

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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Contents

TWO WAYS

HEARING THE LORD'S VOICE

REMEMBER YOUR LEADERS

THE NECESSITY OF THE GOSPEL

James S. Gray

Acts 4: 8-12; John 3: 12-17

I am impressed to say that the announcement of the gospel does not really involve an option for anyone; it involves necessity. Each one of us must come into contact with God and that must be through our Lord Jesus Christ. There are things presented these days which offer options, but the things of God are not optional. They involve issues of life and death, and time and eternity, and they include the thought of commandment, because it says that God “enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent”, and that is connected with the set day of judgment (Acts 17: 30,21). If you think about it, it is quite easy to see that God must bring things into judgment. God must have the last word as to everything. Someone may say, I have expert opinion about this or that, but that is not good enough for God. The judgment of everything must be according to God and I present that, beloved hearers, as a necessity. Those who know the Old Testament a little will remember that Solomon spoke about God bringing everything into judgment (see Eccl 12: 14). I do not think that means so much penal judgment as an assessment according to God of everything, under the sun, in Solomon’s words. And you and I are under the sun and our lives are under the eye of God, and our histories, and so it is a necessity to have to do with God, for example, as to right and wrong. What a great issue that is in the world to-day! Who is going to tell us what it is? The word of God in its penetrating character, bringing with it grace and power in view of salvation. The glad tidings, as Paul says, are “God’s power to salvation, to everyone that believes”, Rom 1: 6.

There are two things about that: one is that salvation, according to this scripture we read first is a necessity. You must be saved. It is as if to say, what is the alternative? And the other is that you must be saved individually. It is no good thinking that, because we have been brought up in certain circumstances or we have favours through baptism and being continually under the sound of

the word of God, we can have eternal salvation that way. Salvation, in the sense of preservation, certainly involves being in the circle where God's word is read and He honoured and worshipped; but salvation through faith in Christ from sin and its consequences and for eternity is a necessity for everyone, and that individually.

Now, the One in whom salvation is, is the One about whom we want to speak, and that is Jesus. What I want to ask each one of us from this passage in Acts 4 is, simply, what place has the Lord Jesus Christ in your life so far? I may say, what place has Jesus in your plans? You have made plans. You thought you would do this or that. The apostle James speaks about that. He says that people say, We will go into such and such a city and we will traffic there, do business, instead of saying, "If the Lord should so will and we should live, we will also do this or that", James 4: 13-15. So, I say to myself and to all of us, am I taking the Lord Jesus into account in what I plan to do? Have I taken Him into account in what I have done so far?

The background to this passage in Acts was that there was a lame man sitting at the gate of the temple (chap 3) and as we commonly see people these days, he was asking for money, "alms", 'please give me'. The gospel changes people from wanting to receive to being givers and Peter says to him, with the support of John, "Silver and gold I have not; but what I have, this give I to thee". How full the gospel is from God's side! Dear friend, if you need salvation, it is available. God is ready to give the blessings of the gospel through faith in Christ to whosoever will. Make it personal for yourself! You need salvation, do you not? This man was lame from birth, the state of humanity pointed out, helpless, dependent on others. I say that for salvation you need help outside of yourself. Look to Jesus! He is the One in whom salvation can be found. And Peter is here answering the questions about how he did it. I suppose that is understandable: how did you do it? It is as if they would line up all the lame people if they could be saved like that. And that is what - I speak reverently - God would desire to do, to convey to you the impression that He has the power and the

resource to meet every condition, whatever it is. Do not exclude yourself, dear friend, because God's glad tidings are His "power to salvation, to everyone that believes". But Peter says it is through Jesus. 'It is through His name. We did not do this in our power; it was through His name', and that involves the greatness, I believe of all that He has accomplished in His atoning work.

This passage shows that there is no-one else who can save you: "for neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved". The need of salvation is absolute for everyone, but the question is whether you have, for yourself, come to Jesus. Peter points out that the people who were asking this question were the people who had been directly responsible for the rejection of the Saviour. You may say, I am not like that, but, dear friend, God has appointed the Lord Jesus Christ as the only One in whom salvation is. Peter says, "He is the stone which has been set at nought by you the builders, which is become the corner stone". Dear friend, I raise the question whether you are prepared to continue in contradiction to what God has done as to the Lord Jesus Christ. They had a religious system in Jerusalem and they said, "We have a law, and according to our law he ought to die ...", John 19:7. What a thing to say about the Son of God, come into manhood to die, to make atonement, to satisfy God's holy claims as to sin in the human race. And they set Him at nought. God has given Him the highest place. God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ. As it says here, "He ... is become the corner stone".

I want to speak of that just a little because God delights in the One whom He proclaims in the glad tidings. He has made Him the corner stone. Much could be said about that, but one thought is that everything hangs upon Him. Everything for God depends upon Jesus. It is not here exactly the foundation, great as that is - He is the foundation of everything for God too in man - but He is the corner stone, and it is as if it is the answer to the ignorant despoliation by men of the Son of God, come in love and in grace and in goodness and in sacrifice to be the means of our salvation. "He is the stone which has been set at nought by you the builders". Think of this figure of a

structure being reared up and Jesus being given no place in it! What about a life being lived and Jesus being given no place in it? But “God has made him ... both Lord and Christ”, Acts 2: 36. “He ... is become the corner stone”. You say, it does not appear so. Well, no, not yet. It will be publicly, quite soon, no doubt, but God presents His glad tidings to faith and it is accomplished for God. “He ... is become the corner stone”. He is the One who adorns everything for God, the whole building, the whole structure of what God is working out in men for His own satisfaction, for response to Him. God loves to hear men’s voices in thanksgiving. Are all our voices set free in thanksgiving to God? Do it alone! Give thanks to God for the Saviour! Give thanks to God for the grace in which He has moved to provide such a full means of salvation in the One who came to die. But do not leave Jesus out, because He is the One who is the centre of everything for God.

Peter says a little earlier, “Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazaraean, whom ye have crucified, whom God has raised from among the dead, by him this man stands here before you sound in body”. The man was cured; the man was healed through the power of the name of Jesus. God is not now speaking only of physical healing - He may do it; He can do it - but He is speaking in the glad tidings of the salvation of souls. This same apostle speaks of that in his epistle, does he not, “receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls”, 1 Pet. 1:9. That is what God is concerned about. And it is a necessity that each one should have salvation of soul through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was crucified. Why was that? Because of men’s hatred, yes. Peter says does he not, earlier, “him, given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain”, 1 Pet. 2:23. Think of the grace of the Saviour coming to take up the issue of distance from God in which we were! What a Saviour we present to you! I ask myself whether I take in the greatness of what Jesus has accomplished. Sin brings in distance. Have you known it? Dear

friend, God hates distance between man and Himself. He would have everything clear and Jesus has gone the suffering way so that God's holy claims as to sin might be met. On the cross Jesus bore the judgment of God against sin. That was a necessity - we will come to that in a moment in the other passage - but He bore the judgment of God against sin so that we might go free. He bore the judgment as the only One who could. He was a spotless, holy offering to God, and the claims of God as to righteousness were perfectly and fully maintained in Jesus; that life of devotion, of energy in devotion, of love, of singleness of outlook, seen so perfectly in Jesus, that life laid down and offered to God as a sacrifice. Nothing else could suffice, but that was sufficient to meet God's holy claims and it is sufficient, dear friend, to purge away your sins if you have put your faith in Him. Of course, it was necessary also for salvation and for the setting free of those who believe, that Jesus should enter into death itself. The judgment on the cross was borne, the penalty for sin, death, was borne too, and Jesus, as it says, "having bowed his head ... delivered up his spirit", John 19: 30. It is a wonderful thing to think of the Son of God, having come into manhood and offering Himself to bear all that lay upon us as a result of sin and its distance, the distance it had brought in between us and God.

And then Peter says, "whom God has raised from among the dead". That is a wonderful part of the gospel. That is a necessity too, as to the wondrous work of Jesus, that the satisfaction of God in it should be witnessed, should be proved, by His being raised from among the dead. That is to say, in another way, that God is fully pleased and satisfied, with the glorious Saviour. He is pleased with the work He has done, but He rejoices in Jesus Himself and He has raised Him from among the dead. It has been pointed out - it was mentioned with us recently - that the Jews who, I suppose, were mainly the audience here, were accustomed from the Old Testament to the general thought of resurrection, but they did not accept the selective resurrection of Jesus from among the dead. As we know, they spread a lie about it - but "whom God has raised from among

the dead". And the victory of Jesus is complete. His work proved to be entirely satisfying to God and He is now exalted to the highest place. As Peter says, "He ... is become the corner stone".

The gospel writer John, later in chapter 3 where we read, says that "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things to be in his hand" (v 35). I wonder, dear friend, if you have thought about the possibility of being outside of the range of the blessing of that administration in the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, how vital it is that we should each come to know Jesus for ourselves, speak to Him, acknowledge our true state before God, and receive the Saviour by faith. We shall then come into the benefit of the great blessings which are in His hand from God because He would bring us into liberty from the power of sin. I wanted to speak about how God has dealt with the whole issue of the state of man after the flesh.

In this passage which we read, verse 13 points out that "... no one has gone up into heaven, save he who came down out of heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven". How mysterious, yet how wonderful that is, that it is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who has accomplished the great work which was needed to settle for ever the great issue of sin before God. And He goes on to say, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up ...". You will remember that the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness was the cure for the plague which came in among the people according to the book of Numbers, and it speaks of the poison of sin in human flesh, our natural condition according to flesh, which involves the inability to overcome the power of sin as it is against God. Moses was told to make a serpent of brass, that is an image or figure of the serpents that bit the people, and to put it upon a pole. It means that One who had no sin, Jesus, has been lifted up so that we might look upon Him and be cured. Every one that looked lived, it says. So the Lord is saying to Nicodemus, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up ...", that is, that it is a necessity that sin in the flesh should be judged in the sight of God.

God is finished with it because He has judged it finally in the Lord Jesus Christ. But He is One who is on our behalf, the Son of man: “thus must the Son of man be lifted up, that every one who believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”.

Now, I would like to point out that in God’s view we are either lost or saved. These are vital questions for each one of us, dear friends. The apostle Paul says, in speaking about his gospel, “But if also our gospel is veiled” - that is people do not see it - “it is veiled in those that are lost; in whom the god of this world has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, so that the radiancy of the glad tidings of the glory of the Christ, who is the image of God, should not shine forth for them” (2 Cor 4: 3,4), the radiancy of Christ glorified. Dear friend, this verse brings this home to me that people are either perishing or they are saved, and my burden is that it is a necessity that you should have to do with Jesus for yourself in view of salvation and eternal life. There is death, moral death, outside of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ in whom salvation is, but then life eternal is God’s answer to the total dealing with sin in the flesh. Paul says again, does he not, that “God, having sent his own Son, in likeness” - that is like this figure - “of flesh of sin, and for sin, has condemned sin in the flesh”, Rom 8: 3. Do not look for improvement! It is condemned, but in view of God giving those who believe eternal life, that which will never fail to satisfy you, which will never leave a void, that will never, like the sin system, leave you dissatisfied or unsuccessful. No, life eternal is God’s desire for you, that you should be set free from the bondage of sin, as knowing Jesus, the One in whom life is. He is now at the right hand of God and He is the One in whom God would give us eternal life as the answer to this great issue, which has been solved by the condemning of sin in the flesh in Jesus when He was made sin.

What a solemn thing it is that Jesus was made sin and God judged sin in Him in our place. He was lifted up. What a spectacle it was! It was reproach: the cross was reproach for Jesus. It was shame. One word which Paul uses is “scandal” (see Gal. 5:11). Think for a moment of the lowly Jesus, the suffering One, come in

grace to be our Saviour, and man, as the hymn says, awarded the cross to Him and crucified Him. What do you think God felt about that? Darkness came over the whole land. God was dealing alone in Jesus with the issue of sin and its judgment, and He was forsaken by God. The whole work has been done because Jesus bore the judgment and then, as I said, He went into death and is now risen again. We need to direct our view to Jesus.

And He said here, “that every one who believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”. I say again that it is a necessity that everyone should believe, individually, for themselves. And it says in this well-known verse, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son ...” - what love that was! God desired that men should come to know Him in the One who was so precious to Him. He gave His only-begotten Son. What God has expended in order that we might be saved! And it says, “that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal. For God has not sent his Son into the world that he may judge the world, but that the world may be saved through him”. What a wonderful thing to think of God’s disposition, His desires towards all men. He has established His righteousness in the judgment of sin; He has upheld His holy claims; He has glorified Himself in the atoning work of Jesus. And that precious blood, which was shed when the Saviour’s side was pierced, is the proof of the life given up, but it is that which satisfied God for atonement. “For the redemption of their soul is costly and must be given up for ever”, Ps 49: 8. A life had to be given up for the satisfaction of God’s holy claims, but the life of Jesus has been given up and God’s righteousness established and His love made known at the same time. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”. How wonderful that atoning work that lays the basis for God to proclaim glad tidings to whosoever will - a wonderful thing! - and the results are proved.

How powerful the gospel is! Take Saul of Tarsus as, in a way, the prime example of the abounding of grace, and he says, eventually in his writing, “I am crucified with Christ, and no longer

live, I, but Christ lives in me”, Gal 2: 20. How can that be? In your heart, dear friend, in your heart because you love Him, because He gave Himself for you. Let us be simple and personal and earnest as to these things and then, too, as to the value of the blood before God.

And then, as to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, the administration in the hands of Jesus implied at the close of this chapter, includes the great blessing of the gift of the Holy Spirit. How otherwise are we to live according to God? How otherwise are we to be maintained in power in our outlook and committal to the Saviour whom we love? The Holy Spirit has come from Jesus in glory and He has resources which are infinite. He is a Comforter; He is a Guide; He has power to help. If any of us is not sure as to whether we have received the Holy Spirit, let us speak to God the Father about it because it is a great blessing to know that there is power in One who is here in the assembly, the vessel of God’s pleasure, the circle of the saints. God’s house is here and the Holy Spirit is here and the resource and power are available so that we might be pleasing to God while we wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus Himself.

I wanted to refer briefly in closing to two other necessities. One is, it says, (I think in another of Peter’s preachings early in Acts), “whom heaven indeed must receive” (chap 3: 21). I love to think of the distinctiveness of the place which Jesus has in heaven because of the great work which He has accomplished: “heaven indeed must receive”. If men reject Him, heaven must receive Him. God has honoured Him by giving Him the highest place in the universe. Then it says too, in one of Paul’s epistles to the Corinthians, in the resurrection chapter, “For he must reign until he put all enemies under his feet”, 1 Cor 15: 25. I just leave these two necessities with you also because we should think of the glory of Jesus where He is now but also what is going to be accomplished yet, in a public way, that all enemies are going to be put under his feet and, as Paul says there, “The last enemy that is annulled is death”. Does it not interfere with things? Does it not bring a stain?

Does it not bring sorrow? When those who are without Christ face death - how serious! how sorrowful! But, "... God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal".

And Jesus is soon to reign publicly and everything will be put under His feet. How wonderful to think of such a One, who gave Himself, being the One in whom God will be made known in the day to come in all His supremacy and glory as administering things according to God in righteousness. May we have our faith and trust in that glorious, living Saviour and prove the blessing and joy and liberty and peace of the gift of the Holy Spirit for the enjoyment of the blessings of the gospel, even now, for the Lord's sake.

ST. ALBANS

26 September 1999

TWO WAYS

Tim Vanderhoek

John 14: 5 (“and how can we know the way?”), 6 (to: “and the life”); Matthew 7: 13,14; Genesis 13: 1-13, 18; 18: 1; 19: 24, 25; Luke 5: 4-11; John 6: 67,68

I had on my heart to speak of these two different ways, this broad way that is spoken of and the narrow way. In John 14, just to begin with, the Lord Himself says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”. The Lord Jesus Christ presents Himself as that one way. He is the One who has gone into death, conquered death and settled the sin question that we might know Him as being “the way, and the truth, and the life”. We have come to know Him as our Saviour. I have confidence that each one of responsible age in the room has come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. We have a choice and we would make the choice to come to know the Lord as Saviour. And so we know Him now as the One who is “the way, and the truth, and the life”.

He presents in Matthew 7 two ways. What I had before me was to see those who would have chosen different ways. In Matthew 7 He says, “Enter in through the narrow gate, for wide the gate and broad the way that leads to destruction ...” We see destruction all around us of various kinds and yet the destruction spoken of here would be the sentence of death is the result of sin: “For the wages of sin is death; but the act of favour of God, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”, Rom 6: 23. And here in Matthew 7 He says, “Enter in through the narrow gate ...” This came before me as we had the word in the ministry meeting about the restricted path, the restricted way, yet it is a way of joy, a way of peace, a way in which we can prosper in our souls. But the Lord refers to it as the narrow gate, something which we could come through initially and then arrive in the good of that narrow path, a path of obedience, a path of joy and peace, knowing our sins forgiven, knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

So here this narrow gate is introduced first. But then “wide the gate and broad the way that leads to destruction” and, sad to say, the Lord has to say, “and many are they who enter in through it”. That is, not all will come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. We have a responsibility to make a choice. We have to choose to come to the end of ourselves. We see as Peter says in Luke, “I am a sinful man”. We have to have come to that point of saying, “I am a sinful man”. We have to come to full repentance, to see what we were in our natural state, unfit to be in the presence of God. And so, “broad the way that leads to destruction”. But there is a narrow way: “For narrow the gate and straitened the way that leads to life, and they are few who find it”. How thankful we are for the few who do find it! How thankful we are for God’s sovereign work in our souls that would bring us into this way of life, the way that leads to life! The Lord said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”. Think of the greatness of that place, the greatness of what we have been brought into as knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, the greatness of the work that He has accomplished to provide the basis for forgiveness of sins!

That is what I had before me in this portion of Genesis, bringing before us Abram and Lot. Think of the type that we have as we would apply it in the preaching! In the actual event Abram had a relationship with God and Lot though, you might say, he had exposure to Jehovah - he knew who He was - yet he chose a broad way. He chose this way to the plains. It is very instructive to see that they both started out, you might say, on an equal basis. They both came up out of Egypt. They knew who God was; they knew who Jehovah was. They were both provided with some knowledge and some means and yet each made a difference choice. We think of the sovereign love of God that would work in our souls so that we might make the choice to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

We see that both were very rich. Abram is described as “very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” and yet Lot who went with Abram “had flocks, and herds, and tents”. They both had means. They

both needed this land to continue on and yet they could not dwell together. You might say that those who have made that choice of the narrow way, who have known the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, cannot walk with one who has not.

We might take this as a type in the preaching, as Lot making this choice. In verse 10 of the chapter, he “lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan that it was thoroughly watered”. It had an appeal to him. We know that the world has an appeal to us. It is a narrow way with the Lord Jesus Christ. As we come to know Him, we have a place of joy and peace in our souls, but as to the world, the world’s goods are shut out. If that is what we have in mind, this plain that is “thoroughly watered” is very attractive to the flesh. It is what the flesh and the natural man would like to go on with but it is inconsistent with going on for the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we see even in Lot’s eyes, it is “as the garden of Jehovah”. That is very positive. As we look at things around us, if it has that appearance, we would say that is very positive. But then he says, “like the land of Egypt”. So here Lot, a type of the sinner making a choice, would view perhaps, we might say, religious things and natural things in the same light, but they are not equal and Lot makes this incorrect judgment that both are equal. In this portion of Genesis 13 verse 10, “as the garden of Jehovah, like the land of Egypt”. What a thing to put the things of God in the same light as the things of the world. This would be the key to his failure, not differentiating the things that God would supply.

As the good news of salvation goes out, we would be responsible to hear it and make the choice and to discern that we are hearing the word of God preached. We are hearing the Lord Jesus Christ presented as our Saviour. We would need to have repentance. As Peter could say, “I am a sinful man”. We would have to come to the end of ourselves so that we would be able to see our need and know that this appearance of the “thoroughly watered” plain was not that which would bring us eternal blessing.

We need to be brought truly into the garden of Jehovah. Everything that we might think of when we think of this plain of Jordan that was “thoroughly watered” brings before us a very open, spacious area; and that is very attractive to us naturally. It is not what God wants, as we know from this account with Abram. It is what would be attractive to the flesh. And that is what Lot chose. He would choose to go away from God: he “chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan” and he went to this dwelling place “in the cities of the plain, and pitched tents as far as Sodom”. We see that God’s judgment of what he was in association with was that is was very wicked.

That is also a type of a person in their sins, that they would make this decision: “Lot chose for himself”. Think of that verse in Proverbs that would bring very much before us our responsibility and, if the Lord has not touched our heart, what we do. Proverbs 14 verse 12: “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the ways of death”: again the choice being made. Lot makes this choice; a sinner makes the choice of rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, because they want their own choice. The way they choose for themselves would seem right and they would go on in their sins, but we know that “the end thereof is the ways of death”. So Lot here is a type of one who rejects the Lord Jesus Christ as a Saviour, who chooses this area, this well watered plain, a beautiful area, but one away from God, and he would dwell in a place that is judged as being away from God. God had judged the place of Sodom as a wicked place and they were great sinners.

Abram, typical perhaps of one who comes into relationships with God, typical of one who comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her Saviour he is privileged to have communication from God. In chapter 18 that we read: “And Jehovah appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre”. He takes up his place there in chapter 13: “Then Abram moved his tents, and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron. And he built there an altar to Jehovah”. Typical of one who comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, they make a choice to come into what would perhaps be

more restricted from a natural man's viewpoint, but it is a place of privilege because in chapter 18 it says, "And he sat at the tent-door in the heat of the day".

We know from the account that Lot sat in the gate of the city. That was not a restricted place: he had a place of prominence, a place that would be very attractive to the heart of man. But we see with Abraham that "he sat at the tent-door in the heat of the day". It does not sound like a very glamorous place compared to what Lot had, and yet we know that Lot's choice, typical of rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, ended up in a place of destruction. We know that Abram had that communication and relationship with God, typical of one coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. But Lot ends up in this place that is destroyed - chapter 19 verses 24 and 25: "And Jehovah rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven, and overthrew those cities, and all the plain ..." It is very instructive that "all the plain" is again mentioned. It was not just a simple thing of fields, but it is indicative of the judgment on a place that would be attractive to man - "wide the gate and broad the way". Man would desire this spacious, easy life and reject the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.

We know from the account that sovereignly Lot is saved and how thankful we would be that God in a sovereign way comes in and touches our hearts no matter where we are. The apostle Paul could say that he was the chief of sinners: so we know it is not a matter of how good we are. There is actually nothing we can do because the apostle Paul could also refer to himself as being the best, "Hebrew of Hebrews", Phil 3: 5. He was really the best that man could offer in a natural sense. He went on in a way that was probably looked at by many as an example of the best within the religion, yet he could refer to himself as chief of sinners. God sovereignly will come in and touch our hearts - how thankful we are for that!

I was thinking of Luke 5. You see how things had to be totally given up. You see Peter there, out seeking to go on in this world. They had been fishing. We know from other accounts that they had fished all night. He says, "Master, having laboured through the

whole night we have taken nothing, but at thy word ...” Coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour begins with obedience to the word, coming to the end of oneself. Peter is typical of what is needed - full repentance, because he says, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord”. The word “Lord” is used and we know from what we have had before us many times in the preaching how the apostle Paul as Saul of Tarsus comes to know that beloved One, the Lord Jesus Christ, on the road to Damascus, by addressing Him as Lord. He had to come to the end of himself as well and addressed Him as Lord. It is very striking that Peter, still referred to as Simon in verse 5, uses that very same word, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord”. It is His lordship; it is coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour as it says in Romans, “confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord”, chap 10: 9. It is something that we have to do, to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, to own His lordship, which brings us into full subjection to Himself.

This narrow way is not that we are narrow in our souls in any way, but we are brought into life, we are brought into the truth of the Lord Himself as being “the way, and the truth, and the life”. It is striking here that of Simon Peter, it says, “having run the ships on shore, leaving all they followed him”. I was just thinking of that: “leaving all”. It is quite a statement. It is quite a contrast to Lot: he did not leave all. He took his herds and his tents, all that he had, into that well-watered plain and attached himself to the cities that were to be judged. But Peter does the opposite. He leaves all: “leaving all they followed him”. That is what we do as we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. All we have would be secondary. Practically we must still go on in this world. We do not move off to a mountain top or something like that as we know some have done before, but the things themselves become very secondary. They are simply a means which we use while we are left here. We would be like Peter and leave all to follow Him.

It is very encouraging to see that this is the result of Peter coming to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. He was a sinful man; he recognised his need of a Saviour; and he followed Jesus. We know

from other verses, other portions, that there were those who followed Jesus in the way. But the fulness of what Peter came into was very evident. The apostle Paul's writings contain the truth of the assembly, but we would be very encouraged with what Peter left with us.

I think this was the beginning of his pathway of knowing the Lord Jesus as One who could say, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life", because in John 6, as we read, in answer to Jesus' question, "Will ye also go away?", it was Peter who said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of life eternal". Just think of that! Peter came to know the Lord, who He was and what He was able to offer - "life eternal". In the preaching of the glad tidings I love to quote that verse: "For the wages of sin is death; but the act of favour of God, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord". How happy we are to present the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and how it is God's sovereign mercy and His sovereign purpose that brings those into blessing and how it is our responsibility to make that choice!

Do you want to make that choice? We would present it to individuals. Do you want to make that choice of going on that wide way that is spoken of in Matthew 7: "for wide the gate and broad the way that leads to destruction"? It is a responsible question that needs to be answered and we would present the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour of sinners, the One who would say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life". It is the narrow gate that would lead to life and that is a great thought of life, that narrow way that would bring us into the blessing of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and having that eternal life in Christ Jesus referred to in Romans 6. And so we would be glad to present the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour in such a way. May God bless His word!

DENTON

25 April 1999

HEARING THE LORD'S VOICE

Brian Clark

John 10: 1-6, 14-18; Revelation 3: 2-3 (to “and repent”), 6

I was thinking, as our brother prayed, of the importance of hearing the Lord's voice. Often we consider it and we think of this scripture in John; but it came home to me to ask what it really means to us when we speak about hearing the Lord's voice. Sometimes perhaps we think of it in a rather abstract way, but the words of the hymn we sang emphasise to my mind and heart what it really means:

Thy glory Lord this living waste,
To us no rest can give

(Hymn 47)

Surely the voice would attract us and focus our minds and hearts on the Person. The voice would keep us from wandering in this scene and would concentrate our hearts and affections on Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. As we are often reminded, the voice would bring home to us the nearness of the Lord Jesus. To hear someone's voice is to realise that they are near. It is not a great sound and cannot be heard from a distance. It is wonderful that the Lord Jesus and His voice are near. May all our hearts be attracted to the thought that the Lord Jesus is near! The Lord is near. May we ever remember that! In that nearness the Lord Jesus speaks and His voice is heard. It says here “He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out”. How we can thank God for the voice that has led us out from this scene, from this order of things here, which is marked by what is perishing, what is dark and confused, and brought us into a wonderful living sphere which the Holy Spirit delights in. The Spirit himself has come from Christ glorified and in His power would attract our hearts to where our spirits are at home. For those that love the Lord Jesus, things here quickly lose their shine, if they had any at all. May we see them for what they are, that things here are passing, and so cannot satisfy us! He leads us out, but He brings us in. Psalm 23 contemplates that and would make us realise

the blessed experience of how He “maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside still waters” (v. 2). May we be submissive and not led by our own wills, but answer through our love to the voice and the leading of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The thought of life and the maintenance of it has been much before us. It would be known and enjoyed as we are engaged with the glories of the Lord Jesus where He is. Life is not something that we can exactly strive for, but it is consequential as we are engaged with what is heavenly. It says, “When He has put forth all his own, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him”. I feel that the scripture itself is more attractive than my words. It speaks of the desires of the Shepherd and His love. “When He has put forth all his own”. How we rejoice that we are among the myriads that are His own and brought into a place of safety! You realise in this chapter that the Shepherd has done everything in laying down His life for the sheep. It says “the sheep follow Him”. It is the principle of attraction and so we are kept near to Him. We all know that if we lose sight of someone we cannot follow them, but we must keep near to the Lord. Let everyone here tonight keep near to the Shepherd, keep near to the Lord Jesus Christ. These are very basic thoughts but I am sure they are very attractive. “Because they know His voice”. Let us discern that voice. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to recognise His speaking presently. We cannot discern it if our eyes and ears are occupied with other things. “I am the good Shepherd; and I know those that are mine and am known of those that are mine, as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep”. How perfectly He loves us, and that love is never going to fail.

What blessed secrets are disclosed here by the Lord, relationships that are secret and yet to be the regulating power in our lives. How wonderful it is to contemplate the scripture in the perfection of love, love that will maintain us here if we are consciously kept in the experience and enjoyment of it. The Lord tells us, “I have other sheep which are not of this fold: these also I must bring”. He will not forget any, they are all known.

I read the scripture in Revelation thinking of “be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, which are about to die ... and remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and keep it and repent”. This address to Sardis is solemn because it says, “I have not found thy works complete before my God”. Let us be maintained in life in the power of the Holy Spirit and strengthen the things that remain. It is quite easy to look at things naturally and see them small and broken; we are only a few here tonight, but let us consider the fulness of what Christ has secured. These things remain, they will never fail. Christ has won the victory alone and in wondrous grace He would have us share that, walking in newness of life in the enjoyment of His own triumphs. It says, “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard”. In what spirit have we heard? Let us value what has come down to us, that the Holy Spirit would make real to us. The overcomer is one who hears the current voice of the Lord and acts on it, awaiting the fulness of His heavenly portion. May we all be encouraged to go on, keeping near to our Lord Jesus, and listen for His voice, and so strengthen what remains, till He comes.

May we all be encouraged, for His Name’s sake.

LONDON

11 January 2000

REMEMBER YOUR LEADERS

Andrew Burr

Hebrews 13: 7-8

I bring this verse forward because we were enjoying the relationship between the principle of leadership and faith last week; and because we have heard this evening about the voice of the Lord Jesus and how we hear it. As our brother has said, we must not begin to make that abstract. What the Lord says, that the sheep know him, as He knows the Father, and the Father knows him, is as far from abstraction as it is possible to be. It is absolute reality, eternal reality. As far as we are concerned, we enter into it by the Spirit, but if one was looking for what was more absolutely real than anything else, you could not find anything more real than that verse. It is wonderful to see our knowledge of Jesus put on that level. It must need the Spirit, because there is nothing certain about what we are naturally. In fact there is comfort in that verse, that, as the hymn says 'nature's voice is silent' and 'what yet of nature is lies silent through that heavenly call, no earthly voice like this'. There is nothing of nature in the speaking and nothing of nature in the hearing. All the doubt and questions and uncertainties that belong, inescapably, to nature, are absent. Would that we knew more about this! I believe our brother's word has helped us about it.

I simply put these thoughts into what I have read, because here we have a reference to the word of God being spoken, not by Jesus, but by our leaders. I trust that I will not be thought to be stretching this passage, but it goes on to refer to manner of life or conversation. It is interesting that the word conversation is used, because that conveys the idea of speaking. That is not really meant here; it conveys the wider idea of a manner of life. When we were speaking about leadership last week, we were helped to see that it is not simply that a lead is given in ministry, but it is more the idea that a lead is given by example. The example especially in mind here is of faith. I have been led to go on thinking about that because attention is drawn from time to time to brethren who have gone on a

very long time. Our brother Mr Palmer in hospital is an example of one who has been in this path for as long as anyone here can remember, perhaps as long as he can remember. Our sister who was buried last week is another of the kind - we have a brother and a sister under our special attention at the moment. There are others. They have come through many trials, and faith has brought them through. I believe it would be fair to say that their faith speaks to us, and in the voice of their faith, there is the word of God.

Our brother has referred to how we hear. We might say we hear by the Spirit, but does not what is expressed by those who are examples among us speak to us? If it does, what does it say, and how do we hear it? Do we hear it? I trust I am right in saying that there is no sense in which older ones are in any way discounted among us; they are very much esteemed. We know little of the early years of some of them, and some of the trials and difficulties; the mood of the day is to leave all that behind as things that belong to an old past, but for these brethren they lie on their pathway of faith. Through them the measure of faith that we see has been formed. What we have seen is a readiness to make sacrifice and to bear reproach; a desire to put the Lord's things where they should be; a readiness to serve the brethren in practical ways as well as in more prominent ways; a readiness to serve unseen. There has been no seeking of recognition or prominence. The writer here says, they must not be forgotten, because what they have done speaks. A day will come when those who die in the Lord are blessed and their works follow with them. It would be a shame if works began to follow only after people have died, when we have living examples among us through whom the word of God has come to us. The word of God has come in what they have said, in their advice, in the way that they have looked at the Scriptures; in the practical way they have spoken about the brethren. It has come in the way they have given expression to their affections and desires for the brethren, their prayers. All these things enter into what they have said, and their manner of life speaks to us as well.

I feel the importance of this. Our brother has referred to what is continuing. Jesus Christ is the Same, it says, and He would be the same to us as He has been to those who have gone before - the Same, yesterday and today. Therefore I believe that there is something to be especially taken account of. I suppose it would be true to say that the proportion of elderly ones among us is relatively high; in a sense the generation that is thin is my own, because diversions among us claimed a disproportionate number of those who were then young. Another generation is growing up for which we can be thankful, who knew nothing of those times, for whom the elder brethren have the greatest affection. Let us bind one another together in the learning of these lessons so that we are strengthened by what never changes in Jesus Himself, that has been learned and would be expressed in the lives of one another.

May He bless the word.

LONDON

11 January 2000