

*A*  
*WORD*  
*IN ITS*  
*SEASON*

1<sup>st</sup> Series

No. 323

February 2000

Contents

LIFE AND LIBERTY THROUGH PROPHECY

“A BONDMAN OF THE LORD”

# **LIFE AND LIBERTY THROUGH PROPHECY**

## **1 Kings 17: 7-16; 2 Kings 4: 1-7**

W.McK.            These passages present prophetic ministry; first in relation to the continuance of life, and secondly in relation to the continuance of spiritual liberty. It is interesting that both the prophets are in touch with widow women, which would point to our position publicly in the absence of Christ, that the widow spirit marks us. In 1 Kings this widow woman would be over against Jezebel who was dominant in Jerusalem. If we think of the public position around us Jezebel is dominant. We know well enough what that system is. But in spite of Jezebel destroying the prophets of Jehovah, as the next chapter tells us, we have here a prophet who is preserved by a widow woman. Although her outlook was dismal it changes as she follows the prophetic instruction. The result is that the meal in the barrel and the oil in the cruse lasted the whole year, as long as was necessary. In 2 Kings 4 the situation is similar, but different in the sense that it is not death that confronts the widow but rather that the creditor has come to take her two children. The prophet's instruction is to enable her to get the gain of the presence of the Spirit. So it is oil not for anointing but oil as a means of acquiring wealth in order to pay debts and live on the rest. I thought we might find some help going over this ground together.

L.McF.            It is interesting to see that what they had, a little meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse, is suggestive of our vessel, do you think?

W.McK.            It is interesting how the thought of vessels comes into both these passages. It would link with the apostle's instruction in 2 Timothy as to vessels to honour. These vessels are usable, and so the prophet says to her, "Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel". The thought of vessels is of the greatest importance at the present time because they refer to persons usable by Christ in the testimony and the service of God. "A little water in a vessel" would point to what is available. It is not an abundance of water as we find in the next book, but it is enough for the prophet to drink.

J.A.P. You suggested that the prophetic ministry is in relation to life. I notice that Paul speaks about the life which is in Christ Jesus and then the Spirit of life in the believer, the spirit of sonship.

W.McK. Prophetic ministry is intended to produce life and maintain it. If we think of Ezekiel 37, it is a result of the prophet prophesying to the wind (that is typically to the Spirit) that the dead bones are made to live. Bone comes to its bone, then sinews and skin, but then he is to prophesy and it speaks about breath entering into them. The Spirit viewed as breath is connected with the highest line of things in us as believers. The Lord spoke of water in John 3 and John 7; in John 20 it was not water but breath. It would seem that if we are to be maintained in life on the level that the 'life that is in Christ Jesus' alludes to, we need to understand the thought of breath. This would be more basic; it is water and then in the next section we read it is oil. But all these things are instructive for us.

A.S.H. We are told that water represents the Spirit. What does the oil represent?

W.McK. The oil represents the Spirit also. The water is for satisfaction, because he says here, not that I may wash - that would be cleansing - but "that I may drink", that is satisfaction. But the oil in the cruse is essential because the meal without the oil cannot be formed into a little cake; that is, the thought of the assembly could not be practically enjoyed among us apart from the Spirit known as in the body. So meal by itself is useful, oil by itself is useful; but the two must be used together to form this little cake.

L.McF. So we hold to the whole thought, the assembly. It is not fragmentary as it appears to be at the present time?

W.McK. It is important for us to see that and to keep the full thought before us. The Supper is intended to help us in that connection; we being many are one body (1 Cor. 12:12). We might tend to be occupied with the fact that it is a handful of meal in a barrel and we might be somewhat overwhelmed by public conditions. If you take the beloved saints in this locality and in Plainfield, for instance, there are very few. If you think of this vast metropolis, it is

like the barrel and you might say, 'What are so few in the presence of so much?' But another thing to be thought of is that the cruse is a very much smaller vessel but it contains what is essential to the thought of the little cake. That is really what we have; it is a little cake but still it represents, as you say, the whole thought of the assembly.

L.McF. That is worked out in our localities whether it be two or three or larger numbers.

W.McK. Yes. So every locality which is gathered together to the Lord's Name sets out this spirit of the widow woman. At the same time we want to acquire and maintain a better outlook than she had to begin with and that is through prophetic ministry. Our view is clarified and lifted by prophetic ministry.

L.D.P. I wonder if what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14 fits in, "but he that prophesies edify the assembly" (v 4). It is the assembly that is in mind; not, as you say, a fragment even though number might be small.

W.McK. Yes. So throughout that chapter you find the assembly mentioned many times, showing that it was the predominant thought in the apostle's mind as he considered assembly function and prophetic ministry in that regard. What that leads on to is "that God is indeed amongst you". That is really the greatest evidence of life, that the living God is among us. Joshua said to Israel, "Hereby shall ye know that the living God is in your midst", Josh 3: 10. The greatest evidence we have spiritually and inwardly is that the Lord comes in among us at the breaking of bread and leads us into a realm which involves "the life which is in Christ Jesus", 2 Tim 1: 1.

C.F.D. Do you think we need sometimes to have our vision lifted? She was going to make a cake for her and her son and eat of it and die. Life is really in view, but for the moment her vision was allowed to drop. The prophetic word would be to bring her up where the Spirit would have dominance.

W.McK. That is what I was thinking. So she was gathering sticks and she brings it down, you might say, to the smallest number:

“I am gathering two sticks”. She was thinking of herself and her son. But although she had the idea of the cake, her thought was that she would dress it “for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die”, whereas the thought is that we may eat it and live.

K.N.P. She was dependent only on what she saw. You mentioned earlier the handful of meal in the barrel - that was what was seen - but do you think there is something beyond that has far more power because of the combination of the meal and the oil?

W.McK. That is what I was thinking. So that we do not want to be governed by the sight of our eyes. I am sure that some of the persons who are deflecting from the truth are governed only by the sight of their eyes: all they see is how large the barrel is and how little a handful of meal is, and undoubtedly in their minds is how dominant Jezebel is. Look at the numbers connected with Jezebel in Jerusalem, whereas numbers from one point of view do not mean anything to God: He is able for any number if it is His will. But if divine Persons come down in grace, as the Lord says, “two of you” (Matt 18: 19), we must remember that that is related to the presence of the Spirit. Therefore since everything remains in the Spirit, for the Spirit is the truth, we need not be oppressed by a handful of meal in a barrel.

A.S.H. Is it right to say that the prophet brought in the prophetic word; “Fear not”? She has death before her but the prophet is saying, Fear not, thou shalt not die but thou shalt live.

W.McK. Yes. He says, “Fear not”, that is encouraging, and then, “go, do as thou has said”. That would sound as though he is endorsing what she was thinking, but then you get the edge of things, do you not? “But make me thereof a little cake first; and bring it to me; and afterward make for thee and for thy son”. This tests her as to whether her faith is equal to this. Our faith is continually tested week by week in our localities as to whether we really believe that the Lord at the right hand of God and the Spirit here in the assembly are equal to this outwardly weak condition. The very limitation of the meal and the oil is to bring out dependence, “that the

surpassingness of the power may be of God and not from us”, 2 Cor 4: 7.

K.N.P.            Would that help us to hear the prophetic word - dependence?

W.McK.           It would. We know that prophecy is essential, because by a prophet God brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved, Hos 12: 13. When they left Egypt they were under the prophetic word and when they went into the land they were. The whole time in testimony, so to speak, was really under prophetic speaking. In the recovery to the truth we have had prophetic speaking continually, and it continues to this very day because it is the Spirit who is speaking.

J.A.P.            I suppose the apostles John and Paul are like Elijah and Elisha. There is a very prophetic side to the gospel of John in which life is stressed. Would that help as to your thought of life and vitality?

W.McK.           It does. Although this is a little cake, as we pursue the thought of food in relation to life in John’s gospel, in chapter 6 you come to the food of eternal life. It involves not only that the Lord was the bread that came down from heaven, but that we need to learn to eat His flesh and drink His blood. Without the appropriation of His death, we have no life. Then He goes on to say, “he also who eats me shall live also on account of me”; that is the appropriation of Christ where He is. All that is intended to strengthen us in view of our function in our localities.

L.McF.           We should note this word “first”. We had a dear brother here with us who always stressed that, first things first.

W.McK.           Sometimes we are slow to come to that. This woman came to it without any objection. She becomes a model for us. She abandons her own line of thought; she went and did according to the word of Elijah. See what the results is, “and she, and he” - note she is put before the prophet now - “she and he, and her house, ate a whole year”. As we act in response to the prophetic word, the thought of the assembly becomes more prominent.

C.F.D. Your suggestion as to the prophetic word becoming more prominent is very important, because the rapidity with which she was adjusted would show that inwardly she was looking for something of that character. I wonder whether in our localities we should not be on that line, looking for something coming in which would be of a prophetic character which will affect the proceedings in the place? It affected not only her and her son, but her whole house.

W.McK. It did. So the whole position is really changed and brought into life, or life is continued, and they ate a whole year. "The meal in the barrel did not waste, neither did the oil in the cruse fail, according to the word of Jehovah". Now it is not just the prophet's word; it is the word of God which he had spoken through Elijah. It is a great thing to see that the word of God is coming to us and that it has in mind the continuance in life of every person in every locality.

C.F.D. As you say, the word of God is coming. I think this is may be a word for us because it is to affect our outlook in the locality. We might look around and say, 'Well, things are small in Plainfield, New York and such', but we are to be on the lookout for the prophetic word to come in, which, when it comes, will have power to bring in a change.

W.McK. Exactly. So what a change was brought about. The resources did not fail and the assembly comes more into prominence; "she, and he, and her house". The prophetic word is really to bring forward the thought of the assembly. Although the prophet is prominent initially, at this point the assembly typically is prominent. The thought of her widowhood is not stressed at the end; it is at the beginning. God said, I have commanded a widow woman there to maintain thee, and as he came to the entrance of the city, behold, a widow woman was there gathering sticks. But she seems to acquire spiritual dignity as we go through the section, and I think the Lord would encourage us to see that the prophetic word in our localities is to make the thought of the assembly more prominent. The assembly will be prominent in the world to come when prophecies shall be done away. There is a time coming when there

will not be prophecies, but there will be the assembly and she will be coming down out of heaven from God having the glory of God.

*Rem.* I am affected that the woman here had been very disheartened. She felt that she would die, her son would die - very obviously she had given up all hope when she spoke to Elijah about it. Yet God had another plan in mind: Elijah prophesied that food would be multiplied. This woman had really lost hope, even though the prophet Elijah had come to visit her; yet she had reason to have hope.

W.McK. We may tend to do that. The contrast would be that as the prophetic word helps us and we avail ourselves of the resources, we begin to understand what it is to abound in hope. We get that touch in Romans, "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit", (chap 15: 13). It may be that what she represents in the way of lack of hope applies to somebody here; the prophetic word as it comes as we are together is to change somebody's outlook and lead the person to accept these outwardly small conditions. But there is food; the meal typical of Christ is there, the oil typical of the Spirit, and as we recognise these great thoughts there comes about the idea of the little cake.

K.N.P. The prophet did not bring the meal and the oil; it was there already. But he brought in God's word which caused the widow to see the value of the meal and the oil and the cake that could be made.

W.McK. Yes, that is the thing we should see. She tended to under-value the resources that were there. She was sure they were going to run out once she had done what she proposed, but the prophetic word shows that God was acting on other lines, and so they ate for a whole year. I suppose we might say it would run through the whole period of the acceptable year of the Lord, the whole assembly period; the meal in the barrel and the oil in the cruse will not fail.

L.McF. It is encouraging to see that the ingredients were there in the locality. Sometimes we might feel we are wanting.

W.McK. It is important to see that they are there and they are there in the persons who are in the locality. So it is not empty vessels; there is something in both these vessels: the meal in the barrel, the oil in the cruse; it is already there.

C.F.D. I think what our brother raises is important, because you are drawing on what is in the locality by the Spirit of God. One of the interesting points here is that it shall not fail until the day that Jehovah sendeth rain upon the face of the earth - it shall not fail. So we can look for an indication from the Spirit of God as to just how God is moving in this exercise.

W.McK. It would stabilise us and enable us to abound in hope to see that this will continue until the Lord comes. The rain, I suppose, alludes dispensationally to the world to come, but what we have in the meantime will not fail or waste. There is never a great increase in the measure but there is always enough to sustain the position in the light of the assembly and in assembly life.

L.D.P. Should we not seek to be available to convey a prophetic word? I am thinking of what this prophet went through before being sent here. He was told to hide himself and then he himself drank of the torrent that was dried up; no doubt he would see it drying up and was concerned about what was going to follow. Faith was needed on his side. Do we need to make ourselves available to receive what is prophetic, so that the Lord can use us?

W.McK. I would say that. I think, too, that we must be prepared to go through in our spirits the conditions about which we are going to prophesy. As you are pointing out, Elijah had bread and flesh brought in the morning and the evening and he drank of the torrent, but after a while, it says, the torrent dried up. Now he is confronted with the same conditions about which he is going to prophesy when he speaks to this widow woman. If we take on existing conditions in our own spirits before God, we are going to be more available to be used for prophetic speaking and there will be more power in it. What do you think?

L.D.P. I appreciate what you are saying, 'as we take it on'. It is not just observing the condition but it is as we take it on and are with the Lord in it that we are able to speak with power. I notice, in the morning and the evening; would you say something as to that? It is not just receiving a word in the morning. Daniel prayed three times a day.

W.McK. This was adequate to sustain him and no doubt he was tested by what God used to bring him the bread and the flesh because these were unclean birds. The raven is an unclean bird in Scripture and yet that is the means that God used. So the prophet is tested as to whether he is going to be hindered by any religious or traditional thoughts or whether he is going to be ready for the way in which his sustenance comes. And then the torrent - it is not even named - he drank of it but in due course it dried up. Now if I am going to prophesy effectively in my locality or elsewhere, I am going to have to go through some experience like this; otherwise I shall be merely an academic retailing doctrine to the brethren. But here is a man who had to go through some suffering in order to have power with a widow woman.

J.A.P. The Lord refers to this passage when He preached in Nazareth. If any are inquiring where the help is, seems to me the answer, "Where is the food?" I am thankful to be amongst brethren where I can say there is a measure of food at the present time.

W.McK. Yes. I am glad you mention that because where he was sent was actually outside the borders of Israel. He was sent into the area of Phoenicia, which means that you are not going to find food in the accredited religions of this world. You must get outside the borders of Israel in that sense. And this is a nondescript place, Zarephath; it is not of great importance in Scripture except for this incident and the fact the Lord mentions it. We need to be ready to move morally outside the camp, because that is really what it is. Israel is dominated by Jezebel at this point.

A.S.H. Is it right to say that we need more faith in all these things? The apostles said to the Lord, Give us more faith. The Lord

said, "O ye of little faith". This woman did not have faith in the beginning; she was thinking about dying, "I have not a cake".

W.McK. We are always tested as the word of God comes to us, and what should encourage us is that God has dealt to each a measure of faith (Rom 12: 3). If you are in Zarephath or somewhere else, God is giving you a measure of faith that is equal to maintaining you in life in that position; it is equal to enabling you to obey the prophetic word. One of the features of faith is obedience.

P.Z. So it says, "she, and he, and her house, ate a whole year". It is not she, and he, and her son, but a house is mentioned. Do you think that would bring in the thought of the assembly as you have said? The result of faith will be the maintenance of things and the maintenance of households in relation to the truth?

W.McK. Yes. And that house conditions are enjoyed in the locality. We want to understand that the thought of the house according to Luke 15 is that there is light and joy and food. All that would enter into that thought of "her house".

D.McF. In chapter 4 of 2 Kings the prophet says, "Tell me, what hast thou in the house?"

W.McK. It is very important to see that. It relates to what was remarked earlier as to what was there, which she undervalued; the woman here does likewise. She says, "Thy handmaid has not anything at all in the house but a pot of oil". But she did not need anything more than that. I think what you point out is important, that we need to see what is in the place. Here it is more than a little oil in a cruse; it is a pot of oil. It is a more extensive idea and a different kind of vessel indicating greater capacity. This is a woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets. The sons of the prophets are not generally very creditable, as the earlier part of this book shows, and this woman was married to one but he had died. And she says, "thou knowest that they servant feared Jehovah". Elisha does not make any comment on that, but when she says, "the creditor is come to take my two children to be bondmen", he says, "What shall I do for

thee? Tell me, what hast thou in the house?" What he is going to do relates to what she has in the house.

K.N.P. Why do you think she has to go in and shut the door?

W.McK. It would seem to indicate that the position can only be understood spiritually. It is not open to public view, it is a secret transaction, and it is going to lead to continuance not only in life but also in spiritual liberty. What were you thinking yourself?

K.N.P. I think that is helpful, because the Lord exhorts His own to go into thy closet and close the door and pray to thy Father who is in secret, Matt 6: 6. Sometimes we like things to be public, we like things to make much of ourselves, but do you think there is this secret side that has to be gone through to come to a full appreciation of the oil in the cruse?

W.McK. Yes. So in John 20 the doors were shut through fear of the Jews. The Jews at that time would correspond with what Jezebel is in our time, and we certainly do not want Jezebel having any cognisance of what is going on in this secret spiritual way among us.

C.F.D. The woman seems to me to need to have things upgraded in her own mind. In answer to Elisha she says, "Thy handmaid has not anything at all in the house but a pot of oil" - anything at all - as if she is discounting what was available to her in the Spirit.

W.McK. I think that is what you see, that she does not value the presence of the Spirit and what that can lead to. We perhaps underestimate the greatness of the presence of the Spirit. If the Lord said, It is profitable that I go away because if I do not go away the Spirit will not come to you (John 16: 7), it throws into relief how great this resource is. The Lord is really saying in effect that it is a greater matter for you to have the Spirit than for Me to remain among you. Yet you may be saying, as our brother was pointing out, I have only this pot of oil. But from one point of view, I could not have anything greater as the sequel shows.

C.F.D. Do you think this is reflected in our personal link with the Spirit of God, He Who is so available and so powerful? Do you think we need to be stirred up to have a greater recognition of what is so near to us in the Spirit of God?

W.McK. It is the greatest thing we could speak about really, that the Spirit of God is here in the assembly. We must, to refer to what our brother was saying about faith, be in faith as to that. Mr. Stoney said that you need faith as much to believe that the Spirit is here as you need faith to believe that Christ is in heaven; faith is required for both. But think of a divine Person being here and it is said of Him the Spirit is the truth. There is not one thing lacking. The Lord said, I am the truth (see John 14: 6) and the Spirit through John says, the Spirit is the truth (see John 16: 13); in that sense what is down here in the Spirit is equal to what was here in Christ. We need to be impressed with the greatness of it, and then see that that can lead to a spiritual transaction, because he says to her when she tells what has happened: "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy sons on the rest". The presence of the Spirit means that any debt can be met. Whether we view the creditor as a type of the law or whatever application we may give it, the value of the oil is far greater than the demand of the creditor.

L.McF. What is involved in borrowing vessels? These vessels are to be empty.

W.McK. I was thinking about that earlier and wondering, since the prophet says, "Go, borrow for thyself vessels abroad from all thy neighbours". There are a good many systems and the like around us, especially so-called brethren, and there are a lot of empty vessels there. Sometimes these brethren are not very neighbourly. He says to her, "from all thy neighbours", but "borrow for thyself vessels abroad". Maybe we need to take a wider outlook on where persons may be who could be usable, and they need to be filled with the oil. What would you say?

L.McF. Yes, empty vessels, not a few. We have to be rid of the first order of things if the Spirit is to find scope in us.

W.McK. Yes, indeed. If we are self-judged persons, we may acquire more power with these neighbours and with these empty vessels which can gather to fill. I hope I am not straining the faith of the brethren in saying that, but there are a lot of persons around us who trust in the blood, but are empty as far as the oil is concerned. The need is to get them out of that position. Although it says, "borrow", it does not mean we are going to send them back. Once we get them out of what they are in, we are going to keep them because they are going to be spiritually valuable. They will contribute to the supply of oil for spiritual transactions.

J.A.P. It touches the evangelical outlook of the brethren at the present time. I know you have a little interest by someone in Ormond Beach and you follow that right up. I think it is a great matter that we are not only evangelical to the lost but evangelical toward those who really do not know what to do at the present time as to the testimony.

W.McK. Yes. There is nothing more pathetic than to come across persons who have faith in an initial sense and believe in the Lord as their Saviour, but they are empty vessels. They have no thought that a divine Person is here and that they can be filled, which will lead into a realm of spiritual wealth. They can get out of this situation where the creditor is going to take the children; they can come where sonship is enjoyed, because she says, "the creditor is come to take my two children to be bondmen".

P.Z. So that the future of the testimony here we can see is maintained by the oil is it not?

W.McK. It is. And the testimony continues according to this passage in spiritual prosperity. Because, as he tells her, "pay thy debt" - that is you can meet moral obligations - "and live thou and thy sons on the rest". What we have in the Spirit, which was referred to earlier, "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8: 2), involves spiritual abundance and we can live on that. The Spirit in Romans 8 involves that we have the means to discharge the obligations of righteousness. The brethren will remember that one of the conflicts

early in Mr Taylor's history was fulfilled responsibility and he used this scripture in Romans 8 to show that by the Spirit the believer can fulfill responsibility, that is pay the debt and be free. So spiritual liberty and spiritual increase are great thoughts in this passage.

P.Z. So the experience that she went through, she and her sons, would make her dependent upon the oil for the rest of her life. It is interesting that the oil was in her house. Maybe you can help us as to how to apply this in the light of what we have in our own homes, such as the ministry.

W.McK. I would connect it with the local position, that the Spirit is here and He is available to us to meet moral obligations and that we might enjoy sonship, because, although she says, "my two children", he says, "thy sons". It is really the liberty and the life of sonship that is in view and that is to be enjoyed in the locality as moral obligations are met by selling the oil. But you live on the rest; the debts are not equal to the supply. That is a great thing to understand, whether in my own life, or my household, or my locality, whatever the obligations are that need to be met righteously, there is far more to meet them than is needed, and the rest means that we are living in spiritual liberty, really the liberty of sonship.

D.McF. So it says here that she was to set aside what was full. In Acts it says they were filled with the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2: 4); there is the thought of pouring out.

W.McK. I think it is an important point to see that, to set aside what is full. We should have that in mind, that we are to be filled vessels. No doubt the apostle is thinking of that when he says to the Ephesians "be filled with the Spirit", Eph 5: 18. That involves, as our brother was saying, the setting aside of the first order. But it is wonderfully encouraging that, even in such a day as ours, vessels can be full.

K.N.P. These filled vessels are not just filled, they are available, the oil has to be sold. I was thinking about trading. Sometimes we need to learn how to trade, do we not, what we have spiritually, so that there is growth, and there is food as a result of it?

W.McK. Yes. So he says, "Go, sell the oil". What it would indicate to me is what the apostle says, "communicating spiritual things by spiritual means", 1 Cor 2: 13. So that in this meeting there is a certain interchange and it involves that on the one hand I am selling something of value but on the other hand I am getting something of value, because not everything was sold. It is important to engage in spiritual transactions, whether in our households as we may read the ministry and the scriptures, as was referred to, or in our localities. But it is wonderful to have the sense that we are free of obligation, we have met the obligations of righteousness; the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us (see Rom 8: 4), and that relates to the Spirit. But there is more than that, because later in that section "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (v 14). In that same chapter we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father (see v 15). I think that is, "live on the rest".

L.McF. You might help us - it is not free. You have to sell here and in the parable of the virgins they were go to and buy. I wonder how that could be applied. You do not get it for nothing. What is the application?

W.McK. It seems to indicate that I must be prepared to surrender certain things in order to acquire this. So in Matthew 25 to which you refer, they were told to go to those that sell, and of course they were too late, because as they were going the bridegroom came. We want to make the most of the present time and not miss the opportunity to engage in spiritual transaction. The word in Proverbs is always seasonal, "Buy the truth, and sell it not", Prov. 23:23. Whatever else you sell, do not sell the truth; you are buying *that* all the time!

## **KEY TO INITIALS**

C.F. Dadd, Plainfield; A.S. Hinkson; D. McFarlane; L. McFarlane; W. McKillop, Ormond Beach; J.A. Petersen, Plainfield, K.N. Pye, L.D.

Phillips; P. Zaklama

## **“A BONDMAN OF THE LORD”**

**W.McKillop**

**2 Timothy 2: 24, 25 (to “oppose”); 1 Corinthians 4: 17; 16: 10, 11; Philippians 2: 19-22**

The passage in 2 Timothy 2 opens the door for all of us to take up the Lord’s work. Paul in writing says, “a bondman of the Lord”; not *the* bondman but “a bondman of the Lord”. That would open the door for every one of us to come into the Lord’s work in whatever way we can. We all belong to the levitical family; we all belong to “the assembly of the firstborn who are registered in heaven”, Heb 12: 23. Belonging to that family affords us, of course, great distinction and great spiritual privileges. It also affords us the privilege of having part in the Lord’s work. Under Moses, the levitical families were to carry on the work of the tabernacle system, and they are only a type of ourselves. What Moses wrote, as Paul would tell us, was not really for Israel but for us (see 1 Cor 10: 11). We have things broken up and amplified in type by Moses so that we should understand how to come into the work. A bondman of the Lord has certain moral characteristics, as the apostle writes. He says, “A bondman of the Lord ought not to contend”. This feature came in early in the history of servants of God. The servants of Abimelech, the Philistine, violently took away a well that Abraham had dug. And although Abraham reproved Abimelech, he really met the matter by setting before him seven ewe-lambs (see Gen 21). That would be a very full presentation typically of the Spirit of Christ. The Philistine asked, What mean these? Abraham understood what he had presented to Abimelech, and he said that it was a testimony that he had dug this well. He did not contend with Abimelech nor did he contend with his servants. The same thing came up in Isaac’s day; the shepherds of Gerar strove with shepherds of Isaac (see Gen 26: 1). It does not say that Isaac’s shepherds strove with them, no doubt as affected by the influence of the heavenly man. What they did was that they removed themselves - at least Isaac did but they would have gone with him - and dug other wells. Although Isaac did

not set seven ewe-lambs by themselves, yet his action in removing himself and not contending meant that the spirit of the seven ewe-lambs was there. But he named those wells to bring out the character of the opposition; one meaning strife and another meaning quarrel. He removed himself from persons who claimed the water. They said the water is ours - it was not theirs of course for Abraham and Isaac had dug the wells - but there are persons who claim that the water is theirs. The test is always how to meet that. I think the Spirit of Christ is what comes out typically in Abraham and Isaac. Paul adds here, "but be gentle towards all", a feature that would mark us regardless of the provocation, regardless of the contention. We know what it is to be accused of being contentious and controversial, but typically Abraham and Isaac would show us how heavenly persons meet that line of things. It is in the Spirit of Christ and in removing themselves from the area of contention. Then Paul goes on with other things, "apt to teach; forbearing; in meekness setting right those who oppose". We would always like to set right those who oppose if we could, but really, as he goes on to show, it is God's matter, "if God perhaps may sometime give them repentance". But our part is to be characterised by meekness in setting them right.

In thinking about "a bondman of the Lord", I have selected Timothy to speak about because of the things that the apostle says of him. In the passage in 1 Corinthians 4, speaking about his sufferings and about the partisan feelings there were in Corinth, he says, "For this reason I have sent to you Timotheus, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord". The Lord is administratively in charge. This title "the Lord" involves not only authority but administrative function. The Lord is always active administratively in regard of His work. The fact that He is spoken of as over the work is to affect us; not only is He over us in that sense but He supplies richly what we need for whatever little part we have in the work. Proverbs tells us "A master roughly worketh every one", Prov 26: 10. That would only mean that, as the Lord asserts His authority in order to make us usable and useful, and to help us to become more skilled in the work, He is not governed by our natural feelings or thoughts or

desires. So “a master roughly worketh every one”; it is not rough to your spiritual feelings, to your subject mind and heart. It is only rough to your natural desires, because naturally we like to determine what we will do and how and when. Even Paul had to say, if not of my own will. There were certain things he would rather not have taken up, but the Lord did not accede to Paul’s desire. Even Apollos did not yield to Paul’s entreaty to go to Corinth; he refused to go because he knew that the Corinthians on account of their state would set Apollos over against Paul, and Apollos would not have Paul’s great ministry in Corinth interfered with or damaged in the Corinthians.

But I am speaking really about Timothy not Apollos. So he says, “my beloved and faithful child”. He is someone who was nurtured in Paul’s affection and he showed by his faithfulness that there was a real answer morally to the affection that Paul lavished on him. He says, “my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who shall put you in mind of my ways as they are in Christ” - a remarkable thing that this relatively young man could be sent by Paul to Corinth. He would come in faithfulness to Paul and conscious of Paul’s affection, to set out in Corinth Paul’s ways as they are in Christ. You can understand that he might have had great trepidation in doing this because there were persons there who thought they were equal to the apostle and they would no doubt regard Timothy as just a youth; as Goliath regarded David. “Thou art but a youth”, Saul says that to him (see 1 Sam 17: 33). Saul is really a figure of the natural man in divine things and there were some like that at Corinth and they would have regarded Timothy with scorn. But what was to shine in him was not that he was going to contend with these persons but that he would put them in mind of Paul’s ways as they are in Christ. As they saw Timothy moving in and out among them it would remind them of how Paul had moved in and out among them. I do not know how long Paul wanted Timothy to remain there, (he himself had been there eighteen months teaching the word of God), but he sends Timothy, a bondman of the Lord, and a beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and what he puts on him is to set out Paul’s ways as they

are in Christ. No doubt that would be like the seven ewe-lambs. As these self-important persons in Corinth saw Timothy they would see a ewe-lamb coming in among them; what would shine would be the Spirit of Christ - not only the spirit of Paul but the Spirit of Christ. So "my ways as they are in Christ" would point to the elevated character of Timothy's movements among these Corinthians. It is a great help to us as we see persons who in some measure are setting out Paul's ways as they are in Christ, an elevated line of things that comes out in the way they move among the saints. Of course the divine thought is that all of us should be on this line because we all ought to be beloved and faithful children of Paul. That is one of the great urges of the Spirit at the present time that, when most in Christendom have forsaken Paul, there should be persons here and there who set out his ways as they are in Christ.

In the sixteenth chapter, where he refers again to Timothy, he gives admonition to the Corinthians; he says, "Now if Timotheus come". Earlier he had said, I am sending him; here he says, if he come, meaning that there might be a change. There was not, he went there; but he says, "see that he may be with you without fear". That would not be a word to the household of Stephanas and Chloe and persons like that; it would be a word really to the Philistines in Corinth, these big persons in their own minds who would try to intimidate Timothy. So he says, "see that he may be with you without fear; for he works the work of the Lord, even as I". Paul had had to say to them "ye have reigned without us" (chap 4: 8). You can understand how the suffering apostle would say that reproachfully to these Corinthians. He says, "I would that ye reigned". So over against that line of things he sends them a worker, He says, "he works the work of the Lord, even as I". That is a remarkable thing, that the same character of workmanship would be seen in Timothy as in Paul. It would not of course be the same measure and perhaps not the same quality, but the character would be the same, "he works the work of the Lord, even as I". It would be a very great commendation for any one of us if Paul could say about us that he or she is working the work of the Lord even as I.

So it would be helpful to us, I think, to search out privately how Paul worked, what characterised him. As we have often heard, he could do the lowliest service, such as gathering a bundle of sticks; on the other hand, he could do what we cannot do, he declared unto the Ephesians the whole counsel of God. That has been done; there is no need for it to be repeated. But there is plenty of other work between declaring the whole counsel of God and gathering sticks that is open to all of us a belonging to the levitical family. So he says of Timothy, "he works the work of the Lord, even as I". That means that Paul is Timothy's model; it would be Paul under Christ of course. In all that we are saying we would always keep in mind that everything is seen uniquely and superlatively in Christ Himself. But the fact that things are seen in persons of like passions with ourselves is to help us. God comes down in His consideration for us and sets persons among us who are the same in flesh and blood as we are and helps us to see that there is something there that is worth going after, worth taking on even if it costs something. As was said in the reading, things have to be acquired on the basis of buying and selling. Timothy undoubtedly had sold certain opportunities that he had; his father was a Greek, he could no doubt have had prominence in the Greek world in some way, whether commercially or academically, but he became a disciple of the apostle and he learned how to work. This is work that is worth doing and work that abides. So the Preacher tells us, "I know that whatever God doeth, it shall be for ever; there is nothing to be added to it, nor anything to be taken from it", Eccl 3: 14. That is what the work of the Lord is. The Lord comes down in grace and uses persons like ourselves and in what He does there is nothing to be added to it and nothing to be taken from it. So we can understand why Paul says to the brethren in an earlier chapter, "knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord", chap 15: 58, that is it is worth doing because it will remain.

I move on to what Paul says in Philippians about Timothy. No doubt what he says in Philippians is written a good while after what he said about him in Corinthians. You notice the affectionate way in

which he speaks. "I hope in the Lord Jesus" - he uses that affectionate assembly title of the Lord, the Lord Jesus - "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus to you shortly". Here it is not on any corrective line but "that I also may be refreshed, knowing how ye get on". That is another fine feature of a bondman of the Lord as exemplified in Timothy, that he can give an accurate and commendable report of how the brethren are getting on. He is not, as we were saying in the reading, someone who would only see the size of the barrel with a handful of meal and know about that, but he would see the value of the pot of oil and the use the saints are making of it, and he would say the very best he could. I have no doubt he learned that from Paul too, because Paul told the Corinthians that they were his letter, written in his heart, known and read of all men (see 2 Cor 3: 2). Wherever Paul went he spoke well of the Corinthians; that is what I gather that passage means in 2 Corinthians 3. It does not mean that he did not in priestly concern say certain things, but that he was not an habitual critic of the saints in one place or another. So he says, "that I also may be refreshed, knowing how ye get on". Not that I may be depressed knowing how you are not getting on. We want to see the very best in our local brethren and the brethren in every locality where we may be. I recall Mr Taylor many years ago in a meeting quoting a poet. He said it is not scripture but it has a certain value. So he quoted Alexander Pope in the three-day meetings, and what the poet wrote was:

Be to their virtues ever kind,  
Be to their faults a little blind.

He thought that was good advice. So I pass it on. I would not quote it otherwise but he did, so I feel free to do it. I do not think anybody will find fault with it. It is not scripture but it contains a germ of truth.

Anyway he says here as to Timothy, "I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on". Now I wonder why he had to say this to the Philippians, because they were a spiritual, heavenly-minded company, marked by a great deal of love, and yet he has to say this, "I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on". Perhaps they did not realise the

depth of Timothy's priestly concern as to how they got on. First Paul says, "I have no one like-minded"; that is, Timothy's mind would be the same as Paul's about the Philippians, and he cared with genuine feeling how they were getting on. I think that is a great tribute to Timothy, because this was probably the most spiritual company to which the apostle wrote; yet here is Timothy and what he is concerned about is how they get on. So he says, "all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ". What often shuts us out of having part livingly in the work of the Lord is that our own things govern us. Further he says, "But ye know the proof of him, that, as a child a father", that is Timothy would be marked by the filial affection toward Paul, and Paul would be marked by fatherly affection toward Timothy. And he says, "he has served with me"; a great privilege you would say for Timothy and so it was. But he was equal to it. Think of serving with Paul in the glad tidings! And he says, "in the work of the glad tidings". The work of the Lord would include the work of the glad tidings. It really takes a heavenly-minded person to be engaged in the work of the glad tidings. Mr Leslie McFarlane was speaking to me the other night about the glad tidings as coming from heaven involving glory; that would be the way the glad tidings would be in Paul's mind in writing to the Philippians, and Timothy is with him in that. The Spirit of God would help us as we seek to have part in the work of the glad tidings to show that they involve heavenly light. They are not only the meeting of need - thank God they do meet need - but they also bring light from heaven about the purpose of God. Here is Timothy who was with Paul in the work of the glad tidings and he was like-minded. It would be a great thing to get alongside someone like Paul and see what his mind was about matters. That has been seen in the recovery of the truth. You will find, for instance, that Mr Stoney records visiting Mr Darby on his deathbed and speaking about his departure. And what did Mr Darby say? He said, 'Let us have a little prayer, Stoney, for the church'. That is the kind of mind that he had. And of course Mr. Stoney was like-minded because, as we know, his great theme in his ministry was the mystery, union with Christ.

I have mentioned these things, beloved brethren, in a rather scattered way to interest us and stimulate us to be on this line, and to see that we can also be in measure what Timothy was through grace. You might say, We do not have Paul. No, but we have the Spirit of God, we have the Spirit of Christ. Mr Raven said that Timothy is the characteristic servant who remains until the Lord comes. That means that there must be persons who are going to carry on what was seen in Timothy, and I would like to elicit your interest and stimulate your desire to be in this as Timothy was. Paul is not here to take account of it but the Lord is looking at it and the Spirit of God will surely come alongside of you and say, 'I will help you in this. I see the bent of your mind and I am going to strengthen that with you and help you so that you will become a real worker in the work of the Lord, and as a result of that you can say how the saints are getting on'.

Well, may the Lord enable us to see the value of these things, and in whatever time we have left, to go in for them increasingly. For His Name's sake.

**NEW YORK**

**12 June 1999**