that shone in these persons. They were faithful men, and we want to know what it is to be faithful to God and to one another, considering for one another and realising that the things that you do, or say, are faithful. So you are characterised by right speaking and a right testimony.

That is all that one had to say, just a simple thought of what it is to be pleasing.

EDINBURGH

6 March 1995

(ii) THE HEADSTONE

Robert Trotter

Zechariah 4 4-10

This is a very interesting chapter what I had in mind was the thought of the headstone. The chapter begins with the "lamp-stand all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon, seven lamps and seven pipes to the lamps, which are upon the top thereof; and two olive-trees beside it", v 2,3, all suggesting to us the thought of a flow - I suppose the flow of the Spirit - and that flow was to be unhindered. I think we would get that impression as we read through these verses that there is nothing to hinder. That is quite a test for each one of us because, I suppose, that is how the Spirit operates in our day the day of the Spirit, that is, our day. The Spirit would operate through persons, through assembly persons, a very important matter, something that would cause us much exercise. But it speaks about "the angel that talked with me", He goes on to speak of the headstone. It would have some relation to the headship of Christ, having His right place amongst us as Head. That is another matter that would cause us exercise. How easy it is in some sense to proceed human-wise, but as He has His place as Head, we proceed rightly as under Him. It speaks of the governor too in these chapters. All these are interesting thoughts and relate to Christ and His place over us. We are to be such persons as come under His governorship, under His rule, under His lordship. All these are separate thoughts but they would enter into the experiences of the believer's life.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit" is a very interesting matter. We like the might and we like the power, things pushed through; that is how men operate today. That would be the world's system and how it operates. That is not how we have to operate, it is not how the assembly operates, this mountain here becomes a plain. There is to be dignity, "by my Spirit". "Not by might" - there is a note to that which says 'Or "forces"' - "nor by

power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts". Well, we need to let that have its way with us. That is how things are to be. That is the divinely ordered way, "by my Spirit".

It goes on to speak of the headstone "and he shall bring forth the headstone with shoutings Grace, grace unto it!". The headstone has to do with the completion of things. We all know that in building there is what they speak of as the topping-out ceremony when the building itself is completed. There is usually a little celebration, but nothing compared to what we have here. It says, "and he shall bring forth the headstone with shoutings Grace, grace unto it!" In the next verses it speaks about the foundation that has been laid. Wonderful, wonderful thing! How rightly things are valued! "Yet the firm foundation of God stands", 2 Tim 2: 19, no-one can shake that. Foundations in the world today are shaken we see that all around us. Men try their best to produce something that will not be shaken. It is all going to come down, something that we have to keep continually in our minds; these wonderful creations of men are all coming down, every one of them. But what it says here, "and he shall bring forth the headstone with shoutings". I suppose we are in this time. We often speak about the shortness of the time. The Lord is coming it would be the headstone time, the time of completing. What a completing that is going to be! I suppose John in Revelation saw something of it. Returning to the Scripture read, it says, "with shouting, Grace, grace unto it!" Oh what a celebration that is going to be, this vessel that has been going on, being added to, nigh on two thousand years, what a vessel! God's creation took six days, but think of the assembly being formed over two thousand years. You feel what thoughts and what a view we should have of this vessel.

Going on to Zerubbabel, he would be a type for us. It says that he laid the foundation. He is going to bring forth the headstone with shoutings. There is the thought of assurance, that this matter will be completed. What a comfort that is to us. We can be assured tonight that there will be a completion. There is a completing going on in each one of us "he who has begun in you a good work will complete

it", Phil 1: 6, that is in every believer. "Grace! grace unto it! " I feel I cannot say more but there would be assurance for each one of us. How we need that in our day - things, you might say, waxing worse around us, but what this is going to be. I feel I have some little impression as to it. It goes on to say, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; and his hands shall finish it and thou shalt know that Jehovah of hosts hath sent me unto you". It is this line of assurance, I think, that would enter into this time together. We would go away with that thought in our hearts, we would be assured. Things are not going to the wall, but they are going on to this glorious completion.

Then it goes on to speak of the plumb-line, the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel "these are the eyes of Jehovah, which run to and fro in the whole earth." There are two things in relation to the headstone, one is ornamentation and the other is the thought of binding. That to me is of great importance we need the thought of binding. We have been reminded recently about what we have to bind on - humility - it is to be bound on, but I think this is a binding together. So what we say, does it have this effect of binding the saints together? Oh, how easy it is to scatter. These two features are seen in the headstone, ornamentation and binding. What ornamentation there is and will be! It is mentioned in relation to John, "having the glory of God", Rev 21: 10. What ornamentation that is!

Well, may we be encouraged and assured by these few words. Let our hearts be comforted, beloved brethren, for His Name's sake!

EDINBURGH

9 May 1995

(iii) A NAIL IN A SURE PLACE

David Scougal

Isaiah 22L 23,24; Luke 22: 20; Revelation 22: 16,17 ("Come")

Our brother says we can be sure. We certainly can be sure of Christ "And I will fasten him" it speaks of Christ. The prophet of old, Isaiah, saw His glory and spoke of Him. He spoke of Christ because he saw His glory. It is a wonderful thing that the prophet Isaiah, these hundred and hundreds of years before, has his eyes filled with Christ, the glory of Christ, God's Christ, God's anointed One "And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place." That fastening in a sure place will never be altered save under the hand of God. How sure we can be as to the divine system. Our brother has been speaking of it, the wonder of it, the glory of it. It goes on to say, "and he shall be for a throne of glory to his father's house; and they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house." Many sons brought to glory, oh what glory there is in the Father's house and the sons hanging on Christ, holding on to Him, never letting go! "The offspring and the issue, all the small vessels, as well the vessels of cups as all the vessels of flagons." I think that in a day of small things, of which our brother's scripture spoke, the small vessels are there too. This is not the day of the vessels of cups and the vessels of flagons. There have been these days, perhaps there still are. We know the smallness but all is hanging on Christ - vessels to be poured out, occupied, filled with Christ, ready to be poured out; we learn how to be poured out by our contact with Christ. He Himself, as we read in Luke, speaks about being poured out. It says somewhere 'learn from me' (Matt 11: 29) - that is persons who are near to Christ, persons who are holding fast the Head, learn from Him. Our brother spoke of the headship of Christ. Paul exhorts us to hold fast the Head. He does it in a different setting of the word, "And not holding fast the head" Col 2: 19, assembly persons are to be in the gain of it, enjoying the peace and the perfection of holding fast the Head and learning everything from Him, learning from Christ, not learning from the things of the world, or from all that we pass

through in our occupations, but learning from Christ in these circumstances as those who belong to Him, those who form part of the assembly. All these cups and vessels of flagons suggest the individual members of the assembly, this great vessel which is for the pouring out of the praise of God. But we have to learn these things. They do not come to us naturally or just by the receipt of the gift of the Spirit, but we do receive the Spirit - and by His service we learn from Christ. Surely we get help from one another, we have ministry in many ways and through that we learn from Christ. He uses human vessels in order that we might learn from Him.

These vessels, as I said, in Isaiah 22 are for pouring out, and here is the great example in the Lord Himself in Luke 22. He says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." We had this in the gospel on Lord's Day, the glory of what the blood can do. "Poured out for you" every issue settled in the pouring out of the blood of Christ, not an unsettled issue. We have to take this to heart, issues in our lives whatever they are, can be settled, every one because of the pouring out of the blood.

We need to learn to pour ourselves out. We need to serve one another in love. It means pouring out, giving of ourselves, of our energies, of what we are endued with. In 2 Corinthians the apostle speaks about spending and being "utterly spent", chap 12: 15. I think that gives some idea of the way in which the apostle Paul poured himself out in the care of all the assemblies, not one assembly, but all the assemblies, and all the individuals in them. How he loved these Corinthians, he knew everyone he was writing to. He had been into their houses he had been the means of their conversion. Oh the teaching there had been in the local company here! He poured himself out for it. We have had brethren amongst us who have poured themselves out to the very last days of their lives, pouring themselves out in service amongst us so that every issue can be settled and the beauties of Christ be shining amongst us to the great end that there will be a response from Christ's leading in assembly, praise and worship to God.

I suggest that in Revelation 22 we get some idea of the Lord's work complete. I read verse 16 just for the connection, it is a great thing to see "the root and offspring of David", the glory of the way the divine plan was worked out. Then he goes on to say, "the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come." Think of what that is - human vessels like you and me, sons of God, our divine calling, every spiritual blessing given to us in the heavenlies in Christ, wonderful gifts have been given to us in the heavenlies and here we are saying exactly the same thing as the Spirit. That is wonderful that we should be so wrought upon by Christ and our knowledge of Christ as holding on to Him and receiving from Him and pouring out from Him, that we are saying the same things as the Spirit would say.

May the Lord encourage us. These things are within our range. They are not glorious impossibilities. They are wonderful possibilities to be enjoyed and to be in the good of in these days, the last days. Our brother spoke about the very last days, bringing forth the headstone with shoutings. Surely that would be the concerted voice of the bride and the Spirit. The bride, the assembly, coming into its fulness here, glorious answer to the heavenly bridegroom. Beloved brethren, we are strangers and sojourners in this scene. We are a heavenly people, heavenly in origin, heavenly in destiny. The test is in between are we heavenly in our walk and our talk in our lives and in our outlooks? Well, the suggestion is here we are "the Spirit and the bride" - that is you and I, beloved brethren, we belong to the bride - "the Spirit and the bride say, Come." May the Lord bless the word!

EDINBURGH

9 May 1995