

*A*  
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## **"THE ELDERS WHICH ARE AMONG YOU"**

**Psalm 92: 12-15; Genesis 18: 1-8; Joshua 14: 6-12; 1 Kings 18: 40-46**

L.McF. Having in mind particularly the fact that many are getting on in years, I thought we might consider that we should be vigorous in old age. I think the state of localities to a large extent depends on the lead the elders would give. The younger generation will undoubtedly be helped as those who have known the Lord from the beginning set on the pace in the locality.

I read about these elders. We had the three men in the gospel last week, and here we have three men. As to the Psalm we might say that to be vigorous in old age, from one's own experience, involves that our roots are right, roots that go down deep. The Lord Jesus was in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

The death of Christ and His risen life involves where our roots are. What would result is life: that is John's gospel, evidence of life among us. These persons are still vigorous in old age. The blessed Spirit of course would be the source of this energy we are speaking of: it has to be in the Spirit. We thank God for the light we have, for the books on our shelves, but the service of the Spirit is most essential if we are to rise up. What marks Abraham and Elijah is that they are still able to run. It is an unusual thing for old men, but it brings out this feature of spiritual energy. Thank God for the elders in Israel here today and the example they afford the younger men. All this is essential to growth among the young: they have a pattern in the older ones. Hence we feel the responsibility to the Lord and to the testimony to follow in the steps of our mother Sarah, an old sister in Hebrews 11. It is in that scripture that the husband and the wife are given the place that belongs to them: it says "by faith Abraham". It is followed by "by faith Sarah" (vv 8,11). These examples in Scripture are for us, that is the husband and the wife are one in the testimony of our Lord.

Then we are affected by the way Elijah was able to deal with the legal system - one man. He could speak of "Jehovah before whom I stand". I am stressing, no doubt, the individual side of things, and yet it is an essential service in our localities to be energetic in relation to the testimony and for the preservation of life.

D.E.B. I note the use of the word "still" in your Psalm - "they are still vigorous", or the note says, 'shall still bear fruit'. It is not something that suddenly happens in old age. There has been a life-time of devoted committal. What you are saying would stimulate the youngest to make a start, so that as they advance they can still be vigorous.

L.McF. That is very helpful. David speaks of when he was young - "I have been young, but now am old" (Ps 37: 25). If we are to be useable in the testimony - and it is a right desire that every young person here should have, to become useable - it involves that we begin in our youth. Scripture supports that. David began as a shepherd-boy as a youth, he was always with the sheep. The time came when Jehovah took him from the sheepfolds (Ps 78: 70). The experiences we go through help us to honour God. That is the word of the man of God, Eli, "them that honour me, I will honour" (1 Sam 2: 30). Let us begin from our youth to honour God. Joseph is another young man who honoured God and God honoured him. It is to encourage us, each one, to commit ourselves.

J.W. Could you say what place righteousness has in this? The Psalm refers to the righteous and these things that are mentioned are spoken of as righteousness.

L.McF. Honour God is really the definition of righteousness. You walk here in the fear of God, doing what is right, right in the sight of God like these godly persons in the Old Testament. The last verse of the Psalm says "to show that Jehovah is upright: he is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in Him". We think of the Lord Jesus: He is the righteous One, and we are to take character from Him.

E.C.B. Isaiah chapter 40 says "even the youths shall faint and shall tire ... but they that wait upon Jehovah shall renew their strength" (v 40). Does that connect with what you are saying about when we are young?

L.McF. Yes. "Even the youths shall faint and shall tire, but they that wait upon Jehovah shall renew their strength". That is your experience, I am sure, learning to wait on Jehovah, dependent.

That takes us to Genesis. Here is the beloved Abraham at the oaks of Mamre. He sat at the tent door in the heat of the day. What an attitude! He is waiting. As Mr Raven says, he was here waiting for light, what he should do. He sat at his tent door in the heat of the day, waiting for divine direction. We need that. We have been speaking a lot about activity, but the balance is that we learn to wait for divine guidance and help. So he lifted up his eyes and he saw these three men. These three men are the three I had in mind in reading these scriptures. Here they are divine Persons, a divine visitation.

J.W. You said he was waiting for light, divine direction. In the previous chapter he had been obedient to the light that came to him as to circumcision. Do you think we need to be obedient to the light we have if we are to receive more light?

L.McF. Exactly. Here he is ninety nine years old, and he was still waiting for the promised seed. He is not saying, Well, that is impossible. He is ninety nine; he is not saying it is impossible, he is waiting for light from God. He got the light, "Sarah thy wife shall have a son".

D.E.B. He believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

L.McF. Is that not a challenge to us?

D.E.B. We are here as a company of believers, but our faith needs to be maintained and increased, and experience would work through to results so that belief in God is real and effective.

L.McF. That is righteousness that you are speaking of - he believed God. Abraham believed God, that God was able to do far more for him than he could do for himself. That is believing God. I live here in piety, counting on God to see me through. To this day the promises He made to Abraham are yet to be fulfilled, but God has not forgotten those promises.

D.E.R. Conditions in Abraham's house were such that Jehovah and the two angels with Jehovah could be at home there. Is that a sign of the vigour that you are speaking about, that it will extend into the circumstances and surroundings of persons who are with God?

L.McF. That is right, how the household is affected. Abraham and Sarah were yet waiting for this promise, "in thy seed". Jehovah said to him at the very outset, "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (ch 12: 3).

D.J.W. Do you think that being restful is essential if we are to receive light from God? Abraham sat by the tent door suggesting restfulness and it was at the oaks of Mamre, speaking of the stability of divine purpose.

L.McF. That is good. We all know something about anxiety in the heat of the day. Young men no doubt have a job, difficult circumstances, and from experience we know that this is not easy. Yet we can confide in God and be assured that He will come to us. So that in our latter years the older ones look back and they marvel at the way God has brought them through, "I have ... borne you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Exod 19: 4). God is able for all that. For the younger people, do not be discouraged, the tests will come and you will admit as you go over them afterwards that they were very necessary. It was a necessary thing that I was out of a job, it taught me to pray more. We think of the Lord Jesus as a model, always found in prayer.

E.C.B. It says in Hebrews that Abraham dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob (Heb 11: 9). Does that bear on what you had in mind as to communication and things going from one generation to another?

L.McF. Exactly. They dwelt in tents. We are not told that the patriarchs built houses, apart from Jacob, but they were sojourners - strangers and sojourners here - they lived that way, so you can understand what an example Abraham would be to his son and his grandson. That is something to be thankful for, beloved. We have the three generations in the testimony and we are to see something. In the book of Joshua the stones that were taken out of the Jordan were set up as a pillar so that when the young people enquired, What mean these stones? They were able to tell them what Jehovah had done. That is the thought in mind as to the elders, these stones, these persons who have had to do with God, persons who can speak about God, so that there are Isaac and Jacob and we see what is arrived at in the history of Jacob - the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Jacob as the greatest.

E.C.B. Had Abraham seen them right through he might have had cause to be disappointed in Isaac and Jacob - Isaac committed the same sin as his father, and Jacob had a very mixed history - but in the end they all came through for God. Does faith hold to that?

L.McF. That is so. So they came through, but what was in mind in saying that Jacob was the greatest is that he arrived at the truth experimentally and that is a great thing in our histories. He could speak of the God who shepherded him all his life long to this day, the Angel that redeemed me from all evil (see Gen 48: 14). The younger people have to face difficulties in this life, but God uses it for your blessing. These persons all have a place in Hebrews 11; "by faith" they did certain things. We belong to that certain dispensation of faith. We have faith in a risen Christ. Our Lord Jesus has gone on high and He becomes the object of our faith.

J.W. Jacob was certainly vigorous in old age, was he not? He was referred to as a worshipper and he was a blessing. He began as a supplanter. Do you think that was characteristic of him, although he did get away from it at times. Characteristically he was a supplanter. Was that a secret of his vigour in old age?

L.McF. Throughout the Psalms you have reference to the God of Jacob. We know well that his name was changed to Israel, a prince, but how God was in his difficult circumstances. The bereavement of Joseph, the death of Rachel and all these things entered into the life of Jacob, and finally it is said that Israel revived when he heard that Joseph was living. Jesus is living. That has to come into the soul of the believer in a real way. The Person we speak of so freely is living.

E.O. Going back further, Abraham was taken out of his father's house, and he experienced God's care in that way which he never forgot. Would it mark him in his own conduct in expressing God's care?

L.McF. That is so. He moved in faith, he believed God. He was to leave his father's house and the activity and everything in that land to go to a place that God would show him. Abraham, our father, is a remarkable man; he obeyed. It says, "having obeyed". That is a feature that we need beloved, obedience to the truth, obedience to the word of God, and what follows that is blessing.

P.M. Later in this chapter, Jehovah says as to him, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him". Is it an obedient man that can command his household and his children?

L.McF. I am sure that is so. If any man love God, he is known of Him. You get that in the New Testament (see 1 Cor 8: 3). Abraham was well known. Jehovah could say, "I know him". What a commendation! A divine commendation, he would command his house, and his children after him. I believe the secret of God knowing us is that in our measure we know Him.

D.E.B. Did you have in mind to say any more about the three men?

L.McF. Nothing more.

D.E.B. You drew attention to them in your earlier remarks and I wondered if there was something there which you wanted to develop.



L.McF. More could be said. There are two or three in the testimony. But here we are speaking of divine Persons and they came down.

P.J.W. I was thinking of what you said as to God knowing Abraham. He says to Moses, "I am ... the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Exod 3: 6). Would that repetition show that He knew the persons, and as you say it passes down the generations. They knew Him, but He knew them and acknowledged them as being their God.

L.McF. That is fine. He knew them intimately.

P.J.W. He could have just said, I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, but each time He says, the God of Abraham and so on.

L.McF. That is good. We might go on to Caleb.

D.J.H. Do you think these persons were characteristically planted in the house of Jehovah, that is that they characteristically resorted to His presence and this was the way in which He knew them. I was thinking of the reference in the Psalm - they were planted. That is, they are not easily moved, but it is characteristic of them that they were in the house of Jehovah, characteristically they resorted to His presence and He would know them because of the way in which they spoke with Him, prayed to Him, waited upon Him.

L.McF. I think that is very good. That is another feature, that we are planted in the house: that is agriculture.

D.J.W. God plants us in the very best environment in which we can grow, does He not?

L.McF. Absolutely. In the house.

J.R.W. Do you think that one feature that marks these persons is that they considered for God? Abraham was concerned that he should provide what ministered to him; Caleb he says "I wholly followed Jehovah my God" (Josh 14: 8), that is what marked him; and Elijah was jealous as to what related to God.

L.McF. That is very helpful. So that Caleb wholly followed Jehovah his God. Consequently Jehovah kept him alive. "Jehovah has kept

me alive, as he said these forty-five years". Jehovah delighted in that man. Dear brethren, may the brethren's affections melt. Caleb had to suffer. Then what is particularly in mind in relation to Caleb is valuation of the inheritance.

E.C.B. His history so far as Numbers records is really secret. Does that bear on what you have in mind as to continuance?

L.McF. That is a very important phase, that marked Elijah as well. He appeared on the scene abruptly. The secret history is what we need. It says that John the Baptist was in the wilderness until the time came when he was shown to Israel.

J.W. Caleb had purpose. You spoke of his valuation of the inheritance. He had that before him to possess it. Do you think the years in the wilderness with Caleb would not have been years of wandering? The people wandered, but he followed Jehovah, as having that purpose before him.

L.McF. He had been a spy in the land and Caleb had the land in his heart. That was the difference between that man and the others. "That goodly land" was in this man's heart and he had to go on with these unbelievers for a number of years. But God kept him alive and in the faithfulness of God, he is brought into the land. The brethren, all perished, carcasses fell in the wilderness.

V.E.W. With Caleb it was a heart matter. That is most important. I was thinking of what is said of David, God said "he is a man after my own heart". It would enter into what was just mentioned as to secret history.

L.McF. I am sure that is so. The heart is a very important member in the body, the heart and the mind. He wholly followed Jehovah his God.

D.E.B. The unbelievers here made the heart of the people to melt. That is in great distinction to what is being referred to.

L.McF. Here they brought back an evil report of the land, the ten spies. All this is challenging, the report we bring back. It was not only the report, but there were the grapes of Eschol, they brought

them back, but even that did not convince some of them. We want to be kept alive, the Spirit of God having liberty in our souls. We are able to refresh the saints, life is to be evidenced in all our meetings.

In the prayer meeting the priests are ready to get on their feet, praise God, thanksgiving and prayers, the priestly service. I think all this is intended to strengthen the younger people.

E.C.B. Do you think that Caleb's history shows that he accepted the ways of God? When the people were influenced by the evil report of the spies and God says 'turn and go round forty years', Caleb does not protest. He does not say we really ought to go or anything like that. He accepts the ways of God. Is that important as we grow old?

L.McF. Yes. I am sure that is so. The grace that was given to him, and Joshua too, to stay with the brethren despite all that had come in. They did not isolate themselves. And so it is in localities, we have to learn to wait, we have to learn to wait on our brethren at times. Some say, I cannot see this, I cannot see the other. This would be an example where we wait. As we know it is another generation that entered into the land, Caleb and Joshua being the only two of the old.

D.J.H. Is it important to have an objective before us. We have spoken of the object; Christ would be our object, but then we have an objective. Paul speaks of the "prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus" Phil 3: 14. Would the Holy Spirit being the earnest of our inheritance would help us? You might say, typically, that Caleb would have had the Holy Spirit as the earnest.

L.McF. That helps, it implies that I am in the enjoyment of the inheritance now. The gift of the Spirit involves that.

D.E.R. All of these persons who considered for God were brought into great blessing and privilege, which would be a stimulation that we too might consider for God.

L.McF. I think that is right.

R.M.B. I would like you to say something as to how we acquire moral power. We can remember those that have gone before as to

what they have said, who had authority and weight, and they were able to influence us into the right path. What would you say as to how we would get that moral power?

L.McF. You pray more. That is not knowledge. Moral power is not knowledge, nor light, but you keep near to God. I think if you go into the history of the persons you are referring to, that is where power lay. They were often found in prayer. Daniel, you will recall, prayed three times a day, with his window opened towards Jerusalem. He is another person we could have referred to, Abraham was by the oaks of Mamre, but his prayers are in relation to the purpose of God.

D.E.B. And Caleb wholly followed. That was a daily matter throughout his forty years, that he wholly followed.

L.McF. So we speak of overcomers and we each of us should be that. In Revelation the word is to the overcomer. Caleb is such a man. Then he is ready for conflict, "I am this day, eighty five years old, I am still as strong as in the day that Moses sent me as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in".

L.W.B. He kept his eye on his Master and I think we need to tell God everything to be dependent and to tell Him everything and to trust Him in everything.

L.McF. That is fine. That is the feature that marked him, he never came into prominence and I do not think he desired it, he was happy to be a follower.

P.M. Why does he say that he knows both how to go out and to come in?

L.McF. What does it say in Acts 1 as to the Lord Jesus, in relation to the disciple that was to take the place of Judas? "It is necessary therefore, that of the men who have assembled with us all the time in which the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us" (v 21). What does it say as to Caleb?

P.M. "As my strength was then even so is my strength now for war, both to go out and to come in". I wondered whether it was a sign of

maturity with God, not only to know how to go out. Maybe when we are young we think we know how to go out, but is it a sign of maturity to know also how to come in?

L.McF. I am sure you are right.

J.W. Would it mean that Caleb knew what it was to return to Jehovah? We are speaking of conflict here; he would know how to go out in conflict, but he would know how to get back into the presence of God.

L.McF. That is how we go out in conflict, but we bring back the saints, bring them back in. They are not lost. You are to know how to go out and how to come in. The Lord said, "Not one of them has perished, but the son of perdition" (see John 17: 12).

J.W. Was David like that? David is referred to as the one who led out and brought in Israel.

L.McF. What we are saying this morning has that in view, that the saints might be held together in love and that a way of life might contribute to that.

E.C.B. I wondered whether it bore on the way in which we are affected in our own spirits in conflict, whether the spirit in which we come in is not of vain-glory, but that it is that Jehovah had fought the battle. In Numbers 10 it is the ark that sets the pattern of this "Rise up, Jehovah, and let thine enemies be scattered ... Return, Jehovah, unto the myriads of the thousands of Israel" (vv 35,36).

L.McF. That helps. In the beginning of Joshua they have the man with the drawn sword. Joshua saw him. He was ready for conflict and would, as captain of Jehovah's army lead, I think, Joshua's exploits and his success was due to the fact that he followed that man. He followed that spiritual lead and that is so essential. The Spirit has His place with us, and we are not going by what we hear, but having recourse to the Spirit of God.

I refer now to energy that marked Elijah in dealing with the fallen system, then the authority. Our brother was enquiring as to how acquire this moral power. That was seen in Elijah. He could

say "as Jehovah the God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years except by my word", 1 Kings 17: 1. What authority! James tells that he was "a man of like passions to us". It goes on to say "the word of Jehovah came to him, Get thee eastward and hide thyself". I think that relates to moral authority, meanwhile to hide ourselves. This man was with God. What he said came to pass.

H.A.H. It is only in James that we learn that he prayed before the drought. We get his second prayer here, but we have to wait until James to know that he had already prayed in relation to the shutting of the heavens.

L.McF. He prayed with prayer. That supports what I said earlier, that the moral authority is 'prayed with prayer'.

D.J.W. "The fervent supplication of the righteous man has much power". You have referred to righteousness earlier and I wondered whether it entered into the moral power that we are speaking of. Does God takes account of that?

L.McF. That is so. I think there is a footnote in that scripture in which the emphasis is on fervency. He kept at it. God was affected by this man and the fervency of his prayers.

E.C.B. That is to say that he had power with God. I think what our brother was asking about is how we get some power with one another. Elijah had power with God. Perhaps that is where we begin. In answer to him you referred to prayer.

L.McF. It begins with God.

H.A.H. That is what was said to Jacob, "thou hast wrestled with God, and with men" (see Gen 32: 28). I was only confirming what was said that we begin with God. God takes account of the power, the fervency, the insistence. Jacob says "I will not let thee go except thou bless me".

L.McF. What you have said helps me. We need more fervency in prayer.

A.L. Earlier it says, "the word of Jehovah came to him". Would that link on with a mutual thought between God and Elijah?

L.McF. I am sure it would "the word of Jehovah came to him". God knew Elijah.

D.E.B. Elijah's servant says to him "there is nothing". Elijah says, Well, try seven times.

L.McF. That is it, fervency. It says of Paul that he besought the Lord thrice, as to his thorn for the flesh. Seven times - I think that if we get nothing more out of this meeting it is the need of prayer.

J.W. Elijah himself had to suffer as a result of his prayer that there might be no rain. It would be exercising to pray in relation to things from which we might suffer.

L.McF. We should be prepared for the suffering, go through the thing ourselves. Daniel, a man greatly beloved - "O man greatly beloved" - known in heaven on account of his prayers.

S.H. It says in Mark, "All things whatsoever you pray for and ask, believe that ye shall receive it, and it shall come to pass for you", Mark 11: 24. Elijah was like that was he not? But he says "Jehovah hear me".

L.McF. That is so; he believed.

S.H. It would be a principle for our praying.

L.McF. That we believe. Some of us have been praying for certain things for a long time, and we might not get the answer in our lifetime. Nevertheless we believe that God will do it, believe God that He will answer those prayers.

E.C.B. What you have said is encouraging. You said you pray and pray, and you might not get the answer in your lifetime. We have known brethren who had much to pray for and longings, and they prayed and prayed; they were pious men and women, but maybe when they are with Christ an answer will come to what they prayed for. I think what you said is encouraging.

L.McF. In the wisdom of God we have to learn to wait. We have to wait upon Jehovah.

L.W.B. It says that we are to let our requests be made known to God, and the peace of God shall guard our hearts and thoughts by Christ Jesus. So if we are concerned about others and we pray for them in faith, we get an audience with God and He has heard and we have peace.

L.McF. That is right.

M.W. You referred at the beginning to roots, and life which flows from roots. I was thinking of the reference, again in James, to Elijah's second prayer - again he prayed "and the earth gave rain, and the earth caused its fruit to spring forth". I wondered if there was a link with what you were saying earlier? .

L.McF. That is good. Fruit - that is the ultimate of what is in mind. We have had some godly men in this area and I am sure I am looking at the fruit of their labours today. They are with Christ. That is before us, that there might be something for God.

A.G.S. Would that link with the palm tree and the cedar that are referred to in the Psalm. I was thinking of the cedar as the dignity of manhood before God and what is in evidence, the palm tree as the thought of fruit and victory. They are features that we, as younger persons, take account of in older brethren. Is that something that is worked out that is particularly pleasing to God?

L.McF. I think that is right, the dignity relating to the fellowship. I will find that in the house of God. If the young people are taking account of things we might not think very important, they are rejoicing people, they are in victory - the palm tree. Deborah had her palm tree. We do not want to be giving the impression that we are depressed on account of the smallness of things, but the word is "hope thou in God".

P.M. Peter speaks of the holy women who had their hope in God. I wondered if they showed the features that you are bringing out that



they were persons who had nothing here, as everything for them was in God.

L.McF. And now it is the holy brethren. Peter speaks of that, holy brethren.

**REDBRIDGE**

**18 April 1998**

## **Key to initials**

*(Local if not otherwise indicated)*

D.E.Burr; E.C.Burr, London; L.W.Burton, Merton Park; R.M.Brown, East Finchley;

D.J.Hutson, London; H.A.Hutson, London; S.Hewison, Dorking, A.Lidbeck., Gothenburg; L.Mcfarlane, New York; P.Martin, Colchester; E.Oliver; D.E.Remmington, St Albans; A.G.Smith, Bexley; D.J.Wright; J.Wright; J.R.Walkinshaw, Bexley; P.J.Walkinshaw, Gillingham; M.Webster, Buckhurst Hill; V.E.Wraighte, Gillingham

## **"THE HEAVENS SHALL HEAR THE EARTH"**

**Gordon McKay**

**Joshua 10: 12-15; Luke 11: 1-13; John 14: 12-17; 1 Chronicles 4: 9,10**

When God created the heavens and the earth, one of His thoughts was that what was superior in heaven should influence the earth.

Indeed He has in mind a scene where heaven and earth will be in entire accord. We know that what has transpired in the history divinely recorded in the Scriptures is that dislocation has taken place and the breach of God's thoughts in the sinfulness of man and his alienation from God, the alienation in that sense of earth from heaven. Distance has come in, and yet God has not given up the earth. He gives up nothing of what He establishes. He has thoughts and He introduces them and continues them, and completes them.

God has His thoughts as to the heaven and earth. At the present time God is operating in regard to the earth, but He still has this blessed thought that the heavens will influence the earth, and we are in the gain of that through the glad tidings and through the disposition and grace of God in the incoming of the Spirit. The earth is being influenced from above. How precious that is, everything coming from God, so that He would bring to bear such influence on the earth.

But what He has also in mind in His operations is remarkable; that those that are on earth should influence heaven. That is, that He would not have the scene on earth simply passive as receiving what comes from above, but that He would work in persons who have a link with heaven. He loves to do that, to work in persons who have faith and a link with God, persons who are righteous, persons of faith and integrity, persons who can influence heaven in their prayers. It creates a sense of wonder in your soul to think of that, that God would have it that our prayers should influence heaven, that the voice of man according to Joshua 10 should influence heaven, indeed influence heaven in the most wonderful way.

Joshua was speaking to Jehovah in a very definite way, and he addressed the sun and the moon and they halted in their course, and it is recorded here that there was no day like that before or after, when Jehovah hearkened to the voice of a man. God loves to work that way. Heaven loves to move in connection with what is produced and is developing on earth according to God's will. You find in the movements of God that He loves to act in connection with those who are looking for Him to act, and are praying, are in connection with heaven.

This remarkable day alluded to in Joshua was a day of vengeance. It was not in its primary setting like our day. We live in another day, a day of rich blessing and a dispensation of favour, not a day of slaughter, or judgment, but a day of blessing. I was wondering if we could enlarge our thoughts then as to prayer and as to how we could take up this exercise, because "the voice of a man" leaves room for exercise that there might be something developed in manhood that heaven would listen to. Heaven has its men here to whom it listens, the saints of God. There are on earth, maintained today, those who pray and heaven listens. In everything Jesus, of course, is a wonderful example to us, blessed lowly Man. We know that in Luke's gospel seven times He is seen as praying, the dependent and praying One! Think of what God had on earth in the days of the Son of Man, the days of His flesh. What prayer, what a connection there was then' between heaven and earth in the prayers of Jesus. The thought of the prayers of Jesus is something that would be worth contemplating, to think of His dependence. He received answers too. He says in John's gospel "I thank thee that thou hast heard me" (11: 41). On another occasion in chapter 12 He said, "Father glorify thy name" (v 28), and there was a voice from heaven, an answer. How blessed to think of Jesus on earth in communion with the Father and speaking and receiving answers. In one of the culminating chapters in John's gospel, chapter 17, you have the Son requesting things from the Father. God operates His own way. We cannot confine Him, we cannot dictate to Him, and He will operate as He wishes to operate, and He loves to act in

connection with prayer. He will wait sometimes, I believe, for prayer on our side so that He might act. That would enhance the thought of prayer, that there are persons on earth who have confidence in God and faith, and uprightness, persons who can approach Him freely and with confidence and know that they will receive answers as they pray according to His will as it says in John's epistle.

The first attack on man through Eve was a suggestion, I suppose, that God could not be trusted: when the serpent approached Eve, the subtle suggestion was that God was withholding something good from man - the true knowledge of good and evil - so alas instilling a lack of confidence in God, and thus sin entered in. God works through the glad tidings to establish confidence in our hearts, so that through the gospel and through the divine teaching that follows our reception of the gospel, we are established in the knowledge of God and His disposition, His gracious, giving disposition, the One who gave us the Son. "How shall He not also with him freely give us all things?". That is God's disposition. And so we ought to be encouraged to pray and to know that God will listen to us and indeed that He will answer our prayers. He will come in for us in connection with our prayers and He will act, both in our individual exercises, and in assembly exercises, and even in regard to the world itself. He will act according to our prayers, the prayers of the saints. God has chosen to work this way, He loves to do that. He has a testimony here on earth - "not leave himself without a testimony" - and those in whom that testimony is deposited are in touch with Him and speak to Him and He speaks to them. You understand how blessed this is. Sometimes a contrast is drawn between what Joshua says in chapter 10 to Jehovah, and the day of the glad tidings, which follow the words of Jesus on the cross. Think of the prayers of Jesus. The whole setting of this dispensation is, in one sense, based on the prayers of Jesus, that is that He said on the cross "Father forgive them for they know not what they do". That blessed intercession was heard in heaven, and has given character to the present day.

Where we read in John 14 the Lord Jesus says, "I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter". One of the settings of the great matter of the presence of the Spirit here is this, that He came in answer to a request from Christ, that he begged the Father, and the Holy Spirit was given. Think of the Father, think of God acting in connection with the requests of Jesus; but then He would act in regard to our requests and so we ought to take courage, we ought to grow in our knowledge of God, and as having a good conscience and being set in righteousness, and in faith here, we can approach Him and we know that our prayers can be effective.

The Lord Jesus in Luke 11 is Himself answering a request from His own. He is a praying Man, and here he is in a certain place praying and when He ceased, they said to Him "Lord teach us to pray". They saw something in Jesus that they wanted to emulate, they wanted to learn how to pray. It is a thing you can learn. God's ear is ever open to the cry of any sinner, however ignorant, any despairing cry, the ear of heaven is open. But there is such a thing as learning what it is to be in the presence of God and to pray. And so the Lord Jesus taught them, and He gave them this prayer. It has been taken up and fossilised, you might say, in the professing church, become a kind of ritual, so deeply embedded in the mind that it almost would take away the true virtue and power of what the words actually mean. But we can take up this too in the spirit of it, we can take up what this is and we can say, "Father". That is Luke's account. In Matthew, that is not where prayer begins, as we know, but in Luke, he says when you pray say "Father". How blessed that is! It is the liberty and grace of the present dispensation, God known in grace. The Lord Jesus did that Himself in chapter 17 of John, it says He "lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father". How precious that the same privilege is open to you and to me. We can do that in simplicity, we can lift up our eyes to heaven and say, Father. I do not want to go into the detail of it, but you can see that the persons who are praying know the Father, they value His Name, "thy name be hallowed", they think of everything that would honour Him, they think of their own lives and as to whether they themselves

in their lives are honouring Him and hallowing Him. They have some thought of His holiness. You see the kind of persons that can approach, and surely their prayers will be heard. They are looking for His kingdom to come. That suggests that they themselves are subjects of His kingdom, subject and obedient persons, and they are looking for that to extend for the Father's glory; they would love to see that, everyone coming under that blessed sway. They are dependent persons, they are forgiving persons, they are persons who desire to be kept in the midst of evil. You can see then that God looks for qualities in persons that can give them a basis to approach Him and to intercede indeed for others, not only to pray for themselves' but to intercede for others.

The Lord goes on and He encourages by this very interesting parable or story. He illustrates the need for prayer. It is a kind of contrast, I take it. There might be in friendship in the world, however sincere, a limit to how much you can ask. But even if you ask at midnight and things are very awkward, and you get a refusal, sometimes by persistence you can get what you wish, because of your shamelessness, keeping knocking at the door at midnight until you get what you want. But then He brings in what I believe is a contrast. The Father will never say, Do not disturb me. You will not get that answer when you pray. His ear is ever open, and so the Lord says, "I say to you, Ask and it shall be given to you".

I would like to ask whether you are a praying person. Do you ask for things? Could you tell me what things you ask for? Have you ever thought of what you should ask for? Have you anything special that you would like, any spiritual desires that have led you to want to make a petition, or more than one petition. The man we read of in 1 Chronicles 4 had quite a list of things, he knew what he wanted and he decided to make a petition for it. So, the Lord encourages us, Be that kind of person, ask. Indeed, He says "seek and knock", that is be persistent, and He brings out the disposition of God. He brings in natural comparisons to help us. Scripture comes down in that sense to help us, to illustrate things to us, as to what a natural father would give to his son, and then he says, "how much rather shall the Father

who is of heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?". It is as if it is almost like a kind of epitome, a wonderful touch as to how much the Father would give, that He would give the Holy Spirit to them that ask.

What a thing it is that we can ask for the Holy Spirit. It would apply individually and I understand too that it can apply collectively, because it is plural here: the Father who is of heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him. So, dear brethren, we need the power and help of the Holy Spirit. We can pray about that, we can seek to be in right conditions locally for that. It has been pointed out that this occurs in a certain place, He was in a certain place praying and so we can pray in a certain place. We do that I suppose. The men should pray in every place, it says, and in our own localities we pray in that place. What do we pray for? We can make petitions for our own needs, we can think of much that would come readily to mind, but what is your thought for your locality? Have you a thought, have you a petition? Would you desire holy conditions, would you desire restful conditions for the Holy Spirit, would you like the meeting to be spiritual, would you like the meetings as they proceed to be marked by the, power of the Holy Spirit, and the preaching proceed in the power of the Holy Spirit? Have you a thought as to your locality, a thought as to what would lead to prosperity? You can ask, and you can ask together: "them that ask Him", we can be among those that ask. May we be encouraged to formulate some petitions, to define in our minds and exercises what we would like: perhaps for our own exercises, but even greater what we might like for the prosperity of the testimony and for one another, because we have the privilege of praying not only for ourselves, but for one another and for the meeting and for the whole church of God. You can pray for the assembly. You can seek to be expanded in your affections and think of the assembly, think of those that are here on earth indwelt by the Spirit, that belong to Christ.

In John's gospel chapter 14 we have in the Lord's instruction some amazing statements. I think you cannot go very far in Scripture before you see "wondrous things out of thy law", Ps 119:



18. Think of the Lord saying "Verily, verily". The writers of the other gospels do not use that, it is a John expression for the time of doubt and difficulty and deceit. The Lord says that despite all these problems and clouds He will tell you of something you can trust, and He says "Verily, verily". Have you a 'verily, verily' in your soul? Are you sure in your soul where you are and what you are doing? It is a broken day, a small day and a difficult day, John wrote for these days, and therefore when the Lord says certain things as we remarked in the reading, He says verily, verily, so that there might be the stability in our souls, that we might know where we are assuredly. You do not need to go on drifting in doubt, we do not need to be in doubt or hesitation, we can be definite as listening to the Lord.

Here He tells us, what I would say is one of the "wondrous things": "He that believes on me, the works which I do shall he do also". Is that not astonishing? The Lord is pointing to the time of His absence and He is preparing His disciples, and one of the things He says is that he that believes on Him shall do the works which Jesus did. That is, that there will be still be power available. The Lord is at pains in these chapters in John to show that the disciples will not be at any disadvantage at all, rather at greater advantage. And then, "he shall do greater than these, because I go to the Father". He is pointing to the great advantage of the present disposition of things, that Christ has gone to the Father. There is a blessed Man in the presence of God, a blessed Man with the Father. His own are here, and are asking. In the midst of this great matter of Christ being with the Father, then the incoming of the Spirit, you get verses 13 and 14, the matter of prayer. That is, that the matter is going to be worked out on the principle of prayer, because He says, "whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, this will I do". How is this wonderful dispensation going to be put into effect in our souls and localities? Christ is on high and the Spirit here, and the saints are praying. That is an essential part of this system that is operating at the present time, a system of power and advantage and help in the last days. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, this will I do". The Father will

surely grant it, and Christ as with the Father will do it. He says "this will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son". Think of the divine economy and the pleasure they have in what is done, the pleasure the Son has in pleasing the Father in bringing about an answer to what He has agreed to, the petitions that He has granted, "the Father ... glorified in the Son". The saints are asking the Father in the Son's name, and all this is pleasing to heaven, and it is efficacious, so the Lord says again, "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it". How remarkable, "anything". He knows, He is speaking to those He can trust, persons that will ask as having right desires in their hearts. We may sometimes tend to think of prayer as a kind of forlorn matter. You see a difficult situation, and you say, We'll pray about it. You find that you are lacking faith that God will come in in regard to it. But I think Scriptures would point to the fact that God will answer prayer as we pray as feeling things before Him and having right exercise. God will delight to answer prayer. You cannot make anything automatic with God, but He delights to do this.

Then we have this added that, as the saints are below keeping the Lord's commandments, He would beg the Father: "I will beg the Father and he will give you another Comforter". Think of the Father giving the Spirit, delighting to give it because Christ has asked that He should give the saints the Spirit to be with them forever, the Spirit of truth. Then the question comes up as to reception, "whom the world cannot receive", because there is not only the request, but there is the idea of receiving what God gives, a fit state to accept what comes in answer to prayer. It runs through these chapters.

We read a similar expression in John 15, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall come to pass to you" (v 7), and in chapter 16 too: "And in that day ye shall demand nothing of me ... Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name he will give you" (v 23). How remarkable, "whatsoever". Think of the confidence heaven reposes in such persons, that they will ask and their prayer will so please heaven, that it will come to them.

That expression is used in Matthew 18 as to those that pray, "two of you", assembly minded persons as we are often taught. They agree

on earth concerning any matter - on earth, mark you - and it comes to them "from my Father who is in the heavens". "Two of you": that is for our day. If you have a small prayer meeting, perhaps only two brothers, that is all you need, and then the thing will come to you, "For where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them" (v 20). It is as if there is confirmation in the heart of the two that pray, the presence of the Lord, among the two or three. It might reach to three, things may increase, and you have the sense of the Lord's presence.

And so we ought to be encouraged, dear brethren, and take up this matter of prayer. God has disposed of things, organised or arranged things so that matters will, from one point of view, derive from what is on the earth and what rises to heaven in the prayers of the saints, so that heaven is affected and heaven will act. God will do that, He will even disclose to His servants the prophets what He does. He will tell people what He will do before He does it. He will have those that are intelligent and He will have those that are praying in connection with that intelligence as to what God is about to do. The Lord will come in that connection, I believe, the Spirit and the bride saying, "Come". He will appear, it says, to those that look for Him, He will come in answer to what is down here. How precious a thought that is, that what is on the earth is answering to heaven. It says in the Psalm "truth will spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from the heavens" (Ps 85: 11). There is something springing from the earth that is pleasing to heaven, that is in accord with heaven and heaven acts in connection with this.

I read in Chronicles to emphasise the individual side, because the matters that we have spoken of so far centre largely on what we are exercised about as together and for one another, but Jabez sets out individual exercise and indeed exercise for himself. That is right, that you should have right exercises for yourself, perhaps you ought to begin there. Let no one think then that we should be slow to ask. It is remarkable that this man finds his place in Scripture because of a remarkable prayer. It is about all we know about him as far as I can see. We know his name was Jabez, and he was more honoured

than his brethren, we know how he received his name, that his mother bore him with pain, but the reason he finds his place in the divine record is that he prayed and he required an answer to his prayers. Think of that, a person being picked out from among the saints of God to be put in the divine record, and his claim to be there is this outstanding matter that he prayed. As he prayed he called on the God of Israel. It was not a long prayer, but it was a full prayer, and it was a definite prayer and specific prayer. He knew what he wanted and he asked for it. We have that expression, 'whatever they ask', as a kind of open matter as to what you are going to ask.

Be sure to ask. Surely if such a God, such a disposition, is known to you, you will want to put in your claim. Ask, and ask fully. Be bold to ask. I think this man was bold to ask. He did not say, I would just like to get through, and get a little bit of help, he prayed with feeling, "Oh that thou wouldest richly bless me". He did not just ask for blessing, he wanted rich blessing. Why should you not want rich blessing and want the best? And "enlarge my border": as if he wanted to be blessed beyond the realms he could see at the moment, to lift up his eyes and see beyond that the realms of divine blessing that are available to him. Then "that thy hand might be with me" - I suppose that is like a third thing, that God's hand may be with him, and another thing is that he should be kept from evil that it should not grieve him. He prayed in that way for himself. And God brought about what he had requested, and here it is recorded in Scripture as a kind of encouragement to us. Have you made your prayer, then? His name was called Jabez because his mother bore him with pain. Perhaps your mother bore you with pain, perhaps you are the product of deep exercises among the saints: you do not know what prayers have gone up for you. We little know what is going on in the way of agonising in prayer for us. Perhaps that is why we are here today, because persons have been praying for us and are continuing to pray. Is there going to be a result from that exercise? The saints desire the best from you. They go to great lengths, they will spend time on their knees, they will persist in their prayers for you, and they are looking for a result. With Jabez there

was a result from his mother's exercise and it came out in the definiteness of his exercise.

Let us not draw back from this, but let us make our petitions, dear brethren, whether it be for ourselves, or for our localities, whatever it might be, let us put in these petitions and prove what God can be to us, for His Name's sake.

**BIRMINGHAM**

**14 March 1998**