

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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THE FOUNDATION OF THE GOSPEL

David Robertson

Romans 3: 21-26; 5: 1,2,11,20,21; 8: 15

I thought to speak, firstly, of the foundation of the glad tidings. That would be chapter 3 of Romans. Then, in chapter 5, I would like to draw attention to the administration of the glad tidings: and in chapter 8 to the result of them.

It is a wonderful thing to have some apprehension of the foundation of the glad tidings. The psalmist says that He has established His foundation "in the mountains of holiness", Ps 87: 1.

Everything for God, and, indeed, everything that God has in mind for man, is established on the redemptive work of Christ: that is the basis upon which God is operating in blessing towards man. The foundation has been laid in the redemptive work of Christ. I think that to understand the glory of the redemptive work of Christ, we must first of all have an understanding and an appreciation of the Redeemer Himself. I think John in the beginning of John's gospel - we were struck with that in the home this morning - was one who had an appreciation of the glory of the Redeemer: "Behold the Lamb of God." What language!

No doubt, as divinely impressed, John makes that exclamation: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." I think he apprehended through the work of God in his soul the glory of Christ as the Redeemer, the glory of the One who could work a work that would satisfy the claims of a holy God with respect to the whole moral issue. What a wonderful glory for a person to have in his soul! God intends that you should have it in your soul, an apprehension of the glory of Christ as the Redeemer, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." John says, "Behold" and that is God's language and that is the preacher's language: "Behold the Lamb of God." If there is to be glory for God, if God's rights have to be maintained and established in the face of what had come in through sin, if man is to be brought into blessing by God, there must

be a Redeemer, and that is the glory of the One whom John sees. He says, "Behold the Lamb of God."

I often wonder what John actually saw at that moment. It says, "looking at Jesus as he walked." How that walk must have conveyed something to him! The Lord Jesus was not here casually. David says at one point, no doubt typically of Christ, "Was it not laid upon me?" (1 Sam 17: 29). That is, David felt obligation that God had pressed upon him, but how much more the Lord Jesus felt the obligation that was placed upon Him as in manhood. We think of that typical language, and how the Lord would use it to affect our own hearts, "Was it not laid upon me?" Something of that must have laid hold of the soul of John. Here was the One who was able to glorify God with respect to all that had come in as the result of sin and here was the One who, through the effective character of His work on the cross of Calvary, could remove sin from before the sight of God, and finally give God the basis to remove it from the universe; but in the meantime, also to give God the righteous basis to bless His creature. John apprehended that glory: "Behold the Lamb of God."

And so in Romans chapter three, God is setting Him forth. It says, "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood." God sets forth Christ as "a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood" in the light of an accomplished work. The glory of that work, its perfect value, stands in the sight of God - the work of Christ on the cross. How He has glorified God at tremendous cost to Himself with respect to the removal of sin! The whole matter has been dealt with thoroughly. If it had not been, there could be no blessing for man, and God would not have been glorified. Jesus Himself testifies from His own lips in that unique moment when He said, "It is finished." It is the glorious witness of the Accomplisher Himself that there was a work accomplished that glorified God. What a work it is! It is the foundation of everything for God and of the blessing of God for man. Who else could have done it? It says, God has "laid help upon a mighty one" Ps 89: 19. There

were two things that had to mark the redeemer: one was that He had to be mighty; the other is that He had to be wealthy. That is Boaz. It says he was "a mighty man of wealth", Ruth 2: 1, and these are the features that Christ brought into manhood. He was mighty, that is, He had the ability, the power morally because of who He is and because of what He was in the spotlessness of His manhood, to take up the whole question of sin and glorify God in the judgment of it. He is not only mighty, but He was also wealthy. Paul speaks of "the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ", Eph 3: 8. And also to accomplish redemption, He had to draw near to man. That is another glory that comes out in the book of Ruth, that the redeemer had to be a kinsman, and we know a Kinsman Redeemer, One who in His own Person is God and ever will be God. As the scripture says "who is over all, God blessed for ever", Rom 9: 5, and yet He stoops into manhood to be the Redeemer. He became a man in order to redeem man, not only to redeem man in the sense that He would extricate him from the evil and the bondage in which he was held, but to redeem man as a vessel for the pleasure of God. As we quoted yesterday, that beautiful verse in Revelation 5: He has redeemed us to God. It is "out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation", v 9. The new universe will reflect the glory of that work. What a witness it will be eternally to the glory of the completed work of Christ at the cross of Calvary! Well, that is the great foundation. All God's operations are founded on it. Everything that God does is sound and Christianity is sound, and those who are brought into the blessing of Christianity are blessed on sound ground, established ground, and Christ is the One who has established it.

Now, that work is completed. What it cost the Saviour! Who could ever estimate it? Who could ever fathom it? Those words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Matt 27: 46 - who could explain the depths involved in them? Who could comprehend the feelings of the Saviour when He was abandoned in those three hours of darkness? Who could enter into them? Our hearts should be touched by the way God has had to move to reach us, to extricate

us from our sinful state and to secure us for His own glory. The Lord Jesus had to go this way and suffer at the hands of God without any pity. What a thought! What a contemplation! Let it be appreciated by us! A heart that can say, Yes, I know why He was forsaken? He was forsaken that I might never be forsaken. It says in one scripture, as to those who reject the gospel, "who shall pay the penalty of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord", 2 Thess 1: 9. What a thing that is! There is no need for it. The Saviour has paid the price.

He has paid the price that you might be brought into the knowledge of the love of God, into the fulness of the blessing that God has in His heart for you. Oh, that each of us, young and old would be affected by the sufferings of the Saviour, what He endured at the hand of God, then what He removed from the sight of God as He goes into death and burial!

After He died, He shed His blood. There is wonderful teaching in these things. The contrast between the blood-shedding of the animals in the Old Testament (a figure of the death of Christ) and the actual shedding of Christ's blood is to be noted. All these animals died by blood-shedding. The Lord's blood was shed after He died. No man took His life from Him. He laid down His life of Himself, and the blood came forth as a witness of the love of God for man:

'Though man in hatred pierced Thy side,
Thy blood love's answer gave.' (Hymn 230)

What an answer to the hatred of man was the shedding of the blood of Jesus.

The Lord goes into the grave, and all that sinful history was removed from the sight of God, put out of sight. The work was complete and He arose triumphant from the grave. We had that this morning, a wonderful sense of triumph in our souls: the Lord was out of death! What a thing it is to apprehend it and be affected by it! Death could not hold Him. He is out of it. Now, as a risen Saviour, God sets Him forth "a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood." It is a risen Saviour that is set forth as a mercy-seat. The work has been

completed. The whole question of sin has been disposed of to the satisfaction and glory of a holy God and there is such a foundation laid that He is now "set forth a mercy-seat", a place where God can meet and where He can bless the sinner and where He can secure man for His own glory. What a work the work of the Saviour is! It says, "whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood." Faith in the Person is one thing and absolutely essential, but you need also faith in His blood. Can you point to it when the enemy assails you and when you are attacked by the sceptics, attacked by the mockers? Can you point and say, There is the blood of Jesus: my faith is in it. God's eye looks on it. It was put once on the mercy-seat, and seven times before it. God's eye was upon it. These cherubim looking down: there was the abiding testimony there in the blood on the mercy-seat that God was perfectly satisfied with the settling of the moral issue. Then it is not only on the mercyseat, but it is seven times before it. It speaks of the fulness of its value manward, to bring man into blessing. What a precious thing it is, faith in the Person and faith in His blood.

It is absolutely solid. The psalmist says, "If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?" Ps 11: 3. The foundation can never be removed. This foundation is established in the light and the glory of the sacrificial work of Christ and it is established for eternity. Not only would it operate for the establishment of man's blessing eternally, but it will be there and upon it will stand the whole new world.

So I point to that so that our faith might be assured. The sinner needs the gospel of relief, but the believer needs the gospel of assurance and we need it often. There is nothing assures the soul but to look and see the great basis on which God has brought you into blessing, and that is the basis that Christ has established through His sacrificial work. I wanted to touch on chapter 5. You will find everything in chapter 5 is "through our Lord Jesus Christ." Not only is He the Accomplisher of this great foundational work, but He is the Administrator of the glad tidings. Christ is now up there. He is on high. Many believers are not really consciously aware of where

the Lord Jesus is. They know very little of an ascended Christ. Another great feature of the gospel is that it brings you into the faith of the ascension of Christ, that Christ is now in the presence of God. His might established the basis - God "laid help upon a mighty one" - but I think in His wealth He operates this great administrative system of blessing. That is the glad tidings of God "concerning his Son ... Jesus Christ our Lord" Rom 1: 3,4. Christ is the great Administrator of it.

We have often been reminded of the richness of His administration and the proof of it is that His first great administrative act when He went into heaven was to send down the Spirit. It is the proof of the wealth of the Administrator. That is, He sends down the greatest blessing of God for man. Wonderful thing that! It is a great thing to apprehend in your soul that the greatest blessing that God has in mind for men is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the dispensation He continues to administer. It is a living matter: it is in the hands of the true Joseph in this sense, one who is the Sustainer of life, the Saviour of the world, the Revealer of secrets. The administration is in His hands and He is administering the wealth of the glad tidings. No wonder Paul says it is "the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ." I want to point out that His administration is meaningful. It is not just that He is broadcasting blessing everywhere like the showers of blessing the scripture speaks about. That is true: there are showers of blessing coming down. But it is meaningful. That is, the Lord Jesus considers for man, takes account of man as affected by sin. There are three things that I see in this chapter, three effects that have come upon man as the result of sin, and the Lord as the Administrator meets them. The first thing is that sin brought in disturbance. It brought dislocation of the relationship between man and God and the relationship between man and man. So you find a man slaying his brother very early in scripture. It is all the result of sin, the disturbance that sin has brought in. But what is the Administrator's answer to disturbance? "Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God." He would bring you

into this great matter of "peace towards God." He would dispel the disturbance that may exist in your heart. Eventually in the world to come He will dispel the whole disturbance, He is doing it in individuals like you and me. Instead of the disturbance, He would have you to have "peace towards God." "Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ".

The next thing is in verse 11; you find that sin has brought in not only disturbance, but distance, and the Lord Jesus feels that. He Himself, of course, went into the distance to remove it, not to bridge it. He has effected the great work of reconciliation. He has done that in His death. We are told that in this very chapter that we are "reconciled ... through the death of his Son", v 10. What an affecting thought! But think of how the Lord Jesus is affected by seeing a person at a distance from God. What is the answer to it? "And not only that, but we are making our boast in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom now we have received the reconciliation." These are persons who know that the distance has all gone. Has it happened in your history? Have you received "the reconciliation", not received reconciliation merely, but received "the reconciliation" because there is no other. It is "the reconciliation." That is what meets the distance and God would bring you out of the distance. That is what He is doing: He is bringing the Gentiles out of the distance. It says He has opened up a door of faith to the Gentiles. He has done that, that the Gentiles might be brought out of their distance and that those of us who were afar off might be brought nigh. How wonderfully this great Administrator of the glad tidings is operating in the work of the glad tidings, removing the effects of sin in the history of persons. If it be disturbance, He will give you "peace towards God"; if it be you are feeling your distance, He will bring you out of it; and through Him you will receive "the reconciliation", brought in not only to have peace with God, but to have a near relation with God, to be near to God. That is the glory of reconciliation. It is a wonderful matter.

Then in the last verses we read, it says, "But law came in, in order that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace has overabounded, in order that, even as sin has reigned in the power of death..." - "the power of death": that is the next result of sin I want to speak of. Sin brought death in. It was the penalty that God imposed because of sin coming into the world. How would the Administrator meet that? The great Administrator takes account of man and that penalty lies upon him. Of course, the Lord Jesus bore the penalty or else He could not relieve us of its pressure.

Nevertheless, death is inevitable. It is the wages of sin. It is a solemn thing: "For the wages of sin is death", Rom 6: 23. You see the efforts of men medically and you admire them in their effort to save life, but the truth is that "the wages of sin is death." Those wages must be paid. It is a solemn matter. It comes to the old and to the young: it touches the rich and the poor. It is inescapable. The poet had some sense of it when he said, 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave.' But the Administrator takes account of all that and He is able for it because of the work He accomplished, because of the glorious fact that He has abolished the power of death. He is able to give you something that is far greater than death. What is that? It is eternal life.

I see these are the three things in this chapter: disturbance is met by the Administrator bringing you into the joy of "peace towards God"; distance is met by being brought into the joy of "the reconciliation"; and death is met, the believer is delivered from its terror and given eternal life that can be enjoyed in the very scene where death meets us. As the word says here, "So also grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life..." How? - "through Jesus Christ our Lord." I wonder if you have ever come under the hands of this Administrator. He longs to lay His hand upon you, to claim you for Himself, and for God. To pour in, because of the wealth that He has, all the fulness of the blessing that God has in mind that you should be brought into. He is the "mighty man of wealth." How rich the glad tidings are!

I suggest that in chapter 8 we have the result. It is the great chapter of the Spirit. I trust each of us here know what it is to be consciously indwelt by the Spirit. It is a great blessing to have the Holy Spirit. It is the greatest of all blessings. It must be because it involves the reception of a divine Person. I trust everyone here is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is a sad thing if a believer is without the Holy Spirit. The great proposal of God in the glad tidings is to give man the gift of the Holy Spirit. That is the greatest of all God's proposals. So it says here, "For ye have not received a spirit of bondage again for fear, but "ye have received a spirit of adoption." It is a reference to the Holy Spirit, a spirit of adoption." So we are delivered from fear too, delivered from bondage, "but ye have received a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." It thrills my soul that verse, that you and I can take up that language. It is part of the vocabulary of the glad tidings, that the believer is brought into such a state and given such a power in the Holy Spirit that he can use such language, language used by the Lord Jesus Himself.

The believer takes up this language and he cries out of the fulness of the joy of his soul, "Abba, Father." You are brought to the fountainhead. The Father represents the Source in the economy.

The believer is not left disturbed, at a distance, under the fear of death through the administration of the "mighty man of wealth." He finds that the effects of sin can all be overcome, and he is brought into a position where his soul is so full that there is an outflow to God, from a satisfied heart. An outflow that satisfies the heart of God!

So the foundation of the glad tidings, how unchangeable, how fixed it is! How fine it is to have your feet upon it! The psalmist says, "And he brought me up ... out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock", Ps 40: 2. I trust all our feet are set upon this rock, that there is no doubt, no fear that we are saved. It is a great matter to be sure of it, not that you might be saved but you are saved. Are we all standing on this imperishable foundation? It says of the Lord Jesus that He has established "an eternal redemption", Heb 9: 12. That is the ground we need to be standing on, and then your soul filled with

the administration, what comes from the richness of the One who administers the glad tidings. What an Administrator He is, "through our Lord Jesus Christ", then the gift of the Spirit, and leading on to the great result of the glad tidings, that there are worshippers secured for God.

Well, may God bless the word for His Name's sake.

COLCHESTER

20 April 1997

A PREPARED BODY AND A PREPARED PLACE

James Marshall

Hebrews 10: 5-7; John 14: 1-3

I would just seek help, beloved brethren, to say something in regard to a prepared body and a prepared place. We had no part in these

two preparations. The prepared body - you might say the curtains pulled back to give us a view of the greatness of divine counsel of which it was said, "thou hast prepared me a body." This was God's approach to man. Man could not prepare himself to approach God, so God devised a way whereby He could approach man, in a body.

It meant limitations, but the limitations that were expressed in it brought forth the wisdom of God. It involved the incarnation and even in the incarnation you see that there is preparation as well, not our preparation, but divine preparation, in regard to this One who was coming in to do the will of God. Divine preparation is a wonderful matter. Think of what surrounded the incarnation! There were persons who were filled with the Holy Spirit in regard to the incoming of the Lord Jesus as a babe. I think it would be fair to say that where the babe lay was a prepared place. He was found in a manger, a prepared place. It brings before us God's approach to man. How lowly, how wise, how impressive! Simeon took the babe into his arms, and he blessed God and said, "for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared" (Luke 2: 30,31). And he blessed God. He did not bless Mary and Joseph. He blessed God. He realised the source behind the incoming of that lowly babe.

The body that was prepared had not in mind only the incarnation: it was in regard to the accomplishment of the will of God. That is what lay behind it. "Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do, O God, thy will." Think of those feelings that were expressed before the revelation of God, and how they came to pass when the revelation began, the fulness of the time began, God's approach to man. But it involved the will of God. There was no other equal to accomplishing the will of God: it all came from the divine side: "but thou hast prepared me a body." No other could do this: no other was able for it. But there was One that was able for it and that, as we all know, involved the cross where the will of God was accomplished. Further down it says, "by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all", v 10 -the body again: "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." This was something done, and it never needs to be

repeated. It was done "once for all". How God must have looked forward to this, that there was going to be something done and it would supersede everything that had gone before. Wondrous, glorious matter, what was done on the cross! Something was done at the cross, a completed work! I venture to say that it was not only the cross; it was resurrection; it was ascension; because He sat down at the right hand of God. When? After His work was completed: He completed work and sat down at the right hand of God.

I just feel touched with this matter of a body being prepared. It was not compulsion; it was love! It was love that brought this body into expression. It was love that took this Man, this beloved Man, to the cross. I think you need only to read Philippians chapter 2 to get a glimpse of what was involved in the will of God. Just look at it! Just read it! It did not stop at the cross; it did not stop at resurrection. It says, "Wherefore also God highly exalted him", v 9. Like the Hebrew bondman He says, "I love." That was all involved in the body:" I love my master, my wife, and my children..." and what characterised the Hebrew bondman was that he had his ear bored through with an awl. Day by day this Man received communications. He was obedient to what He was told to do. Never a day was He marked by disobedience: never a day did He not hear the divine voice, He had His ear bored through with an awl! When it comes to the word "bored" in regard to His body, I think what Peter says is very touching, "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 24. It does not say 'who bore our sins on the tree'; it says, "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." These things should touch us, should affect us, that there was a Man here devoted to the will of God. It raises a challenge. It is not only what has been done, but it is a model for all mankind that there was one Man and He was not disobedient. Everything was lost through disobedience, but here was One who recovered everything on the principle of obedience.

In John chapter 14 we have a prepared place. I think it would be right to say that this is the result of One doing the will of God, and, before He ascends, He is thinking of His own. Before He departs out of this world, He speaks to His own, and the first thing

He says in this chapter is, "Let not your heart be troubled." I think that is very tender language. Sometimes things come in and we do get troubled. There had been trouble in chapter 13: it says, "Jesus was troubled in spirit", v 21. Nobody has experienced trouble like the Lord Jesus. He was troubled in His soul; He was troubled in His spirit; and He endured the sufferings of the cross. That is what Jesus did. And here He is saying, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe on God, believe also on me. In my Father's house there are many abodes; were it not so, I had told you: for I go to prepare you a place."

I feel touched that there is a prepared place. We need to know what it is to resort to this prepared place, because we live in a world that is full of trouble. It is full of sorrow. There might even be trouble and sorrow amongst us, but here is a place where there is no sorrow, a prepared place. Jesus is beyond the sorrow, and beyond the trouble, and He wants us to be with Him in that place: "I go to prepare you a place; and if I go and shall prepare you a place, I am coming again and shall receive you to myself, that where I am ye also may be." One has referred to what is around us and really, if we are healthy spiritually, I would say that we have no place there. I cannot reconcile any lover of the Lord Jesus finding a place in this world. I do not think it would be in keeping, because the Lord Jesus here is leading them out of the world and His desire is that we should know what it is to have a place where He is. And so He says, "and if I go and shall prepare you a place, I am coming again and shall receive you to myself, that where I am ye also may be." We need to experience this: what matters to be occupied with the Lord Jesus where He is. Time was when He was in the depths, but now He is on the Father's throne. He has a place of preeminence there. He had no place in the world: indeed, the places that refer to the Lord Jesus should affect our hearts. In regard to His body it says there were "two angels sitting in white garments, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain", John 20: 12. The body was treasured.

Just these simple impressions, beloved brethren, that we might know what it is to be affected by what the Lord says, "that where I am ye also may be." These are eternal matters: they are not temporal matters. We are speaking about eternal matters: "Seek the things which are above, where the Christ is", Col 3: 1. He is above and He wants us above. One day we will actually go up, but He wants us to go up in spirit and in mind even now.

EDINBURGH

18 February 1997

HOW BLESSING IS ACQUIRED

Jim T. Brown

2 Chronicles 4: 1 (first clause), 9,10; 13: 1, 3 14; Ruth 2: 10-12 (And she...); 3: 10

I have been thinking a little since Lord's Day of how blessing is acquired. I suppose the prepared place, to which our brother has referred, would involve the enjoyment of blessing. It links, as we know with Exodus 15: 17, "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, The place that thou, Jehovah, hast made thy dwelling, The Sanctuary, Lord, that thy hands have prepared." That is the place of blessing which Christ has gone to secure for us. The disposition of God is to bless and He has blessed us unstintingly. The great patriarch said, Bring them ... to me, that I may bless them", Gen. 48: 9. It is as if the divine presence is synonymous with blessing. At the end of Malachi, God says, "Prove me now herewith ... if I open not to you the windows of the heavens, and pour you out a blessing, till there be no place for it", chap 3: 10.

How wonderful to think of God creationally establishing windows in heaven. There are doors in creation. In Job He said, "And who shut up the sea with doors, when it burst forth, issuing out of the womb? " chap 38: 8. Then in Philadelphia there is the "opened door", Rev 3: 8. But the windows suggest something distinctive. How fine to contemplate God poised, as it were, at the windows of heaven, desiring and looking for, the opportunity to dispense blessing on His creature "till there be no place for it"!

Of course, in Genesis the windows of heaven were opened in judgment. God looked down through the windows and saw wickedness on the earth. He opened the windows and the rains of judgment fell upon this scene. The waters prevailed on the earth till, in His measured way, God closed the windows of heaven and stayed the course of judgment. At Calvary, in one sense, the heavens were closed: the heavens were like brass, unresponsive to the cry of the suffering Saviour. In another sense - one simply applies it - the

windows of heaven were opened and the unmitigated wrath of God rained down upon the head of the blessed Saviour: "The waters encompassed me, to the soul", Jon 2: 5. How affecting that is! But blessed be the day that we are in: by virtue of the work of Jesus the windows of heaven are open wide and the blessing of God is available to men! So there sits God, we might say, looking out of the windows of heaven today, observant, vigilant, surveying the scene, seeking an occasion to bless men.

Well, what is seen in Jabez is that he acquired the blessing on the principle of desire. That is a very necessary thing. Sometimes the shallowness of our enjoyment of the blessing is commensurate with the deficiency in our desire. The Lord Jesus demonstrated the principle of desire in perfection. In John 17 He says, "I desire that where I am they also may be with me", v.24. Then in Luke's gospel He says, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you", chap 22: 15. What blessing was His in consequence. The divine response is recorded in the Psalm, "Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. Selah. For thou hast met him with the blessings of goodness; thou hast set a crown of pure gold on his head", Ps 21: 2,3. The desires of that perfect heart were met in His resurrection and glorification.

So here is Jabez and the backcloth to his desire for blessing is maternal travail. How much travail there has been in our localities on the part of godly sisters; how deep has been the expression of maternal instincts and longings that the seeds of spiritual desire might be sown in the coming generation. We know it - I do not say it patronisingly - in our own local gathering here in Meadow Place; godly sisters with these evident desires that there might be vitality and fruitfulness, productivity for God in our generation. Some of us have known it in our personal experience in relation to our natural mothers, the travail and the agonising that there might be something inwrought in our hearts that might be for spiritual blessing. Such was the background to these desires of Jabez. It says, "I bore him with pain. And Jabez called..." His call for blessing flowed immediately and sequentially from His mother's remarks. How much then we

owe to the agonising and travailing which have gone on on our behalf that there might be inwrought in us what is desirous of divine blessing!

So Jabez says "Oh that thou wouldest richly bless me and enlarge my border." He is not seeking enlargement in a natural or predatory sense: nor is he envious or jealous of his neighbours' possessions; but rather he is seeking enlargement spiritually. That is why I read verse 1 with its reference to "The sons of Judah." What a fine territory Judah is! Worthy of observation and study are the spiritual geography and the spiritual land scape of Judah. Jabez is like an Ephesian saint "enlightened in the eyes of your heart", Ephes 1: 18. His spiritual vision was expanding to embrace the whole territory of Judah that he might be enlarged in it. He would look out on Bethlehem Ephratah, and he would desire to have an enlarged impression of the incoming of Christ, "Bethlehem Ephratah, little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall he come forth unto me who is to be Ruler in Israel: whose goings forth are from of old, from the days of eternity", Mic 5: 2. On that we might have enlargement in our appreciation of the wonder of the incarnation!

"Bless'd Babe! who lowly liest
In manger-cradle there;
Descended from the highest,
Our sorrows all to share.

Come now, and view that manger –
The Lord of glory see,
A houseless, homeless Stranger
In this poor world for thee."

Who can grasp the glory of the One who came out of Bethlehem Ephratah. On the one hand the humility of the manger: on the other the surpassing greatness of Him, who would be Ruler in Israel, "Whose goings forth are from of old, from the days of eternity."

Then the eyes of Jabez would, no doubt, gaze out to Hebron. What a place Hebron was, one of the great landmarks of Judah, linking us up with the grand purposes of God. Built before Zoan in

Egypt, there is something immutable about Hebron, and it introduces us into a land where the blessings never fail. And Jabez would desire expansion in his enjoyment of these blessings and of the favour into which through grace he had been brought. Then wonderful contemplation - "our Lord has sprung out of Juda", Heb 7: 14. Jabez would look out again and he would see the lion of the tribe of Judah bestriding the land! and he would say: "give me an enhanced appreciation of Jesus glorified. "Judah", it says, "is a young lion; From the prey, my son, thou art gone up." Think of the Lord Jesus going up from the prey victorious, having smitten the power of death. "He stoopeth, he layeth himself down as a lion, And as a lioness: who will rouse him up? The sceptre will not depart from Judah, Nor the lawgiver from between his fee, Until Shiloh come, And to him will be the obedience of peoples", Gen 49: 9,10. Everything is secure in Him! What a desire for enlargement then Jabez would have as he looked out on the great territory of Judah. When he says, "Oh that thou wouldest richly bless me, and enlarge my border." It is as if his innermost longings and instincts were stirred to acquire a deeper appreciation of the glory and grandeur of the divine territory. It is there for the asking; it is there for the taking. God is unstinting, as we said, in His disposition of the blessings. Remember Moses went up to the top of Pisgah and "Jehovah shewed him the whole land", Deut 34: 1. May our spiritual vision be increasingly focused on the vastness of the heavenly land!

So it says, "And God brought about what he had requested." We know that a little in our experience. Spiritual blessings come to us on the basis of desire and request; and God in His grace honours exercise. The request here is made to the God of Israel. What a great, expansive title that is, "the God of Israel". Not here the thought of the tribes dispersed, but the God of Israel is the complete thought, and it is upon such a One that Jabez calls.

Then, in the next chapter read, in the case of the house of Obed-Edom, blessing is gained on the principle of making room for Christ in our circumstances and households. That would challenge us all to the core. Here it is the culmination of a dark period in

Israel's history, but the beginning of a wonderful chapter, too, ending in the building of the Temple as a place for the ark to rest. The ark had been in the house of Abinadab for many years and David was desirous of bringing it home to himself in Jerusalem. But because of an unpriestly act by Uzza, which incurred God's anger, David was fearful of the consequences, "but he carried it aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite." What wonderful blessing ensued for Obed-Edom. I suppose he might have thought: 'This is going to upset the family arrangements. This is going to disturb our domestic circumstances, and hinder the discharge of our responsibilities.' But what is the outcome? "Jehovah blessed the house of Obed-Edom, and all that he had." How attractive that is!

One ponders often on what would transpire in that household as the ark was there. What would Obed-Edom have to say to his children about the ark, that was born of his own experience? Could he tell them about the construction and coverings of the ark as set out in Exodus or Numbers? Would it be covered with the veil of separation? Could he tell them what that represented? Would it have a covering of badgers' skin? Would it have spread over it "a cloth wholly of blue"? Could he tell them about these things from his own experience? The cloth of blue over everything - the heavenly Man, the Son of Man who is in heaven, the second Man out of heaven! Then the veil of separation. How precious to think of the distinctiveness of the humanity of Jesus. What a Man the Lord Jesus was: in His Person distinct, in His nature divine, in His existence eternal! Yet alongside all that, His was a real but sinless humanity. Then in between was the badgers' skin, suggesting how our Lord was impervious to evil, vigilant against every thrust of the enemy and sin could have no entrance to Him. All these things would flood, no doubt, into the mind, typically, of Obed-Edom as he looked upon the ark. Then he would think of the ark overlaid with gold, and he would say to his household that God and the testimony of God were seen in that wonderful ark. He would be able to tell his family of the acacia wood and of that journey through the wilderness. He would explain to them how it typifies that pathway of Jesus and

all the exigencies through which He passed, all the tribulations, all the sorrows. He would be able to point to the rings in the ark and the staves within them and he would recall that wonderful verse in Exodus which says, "The staves shall be in the rings of the ark: they shall not come out from it" Exod 25: 15. He would speak of the devotion of the Lord Jesus to His Father's will: "they shall not come out from it" - the staves there perpetually in the Lord's pathway here.

Well, "Jehovah blessed the house of Obed-Edom, and all that he had." How often we put things round the other way, do we not? We seek natural blessing first, thinking that spiritual blessing will be a consequence, but here the converse is true: "Jehovah blessed the house of Obed-Edom, and all that he had." That was a result of room being made for Christ in his circumstances, room being made for Christ in the house!

In the reference to Jabez, the emphasis was on the mother and the maternal instincts. Here the accent is on the father and the paternal side. How much devolves on the parents and that is a test for us all for there is no doubt that the children imbibe the characteristics of the parents. If there is lack of interest or immaturity or restlessness or lack of committal in the children, how far is that a reflection of what is seen in the parents? How far is that a reflection of inadequate room being made for Christ in our households and in our circumstances? These are testing questions.

Then in Ruth, the blessing is acquired on the principle of sacrifice. How extensive was the sacrifice of Ruth. There is this sweet verse in chapter 1, "Do not intreat me to leave thee, to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried", v 16,17. What sentiments these were, what holy desires, what expression of wonderful committal and sacrifice, and yet what a blessing was hers! She went out in faith leaving behind the whole Moabitish scene, and what was legitimately hers in terms of what was natural. She left the fields of Moab, no doubt the environment in which she had been brought up and reared. She left it all behind

and in faith clung to Naomi. And what was the outcome? A relationship with Boaz, the blessed Redeemer! We had a reference to him on Lord's Day which affected me, the Kinsman Redeemer, the mighty man of wealth, the One from whom all blessing flows. What blessings are at His disposal! He says here, "And Boaz answered and said to her, It has fully been shewn me, all that thou hast done to thy mother-in-law since the death of thy husband." He is able to assess the situation. There are criticisms that come our way sometimes, but the Lord Jesus has His own assessment of that and He helps us to rise above them! What we meet in our pathway secretly, individually, what each of us does sacrificially, unknown to the brethren - how much goes on unseen - the Lord Jesus, the true Boaz has His own valuation of everything and He dispenses His true reward. It comes from God: "Jehovah recompense thy work, and let thy reward be full from Jehovah the God of Israel." Here it is again, the reference to the God of Israel, what a source of provision and divine resource, "under whose wings thou art come to take refuge."

Then later on "she sat beside the reapers; and he reached her parched corn." She is now coming on to enjoy the blessings of the land, sampling the great panoply of blessings available to us, as set out in Ephesians, where God has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ", chap 1: 3. See her gleaning among the sheaves during the barley harvest and then the wheat harvest. How she would revel in the blessings that have ensued from the resurrection of Christ and rejoice in His work as seen in the sheaves, and the Christian circle into which she had been brought.

Then in chapter 3 Boaz says, "Blessed be thou of Jehovah, my daughter! Thou hast shewn more kindness at the end than at the first ... all that thou sayest will I do to thee; for all the gate of my people knows that thou art a woman of worth." What blessings were hers! One thinks often of that scripture in the Proverbs, "The blessing of Jehovah, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow to it", Prov 10: 22. There is what underlies the blessing - tribulation, perhaps, and sorrow, but once acquired, He addeth no sorrow to it. We are introduced into a great realm of blessing, an environment of eternal

life, untouched, unsullied, by earth's sorrows or griefs. It is all one great scene of wonderful blessing.

Well, these things are glorious. The blessings are available from God unstintingly. But underlying it all is the need for us to acquire these desires, to make room for Christ in our circumstances, and to go on in that sacrificial way, which is amenable and susceptible, to the divine blessing. For His Name's sake!

EDINBURGH

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