

A
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THE MORNING STAR

Jim Gray

**2 Peter 1: 1, 5-11, 16-19; Revelation 2: 18-21, 23 (from “and all the ...”)-29;
22: 16,17**

It will be evident that what is on my heart to speak to you about is Christ as the morning star. God has always been faithful and the Lord has always been faithful to His saints. There have always been times of pressure and tribulation and turmoil in the world, there have always been times of pressure amongst the people of God, but He has always been faithful. Divine Persons are faithful to what they have committed themselves to here testimonially. They give ministry to encourage us at any time in the dispensation. God takes account of us at the present time as He took account of His saints in the time of Peter. It does not quite say who Peter was writing to in 2 Peter except to say, “to them that have received like precious faith with us through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ”, that is he is writing to persons who had received the testimony of Christ, who were Christians, who had received the Christian faith. He of course was writing to Jewish believers. He tells you in his first epistle he was writing, “to the sojourners of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Peter 1: 1). He was writing to Jewish believers who had been scattered and had suffered for the testimony and he is seeking to encourage them in the Christian path. We are at the close of the dispensation but it is necessary to continue in the Christian path. I am speaking in the context of what surrounds the disclosure of the Lord as the morning star. There are certain credentials that persons should have before they would understand the appeal of Peter, or of the Lord through Peter, “until the day dawn and the morning star arise in your hearts”. I seek to exercise us to be amongst the kind of persons to whom this disclosure of Christ as the morning star would mean something. I do not think it would mean too much to a worldly believer. In saying that

I am not trying to write down worldly believers, because if there is a work of God in a person it is real. If I divert for a moment, Mr. Darby in his comments on the time of Smyrna says, the Lord sought to separate His people from the world and He allowed persecution in order to do it in the time of Smyrna, and there were worldly believers who when it came to the issue laid down their life for Christ. What it brought to light was the real work of God in them through real severe exercises. In saying that I do not think this would appeal to worldly believers exactly, I do not mean to write down the work of God in a person, but what this appeals to is persons who make their calling and election sure. I was often puzzled about that, what it is to make your calling and election sure, and I came to it that it does not mean that God doubted my election and my calling, not at all. There is no doubt about your calling and election from the divine side, but from our side we have to make our calling and election sure. How is that brought about? It is brought about by the individual saint maintaining exercise to be true to the Lord. Receiving the Christian faith is a wonderful matter, but it says, "But for this very reason also using therewith all diligence, in your faith have also virtue", that is there is to be progress made in our faith. Receiving the Christian faith, receiving Christ as your Saviour, the gift of the Holy Spirit, is the beginning of Christian life, and what Peter goes into here from verse 5 through to verse 11, "making your call and election sure", is what Paul speaks about in Romans 8 "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (v 14). You prove your election by your walk and your life by being exercised to maintain the faith of Christianity in your soul, maintaining Christ in your soul as a real living Saviour, maintaining your links with divine Persons, "have also virtue". I looked this up, and I understand it is moral courage, maintaining your Christianity in the face of adversity in the world through moral courage. Then "in virtue knowledge", that is your intelligence, you grow in your intelligence in regard to divine things, in regard to your interests of the Lord here. Then "in knowledge temperance", that is you are moderate, you are not given to excesses, that your passions are under control, you do not lose your temper – things like that, you maintain yourself in dignity, as all

Christians should do. And then “in godliness”, that is piety, and then “brotherly love” that is you are well disposed to your brethren, to your neighbour. It is, “out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water”, there is something flowing out of the believer towards his brother.

And then “brotherly love love”, I think in the reverse I have understood this scripture, everything flows from that word love, but it is the knowledge of God that you have. It flows from the fact that you have been made a participator of the divine nature. It says, “having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (v 4). What an escape to be a partaker of the divine nature! Then you come to the understanding of love as set out by God so that you are not partial in your brotherly love, you love each other because of what Christ has done in your soul, not because of what I like in a brother or sister. It is not nature’s brotherly love, that is all right in its setting: in families, brothers and sisters love each through nature, but this is more than that, this is love that is flowing from the divine source, the divine love in the believer, and it is impartial and it loves the brethren because of the work of God in them.

It says in Deuteronomy, “if thy brother grow poor beside thee”, you would consider for your brother if he grow poor beside you, that is if he is weakening in his affection for Christ or if he is falling into sin, you would be considerate for your brother – “grow poor beside thee”, grow poor in spirit. You would have consideration for your brother because you love him according to God. What an atmosphere to be in. That is the sphere of the Christian circle, and that is the sphere in which Christ’s interests are held and treasured and where Christ is held and treasured, because above all others the great thing is the Person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He says, “For we have not made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, following cleverly imagined fables”. The Jewish people, according to scripture, were looking for Christ to come, their Messiah; they were looking for Christ as the Sun of righteousness, that is the end of the Old Testament in Malachi, “the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings”, Mal. 4: 2.

What a change was to take place, glory in the world to come, the

nations around in blessing, and evil removed by the judicial working of Christ, the judicial power of the Lord Jesus takes away the sin of the world. He is going to do it finally by His judicial power; He does it in our souls and hearts by the operation of divine grace. They were looking for Christ to come and they expected the Messiah to come and give them the kingdom, and they think that way until Acts 1.

“They therefore, being come together, asked him saying, Lord, it is at this time that thou restorest the kingdom to Israel” (v 6). That is what they were looking for, but the Lord ascended into heaven and there are “times or seasons, which the Father has placed in his own authority” (v 7). He did not take the place of knowing times and seasons: that was the Lord in His humility in Manhood. These believers had much in scripture to tell them about Christ coming in power. Read the Old Testament scriptures and you will see: it says here, “we have the prophetic word made surer to which we do well taking heed, as a lamp shining in an obscure place” (v 19). That is the Old Testament scriptures; they shone as a lamp in an obscure place. It is the darkness of the world, the Old Testament scriptures shone amongst the Jewish people as a lamp in an obscure place.

They were told about Christ that He would come. The book of Daniel tells you about the kingdoms that would be set on, but it always ends with Christ coming. The Jewish believers were looking forward to that. Well Peter says, do not think that He will not come in power because we have seen Him come in power. It would appeal to the Jew for persons to say, we have seen Christ glorified on the mount of transfiguration, we have seen Him there, He is coming in power, just wait a little time, you need a little patience. He is seeking to encourage them, as we would do today, seek to encourage the saints to continue in their path, to continue in the testimony, for Christ is going to come in power, He has already demonstrated that He is a Man in power by His transfiguration. It says here, “made known to you the power and coming of the our Lord Jesus Christ ... having been eyewitnesses of *his* majesty”. That would be a testimony to these dear brethren to hold fast until He come, and a testimony to us today that Christ is coming. Peter says in chapter 3, the mocker says “Where is the promise of his coming? For from the

time the fathers fell asleep all things remain thus from the beginning of the creation" (v 4). But the Lord does not delay His coming, the Lord is coming.

Then he gives them this treasure, "until the day dawn and the morning star arise in your hearts". I think that would give them something to think about. I do not think these believers, according to the record, had heard of this before, that Christ takes another form, not the Sun of righteousness arising with healing in his wings, but there is something else for the saints. He just gives them an indication that there is a day dawning, not the day fully come. When the sun comes over the horizon the day is fully come, but the morning star is seen before that. When you look out in the early morning as the dawn comes up, the rays of another day come up and you see the morning star: all the other stars are obliterated. If you look at the sky in the early morning you see all the stars in the darkness, but as the day comes up, and the streaks of dawn arise one star remains, the only star in the heavens, and that is what the apostle is speaking about here, "the day dawn". The earliest of the day is dawning and "the morning star arise in your hearts", that is Christ is arising in your heart. The thing takes place in your heart, that Person whom you love, the Lord Jesus Christ, is giving you a token that He is coming and He is coming for you.

In Revelation it is addressed to Thyatira – a change takes place here – there is Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamos and the Lord's coming is not presented to Ephesus, Smyrna or Pergamos and the word to the saints from the Spirit is before the word to the overcomer. That is up until this point the Lord, as I understand it, had held out the possibility of recovery in the church, but now there is no longer the possibility of the recovery in the church in Thyatira, things had gone too far. It says of this woman Jezebel, "I gave her time that she should repent". I read that deliberately to show the graciousness of Christ in the dispensation that He gives time to repent, He does not act before the time, He gives time to repent. It is the same all through scripture. It says in regard to the children of Israel and the taking of the land, "the iniquity of the Amorites is not

yet full". He waits on man before He changes his way. He waited on the church – was it possible that His word through Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamos would cause repentance, would allow change to take place? But it did not. The world as set out in the woman Jezebel, the development of evil within the church, is such that the Lord says, "I gave her time that she should repent, and she will not repent".

I also want to draw your attention to this, "I know thy works, and love, and faith, and service, and thine endurance, and thy last works to be more than the first" – that is a remarkable statement by Christ, that He appreciated something in Thyatira that the last works were more than the first, they were greater than what was in Ephesus. I think it came out in individuals, but the Lord takes account of everything. To Philadelphia He says, "I know thy works", but here he says, "and thy last works to be more than the first".

There was some evidence of devotedness, and this represents, as we have been taught, Thyatira at midnight, as we speak about, the middle ages, the medieval times, but in those times there was devotedness that was not seen in earlier times. It must have been seen in individuals. Dear brethren, it makes way for each to be devoted as an individual to the Lord Jesus and He would take account of that in our lives, devotedness to Himself because of our love for Himself, and then he says, "the rest who are in Thyatira"; there were persons there that did not know the depths of Satan, He says to them, "hold fast till I shall come". That is the first indication in the address to the assemblies that He is coming. We cannot put right the state of things in Christendom, what we have to wait for is Christ coming, He is the only One who can put matters right, the Lord Jesus Christ. No man on this earth, no ecumenical movement will ever put matters right, the only One who can put it right is Christ and He says "hold fast till I shall come". He says to them "he that overcomes, and he that keeps unto the end my works, to him will I give authority over the nations, and he shall shepherd them with an iron rod; as vessels of pottery are they broken in pieces, as I also have received from my Father", that is that we share with Him in His rule in the millennial day. That is a wonderful matter, but then He

says, "I will give to him the morning star" – what was that? Think of the Lord giving this to a believer in the middle of the dark ages. You know dear brethren, you are going to have a portion with Christ as the morning star. It is a portion that belongs to the believer at the present time, that he is going to have a time with Christ as the morning star. That is going to mean something to you, "I will give to him the morning star", that is Christ was about to come. There was not one iota of prophecy to be fulfilled before Christ comes as the morning star. The Lord was faithful then too when He gave this word at this time, there was not one thing of prophecy to take place before He would come as the morning star. Before He comes at the appearing as the Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings there are prophetic matters to be filled out. There is the last week of Daniel's prophecy to be filled out, there is the covenant of death to be seen where the Jews make a covenant with the head of the Roman Empire and the antichrist to continue their services in the temple. It is broken in the middle of the week: all that is to take place, but there is not one thing to take place before Christ comes as the morning star. What a matter that is to have Christ in your affections as the One who is about to come to rapture His saints. That is affection for Christ, He can come at any time and the Lord is not unfaithful. He held this out to believers at that time and it kept them faithful through their lifetime and through the tribulations that they went through. They had an imparted affection from Christ of how He appreciated their faithfulness in the day of darkness that surrounded them at that time. It is the same time now. The coming of Christ is always presented in scripture as if it takes place in the lifetime of the person who is speaking. Paul spoke about it that way, those "who are alive and remain". He always spoke about the coming of Christ as if it would take place in his lifetime and that is the way to speak about it. If you put it off in any other way you become like the bondman who says, "my lord delays his coming" and then there will be degeneration in your soul, but be maintained in the light of Christ about to come.

I want to speak about the secret of the spring of affection, “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assembly. I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star”. You know what stimulates the heart is relationship, “I Jesus”. He does not say He is coming here, not just in this section, He says, “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies”. What stimulates the heart after Christ is relationship, it is the bride, it is her bridegroom. When He says I Jesus it is her bridegroom. Would not a bride want to see her bridegroom? Would she not want to respond? Mr. Darby says in his writings, it is like a wife hearing the footsteps of her husband coming up the path and knocking on the door. What a response in her heart as she goes to that door, it is relationship! If it was the postman there would be no response, but it is her husband who is coming and she knows that knock, she knows the footstep and love comes into her heart and wells forth as she desires to have him and that is, “I Jesus”. “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies. I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star”. That is the One who is coming. Christ coming to rapture the saints before the appearing; He is going to take us in to a time with Him before He comes out and reigns.

Colossians 3 says, “for ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God. When the Christ is manifested who is our life, then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory” (vv 3,4). When He comes out the saints are with Him. You know, friend, that is what He held before the saints. That is what stimulates the heart that He is coming as the bridegroom, before the day of the marriage, you might say, because the marriage takes place in heaven, “the marriage of the Lamb is come”. The marriage of the Lamb does not come until what is false on the earth is destroyed. Great Babylon is judged and destroyed, then the purity of the bride comes out and her righteousness, “Let us rejoice and exult, and give him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints” (Rev 19: 7,8), she is suitably clad for him. Here she is the bride. Are you

maintained in love and affection for Christ, dear brother and sister?

Is your life and my life such that that is the kind of affection I have for Jesus? That is Philadelphia. Philadelphia is not a position, it is a state in the soul of a believer where the only thing that is going to satisfy him is Christ and when He says, “/ Jesus”, the heart goes out in response immediately, “come”. That is what the Spirit says, “the Spirit and the bride say, Come”. The heart goes out immediately to say come, we want Jesus to come, not only come for us and take us to share that peculiar matter with Him in glory, where our life is actually hidden with the Christ in glory. Morally it is so now, but actually it will be before the appearing. That is what He held out to the saints at Thyatira at midnight, He could come at any time, He was being true to them. But in the ways of God it was delayed.

Christ is waiting patiently, He would long to come, but He is waiting patiently, but time is in the Father’s hands and we are keeping the word of His patience. The word of Christ’s patience is being maintained by the saints and I think it is expressed in our gatherings, in the saints’ lives that are maintained in touch with Christ in glory by the Holy Spirit. They are maintained testimonially as working out what we call the light of the assembly, maintaining the Lord’s Supper, maintaining the glad tidings, maintaining conversations as they did in Malachi’s day, they conversed often one with another. Those are the features of keeping the word of Christ’s patience, and the Lord is pleased with that, because He is waiting. He is waiting on the Father’s perfect time when He says, “ask of me and I will give thee the nations for an inheritance”, (see Ps 2), the Father’s perfect time will coalesce with the Lord asking. We do not need to wait until the time of the appearing. We are going to have Christ personally. Mr.

Darby says of the rapture, when we shall ever be with the Lord that there is nothing more to be desired by the saints than to be for ever with the Lord and that can take place at any time. Am I going to be faithful? The Lord would stimulate our hearts to maintain things that are true to Christ and waiting on Him, the One who says, “/ Jesus”.

It says here “the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come”, that is someone who is not so much in touch

with Christ, but you would seek to help a fellow believer to say “come”. The Spirit of God would be desirous that if there is a soul who is not quite in touch with the Lord Jesus that he would be stimulated to hear and if he hears he will say, “come” – a triumph of divine grace working in the hearts of men and women. Then it says, “let him that is athirst come; he that will, let him take the water of life freely” – that is the gospel. What a gospel flows out from hearts that are full of Christ.

These thoughts were on my heart to stimulate you and enlighten you in relation to the morning star, that is Christ as a bridegroom, and the bride responds to that immediately when He speaks. It does not say He is coming, but He says, “I Jesus”, and she responds immediately to His speaking for her heart is full of Christ. She wants Him to come, not only at the rapture to take her to be with Himself for ever, but to come into His own place in glory too. It goes right forward to the appearing. The appearing is in two parts, the rapture and the public appearing, and this scripture, I think, would include them both, going on to the public appearing, when Christ is vindicated. Would we not want to see our Lord Jesus Christ vindicated, the Man who has been maligned. The vindication of the righteous will take place in the coming day. but meanwhile the star is in the sky. May your heart be stimulated, dear brother and sister, in relation to Christ, who is about to come.

May the Lord bless His word, for His Name’s sake.

WITNEY

SAVIOUR OF SINNERS

Tim VanderHoek

1 Corinthians 15: 1-4; Acts 10: 1-5, 19, 20, 24-27, 33-44; 17: 1-4 (to Silas), 11, 16-25, 30-32

What was on my heart to speak of was the Lord Jesus presented as the Saviour of sinners and presented in such a way as brings the completeness of the which He went through. We have 1 Corinthians 15, in those two succinct verses, “that Christ died for our sins ... and that he was buried; and that he was raised the third day”. It is spoken of faithfully by both Peter and the apostle Paul – how the Lord Jesus is presented by both of them as having gone through death and then as being raised from the dead. It is only through the completeness of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, in going into death and then being raised for our justification, that we have the forgiveness of sins. These two portions in Acts bring quite a contrast between hearers of the testimony concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Those in Acts 10 were referred to as “all present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God”, (v 33). It is quite a statement. And it is that which would be the exercise of heart and soul that there would be those open to hearing the glad tidings, receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. He is the One who would bring us into full peace with God, the One whom we would present as the Saviour of sinners. It is quite striking that in the last verse of the hymn we sang it says:

Peace, sonship, joy, the Holy Spirit giv'n.
Through Him are known. (Hymn 123)

The Lord Jesus Christ is presented as the Saviour of sinners, as the One who would bring us into the fulness of peace, the place of sonship, the fulness of joy and then we have the Spirit given, as we have referred to here, in both Acts 10 and Acts 17.

I was thinking of how this man Cornelius brings before us someone who had an exercise of soul and yet he did not have peace and joy. He was exercised to be before God in a righteous way and

yet he was missing something. Of course, we have in Acts, the acts of the Spirit of God, the transition from the old dispensation to the new dispensation: the Lord Jesus Christ, as having gone into death and being raised, a testimony as to Himself was just beginning to go out. And so we have the old dispensation having to be set aside even by those that were saved out of it such as the apostle Peter.

We did not read his vision, but he had this vision that would emphasise how God is not a respecter of persons and that each one must come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour regardless of whether born a Jew or a Gentile the apostle here saying, "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him" (v 35).

So we have here those who would be before one who would bring the glad tidings, Peter as having been sent by the Spirit. The Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men seek thee; but rise up, go down, and go with them, nothing doubting" (vv 19,20). This is the same activity of the Spirit of God in this scene to-day, convicting men of their need of a Saviour. It is a very real activity which we would be thankful for, how the Spirit would be working to convict men of the need of a Saviour. Here we have those that, we might say, were in Cornelius's circle. We had a touch of that this morning, how there would be that circle of affection. Well, here he had a care for souls.

In verse 24 it says he had "called together his kinsmen and his intimate friends". He had a care for them in such a way that he would desire that they would have this news that he anticipated being brought by the apostle. He did not know what the news would be but he had been given this vision, the Spirit of God no doubt working in his soul and having told him to send for this one called Simon, surnamed Peter. There was that willing spirit. They were gathered together and the apostle went in, talking with Cornelius, "and found many gathered together". They were receptive to the word of God working in their souls. It is also striking to me that as the apostle Peter speaks faithfully of the Lord Jesus Christ, he speaks to them as His being a judge (v 42): "And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that *he*" – that is the Lord Jesus

– “it is who was determinately appointed of God to be judge of living and dead”. A very positive note comes in before that in the apostle taking these ones up who, naturally speaking, were very strange to him and he was even forbidden to go into them, being a Jew. But having been enlightened by the Spirit of God in the vision and seeing that God was no respecter of persons but that all needed to come to know the Lord as Saviour, he can speak plainly to them of that beloved One as having gone into death, who the Jews had hanged on a cross and yet God raised Him up the third day; then a testimony as to His being raised from the dead was given because He was openly seen to those that were witnesses.

So here there were those who were hearing the word of the gospel. And so it is with each one of us: there has been a sovereign work in our souls, those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and have been receptive to hearing about the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who was raised up the third day after having been hanged on a cross, after having been put to death. God raised Him up the third day and we have witness and testimony to the fact that He is no longer here, no longer in death. It says, in Corinthians, that if we had the Lord still in the grave, we would be really the worst of all men. We would have no hope. But the Lord Jesus Himself is on high.

So the apostle Peter here speaks of being commanded to preach to the people that He, the Lord Jesus, was the One appointed by God to judge the living and the dead, and these with receptive ears would be those whom the Spirit could come and fall on: “While Peter was yet speaking these words the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were hearing the word”. This was not just some idle tale that the apostle Peter was speaking of, but he was speaking of that Lord of glory, the One who went into death to settle the sin question and the One who was raised again for our justification.

In chapter 17 we have the same line of thought that there were receptive ears and in contrast those who did not have receptive ears. Here in chapter 17 we have the apostle Paul on his journey, coming to Thessalonica, again coming in amongst the Jews and

speaking to them as to the Christ and how He “must have suffered and risen up from among the dead” (v 3), a testimony again to those who had put Him to death, to the Jews themselves. So the apostle Paul could speak of the Lord Jesus Christ and He could say, “Jesus who *I* announce to you”. It seems that Mr. Darby places the emphasis on the “*I*” there, and I wonder if it is not because here the apostle could speak from personal experience. He had seen this One who was raised from the dead. He had seen that great light from heaven and, no doubt, that personal experience with the Lord Jesus as the living One and the One that brought light into his pathway, brought the apostle to know Him, the Lord Jesus as Saviour. He could speak personally as he could emphasise it: “Christ must have suffered and risen up from among the dead, and that is the Christ, Jesus whom *I* announce to you”. Well, it was on this testimony that it says, “And some of them believed, and joined themselves ...”, just “some of them”. There were some who, no doubt, had their heart pricked as the apostle himself had had. It was those who realised that the Lord Jesus Christ had gone through death for themselves, and it is when we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we would be drawn into that joy and peace and place of sonship through the knowledge of our sins forgiven, through the knowledge of that beloved One and the finished work that He accomplished, the One who is soon coming for us.

So difficulties arise because of this testimony. We did not read the verses, but the apostle is taken off to another area and then it speaks of those who heard this same testimony (v 11) and it says, “And these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, receiving the word with all readiness of mind”. “Readiness of mind” is required to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. There must be a receptive heart; there must be a “readiness of mind”. And yet it is puzzling in a way then to read, “daily searching the scriptures if these things were so”. That was not done in a sceptical way, no doubt, but in a way that would then solidify what they had heard in their own souls that caused them to have the solid foundation of the

word of God as to the testimony of what they had heard. And this is required too for any growth in our own souls, that we would search the scriptures. Many of us have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, some of us in our very young years and some maybe not so young, but all of us then have a need to search the scriptures to be well-founded in the Word so that we would fully appreciate what we have been brought into.

We then come to a further testimony because difficulties arise and the apostle was taken away from that place and ended up in Athens where he was waiting for his brethren. And yet what he saw in Athens, it says, “painfully excited” him in his spirit. He could see the gross unbelief around him and therefore he was out giving the glad tidings as to the Lord Jesus Christ. “He reasoned therefore in the synagogue with the Jews, and those who worshipped, and in the market-place every day with those he met with”. Well, I do not imagine it was restricted to the Jews, as we read of these Athenians. He was giving a testimony as to the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, but how was it received? It was received in such a way that they could say “What would this chatterer say?” (v 18). Now, we could say that they were not like those in Cornelius’s household who were there with readiness of mind, waiting to hear what the Spirit of God had to say through the apostle Peter. But these who would refer to the apostle Paul as a chatterer did not have an open heart or readiness of mind and so the apostle Paul, in announcing the glad tidings of Jesus to them and the resurrection, seemed as a foolish chatterer. And so it is a sovereign work that must occur in our souls to come to realise that we need a Saviour.

So the apostle is brought in to speak of what he had been proclaiming in the market-place and in the synagogues, and yet it is very interesting and instructive to see in verse 21 that those who wanted to hear what he had to say were those who were described as spending “their time in nothing else than to tell and to hear the news”. It is very telling to see the order in which that is put, “to tell and to hear the news”. In Acts 10 it says they were gathered together (v 27) and then Cornelius said, “Now therefore we are all

present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" (v 33), and then earlier in this chapter, "receiving the word with all readiness of mind". We are thankful that the sovereign work of God has taken place in our souls so that we have been hearers of the report, hearers of the testimony that has been given to us and that we have believed. But these are described as those there to tell, first. It seems that they did not have an openness to hear what the apostle was speaking of in his testimony as "he announced the glad tidings of Jesus and the resurrection to them" (v 18). They were there to tell first and then to hear the news. Is that not typical of man in the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ? Man has self interest first and other things second and so our natural inclination is not to hear, not to be receivers of the word, but that we would have something first to tell. Of course, that would be the "I" of man, the big "I". So these Athenians and strangers were there "to tell and to hear the news" and therefore they completely missed having an open ear to hear the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus Christ and how He is the Saviour of sinners.

So the apostle ultimately speaks and announces the glad tidings using as a basis this unknown God they had identified. The apostle spoke to them faithfully of how there is one God and how He has brought in the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 30 he says, "God, therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, now enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent, because he has set a day in which he is going to judge the habitable earth in righteousness by the man whom he has appointed". That was a very serious thing to bring before these Athenians, the thing that brought them into responsibility. Now, dear one, as we think of the good news of salvation going forth, the gospel, and how it is preached in every region of the globe, men are put into responsibility, hearing of the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. These Athenians and strangers here were brought into responsibility and the apostle could speak to them of the need of repentance and need to come to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.

But he speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as being Judge. It is a severe warning to those who have not accepted Him as Saviour. He will be the Judge, and Judge not only of the living and the dead, but here as it is put "the habitable earth". That is, the Lord Jesus is qualified and has the rightful place to be the Judge of everything in the habitable earth. Even in Acts 10 the apostle Peter brings before them that He would be the "judge of living and dead" and yet they received remission through His Name. They had an open ear and each one of us who has come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour would have that open ear. We have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and we know the Lord Jesus as the One who is to be the Judge, but He has already borne our judgment. We look on Him as our Substitute and He has received our judgment as to our sins. How thankful we are for that! We know Him as the Lamb in that sense. But here these men, those who were gathered together at the hill of Mars in Acts 17, were warned by the apostle that He would "judge the habitable earth in righteousness" through that very One, the Lord Jesus Christ, and these then had the opportunity to come to know the Lord as Saviour. But when they heard that, heard of the resurrection, they mocked. They refused to hear of the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.

How sad it is that there are those who know not the Lord Jesus Christ and yet what a joy it is for those of us that we know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. We have been brought into that place, as we sang, of joy, peace, a place of relationships in sonship, and we are indwelt by the Spirit of God. That would be the normal portion of every believer, every one who has accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. May the Lord bless His word!

DENTON

13 June 1999

THE CROSS

Adrian Buchan

Philippians 2: 7-11; Luke 23: 39-46 (to “spirit)

I want to speak about the cross of Christ. Persons wear a cross round their neck as an ornament, quite a common thing, but I want to ask each one of us what significance does the cross mean to you?

What does it mean to you? If you go back in history, when Sir Edmond Hilary conquered Everest he put a cross there. We were just looking at the Belsen field where many persons died in concentration camps, and in the fields where they were buried they put up a big cross. What does that cross really mean? What significance does it have to you? To the Christian the cross has a very great significance. The Lord of glory was suspended on a cross between heaven and earth and the great matter of sin and sins – sin the root, and sins the fruit – the whole tremendous matter of good and evil was solved at the cross. What does it mean to you? I want to show, dear friends, the number of persons who were at the cross and the different categories that they come into. Then we have to ask ourselves, each one of us, what category do we come into because it is the great separating line between the Christian and the world. The Lord Jesus did not only suffer – the sufferings, the ignominy, the spitting – all that the Lord Jesus suffered was tremendous, but there is more than that. He suffered at the hands of men and then He suffered at the hands of God, but it says in Hebrews that He “endured the cross, having despised the shame”, Heb 12: 2. It is a tremendous matter to take account of what was wrought, what was accomplished, and by virtue of an accomplished and finished work an immutable basis has now been laid upon which every man, woman and child can receive the forgiveness of their sins for time and for all eternity. It stands, the cross stands, dear friend, as an eternal witness before God, before men.

What does the cross really mean? The first thing I think the cross means is the depth of what sin is. You will never know what the depth of sin really means until you come to the cross. You see

God's judgment meted out on the Lord Jesus, His only Son. He gave His only Son. Sin must have been a horrible thing for Jesus to have to suffer and die. It shows the depths of sin. That is the first thing it shows.

The second thing the cross shows is the fulness of the love of God. It is a tremendous thing the expression, "how shall he not also with him grant us all things?", Rom 8: 32. Think of the richness of God coming out and His mercy to persons like you and me who had no rights, undeserving as we were.

The third point in the cross is that there is no other way of salvation. If you want to be saved, if you want to be converted, if you want to have to do with God on His terms, you have to come to the cross.

What does the cross mean to you? What does the cross really mean? The next point is that the cross gives a new dynamic power to life because if it was not for the cross there would not be resurrection and there would not be any hope for any one of us here. The cross is the great central point because that is where the great matter of sin was settled, "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us" (2 Cor. 5: 21): in Him sin was not, He was made sin for us. It says, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sakes he, being rich, became poor, in order that ye by his poverty might be enriched", 2 Cor 8: 9. It is a tremendous matter, dear friends, to appreciate the cross.

So I have read in Luke's Gospel. You will know that Matthew, Mark and Luke have their own presentation, different from John. John has his own presentation. In John the Lord Jesus carried His own cross. But Matthew, Mark and Luke give us some detail as to the persons who surrounded the cross, and you just think of the Lord Jesus as He journeyed with these persons after being given stripes. In the first three gospels we know that Simon the Cyrenian came and helped Jesus as He bore the cross, and the soldiers, how they pierced His hands and His feet, and they put Him on a cross.

Crucifixion is the most torturing of deaths that there can ever be.

Stoning or slaying is an act of mercy compared to crucifixion because it can last for hours and days. It lingers on. It is the most torturing of all deaths. Jesus endured it, and the point in the gospel, dear friend, is that He endured it for you and for me. Peter says, “who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Peter 2: 24), Himself. I want this to come home because there are certain facts in the gospel which need to be mentioned, but I want to give you something of the feelings of God. That is what the gospel is about, the feelings of God, and they come out in the gospel. God has feelings for you and for me and He wants to bring you in to the blessedness of the enjoyment of His house. But, you see, we have all broken God’s law, and there is a sentence for that. The sentence has been passed and it is death, and it has been passed upon all men. All men have come short of the glory of God, every one. We all say in the period of our lives, ‘Well I am as good as him’, ‘I am as good as her’, ‘I am as good as them’. God is not judging you with another man, who is a sinner too. God is judging you by Jesus Christ, that is how He is judging you. God wants you to come up to that level, Jesus Christ. How can I have that kind of goodness?

How can I acquire that kind of goodness? You get it at the cross.

You find God’s judgment about sin. During the week we were speaking about Psalm 73, and how great a man David the king was. It says, “my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped”; nothing happens in that Psalm until we get to that word “Until”. All the rest of it was not of much relevance, “Until I went in to the sanctuaries of God” – notice the plural, “sanctuaries” – “then understood I their end”, Ps 73: 17. It all came into perspective, all the things he had ended, the wicked and the arrogant, how they seemed to prosper, and David had the thing completely out of perspective. But it is interesting, it says, “Until I went in to the sanctuaries of God”. It is interesting if you go on further it says, “Nevertheless I am continually with thee”, (v 23). Wonderful thing!

In spite of all the failings and the wanderings, God is saying “Nevertheless”. His grace has overabounded! That is the God we have to do with. Then you go further down that chapter and it says, “and after”. Oh, dear friend, have you reached through to the

“after”? – the Authorised says “afterwards”. Men only think about today, they only live for the day:

The creature of a day (Hymn 150)

They only think about this moment, they do not think about the future, but the Psalm says, “and after”. Wonderful thing! It says, “But no chastening at the time seems to be matter of joy ... but afterwards yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those exercised by it”, Heb 12: 11. O, dear friend, do you think of the afterwards? That is what the gospel is about. Do you think about the afterwards? Where is each one of us going to spend eternity? Where are we going to spend eternity? This matter of which we are speaking addresses the subject, because by virtue of accepting God’s word and the means which He has provided in the death of Christ, we can come into the enjoyment with Him, loved with the same love with which Jesus is loved.

I read in Luke 23 because it says that when the Lord Jesus was being crucified, others came up and they watched, they looked on. There were conditions of apathy. It speaks elsewhere about the rulers and the scribes and the elders, and the passers-by shouted and said to the Lord Jesus, “Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou art Son of God, descend from the cross” (Matt 27: 40) – ‘Come down from the cross and we will believe on you!’ There were the mockers, there were those who spat on the Lord Jesus, the Creator of the world. What a gathering of people there is here!

Then we come to the malefactors, and you might say one of the malefactors had a strange look in his eye. He turned to the other, and it says, “Now one of the malefactors who had been hanged spoke insultingly to him, saying, Art not thou the Christ? Save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost thou too not fear God, thou that art under the same judgment? And we indeed justly”. Life was ebbing out for this man and he took an opportunity; he would never have that opportunity again. Somebody said this was the greatest evidence in the whole of the

New Testament of faith; the greatest evidence of faith in the whole New Testament was what this man did, and he comes into the blessing. It says that whosoever calls on the name of Jehovah shall be saved. This is it, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of Jehovah shall be saved", (Joel 2: 32), you might say, if you pardon the expression, almost by the skin of his teeth. But grace is available and the Lord Jesus, if you think of what he says to Jesus, "Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom". What this man would have seen would have been quite awful as far as the eye could see, but yet in the faith of his soul he could see the Lord Jesus coming in His kingdom. It is a wonderful thing, a wonderful thing! He says, "Remember me Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him, "Verily I say to thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise". He was the first person to enter into paradise with the Lord Jesus, wonderful thing, another kind of person who was at the cross.

It goes from there to the centurion. Think of the effect it had on the centurion. He could say, "Truly this man was Son of God", Matt 27: 54. What a wonderful thing, beloved. It had such an effect he said, "Truly this man was Son of God".

There is another kind of person too. John tells us, "And by the cross of Jesus stood ...", John 19: 25. That is a wonderful stance to take. In the rejection of Jesus Christ today, "And by the cross of Jesus stood his mother", these women who were able to stand – another kind of person who was at the cross. Somebody said that the pagan mob that was present at the cross is less painful than the present world where indifference and apathy abound, where the light of the gospel has spread for almost two thousand years.

That is a very sobering thing if we think about it. Where do you stand in relation to the cross? Paul speaks about the scandal of the cross. What a scandal it was! The Prince, not of this world, but the Prince Jesus, He is the true Prince, the Creator of the world, Jesus; the greatest travesty that ever was committed in this universe was that Jesus died at the hands of sinful men. What a travesty! Think of it, the cross. Now as the Lord Jesus has died and has taken my

place, He is not only the Offerer, He is the Offering and He is the Offering Priest. He exhausted God's judgment in relation to sin. He exhausted it, dear friend. Wonderful thing! And God has been glorified. That is the great point in the gospel. Let us not miss the great point in the gospel, that God has been glorified righteously in result of sin. My blessing and your blessing is only incidental. The great point and the great scheme of things is that God has been glorified. May we come into the whole system that God is being glorified and come into the house! We can join in it.

When Jesus died, as somebody said, as Man it was murder, as God it was an offering; as Man it was martyrdom, as God it was sacrifice; as Man His life was taken from the earth, as God He laid it down; as Man it calls out admiration from our hearts, as God it calls our adoration; as Man we bow our hearts with great respect, as God we bow in homage and worship. How wonderful the gospel is and the message goes out to every corner of the world and persons are being brought into the blessings of the gospel;

Rich blessings unmeasured, conceived in His heart

Do you know something of the richness of God's heart towards you and towards me? We had no rights, "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who once were afar off are become nigh by the blood of the Christ", Eph. 2: 12,13. He has "made peace", it says, "by the blood of his cross", Col. 1: 20. It is a wonderful thing this matter of the cross; it keeps coming up. Paul speaks about it at the beginning of Corinthians, "the word of the cross", 1 Cor. 1: 18. You will notice it is the word, not the work. Oh no, it would not be the work; the work has been accomplished, dear friend, and God has been glorified. "The word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us that are saved it is God's power", to everyone that believes. What a message is going out, dear friend, and God is bringing men into the blessedness, undeserved as it may be, but how very blessed. Dear friend, I want you to think about that, about the cross. May it not lose its effect with us. It is the basis of it all. May it be so for His Name's sake.

EDINBURGH

10 July 2001