

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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THE SPIRIT'S SERVICE AT THE SUPPER

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

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THE SPIRIT'S SERVICE AT THE SUPPER

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J.M. I was thinking of the Spirit in His service to us in view of the Supper and the service of God. The verses in Esther would suggest typically the service of the Spirit that the assembly might be entirely suitable to the heart of Christ: "She required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women, appointed". That is that the Spirit is able to serve us so that there is everything there for the heart of Christ. It came into the hymn that we started with:

Oft has the Comforter spoken of thee,
Now with this treasure our spirits are freighted (Hymn No. 4)

The service of the Spirit is towards us, prior to the Supper, so that every grace that is pleasurable to the heart of Christ is wrought out among the saints and can be given expression to as in the presence of the glorious Man

The teaching in Romans has a moral character about it, and I do not deny that; that is the primary setting of it. But this verse refers to the reception of the Spirit of adoption. That would include the Spirit's service to us as we are in relation to the Father. So that while we have the title of sonship through our Lord Jesus Christ, He the firstborn and we brought in through adoption, the Spirit of adoption would give us the feelings and the intelligence of sons. Sonship is a feeling and an intelligent relationship.

Finally in Ephesians 3, being strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man has in view reaching on to the full thought of God and what is for God's own heart, "glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages". That, of course, reaches on to eternity.

J.A.G. The Spirit in type here has developed these precious refined affinities that are equal to the king so that she is quite competent to have the royal crown put upon her head and exercise queenship, a holy consort to Christ.

J.M. I think so. The service of Hegai and the adornment and the refinement that He produces, are particularly suggestive of the Spirit producing beauty and refinement and adornment, “by his spirit he garnished the heavens”. Because of that she would not feel a stranger in such a place, she feels perfectly at home, because she is perfectly suited to the king himself and to the environment that surrounds the king.

J.A.G. So the Spirit would come from Christ glorified. It is something to think about because Christ is in final conditions of glory and the assembly is being made competent to fill out that both dominically, and also from the point of view of what is bridal and wifely for the satisfaction of His own heart.

J.M. We would encourage one another that we might make more room for the Spirit’s service to us through the week producing spiritual substance, spiritual adornment and spiritual beauty that can ravish the heart of Christ. It is very beautiful to think of the unselfish character of the Spirit’s service so that Christ might have His portion from the assembly.

J.A.G. So it is a feature of royalty to open up the well “which princes digged, which the nobles of the people hollowed out”, Num 21: 18. It is getting what is earthly out of the way so that the Spirit might have free course as presented objectively.

J.M. Your reference to royalty is very helpful, because it is the princes who digged there. As we fill out the week at work we get involved in commercial things, or whatever our work involves; there is always a danger of that taking over our whole being, but the Spirit would help us, even in those circumstances, to take on spiritual adornment so that as we come up to the Supper there is something that has been secured through the week that is going to be for the heart of Christ.

D.D. The Lord speaks about the Spirit in John 16. He says, “He shall glorify me” (v. 14). That is the first thing He says, then “for he shall receive of mine and shall announce it to you”. But the fact that

He has referred to his glorifying Christ, is that what is in your mind in this particular setting?

J.M. In Genesis 24 the servant's bringing out of his treasures very much reminds us of that verse in John 16, "he shall receive of mine and shall announce it", John 16: 14. The service of the Spirit in Genesis 24 was to make Isaac precious to the heart of Rebecca. She had never seen him but by the time that journey was over, through the service of the Spirit typically, Rebecca would be well acquainted with Isaac, and the Spirit would serve us through the week so that we are ready, as we come up to the Supper, to yield what is precious to Christ for His own heart.

H.T. Is it something vital in the Spirit's service in that way?

J.M. I do not think you could do without it. The Supper is the Lord's consideration for us. That comes into that section in John's gospel. He looks through the whole dispensation and He feels what it is for us to be orphaned, and the Supper is inaugurated in order that our affections might be sustained, but then there is another side to the Supper, that is that the Lord is looking for what is for His own heart. The Spirit particularly serves us to secure that. Coming from the exalted Head and taking of the things that are Christ's and showing them to us, shows that He knows exactly what is suited to the affections of Christ and He produces that amongst the saints.

H.T. 'Bowed at thy feet and the fragrance set free' is the result of the Spirit's touch.

J.M. That is it, 'the fragrance set free'. It strikes me more and more that the main point in the Supper is what is for the heart of Christ, not that in any sense you set aside love's consideration in Himself for His own here in His absence. That has a prominent place, but the main point of the Supper is what is for the heart of Christ Himself. That comes about as room is made for the Spirit's service through the week.

J.A.G. So his heart is won here, "And the king loved Esther above all the women".

J.M. She is equal to the relationship into which she is brought. She shines in her beauty in that relationship and there is no disparity whatsoever. It is very beautiful that the Lord finds here, through the Spirit's operation, a vessel that is entirely suited to Himself and is able to enter feelingly and intelligently into His own affections and to be responsive to them.

J.A.G. This great feast would be the result of that. He wants others brought into the greatness and blessedness of it, "the king made a great feast to all his princes and his servants, Esther's feast".

J.M. It is very touching, the way that it is referred to as "Esther's feast", as though it is to bring out his appreciation of Esther, and that because of the service of Hegai. The keeper of the women, Hegai, gives her all that is necessary of the fragrant graces that are pleasurable to the heart of Christ.

J.R.C. It says, "instead of Vashti". You are speaking about the world, the world is going on but there is no place for Christ there. So that what Vashti represents is set aside.

J.M. She was really in subject, she was not suited to be the wife of the king. What has been referred to as the royal features were absent in Vashti but everything that was absent in Vashti is seen in its beauty in Esther.

J.R.C. That is pre-eminently for the heart of Christ, is it not?

J.M. Therefore the verse we often quote, "He shall drink of the brook in the way", Ps 110: 7. The Lord is moving on to finality when He will have the assembly entirely with Himself and there will be nothing to hinder reciprocal affections. But the Supper affords Him a foretaste of it and the Spirit's service as underlying our coming up at the Supper produces all that is necessary that His heart should be ravished.

A.B. In Genesis 24 there are certain characteristics in Rebecca that were there before the servant made himself known to her. I was thinking of how she fulfilled his prayer, "Drink, and I will give thy

camels drink also” (v 14), but then when the servant makes himself known there are adornments brought out and there is movement imparted that the Spirit typically brings in, He leads the bride in movement.

J.M. Rebecca was a person who had a history in relation to the well before the servant comes on to view. What was in her was the product of the Spirit’s work. Genesis 24 is very beautiful because it brings out in an extraordinary full way, the types of the Spirit and it seems that Rebecca was a person who had given herself over to the Spirit entirely so that the beauty that was seen in her was the result of His operations. That provides a basis for the servant to bring out and clothe her in these things that he brought from his master.

A.B. It says “all the treasure of his master was under his hand” (v 10).

J.M. Then in Genesis 24 you come on to the journey, involving the camels and the company of the servant. There would be no topic of conversation there outside of Isaac, he would have been the sole topic of conversation so that when she comes to the end of it, she is ready for him.

J.A.G. You cannot separate Esther from Mordecai. Mordecai is the background for this. No doubt Vashti might be the Jew, but this is something very precious. A man like Mordecai who is called a Jew and is the Jew, and he took her for his daughter, so from that background she ready for the Spirit’s service.

J.M. Mordecai is a very beautiful character. I do not want to go into the detail of it, because it was really what she was for the heart of Christ, what she was for the king that was in mind, but you can see that Esther is going to shine out in true assembly features. She was under the tutelage of Mordecai; she put herself there. He is a beautiful character in that sense because he knows what is needed and he serves her in view of producing that so that when the crisis comes she is equal to it, equal even to taking her life in her hands.

D.D. In Ephesians it says, “the assembly which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all”, Eph 1: 23. The Spirit’s service is

essential in that. He shares His headship with her. It is a tremendous matter. In Colossians He is head of the assembly, that is headship personally, but in Ephesians it is headship officially, and He shares His headship with her.

D.D. Because of the Spirit's service, the assembly adds to Christ by way of expression.

J.M. She is equal to the position that she is given. That section brings out what was in the divine mind in the very beginning in man, "Let us make man" (Gen 1: 26). That involves the man and the woman, and she fills out the position that she is given. There is no question about it, that what lies at the root of that is the Spirit's service to her.

The epistle to the Romans is generally moral teaching and I have no doubt that the verse that we read has a very strong moral bearing. But I thought we might just look at it from the point of view that the Spirit of adoption is service us. The Spirit of adoption is His character and He is serving us with the result that we cry "Abba, Father". "Abba, Father" is the most affectionate way of speaking to the Father.

F.G. Is it, Father, Father?

J.M. That is right, but it is even more than that; it is difficult to get it into expression just to find language. It certainly is Father, Father, but it is the most intimate expression of the relationship of a son to the father. I do not think it is a cry of need. It is the Spirit producing affections in us that are bursting to get out into expression. That is the idea of the cry here. It is worked out inwardly by the Spirit and it cannot be withheld, it cannot be restrained.

J.A.G. Does it help to understand and appreciate the intensity of the relationship and learn the compassions of God? We are going from here to chapter 12, but, as we know, the relationship and the greatness of it and the liberty of it and the marvel of it sets us completely free.

J.M. And there is that expression of affection for the Father in the saints that is entirely suited to the relationship. We not only have the status of sons, but we have the feelings and intelligence of sons.

J.A.G. And the wherewithal as we go through the chapters to live at this level because we are heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ?

J.M. Mr Stoney said, we are called to sonship, and the great privilege is to live at that level, but we often act as beggars. You are enriched, you could not be more enriched. There is a dignity, and almost a royalty about the sons.

W.L. To live at that level, is it as we had this morning as to digging the wells?

J.M. I think it is making room for the Spirit. The Spirit of adoption will produce these feelings in us so that as we come to the service of God flowing out of the Supper, there is in our hearts what cannot be contained and it breaks out Godward. I often think of this passage in relation to the three mighty men of David. They broke through and brought the water that is by the well of Bethlehem to David. This is not to the king, this is to the Father, but it is the same idea. There is that energy of affection produced by the Spirit that cannot be contained.

H.T. Our status is a very wonderful thing; it is a great honour, but it is unfulfilled without the Spirit.

J.M. The fulness of it is given expression by the Spirit of adoption in us so that there are the feelings that are suited to sons. This, "whereby we cry, Abba, Father", is not a cry of need, it is an answer to the Father's own affections.

G.C. It says in verse 15 "For ye have not received a spirit of bondage again for fear". Can you say why the apostle speaks like that?

J.M. I suppose that what might be in the apostle's mind is the old dispensation and the legal system. In Exodus 19, verse 16 the

people trembled. They were not set at liberty, but the great point of sonship is that we are set absolutely free.

G.C. Do you think then, Paul is writing this, (he was well versed in all the Jewish things), but on the road to Damascus, something must have happened within that man? Can you help us along that line?

J.M. Mr Darby says that on the Damascus road, all that Paul was morally was smashed. The whole moral being of the man was brought down, and he is set up in another Man altogether. That is what we speak of as really true conversion. What had you in mind yourself?

G.C. It was the fact that we have been brought into the Spirit of adoption. I was thinking of Paul coming to realise, maybe as he went into Damascus and saw certain things, that there was an area of liberty which was directly in touch with heaven, and therefore there was a part to played, but there was also a part to be enjoyed by persons who even were afar off but had been brought nigh.

J.M. It is a matter to be enjoyed. The Spirit of adoption, among other things would bring home to us that we have absolutely no title to it. But, nevertheless we are brought into that relationship of sons. Christ is *the* Son. He stands out in His own dignity and His own uniqueness and that is His place, but then His place becomes our place and the Spirit of adoption gives us the feelings and the intelligence that is necessary for the filling out of that place.

D.D. In John 20 He says to Mary, "Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my Father" (v 17). It seems to stand by itself, but then He says, "but go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father". Do you think that would bring in the Spirit of adoption?

J.M. That is the most important message He could ever have given to His brethren and He entrusted it to a woman. That message opens up the whole truth of sonship. John's gospel generally does not deal with sonship in us, (it is mostly children of God in John), but that section is unique and it opens up the truth of

sonship as it relates to us and what there is for the Father's pleasure.

D.D. There are certain things in which the Lord Jesus stands alone, but when it comes to that point, we are brought in on the line of adoption.

J.M. That is why it says, "my Father and your Father". It is wholly wrong to say here 'our Father'. Some do, sad to say, but that is not the truth, the truth is "my Father and your Father". Nevertheless, although sonship is uniquely His, we are brought into the affections that are proper to that relationship through the Spirit.

A.B. I was thinking of the scripture in Galatians, it says, "but because ye are sons, God has sent out the spirit of His son ... crying Abba, Father", Gal 4: 6.

J.M. That is a parallel passage. He sent out the spirit of His Son. You have the feelings of Christ. There are certain terms that we use and I sometimes think it would be a good thing if we stop and just enquire whether we understand what they mean. In the Supper we experience union with Christ and it is quite remarkable that it is from the position of union with Christ that we move by way of the worship of the Spirit, to sonship. In union with Christ we have an entrance into the heart of Christ. We discern the things that Christ loves, we know the persons that He loves, and we love like Him. I do not think that is too much to say, is it?

J.A.G. I think the service of God the Father proceeds from union; it cannot carry on from any other position.

J.M. And it involves that we have the feelings and the intelligence that is proper to that relationship. We gain these through union.

J.A.G. You must be in tune with the Chief Musician.

J.M. That is right. We have a certain order in the service and we would all agree that the order is the right order. The order has not always been that way. Some of us can remember when things were a bit different. But the present order is right. Nevertheless order is

not the substance in the service of God. Substance in the service of God is really acquired through union with Christ. Then the Spirit comes, as He does here, to help us and to give us the real feelings of sons.

J.A.G. Paul helped bring Philemon on to this level in case there might be any trace of the spirit of bondage again for fear, and his account is able to cover anything owing, and we should have an account like him.

J.M. That is beautiful. He says, put it to my account; he has substance there. That is a very good illustration because he was anxious that Onesimus should have the real feelings that were proper to the position into which he was seeking to be reinstated.

In Ephesians we get the touchstone. He is speaking of being “strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man”. In Daniel 9, Daniel had no strength because he was convicted of the sin of the people and he puts himself in that category, but in chapter 10 the reason for him not having strength was the greatness of what God was presenting to him and he felt the need of power outside of himself. The answer to that is here, “strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man” gives us the power to grasp hold of the greatest thing. So, while the service of God elevates us to the greatest position which creature could ever be, there is power to sustain us in that.

J.A.G. It is “according to the riches of his glory”, a remarkable expression.

J.M. That links with your reference to Philemon. It is a bottomless account; an account that never runs out. It is the way God has affected things for His own pleasure. There is no shortage of resource with Him to bring things through in a substantial way.

H.T. The result is what is substantially in the hearts of the saints.

J.M. That is right. It is coming out, glory to God in the assembly. It is a very beautiful thing, and that is realised now because the Father’s spirit would serve us “in the inner man”, so that we might

answer even now to this great matter of glory to God in the assembly. “That the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts”, that is the first thing, and then “ye may be fully able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge”. What great things we are brought into, but we are given the power as being strengthened by the Father’s spirit to fill out these great matters.

H.T. It refers to substance.

J.M. This is remarkable substance. It is not just a matter of doctrine or a matter of theory, it is a very substantial matter.

J.A.G. Say something about ‘the Christ’. Why is the Lord Jesus called the Christ here, “the Christ may dwell ... in you hearts”, and the “love of the Christ”.

J.M. It is quite remarkable, especially the reference to the “love of the Christ”, that comes in only twice in scripture. You get the love of Christ, but “love of *the* Christ” comes in only twice in scripture and the reference here - “the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your heart” – I think very simply it is the anointed man, it is the One who is securing everything for the pleasure of God, but we are brought in to know Him and to know the things that He is securing for the pleasure of God and to have a part in them, do you not think?

J.A.G. I think it is tremendous that this Person, the Man of God’s purpose, dwells through faith in your heart; you are fully established in it, and may be fully able to apprehend with all the saints the whole scope of the realm into which God has come and to be sustained in it by the love of the Christ.

J.M. You may recall it used to be a very common expression, that we are lost in eternity. Adjustment came in that you are not lost; you are actually fixed in eternity, and we belong there. It is a very great matter.

A.B. In writing to the Corinthians Paul speaks of “the Spirit searching all things even the depths of God”, but then he says, “we

have been given the Spirit which is of God that we may know the things which have been freely given to us of God”, there is no limitation on that.

J.M. He searches all things, even the depths of God. Here you are into the heights as well, “breadth and length and depth and height”. There are the four dimensions here so that you are brought into the fulness of all that God has had in mind for man. So many Christians go no further than the forgiveness of their sins, and yet what great things God has in mind for men, and He has given us the power that we might actually grasp them and enter into them and be responsive in them.

J.A.G. While all this is so, He is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think according to the power which works in us, which is the Spirit.

J.M. That is right. That is very beautiful because you get the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge. You might think, the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge is a contradiction, but here you come to this, “to him that is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think, according to the power which works in us”. You can see that there is a power, which lies in the Father’s Spirit. That is much greater than any conception that we can have of it and it is there to bring us livingly, intelligently and responsively into this great area of glory.

J.A.G. Perhaps one of the things we need help about is that we judge God from our own point of view and consequently we are so limited. It would greatly broaden and enlarge our outlook to see things from God’s point of view, and to see the joy and gladness of His heart that He has come out in this way. It is a joy to His heart to bring us into it.

J.M. The Epistle to the Ephesians commences with that, it is what has been in the mind of God before sin ever came in. In chapter 3 we are actually reaching it.

D.D. In Revelation 21 it is not an empty vessel: the dimensions are there but it is full. Do you think that is what is brought out here,

“that ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God”, everything that has been absorbed in the present time is seen there in substance. Is that right?

J.M. That is right. The difference between Revelation 21 and what is here is that in that section the vessel has the glory of God. That is in view of it shining out in testimony, but here it is actually glory “to God”. We are touching here the highest point that creature can ever touch. It is really the acme of Paul’s ministry. It is the acme of divine thoughts.

D.D. Glory in testimony and privilege has been spoken of. Glory in testimony is Revelation 21; this is glory in privilege.

J.M. This is what is really for the heart of God Himself. Unto all generations of the age of ages is the nearest you can get in finite language to express infinity. So what we are touching here is really eternity.

H.T. We have been taught that the response will be equal to the revelation because Christ is in it, but the Spirit is in it also.

J.M. We have come to see that there is a subjective answer in the operations of the Spirit, additional to what Mr Raven says as to the response being equal to the revelation.

J.A.G. We are getting some idea about the third heaven and paradise. It is so very beautiful and full and no doubt it affected Paul’s ministry, things which he was not allowed to utter, yet the effect upon him comes out in these chapters.

J.M. The remarkable thing about it, and I say this without any shadow of doubt, is that we can touch this in the service of God on Lord’s Day morning, but the actuality of it is very near.

J.A.G. When the Lord comes you are in it.

J.M. I think that the Lord’s coming is very near. Somebody might say, With all the conditions that there are among the saints, I think the Lord’s coming is very near.

D.D. “to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages” – is it right to think that the assembly will be an influence by way of the service of God extending to other families?

J.M. I think so. One has to be very careful because the mediator of God and men is One, the Man Christ Jesus, so you must always carry that in your mind and respect it, but I do not think it is wrong to think of the assembly as having a kind of a mediatorial service, I think it is fully justified in the ministry and the scriptures.

D.D. In Revelation 21 the tabernacle of God is with men. It seems that she spreads a benign influence and it involves other families. She is distinct, of course, but it stands related to other families.

J.M. That is right. She will enjoy a unique place in eternity as the nearest family to deity. That kind of service will be carried out by the assembly.

J.R.C. Is there mention of that in verse 14 “of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named”? That is quite a remarkable thing. Maybe the assembly is in a prime position, but everything else according to God’s thoughts of family are carried through.

J.M. It is “of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named”, and I think there will be a response from every family according to the light that is given to that family. You get a similar expression in Timothy when he speaks about the “king of the ages”. Every age will have its own quota of glory. When you come to the assembly, all these responses are gathered up in one vessel. I do not think there is anything that any family will have in the way of knowledge of God and response Godward that you will not find in the assembly.

J.R.C. I am sure that is right. Along with that every thought of God in regard to this family position is carried through.

J.M. It is very comforting and exercising too that God eternally will dwell with men family-wise. What is going to predominate in the

millennium is the kingdom. But, when you come to eternity, what will dominate is the family idea, that goes right through.

J.A.G. Growing to a holy temple in the Lord; that great area of divine light must bear upon what is mediatorial.

J.M. I think that is right. I do not want to get too much into it, because I want to be preserved in what is right. I think that is quite clear and it is a great thing to seek the Spirit's help to appreciate the unique position in the divine scheme of things that is given to the assembly.

J.A.G. "The glory of God doth enlighten, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb", that is all mediatorial.

J.M. As you know we will be dependent upon the mediatorial position eternally. It was said some time ago that when you get the tabernacle of God with men, that was outside the mediatorial position, but it is not. We will need the mediator right throughout eternity. But, I think the assembly has a kind of mediatorial service to perform.

J.A.G. It has got to be because the economy remains.

J.M. That is right. If the economy did not remain where would we be? There would be no place for us.

J.A.G. Persons say that the mediatorial ceases: that must mean that the economy ceases but it cannot be.

J.M. That is impossible otherwise there would be no place for us. God has come into a mediatorial position in order that He might be known of men. That must go through eternally.

J.R.C. It says here, "to him be glory in the assembly". What is your impression of that phrase, "glory"?

J.M. I used to think, "to him be glory in the assembly" was something beyond the matter of praise – glory to me seemed to be a matter of substance, but then the Psalm says "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me", Ps. 50: 23. It must therefore involve the praises that are ascending from the assembly, as well as the former.

J.R.C. We read it quickly, but then you say, what is really in the fact of glory.

J.M. I think it must involve praise. You come to the last Psalm “Let everything that hath breath praise Jah” (Ps. 150: 6), that is what it ends with, but it starts in the centre and widens out through all the circles, and you can picture that, as the hymn writer says:

Every circle gathered round Him (Hymn 83)

You can picture the whole universe being affected in the way of praise to God. I think that is included in what it says here, “glory to God in the assembly”.

J.R.C. And Christ is the centre of all of it.

J.M. That is quite clear, “to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge. That is something that you might have difficulty in understanding. We generally think of the love of the Christ being His love towards the assembly, but the love of the Christ, the perfect Man, which surpasses knowledge must include His love for His God. That opens the thing up, otherwise how could we have the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge. When you come to His love for His God you are really touching infinity. All that enters into this section involving what there is in the way of an answer for God Himself. Do you think that would be right to say that?

J.A.G. I think without being misunderstood it is the general position in the assembly, everything is glory, “in his temple doth every one say glory”, Ps 29: 9.

J.M. You might say, wherever you look, whatever you touch, is glory, but the glory here is glory to God, it is an answer, as we remarked Revelation 21 is the glory shining out testimonially but this is flowing responsively.

J.A.G. David says, “of thine own have they given thee”, everything here is of God.

J.M. Everything is of God and everything is for God, so that you are touching the divine end that God will be glorified.

ABERDEEN

6 May 2001

Key to initials

A. Brown, Grangemouth; G. Coull, Aberdeen; J.R. Cumming, Edinburgh; D. Duthie, Aberdeen; F. Gardiner, Aberdeen; J.A. Gardiner, Aberdeen; W. Lovie, Aberdeen; J. Mitchell, Chester; H. Taylor, Aberdeen

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

David Willetts

Luke 12: 13-21; Acts 2: 32-39; 16: 22-34

It is not difficult to see the connection between these three passages. The first man says, "What shall I do", and in the second those who were pricked in heart said, "What shall we do", and in the third the jailor says, "What must I do". I might ask you the question - do you still think that your salvation depends on you? Do you still think that there is something you must do? Romans teaches us that salvation is by faith, that Abraham was commended as a righteous man because he had faith and he believed in God. So many people, maybe, dear friend, you are one of them, think that there is something you must do to merit God's favour. Man fell in the garden, and there is nothing from that point on that man could do to justify himself before God. Everything for man's salvation depended not on what man could do, but on what God can do.

I read of this first man - we live in a very material age and no doubt you have found yourself alongside this man. It is a parable that the Lord Jesus is speaking and this man, in a soliloquy, finds himself - I suppose he was on his bed in the night - lying back in self-satisfaction, reviewing the future, quite pleased with himself. His farm had been prosperous and he had had a good season, I suppose he commended himself for planting the things at the right time and finding that he had picked the right seed and all the rest: he had evidently been successful over the years because He is spoken of as a rich man. He could look back to years of prosperity, and he reaches the point where he feels there is something he has to do and he says to himself, what shall I do? He felt that everything depended upon himself, and I suppose, dear friend, you have been like that; you have lain back and considered your life and spoken to yourself about it, reasoned with yourself about it. You may have said, in the future I will do this, get my qualifications, do as well as I can at school, maybe get a degree, go out into business, maybe get married, have a family, get a reasonable house and so on, you set

your life out in an orderly kind of way and you have a certain ambition for yourself, the same as this man, and count without God. He counted without God.

I wonder whether your life has gone up to this point where you, maybe are in a position where there are great material blessings, maybe you have been brought up in a household where God's name has been used and honoured, and you feel fairly safe, that things are fairly secure, but you yourself have ignored the God who gave you breath, the God in whose hand your life, that delicate little thread of life, is held (see Dan 5: 23).

This man says, "I will take away my granaries and build greater, and there I will lay up all my produce and my good things; and I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much good things laid by for many years". You can just imagine it, looking for year after year and saying, he is well set. But he calculated without God. I think he made the biggest miscalculation in his life. If dear friend, young person, old person, you have left God out of your life it is the biggest miscalculation you have ever made. The Lord said, "But God said to him, Fool". Imagine that! Is that not something of great sobriety, that God should call a man a fool, a fool because he had calculated without God? He had planned his life, he had set things out, but he had calculated without God. Where, dear friend, is God in your life? No one else can answer the question for you; it is between you and God alone. God says to this man, "Fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee". Suddenly he passed from time into eternity. The gospel has to do with eternal realities. One moment he had the opportunity to have to do with God and to come into salvation, the next moment he passed from time into eternity, and things became very sober, they became for him fixed.

Ecclesiastes says, "whichever way the tree falls, whether to the south or to the north, there shall it be", Eccl 11: 3. That is the sobriety of the gospel, that death finalises things. It may be it is not death, it may be the coming of the Lord. Those of us who believe on the Lord Jesus are looking for Him to come again. The end of this glorious dispensation is very near, and He may claim every vestige

of what belongs to Him for Himself. That is a great thrill to a believer, but very soberly you may consider tonight that there may be a possibility that you may be left behind. I do not wish to make you frightened or alarmed, but I want you to face realities. This man miscalculated and very seriously, because He calculated without God.

I read the second passage, a very beautiful passage – these persons heard Peter’s preaching. He presented to them the most glorious and wonderful opportunity that could ever be presented to man, and what did he present to them? - a glorious Man for their affections. Here was a city that just a few days before had crucified the Lord of glory, the greatest miscalculation in men’s judgments when Jesus was given the place of a criminal on that cross, where He had the central position between two malefactors. How sobering! God was not holding it against them. He says through Peter, I know that you did it ignorantly. Dear friend, God is not against you. Did you have that idea that God was against you? May I correct that at this very moment, God is not against you. He may be against your sins, but He is not against you personally, He wants your salvation today, so much so that the thing that was most precious to Him, His only begotten Son, He has not spared Him, who knew not sin, He has made sin, in order that you might become God’s righteousness in Him. Just think of that, that God was prepared to give us of His best in order that you might receive the most wonderful blessing today. God is towards you in Jesus. Dear friend, have you ever had to do with Jesus? Have you ever spoken to Him about your history, about your sinful state, all those awful sins that stand between you and a sin- hating God? Peter preaches, “This Jesus has God raised up, whereof all we are witnesses”. Is that not wonderful? That there is one Man out of death. That is one of the things that is distinctive to Christianity, no other religion can offer you that, faith in a Person who has been into death and has come out of it triumphant. You say it is a miracle. So surely it was, but it was of a miracle that that Man died, because He was the originator of life. He went into death in order that you might receive blessing, and He came out. He lay

there for three days, but He came out triumphant, raised by the glory of the Father. The intensity of God's power entered into that grave and it raised Him up, took Him out triumphant. More than that, He has put Him at His right hand. You mark the words here, "Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God". Think of the power of God's right hand, having brought Him out of the grave, and then just forty days later taking that blessed Man up to heaven and sitting Him upon His throne, giving Him the place of supremacy and dignity. He says "having been exalted by the right hand of God". Another scripture says "to the right hand of God", which involves place, but this one says, "by the right hand of God". That is instrumentally showing how pleasurable He was to Him. Oh, dear friend, what God thinks of Jesus! What do you think of Him? Is He just a mere Man, is He just information, is He just another name that you hear spoken about regularly amongst the brethren, does it mean anything to you? Does the name of Jesus mean anything to you? Have you ever spoken with Jesus? Have you ever asked Him to forgive you your sins on the basis of the infinitude of His work. If there had been no other sinner, Jesus would have gone that way just for you. Can you say, He died for me? These are realities. There are a lot of persons in this room - you are surrounded by them at this time - who have known at some point in their life when they have said to the Lord Jesus, I am a sinner, forgive me my sins. Has anyone been disappointed? No, dear friend, no one has ever called upon the Name of the Lord who has found that the heavens were as brass, who has found that He never listened, "whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord *shall be saved*". That is the certainty of Christianity. Christianity has to do with certainties. Dear friend, are you going on in doubt? Young person, young girl, young boy, are you still going on in any doubts? Are you sure that you are saved? I would to God that tonight you might say like these persons, 'What shall we do, brethren'. Not now a man considering his future in this world, but persons who were pricked in heart who felt the edge of the gospel. Maybe it was last week, maybe the week before, and you felt that somehow the word was just for you. You have heard the gospel, and you have heard the gospel, but maybe today when you

hear the gospel you are pricked in heart. It gets below the surface and affects your conscience in such a way that you feel you have got to do something about it, and to find that there is nothing you can do but believe. God makes it absolutely simple. It has to be simple so that there is not one that could be left out of it. If He had left something for man to do, then it would exclude certain ones, like the man on the cross alongside Jesus. What could he do? There he was nailed to a cross, what could he do for his salvation? He could not move, he could not do anything, but he says, "This man has done nothing amiss". How wonderful! Some light of God dawned into his soul, he says "remember me Lord when thou comest in thy kingdom". Let the gospel dawn in on your soul, open your heart, open it up and let Jesus come into your life. Let Him transform it, not just on the surface, let Him have your whole life. You will never regret it.

It says of these persons, "And having heard it they were pricked in heart", not in the mind, not just affected in their mind, but affected in their hearts. The gospel is not presented for your reason. The last man was reasoning his life out. There is nothing unreasonable about the gospel, but it is not exactly presented for your mind, it is presented for your heart. It is to affect your heart, your affections. Let your affections go out to Jesus today. These men were affected profoundly by it, "What shall we do, brethren?" and Peter said to them "Repent, and be baptised, each one of you". No mass conversions, "each one of you". It says at the end of the section, "three thousand souls" (v 41). Three thousand, "each one of you". Are you going to add it by one today? God is watching, He knows what effect the gospel is having on your heart, He knows what effect it has had upon you. Are you pricked in heart? Dear friend, you will never be converted unless you are pricked in heart, unless you are affected by the glory of the glad tidings. "The Lord said, unto my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put thine enemies as footstool at thy feet". I would not like to be found as an enemy of God, but it was just when I was an enemy, just when we were enemies. Paul says that, "Christ died for the ungodly", Rom 5: 9,10.

Not when you were a respected person like that rich man who may have been accepted in the community where he lived, but when we are enemies. Everyone of us has to come to it, that we were enemies of God, and it was when we were enemies that God commended His love to us for, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". There is nothing like the gospel. God has nothing better for you and He could not have anything less. He wants you to accept the Lord Jesus, the One whom He Himself has glorified and said, "sit at my right hand until I set thine enemies as footstool at thy feet". There is a day coming, it is a thrill to my soul, when everything will be subjugated to Christ, when heavenly, and earthly and infernal beings shall use their very lips to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father's glory. Have you ever used those lips that God has given you to confess Jesus Christ as Lord? You say, I have not got much. You have two lips, have you not? You can speak. Can you not glorify God with those lips? Can you not cry out today and confess the Name of the Lord Jesus and find that His Name is a strong tower "the righteous runneth into". "Confess the Name of the Lord and thou shalt be saved". Peter says, "Repent", change your mind. What does it mean? It means that you take God's view about yourself. Suddenly instead of thinking that you are a fairly reasonable person that passes muster amongst the brethren, and you might pass muster amongst the brethren for many years, there comes a time when you have to do with God for yourself about your sins and you repent. Peter says, "Repent and be baptised each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". Repentance is the beginning of the whole system of blessing. God wants not only to forgive you your sins, but He wants to set you up with a new power. Can I ask, you may be a believer on the Lord Jesus, but have you received the gift of the Holy Spirit? God wants you to feel the need of a new power; He wants you to feel the need of the gift of the Holy Spirit and to ask for it. Have you received the gift of the Holy Spirit? Do you know a new power in your life, know what the consciousness of the love of God is? The first operation of the Holy Spirit is to shed abroad in your heart the love of God. There is nothing half hearted

in the way God does things, He does not forgive you your sins grudgingly, He is rich in mercy, and He is rich in grace. If He gives you the Holy Spirit, He gives Him so that He can shed abroad the love of God in your heart. Do you know what the love of God is like? Are you conscious that inside there is a new warmth, that there is a consciousness that the love of God has been shed there? Who has done that? - the Holy Spirit. You suddenly find that you have a love for the brethren. Who has given you that? - the Holy Spirit.

What things these are. It goes on to say, and I think this is a beautiful verse, "For to you is the promise and to your children". Is that not special? Did you not know, young people, that God has a special place for you? "You and your children", that is simple to understand. Mum and Dad have repented, but He says that is not enough. Have you! He says, "to you ... and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God may call". Nobody is excluded, you are included in it. Do you want to be included? Do you want the blessing? It is up to you. All you have to do is repent. You do not have to do anything great in that sense, you just have to accept God's free offer of mercy. Come in repentance. There might not be tomorrow. To the man in the first scripture, the Lord says, "this night". It is a very sobering thing, but we cannot promise you tomorrow. It is important that you have it for yourself today.

I read this last passage. In the previous two it says, "what shall I do?" It shows the possibilities, but here is a man in this section, who was desperate. It he says, "And leading them out said, Sirs, what *must* I do that I may be saved?" Did Paul and Silas say anything about doing. He just says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house". It is a very interesting passage – here are two men completely superior to their circumstances. They had been preaching the gospel, been falsely accused, and were taken into prison. It says "having torn off their clothes". They were a bit brutal about it, they did not undo the buttons, they just tore them off and then they scourged them. It says, "And having laid many stripes upon them they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely; who, having received

such a charge, cast them into the inner prison, and secured their feet to the stocks". I do not think I would feel very happy about that, but here are two men who knew God. There they were having received those stripes and it says, "And at midnight Paul and Silas, in praying, were praising God with singing". It is interesting that it says, "the prisoners listened to them". I do not think there had been any prisoners so privileged to be so near to two persons who were directly in touch with God, and so superior to their circumstances that in praying they were praising God with singing. A song was in their heart. Perhaps you find that you have got so down, things are really overwhelming you, that you find that you cannot sing. This jailor, of course received the charge from the Roman Empire that his life was for their life. You can understand him putting them in the inner prison with such a charge, because his life depended upon it. When the earthquake came he thought they had all gone. It says, "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison shook, and all the doors were immediately opened, and the bonds of all loosed". Have you ever noticed how God can deal so specifically with events and things in your life? You say, I cannot believe what has happened to me. How many times have you said that? Have you never noticed the finger of God in it? In this earthquake, the walls did not come down, the roof did not come off and yet the doors were opened and stranger than that, the bonds of all were loosed. God can do that and He wants to do that for you today. He wants you to be absolutely free and at home in His presence, and to do that He has to release you from the whole system of bondage the world has brought you into. It says, "The jailor being awakened out of his sleep". I suppose he felt fairly confident having cast them in the inner prison and put their feet in the stocks, but he is woken out of his sleep. Scripture says to one man, "What meanest thou, sleeper". Who was that? Jonah. A man in the Old Testament; he was given a message and ran away and he went down into a ship and slept. The captain of the ship went to find him and woke him up, "arise call upon thy God". The jailor was suddenly woken out of his sleep, he was going to kill himself, he was going to commit suicide. What a point of desperation! It is sad

reading that in Japan, where the gospel has penetrated little, that the levels of suicides are the highest in the world. It is sobering, men driven to that point that they cannot face the future. You can face the future with Christ however you may be tied. It is wonderful what God can do in Christ!

This man, “having drawn a sword was going to kill himself”, it was a very close shave, he had already drawn the sword. I do not know how Paul saw him. It says, “And having asked for lights, he rushed in”. Evidently Paul could not see him, I think God gave him that message, I think God told Paul that that man was going to kill himself, and he says, “Do thyself no harm, for we are all here”. It must be that God told him. How did he know that they were all there if it was dark in the inner prison? God has to do with things in your life, you may not be able to understand them, you may not be able to reason them out. Come into the area where God’s message is flowing in all its fulness. “And having asked for lights, he rushed in, and trembling, fell down before Paul and Silas”, imagine that, a hard man like a jailor who only hours before could scourge these two men, comes in all of a shiver, he was trembling. God had affected that man, he faced the fact that he had no future apart from salvation, “What must I do that I may be saved?” Dear friend, there is no future for you apart from salvation, and God is putting it within your reach tonight. The message that the jailor got is the message that I give you, “Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved”. No uncertainty again, he that believes shall not come into judgment (see John 5: 24). There is nothing in the gospel that will ever leave you in any doubt. Persons say to you, How can I ever know that I can be saved for eternity? Dear friend, the answer is simple, you just accept God at His word and that is the very effect of faith and if you want faith ask God and He will give it to you. It is not something that you have got to do, just believe.

Oh the wonders of the gospel! This man suddenly changes from being a jailor, he says, “Sirs”. What a change in a man, he is calling the prisoners Sirs. It is a great thing when you begin to respect God’s messengers and to respect that God can use

whomsoever He will to bring to you the glad tidings today. "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house". God had blessing for the whole house, and if he secured the jailor, what a change would take place in that house. I do not know what his wife thought when the jailor came back with two prisoners in tow, and he comes and lays the table for them. There was a transformation there in a man. Dear friend, God can affect your life, the same radical change can affect your life if you allow the gospel into it. Instead of being a man who beats persons and is as hard as nails, it turns him into a man who had something to give. Why? Because he had got something from God. He had received something very precious.

He lays the table for them and he has his house baptised. You say, baptised at that hour of the night, in the middle of the night? You cannot put things off when you suddenly become urgent about the glad tidings. It does not matter if it is two in the morning, you will find that God is ready to receive you and He will see to it that you will get the blessing. The influence of that blessing comes into your household at once. It says, "and washed them from their stripes; and was baptised, he and all his straightway. And having brought them into his house he laid the table for them, and rejoiced with all his house". He rejoiced household-wise. If you want to bring some joy into your house, you accept Jesus into your life. You will never regret it.

May it be so for His Name's sake.

EDINBURGH

12 November 2000

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

Paul Devenish

Numbers 10: 31-36; 1 Corinthians 10: 1-5; Luke 22: 31-34, 54, 61,62

The first scripture speaks of the ark of Jehovah going before them. These scriptures came to me as a result of a brother's remark about Mary in the garden, how she was absorbed with Christ, absorbed with Jesus. He was the Object of her affections, and I trust that as a result of our being together, in some increasing measure we may become altogether occupied with Christ.

So He goes before them in this section. They would have made Hobab a leader, Moses would have. He was a child of the wilderness. "He said to him ... and thou wilt be to us for eyes". So many of us are ready to follow persons in this world, philosophers, persons who are really children of the wilderness, yet many follow them. The Eastern religions are coming into the Western world at an amazing rate, and it is amazing how quickly young persons particularly are following this one and that one seeking to find something to satisfy their yearnings, their longings. I am not saying that Hobab was like that, but he was a child of the wilderness, and I think perhaps because of this proposal of Moses there is a movement by the ark of the covenant in leadership. It says, "And they set forward from the mountain of Jehovah and went three days' journey; and the ark of the covenant of Jehovah went before them in the three days' journey. It was a most unusual happening at this time. The ark was normally in the centre of the camp and the tribes around the tabernacle and the ark, but here there was a movement, not according to what you might expect, but a movement of the ark of the covenant to provide leadership, to provide a way for the children of Israel. The ark of the covenant would speak of the love of God in Christ. It says nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8: 39); that is the ark of the covenant. The love of God was there in Him, and He has gone before, beloved; He has gone before to seek out a resting place. The enemies were scattered when He went into death and then arose from the dead. The enemies were all concentrated

around the Lord at His crucifixion. Psalm 22 speaks of the bulls of Bashan, the dogs, “an assembly of evil-doers have surrounded me: they pierced my hands and my feet” (v 16). Round the Lord were gathered all the enemies, but in His death and resurrection they were scattered and He went that way ahead for us. Wonderful to think about! In John 18 He says, “if therefore ye seek me, let these go away” (v 8). He provides a shelter. He is a surety for them. We sometimes sing, “Thine open bosom was my ward”. When divine judgment fell, His bosom was my ward. What was due to us fell upon the Lord Jesus. When we were in Toronto a brother told me about a story that had affected his son and I was quite taken with it. He said he had a dream and in the dream there was a filing cabinet, and on every file was his name and in every file was a list of his sins. He could not count the number of them and he tried his utmost to get rid of them. He tried to get them out of the files and he could not. He tried to dispose of them, and someone came into the room beside him and he put his name on every file, and it was the Lord Jesus. He put His name on every file. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. Have you ever had an experience like that? You cannot atone for your sins yourself, and how will you meet a righteous, holy God? But the Lord Jesus intervened. He has gone ahead and He is taking your sins and mine and put His name there. He bore our sins. He was made sin. “Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become God’s righteousness in Him”, 2 Cor 5: 21. Well, think about that. He has gone ahead. You want to follow Him through the gospels. We were reading about Him in Luke this morning how He told His disciples that the Son of Man should suffer. They did not understand, but we understand that He went ahead, and what we could not bear, what we could not meet ourselves, what stood out against us, the Lord Jesus took it on Himself and suffered for our sins, the Just for the unjust to bring us to God. He has gone ahead. Let us think about that. He shouldered the responsibility that belonged to us. He bore the judgment for our sins. Say it in your heart that it was your sins that involved the sufferings of Christ. Well, He has gone ahead and He has scattered your enemies. He died, but He arose again and His

enemies were scattered. Wonderful to think about! When the devil thought that he had finished with Him, what a triumph it was when He arose from the dead, and He is a Prince and a Saviour. There is a word in the New Translation, Leader and Saviour; in the Old I think it is Prince and Saviour. That is what He is, and He is that today.

In 1 Corinthians, He follows behind, the rock which followed them was the Christ. It has often been spoken about, the “all the way home” Saviour. That is a lovely expression and I have heard it many times, “all the way home” Saviour. That is what He is, and I hope that He wraps Himself around your heart today and that you cannot do without Him. That is one of the hymns we sing:

I could not do without Thee,
O Saviour of the lost

It is intended that He should be everything to you, the absorbing Object of your heart and mind. I trust that today a little more He may wrap Himself around your heart so that you cannot do without Him. Well, He followed them. Deuteronomy refers to the hindermost of them. “Remember what Amalek did unto thee on the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; how he met thee on the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, all the feeble that lagged behind thee, when thou was faint and weary, and he feared not God”, Deut 25: 17,18. But then the rock was there; the rock which followed them was the Christ. Peter followed afar off. That is what the scripture says; he followed afar off. Do not follow afar off, you will be vulnerable to the enemy, to Amalek. But in any case He was there. He was there for the thirsty, for the weary. He was there. It is worth taking advantage of his presence of the resource that was there in Him. The woman in John 4 had a drink from that well. He says, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would give thee living water” (v 10). He was there. At the very start of the path, you might say, He followed them, the most weary, the most faint, the most thirsty could have taken the water, “the water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life” (v 14). It was available for them and it is available for us. Maybe we get weary

sometimes, maybe we lag behind. I think that is the case with most of us. We have that experience. Perhaps we are thirsty. Perhaps we are looking elsewhere to satisfy our thirst, but I want to say that the rock that followed them was the Christ. He was available to meet their thirst and He is available today to meet your thirst. He has gone ahead of you, but He is behind you. It is wonderful to think that our Saviour has become available to us to meet our desperate needs, to suffer for our sins, to take the burden of our guilt, but then He is there too to refresh us and, if we are thirsty, to satisfy our thirst, and He would do that by giving us the Holy Spirit. Wonderful thing! “The water which I shall give him”, that is the Holy Spirit that has sprung up. A well of water, a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life. What a wonderful thing the gift of the Spirit is! I wonder if we realise it. It has been given to us, you might say, by the Lord Jesus as we are speaking of it. It is available to us through Him. Wonderful to think about it that these wonderful resources are available and then they are right behind, they are not a long way off. If the Lord is behind us He is there, we might say, just to answer your faith, to help you overcome, to help you get free of Amalek, that is Satan attacking through the weakness of the flesh. Now we all know what that is, the books we read, the videos we look at, are these to satisfy our thirst? I tell you to think about it. You do not need to feel or to satisfy your thirst with these things in this world. You do not need it. You have a Saviour who is thinking about you all the day. He has met your sins, but He has not only met your sins but He would tell you, He would meet your need all the way through the wilderness. Wonderful Saviour! An all the way home Saviour! What a Person, what a Man to present in the glad tidings!

Well, I just want to speak about what comes between, and that is Shepherd and a Priest, and you get both these things in Luke. You get Him as a Shepherd and a Priest. He will pray for you before you ever go into temptation. He prayed for Peter; He was a Priest. He says, “I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not”; “Satan has demanded to have you, to sift you as wheat but I have besought for thee” – that is for Peter – “that thy faith fail not”. “Satan has

demanded to have you, to sift you as wheat” would be the twelve disciples, but “I have besought for thee” – I wonder if we have ever thought about Jesus beseeching the Father for us, that is, you are in His heart and His prayer has gone up to the Father on your account. That is the Priest, our great High Priest, and He has to do with our spiritual blessing, our salvation spiritually. Even before we get into temptation. He would intercede for us. He is our great Advocate too. “If anyone sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”, 1 John 2: 1. If we sin He is immediately engaged on our behalf, an Advocate with the Father. What a wonderful thing to have, an Advocate with the Father – I think that is the Old Translation, I do not remember the New, but it conveys the meaning, One who is before God on our behalf immediately. What a wonderful thing to have an Advocate! But here is a Priest who, we might say, anticipates our needs, and He says, “I have besought for thee”. We should contemplate the feelings of the heart of Jesus when He knew that Peter was going astray, of His feelings there as He spoke to the Father. But then, I think He is a Shepherd too. A Shepherd has to do with our waywardness. I think he would watch Peter afar off and the Shepherd’s heart would be deeply affected that one of His sheep, one of His lambs had gone astray. Do you have a shepherd’s heart? Do I? Are we concerned if one of the lambs, one of the sheep goes astray? The Lord was the good Shepherd, the good Shepherd that lays down His life for the sheep. He knew what was happening in this incident when Peter denied the Lord, denied Him with a curse it says in another section - think of it! - but the Lord as the Shepherd would not let His sheep go, He would not let him go. Well, it is the same today; the Shepherd will not let us go. It says at the end of this section, “And the Lord, turning round, looked at Peter”. I wonder what was in that look. “And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he said to him, Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter, going forth without, wept bitterly”.

Well, I would commend these things to us. He has gone ahead; He has gone before, the great Leader of salvation. Wonderful service! He is the Leader of our salvation. He has

sheltered us. It is very interesting in John 18, it is almost as if He shielded them; He said, I will go ahead. I will go ahead with the whole matter of sins and sin; He was prepared to suffer. He is the great Leader of our salvation. But then He follows you day by day. Do you ever think of it? Do you ever turn around and say, 'Well, He is there, and I find satisfaction in Him'? He is there. He never leaves us. In a sense He encompasses us in His grace and love, and then in between on the way He is the Shepherd, the Priest.

May the Lord bless the word!

DENTON

1 October 2000