

A
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LOVING HIS APPEARING

David C. Brown

2 Timothy 4: 8

Do you love the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Paul speaks of the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a blessing it is that God has something laid up for Paul – a crown of righteousness. What a faithful man Paul was: think of his years of service; how right it was that a crown of righteousness was laid up for him. But it is not only for him – for he says, “but not only to me, but also to all who love his appearing”.

There are many things to look forward to – a wedding, or a baby coming, or beginning work, or finishing work ... We look forward to various things throughout different stages of life. But, whatever stage you are at, are you looking forward to the Lord’s appearing? Is that the first thing in your heart?

Firstly it is best, perhaps, to clarify the distinction between His appearing and what we speak of as the rapture. The scripture which mainly deals with the rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4 verses 15-18. It speaks of us being caught up. That is what rapture means: being caught up. Now it would surely be right to look forward to that great event when we are caught up. Believers in the Lord Jesus will be caught up to be with Him. The dead in Christ will rise, the living will be changed, and we will all be caught up. We will hear His voice! We will see His face! What a thing that is to look forward to!

But this reference in Timothy is different. After the rapture, matters will be worked out on the earth. That will be a very serious crisis, a very serious period on the earth, because judgment will have to come in. Matters will have to be dealt with on the earth. Lawlessness will break out, because the Spirit of God, who restrains now, will be taken away. While government now is subject to that constraint, you could not say that about the period after the saints have been caught up. The time will come then the Lord Jesus will set forth, and will come down in His appearing. “His appearing”

simply means that He will be seen. He will be seen by those on the earth, and He will take up His rights. So this scripture refers to loving that, “his appearing”.

However, while the scripture sometimes makes the distinction between the rapture and the appearing, sometimes it simply refers to His coming, treating it all as part of one great event. So I am not going to confine myself to the appearing in what I am going to say.

Why then should we love the rapture? I desire to quicken your hearts, and the Spirit of God would quicken your hearts, to think of the time of the catching away. You are going to be caught away if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus.

If we start from the lowest level – what a relief it will be! We are in a scene where the people of God, along with men in the world, have many sorrows, and tears, and anxieties and pains. For the believer in the Lord Jesus all these are going to be finished at the rapture. That in itself – what a relief it will be! I do not think that is a small thing – but when compared to the greater things in mind we see that it is minor.

What are the two major things from the believer’s point of view? Are you looking forward to them? You are going to hear His voice. You are going to see His face. Beloved, what else is there? What greater prospect can you have before you? I heard a word by a young brother recently, speaking about this section in 1 Thessalonians, and he mentioned that we do not know what He will say. There will be an assembling shout. Have you thought about what He will say? I had not thought of that before. Are you longing to hear what He will say? In that assembling shout, will He call His assembly together with some term of endearment, as the bridegroom in the Song of Songs says, “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away” (2: 10)? Think of that, all the assembly called up together.

Indeed, not only will He call together the assembly, and those belonging to the assembly, He will call together that great and glorious range of people whom the scripture refers to as “the dead in

Christ”, 1 Thess 4: 16. Who is the first of these? Abel. The first man whose death is recorded, Abel, was one of the dead in Christ.

Look through these great names, these great lists of names. Sometimes as you read some of the chapters in the Old Testament you say, ‘Why are all these names there?’. God enjoys them. He goes over the names of those persons, one after another, who are “the dead in Christ”. They are His; He has secured them; they are His own. Wonderful! Think of all those He has secured in that great line of faith. Go through Hebrews 11 – you begin with Abel (Enoch has been translated already), then Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, on to Rahab – a wonderful list of people. The dead in Christ, they are going to be raised at the rapture, and all the saints throughout the Old Testament. How many there will be of the house of Israel, secured by the work of Christ – the dead in Christ, who lived by faith.

And not only those of Israel. It is wonderful to think of others whom grace brought in. I mentioned Rahab. There is Job, not of the house of Israel. He is brought in, one of the dead in Christ. There are many. There is Jethro. There is Nebuchadnezzar, the great king, secured in one of the greatest conversions in the Old Testament. He was brought in. With all the dead in Christ, they will arise.

Then you think of all the saints referred to in the New Testament. I love to read the last chapter of Romans. You may say it is just a list of names – but what names! How attractive the names of those secured by Christ are! So do you love that great event when every one of them will be raised and be available? How wonderful that will be! Even up to the present time there are many.

Think of this place – what it will be like on resurrection day! Think of what the sea around here will be like, when the sea will give up the saints that are in it! The dead in Christ, rising, changed, transformed – what a wonderful company it will be! It will be wonderful for the believer, and wonderful for the assembly as a united vessel.

But have you thought how wonderful that time will be to Christ, what it will be to Him when He sees, without one shade of

variation, all His saints, and all His assembly assembled and gathered together? Surely you will look forward to such a time as the rapture. What a glorious fact, and what a glorious time, as a wonderful company assembles to Him.

As you read the scriptures you will find that the Spirit and the bride say, "Come". Have you ever considered what that time will be for the Spirit of God? The Spirit of God, having completed the dignity of that assembly for Christ, having completed the vessels under the hand of God, will be able to render up the product of His service. He has his part at the time of transformation. Our bodies are transformed "on account of his Spirit which dwells in you", Rom 8: 11. As you are one of those who are indwelt by the Spirit, have you ever thought that God has that inroad into you for the time of the transformation? The Spirit of God helps you here. The Spirit of God gives help in response to God, but He is there and God will transform you on account of – and by – His Spirit which dwells in you. Wonderful transformation – do you look forward to that?

Then, what it will mean to the Father too, when He sees Christ satisfied in having the assembly presented in its fulness and glory. Wonderful! Are you looking forward to that? Is that the first thing before you?

I speak of these things because the rapture is the first thing, and we are often told that we are to look for no event before the rapture. We do not look for changes in the world; we do not look for changes in government: your view is entirely on Christ. Your view is entirely on Him, and the movement will come at the Father's time.

That time is in the Father's calendar. He knows that time, when everything will be ready, and finished, and we will be caught up with Christ, with everything of this scene past forever for the believer.

Well, of course, one of the interesting features that follows is that there is what is referred to at the judgment seat of Christ. The believer in the Lord Jesus will have no fear as the judgment seat of Christ. There will no remorse at the judgment seat of Christ.

Everything has been completed, everything has been righteously

satisfied, and everything has been settled by the work of the Lord Jesus. But still, matters will have to be gone over with Him – as the hymn expresses it:

With Him look back on all the way (Hymn 299)

You will see what was there, what was happening. You will see His hand in it, and see His care in it. You will see His blessing in what you thought was the time of your greatest sorrow. You will look back upon it, and see what failures diverted you – but He had His hand upon you in them. Each one of us can say, Look at these failures of mine! They might depress you – but at the judgment seat of Christ they will not depress you because you will see what the answer to them all was, in the work of Christ. You will see how God has secured things for His own pleasure.

But matters are not to be left to that time. For ourselves, and for our localities – do not leave them till then. You may be settled in your conviction that Christ is your Saviour – then matters are settled for eternity. But if there are matters of divergence in your life do not leave them till the judgment seat of Christ to resolve. Be ready. Be ready for the time when the Lord Jesus comes. Be ready for it – let that be the desire of each one, a judgment of ourselves before the Lord.

We have spoken of the rapture – but to go on now to the actual appearing. The reference here is to those who, “love his appearing”. How was the Lord last seen on the earth? The resurrection was a secret matter. Believers knew about it – believers saw the empty tomb, and they saw Him risen. They saw Him going into heaven as was caught up. The world did not see Christ ascending. No unbelievers saw Christ ascending. The rapture will be a secret matter too. The world will not see you ascending. How conscious the world will be of what has happened we do not know.

These are secret things. But what was the last that the world saw of Christ? The last official transaction that the world had was when there was a request from a believer to take the Lord’s body from the cross. That is still the world’s real view of Christ – a request

– and, what happened next? In the last acts of an unbeliever in relation to Jesus, Pilate called the centurion, and when he knew from the centurion that Jesus was dead he granted the body to Joseph.

What must it have meant to the centurion, for he was one who had just confessed, “Truly this man was Son of God” (Mark 15: 39), that Jesus was to be taken to be buried? We do not know that an unbeliever saw Him buried; we know that the world saw Him on the cross. He is crucified still as far as this world is concerned.

He is going to appear. The appearing is the next time when the world will see Christ. He went out, so far as they were concerned, not in the glory of resurrection, but in rejection. He went out in shame. He went out with a crown of thorns on His head. He went out in weakness. That is what it meant to them, that a Man should be crucified. He is going to come. He is going to come in power. He is going to come in total vindication. Publicly persons might take the view that He was a wrongdoer being crucified.

Somebody passing might have concluded that it was a worthless wrongdoer who was hanging on the cross. They would view Him as a criminal who was not worthy even of a more respectable execution. That is the world’s view of Christ – that Man is going to come, and it will be fully acknowledged by everyone in this scene that He was right and righteous.

Now, how does that affect your heart? Do you love His appearing because His interest, and His honour, are so important to you that you love the fact that He is going to come, and be publicly declared as righteous, and publicly acknowledged in this scene? It is a wonderful fact.

God is always righteous in His dealing. But sometimes matters wait. There are persons in the scriptures who were put to death and there was no acknowledgement that they were righteous persons – think of Urijah, or Naboth, for example. These persons were righteous, and God is going publicly to acknowledge these persons as well. He is going to notify the world that persons that the world cast out were righteous persons. They were persons whom He approves of, whatever the world’s view may be. The believer can

wait. We know that our natural feelings arise when something seems unfair, and the flesh rises in us. We can wait. The believer can wait because the vindication, the acknowledgement of righteousness, is from God. He will set that out. But firstly, and the matter that is predominantly before us in loving Christ's appearing, it is that your heart, and your desire, is that Christ should be honoured, and that He should have His right place in this scene.

Wonderful things will happen because of that, really as part of that. When He comes not only will the universe wonder at Christ in His glory personally, but He will be "wondered at in all that have believed" (2 Thess 1: 10), not just by those who have believed.

There will be those persons who come out in glory. There will be a display of glory in persons who are Christ's, those coming with Him, and the world will wonder. The world will wonder at these persons because Christ is in them. No only are they with Him, but they are formed by Him, and are displaying Him. Indeed, in the world to come there will be a special display of Christ in His saints. There will be a special display of it in the assembly, as coming out from God, and having the glory of God. All this depends on the appearing.

What a difference it will make to the world too. Men are concerned rightly about the condition of the earth. They see resources running out, they are concerned about climate chaos, about all that happens in this scene. There are creatures which God created which appear to be becoming extinct. Men are concerned about that, and the believer has sympathy with that concern. The creatures are God's creatures, the earth is God's earth. God loved the world – He loved a scene which He created which was according to His pleasure. It was set for Man. But what happened? We sang that:

All creation, travails, groans

All that affects men, but it is:

'til Thou shalt come

(Hymn 291)

The appearing is going to have a wonderful effect upon the earth. What will it be like to have an earth where there is corn

growing upon the tops of the mountains, where there is abundance of resource? Men are concerned now that there might be wars because of lack of water in some regions. There will be abundance of resource, there will be a fulness of supply. I love to think of the world to come, and the perfect administration that will flow because Christ has come in and He is in control. Men in their administration try their best. Sometimes they are tangled up in matters that are corrupt; but very often it is simply man's weakness, man's failures since sin has come in.

We have the exclamation of John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world", John 1: 29. That is related in its fulness to the appearing, when Christ comes, when everything that is evil is judged, and the whole scene is in perfection according to God's mind. Now man, of course, will still be on the earth, and man will still be in the flesh. Under the ways of God the flesh will still exist through the thousand years of Christ's public reign. So that sin will occur again – there will be a rebellion at the end of the thousand years, just before God sets out everything according to Himself in a new heaven and a new earth, eternally.

But still, how wonderful to think of the inauguration of the millennium, a scene of perfection and glory. Do you love His appearing because you look forward to this scene where everything on earth will be in perfection and glory according to God. Do you love the appearing because evil will be judged? Does evil affect you? I speak for myself – very often things in the world that should affect me do not affect me as they should; I am insensitive to them.

The Lord would awaken sensitivities to what a scene this is. Think of what it was to the Lord Jesus as a Man here, walking through this scene, and sin affecting His spirit, sin affecting relationships among men. We look forward to that time, His appearing, when all will be set right. Nothing else is going to secure it. Men's efforts will not secure it. His appearing will secure it: a scene where evil has been judged, and, for that time, cast out.

Things will be ordered at His appearing. Think of the way in which now there is disorder and warfare – all that will be removed at

His appearing. What a beautiful scene this earth will be. Do you love His appearing because of that? As you look through the Old Testament you get many references to the world to come. God has plans for the world to come. Things are going to be set up in a way that suits Him. Israel at the moment are rejecters of Christ. There will be a time, after the church has been raptured, when there will be those of Israel, a remnant of Israel, who will cling to Christ. They will take their place here, they will be rejected, they will be despised, and they will be persecuted because of it. At His appearing they will be set up, and given the place that they should have – God’s focus on earth. They will be in their proper place then. Do you love His appearing because of that?

Have you thought of the beauty of everything being in focus? Think of areas of turmoil now. What is Iraq is now associated with what is Assyria in the Old Testament, and Assyria is one of the nations that God is going to set up in relation to Israel. He is going to give it a place, and “Israel shall be the third with Egypt and with Assyria”, Isa 19: 24. Many other nations will be in place according to Him. Do you love His appearing because everything is going to be in order, because you are interested in His people Israel, in His thoughts and desires for His people? I trust that we will all be awakened in interest in these things, things that are in the future.

We have our own lives, many things we are looking forward to. Have you been captivated by Christ, so that your interests have become His, and so that your desires are for what glorified Him, your desires are for what will see Him publicly vindicated – so that you are one of those who love His appearing? I desire that everyone should be quickened in love for His appearing. And what a reward, “The crown of righteousness is laid up for me ... but not only for me, but ... all those who love his appearing”. Yet even that is for His glory – the twenty-four elders in Revelation “cast their crowns before the throne”, Rev 4: 10. Everything is to be for His glory. He will secure it. It will be a public matter. As we increase in love for His appearing it will affect us in the service of God, and it will affect us in our lives.

This is what is before us. May it be increasingly so, for His Name's sake.

PETERHEAD

25 March 2006

THE INN

Edwin Mutton

Isaiah 61: 1-3; Luke 10: 33, 34; Acts 9: 4-6, 17; 2 Kings 5: 10-14; 2 Samuel 9: 1-4, 7, 12, 13; Acts 20: 9-12, 35

We have been occupied these days with the very greatest thoughts that God has for men. His thoughts are above our thoughts, and the things that God has prepared for those that love Him surpass anything we could find down here in this world. God wants us to be in them and enjoy them. We could have meetings like this and go away with more information about the Body, the Assembly, and the pathway of the will of God in broken days, but God also intends us to enjoy these things. The present time is for the enjoyment of Christianity. It is not only for talking about, although we love to speak over these things – I would that we did it more – but God wants us to enjoy things.

That is why I read in Isaiah 61, a scripture that we have referred to several times. The incoming of Christ and the manifesting of God's attitude and desires for men, are epitomised in this scripture from which the Lord quotes. What you find here is that the incoming of the Lord Jesus and all that He brought to men was to form something amongst men. It was to have an effect. It was not only to enlighten, it was that – “the true light was that which, coming into the world, lightens every man”, John 1: 9. It was wonderful light from God and it is still shining. Then as you go into that chapter in John you find that those who received Him, “... to them gave He the right to be children of God”. If you read the footnote to that you will see that it refers to children in the sense of relationship, the family relationship that they could have with God. A little further on it says that they beheld the Person of the Lord Jesus, and what had they seen? They had seen, “as of an only-begotten with a father, full of grace and truth”. They had seen One Who was going to bring them into the enjoyment of the Light that has dawned upon man.

Here in Isaiah we see the things that the Word of God was going to do. It was going to bind up the broken hearted; it was going

to liberate captives; it was going to open the prisons to release them that were bound; it was going to comfort those that mourned, even those that mourned in Zion. I think there are some persons in Zion who are mourning. I would apply that simply this way – that we may be in a position where we enjoy the very greatest truth and light, and where what we actually enjoy touches by the Spirit of what eternity is going to be, and yet we are in conditions where things come in that make us mourn. So you may be in Zion in your experience, but you may be one who is mourning in Zion, “That beauty should be given unto them instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness”. There may be someone here with the spirit of heaviness. God wants to give you a garment of praise. He wants to clothe you in something that will make you responsive to God. This whole passage of scripture speaks of the fact that God has come out in Christ and brought within our range the wonderful thoughts we have been speaking of these two days, because He wants you to enjoy them and to be altered thereby.

Christianity is about change. The gospel is about changing your man, and the work of God in you will change what is outward. We were having something about that this past week – how what is inward will change what is outward. The inward man is renewed day by day and there is a change outwardly (see 2 Cor 4: 16). We read stories of conversions of a hundred or one hundred and fifty years ago where men who were given up to debauchery, drunkenness, and violence were affected by the gospel and the whole of their life was changed. They became sober, their wife and children became looked after instead of beaten. Some of us have touched lives and situations like that where the gospel has changed persons dramatically. That is what the Word of God can do; that is what the Spirit can do; that is what new birth does. The work of God in a soul changes persons dramatically. Many of us in this room have been brought up, through God’s mercy, in Christian households where the truth is known, and we still need that dramatic change to enjoy what can be ours in Christ. Not just the knowledge of it. A brother said to

me that perhaps some of us have too much knowledge, and I think I know what he means. We can, in one sense, never have enough of the true knowledge of God because that is what is going through into eternity, but sometimes we know more than we are actually in the enjoyment and gain of. My exercise in this is that God has come in in Christ that we might be affected, and come into the enjoyment of the great things of God. What is more, He has set up here a system of supply whereby we can help one another into the gain and good of Christianity.

So, I want to speak about the great system of care that is here on the earth seen in the second scripture I read, typified by the “inn”. It is not a permanent situation because soon we are going to be translated to glory, but it is a provision that the work the Lord made the way He brought these things within the range of man that might be continued among His own. I would like to enlist you and myself in being set to having part in that. It touches on John’s ministry. We have touched on Peter and we touched on Paul, but I think John’s ministry underlies all that. John asks how can you say you love God if you do not love your brother (see 1 John 4: 20)? That is the family side of the truth and there is a great area of help typified in the “inn”. I would like to engage you with some of the people in scripture that found the inn.

We have read of Saul, Naaman, Mephibosheth, and Eutychus. They all, by different means and in different circumstances, found the inn. Young people, this atmosphere in which you are, is yours. It is God’s provision here on earth. It is an experience of the Christian circle – persons who love the Lord Jesus and are seeking to walk here in accord with His desires, in a day which is so broken and fragmented. This is your family – the family of God. Family exercises, family feelings, and family conditions are something that we should be very, very careful to maintain among us in all our localities. The breakdown of the family is one of the banes of the world. We read about it in newspapers. The rise of juvenile delinquency, drug taking, delinquent behaviour in schools, and this kind of thing; men put it down, rightly, to the breakdown of the family

and they cannot put it right. Why? Because without God and the influence of God, and without the help of the Lord Jesus and the Spirit, man cannot put together what he has broken. But we, beloved brethren, have the privilege of being where there are persons who love God and therefore are concerned that conditions among us should be such that we can all be helped into the truth.

So that we can have an understanding, as those men of Issachar did – they knew what Israel should do.

In Luke 10 you get this “inn”. I do not go into the detail of the scripture, as it is well known among us, and we can apply it in many ways, but I just want to get this out of it – that there was a place where the Samaritan could take this man who was in a half-dead state, and where it says he, “took care of him”. That is, very simply, what is on my heart – a system of tender loving care.

We have an older sister who is over 90, and goes into the hospital fairly frequently. She can go into one of two hospitals depending on how full they are. In one she gets tender loving care, in the other she gets clinical attention. The difference, when she comes out, is demonstrable! They give her the right medicine in the clinical hospital, they give her food three times a day, they take her blood pressure, they give her pills, and she comes out. The condition she went in with has been alleviated, but she is ‘anywhere’ in her mind because of her age. The other hospital; they give the medicine, and food, but they also give her tender loving care and she comes out a different woman. That is like our localities; we may give one another clinical help, we can say the right things, we can bring the right scriptures to bear on exercises that are among us, but do we miss out on the tender loving care? It is not the easy option.

The easy option is the clinical one because you can write it down and tick it off – take the pills three times a day – but tender loving care is notice at any moment. You never know when it is going to be needed. You never know when persons are going to need that. I am sure there is in our localities a good basis of tender loving care.

Most of us have been brought up in families. We know that whatever goes wrong, somebody still loves us. We know that if we

do something we should not do our father or mother may need to correct us. But you know that they love you, and what you may not know is that it probably costs them more to bring you back on to the straight and narrow path than it did for you to accept it from them.

Think about that, young people, the next time your father or mother has to put you right. Think about what it costs them. Then think about God, think about your heavenly Father and what it has cost Him to provide this area where you can grow and be looked after.

“He who, yea, has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all”, Rom 8: 32. That is how much God wants you to enjoy your heavenly portion. So we can all understand how it works out in a natural family, and the same principles apply spiritually among us.

I have chosen these four people because they all had a different problem. If anyone had forfeited his right to heaven it was Saul of Tarsus. If anyone had offended God it was Saul of Tarsus.

He speaks of himself as the “chief of sinners”, and I think he was. I do not think he made that statement in some kind of boastful way. I think if you added up his sins they probably would be more than those of anybody else, and God saved him. God spoke to him and brought him to the “inn”. God had Ananias there – Ananias was like the innkeeper, he took care of him. He said, “Saul, brother”. Think of that! A man you had heard was coming to Damascus, probably to drag Ananias and others off to prison, and the Lord says, ‘You go and talk to him’. Ananias said, “Lord, I have heard much about this man”, but the Lord adjusted Ananias. Sometimes we are behind the times with the news. It maybe just by half a day – we need to be with the Lord. The Lord had someone in Damascus who was in the good of the family of God; someone who was concerned about providing tender loving care, and he went in and said, “Saul, brother”. I do not think the Lord told him to do that. The Lord just told him he would find the man, so that was something Ananias did from spiritual instinct, “Saul, brother”. Could you go to every brother or sister in your locality and say that? Is that your feeling for your local brethren? I trust it is, but let it increase. We are not more than we are as a local brother or sister in our locality. We may, under the

Lord's hand, go about doing a little preaching, but I am no more than I am as a local brother in Walton-on-the-Naze. That is my true measure. I would love to think that any of them could come to me and say, 'Edwin, brother'. Would that not be wonderful! Is that the kind of atmosphere that is in your locality? If it is, thank God for it and promote it, if it is not then seek grace to make it so.

In most of our localities we are few in number, and it is not beyond the measure of any of us to handle that number and to have happy, tender relations so that if something comes in we can draw near each other. Someone recently spoke about, "And if thy brother grow poor beside thee", Lev 25: 39. Are you close enough to your brother to realise he is growing cold? You may not know the reason, he may not tell you, he may not *want* to tell you, but can you draw near him? If a man like Saul comes into your locality – a big man who is set against God – can you see that God is working, and can you be with God and help that work on? How much we owe to Ananias; the whole of Paul's ministry, the mystery we have been speaking of, the transformation of Saul of Tarsus into the apostle Paul – in a sense Ananias was the touch-stone. Yes, the Lord worked with Saul and worked in his soul, but Ananias helped that on. He helped the brethren in Damascus to accept this man. A man that had come to drag them off to prison, and the next thing you see he has come to the prayer meeting. That would have taken a lot of grace on the part of the brethren would it not? A lot of grace!

Naaman was a man in a rage. I do not know if you have ever seen anyone in a rage? "He went away in a rage (2 Kings 5: 12), and you may say, 'Can this man be helped?' Yesd he can. By the system of tender loving care. His servants drew near and said, "My father". Among the people of God, if a brother or a sister made an outraged comment or lost their temper, there is the ability to contain it by the Spirit. The assembly is a wonderful place. You or I may say something we should not have said, or may act in a way that is fleshly, but there is a means, typified by the "servants" that can bring us back to the inn. I am not saying that this is something normal, but I want to show the extremes that this atmosphere of care can cope

with. Here was Naaman going away in a rage, he was wroth. Even when they pointed the way that was right, it says he “plunged” into the Jordan. He was not told to “plunge” into the Jordan, he was told to wash. I think he went into the Jordan in a rage. Perhaps you have been like that – I certainly have! You say, ‘All right, if that is what the word of God says I will do it, but I know better than God’.

“He plunged into the Jordan”, but God kept His word, “and his flesh came again as a little child”. Can you handle someone in a rage?

Someone who is really upset? Someone who wants to put the world right? Someone who does not want to accept what is going on? There is a system that can, and it should be present in all our localities. Bring in an element that can defuse and lower a high temperature.

That is a service you get in hospital. There is someone who is trying to lower your temperature. If you are overheated, can someone lower the temperature? God can do that, He says, “Come now, let us reason together, saith Jehovah: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white a snow”, Isa. 2:18. God lowers the temperature as you get into His presence. You may be in a rage.

Saul of Tarsus was in a rage. You can almost imagine Saul cowering as he said, “Who art thou, Lord?”. Saul was probably expecting judgment, no doubt his conscience had been working. He had been kicking against the goads, and as that light came out of heaven, he probably knew who it was and he probably expected judgment was to fall. “Who art thou, Lord?” What was the answer?

“I am Jesus”. The Lord, if I can say it reverently, took the heat out of that situation. The Lord can take the heat out of every situation that has to do with moral issues. He has borne the judgment of God against sin; He has made a basis upon which you and I can live in the favour of God forever. He has borne the judgment of God that was due to you and me, and exhausted it in those three hours of darkness.

Mephibosheth was of the house of Saul, and I think he speaks to us of many of our brethren who have missed their way.

You might say it is the house of Saul and we have a real judgment

of that. David says, “Is there yet any that if lest of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” and also, “... that I may show the kindness of God to him?” This was David’s exercise. He was concerned that someone needed help. Mephibosheth did not feel worthy of it; he calls himself a “dead dog”. Nobody else had gone to look for him, but David said I want to “show him the kindness of God”. When Mephibosheth came it was obvious that he was prepared to receive it. “What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?” If David had not gone looking for him he would never have found a repentant man. That would have been very sad, would it not? It would be very sad if there was someone who had not had any contact for a long time with this system of loving care. They are repentant; they have come to it they are a “dead dog”, and yet they are lame, and they can do nothing about it. They could not walk back. David says, “Is there any ... I may show the kindness of God to?”

He sat at the king’s table. He was still lame on both his feet – sometimes we have done damage in the testimony that cannot be put right. Here was the testimony of Mephibosheth, that Saul’s system had left him lame. Things that had been among the people of God (because Saul was the anointed king) had left him lame on both feet. David says that he is going to sit at my table. It has often been remarked that when he sat at the table you could not see that he was lame. Is that not wonderful – you look at a brother who perhaps has a history that lameness might represent but, as he sits at the king’s table, you see no evidence of it. That is what this system of tender loving care can do, beloved, and we need to be sure it is. The Lord expects that; it is a reflection of how the Lord would act Himself. If you notice, the Lord said to the lawyer in Luke 10, “Go, and do thou likewise”. The next incident that Luke records is Mary and Martha and. As we have often said, Martha listened to the “Go, and do”, but Mary was concerned about the “likewise”, sitting at His feet. That is where we learn tender loving care. Learn to do things the way Jesus would do them. If you want to serve the people of God learn to do it as Jesus would do it.

There are lots of things that go on in a practical way, personal care for one another, and visiting those that are sick or lame.

Visiting is part of tender loving care, there are many lonely souls among us as well as not among us, who need a touch from the Lord and it could be by you. Let us not neglect it even if we are young.

I knew of a young brother whose parents insisted that once a week, on his way home from school, he visit an old brother or sister. He told me he hated it so he left it until Friday night, but looking back he realised that what he got from those visits has been of immeasurable help to him in his soul. This is a service that needs to go on, and it does go on. There are some sisters who have a telephone ministry. They cannot move around, they cannot leave their house, but they regularly call persons who are elderly or disabled and cannot get out to the meetings – what a service that is! Just a touch that keeps them in touch with what is going on down here under the eye of God. It is all helping to keep the saints in good trim, and to keep them in the great things of God. Mephibosheth was one such; he was of the house of Saul. Do not forget those of the house of Saul. I am not implying that those we do not walk with, or have never walked with, are of the house of Saul, far be the thought, but it is not the house of David. They are not those with whom we have happy, free, and full fellowship. Under the Lord's hand and in the Spirit's guidance you can bring comfort and encouragement, and maybe help in setting someone's step towards the house of David. Show them the kindness of God. That is what the Scriptures tell us happened when the Lord Jesus came, "The kindness ... of our Saviour God appeared", Titus 3:4. That kindness is to continue until He come.

We often refer to Eutychus in this connection and he gets 'a bad press'! Mr. Coates said that this chapter (Acts 20) is one of the most important chapters in the New Testament. The reason why is because it is the final words of Paul. This is the height of Paul's ministry. These are his final words, "I have showed you all things, that thus labouring we ought to come in aid of the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He himself, said, It is

more blessed to give than to receive". Paul's final word to the church was that we ought to come in aid of the weak. His entire ministry is here – the whole counsel of God is in this chapter. Paul had shown them and told them everything and that is his final word, and I believe it is something for us to consider. As the dispensation goes on the Lord is in heaven. Paul is no longer here, but this system of care, and proving that it is more blessed to give than to receive, is to go on. Here Paul himself demonstrated it with Eutychus. There were long meetings and this young man was overpowered with sleep. This could be applied in many ways. Most of us get overpowered with something at sometimes in our lives. I do not mean that you sleep in the meeting, but that you have something that takes up too much of your time and your thoughts.

Mr Stoney said that he was very envious of persons who had a manual job and not a job that used their minds, because they could think about spiritual things while they were doing their job. I have a job which uses my mind all the time, I am reading papers and correcting letters and this kind of thing and all that time I cannot think on spiritual things. We had a brother among us when I was young who was a road sweeper, he swept the streets with a broom, and he used to bring some real gems to the ministry meeting! He got them while he was sweeping the streets. I am not saying we should all be street cleaners, but let us make time for these things. Eutychus had been overpowered and he fell down, and Paul stopped the meeting – this was the great apostle Paul – and he went down and enfolded him in his arms. There seems to have been a defect with the saints in this meeting because they took Eutychus up as dead – Paul said his life is in him. In spiritual things let us be trained to detect when life is still in him. Do not give up! Do not give up until you are absolutely certain there is no life there. Sadly, and I hope less and less frequently, we have to part company with someone. As we say, we have to withdraw from them because they are going on with something not pleasing to the Lord, and after pleading and pleading they will not separate themselves from it. That does happen but it should be the really last thing that happens. It is a terrible thing! It

has been said that if you withdraw from someone that you are effectively saying that they are unfit for Christian fellowship, and that is a very solemn thing to consider. It may be necessary, but I suggest if this level of care is working in your locality it will be a very, very rare occurrence. Paul said his life is in him. Did he leave him to someone else? No, he carried him up himself. He was like the good Samaritan.

We came across an accident the other week. There was a man lying badly injured in the road and we had nothing we could do to help him. We had no bandages or blankets or anything else and we had to phone for an ambulance. The good Samaritan had the supplies with him. Paul did. He did not even delegate it to other brethren he did it himself. That shows, beloved brethren, however spiritual you and I may think we are, or however spiritual we may be, the more fitted we will be to meet a situation like this. He brought him to the inn; he brought him back to the local company. Then it says of the local brethren, "And they brought away the boy alive, and were no little comforted". Paul gave them a lesson in spiritual first aid. Some of us should have some training in practical first aid, it is virtually obligatory in most firms in the United Kingdom. Spiritually how fitted are we? If someone chokes, or someone has a haemorrhage spiritually, are you able to meet that? Have you got what it takes? The good Samaritan had the oil and the wine. Think of what Paul had – he enfolded him in his arms. That is a lovely word – enfolded him. You might say, 'I could not be identified with what he was doing. Beloved brethren, let us enfold one another in our arms and bring persons back to the inn. Keep them in the warmth. If you get away from the fire you get cold. This is where God has given us the enjoyment of the very greatest things and that is where people will get help. That is where people will get revived. That is where people will become warm.

I just commend this thought to the brethren – the inn – a wonderful temporary provision. You do not stay at an inn for long, just a few days and then you move on. It is comfortable, it is refreshing, and there is food – all that you need, and where you can

be encouraged. "Take care of him". If you worry about running out of money, the Samaritan says, "I will render to thee on my coming back". There is all the supply in the Lord Jesus, and there is the presence of the Spirit in the inn to revive persons who may have fallen by the wayside. We have been engaged with such wonderful thoughts it would be a terrible shame if any of us missed the enjoyment of them because there was no such "inn" conditions among us, as I am sure there are, where we can encourage one another to be at the very centre of what God has for our enjoyment. May He bless the word. For His Name's sake.

WHEATON IL

26 November, 2005

MAKING UP THE NUMBER

Andrew Burr

Luke 15: 1-11; 22-25

This chapter is one that especially brings home to me the very small measure I have in relation to the preaching of the gospel, because in this chapter the preacher is the Lord Jesus Himself. He unfolds these simple, well-loved stories about someone He knows better than anybody else. The stories were about God, about the Father, stories that tell us how much God wants to have us for Himself. The stories themselves are very simple but their insight into the knowledge of God is very wonderful. The stories could apply to anybody. We often speak of them in relation to wanderers, people who are lost, but we might say – wandering from what? The subjects of these parables are people who had a place in the company: they had a place among others who were saved which for one reason or another they nearly lost. The parables are spoken in the hearing of tax-gatherers and sinners and Pharisees, a community of hearers about as diverse as you could find. We have read them this evening to ourselves, and they apply to us as much as they do to these people. Let us not believe that these stories have some particular application to the unsaved, or to those who have never tasted of the blessings that we announce to the glad tidings, because it would be much easier to show that they apply to people like us. They apply to people who belong in the company and for one reason or another have not sufficiently valued the place they had in that company.

We have been speaking about fellowship over the weekend and I believe we have enjoyed speaking about it. We have spoken about the reality of it and the need to be real about it and the need to really possess the truth that relates to fellowship. This leads me to use these scriptures to raise a question with each: do we really understand how much it means to God that each of us should take our place in relation to His interests here and among the company of

His people? How much do we understand what it means to God that we should have a place in that company?

I turn to these narratives here to seek to bring that out. There are four examples, different kinds of objects: the sheep, the coin, the younger son and the older son. We often speak about the parable of the prodigal son, but it is as much a parable about the elder son; and it might be more a parable about me in that relation than it is in relation to the prodigal son. Each of the four had fallen out of a place that was theirs. The purpose of this chapter is to show the lengths to which God will go, and the reasons why He will go to those lengths, to recover people to a place among His people. You might say, we are all here today, which of us needs to be recovered? But any of us could under-value what we have been called to, and any of us who under-values it stands in danger one day of letting it slip, letting it all go, losing it, losing ourselves. The preaching is announced among those who may have assented to its first message as to guilt and as to the need for the work of Christ. The preaching continues to be addressed to such so that they might not give up what they have once possessed, perhaps without realising entirely what it was they had been given.

I never take up this first parable about the lost sheep without recalling the story Mr Darby tells, which some of us may know, about the time when he was a curate. The story is called, 'How the Lost Sheep was Found'. He had been called to a house where a boy was dying from the consequences of exposure. The boy was in his last days. He had never read the Bible, and as far as Mr Darby was concerned God was a stranger to him, and he did not know how he could preach the gospel to him. Then he found that the reason why this boy was so ill was that he had gone after one of his father's sheep the previous winter in very bad weather. He had been out all night and came home ill, and now he was going to die. When Mr. Darby showed him the connection with this parable he was converted. The reason I keep referring to the story is that behind what the Lord Jesus says is this great truth that the sheep were the Father's. The shepherd went after them because they were the

Father's and because He loved the Father. Have you thought of that? When the Lord Jesus found you, when He reached after you in your lost condition away from Himself, and perhaps on other occasions since, and you have felt the sure hand of the shepherd catching hold of you, have you remembered that he did that because you were the Father's. He did it, not only because He loved you but because He loved the Father? How precious it is to think of this that the Lord Jesus has gone to the lengths that He has because He loved the Father. He has laid down His life because He loved the Father.

This story goes on. Mr Darby asked the boy what he did when he found the sheep. He laid it on his shoulders and brought it home that way. The boy said, the sheep was dead beat and tired.

He would not have trusted it to come back on its own. The Lord Jesus does not trust you to come back on your own. He has carried you on His shoulders and brought you back because He knows what a wanderer you are, what a wanderer I am. He knows how far away I easily get, the things I might get into so quickly; and as this boy said, I did not trust the sheep to come on his own, so I carried him, he did not have the strength. Nor have you had the strength. It is the power of the Lord Jesus that has brought you back and it is His sure way that has brought you back.

Where has He brought you? He has brought you where others are. The gospel is preached because the Lord Jesus wants to bring you where others are. The reason is that He sees you as part of that number and what I would like to convey to you is that that number is not complete unless you come.

Someone may say, as the disciples said, how many are going to be saved? We sing this hymn:

Some guest will be the last (Hymn 70)

How many will there be, how near to that number are we? We make these foolish suggestions. The Lord's interest in you is as if you were part of a number that will not be complete until you are in it. He seeks to bring you to a company that will not be complete until you

are livingly and fully and securely part of it. I am not talking about this meeting, or anything of that sort, but imagine you were the shepherd: imagine what a difference it makes to the shepherd if all his sheep are there on the one hand, or if all his sheep except one is there. You might say, the sheep is out in the snow and we had better leave it until the morning, we cannot go out now – shepherds do not think like that. There is an urgency with a shepherd to find one who is missing. The gospel is preached because if you are missing it is urgent. The Lord addresses your need and comes into your life as if it made all the difference to Him whether you were there or not, just you. You might think you do not account for that much. Oh yes you do, the Lord Jesus is intensely interested in you and the number of the saved is not the same to Him if you are not among them. We preach with that intensity and the urgency that you should come. Submit to His shepherd care today that there should not longer be a space in that company where you should be.

He says, “having found it, he lays it upon his own shoulders, rejoicing; and being come to the house, calls together the friends and the neighbours, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found *my* lost sheep”. People say they are the Lord’s and they speak as if that it is something they have arrived at but, beloved, you were the Lord’s away in the far country, that is how He sees you, “*my* lost sheep”, not my found sheep, but “*my* lost sheep”. You may be away, you may be far away, but you are one of His sheep. It makes all the difference to Him that you are away. To Him it is a life and death question whether you come. He has given Himself for you, that is how much He loves you, needs you, wants you. In the urgency and fulness of His love, He has been prepared to die for you, and shed His precious blood. He has done that because He loves you.

I go on to say something about the coins. If you went to the Middle East and you met a married woman, you might well find that she had around her head an ornament made of coins. It would be a gift from her husband, and it would be mark of her honour for him that she wore it. Can you imagine how such a woman would feel if

one day she took that ornament off and found that one of the coins was missing? These were not just coins in the woman's pocket or money box; this was, I think, a collection which depended for its value on its integrity, and the honour of her husband depended on that integrity. It happens from time to time, and it may have happened to somebody here. Just imagine that one of the wives here lost a stone out of their ring; can you see what a search would be launched for such a tiny thing; the whole house would be swept for it. The search would go on and on and the whole house would be turned over in the hope that this little stone could be found. Here we see how, with that same sense of urgency and value, the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit are looking for you. Imagine the state of mind of a woman who wore a dowry from which one of the items was missing: what a dishonour she would feel was cast upon her husband. He out of his love for her had given her this thing, and out of some carelessness or lack of watchfulness it was incomplete.

Just imagine her feelings, imagine the intensity of it, this is a public display of the honour in which she held her husband and it is damaged. She would be ashamed to wear it. Nothing would stand between her and the rediscovery of this missing piece. The Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit feel exactly the same and much more so about you. You say, I am just an ordinary person, what difference does it make? It makes every difference possible that you should be found. The Lord Jesus says in John's gospel as to the Holy Spirit that the wind blows where it will. That refers to the sovereignty of the Spirit, but I hope nobody suggests that the Spirit blows round some people and not round other people. It is impossible to stand out on a windy day and for some people to feel the wind while others to say, What wind? If the wind is blowing everybody feels the wind.

The Holy Spirit is working in relation to the will of God, "The wind blows where it will" (John 3:8), there is a reference to the will of God there. What is the will of God? "The Lord does not delay his promise ... but is longsuffering towards you, not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3: 9). The Holy Spirit is working to the will of God that nobody should perish, and He is therefore looking for you.

It is not just in a casual way as if someone else will do if He cannot

find you, but because it matters intensely to God that you should be among the saved. The Spirit therefore seeks entrance so that you might be discovered and that you might take your place in something that is for the honour and glory for Christ? What greater fulfilment is there for a man, woman or child but to be here for the honour and glory of Christ. What an opportunity you have! Who would lie, as it were, in a dusty corner when they could be on display for the honour and glory of Christ?

These are simple applications I make of these passages, and I just want to add something about the last passage. There is so much in it that I cannot go into it all, but the simple point I would like to make is that the Father has made a preparation. We know it is so because the One who tells this story is no one else but the Lord Jesus Himself. If any one knows what the Father is doing it is He. He has made this preparation, a fatted calf, a ring, and sandals, and he has trained people in his house who can sing and dance. He has servants who share his feelings and who move about with him, who know how to run, and he has other servants in the house who understand His longings and are able and willing to speak to other people about them. All that is missing is you. If you would come, all this celebration could begin: think of that!

It is poised ready to begin, the father's feelings pent up so much that he takes a vantage point from which he can see the far country, so that as soon the person for whom He is waiting begins to move in repentance, the father runs. There is urgency because all this preparation is waiting ready. It says in chapter 14, "Come, for already all things are ready" (v 17), all that is missing, as we find there, is the person for whom it has all been prepared. These two sons were away. I think it is fair to say that the father had prepared all this for them both. He would have liked them both to be there.

We know that because, when the elder son would not go in, his father went out and besought him. Think of the way the gospel is preached by the Father Himself: the messenger went out, but then the father went out. He pleads, Come in, this is for you; it will not be same if you are not there. The elder son says, if you want to have it

for the younger son that is fair enough but it is nothing to do with me. But he was as much needed to complete that occasion as the younger son. "It was right to make merry and rejoice" (v 32) and so it is that there is nothing to make merry or to rejoice about until the lost sinner returns.

You might say, that is all very well, but how should I come?

The Lord Jesus makes it very simple, you come repenting. That way sounds rather severe, what does that mean? We all have our own view of ourselves, perhaps until we read a section like this, and perhaps until we have really thought about it, we had not understood what our waywardness from God meant to God. Maybe we thought that a bit of self-indulgence, or a bit of sailing near the wind, would not do any harm. We have done a lot of things that we could not see any harm in, they did not seem to carry any risk. It is rather like this elder son, he lived at home, he had got his circle of friends, but the father was not one of them. They were not like the father, and although he lived at home he was really as far away as the one who was eating the pig food in the far country. So it is, but see how different things look when you come and see them as God sees them. The Lord Jesus is presenting the feelings of God here in a way these people had never seen. Perhaps in the preaching of the gospel a renewed impression about the urgency and the desires of God make you see things differently. Maybe you thought someday you had better do something about this: someday I had better be committed, someday I had better take my part in this, someday I had better yield and acknowledge that God has a claim over me, and then you come into the presence of God and you see how self-indulgent that is, how truly sinful it is to think like that. You are sinning not just against the rights of God, but you are sinning against the heart of God.

Mr Alfred Gardiner was asked why the son says he had sinned against heaven? Well, heaven is the throne of God and sin is against the throne of God, against God's rights. It is an offence. It is guilty to sin, and it attracts God's judgment and wrath. But then why does it say, "and before thee"? Mr. Gardiner said, Imagine sinning

against a Father like that! We have all done it, and we have done it over and over again. It has perhaps not troubled us when we did it, maybe a long time has gone by; and then it comes to us that we sinned against a Father like this, a Father who wanted to bless us, a Father who wanted to treat us, a Father who had something prepared that He was waiting for us to enter into. Rather than please Him we pleased ourselves, and we got nothing but misery out of it. When we came back we found that everything that had been prepared long ago was still there and the Father's heart was unchanged. He loved us just as much as when we ever first heard about Him, and before that, and He still wants us to have the place that perhaps we have long neglected. It still matters as much to Him as it ever did that that place should be ours.

I believe that this goes with what we have been having over the weekend. We speak about the company and what it is to us, but think of it as if it meant something to God that the completion of this company was a thing for which He has given everything. "He who, yea, has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him grant us all things?", Rom 8: 32.

KIRKCALDY

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