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THE SERVICE OF GOD DEPENDENT ON CHRIST

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

THE SERVICE OF GOD DEPENDENT ON CHRIST

Numbers 17: 1-11; Psalm 19: 1-6; Hebrews 2: 11,12

J.McK. The impression that came to me this morning was to see, if the Lord helps us, how the whole of the service of God depends upon Christ. These passages bring out His glory in different ways. Everything for God's pleasure depends on the energy of life in Christ Himself. In Numbers 17 we have, as background, those who sought to enter the service of God though not called to it, and they are eclipsed by divine intervention in the Man of God's choice. God says, "the man whom I shall choose." It is very fine to be in an environment where matters are settled. What follows is the evidence of life in the staff of Aaron, life in its rapid development and life in its maturity. In Psalm 19 there is reference to the bridegroom, again the idea of freshness and vitality entering into that. And in Hebrews 2, which was referred to in our meeting this morning, the Lord says, "in the midst of the assembly will I sing". That involves energy it involves life in Christ as engaging Himself in the great matter of the service of God. If we are to be caught up in what is for God's pleasure in any measure, it is that we realise His touch, His leadership and, if I might speak simply, His energy as giving impulse to things. I trust the brethren will be free. We have all participated in a great privilege and we need to speak together about these great things.

J.S. God has shown His approval of the Man whom He has selected in raising Him from among the dead. Is it in the power of that life that the service is to be carried on, according to His mind and for His pleasure?

J.McK. I think so. The power of life out of death is what is witnessed here. Of course, the life of Jesus as Man upon the earth often engages our hearts. I suppose as we come to the Supper we look on the loaf and we think of what He was in the days of His flesh, as the scripture speaks of it, "a tender sapling ... a root out of dry ground", Isa 53: 2. There was something here that did not find its origin in the soil of the wilderness, did not find its origin amongst

men. It is a different kind of life. But what we have in chapter 17, as you say, is life out of death. We need to be assured that the reality of that manhood, so attractively portrayed for us in the gospels, has gone through.

J.N.M. In relation to this happening in Numbers 17, there is no question of the staff withering again in the years that follow.

J.McK. It is fine to see that God has something permanent in life, in manhood, in His presence, so that it says at the end of the passage we read, "Bring Aaron's staff again before the testimony, to be kept as a token ..." (v 10). As you say, the life of Christ in its energy is always available as beyond death, beyond the reach of what is alien, for God's pleasure, and it is a question of realising that our link with Him is in that environment.

J.N.M. It is covered in the New Testament word, "in that he lives, he lives to God", Rom. 6:10 - that is, His present life entirely, He lives to God.

J.McK. So that if He were on earth, we are told, He would not be a priest. He had no place in the function of God's service according to nature, but, as raised from the dead, He is the Man who is giving character to everything that is for God's pleasure. Thus orthodox religion is not pleasing and cannot fit with God's requirements.

D.T.P. Is there a wonderful touch of grace in the fact that there is a certain provision for those who had failed and been conscious of it? It goes on to say, "that they may not die". That is how we are sustained in the glory of what He has set on.

J.McK. God has found a way in Christ of retaining man for His pleasure, else there would have been no future for the race, and God's thought in having His creature responsively would not have come to fruition. Because of what was found in Jesus, everything is preserved and comes through inviolate and God has a new basis on which He can have response from His creature. It is a very fine thing to be in the atmosphere where God is responded to, and it all depends on what has come into view first in one Man.

J.C.G. Other scriptures that refer to this incident speak about Aaron's rod that budded as if that were the first and prime matter that God had in mind - the importance of the resurrection of Christ from among the selection of those that were there.

J.McK. Well, it was a very solemn time. Each of the staves was placed before the testimony: "Take of them a staff, a staff for each father's house, of all their princes according to the houses of their fathers, twelve staves" (v 2). These were distinguished men and they are all put to the test as in the same circumstances. The staves are laid up "in the tent of meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you". The great test is the presence of God. The test of the ambitions that men have is the presence of God, and this happens in the night season.

J.C.G. Help us as to what that means.

J.McK. I do not know that I can but it is a confined period of testing, the night season. We often say that earth's dark night continues. What shines over against that is the energy of life which comes to light in the morning in relation to one Man. God says, "the man whom I shall choose, his staff shall bud forth" (v 5). Now, what actually happens is more than that. Verse 8 says, "behold the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had budded and brought forth buds and bloomed blossoms, and ripened almonds". This is the expression of what is living and what developed very rapidly for God's pleasure. It relates typically to life in Christ.

J.C.G. So that God in His counsels had a full result in mind but it started in one Man raised from the dead.

J.McK. That is right.

J.S. Were you thinking, in regard to these buds and blossoms and ripened almonds, that it is like life that comes into evidence among the saints - you might say, different stages of maturity, but it is all of the same character.

J.McK. Well, I was pondering it and I do not know that I can say much about it. There is something attractive as you think of the

development of manhood according to God on the other side of death. We speak of what was in Jesus in the days of His flesh and we refer to that as being perfectly normal in its development. There was the child, the boy, and the man. We have often been reminded that everything was seasonal in its development in Jesus, everything was normal according to God. But then that was in conditions of flesh and blood. Here we have the development of life in manhood in a new condition on the other side of death and it happens very rapidly.

J.A.G. Do you think the hundred and twenty in the upper room are evidence of ripened almonds? Being breathed into, the last Adam has imparted life to them, and they are superior in life to whatever else is around.

J.McK. That is interesting because it becomes evident in this passage that the life is inherent in Himself. So it says, "the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had budded". Normally, in agricultural terms, you need light and moisture and time for these things to develop, but the inherent power for the whole thing was in the Person of Christ typically. Those who have a link with Him, those, as you say, who are breathed into by the heavenly Man are invigorated by what comes from Him.

J.A.G. The "power of indissoluble life", Heb 7: 16.

J.McK. As thus described it is something that God will never lose. As having a link with Christ we are to be sustained by what in itself is un failing. It is a condition that is not subject to deterioration, it is "indissoluble".

J.C.G. We had a touch of Ephesians 2 this morning - "and has raised us up together, and has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. (v 6). The saints are alongside Him, but raised. I suppose the sitting down would be in a position where there is blossom for God after the character of Christ, something displayed for the pleasure of God.

J.McK. We have some experience of divine favour, distinctively resting upon Christ but extended to those who through Him are

brought into a position of abiding favour.

A.P.G. It says that Joseph's sheaf remained standing. Is that the inherent power of life? The Lord says, "because I live ye also shall live", John 14: 19. It is life as being associated with Him.

J.McK. That is very interesting because it says, "my sheaf rose up", Gen 37: 7. The power was in the sheaf itself and the power in this section is in the rod. It is not a question of action on the part of anybody else; it is inherent life in Christ Himself, and that is what is coming into expression in view of the service of God, because Aaron is the priest.

J.N.M. The preservation of the sons of Korah would be an encouragement to us. It is not man in innocence to whom this is addressed; it is men who on one line had forfeited in a startling way every claim: "and all things are of the God who has reconciled us to himself", 2 Cor 5: 18. I wondered if it might encourage all of us, including young ones who maybe do not feel up to it sometimes, also perhaps older ones who have been recovered and grieve over the wasted years. Sons of Korah come later into the service of God.

J.McK. They do and really all is because of what came to light in the staff. The basis that God has to go on with the saints is because of what He has livingly in Christ. It is not life historically. It is life currently active in Jesus in the service of God.

C.K.R. I feel so much is involved in 'in remembrance of Me' in the light of what you are saying. It is remembering the Person. You touched this morning on the fact that He is living: there is triumph in that. The emblems are there testifying to what he has done, but He Himself is a living, glorious Man with whom we are linked now.

J.McK. That is right, so this staff being kept is very fine. God says, Take it up and show it to the people. The fact that the people saw it was a testimony on God's part towards them of what he had found in Christ, but then He says, Bring it back and keep it as a testimony, so that in the divine presence there is a living witness to the power and energy of life of a new kind in Christ Himself.

G.B.G. Where does the Spirit fit in in this matter of life and the life that is in Christ in relation to ourselves?

J.McK. It is by the Spirit that we have a link with Him, is it not I suppose the Spirit in us is the energy of life that gives us liberty Godward. Is that what you were thinking?

G.B.G. Do you think it is by the Spirit that we partake of that life that is in Christ? Is it by the Spirit that we know that life that is in Christ?

J.McK. That is right, so that we have a connection with Christ by the spirit. Romans speaks about the saints reigning in life. It refers to being "saved in the power of his life", Rom 5: 10. As John's gospel says, "because I live ye also shall live". Now, if there is any evidence of it - and thank God for the evidence of life that is among the saints - it is a proof that Christ lives.

J.A.G. Murmuring ceases from hereon and the staff becomes a kind of standard. "Take the staff", He says to Moses. He took his own, but he should have taken Aaron's.

J.McK. That is right: you are referring to Numbers 20. Obviously this particular staff had not assumed enough importance in Moses' view. Moses perhaps reasoned that he had seen a situation like this before. The people were acting in a way that was unseemly and he felt that he could deal with it. God had told him that he was to speak to the rock, instead of which he smote it. Nevertheless God's grace abounded over all because the water flowed, and it says in that chapter that the people drank. It does not say that in Exodus 17, but in Numbers 20. It says the people drank of the water so that God's grace over-abounded. But the staff of Aaron should have had a greater place with Moses.

J.A.G. He took the staff but he used his own. It is quite a sobering consideration.

J.McK. Had he smitten with the staff of Aaron, these buds and blossoms would have been damaged. It was out of keeping with the way that God had shown, life according to Himself in new conditions.

J.N.M. I know it is not your subject, but that would have a strong influence on us in our administration. Aaron's rod, I suppose, is the rod of the law. The water was to flow on the basis of the priesthood of Christ. Mr Raven says as to that time and incident that what Moses failed to discern was that a new generation had come to light - the others had died - and God was dealing with the new generation on a priestly basis. Oh, to see one another like that! I am maybe digressing but it is very precious. In fact the whole thing is overshadowed, or should have been normally, by what was priestly.

J.McK. It connects a little perhaps with what we were seeking to say yesterday, that God deals with the situation positively. That is, He is not reducing the people to the level of their own conduct. It would be a sad thing if God dealt with us on the level of our conduct. He is dealing with us in the light of what He has in Christ risen from the dead, a man who is living to Him, and that is the only basis, really, on which we can be retained.

J.M. I wondered whether this new generation, to which reference has been made, is in view here: "that thou mayest put an end to their murmurings before me, that they may not die" (v 10).

J.McK. Quite so. As we were saying, life in Christ is to continue, but life in the saints must continue too, and the secret of it is to realise our own link with the Man who currently is living to God and is engaged in what is fresh and energetic for God's pleasure. I wonder if we have grasped that. It is not only what Jesus was historically for God's pleasure; it is what He is now.

C.K.R. I was thinking of the reference in 2 Timothy, "according to promise of life, the life which is in Christ Jesus", 2 Tim 1: 1. It is the answer to everything, even in a darkening state of things publicly, to get a touch of "the life which is in Christ Jesus".

J.McK. And, as we said, it is in the power of what is indissoluble. It will not deteriorate. It will be sustained, and we be sustained in it, for God's pleasure.

Rem. I was thinking of the mount of transfiguration where God really showed His power of choosing as to the pre-eminence of Christ. It

says at the end of that incident that the Lord said to them that they should tell no-one until the Son of Man be risen up from among the dead, as if they had an insight as to what was going to come in as a result of the death of Christ, that He was going to be pre-eminent.

J.McK. It says His countenance shone as the sun. I think what was inherent in Christ came out on the mount of transfiguration. On the level of the plain it was largely veiled, but it shone, in view of the energy of life in Him being witnessed by those who were privileged to be taken up to the mount of God. It was a question, I suppose, of sovereign selection as to those who were there, the basis of all our privileges. It involved that they were brought into touch with a Man in whom all the features of life for God's pleasure are manifested.

J.C.G. What do you say about the almonds, "ripened almonds"? What would that represent for us?

J.McK. What has been said often is that it is the first of the fruits. The almond is very early in the season and fruit according to God has begun as finding its source in the Lord Jesus.

J.C.G. The fact that it is the first involves the counsels of God as to sonship, does it? 'Ripened almonds' is a mature thought.

J.McK. It is the fulfilment, I suppose, too, of God's word. Jeremiah refers to the rod of an almond tree: God says, "I am watchful over my word to perform it", Jer 1: 12. I suppose these people were in the presence of the performance of what God had said. He said, This rod is going to bud, but then they saw that it had actually happened. The energy of life in a Man out of death is what, I think, should affect us. If we link that with Psalm 19, we have the "bridegroom going forth from his chamber". "The heavens declare the glory of God". The scope of this is impressive. "In them" (in the heavens) "hath he set a tent for the sun". Christ has a place up there. But then He is moving. I think we should be enlarged in our affections and alerted in our sensibilities to the fact that this great Person is active. "And he is as a bridegroom going forth from his chamber". There always was what is fresh in the life of Jesus and I think that remains true.

J.N.M. "Draw me, we will run after thee!", Song of Songs 1: 4.

J.McK. There is an interesting use of number there. We spoke yesterday about what was personal and individual: "Draw me, we will run after Thee"; so that the link that you and I have personally with the Man of God's choice quickly connects us in our experience with others who have likewise been drawn after Himself. That is the way it works.

J.S. In "His going forth is from the end of the heavens", is there a suggestion that He starts things?

J.McK. I think it is very important to realise that. We do not initiate things when we come together. Is that true?

J.S. I think that would be the significance of the assembly looking for the Lord to set something on and appreciating the influence that He exerts.

J.McK. I think we should realise that Christ risen from the dead is active in God's service. When we gather, as we do, for the Supper, our desire is that we should be caught up in the current of what He Himself is already moving in, so that it is a circuit, "and his circuit unto the ends of it".

J.S. Does that mean that He is going to complete the whole matter He has in view in the service of God in a fresh, living, energetic way?

J.McK. In John 13 He rises from supper, "knowing that ... he came out from God and was going to God" (v 3). What He had in mind in that chapter, so well known to us, was that the disciples should be caught up in the current of that movement.

J.S. Really, that is what happens in John 20. He came and stood in the midst and things proceed from there.

J.McK. Yes, indeed, and in John 20 the word also that was quoted this morning, "I ascend". That is the energy of life in Christ - we speak about it with the deepest reverence - the energy of a Man who says, "I ascend". According to Luke's gospel, He was carried up. The emphasis is different. He is taken into heaven, given a place up there. How true! But in John He says, "I ascend", the energy was His.

J.S. Do you think what He says in that connection, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God" would show that He would have the whole scope of the service of God in mind?

J.McK. I think so, so that the whole circuit is in mind, "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof". You are conscious as you come into the presence of this great Person that you are at the very heart of God's universe. Everything depends upon Him, and we are not participating, dear brethren, in what is formal. We are following the energy and impulse that He Himself gives as coming among us.

A.W. He is in movement Himself in this Psalm: "And he is as a bridegroom going forth from his chamber; he rejoiceth as a strong man to run the race. His going forth is from the end of the heavens". These are His own movements which would link with John 20.

J.McK. Yes, it would, so he is a "strong man". The idea of energy is the expression of inward strength. The Psalm refers to "the son of man whom thou hast made strong for thyself, Ps 80: 17. God has everything in Christ. That is what impresses me today, He has everything in one Man.

J.N.M. Then this will go beyond the assembly's response. The Psalms finish with, "Let everything that hath breath praise Jah", Ps 150: 6. It will not be a disorganised response. Christ will be in charge completely and will give impulse to every different family so that according to their position and the measure of light and formation in them, they will respond fully under His tutorship. This very Psalm stresses the expansive side. You speak of His strength: His strength is great enough for all that. What a thing it will be to witness! How much there will be for the heart of God in it all!

J.McK. Every family in heaven and on earth will be affected finally by these great movements. There is nothing else that will give character to what pleases God, only what comes from Christ.

C.K.R. There is a reference in Psalm 132, "Arise, Jehovah, into thy rest, thou and the ark of thy strength". That would link with what you are bringing out.

J.McK. It would; so the ark had power in itself. At one point it says that the ark went before them in the three days' journey. It moved itself out of its place, and went before them in view of preparing a resting place.

C.K.R. On the line of what you said as to "I ascend to my Father and your Father", the power that was there in the Lord Himself to move upward and inward.

J.McK. No one else could speak such words.

D.T.P. There is what is complete, prepared of God; it is going to provide an answer and yield for Him. There are things marked out, a line set. There is a place where He sets a tent for the sun. These matters are very precious as we see them all related to what is in Christ. That is what stirs our joy, the result of divine workmanship within us.

J.McK. So that while there is an abiding place for Him in heaven, what we need to see is that He is active still and His affections are fresh. He is a bridegroom. He is seeking an answer and while what we said just now is true, that this will affect every family, we need to be aware that His affection has a particular bearing on the saints of the assembly in our day.

J.N.M. This matter of Christ being active at the present time is probably the thing that is least known, I think generally, not necessarily by profession, but by the way people operate, act, speak and so on. All that is in mind is that He died on the cross and rose and went to heaven, and He is coming again, and the intervening period is just a time of inactivity when He is waiting. Nothing could be further from the truth.

J.McK. Let us seize the glorious truth that the Person who accomplished all these things is living to God.

J.N.M. We on our part at least should be weekly testimony to this as He comes in at the Supper, that He is not only alive: He is operative in that realm.

J.McK. And you find that His affections are just as fresh, the affections of the bridegroom, and the effect of that is to draw forth fresh affections from those who belong to Him. Thus our response is not to be stilted, it is not to be formal. We may say something to Him that we have never said before. That is possible, is it not?

J.C.G. That is very important. It makes way for the Spirit. The reference to the current position might be seen in the fact that "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof". The current warmth, as you say, of the affection of Christ, and the saints bask in that, but we are active in relation to Him as a result, enjoying something of His current movements and also His current speaking.

J.McK. So that you become warmed yourself. The effect of this influence is like the influence of the sun. We were having a walk in it today and it is very pleasant. The warmth of it affects you and as you relate that to the Man who is the centre of God's universe, spiritually it becomes very wonderful.

J.A.G. "But let them that love him be as the rising of the sun in its might" (Judges 5: 31) in a broken day!

J.McK. That is fine because that is what He is and that is what they become because they have a link with the Man who is still active in God's service.

J.S. The close, unique, link that the assembly has with Him, as united to Him, would mean that she would get the immediate benefit of this.

J.McK. I think so. What we are tested about (and I am sure you would agree) is our alertness because we know the things that are normally said and we know the hymns that are normally sung. I believe we need more liberty in the use of the hymn book in the service of God. All that relates to the energy of life in Christ having its effect among the saints and setting us free from the channels in which we normally travel so that the service of God becomes vibrant, it becomes the expression of what is in Christ, extended to those who belong to Him. God says, I love that: that is for My pleasure.

G.B.G. There were bells on the garment. That would indicate to us that there is life and activity, the bells and the pomegranates.

J.McK. You mean that in the scene of testimony something was heard that was coming from another place. That is very fine. It would have an effect on those who heard it, so that the impulse for the testimony is coming from Christ and not from us.

J.A.G. That would be the effect of the lace of blue on the tassel of our garments.

J.McK. We were reading that recently: God says, it is for you to look upon it. I always thought of it as testimony to others, but what God says to the people is, it is for you to look upon. There is a constant reminder that we are heavenly. I think we need that because the Man of whom we are speaking in Psalm 19 is no longer on the earth. The tent is set in the heavens.

J.A.G. So the heavenly people in Philippi are marked by this energy of life and Paul can open up his desires in relation to them and the positive effect of the circumcision in himself.

J.McK. So, as we have said often as to that epistle, it is normal Christianity and the normal experience of a believer is that he is conscious that Christ is living for God's pleasure. So that Hebrews 2, if we just refer to it, is often before us. "I will declare thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises". Can we connect this with the energy of life in a risen Man? As on the earth, there was what was fresh which came from Jesus for God's pleasure. God had never had such affections in a man before, a man who fully understood what God's feelings were. From that place of dependent humanity came something that was very precious to heaven. Now He lives in a new condition and as man says, I will sing Thy praises. We need to think about Him as a contributor to the service of God.

J.S. I was thinking of Matthew 11 when it says, "Jesus answering said, I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth ..." (v 25), at a time when the whole scene was so unresponsive. Do you

think the difference, now that He has gone through death and is living beyond death, is that He has a company associated with Him?

J.McK. There is an environment where this song proceeds. How privileged we are to have a link with Christ!

S.McL. The Psalm you read earlier is addressed to the chief Musician. You could say that is a title of the Lord Jesus. It is what He does.

J.McK. You mean He presides over the great matter of the service of God? He certainly does. We are reminded in that of David. He is referred to as "the sweet psalmist of Israel", 2 Sam 23: 1. That was what came from David experimentally. If you apply that to the Lord Jesus, It is very wonderful. What came from Jesus in manhood in the way of response to God was of a quality that God had never had before and I believe that continues for God's pleasure.

J.N.M. What is said of David is truly remarkable, if I can recall it. He wrote Psalms, but he made musical instruments too. He directed the orchestra, and in addition to that he laid down what tunes should be sung. Now, he is only a feeble type of Christ in all that as in complete control of everything, even to the instruments. I suppose in those days perhaps instruments of music were primitive and perhaps not very well made and so he took it on himself to make these things.

J.McK. That is very interesting. It says, "the instruments which I made ... to praise therewith", 1 Chron 23: 5. That is, the purpose of his making instruments was to praise with them. The instruments are the saints.

J.N.M. Am I right in saying that, in a day of breakdown, they came to light again, David's instruments of music?

J.McK. Yes, in a day of recovery. If he had made the instrument, he would know it. I understand from those who know more about it than I do that if a craftsman in days gone by made a violin, he was the one who could play it best. If you apply that to the Lord Jesus as Minister of the sanctuary, you see how His own touch brings the saints to life in the service of God. Whilst He is leading the praise,

others are participating, but they are doing so under His own impulse and control.

D.T.P. Does that really come in through the declaration of His name? That is what prepares instruments, to bring them into accord with what would be serviceable and give added response, but it is all under Christ.

J.McK. That is right. The declaration, I suppose, is complete: "I will declare thy name to my brethren". In that sense there is nothing more to come out in the way of declaration, but what is needed is an alertness as to what He will do as He says, "in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises". He sang with the disciples according to Matthew 26:30: "And having sung a hymn, they went out to the mount of Olives".

C.K.R. I wondered about that when you were speaking of it. That was very precious in itself. But this is greater. Are we not seeing here the completion of divine purpose and Christ in His true place in the midst of the assembly, functioning Godward for God's glory and praise eternally?

J.McK. In the gospels He was still a Man in flesh and blood on the earth. What these disciples experienced, although very precious, was a testimony of what would be fulfilled in its glory in the dispensation in which we are. It impresses me that we are in the greatest time and the need is to realise our conscious link with Christ.

J.S. I was wondering about it saying they went out to the mount of Olives. Do you think the point there is that the service is to be carried on spiritually, not in any formal way, by using a prayer book or something like that, but spiritually? Do you think the Spirit would help us to be sensitive as to the movements and indications of the Lord Jesus Himself?

J.McK. That is right. The fact the disciples went with Him is a fine touch because Jesus had often gone there alone. That was the great place of resource for Him personally. "And everyone went to his home. But Jesus went to the mount of Olives", John 7: 53; 8: 1. But

the moment came when the disciples went along with Him. We need a sense of being caught up in the energy of life that is being expressed in Him Godward as He sings in the midst of the assembly.

DUNDEE

20 April 1997

Key to initials

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PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

J.McKay

Judges 16: 1 (Gazah), 2,3; Luke 22: 39-46; 23: 44-47; Psalm 46: 1

We have spoken together today about the greatness of the manhood of the Lord Jesus. I want to continue, if the Lord gives grace for it, to focus your attention upon Him, to refer to the strength that is in Christ. Men look for strength in these days. The problems of the nations increase, the problems that confront families and individuals, coming right down to the problems that are present in this room. God knows about them. The greatness of the message today is that He has the answer to them. He has the answer to every situation in one glorious Man. His name is Jesus. It is a privilege to speak about Him. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to commend Him as One whose love in some measure we have proved.

I have read this first passage because it gives the solemn background to what I want to say, and what it shows is the world's attitude to the One who is God's appointed Saviour. The world's attitude to Jesus continues to be one of hostility, one of opposition. The young ones know about Samson; the story of Samson is well-loved. When the lion rose against him and he slew the animal it says, "and nothing was in his hand" (Judg 14: 6), the power of Christ personally is demonstrated in a man who so long before typified the greatness of the One who on God's behalf would intervene for man's blessing.

But sadly people were hostile and as he comes to this city of Gazah, they surrounded him. It is not the city that is their object. They surrounded him. The hostility of Satan is directed against Christ. "And they laid wait for him all night at the gate of the city" through a period of darkness. The darkness is increasing in man's world. Scripture speaks elsewhere of a darkness that could be felt and darkness characterised this time and the hostility of the Philistines was focused against a man who on God's behalf was

acting in view of the deliverance of the people. And it says, "and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning light we will kill him". I ask you, what are the prospects in this world? You young people, what are the prospects in this world? We are living at a time when there is great activity politically in this country. What are the prospects? What does the future hold? What these men were saying was that when the morning comes - there is a new day coming and we can promise you something then. What kind of a day is in prospect for man's world? They say, "In the morning light we will kill him". What they have in prospect is a day without Christ. That is the world's prospect. Are you going along with that? Oh, let us turn aside from man's world and all that it offers and let us listen to God's proposals in blessing in the glad tidings!

So it says, "And Samson lay till midnight". This is a figure of the way the Lord Jesus entered death: it says he "lay till midnight". Wonderful fact that the Saviour of the world, the Prince of life, the One who called all things into being by the word of His power, actually lay in death. Samson lay until midnight when the darkness was at its greatest. And then it says, "He arose at midnight, and seized the doors of the gate of the city" - the whole administration of the place - "and the two posts, and tore them up with the bar, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of the mountain that is before Hebron".

What a tremendous victory, a man in whom was strength to overthrow the whole of the opposition that was against him, but more than that, strength for the establishment of all God's thoughts in blessing. He took the administration, the gates of the city, right up to Hebron and established them there. As we know, according to the scripture, Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt. It pre-dates the whole world's system. The Lord Jesus is great enough not only to overthrow what is hostile, but to bring in a great realm of things positively according to God's thoughts in blessing for men. Do you know a Saviour like that? You young ones, have you had to do with Jesus - as the One who not only makes proposals but fulfils them? He is my Saviour and I would like to commend Him to you

today, the One who has met the opposition on God's behalf and has established an order of things in which His richest thoughts can come in without restriction for the blessing of persons so undeserving as you and I. We do not deserve blessing. We have forfeited every right to life, and yet God's overture towards us in blessing in Christ is completely undiverted. What a God we have!

So I just begin with this very solemn picture of man's world. As far as man is concerned, when the morning comes there will be no place for Christ. I can tell you on the authority of Scripture that such a morning will never dawn. Such a morning will never come because God's will involves that the Man whom this world rejected will fill all things. The mystery of His will is that He will head up all things in the Christ so that not only has he gained the victory over what is hostile, but He will bring in everything for God's pleasure and for His glory. He will give the final touch to the whole scene according to 1 Corinthians 15: "Then the end, when he gives up the kingdom to him ... all things in subjection to him, that God may be all in all" (vv 24,28). That is the Saviour we preach, the Man who has come in on God's behalf and has reasserted God's supremacy in His own creation. On the way He has accomplished redemption, laying a basis for our eternal blessing, that every burden should be lifted in order that you should be brought in to what God proposes in His heart to give.

Now, the way to that is portrayed for us in Luke's gospel. God has laid strength, the Psalm tells us, on One that is mighty. The gospel writer testifies that the One who had such strength came into circumstances of suffering. How wonderful is the language that this writer uses as to the incoming of Jesus! If you want to nourish your soul, read the early chapters of Luke's gospel! There in the presence of the greatness of the Roman empire, you have described the incoming of Jesus in the lowliness of a babe in Bethlehem's manger. The word of the angel is, "For to-day a Saviour has been born". As soon as Jesus came, the work of redemption was assured! The One who came was great enough to accomplish all that God's will involved. Elsewhere we have the recorded words and they are

majestic in their meaning, "To do thy good pleasure, my God, is my delight" Ps 40: 8. These are words spoken in power, words spoken, as another has taught us, before He came into the place of obedience, a statement of divine competency to undertake what God willed. That was prior to the incoming of Jesus, but, as He came, what grace is seen! Not coming in majesty, pomp, and outward greatness, but a babe in a manger. What grace in order that man should be disarmed from any prejudice he should have against the God who sought his blessing. And those who received such testimony said, "Let us make our way ... and let us see this thing that is come to pass", Luke 2: 15.

I wonder if you have ever made a move yourself to see that what God said about Jesus was true. We need faith for that. Perhaps you will surrender today to God's overture towards you in blessing and you will make a move to find that what He testifies as to Christ is true. It is wonderfully true! The One who trod the earth and was the object of divine favour on the banks of the Jordan, heaven opening upon Him and the Father's voice saying, "This is my beloved Son", a mature man standing on the earth, the object of heaven's favour. There had never been anything like it before. How many men there had been, and God had taken account of every one of them, but in every one of them there was a defect. In this wonderful Person there was no blemish. We were reading about the red heifer recently and it says, there was no blemish and there was no defect. That is, there was nothing wrong but every positive feature that God sought. That was Jesus, unique under heaven's eye. Here where evil's challenge had swept the whole scene, where all had been dominated and influenced by it, was a Man totally unaffected by the intrusion. He was here for God.

And God's claim was fully recognised as He comes to the end of that beautiful pathway. In His life God's grace had been demonstrated towards men, lifting their burdens, healing their diseases, causing the blind to see, the lame to walk, making deaf to hear, even causing dead persons to rise from the dead. What grace, what power was evidenced in the life of Jesus! But at the end of that

pathway, He comes to this remarkable moment in chapter 22 of Luke when it says, "And going forth he went according to his custom to the mount of Olives".

Can I attract your heart, dear fellow-believer, to take account of this beautiful picture as Jesus appears here as a dependent Man, and yet is here as God's strength? We referred in the reading to the ark as God's strength and here is the great antitype of that. "He went according to his custom to the mount of Olives". The greatest challenge that the universe has ever seen was about to come against Him. Satan had come before, had attacked in wilderness circumstances. He had attacked the Lord Jesus. As an undefeated foe Satan had brought every pressure, every temptation, to bear upon Him, and he was defeated. It says, "And the devil, having completed every temptation, departed from him for a time" (Luke 4:13), and at this point he returns. There were those who went with the Lord Jesus: "and the disciples also followed him". The Spirit of God would help those whose affections are available to draw close to Christ as He moves into this situation of great testing. "And when he was at the place He said to them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw ..." He was not too far away. They were close enough to Him to realise that this was a suffering way. Do you know that it meant suffering for Jesus if you or I were to be brought into blessing? As the hymn-writer says:

No act of power could e'er atone,
No wonder-working word
Gould from the brightness of the throne,
Make love's sweet voice be heard.

If sinners ever were to know
The depths of love divine,
All Calv'ry's weakness and its woe,
Blest Saviour, must be Thine. (Hymn 431)

There was no alternative to Gethsemane as we have it in Matthew's gospel, no alternative to the way He went here on the mount of

Olives. Here He is going through the matter in spirit with His Father. As in Genesis 22, "they went both of them together" (v 6). The Father's will involved that Christ should meet the immense challenge of Satan's return, bringing all that he had, even death itself, to bear upon Him. "And having knelt down he prayed, saying, Father, if thou wilt remove this cup from me". He does not ask for it to be modified. He says, if it is possible for it to be removed. It was not possible. It was divinely necessary, and the Lord Jesus took the cup, not from the hand of Satan, but from the hand of His own Father. He went forward. In His strength He was totally undiverted in the presence of this character of pressure in view of the securing of your salvation and mine. I trust your heart is softened by the contemplation of this.

Then it says, "And an angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening him". That is a very fine touch. We have spoken about His might; we have spoken about His power, as it is particularly seen in John's gospel where according to John's account He enters death, as an invader, overthrowing the power of it Himself personally. But it is very affecting that an angel appears from heaven strengthening Him. The angel did not bring in what was additional. Through the service of the angel, what was there already was enhanced. "Strengthening him": everything that was needed was in Christ but it was brought out in its fullest character and endurance by the service of the angel. "And being in conflict he prayed more intently. And his sweat became as great drops of blood, falling down upon the earth". What endurance, what pressure, my Saviour went through. Moses of old, as anointing the tabernacle system, when he came to the altar, sprinkled it seven times as if to emphasise the power of endurance that was in Christ in suffering. He alone was equal to sustain what was needed. There was never a moment like it before; there has never been a moment like it since and, thank God, the Saviour was equal to it. He went through this in view of the effecting of the work of redemption.

When we come to chapter 23, "And it was about the sixth hour", things have progressed. The Saviour has been through the mockery of a trial at the hands of men and, rejected of men, has

been placed on a cross. There the object of men's taunts and scorn, the evidence of total rejection by man's world, and yet what was of God was being carried through. The strength of what was to be accomplished for God and on man's behalf was totally unaffected by the fact that men were acting against Him as powerfully and as effectively as they possibly could.

Then it says, "And it was about the sixth hour, and there came darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour". This was a unique moment too in the history of the world when there came darkness. There is something that is beyond our understanding in what happened at the cross. We shall always wonder at it. We shall never penetrate its depths. God found it necessary to bring in darkness and for three hours the Saviour endured the weight of the wrath of a holy God against sin. Sin was a challenge to God's holiness, to His majesty, and it was necessary that someone should be found to be the sin-bearer and there was only One who was equal to it. In Revelation 5 there was One who was found to be worthy. John wept much that no-one could be found and then the Lamb - the One who suffered - is seen as worthy. Jesus alone went into the period of the forsaking, there to secure God's will - I speak carefully I trust as to such a holy subject - in isolation. He who knew the sweetness of communion, He who had never wavered from contact with His Father in the presence of the greatest hostility from Satan and from man, now did that will, as Himself forsaken of God. Because the judgment was exhausted God can conduct Himself towards persons who are sinners like you and me on the principle of grace because He has a righteous basis in the finished work of Jesus to forgive our sins.

I wonder if every one of us has come in repentance to acknowledge that Christ was our Substitute, that He took our place at the cross. That what He bore justly and righteously at the hand of His God should have been my part but because He bore it on my account, I can put my trust in His finished work and know Him as my Saviour. You young people, do you know the Saviour? Have your burdens been lifted? God would delight in persons who today come

to Christ and trust Him for what He has done. I would be urgent with you today lest there should be any who do not know the salvation that comes through putting your trust in the only Saviour.

His blood was shed. John's gospel refers to that. "But one of the soldiers pierced his side" (chap 19: 34): Man's cruelty brought out the expression of love and "without blood-shedding", the scripture tells us, "there is no remission", Heb. 9:22. But the blood has been shed and remains an eternal witness to the fact that God was satisfied with the life that was laid down on our account. He entered death. He lay there for three days and three nights and then the Father's glory intervened. What a tremendous thing it was! David says in the Psalm prophetically, "He reached forth from above, he took me ... And he brought me forth into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me", Ps 18: 16,19. The Lord Jesus at the present moment is in a large place. He has plenty of room to operate and He wants to reach persons today from that position of tremendous advantage. It is like David when he came to the throne. He said, "Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God to him?" 2 Sam 9: 3. The Lord Jesus is able to show the grace of heaven to persons who are sinners and far from God. He would draw you to Himself tonight and you will find that He is able to carry your burdens, the mighty Saviour! Isaiah says, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with deep-red garments from Bozrah ...?" and the answer is "I that speak in righteousness, might to save", Isa 63:1.

Oh the sight in heav'n is glorious!

Man in righteousness is there (Hymn 212)

He is established beyond all challenge. As we said today, life out of death is manifested in Him the glorious Saviour and living Redeemer, the One who would love to have your confidence and your trust. You will never regret putting your trust in the Man to whom God Himself has entrusted the whole universe. God says prophetically, "I have laid help upon a mighty one", Ps 89: 12. God has done it. Will you trust Him? I trust there will be an answer today to the appeal from heaven that you should learn to trust Christ.

So He becomes your resource. I just refer to that verse in the Psalm because it is a very affecting one: "God is our refuge and strength". We have been speaking of Christ as God's strength and it is wonderful to realise that the stability of Deity came into manhood in Jesus. All the fulness of the Godhead was there in Him. But when we know God, a measure of strength begins to show itself in the life of the true believer. Have you got that far? Can you allow God's work to assert itself so that He becomes your strength? We need to develop in our knowledge of God so that we find Him a refuge - yes, we flee to Him - but He is also our strength. Refuge involves a safe place in a time of trouble; strength is something that you know inwardly. The light of the glad tidings includes the proposal that God would give His Holy Spirit to you. To those who have received the forgiveness of sins, God will administer, through Christ, the gift of the Spirit. That involves inward strength so that you have power through your link with Jesus to go through a scene that remains hostile, preserved in some measure in keeping with the God who has brought you to Himself.

"A help in distresses": how much pressure there is! The sorrows of humanity, God knows them - "a help in distresses, very readily found". In the midst of the sorrows He is available today. He is available to all men; but He is available to you. Do not put the gospel off in its application to somebody else because that is the way to miss the blessing. May you discover today that He is available to you. The Saviour is available and God as a refuge is available. Learn to trust Him and you will find that He will see you through to the end. We shall not continue here always, the saints do not belong here. God has come into the world and He has called persons out of it in view of taking them to heaven to be with Christ. Heaven is our place according to divine purpose and counsel. It is wonderful that the Lord Jesus, the One who has undertaken the detail of the work of redemption, is also the Man in whom God's purpose is fully secured.

The triumph of God is in Christ. May you trust Him and may you learn to know Him better! For His Name's sake.

DUNDEE

20 April 1997