

A
WORD
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[PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD](#)

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“HOW MAY WE RISE ...”

Genesis 13: 14-18; Numbers 23: 18-23; Colossians 3: 1-15; Revelation 4: 1

R.D.P. I was impressed this morning with the thought of what is above. We are by nature earth-dwellers, and it is very difficult for us to rise above that level of things, and yet I believe we had a touch this morning as to what was above. I thought of the beautiful hymn:

How may we rise to Thy vast thoughts,
Or apprehend Thy sovereign will –
The grace that sets our souls on high,
And love that brings us nearer still? (Hymn 116)

How can this be known? The enjoyment and expansion of what has come to us through Christ and by the Spirit, is not something which is limited to earth, it is connected with what is above. We are not in eternal conditions yet nor in a sphere where faith has given place to sight, but neither is the Christian’s privilege and blessing conducted in the circumstances of earth.

The epistle to the Philippians, as we have been taught, gives us some example of a person who has had experience of what is above, but comes back down here in relation to testimony, and even as you read the epistle you are impressed with the softness and the quality of the language. It says, “*our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens, from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour”, Phil. 3: 20. I am impressed with these things. I think sometimes we find ourselves unable to be lifted above the earth and what is down here. Even the children know that, if you jump in the air, you do not stay there, you come down pretty quickly; it is called gravity. That is because of what we are by nature. But God has come in by His Spirit and He lifts the believer in his spirit into a sphere which is above the earth. Paul could even speak of something very special; he speaks about “a man in Christ” (2 Cor 12: 2), he speaks about an experience that he is barely able to define.

Perhaps we should see that our Christian life is not just to be lived in relation to the earth and what is down here, because we shall prove

disappointment in that alone, whereas what is divine in relation to the believer takes him above the earth. He is still in the vicinity of what is down here but his commonwealth is in the heavens and he is waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first scripture read refers to Abraham, and perhaps bears on our personal relations here. Abraham had come through a very sorrowful time, he had lost his brother, and we have known times like that. It was very stressful for him. Lot had separated from him, and you could imagine the desolation of his heart; sometimes we go through things in relation to the earth and what is down here which cause us sorrow. Perhaps even at the present time we know something of that in circumstances, and so on; and here Jehovah says to him, after Lot had separated himself from him, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art". He invites him to look in all directions, and then, "Arise, walk through the land according to the length of it and according to the breadth of it; for I will give it to thee". There is an area of things which is to grow in our apprehension, which can be enjoyed, that is not limited even by age or the failure and the deterioration of our bodies, but is something that can be known and enjoyed, and there is an expansiveness to it which can be ours. First of all, as I say, I think you get it in relation to our individual lives, our experiences here. Then I thought of Balaam, not so much to speak of Balaam himself but because God intervenes with him. Balak had put him on the highest point geographically that he could in order that he might curse the people of God. He put him in a place where he would see the extremity of the camp where the stragglers were or in our day where we would take the worst view of the brethren, that aspect of them which may be unattractive, not moving in accordance with the camp but straggling out at the back. But Jehovah intervenes and He puts a word in his mouth so that he sees the people of God as God sees them – a much different view – and he has to say at the end, "it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" He is given an elevated view of things in relation to the saints.

In Colossians typically it is the people going into the land. They are about to cross over, they are not looking back now and the apostle encourages them, "If therefore ye have been raised with the Christ, seek the things which are above, where the Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God: have your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth". What flows out from that! Those verses are so beautiful, "lowliness, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another".

Something happens with a believer who is occupied with what is above, with Christ where He is; our spirits are affected in relation to what is down here. Just that final word, there is a door opened in heaven, wonderful, and John is about to see things which had never been seen before. He is about to be shown by the divine hand how God will conclude everything. He heard a voice as of a trumpet says, "Come up here, and I will shew thee". It is as if the greatness of those things cannot be shown upon the earth, it must be that we must come up there. There are many other scriptures I am sure, but perhaps we could think of these and contemplate how we may rise to God's vast thoughts.

R.H.B. It is very attractive. If we think of the 'how', Colossians brings forward the teaching of the death and resurrection of Christ, and I felt this morning particularly the need of the Spirit's touch. We have access to the Father through Christ and by one Spirit. That is not simply a formula; it is the power consciously to enter in spirit into God's own circumstances, is it not?

R.D.P. Yes, and a whole world of life. We might think of the service of God in relation to what is above, but I think the whole circumstances of the life of God involve what is above. The believer is not conducting what belongs to life here upon and in relation to the earth. There is a testimony to Himself here, but the believer's living conditions, his associations of life are in the heavens, he lives in it.

So when we come to depart from this earth it should be that we have grown accustomed to what is outside of the earth, and to what belongs to heaven.

R.H.B. Mr Darby says in his hymn:

There no stranger-God shall meet thee –
Stranger thou in courts above! (Hymn 76)

That is a challenge is it not? It is a question, I think, in the hymn, whether these things are known or whether they are strange to us.

R.D.P. There is a touch of what is out of the world in Mr Darby's hymns and, as you say:

Stranger thou in courts above

It could almost be an exclamation or a question. Now it begins with us as individuals, because we go through circumstances in which we feel pressure and sometimes loss and they can hold you down to the earth. But here, Jehovah says to Abraham, "Lift up now thine eyes". You do not need to go any distance, but from where you are you are at the centre of what God is doing, look in all these different directions, and He says, "All the land that thou seest will I give to thee". What a concept that is!

R.M.B. Much has been said in ministry as to Lot's choice, which precedes this section. Do you think that whilst there is the support and help that we receive from divine Persons, this begins with the desire on our part for heavenly things rather than worldly things?

R.D.P. I think that is good. So it says of Lot that he chose for himself. It is almost as though Abraham left the direction of his course to God. He recognised that God would choose the path for him. He had already moved on that line by going out not knowing where he was going, and that same God would choose a path for him, would take him to the very best part. So he says to Lot, you choose, and it says, "Lot chose for himself". We know the disaster that flows out of that. The best thing is to move in the path that God chooses for us.

R.M.B. Those of us who are younger may feel that our apprehension of divine things is small, but if we demonstrate in our lives and in the kinds of decision that we have to make, say as to our families or our business or whatever it might be, if as a result of those decisions God can see that at least we value divine things,

spiritual things, then He will be pleased, do you think, to bring the light of them to us? That is what he did for Abraham.

R.D.P. Yes, and the words, “from the place where thou art” are important. Abraham did not have to take a journey to get to a different place and then God would speak to him again. We might feel everything has gone wrong, and that we need to get back to where we were. It is “from the place where thou art”. If you will only lift up your eyes God will show you what He will give you, and open up to you a heavenly vista by the Spirit. He will do it from where you are. Every one of us here today can have this opportunity.

J.S.G. Does it include the suggestion that even taking account of the sorrow and the shame and our own part in it, God has something beyond? There is something beyond what we have proved negatively, and that is what God has provided and made available, and are we seeking to enter into it?

R.D.P. Yes, I think Abraham would have felt part of the responsibility for Lot’s course because it was Abraham who had gone down into Egypt, and who in the mercy of God had been recovered from Egypt. Lot had come with him but it seems that he had left his heart there, and I think Abraham would feel that; and undoubtedly in our circumstances part of what we have to bear is responsibility for our own part in what has happened involving others. This is a desolate scene here, and God turns it into a scene of glory. If we could only trust God that even from the place where we are at this moment, if we could lift up our eyes, by the Spirit He would show us that we are at the very centre of His thoughts. I think it is a very fine thing.

D.E.R. From the divine side there is no reason why we should not rise to the height of divine thought. God has so effected things from His side that the way is open. The reason we do not is the extent to which we fail to go in for the height of divine things.

R.D.P. So in the great supper in Luke 14 He says, “all things are ready” (v 17), everything is done, everything is provided, and what you find is that it was earth that detained them. It was the land and the cattle, and a wife that detained them all. It was earth that

detained them, held them back from the great provision that God had made. It is not only the service of God that involves what is above, but the whole of the Christian's life should be related to what is above, He has made every provision for that and the invitation is open to us.

D.E.R. The attractiveness of what is above would make it all the more worthwhile to be separate from what is just of earth, from what is natural with people or from the pull of Egypt. The attractiveness of what is above far surpasses anything that this world can offer.

R.D.P. Yes. I think Abraham loved Lot. In fact he is ready later to go to war in the valley of the kings to recover his brother, but his first regard and his greatest love was what was for God, and the exercises to hold those things in balance are seen in Abraham. He is a man who pitches his tents by the oaks of Mamre and some stability begins to enter into his soul. There is no stability here. It is when we begin to move on spiritual lines and to live in relation to a sphere of things that are above the earth that we begin to get some stability. Abraham becomes established from this point on. Later when his brother is lost, they knew they would find Abraham by the oaks of Mamre.

R.H.B. It was said of the Lord Himself, "He who comes from above is above all" (John 3: 31), morally transcending every other, but it is a striking description of Him, is it not, beyond John's speaking of Him as coming into manhood and contemplating His glory. "He who comes from above" is almost characteristic, and he speaks of "no one has gone up into heaven, save he who came down out of heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven", John 3: 13. That was said here in what you have described as the desolate scene, is it not?

R.D.P. Whilst I am sure it would apply to the Lord coming from glory, it is not put that way, it is "from above". It almost gives the impression not just of a place but of a state of things from what was above, and He lived in relation to that, did He not? I think it is a fine scripture.

A.M. “Arise, walk through the land”: would God have Abraham get an enhanced impression of what was available to him, the detail of it? We sang this morning:

Every feature Christ reflecting (Hymn 83)

There is in what is above what is to be enjoyed in detail, is there not?

R.D.P. I think that is good. It is not only “the land that thou seest will I give to thee”, but “walk through the land according to the length of it and according to the breadth of it; for I will give it to thee”. It is experience, it is putting your feet upon this territory, and I am sure there is something in that. You will never know the full savour of the divine things objectively, but you will learn the sweetness of them in experience, in the way your feet can tread it. I suppose it would be true to say that we shall never tread it all while we are here, but you can experience the inheritance of God and feel it for yourself: it is a great blessing.

T.J.H. Do you have an impression of what is said here, “I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth”? Later on it is more of a heavenly thought as to the stars in the heavens, is it not?

R.D.P. Yes, I was not thinking of the detail, but here I suppose it would relate to what was connected with what was down here, the heavenly side comes in later. I was trying to pick up on this invitation to Abraham to lift him out of despondency. It does not say that but you get the impression that he was desolate. He had seen Lot go and pitch his tent as far as Sodom and you can imagine the feelings of Abraham’s heart as he would see his brother go there, despondency, and then God says to Him, You look up from where you are now. It is necessary for us to lift our eyes up because there is no salvation, there is no blessing and no lasting joy connected with earth.

T.J.H. Our brother was suggesting as to separation, which we need to bear in mind; is it not suggestive of God’s thoughts being wide but our feet in a narrow path. Then very quickly he comes to an upward look when he comes to the oaks of Mamre, and he built there an altar to Jehovah.

R.D.P. Yes, I do not think He is showing him a narrow path here but rather the full expanse of His thoughts. The land that was given to them actually stretched eventually as far as the Euphrates, did it not? It was vast, and even in the experience of the people of Israel they took up only a very small part of it in the ways of God, but the vastness of it was before Him. It was to the north and the south and the east and the west; it is all the directions of the compass and all that that involved, and He says, "I will give it to thee". As a result of it, it says, "Abram moved his tents, and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre", and becomes related to the purpose of God.

G.C.B. I suppose it was not a great move – say more about that. He was already in relation to God, he was free and God was free to speak to him. Is it like the move from Romans to Colossians, and Colossians to Ephesians. Are we always to be prepared for something nearer to the fulness of God's purpose?

R.D.P. I believe so. He "moved his tents, and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron". As you say, it is not as if he seemed to undertake a vast journey, but he just went and moved to a different place. Maybe we need to do that. You may say, here we are in our circumstances, we cannot change our circumstances overnight, but perhaps if we moved our tents by the oaks of Mamre it would begin to make a change in relation to everything that we did. I like what you say; there is no great physical distance involved in this but there is a change of position.

J.S.G. I am thankful for what our brother brings in. I wondered whether it is a lesson for us that we need to look for what is ahead before we walk there, before we move there. If we really feel that we are going through things in Romans, as we ought to with the Spirit's help, we should have our eye on Ephesians. God has something great in view Himself beyond anything that we could have conceived, and the experimental side is essential to possession, is it not? The thought of inheritance and possession seems to be stressed here, that it would be yours. Everybody should be interested in that, should they not?

R.D.P. I think so. “Where there is no vision the people cast off restraint”, Prov 29: 18. So that as you take up Romans you have Ephesians ahead. That is what Paul had in the writing of it, you see that. The people cast off restraint where there is no vision, where you are not lifting up your eyes. You can be amongst the saints at the present time and see only weakness and failure and problems.

Well lift up your eyes and ask the Spirit of God to give you some vision, because the enemy will try to grind us into the ground, and if I am like that I am no use in what God is doing amongst the saints at the present time.

J.S.G. Just to speak practically as to what we commit ourselves to; I confess that I have found Mr. Stoney’s ministry so challenging that I wondered how much I could read. I am really longing to read more of it. I have not read it all yet, but I think that we should have in view that even if there is experimental demand, the things that God has in mind are really great.

R.D.P. I believe that is right, because along with the view there always comes a challenge and along with that will come power. I think that is why you get Paul’s two prayers in Ephesus. Firstly in chapter 1 he says, “I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is in you, and the love which ye have towards all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you ... at my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him” (vv 15-17). I think that is like vision. But then the second prayer in chapter 3 brings in the power for it, where he bows his knees to the Father, “of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named ... to be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man” (vv 15,16).

There is something here I think. The challenge is there but along with the challenge is the power to take it up.

D.E.R. What Abraham had to lift up his eyes to was the inheritance, and we have a rich inheritance. But just as Israel was reluctant to go up into the land of their inheritance and possess it, so we may be; so that it involves, as I think our brother has been indicating, the exercises of Romans, the Passover and the passage of the Red

Sea, the overcoming Amalek, the conflict in the wilderness and then the brazen serpent and the springing well, all with a view to our crossing the Jordan into the land where there is the stability of Mamre.

R.D.P. That is right, and the challenge is that when you trace the journeys of the children of Israel, in a very short time they begin to murmur and look back, and then their memories grew more and more vivid as they went along. They remembered things they probably never had, they remembered the leeks and the onions and the garlic, and all the things about Egypt. Let us remember what was said as to gravity. By nature we will always drop back to the ground, we will do it, and we need help to rise up.

The power of the Spirit of God is available and there is teaching and help but I believe we always need what is deliberate. I think Colossians brings that out, set your mind upon it. I like what our brother said that he started on Mr. Stoney and he is going to keep going at it. Well, that is good. My thought today is that not only the service of God, but the whole of Christian life is to be lived at elevation, and that is what I would like to know more about.

R.H.B. If our brother keeps going with Mr Stoney, he is not only going to get lifted up himself but we are going to get the benefit of it too. That is the point, is it not, that it is those who have experience in the things that you are speaking about that are able to help others in them.

R.D.P. I am sure that is right. I would encourage the younger people to read. I find Mr Stoney is very graphic in his writings and his illustrations help you, and you remember them. He says, for instance, you do not learn to play the piano by always playing the same piece, you go on to something a little more difficult, and these things help us, and we find that there is more beyond. And it is not just about reading ministry and acquiring knowledge; it is about the experience of being with God in relation to His great things.

D.E.R. Israel came into the inheritance to the extent to which they put their foot upon the land. That is the word, is it not, in the

beginning of Joshua, that God has in mind that they should come into the fulness and the richness of all that is in His thoughts for us.

But we need to go in for them experimentally to get the gain of them.

R.D.P. That is right, and then you will find that despite the fact that the enemy will dog every step you take, the Spirit of God is there to strengthen you in that. You find that they failed when they got into the land because they did not dispossess things, and these are all the exercises of the way. But undoubtedly for us the whole of heavenly experience is open for us.

Now just briefly as to the other scriptures – what a thing it is to see the saints as God sees them! We have often said that this view in Numbers is the saints at their worst, and we can get heavily detained by the extremity of the camp. You may say there were things there in the camp of Israel which were not attractive. The stragglers of the camp of Israel were there. Balak indicates to Balaam, the prophet he had hired to curse the people, that he would take him to a place where he could see the extremity of them, that is all he could see. All you will see about the brethren is the bad things; it is possible to conduct our lives and almost relish the negative things amongst the brethren, it is possible to do that. But that is not Christianity, it is not what it is. God intervenes with Balaam and puts a word in his mouth, and he says, “God brought him out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of a buffalo” and “Jehovah his God is with him, and the shout of a king is in his midst”. These are very precious things, are they not? You get an elevated view of the saints, of something that is above the earth.

R.H.B. I was thinking that if you get a view of that you must see the saints as God sees them, “apprehend with all the saints” (Eph 3: 18), God’s elect. It is not just a personal view, is it, but what you are speaking of, what is heavenly, must involve the saints according to God’s thoughts about them? Is that your thought?

R.D.P. It is very striking that you should quote that, “apprehend with all the saints”. You might have thought he could have said

apprehend with divine Persons, but “with all the saints”. It is as if you are not going to enjoy it in its fulness without them. Here it is, “the shout of a king is in his midst”. I wonder if we could discern that at the present time. You say, well, does it apply at the present time? I believe it applies at the present time that the shout of a King is amongst His people. It says He has “brought him out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of a buffalo. For there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel”. Jacob and Israel are the saints in the purpose of God and in the ways of God, both of them. He says, in that day it will be said of both, Jacob and Israel, “What hath God wrought!”. What wonderful things these are, but it is from an elevated view.

A.M. He did not hear the murmurings in the tents and things that might have occupied those who were there, but from this point of view he says, “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob”.

R.D.P. Yes, think of having a view like that. You say, well, you are being naïve. I do not believe it is naïve actually, but seeing things as God sees them.

A.M. He speaks of himself later as a man of opened eye (see Num 24: 3).

R.D.P. He does, yes, and there is a note of remorse with him, he says, “I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh”, Num 24: 17. Balaam is a man who goes to his own end, as far as we see from scripture, he is lost, and yet he is forced to use these words about the people of God, and God puts those words there. It cannot be without point that these words are in the scriptures for us.

C.C.D.R. I was thinking of your encouragement, “Lift up now thine eyes”. There is much just in those few words, is there not? I was thinking of Isaac meditating in the field. He lifted up his eyes and it is amazing what he saw coming to him by way of provision and support, and his wife too of course.

R.D.P. Very good, you mean in relation to Rebecca coming, the camels were coming.

C.C.D.R. Exactly.

R.D.P. The camels were coming. Think of the anticipation of Christ as He lifts up His eyes, and she lifts up her eyes, and there is a meeting, is there not? That is a good scripture. In a certain sense the lifting up of the eyes is to be characteristic, it is an assembly feature, and it meets what there is in Christ, because part of the link of the union between Rebecca and Isaac was that first meeting of the eyes. It is remarkable that it says that.

R.H.B. I do not want to lower the level, but it is remarkable that man can do that physically, is it not? Much of the lower creation is unable to do that, their eyes are permanently fixed on the ground and on the earth, but man has that ability physically which is indicative of something, is it?

R.D.P. Well, I had not thought of that. It would be indicative, I suppose, of the fact that God has especially intervened in relation to man, and what man's spirit is, the ability to look up; and it is almost as though scripture reminds us constantly to look up, to look away from the place where you are. We are spending too much time perhaps looking at the ground and need to see that God has given us this provision to be able to lift up our eyes and see things as He sees them. He has taken on the saints, He is not going to change His mind about them. Everything that enters into this present time, and what will happen between now and the Lord's coming was known when He took them on and He is not going to change His mind. Now let us lift up our eyes from the place where we are and see north, south, east and west.

A.M. It is what God has done, is it not? "At this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!", as to Abraham it is, "I will give to thee". It is a question of what God is doing. In men's hands things fail, but what God does will never break down.

R.D.P. Very fine. We can see that objectively in Christ, man will be secured eternally through His precious work and the shedding of His blood, and the thoughts of God for men chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, but it says, "it shall be said of Jacob and of

Israel, What hath God wrought!". There is going to be an answer, worked out sometimes through circumstances of turmoil in the saints, which will answer to the fulness of His thoughts. What a triumph it will be!

R.M.B. What does this mean for us in practice, lifting up our eyes?

What I am thinking is that if, shall we say, as a result of this occasion the exercise is stimulated with us to answer to the challenge, how do we go about it, where do we start?

R.D.P. Well, you tell us how you would start please.

R.M.B. I was thinking on a very simple level, I suppose one place would be to read the Scriptures, do you think? The New Testament in particular gives us God's thoughts about us, does it not? Do you think one place to start would be to make time each day to read the Scriptures and to pray about them?

R.D.P. Well, I believe that might bring us to Colossians because I do think that what is deliberate enters into the things of God. "If therefore ye have been raised with the Christ, seek the things which are above, where the Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God: have your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth". It is almost as if he is saying, you are about to go into the land, the world really now is behind you, your faces are turned towards God's inheritance, you are going to go into there, now set your mind on it and seek it. Do you think there is something deliberate in that? He says, "not on the things that are on the earth". I have probably said this many times before, but if I ask everyone here to take a piece of paper and write down the things that are upon the earth, they could probably make a long list. The young people could write down the things that are upon the earth, they could write down their school aims, their jobs, their careers and relationships, ambitions, and so on; and then if I said on the other side of the paper write the things which are above, you would probably find the list is much shorter. But here he is saying, set your mind on those things.

The things that are down here are going to last fifty, sixty years, seventy years perhaps at most, the things that are above are what

you are going to live in eternally. So set your mind on that. I do think that what is deliberate enters into it, a deliberate step of setting our minds. I think we need to do it every day.

R.M.B. Yes, and reading the ministry has been referred to. I suppose what we get in the ministry is the fruit of men who have walked through the land; the fruit of what they came to? But since you raise the point, what would you say are some of the things that are above?

R.D.P. I can only tell you what I do remember reading in ministry, not today but previously, that that list in Hebrews is perhaps some indication. It says, "ye have come to mount Zion; and to the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem; and to myriads of angels ... and to Jesus", Heb 12: 22-24. You can see that they are things that are not bounded by earth, "the assembly of the firstborn who are registered in heaven". It has been suggested that that may be some suggestion as to it, but it is left open, it is really left for enquiry and for us to find out. You are going to live in relation to these things for ever. Are you going to go there and not know anything about it at all? And yet you have the Spirit of God. We have the Scriptures.

The Scriptures at times do not give us much detail, do they, as to what is eternal, for instance? It is almost as if that is to be found out with Christ and by the Spirit.

R.M.B. Again, we can be simple about it can we not? Would it include such things as the glory of being part of the assembly? Is that something that we appreciate? Would it include such things as sonship, the fact that we are the sons of God? Then we get these expressions in the New Testament as to being in Christ, well, what does that mean? That is a whole area for us to explore is it not?

R.D.P. I am sure it is, set your mind upon it, and then find out more about that. Put your feet upon that bit of the territory, make it your own. In order to do that it is more than just reading ministry, it involves making that truth mine. So that we can say that, not only have we acquired knowledge, but we have learned God in the treading of the territory as Abraham was invited to do.

G.C.B. As to making this a matter of prayer that we should get into these things, do you think that many of our earthly matters we could just mention to the Father, but the things that are above need more time spent on them with divine Persons? The needs of the saints spiritually may be agonised over, but the earthly things, matters in our circumstances can well be mentioned in confidence to the Father and left with Him, can they not?

R.D.P. I think so. It says, “enter into thy chamber, and ... pray to thy Father which is in secret”, Matt 6: 6. I think our brother mentioned what was simple, and perhaps we need that, that we do have things to care for here, we have responsibilities here and they are not taken away. We have things which need to be discharged, but that is not your life. Your life is in the things that are above, your commonwealth is in the heavens. I am trying to bring some simple illustration into this. If you are going abroad to a country for the first time you would buy books to find out something about the area, a map, for instance, and other guides. You have not seen it yet but you find out about it, you find out some of the interesting features of it. Go in for these things more and take time. Paul says to the Philippians, “Not that I have already obtained the prize”, and he says, “if any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead”, Phil 3: 11,12. It is almost as if one of the things that Paul had before him was, What was the truth and experience of the resurrection from among the dead? He had not arrived there yet. That is remarkable when you think of the capacity of Paul the apostle.

G.C.B. I recently read one of the volumes of Collected Writings as to that. Mr Darby makes a lot of just the point you made, that Paul had not arrived, that he was striving as to it.

R.D.P. Yes, and then he was striving as to the completion of his course, and the goal. That involved time, of course – you mentioned time – and God was going to use it, but there were things in time, like the resurrection from among the dead. I suspect that most of us would be surprised that Paul should admit that. Perhaps some might even be bold enough to say, We will tell you about it. But Paul said, I have not arrived at it yet, almost as if his feet were still to tread

securely and worshipfully on the ground of the resurrection from among the dead and what that involved.

D.E.R. Colossians envisages persons who not only appreciate the fact that Christ has died for us, but have come to it that we have died with Him. If we are to enter into the things which are above, there must be some appreciation of the fact that we have died with Christ and to be found in the gain of having died with Christ, because we have our mind on the things above he goes on to say, “for ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God”.

R.D.P. Yes, and as you say, it is *with* Him, died *with* Him and raised *with* Him. Therefore I think this journey is conducted *with* Him. It is not something that is towards Him exactly, but with Him. I think the taking up of spiritual things involves Christ’s presence and nearness, and of course the power of the Holy Spirit. But let these things be with us. If you spoke about this in the lecture rooms of the world they would not know what you are talking about. The things of the earth would have relevance, they would fill up your mind and your time with the things that are of the earth, and many of them are interesting things but they are limited by time. But here you have something that as to its scope is boundless. I question whether you will ever reach the limit of the things that are above because they are eternal things, and they are open to us at the present time.

I just thought of that scripture in Revelation, “a door opened in heaven”, and he says, “Come up here, and I will shew thee the things which must take place after these things”. I am not suggesting that the saints get involved in prophecy, but I think the great thoughts and judgments of God that we were speaking of yesterday are something that the believer considers worshipfully, and the great movements in Revelation in the concluding of everything involve the saints. As we said yesterday, “God has judged your judgment upon her” (Rev 18: 20), but I think that these things are to be seen from an elevated sphere.

D.E.R. Before we close, just say something about the Spirit’s service, because it is the Spirit’s power alone which will help us to go

through that heavenly door.

R.D.P. Yes, that is good, "I became in the Spirit on the Lord's day", Rev 1: 10. You get these two references to becoming in the Spirit in Revelation. You get one before the addresses to the assembly, and that is significant, and then when this door is opened in heaven "I became in the Spirit", it must involve that.

EAST FINCHLEY

2 January 2005

Key to initials

R.H. Brown; R.M.Brown; G.C.Bywater, Buckhurst Hill; J.S.Gray;
T.J.Harvey;

A.Martin, Buckhurst Hill; R.D.Plant, Birmingham;
C.C.D.Remmington, St. Albans; D.E.Remmington, St. Albans

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

Ron Plant

Luke 19: 37-47; Jonah 2: 7,8; Luke 15: 14-20, 25-32

I know that we have all been very affected by the disaster in the Indian Ocean this past week, and I suppose most of us have a sense of not quite knowing what to say. I think it is right to remember in our prayer those who mourn and those who are in sorrow, and I am sure that that is something which many have done. One thing we do know about it is that the event that brought it about is an evidence of the almighty power of God. No other hand could have moved the earth in relation to that, and we must bow in the presence of His greatness. The outcome of these things we have to leave. I remember reading in the book of poems about a brother whose child was killed on a railway line, and he said, 'Who know Thy heart, O God, can trust Thy hand' (p. 18). And sometimes in life we have express ourselves in that way – 'I who know his heart can trust his hand'. The mighty power of God is something that should affect us all. I thought about Job after all those long chapters where he had protested his innocence and his blamelessness before God, and his friends had sought to help him and had done rather the opposite, God intervenes personally and speaks to him, and He speaks to him on the basis of His almighty power.

I do not think you can leave out the mighty power of God in creation in relation to the way that He speaks to man, because that is the way He spoke to Job. At one point where Job says, he would put his hand upon his mouth and say no more; God speaks to him very strongly and says, "Gird up now thy loins like a man", Job 40: 7. Then He says to him, and it has always affected me, "Hast thou an arm like God?" (v 9); tremendous expression in Job! I hope the young people will look into some of the details of Job. We have been speaking about pursuing certain things, and I think that one thing you can do is to become familiar with the scriptures and the richness of the expressions you get in the books like Job. "Hast thou an arm like God?" – is it possible that the events of the past week

might reach out and God's mighty arm extend even into this room today, arrest your heart at the power and might of the God with whom we have to do? He has always spoken in creation. Romans says, "the invisible things of him are perceived ... through the things that are made", Rom. 1: 20. If you look at those references in Job you will be impressed right now as to the one "who shut up the sea with doors, when it burst forth, issuing out the womb? When I made the cloud its garment ... Hast thou entered as far as the springs of the sea? and hast thou walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed unto thee", Job 38: 8,9,16,17. All these things are brought before Job to weigh upon the spirit of this proud man because God wanted him to change his mind, He wanted to save him.

The mighty hand of God was upon Job as He sought him and He draws attention to this power in creation; and tonight He would come to you in the power of His grace because He would love to make you change your mind. Maybe you are set on a particular course of things, or it may be that you are still a sinner in your sins.

Or perhaps there is someone here who has never known what it is to have a transaction with God as to their sins. You might even have been brought up in Christian fellowship, you might have known and had the truth ringing in your ears for most of your life and yet never have known what it is to have a transaction with God, and time is slipping away. We sang that in our hymn:

Night is gath'ring quickly (Hymn 154)

I know there are brethren here who would say to me that what comes into the gospel is much stronger than changing your mind, but I want to just stay with that tonight. Perhaps you are on a course in opposition to God, and I believe that the glad tidings would come and speak to each one of us, that we might be prepared to change our mind. We are not speaking here in the gospel about the direct application of His mighty power, that is the background to this week, but the direct speaking to you is God speaking in His grace. The soft persuasive words of the grace of God are coming to you tonight, and they are as powerful as what He does through these actions in

creation. The grace of God will be proved to be the greatest thing there ever was in the universe, the most powerful thing there ever was.

We read this morning in the house of the time at the end of the Lord's life, in the house in John 13 where they shared that supper together, and the feet-washing that followed. The section we read about was where John leans upon the breast of Jesus to ask Him who it was who would deliver Him up and the Lord confides a secret to him as to who would betray Him, and He says, "He it is to whom I, after I have dipped the morsel, give it" (v 26). We were speaking about that for a little while. The morsel apparently was the best part of that meal, the Lord took it up and in the kindness of His heart He extended it to Judas. There you had a man who was already set upon betraying the Lord of glory, one who had companied with Him, who prophetically the Lord could speak about.

He says, "For it is not an enemy ... then could I have borne it ... a man mine equal, mine intimate, my familiar friend ...", Ps 55: 12,13.

Can you think of the Lord Jesus at that supper of those that He loved, when He had taken all their feet in His hands, and I do believe He would have washed Judas' feet (because it says, when He had washed their feet (see John 13: 12)), then He extended the best part of the meal to Judas in the kindness of His love because even then he might change his mind. What a thing the gospel is, that even to a man who has set upon betraying him, the Lord Jesus in His grace at that time could extend such kindness to him. Think of man today who has turned away, and perhaps you have turned away, and perhaps many times the glad tidings message has come to you and you have spurned it. You may even in your conduct and in your ways be occupied in that which is dishonourable to Christ, I do not know. I do not know anyone here to that degree. But it may be that there is someone here who has gone to that extent, and he knows about it all. How those words should have convicted Judas as he was there when the Lord Jesus was washing their feet gently says to Peter, "ye are clean, but not all", John 13: 10. Think of the feelings of the Lord Jesus towards you, even today, as He would say to you

that the very best He has He has for you. He wants you to change your mind. It may be that you have had to do with Him long ago in relation to your sins, but I believe the gospel is not just for persons who do not know Christ, it is for *all* of us, because anyone who says they do not need the gospel after they believe does not know themselves. Very often we can in our Christian lives go on a course of incredible hardness, and you are determined that nothing is going to move you from it, and only the gospel can break you down.

Perhaps there is someone here like that in these last days, before the quickly gathering night gathers completely. You can see it outside, you can still see a glimmering of the day, and that is like the gospel day. It may be tonight for the last time it comes to you, and He would extend the infinite goodness and blessedness of His grace to you. What does it say of Judas? As we noted this morning, instead of a change of mind it says Satan entered into his heart, and you almost get a picture of a man who goes out from the room almost seething with indignation. Satan had entered into his heart (see John 13: 27), and he goes out on that dreadful course that would lead to the betrayal of Christ. Beloved friend, he goes out and Judas becomes one of the very few persons in scripture of whom we could say, they are lost for ever. Very sad thing. I wonder if anyone here needs to change their mind. I wonder if just for a moment you could allow the blessedness of the appeal of Christ just to come into your circumstances and your life, and allow it to bathe your heart with its goodness, and to change your mind in relation to whatever it is before God that you need to change.

I read in Luke. I have always been affected by this section of the gospel. I have referred to it before. It is at the end of the Lord's service in Luke's gospel. You can trace His footsteps in Luke. This was the houseless, homeless Stranger, at the end of His journey of love, and He is coming back to Jerusalem for the last time. His life was coming to an end, and He was coming back to Jerusalem for the last time. His life was coming to an end, and He was coming back to Jerusalem for the last time. I understand from the geography of Jerusalem that the mount of Olives lies at the back,

it looms over the city, and here you can see this description. He comes to the descent of the mount of Olives and He comes down the slope of the hill and there is Jerusalem before Him, and He stops, and then it says, "he wept over it". Is that not affecting? You think of all the appeal there had been in Luke's gospel, and particularly the appeal there had been to this city, and all the love that had been extended by Jesus, and all the sufferings that He had known, and all the way that He had been amongst them, and the way that He had been in their houses and He had healed the sick and He had raised the dead, had felt all their sorrows. The expenditure of divine love had been total in Jesus in Luke's gospel.

Now He is coming down to Jerusalem and He stops and He weeps over the city because they would not change their mind. It is a very sad thing. Beloved friend, I wonder if there is anyone here who is taking up an intransigent position. I know nothing of you, I can honestly say that, but it may be you are determined that you will shut your heart to the claims of God. It may be that you would shut out everything as far as the gospel is concerned, or it may be that in your life in some way there is something that is keeping you away from God, and we all know how strong things can be. Yet the grace of Christ would be bathing your heart tonight. He weeps over it. He says, "If thou hadst known, even thou, even at least in this thy day, the things that are for thy peace". What wonderful words they are, the wonderful words that come out in the glad tidings upon you. The same God who has all the mighty power in His hand that we have spoken of and yet in Jesus there is the speaking in love in grace towards man, and tonight I believe it is towards you. He says, "If thou hadst known, even thou, even at least in this thy day". Now this is your day, you will never have another. Sometimes we may look wistfully at the past and wonder about how things were then and whether things were better, and so on, but you did not live then, you are living today. Today is your day, and today is the day when the Lord Jesus in all the appeal of His love would express His feelings in relation to you. He was going into Jerusalem to die. He was going into that city that hated Him. He said, "They hated me without a cause", John 15: 25. He was going into that city to be taken by the

hands of wicked men. He was going to know the travesty of that awful trial. He was going to know the loneliness of total isolation when all forsook Him and fled. The brethren know I love Mr Darby's poems, and he says of that time:

No eye was found to pity,
No heart to bear Thy woe,
But shame, and scorn, and spitting;
None cared Thy Name to know. (Hymn 190)

And He is that same Saviour on that last journey into Jerusalem, and He stops and weeps over people like you and me. He says, "If thou hadst known, even thou, even at least in this thy day, the things that are for thy peace". What a thing it will be if you miss the things that are for your peace; if you miss, first of all, the knowledge of your sins being met through His precious work, if you miss the blessedness of what He can be to you as a Saviour and a Shepherd and a Friend and a Prophet, Priest and King, as the hymn-writer says:

Our Lord, our Life, our Way, our End (Hymn 54)

What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus! You may say it is a very simple sort of preaching. It is very simple.

I read Luke 15 last week and I recalled an experience I had at my work some years ago when my Director called me to give me some reports. I had known him as a hard-driving man as we would say. He had found his way to the top in a fairly ruthless way and he treated people accordingly. I knew he was not very well, but I did not know that in fact he was very ill. After I had reported to him and as I was about to go he expressed to me the fact that he had faith in God and that he was a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ; and I could not take in what I was hearing. I could not understand this, and we spoke for a little while, and he explained that he was one who had been brought up in a Christian home when he was a boy and he had gone away from it, gone away completely and found his own way in the world, and as many men do had driven his way to the top. Some of us here know a little bit about what is required to reach some of these senior positions and the kind of things that they have to do,

and the way that ruthlessness can become part of their code of life.

Yet here was a man who was saying to me that he had been recalled to his faith and he was a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. I could not believe what I was hearing. He knew what I was and we spoke for a while and I said we must speak again, and he said he would like to do that after he had been to the hospital the next day.

By 11 o'clock the next morning he was dead. You know, these things leave a mark on you. When you speak about the treading of the pathway and you speak about experience in divine things, it is not just a question of learning everything from books, because you learn a lot of things from life. My senior colleague was away on holiday, and he came back and he called me in. He said how profoundly affected he was by this sudden death, and he said to me, Did you know, before he died he had got religion? He said that before he had gone away he said to him, while you are away I want you to read the Bible and I want you to look up Luke's gospel chapter 15. He said, I took no notice at all and went on my holidays; and then I heard he had died and I felt before I came back that I ought to go to church. He said, I went to church and do you know what they read? Luke's gospel, chapter 15. He said, It has profoundly affected me. These men were persons, as I say, who were tough men who had found their way in business and all the single mindedness involved; and here was an instance where, as the writer says, through the foolishness of the preaching He can save those that believe (see 1 Cor 1: 21). He can reach into the hardest heart. This world will train you to have a very hard shell about you, and you might feel that you are proof against anything that God can do, but He reserves the right to the entrance into a man's or a woman's soul at any time. I only mention that because perhaps we regard Luke 15 as a simple scripture, and perhaps if I had just read Luke 15 you would have thought, well, I thought he would read something a bit different from that tonight, but it is the foolishness of the preaching, it is the simplicity of the word that might touch you.

My word tonight is, He wants you to change your mind. Perhaps there is something that you are thinking, perhaps there is

something you are doing, perhaps there is something, there is a little voice in you speaking to you and maybe it is conscience. The love of Christ is appealing to you. The first thing is be sure you are right with God about your sins. You boys and girls here, you children here, if you are old enough to understand what I say, it is a truth that you have to learn that sin is upon you. It is not exactly initially because of what you have done, but because of the nature and condition that you are in as a man, or a boy, or a girl here in this human condition, born in sin. The form of it is there and very quickly you become a sinner too in practice, and God has an issue with the sinner. God has provided the answer to your sin and your sins in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary, God's Son. God has provided the answer in Jesus to everything you will ever need. I wonder if you could simply believe that tonight. I wonder if you could. He wants you to know what it is to have a Saviour tonight. These things are very precious.

I read about Jonah because he was a man who knew God, and he was a man who did not like what God had indicated to him.

He did not like what he had been told to do and he ran away from God. Have you ever done that? Have you ever run away from Him? "Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah; and he went down to Joppa", Jonah 1: 3. Very striking, if you read this chapter and trace the course of Jonah's history, you will see it is all downward. He went *down* to Joppa, he went *down* into the ship, and so it goes on all the way through the chapter because the course of a man, or a woman, in opposition to God is downwards.

You might say the world in which we live is one in which man is going upwards, in his knowledge, in his technology, in his brilliance, in his medical research, now they even think that they have the possibility of cloning human life. You wonder how far things will be allowed to go; you do. All these things represent the brilliance of man's mind. But go and ask the man in the street whether man morally is going up or going down. You will find he is going down.

And you and I are part of that, and only God can arrest it, but He wants to come into the course of your life and change your mind;

and He wanted to change Jonah's mind and He was going to do it.

He goes down into the ship. The children know the story of Jonah, how the sailors thought the storm was upon them because it was unlucky to have Jonah in the boat, and how they cast him into the sea, and how the great fish was prepared by God to swallow up Jonah. This story persists even today that Jonah represents something that is unlucky. That is how it persists. What the believer knows is that Jonah represents a man in whom God was working, and the storm and the fish were prepared by God in order that Jonah's mind might be changed; and here in the belly of the great fish in the ocean you get these remarkable words, his prayer, and this one verse I have noticed before says, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy". Beloved, life is full of vanities.

One of the greatest vanities of all is that your own will and mind, and man's mind, generally knows better than God and that you are better able to plan for your own future and your own way than God; and that you are better able to plan your own future and your own way than God could ever plan a way for you. It is the greatest vanity of all. We had a brother once, a preacher, who said to us, If you plan to please yourself then you have chosen the hardest taskmaster you will ever find, because you will never please yourself, never. Jonah goes all this way down into the belly of the great fish, and he says, If you pursue lying vanities you are missing out on mercy. He changed his mind. If you pursue the things that belong to man and the mind of man, then you forsake your own mercy, and the mercy of God is towards mankind at the present time. I wonder if that is something that affects you and appeals to you, because this is Jonah here and God went to great lengths with him to change his mind.

I read the final scripture in Luke 15, I have often been affected by it and I would like to finish with it because it is a very beautiful section and you should read it all. It represents, as we have been taught, not exactly man's wilfulness in straying away from God, but the loss that God feels because He has lost His creature.

He feels it. It says, "What man of you having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the

wilderness and go after that which is lost" (v 4). Very affecting. It is not stressing here man's responsibility exactly, in the early part anyway, it is not stressing exactly man's sinnership, it is emphasising feelings of the blessed God that something that He treasured and valued is for the moment lost to Him, and He expends all that He has to go and find it. What a lovely chapter it is. Heaven is waiting for the sinner to come back, and the angels in heaven. We were speaking about that earlier in the house. What great beings angels are. You know the angels were there at the creation of the earth, "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38: 7), the angels were there. When Jesus came in, the angels were there and the multitude of the heavenly host; and the angels were there when Jesus goes into death and in His resurrection. You can read that in the gospel, they go into the tomb and there is an angel sitting there, and it says, "his look was as lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled" (Matt 28: 3,4); the greatness of the angel is there.

You will find them in Revelation, you will find them when it comes to the opening of the great seals of the book of God's judgments, you will find the angels there in relation to that. What a wonderful thing it is that such great beings are rejoicing in heaven because one sinner comes back to God. What a thing that is. Then there is joy in heaven at the fact that one repenting sinner comes back to God.

The heavens is a mighty thought. You have the atmosphere, heaven you can see around you, and you have the heavens where the planets are, you have the heaven where the angels dwell, you have the heaven where God dwells, you have the thought of the third heaven, you have the glory of the One who went beyond all the heavens, and here in this chapter you have heaven, this mighty thought, rejoicing because one repenting sinner comes back to God. Have you thought of that? Have you thought that these mighty beings and heaven itself could be affected by you today if you change your mind. This younger son did that. In a far country God brings him to a point where he changes his mind. Now you will say to me, it involves repentance, and of course it involves repentance.

Luke 15 several times refers to repentance, but the first step of it I

think is where God's wonderful grace works with you to change your mind.

Beloved friend, I just leave these thoughts with you, along with that solemn warning of the older son who would not change his mind. It says of him that he, "would not go in", and the father comes out and beseeches him. You may say, all the love of God is in the beseeching of the father for his older son, and maybe it is for you.

The man's refusal to go in is not the last word in Luke 15. The last word of the father's beseeching; and the last word of this preaching, beloved, is not what you may say or think; the last word as you go out of the door is the word of Him who is beseeching you that you might change your mind.

May you know what it is to come into the love of God in the Lord Jesus Christ and accept the blessedness of His finished work in relation to your sins, and accept him as the One who is your Saviour, your Shepherd, your Friend, your Prophet, your Priest, your King, in relation to all of your life and everything in it, for His Name's sake.

EAST FINCHLEY

8 January 2005