

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 327

June 2000

Contents

REPAIRER OF BREACHES

PREACHING

“WHAT SHE COULD SHE HAS DONE”

REPAIRER OF BREACHES

Robert Taylor

Isaiah 58: 9-12; Nehemiah 1: 2-7, 11; 2: 11-18; 3: 1, 15; 4: 4-6; 11: 1,2; 12: 31-40

I would seek grace from the Lord to speak about building, and especially about repairing the breaches. It is a needed service in these days, and I would seek to enlist every one of the brethren in the work. The sisters have part in it – indeed at the end of the book of Ruth it speaks of two sisters, “which two did build the house of Israel”, Ruth 4: 11. Nehemiah will show us – his day is very much like our own when the enemy has sought to make great inroads into the fellowship of God’s Son, to spoil what there is here on this earth for the pleasure of God. But in spite of all that has happened in the history of time, our Lord Jesus Christ has come in to repair the damage that sin has done, to make a way back to God that no law or works of man could ever effectuate. It says as to Him when He was here “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself”, 2 Cor 5: 19. I wonder at the majesty of that verse, “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself”. Had it not become lost? Had not Satan had his way in the world so early to spoil the fair creation? The law, coming in, only magnified the great distance there was between God and man, but there in such a dark background, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself”. God was not going to be robbed as to His thoughts of the assembly as the vessel in which His praise is secured. May the Lord speak to us at this hour to encourage our hearts to have a living part today in the great praises of God.

The Lord has been the great Builder. He says, “on this rock I will build”, Matt 16: 18. There is what He has built that has never broken down and never can break down, “on this rock I will build my assembly”. I trust that every one of us is conscious of having a part in what He refers to as “my assembly”. That is certainly not what is abroad today, that men would call ‘the church’. It is not what is seen publicly, but it is known, and very precious to those who know it. I

trust that what the Lord speaks of as “my assembly” is cherished by every heart in this room. He says further, as if to reassure our hearts, “hades’ gates shall not prevail against it”, Matt 16: 18. That word is for you and for me, “hades’ gates shall not prevail against it”. It may seem, as you look at the public side of things, that it has, but it has not, and I trust that every one here knows something of having a living, vital, part in “my assembly”. You say, Where is it? Well come here on Lord’s day morning and you will see it functioning, if you have never seen it before – “in the midst of the assembly with I sing thy praises”, Heb 2: 12. In spite of the breakdown, there is nothing more precious to an assembly-minded person, whatever the outward conditions and however small things may be, than to have part in what there is here for the heart of Christ, that He can employ in service to God. That is “my assembly”. You will not see an outward show. You will not see a choir and an organ or great pretension or a prayer book or an arranged system, but you will see something, I would trust in character, of the assembly functioning. May our hearts be exercised to have our living part in it. That is what the Lord is building. As I say, He says for us, “hades’ gates shall not prevail against it”. You say, Where is it? I say to you, Seek it. The Lord does not make light promises, nor are His words to be taken lightly, but if you soberly seek it, He will lead you to have a living part in it and to see it in function. There is some expression of it today in this country, in this town, to be experienced by eyes that are open to see it and hearts that are exercised to have their part in it. But then there is another side to it, of which we have read in Isaiah and Nehemiah. There is what has been committed to man’s responsibility and sadly most of us in this room would take our part and say, We have had our part in the failure and in the sorrow and the breakdown that has come in. I trust we all acknowledge that feelingly before God, to make room for divine grace outshining.

In this passage in Isaiah, the Lord is rebuking them. He says, Is this what you call a fast? Men proclaim their fasts, they try to afflict their soul, and so on; He says, Is that what you call a fast? You will find persons who would do these things and think that that is

the way through the breakdown, but God is saying, That is not what I call a fast. He says, "Then shalt thou call, and Jehovah will answer; thou shalt cry, and he will say, Here I am". How sweet those words! How near He would make Himself to exercised hearts to say, "Here I am" to lead you, and what He leads them to in this passage is the joy of the new covenant, the way into the great system of blessing. The new covenant, the way into the great system of blessing. The new covenant is based not on the law, but on the work of Christ and all that He has accomplished for God, that, because of the work of Jesus and what has been effectuated in His death and rising again, God is able to come out with His hands outstretched in blessing to men. That is what he is referring to here, "And they that come to thee shall build the old waste places". This is what is needed today, as we will see in Nehemiah, persons who are conscious of all that has happened, and see that apart from God in His mercy and in His grace there is no hope and no power. But in the great ways of God and His wisdom He is coming out in this attitude so that the foundations will be raised up. Thank God they have not gone! "The firm foundation of God stands", 2 Tim 2: 19. This is something that man has not been able to interfere with, "the firm foundation of God stands ... The Lord knows those that are his". If things were normal we should know them, but things are so broken we do not know them all. But the Lord knows those that are His, the *Lord* knows. He would cause us to be exercised to find them too. We cannot just take things altogether at face value. There is a great system of profession around, so there are many we have to leave on that account: yet "The Lord knows those that are His" and "the firm foundation of God stands". He calls on us to come into this line of things to be a repairer of the breaches. As I said, it refers to the Lord Jesus, but there is a call to us in this passage to be a "Repairer of the breaches, restorer of frequented paths". Generally when there is breakdown, men try and start something else. That is what has happened all around. There has been departure and breakdown, and men have started something else that is short of the fellowship of God's Son; but here it says that they will be a "restorer of frequented paths". Nehemiah did that. He did not try to start

something new that would accommodate the wishes of the people. The wall broke down but there were still foundations, and Nehemiah too used the stones that had been there before: it says, after they were burned; the fire had done its work. How wonderful to think of these stones being set up again! There they are, a heap of rubble. On one side of things you see that publicly today, a heap of rubble, but as those stones are revived, after they were burned, they are fitted into their place. Think of the sheep-gate and the valley-gate being built of stones that had been revived. May the Lord revive our hearts today to be stones that are suitable to come into the building.

But first of all I wanted to speak about the kind of man that is a restorer of the breaches, the kind of man that is able to come in and build these frequented paths. You see him here in Nehemiah. His name, as you will see in the footnote, means 'Comfort of Jehovah'. What a man to be builder, to be a restorer of these paths. What delight God had that there was a man, Nehemiah, and may it be in you and me in our measure, who has come to seek the welfare of his brethren. That is what is said about him later. The enemies were annoyed that there was a man who had come to seek the welfare of his brethren, and there he is a man who is a 'Comfort of Jehovah'. God had looked on that ruin that had come in through failure in man's responsibility. But here is a man who valued what God had put in his heart to do for Jerusalem. He would give us all something to do, primarily in our local place: he would give you something to do to repair the breaches, to restore these frequented paths. Here is the kind of man that can do it, a man who cried to God when he saw the confusion. He did not start talking about all the trouble that was there; far less did he send letters abroad or go on the Internet and speak about the confusion that has come in among the brethren. No, he went before God on his knees in prayer night and day. He says, "I sat and wept, and mourned for days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of the heavens, and said, I beseech thee, Jehovah, God of the heavens". Dear brother, dear sister, have you in any measure done that about the sorrows of the present time? I leave the question with you, Have you in any measure been before God

about the confusion and the sorrow, and told God that you contributed to it? Not what So-and-So did or how wrong others are, but *you*; and maybe you will find somebody next to you on their knees about the same thing, and there is a wonderful bond to start and build on the foundations, the foundations that have been laid. Nehemiah is the kind of man that rallies the brethren. He has influence through having wept, and prayed, and been before God about all the sorrow. Now he rises up. He does not remain there, I may say, longer than needed, though he carried it with him all the time. In chapter 9 he goes over his prayer again – three outstanding prayers that are easily remembered, and I commend them to you: Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9 and Daniel 9. You can easily remember that, and read them, and you will see men in whose hearts God had put something about Jerusalem. The kind of men that God can trust to be builders and repairers of the breaches, men who were fasting before God, crying out in their need, as Nehemiah here. He becomes desperate in his appeal to God, and dear brethren, we need to be that in all our localities, and especially in this country where what came out in the light of the temple was quite distinctive. Are there now persons prepared to be with God like a Nehemiah, like an Ezra, like a Daniel, to be a repairer of the breaches? You say, What can I do? Well, this started with one man. The book ends with two great choirs on the wall, but it all started with one man. He could have said, Well what can I do? The breakdown is too great for me; and so it is, but it is not so for God. He has a man like Nehemiah with these feelings who wept, cried and yet in his heart all the time (you will see as you go through these prayers, especially these chapter nines to which I have referred), they never lost sight of the purpose of God. In the faith of their souls there was enshrined in their prayers, that in spite of the ruin, “hades’ gates shall not prevail against it”, Matt 16: 18. In principle they said, Lord show me it. And He did. So he finds others with him. In these exercises the Lord would soon add as He sees persons who have something in their heart that God has placed there. He says, he did not tell any man what God had put in his heart to do for Jerusalem, but he went himself, three days’ journey. These three days of scripture, as the

brethren know, are very interesting. They bring us on to resurrection ground, to see how God has dealt with the breakdown and the confusion. He has raised Christ in whom all the promises of God are Yea and Amen (see 2 Cor 1: 20). What a beautiful scripture to cling to! It says, "For whatever promises of God there are" – and what promises He had made to you and to me – they are all Yea and Amen in Christ, the glorious Son of God. These men laid hold of that in their prayers. May I encourage our hearts to lay hold of the promises and the purpose of God amidst all the confusion there is? The three days bring you to see that the promises are all centred in Christ, the Man of God's choice at His right hand. He says, "I told no man what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem". May God put it into your heart tonight, if never before, to come to see something of what God is ready to do for Jerusalem, what He is ready to bring in as to that holy city. Oh how beautiful it was in Nehemiah's eyes! In spite of it being rubble he clung tenaciously to God's thoughts in purpose, "hades' gates shall not prevail against it". He goes through these gates – how he must have wept! – the valley-gate, the jackal-fountain and the dung-gate. It is very interesting that he refers to these three gates; there were others, they were in ruins. They had forgotten, they had despised these principles of going down. In Deborah's day certain roads were unused (Judg 5: 6). That is what has happened today; you say, That is only Paul. That is despising these gates, despising these frequented paths, but Nehemiah, he goes over them. He sees the dung-gate, the jackal-fountain and the valley-gate. He sees them in ruins. Have we forgotten, dear brethren, how to judge ourselves? Have we forgotten to see that things are settled through going down? Christ made Himself of no reputation. He "emptied himself, taking a bondman's form", Phil 2: 7. That is how things were settled. The whole sin question and all that had come into the race, He has settled in "taking a bondman's form ... becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross". What that meant for Him our hearts could find no language to express, but there it is. It is the way he went to meet the confusion that has come into the race. I say again, Have we forgotten how to judge ourselves? Have we forgotten the

principles that are there to establish recovery? Paul brings that home to them in Corinth, the cross and all that has effected there to make way for the liberty of the Spirit in chapter 2. Here is Nehemiah going through these places. He says, "Ye see the distress that we are in, that Jerusalem lies waste". He does not minimise the difficulty, how great it is, but he says, "Come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach". Well, there is reproach round about, and what we have done has caused reproach and we have to leave that, but let us come and build, that the persons who may reproach us may see that there is something positive, that, in spite of all that has come in through our failure, these stones having been burned are now serviceable. They had become unserviceable at one time, but now through repentance and through faith in God and what Christ has done, the stones are serviceable to be rebuilt into this wall in view of the great choir. That is the great end of the wall. The wall has a reference to the fellowship: it is there to protect the city. Ezra gives us the building of the city, the inward side of it, and for that it says that God raised up Cyrus. God has raised up Christ to bring in that side of things, but here in Nehemiah it is what is in man's hand, the responsibility that there is as in the fellowship to build and repair the breaches that there may be something that is no longer a reproach. So he says, "Come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem". Are we ready, dear brethren, at cost, sacrifice to ourselves, to come and build up the wall? As they built it, they did not build independently. They did not scrap what had been there before. Rather, as it says in Isaiah, "restorer of frequented paths". They did not say, We will start something new, we will start another meeting where these principles are not emphasised. They did not speak on that line, they did not remove the ancient landmarks. There are ancient landmarks that have been laid down, that is the apostles' teaching. Even in the public domain the removal of ancient landmarks has caused tremendous confusion. The breakdown in family life, the breakdown in principles of government, allowing things that in our fathers' day persons were put in jail for, the government is now sanctioning them. There are the ancient landmarks being removed and it is bringing in

tremendous confusion universally. Let us respect the ancient landmarks. Some of them - I speak advisedly and the brethren I trust would be sympathetic in how I speak of it - were re-established in the recovery in the 1800s, through which in grace we have been called to have part. There was then a great movement of the Spirit of God, when persons were liberated from a system in which the Holy Spirit of God was shut out, to come to see that the ancient landmarks were restored, and that there is a Head in heaven and a body here; Christ's body. These are part of the ancient landmarks, and there is a danger among us of saying, Well, that is old-fashioned, things have changed. But those ancient landmarks are good until the day when the church is raptured. The commandments of the Lord and the ancient landmarks stand there as a guide to us, to keep us in that holy path, that when the beloved Bridegroom comes for His bride, she is ready. She has respected the ancient landmarks, she has walked in the commandments that were referred to at the close of the reading, so that she is there when He comes. When He calls, what an answer there will be! There are some beautiful references to it in some of the hymns:

O Lord, with our ears and hearts open,
Awaiting Thy shout would we be. (Hymn 131)

There is a man amid all the ruin who had respected the ancient landmarks and was kept in the freshness and buoyancy of his affections for Christ. Nehemiah is on that principle. He does not give them new names. The priest comes to build first, "Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they built the sheep-gate". They are beginning to think about the brethren, thinking of all those sheep. Do you ever mourn about them? Do you ever sing the song of the bow? What a song! If ever a man had a right to rejoice over the death of Saul it was David, but he composed the song of the bow. "Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their lives", 2 Sam 1: 23. Do we miss the brethren who are no longer available to us? Nehemiah and these priests were carrying them in their heart before God. So they rose up to build the sheep-gate. The men that God has helped have been shepherds, they have

thought about the sheep. In the steps of the great Shepherd they have laid down their lives for the sheep, they have trodden the path to stand between them and the foe. Have you ever done that - prepared to stand between the foe and what the brethren may be facing? The sheep-gate is what they start with. You would want to make a place of safety for the brethren. There is not time to go into these great matters, but it says, "The valley-gate repaired ... they built it, and set up its doors, its locks and its bars", Neh 3: 13. They want to make the thing secure; they go all the way. They do not just take half measures but they go all the way about the repairing of the breaches. You know, if there is the least centimetre left exposed the devil gets in. May our hearts be guarded! May we go all the way in the repairing of the breaches as these priests did, and these men who repaired the valley-gate, the dung-gate, the fountain-gate. What would they think about? Oh, I think they would think about Solomon's time, of the city in all its glory. You may be labouring at the sheep-gate, maybe the dung-gate, but you do it in the light of the whole assembly; you are doing it in the light of how precious it is to God. It says later on that they were joined. I wonder if your repairing can join with my repairing. That is the test. You get a plumb line coming to the wall, and if I have been a bit loose in my building, it will not measure up with yours that has been straight and has gone by the pattern. Maybe I have allowed things in my circumstances that have deviated from those ancient landmarks, from the Lord's commandments and what has been laid down to guide us. Then we will not join up. Let us value the ancient landmarks and keep to these ancient paths, that as we come together in the work that we are doing it can join together. It says, "we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together to the half thereof; for the people had a mind to work". They put their backs into it. They did not say, Well, I think I have done enough. Some people took a second part. How pleasurable that must have been to God that they took on a second part! As you look over these passages in detail you will see there were goldsmiths doing labouring work, there were perfumers doing the work; there are not specialists in this kind of work. It is like Paul, "bondman of Jesus Christ, a called apostle", Rom 1: 1. These are

the builders, the bondmen, persons who have been captivated in their affections for Christ and drawn into committal to Him and His interests here, so that the building goes on. It says later that it was completed in fifty-two days; the whole was joined and it was completed. How quickly God turned the captivity as there were persons in whom repentance toward God was working. How quickly He turns the captivity and brings in the restoration of Jerusalem, that beloved city.

In chapter 11 it says a call went out, “cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city”. There it is. You say, Had it not been in ruins? Here it is, “the holy city”. Divine thoughts about it are going through. There have been the repairers of breaches, the builders of the wall, persons who have worked according to the commandments and the pattern, and here now is a place to dwell in, persons to dwell in Jerusalem. The safety, the security, of the city is dependent on persons prepared to dwell in it. We often speak about assembly-minded persons; that would be these persons who are prepared to dwell in Jerusalem. Yes, they had to do their work, they had responsibilities in righteousness, but their heart was in the holy city. They gave themselves to the work, and here they are to bring one in ten to dwell in Jerusalem. It says, “the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem”. Well, it is a place to live in now; and that is what has come to us through faithful men, that there is a place to live in. They could not live in it in Nehemiah’s time. There was no wall: it was a dangerous place, but, through one man being committed like this, it is now a place to dwell in. And that is true in our time. Are we prepared to be one in ten? Are we prepared, in spite of what there may be abroad, to commit ourselves to dwell in it, for our blessing but primarily to dwell in it for God’s glory and praise?

I only wanted to speak about these two choirs. Who would have thought that those stones that were a pile of ruin and rubble in chapter 1 are now supporting the great praises of God. It says, “I brought up the princes of Judah”. There they are, persons shining in their grandeur. Dear brethren, the whole point of the wall was these

choirs. One point of it was to keep evil out – that is true – but primarily it was to enclose the city, to protect Christ’s assembly, to keep out what would harm. The fellowship does that. There is the protective side to it. It is anxious to keep out what would spoil what is for the heart of Christ. These builders now on that very wall are singing the high praises of God. It does not just say ‘two choirs’, but there was enough for “two great choirs”, and then the “processions ... upon the wall”. They go through those gates, the dung-gate; they halted in the prison-gate. How they would feel all that had come in! They went through these gates, each of them, and stood still in some of them, feeling the sorrows and the breakdown, but that did not hinder the great service of praise. We have been taught that if having been engaged in the conflict we lose sight of, or are not able to have our part in, the praise of God, there is something wrong. The conflict is not an end in itself. It has to be faced, but in the midst of it the service and praise of God is the great object, and it was the great secret in Nehemiah’s mind. You say, He did not speak of it in chapter 1. No, but the great thing in his mind was that there would be something secured in which the service of God could go out, the praises of God could go out in all their fullness. So it says, “They went up by the stairs of the city of David”. Oh, these were well-worn steps. It alludes to the way that Christ has gone, the steps that He has taken, the way He has ascended. “They went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David”. They are not giving new names, as I said already, but they are falling back on God’s great thoughts in His promises, and are seeing that in spite of a broken day they are workable, and the praises of God are continuing. So these choirs go forth, one under Ezra. There is much teaching that we have not time to go in to, but Ezra represents a spiritual line of praises, as it were, and Nehemiah represents a moral road to the same end. It says, they “went in the opposite direction”. There are not only the stairs of the city of David but there is a moral path through “the tower of the furnaces ... the gate of Ephraim ... the old wall ... the fish-gate ... the sheep-gate; and they stood still in the prison-gate”. There is the breakdown, and yet the praises of God are going on, “both choirs stood in the house

of God". There is the great end, dear brethren. May we be encouraged to find our place in the house of God. The firm foundation of God stands. The house of God is there to be enjoyed by those who would commit themselves to the path. May I appeal again, dear brethren, for us all to take our part in being a repairer of the breaches, to restore the ancient paths, to commit ourselves afresh to the building up of what is here protecting the interests of Christ, and on the other hand to have in our hearts to make room for the praise of God, for Christ's Name's sake.

MELBOURNE

2 April 1999

This address will be printed also with the notes of the extended meetings at which it was given.

PREACHING

Norman J. Henry

Matthew 27: 35-50; Mark 15: 33-37; Luke 23: 33, 34, 39-43; John 19: 25-30

I want to speak about a Man who never lost any of His qualities. He never lost any of His qualities because these qualities were not given to Him. These qualities were Himself. Every other man receives. John the Baptist says, "A man receive nothing unless it be given him out of heaven", John 3:27. But the Lord Jesus did not receive His qualities. You might say they were part of Himself. Is that not glorious? The more intense the pressure on Christ, the more His qualities shone. That is how great He was! I want you to think about the suffering of Christ. I do not apologise for reading the four accounts in the gospels of what He said on the cross. You might say, Matthew and Mark are very similar, involving the forsaking, but I took the liberty to read it because if it was written, it should be read. "Every scripture is divinely inspired" (2 Tim 3: 16), and if it is repeated, it is repeated for a reason. God meant it to be repeated, even the same words in different accounts.

What a God He is! He knows His Man, I say reverently. When the people asked for a king, God told them beforehand what kind of person Saul would be. They got what they wanted. God knows every man. They prove themselves to be what they are, wretched, poor and without quality. Now when it comes to Christ, God knew His Man. I say that reverently because the glory of His Person is involved in the gospel. John's account opens with the glory of His Person, but on the cross, what is stressed is His manhood and the qualities that underlay it.

In the Old Testament, in the types, persons were given certain offices, certain functions and invariably, without exception, failure came in because the qualities were not underlying the office they took. It does not matter who you bring up. Some were remarkably true in certain features but they lacked the intrinsic qualities that we have in Christ. If you go into the presence of God, you will find

something of these qualities. Oh that we could draw each other into the presence of God in the gospel today, give a person the sense of the presence of God.

In Matthew and Mark, He addresses God. What He says stands by itself. The forsaking of God was Christ's alone. You and I had no part in that. We can only worship when we consider what He was prepared to take on. What He says on the cross in Matthew and Mark was "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In Luke, He is speaking to the Father in intercession and He is speaking to a repentant sinner. You and I can come in there. I trust we come in there today as repenting sinners. In John's gospel He speaks to His own. It was the time of pressure; the qualities of Christ came out. There was no holding back. There was no erasing of it. Our brother spoke today about a thing being wiped out. You could not erase what was in Christ; it was inherent in Christ. It shone in greater intensity. No wonder one said that He was never more delightful to God than when He was made sin. Think of the glory and preciousness of that work of atonement!

Now I am not saying they characterise the books but I want to bring out certain qualities that come out in them. I think in Matthew it is the Mediator. I will tell you why I have taken that up: it was because when it came to the mediator in the type, Moses needed credentials. He needed proof that he was able for it. So he goes to deliver the people at the beginning of Exodus and God deals with them. God says, tell them that "I AM hath sent me ..." (chap 3: 14). Moses had the credentials for taking up the whole matter of mediatorship to deliver the people. The people required a mediator, not only because of the conditions in which they were, but the idolatry that came in their pathway. They needed a mediator. And what a heart he had! What does Moses say in Exodus 32 "... Forgive their sin ... but if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book that thou hast written" (v 32). Was that not the word, in principle, that Christ takes on here? He is prepared, sacrificially, to be blotted out of God's book. Have you thought about that, what that means?

I speak of the horror of it. Hebrews says, "Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up both supplications and entreaties to him who was able to save him out of death, with strong crying and tears" (chap 5: 7). You might say, He waited for it. Think of what that meant to God! Dear friend, what the three hours of darkness, the time of the forsaking, meant to God, and the Mediator was there, the service of the Mediator. It was not Aaron the priest. It was the Mediator. Moses went up, you remember, in Deuteronomy, and the second forty days he is before God about the sin of the people. What a Mediator we have! He is true to His office. We are told there is one Mediator of God and men: "For God is one, and the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all", 1 Tim 2: 5,6. That proves that He was qualified for His office.

God had His Man. He was true. Matthew sets out the legality of it. It proves how He came in. From the outset, the three fourteen generations, to prove the quality of the Person that was coming in, that could take up everything on God's behalf. What a Mediator He is. There was no other. Job searched after the idea, but nobody could be a mediator of God and man. Nobody could take that place. Christ did!

Now I come to Mark's gospel. I want every heart to think more of Christ. God permits the preaching today so that every person will be profoundly affected by His Son. It is not the priesthood of Exodus. That is the side, you might say, of the glory of the priesthood, his garments set out and the priest is set up in a measure of dignity. When you come to Mark, I think the suggestion is the priest of Leviticus. He is taking up the matter. On the day of atonement: God says "And there shall be no man in the tent of meeting when he goeth in to make atonement in the sanctuary until he come out", Lev 16: 17. The matter was dealt with only between God and Christ. That is all there was. No one could have part in that matter. The same words uttered, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What a Person! You say whatever happened in the wilderness, you go to the tent of meeting and as sure as anything

the priest was there. That is Christ, of course, in type, but the priest was there to take up the matter, to receive your sin-offering. Think of what is possible at the tent of meeting! God says, "There will I meet thee", Exod 25: 22. Where was that? That was the mercy-seat. That was Christ! And the blood was taken in. How wonderful, the whole work of atonement! Blessed be His name, friend, that in Christ under extreme pressure, His qualities shone all the brighter! The antitype covers all the types.

Now, when you come to Luke 23 – He is speaking to this sinner. He is not here exactly receiving the sin-offering. I think, in principle, He is beside the brazen altar, the altar of burnt-offering, and He is looking out. That is Luke. He is interceding for men and He is looking out, you might say, to the entrance to the court. He is looking out to men. What an Interceder He is! "Father, forgive them". Earlier He said He could have asked the Father for twelve legions of angels. He took the onslaught of man, the hatred of man, the violence of man. That is what Christ did. You do not get Gethsemane in Luke, but it is still conflict. You have the garden in Luke. I think here He is at the side of the brazen altar. That is where intercession is made for man, at the side of the brazen altar. (He intercedes for the saints at the golden altar). The very basis of God's approach is seen in the brazen altar. There is no watering down; there is no dilution of God's attributes. At the brazen altar everything is maintained in integrity. That is the quality of the Person that is there. He is the altar; He is the offering; He is the Priest as well. I think that is beautiful: to see Him interceding here. Separating the gospel from the church may have contributed towards the court not being measured in Revelation 11. That is given up to the nations, but here, of course, in the type, it is all under divine control and the brazen altar is there. The sin-offering was put on that. It must be the excellence of the committal and devotion of Christ. It must be a rock-solid basis that we can tell you today to put your trust in, and that is in Christ.

So as it says, He says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". I suppose the only sin that is not forgiven is

apostasy. Judas died the sin of apostasy, but here Christ is looking out, and that is the proclamation today to you the sinner. Forgiveness is offered. Maybe someone here needs forgiveness. You know where you are with God and forgiveness is available. It is stressed in the gospel that your relations with God are vitally important and the offering is there. It is on the altar and the efficacy and acceptability of it is available to you as you repent. You have repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then you come to this repentant man. He lays hold of what is there. "But this man has done nothing amiss". That is the brazen altar. Christ is interceding for men and he lays hold of it, and instead of getting what he expected, he got paradise. I tell you, friend, you will get far more than you thought you would ever get. I know myself: what I ran for in my need, I found God gave me beyond what I can describe. What a God He is! His heart goes out to you. He knows what you need and He will fill it more than you could ever imagine. That is the God we have to do with in the glad tidings. We spoke today about the heart of God, the feelings of God for man! He does not desire any to perish. Deliver him from going down to the pit. I have found a ransom (see Job 33: 24). And it is "with me in paradise", with Christ, with the Man that was here.

Now, I want to touch a moment on John 19. He is not looking out here; He is looking in. The blood is taken in. In John 19 He speaks to His own. What has He got in mind under pressure of all that lay ahead of Him in death. What we referred to in Hebrews, the "strong crying and tears", what He was about to endure, the anticipating of it, and yet, concerned for His own. I think there is something of the Comforter in John 19. In this gospel He says, "And I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter" (chap 14: 16), and I think as John wrote this, he would say, that was an act of the Comforter. He considered for the feelings of His mother. He did not send her back to the house of His brothers and sisters. It was a precious act of concern and care and comfort for His own. He says, of course to John, "Behold thy mother", a new relationship. You find new relationships in Christ. Every right relationship comes

out of the death of Christ. The only, and strongest link you could have comes out of the death of Christ. I have a link with a brother that I could never have with anyone else. You think of that, a brother or a sister! And now this person, John, it says, "And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home". What relationships they must have had together! I know, of course, Mary and the Lord's brethren are found together in Acts, but here it involves spiritual relationships. I think that was in mind. John does not touch the body. He does not touch things that are left with Paul. That is Paul's light. The mystery of the glad tidings involves the body, as I understand it. John provides the personnel for the relationships. That is what John does, the family. Do you fit into the family? You need the Spirit for that. You need the Holy Spirit for that. The only one basis in scripture to walk a lonely path is leprosy, but you are given the Spirit for the company. In a cold world, a world that will try and rob what you have, you need your brother. You need the twos and threes and I think John provides for that. John's family, John's relationships are spiritual.

That is why I said He is looking in now. He is not looking out. That service is done. Where is He looking in – the holiest, the sanctuary, the presence of God? Did we not do that today? Did you have part in the service today, dear brother and sister? Did you have part in that service of going in to the presence of God and having part in divine worship? What a way is open to us and it all depends on what happened on the cross, all hangs on that. The blood was shed there, as we have in John's gospel, blood and water, and that provides the moral conditions to enjoy the presence of God.

I do not want you to be outside of it. I want you to be wholeheartedly in what the Lord had in mind in what He said on the cross in each gospel, to find your part livingly in your relations with God and with your brethren, for His Name's sake.

DENTON

24 May 1998

“WHAT SHE COULD SHE HAS DONE”

Paul Johnson

Mark 14: 6-8

The expression I want to bring before us is “What *she* could she has done”. I was thinking of two thoughts as to this statement. “What *she* could” is one aspect; and the other “she has done”. It may be that circumstances are such that we cannot do certain things, but I think we will always find that we *can* do something. That was my exercise in reading this and other verses we might touch on. We may be limited and there may be things we cannot do, but there will be something we can do. It may not be something that catches the eye of persons. It may be something some would consider very insignificant, as was the case with this woman. This was something that was not looked upon as something great, but it was what she could do and she did it. That is the thing!

I was thinking of the life of the Lord Jesus that it is remarkable that in the first thirty years of His life – there is only one time that there is any mention of what He did. When He was twelve years old, He was there in the temple “hearing ... and asking” (Luke 2: 46), in the spirit of an enquirer. He was about His Father’s business. At His baptism the heavens were rendered asunder as we read in Luke 3, “And it came to pass, all the people having been baptised and Jesus having been baptised and praying, that the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form as a dove upon him; and a voice came out of heaven” (vv 21,22) – and *this* is what I had in mind – “*Thou* art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight”. It is remarkable that God found His delight in Him and yet we do not read of any public service. We know that after this He entered into public service. But think of those thirty years so delightful to the Father as He says, “in thee I have found my delight”. This is what should precede any service; that God gets His portion first; what is delightful to Him.

Sometimes people say, What are you doing? How many souls get saved in your gospel meetings? How many persons are

reached and so forth? For thirty years of the Lord's life there is nothing recorded as to deeds that He did and service that He rendered and yet God says, "I have found my delight" in One like that because He was here for God. That was what brought delight to Him: He was here for God.

So God can find delight in that which is for Himself as the Lord Jesus said when here – "Did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business?" His great exercise as a boy, His great exercise as a young man, was His Father's business. There came a time when He went out into public service, but here is what He was to the Father and how delightful He was to the Father! The primary thing is to bring delight and pleasure for God and this is what He finds delight in. So I think that going back to that thought of "What *she* could she has done" is the great thing.

I would like to touch upon two persons, John and Paul. What they could do, they did, but there were things they could not do. In Revelation 1 "I John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience, in Jesus, was in the island called Patmos ..." (v 9). He was not there on a visit. He was on the island called Patmos because he had been banished. He was restricted. There was not much he could do on that island. There was not much available. But he was there "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus". Notice he says, "I became in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet saying, What thou seest write in a book, and send to the seven assemblies ..." (vv 10,11). And that is what I had in mind. Here was one who could not do a lot of things because he was banished to the island of called Patmos, so he was restricted, but he *could* communicate to the assemblies. He *could* maintain his link with the assemblies here.

I think it is significant that the assembly universally is not in view, although in a day of brokenness we never want to lose sight that the assembly is here: what it comes down to is that there are assemblies that walk in the light of *the* assembly. There are those who are in the light of the assembly in each locality. So in a day of

restriction it is really like John on the island of Patmos: with restrictions. There were things he *could not* do, but what he *could*, that he did. He could communicate with his brethren in the assemblies. He could write to them. He could have to do with them; though he might not be able to visit them; he would maintain his link with them; and would have an exercise in regard to them. I have often thought that, through circumstances, it may be that we are not able to be with our brethren elsewhere, but we should have them upon our hearts: we should have an interest in these localities. We should have some communication; some touch. We should feel our links with our brethren. There may be things we cannot do, just as John could not because he was restricted on the isle of Patmos, but what he *could* do, he did. What he *could*, that he did, and he *could* communicate and he *could* maintain a touch and he *could* maintain an interest and a care for the assemblies, how they got on and what their condition was and what he could say to them that might be of help.

That is another thing. We want to be exercised to do what we can though few in number and even though at great distances. These are all restrictions like the isle of Patmos. They may not be the best of circumstances but nonetheless we should have a touch and a communication and an interest and a care for the gatherings, the assemblies of the Lord's people, those with whom we can walk in this day of ruin and scattering and restriction, as walking in the light of *the* assembly.

Well, here is one who, what he could do, he did. He was not fretting. I think that one of the difficulties that some have – and I have run into this over the years with different ones – is that they fret over things that they cannot control or they cannot change. We cannot change circumstances. John accepted the fact that he was on the isle of Patmos. He could not change that but he did what he could. My exercise in regard to this is that we do not fret over what we cannot do, but what we *can* do, *that* we want to do. Even though it may be somewhat restricted and may not be with the great breadth that some might desire to have.

So I was thinking of the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2: “Remember Jesus Christ raised from among the dead, of the seed of David, according to my glad tidings, in which I suffer even unto bonds as an evil-doer: but the word of God is not bound” (vv 8,9). The apostle said he was in bonds, but he says, “the word of God is not bound”. I think of the circumstance: Paul being in prison and bound would bring before us the circumstances in which we find ourselves today, but it is wonderful that we can say “the word of God is not bound”. Everything that is of God that forms a believer morally and spiritually is just as much with us today as it was two hundred years ago or five hundred years ago. It is all there. We have One on high, “Jesus Christ raised from among the dead”, as our Object. We look up to Him as He is our Object. It is the same Object today as it was in the days of the apostles: that has not changed. “The word of God is not bound”. We might say, that which is really essential to spirituality and to moral power and strength is just as much present today as it ever was. “The word of God is not bound” - it has not been affected by the ruin, the scattering and the weakness. Circumstances do not affect the word of God. The Lord Jesus is the Object as the Man in the glory and He is there making intercession and we have the word of God just as much as ever. The word of God is here and the Holy Spirit is here. Think of that! Divine Persons interceding for us; One on high and One who is supreme, whose word we have in which is found His mind and His will, and food for our souls; and we have the Holy Spirit to make it all good.

It may be we are like Paul: we are bound. There are certain restrictions, certain limitations, “but the word of God is not bound”. I was thinking that there is no reason that we cannot be, as it were, Ephesian believers today as it ever was. All of the things that are necessary are still there, large numbers and great evangelical work and great gift of teachers are not necessary for spiritual growth and moral power and courage. It is the help of divine Persons: Christ as the Object and as the intercessor; God in His precious word and all that He has brought before us, and the Holy Spirit’s power. I am not saying that we are necessarily in the same power, but I think it is

available. The circumstances in which we are found do not limit the power of the Spirit and the effect of the word of God and the help of Christ. All of these things are there: “the word of God is not bound”.

So it is remarkable that even being in such a day in which Paul is bound, “the word of God is not bound”.

Turn back to Luke, I should like just to make one reference there in Luke 19. I was thinking of this in connection with “What *she* could she has done”. We read in verse 17, of one who had the talents and used them, “And he said to him, Well done”. What I had in mind is: “Well done”. “What *she* could she has done”, and so the commendation is, “Well done”. I felt, beloved, that we may not be able to do much but if we do what we can do as we have seen, not only in this woman, but we have seen of John and Paul, I think we will have the commendation of the Lord, “Well done”. It is not so much the amount or what is done but if it is what we *can* do and we do it – my exercise is that we need to have more exercised energy. There may be things we *can* do but we do not do. But “What *she* could she has done” and, we have seen these who were able to do it, even in adverse circumstances, one on the island of Patmos and another in prison. Doing what we can brings the commendation, “Well done” and that is what we would desire for the Lord’s sake!

DENTON

20 April 1999