

A
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DIVINE LOVE AND GRACE

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Hosea 11: 1-4; 2 Corinthians 5: 14, 15; John 12: 27-33; Matthew 11: 25-30

I wish to speak from these scriptures about the way that divine love and grace draw and hold us, and indeed secure us permanently, for the divine pleasure in the testimony and no doubt eternally. What was in mind was the thought of being drawn “with bands of a man”, how we are drawn to Christ. Where we read in 2 Corinthians as to the love of the Christ, I was thinking of it as constraining us and I wish to speak about how it might develop in our soul exercises in the epistle to the Romans, how divine grace and love constrain and secure indeed so that we become bondmen to God and come into full accord with the will of God, “the good and acceptable and perfect will of God”, Rom 12: 2. Then in John’s gospel there is the drawing of a crucified Christ, “I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me”. These are powerful and wonderful matters. Then in Matthew 11, the Lord’s appeal, “Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest”.

As we proceed we might be drawn to Christ more and more. What should proceed in a meeting like this is not simply enlightenment. We are very thankful for the light that comes and for the contributions that open things up, but what is in mind is that there should be something operating in our affections, a certain movement drawing towards Christ. Outside, other things constrain us. As young people we are brought to meetings, and we might even come to an occasion like this with various motives and thoughts which are not Christ, but it is wonderful to be among the brethren, to come to the place where the Lord might be found.

At the beginning of the Song of Songs, one who is typically a lover of Jesus, one who seeks Christ, asks where He feeds His flock and the answer is, “If thou know not, thou fairest among women, Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, And feed thy kids beside

the shepherd's booths" (1: 8). If you go by the footsteps of the flock you go where the brethren are and follow them, and you will find Christ there. Not only will you find Christ reflected in the saints, but you will find Christ Himself. In all these meetings and in all our exercises the great matter is to find Christ, to have a relationship with the Lord Jesus.

We began in Hosea because it refers to Israel being a child and this scripture is especially applicable to young believers, of whom there are many here. I would like to speak as to how God would work with you, what His thoughts are for you and how He would work with you so that you might think as to how far this has been effective with you. You might say, How much have I been drawn by the "bands of a man, with cords of love", how has Jesus affected me and drawn me?

The first thing God says is, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him". Some of the exercises that we might speak of in this line, especially in the epistle to the Romans, are very testing, but it is a wonderful thing to have a sense that you are loved! It impedes your heart if you have not some sense of divine love for you, it makes you resort to legal thinking, thinking of your own faults and unacceptability and so on, but God says, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him". It is a kind of secret of going on and developing in divine things, to be conscious that God loves you. He has great thoughts for you, "out of Egypt I called my son". Divine Persons love you, young people. We might say that you are especially the objects of divine love. You are not perfect and Israel is described here in this epistle as by no means perfect. There are these beautiful allusions to how God dealt with Israel as a child, that was Israel when they were just come out of Egypt, newly come forth. Then there are interjected statements as to their failings, but still running right through there is the chain of what God was doing with them.

Israel, having fed on the Passover lamb, had come out into the wilderness, they had come out from Egypt. They were called out and they responded. If you look at the typical scriptures as to how God dealt with them you will find that He dealt tenderly with them. I

would love to be able to make the truth attractive, even the most testing truth, because scripture does. It is not easy, the move out of Egypt and into the wilderness. The world becomes a place that does not cater for you any more. We do not actually leave one place and go to another but the very world where we found our life, which catered for us very well in the flesh, we find does not cater for us at all because we have spiritual desires and the world does not do anything for them. God has worked in my soul. I have spiritual desires, moving out in love for Christ, with some desire after the people of God, and the world will not cater for these spiritual desires at all. It will seek to draw you back to the fleshly desires that satisfied you when you were in the world. As you go out of the world, out of Egypt, into the wilderness you find that there is nothing for you there. That means you are thrown back on God and you find that where the world provides nothing for you He can provide everything in tender care, He can meet every need. If you read the history of how Israel came out of Egypt, the difficulties they went through, you find the care that divine Persons expended upon them as alluded to here, "I it was that taught Ephraim to walk, -- He took them upon his arms". It describes a certain tenderness. It is the bands of a man, the Lord Jesus whom we are seeking to set forth, and His love for you. This is reflected in the saints too, for persons who know Him take on something of His feelings and something of His activities. He uses them so that I might get some sense of how much divine love is towards me. I am sure you must understand, young people, that the brethren love you, and that is a reflection of Christ's love for you. Not only your parents, but the brethren love you and desire to do the best for you. So, when Israel came out of Egypt, God took them upon His arms and He drew them "with bands of a man, with cords of love". From this typical teaching we can understand that God was working on this principle; really the Man that was in mind for us is Christ. In fact what happened when they came out of Egypt was that Moses and Aaron were looking after them and leading them, caring for them and praying for them, and divine care was coming in in that. So, God says, "I drew them with bands of a man, with cords of love".

They came out and then complained and God was not hard on them. They spoke about going back to Egypt and they asked for food, they hungered, they complained, they murmured, and God was not hard on them. He gave them food. They came out and they thirsted and the waters of Marah were bitter and He made them sweet for them. "Jehovah shewed him wood, and he cast it into the waters, and the waters became sweet" (Exod 15: 25). That is one of the allusions to Christ you can see in these early days of Israel, to the blessed Man that went into death. As you love Him and understand His love for you in going into death, then you can understand how it is that you can accept death and accept the wilderness. Then God fed them, He gave them quails and the manna and at one point, which is very often taken up in connection with this thoughts of the "bands of a man", Moses told Aaron to speak to the people, to tell them to come into the presence of Jehovah. These were people that were murmuring, and it says, "And it came to pass, when Aaron spoke to the whole assembly of the children of Israel, that they turned toward the wilderness", Exod 16: 10. The people turned at the voice of Aaron. That is a reference to the voice of Christ, the priestly, gracious voice of Christ –'Do not go back to Egypt, I know these things were once appealing to you, and you might think things are hard in our Christian path, but do not go back'. The people listened to the voice. The Lord Jesus' voice would come into a meeting like this. If it has come into your heart to go back to Egypt, He would say, do not go back, turn towards the wilderness. When they turned towards the wilderness they saw "the glory of Jehovah". God made Himself manifest. Then food came that very evening, and in the morning, and there was full supply. God gently caused them to eat, having released them from the bondage of Egypt and brought them out. That was what was in my mind, that in our exercises we might prove something of the Lord Jesus. We have been speaking about His glories as brought before us in these readings, the glories of Christ. Another way that we can learn the Lord Jesus is experimentally, what He can be to us, what a blessed Man He can be for my heart, what He can do for me, how He can feed me, how He cares for me, how He can speak with a

voice that reaches into my affections so that I do not go back to Egypt but follow on in the pathway, that is the pathway of the will of God.

I read in 2 Corinthians 5 because of the word constrain, “the love of the Christ constrains us, having judged this”. That is that love known in Christ, the One that died for us, constrains us and in addition to that, under the constraint of divine love we are judging something, we are thinking. God expects us to calculate. There are spontaneous movements of affections that only the Lord Jesus can draw out from our hearts but we are also expected to become intelligent persons and to think as to what is right in the light of divine blessings. We find that in Romans, there are certain things that we can reckon, certain things that we are to be intelligent as to. Thus Paul says “having judged this ... he died for all, that they who live should no longer live to themselves”. You can see that: the Lord Jesus died for me and He secured me from eternal loss, and then what? Should I live to myself? Can I just go on and ignore that? No. It is necessary and right that I should no longer live to myself but to the blessed Man who died for me and has been raised. My life should be in the direction of Christ, I should live to Him who died for me, “and has been raised”.

That brought to my mind the teaching of the epistle to Romans, a very difficult book in some ways when you are young and you read it. What I would like to say is, that while Romans is doctrine and teaching which we need, placing matters in our histories in a certain order so that we are not totally at a loss, not going through uncharted seas, right through beautiful attractive features that come in. When the people left Egypt and went into the wilderness, the next thing was that they came to Sinai and God made a covenant with them and asked them to commit themselves to Him. He committed Himself to them, He said, you will be my people (see Exod 19: 5). That is a very important point. We are speaking about being bound by divine love, and a question might be then as to whether divine love as seen in Christ is so great and compelling to me, so constraining to me that I am going to commit

myself. I cannot just treat divine things lightly; I have to commit myself to the Lord Jesus, to God Himself. These exercises come into Romans. I do not want to speak especially about how discouragement comes in in regard to them. Most here would know how severe some of these exercises can be, but I want to speak about how we might be helped, not to be totally burdened and overcome by them.

One of the attractive features that come in is the thought of the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts (see Rom 5: 5). It is a very important thing to receive the Spirit and have this sense that you are loved. It says, "if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Peter 2: 3). That means that the Lord is gracious. It says also in Romans, "If God be for us" (8: 31). When we are young we tend to be taken up with our own thoughts and failings and shortcomings, but the great overwhelming sense that God would put into our souls is that in spite of all that we are and all that we were, God loves us and He gives us the Holy Spirit to impart this: "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts", Rom. 5: 5. We get some sense of the God we have to do with. The blessed God whom we can commit ourselves to is the One who commends His love to us. We often use it in the preaching, but it is addressed to believers, and we can always resort to that, "God commends *his* love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us" (Rom 5: 8).

Then exercises arise such as the one in chapter 6. If we are to come out of Egypt we have to be in the truth of baptism and if we have been baptised to Christ Jesus we have been baptised unto His death. That is very testing, that we become identified with Christ, we become one with Him morally in the likeness of His death, which is the truth of baptism. That is testing, but what I wanted to point out is that the thought in mind is, "in order that, even as Christ has been raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life" (v 4). It is newness of life in our walk down here. There is a wonderful encouragement placed there, a kind of heavenly glow placed over that scripture because it says, "Christ has been raised up from among the dead by the glory of the

Father”. That glory, the love that took Christ out of the grave, how He was raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father in blessed life – there should be some reflection of that in our walk in newness of life. You find that Romans abounds in encouragement. If we are going to reckon ourselves dead to sin it is because we can see that, “in that he lives, he lives to God” (v 10). So we become associated with Christ in these things.

Then there is the thought of bondmanship, how we were once bondmen to sin, once disobedient, and the gospel brings us into obedience. There is grace in it all, for we get our freedom from sin, and become bondmen to righteousness. It is a process, we yield our members, “For even as ye have yielded your members in bondage to uncleanness and to lawlessness unto lawlessness, so now yield your members in bondage to righteousness unto holiness” (Rom. 5: 19). Paul uses these words, bondage, then “bondmen to God” (v 22). You can see how divine grace is intended to work with us to secure us. It is divine love that is behind it all. These things are to encourage us. I know to the flesh it is irksome, but the thought is that I become happy in coming into this position of bondmanship. I become happy because I have been relieved from the bondage of sin and unrighteousness.

When we come to Romans 7, what I want to say is that the mistake that we may make is that we try to go through these exercises alone. What I mean by ‘alone’ is that we try to go through them without Christ and without the Spirit. That is not the thought. Romans 7 begins with One who is a husband who has been raised up from among the dead. We are “to be to another, who has been raised up from among the dead” (v 4). The thought is that we go through these exercises supported by the love of Christ in His presence. The danger is that we might seek to try to do it alone. If you try to settle these severe exercises alone you might find that Satan wants to be there and your thoughts are darkened and you are disheartened. The great thing is that matters are settled in your soul in the presence of Christ and you can turn to Him. As you are doing these things, as you are becoming identified with Christ in the

likeness of His death in the truth of baptism, as you understand what newness of life is you are being associated with Him. Then as you go through the exercises of Romans 7 the Lord Jesus becomes endeared to you, you prove what He can be. The bands of a man are no longer just a phrase in the Old Testament, but you find that you are being constrained by that blessed Man yourself. You love Him more and more, not only because He died for you and secured you for your eternal welfare but because presently He is a living Saviour and loves you and cares for you as a husband would care for a wife.

These things then cease to become onerous to us. It is not that there is a spirit of bondage, Romans 8 speaks of not receiving a spirit of bondage, "but ye have received a spirit of adoption" (v 15). It is not that things are irksome to us, and so when we become fully committed, even as to our bodies in Romans 12 it is a question of, "the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (v 2). We often speak of that as a kind of increase, but from the beginning it is "good", a way of happiness, a way of peace and rest for your soul to be secured like this, to be delivered from Egypt and from what Satan would do and from the flesh. It is clear in Romans that that is the thought, that we are delivered from the world around us, delivered from the power of sin and from the power of the flesh so that we might prove the power of the Holy Spirit. These things are intended to be encouraging to us.

The scripture in John's gospel is a very testing one. We have been speaking about being attracted to the Lord Jesus in all His grace, but I would like to speak about being attracted to Christ crucified. We have been speaking in the readings about the Lord Jesus and the great centre He is of God's purposes, but in the accomplishment of these wondrous, great purposes of God, these verses were necessary: "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out: and I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me". We have been speaking about all things and how the Lord Jesus becomes the centre, but here He becomes the centre as raised up out of the earth, that is crucified. In all our

contemplation of the Lord Jesus I think it is very important that we think much about His death, we think about His sufferings, we think about His death. These things endear Him to us. I think the bands of a man and cords of love develop in our souls too as we contemplate His sufferings. Here He is lifted up out of the earth. What an awful thing the crucifixion was, lifted up out of the earth, the most awful death, public and utterly humiliating. That is the way the Lord Jesus died, lifted up out of the earth. Yet as lifted up He draws all to Him. Have you been drawn to a suffering Christ, have your affections gone out to that Man, that blessed One who died? He died so that there on the cross there might be the most wonderful testimony to the love of God so that it becomes compelling. To the flesh I suppose such a scene would be repulsive. It would not attract your flesh at all but as God works in our souls, that blessed Man crucified becomes attractive because we see the wondrous grace of divine love expressed in Him, and He is lifted up out of the earth to draw us. It is not to be drawn together to something on the earth, but drawn out of this earth. The Lord Jesus said, "I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me". What volumes there are in these scriptures, what a lesson book the death of Christ is, what depth is involved in it! There is the full terrible exposure of the sinfulness of man, of the man who dishonoured God. The judgment was falling on the One who honoured Him, but the man who is being removed in the death of Christ is the man who dishonoured God. It was a public exposure, He was lifted up out of the earth, all could see Him, God showing to the universe what He thinks about sin and also demonstrating His wondrous love. Thus that blessed One would draw to Him those that God's love was set on. Have you been drawn to the blessed suffering One? The Lord Jesus says that is what will happen, "I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me". Have you been drawn to Him? It means that the One you are drawn to is One that is hated in this world, One that was humiliated here, One that was scorned and jeered at and still is, and if you are going to cast in your lot with Him you will be scorned and jeered at too. Are you prepared for that? Are you prepared to take on that reproach? If you love Christ His love will be such for you that it will

draw you into a position where you will gladly do that, you will take your place.

Later in the gospel you find certain persons stood by the cross of Jesus. Are you prepared to stand by the cross of Jesus, to take your stand there, associate yourself in that sense? What proceeded there goes beyond anything that we can have part in, but yet it is possible that we might stand there by the cross of Jesus. Certain women did, and their names are given, John does not say that he was standing by the cross of Jesus, he tells about the others that were, but he recounts that Jesus saw the other disciple standing there. Jesus saw John standing there and committed something to him (see John 19: 26). What an appeal that is! How wonderful divine love is so that against everything that I would desire in the flesh, and everything that would please me in the flesh it would draw me into a suffering position. It is because of the love of Christ, because of what I find in Him. That is what the Christian path involves. You can see the constraint of it, you can see the way that we are brought thus under the influence of Christ, so that we are prepared to take our place with Him in the testimony.

In Matthew 11 there is the thought of the yoke. Here we have the Lord Jesus calling to us to come alongside Him, "Come to me". He is the Man who is rejected and yet in the time of His rejection He is praising the Father, rising above all the outward rejection in praise to the Father, rejoicing in what the Father was doing and bringing out wonderful truths that we have already been speaking about, "No one knows the Son but the Father, nor does any one know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son may be pleased to reveal him". Here is the appeal and it may be to us, (we could use it in the glad tidings, but it applies to saints too), "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened". Brethren know what it is, for if we are no longer labouring and burdened by our sins yet in the testimony of the Lord we know what labour can be and what burden can be. The Lord allows these things, the hostility and all that might come upon the believer, but the Lord Jesus says, "Come to me ... I will give you rest". He can do it. He is calling us alongside of Him. Is that not a

wonderful appeal to come to Him and take our place alongside Him? He is in rejection and He is not overcome by it, He is rejoicing in what the Father is doing. He says, "Come to me ... and I will give you rest" and then He says, "ye shall find rest". There are two allusions to rest. It is a thing greatly to be coveted, to be at rest in your soul, even in the face of tribulation and difficulty. We are often troubled, and sometimes there are things which might rightly trouble us, but the Lord Jesus' thought is to bring us into rest. So He says, "Come to me ... and I will give you rest". There is a rest He gives and there is a rest we find. If you read this section, this would appeal to our minds, that when He first says, "I will give you rest" He is alluding to what He has just said previously, "no one knows the Son but the Father, nor does any one know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son may be pleased to reveal him". Those that are laboured and burdened are coming to the One who can reveal the Father. What great rest of soul to come to the One who is superior to all the tribulations and all that is around, and is the only One who can reveal the Father, who can bring the Father's love into your heart. How blessed that is.

Then, "Take my yoke upon you". Think of the appeal of this, the Lord Jesus saying as it were, Come alongside me, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me" – not learn from me in the sense of being taught by me, that is not the thought, the thought is to learn from Him by seeing Him Himself and how He is conducting Himself in these circumstances so that we might take example from Him. Thus we learn from Him, the meek and lowly Jesus and it says, "ye shall find rest to your souls". The rest we find to our souls is in taking that yoke. He says, and this is one thing which I have been seeking to try to indicate, that these things are intended to be acceptable to us, they are not intended to be so burdensome that we have to recoil from them. He says, "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light". His yoke was the will of God, He was bound there in regard to the will of God and we can be so too. That is the way of rest. The way of trouble is the way of rebellion against the will of God, the way

of rest is to be like the Lord Jesus and to take His yoke upon us, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”.

John says in his epistle in regard to the commandments of God that his commandments are not grievous (see 1 John 5: 3). It is not intended that we should be grudging Christians, going on rebelling consciously in our minds, doing things because we know they are right but inwardly rebelling against them. What the Lord Jesus sets out before us here is a happy acquiescence in the will of God. It is not burdensome, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”. The secret is that God has worked in our souls so that the flesh is not given full rein, it does not govern us, and we can find the will of God good, acceptable and perfect. I think it is a beautiful scripture, a beautiful appeal to come alongside Him and learn from Him by observing Him and to be given rest by Him, to be in the place where divine disclosures are, the most precious things, and to find rest to our souls in being like Him. How much labour and burden there is, but then the thought is that we should find rest.

I know that what I have said has not emphasised the serious and severe side of these exercises and how testing they are as to the world and as to the flesh, but I was seeking to emphasise what divine grace and love would do to make it easier for us to come into things. May we all come into these things, and as these meetings proceed perhaps we could individually be thinking to ourselves, Is Christ becoming more to me? Is He drawing nearer to me? Am I drawing nearer to Him? Am I set to be conformed to Him?

May the Lord bless the word.

SUNBURY

25 March 2005

WHAT IS OF VALUE TO GOD

Alistair Brown

Hosea 6: 6; Philippians 2: 5-11; 1 Peter 2: 1-7 (to ... is the preciousness); Leviticus 27: 1-8

I seek to say something as to what is of value to God. These scriptures might help us to understand more about what is valuable to God. We can all understand what this means, what is valuable. There are things which each of us can think about which are valuable to us. If something is valuable we care about it and we care for it and we look after it. That might help us to understand that there are things that are of value to God, things that He cares about, things that He finds precious to Him. I think that things which are really valuable to us are precious to us. We can say that of the blessed God: those things that are of value to Him are precious to Him.

It is a very attractive matter to think of what is valuable and precious to God. One thing that you can find out about a person is what they are interested in and what is valuable to them, and that tells you something about the person themselves. When we are speaking about God we must always speak reverently, but if we can get a glimpse, if we can see what is of value to God, then we have some greater appreciation, some insight into the heart of God, into the Being that He is, that He has things that are valuable to Him. The scripture tells us about them and the Holy Spirit would help us to understand something of the things that are of value to God. As having some impression of that we have a fresh and deeper view and insight into the heart of God, what He values, what He takes delight in. It is a wonderful occupation, to be interested in what is precious and valuable to God. The brethren have been taken up with things that are precious to God these last two days. The things that we have been speaking about and enjoying together have been things that are of little value in this world, but are of infinite value to God because they concern the Man of His choice. That Man, Jesus, whom we have been speaking about and with whom we have been

occupied. How valuable, precious and blessed it is in the sight of God to see souls on this earth taken up with these matters, taking an interest in the things that are precious and valuable in the sight of God.

The things that are valuable to God are not of value in this world. We see that in 1 Peter: that blessed One who with God is chosen, precious and elect, the One in whom He found His delight, that blessed One was cast away by men as worthless. I do not want to dwell on what the world's valuation is because it is so poverty stricken and so tawdry, but it might be as well to remind ourselves that the world values things according to the pride of the eyes, the pride of life, the lust of the flesh and all these things. They are not to be the valuation of the believer, they most certainly are not the valuation of God. God's desire and the desire of every one in this room who knows the Lord Jesus and has come to know God for themselves is that we might take on the valuation that God has and that we might not be marked by the values of the world. There are things that God has no delight in. It says that He does not take pleasure in the strength of the horse or the legs of a man (see Ps. 147: 10). You can write that across a great deal of the world's valuation, whether it is the strength of a horse, or horsepower, or whatever the legs of a man might mean in the ways of sport and these things. God does not have delight in, nor does He value, these things. Neither should we because we have something infinitely better before us, a whole order and living world of things that are valuable to God. God's desire is that we might come into them and value them, at least in our measure, as He values them.

We began by reading of two things that God delights in, "I delight in loving-kindness ... and the knowledge of God", the knowledge of Himself. How these matters stand in contrast to all that is around! He delights in loving-kindness. In the New Testament this word would be translated grace or mercy. When the Lord quotes it in Matthew's gospel, He says, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice" (9: 13); this scripture is quoted by the Lord Himself. God has delight in loving kindness and He has delight in the

knowledge of God. How wholesome it is for us to think of that, He has delight in loving kindness. That is the expression of His own nature, He has delight in that, He sees what represents Himself because God is a God of grace, a God of loving kindness and He delights in loving kindness. He delights in His own loving kindness and I believe He delights when He sees it represented, and He delights in the knowledge of God. Think of God speaking through this prophet Hosea in the midst of departure and unfaithfulness on the part of His people. What a sorrowful history it is to read of the children of Israel as they departed from God and followed their own wills. They did not keep the law, they may have been going on with the outward form of sacrifice and burnt-offerings but in their hearts they had departed from God. They followed them with their lips but in their hearts they were far from Him and yet God was looking for, what He delighted in, "loving-kindness ... and the knowledge of God". He found it in measure in men that we read of in the Old Testament. He would have found the knowledge of God in Enoch, a man who walked with God and then He was not because God took him, and He would have found the knowledge of God in Moses. You can trace how God found and took delight in loving-kindness and in the knowledge of God. He most certainly found it in Abraham, a man who believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (see Gen 15: 6). Think of God taking account of these features in which He finds delight and He found them in these men outstandingly. He would have found the knowledge of God in Daniel, a man who was faithful. He was given a very senior position in the kingdom of the Babylonians and yet he was faithful, he opened his windows as he did before towards Jerusalem and prayed (see Dan. 6: 10). Think of the faithfulness of one such as Daniel, God found delight in that, He found delight in these features. But what these men of the Old Testament lead up to is one blessed Man who was introduced into this scene, the Lord Jesus Christ, the One we have been speaking of together, the One whose Name is Jesus, "*He shall be great*", Luke 1: 32. In Him God found His delight, He found loving kindness there, He found the deepest and fullest knowledge of God, He found His delight in one Man. Every other man God could not

find His delight in but He found His delight in Jesus. I just want to occupy our hearts and minds with that blessed One.

We read about Him in Philippians. The passage does not use the word value, it does not say in terms that God valued this One of whom the passage speaks but we can fully and safely infer that God valued this One of whom the passage speaks, Christ, above all others. What a blessed perfect Man He was under the eye of God, pleasing God in everything and not only pleasing God but glorifying Him, that is that every thought that God had for man was fulfilled fully and perfectly in every respect in Christ. Every one of God's thoughts was fulfilled in Him, was filled out, was seen perfectly expressed. Think of the pleasure of God in that One! It is tremendous to bathe our souls in that.

What I wanted to draw out of this passage in Philippians is His descending, gracious manhood, the fact that He came from glory, that He, "did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself, taking a bondman's form, taking his place in the likeness of men". It was this kind of Man, this Man descending from glory, in whom God found His delight. This was the One that God took pleasure in, the One that God valued above all else. The hymn speaks of that:

We see Thee, Lord of glory,
Descending from above,
And learn the wondrous story
Of God come down in love.

Thus cradled in a manger (Hymn 188)

How He emptied Himself, made Himself of no reputation;

We see Thee, Jesus, there,
A houseless, homeless Stranger,
Our sorrows all to share.

Is it not a tremendous thing to feed our souls on that? The Man in whom God found His delight was characterised by going down, by emptying Himself and then humbling Himself and becoming obedient

even unto death. A wonderful blessed feature that we see in Christ that made Him so pleasurable to God was His obedience to the will of God. Never any thought of His, never any word, nor any footstep was outside the will of God, everything absolutely, perfectly in accord, in submission, willingly and joyfully, to the will of God. That was Jesus, the One whom God delighted in, the One whom He valued. What intrinsic worth there is in that blessed One! In Jesus we see that same worth through and through. When they came to Him, and asked Him who He was, He was able to say, "Altogether that which I also say to you", John 8: 25. That value, that worth, ran all through, it ran through His blessed being, it ran through what motivated Him, what He thought, what He said and what He did. What preciousness to God! How God took delight in that blessed One. Then it says, "becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross". Think of the obedience of Jesus leading Him to the cross, suffering there, suffering for me and for you. Dear friends, He suffered there because of His obedience to the will of God, because of His committal to that One. What worth God found in Him! It is said, and it is something I find I need to contemplate more, that He was never more pleasurable to God than when He hung there on the cross in all His perfection, the spotless offering. The only One who could offer Himself offered Himself spotless to God by the eternal Spirit. What worth, what infinite value in that blessed One who gave up His life. What value there is in that life given up! You might say the turning point of the entire universe, every righteous claim of God acknowledged and satisfied in the death of the One who so pleased and delighted Him. The value of that blood shed, "precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish ... foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world", 1 Peter 1: 19, 20. Infinite value! None other could give His life, none other could shed such blood as Jesus did, "becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross". What worth, what value God found there.

Then we have this wonderful result of God's valuation: it says, "Wherefore" -that is as God took account of the worthiness and the

value that was there – He “highly exalted him, and granted him a name, that which is above every name”. What a wonderful answer to the humiliation of Christ, to His death of scorn, that God has exalted that blessed One, “highly exalted him, and granted him a name, that which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow”. It was said this afternoon what a wonderful thing it is to bow willingly to Jesus. I trust that every heart and every knee in this room has bowed willingly to Jesus. Every knee shall bow. That is a future matter when – willing or not – knees will be made to bow to the Lord Jesus when He takes up His rights here. His power will be such that every knee shall bow, but how wonderful it is to bow now willingly and gladly to the One whom God has given this place. He has such worth, such incalculable worth in the sight of God that He has given Him that place, and we have the opportunity now to bow gladly and willingly to the Lord Jesus. What a Man He is for our hearts! He is the Man in God’s sight, the Man in God’s presence to whom He has given everything, every glory is accorded to Him. How rightly crowned He is but how right it is that He should be crowned in our hearts, the worthy One. How wonderful and blessed for us to bow the knee to Him and crown Him in our hearts and to acknowledge that that Name is the Name that is above every name. No other name more worthy, no name to be compared, beloved brother or sister, with the Name of Jesus. May His worthiness be magnified in our hearts, then may these blessed features that are seen and spoken of in this scripture as to Christ be seen in us. It says where we began reading, “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”. I think it is a wonderful thing to see that what God has so valued in Christ, what He values so immensely, the value of Christ to God, that mind, that way of thinking that led Him down from glory’s height to take His place in figure as a Man and be so obedient to the will of God, that mind is to be found in us. So that what God values is to be seen in those upon whom He has set His heart. What God desires to see are these features that are fully, blessedly and absolutely expressed and seen in all their substance and worth in Christ, over again in His own, in His people. Is that not wonderful grace? It would also bring us to see the glory of

God's operations that that mind should be in us and should be found among us. These matters that we have been speaking of together are to have a practical effect with us as we have some impression of the worthiness, the value of Christ in the sight of God. We are to have this mind, "let this mind be in you", and as that mind is in us we will see increasingly the blessed value of Christ in the sight of God. It is a wonderful thing to have an impression of how infinitely precious, delightful and valuable, that One is in the sight of God. That I think would be one of the effects of this mind being in us.

There would also be the matter of conformity to Him, which we get in 1 Peter. I was attracted to this scripture because we have here the blessed reference to the Lord Jesus as being "with God chosen, precious", and then later, "a corner stone, elect, precious". So God had His valuation of this One and in God's sight He was chosen and elect and precious. Much could be said about these matters, I can only speak simply, but the idea of preciousness carries with it the thought of worthiness. God took account of Christ here in all His preciousness and worthiness and God valued every step of that way, finding His delight in every footstep. What intense delight there was to God in that. Chosen, faithful and tried, we sometimes sing of that (see Hymn 33), the One who in every respect fully justified God's choice of Him. Nothing in the testing that came in (and it was the most severe testing) was Christ not able for. His perfection shone out, the more rigorous and deeper the tests were. The greater the temptations, the tribulations, through which He went the more perfectly His worthiness shone out. What beauty in the sight of God, "with God chosen, precious ... elect". It speaks of Him as a "living stone" and also as a "corner stone". That is that God has in mind, that this One should be the foundation and pattern of all that is for Him, for His glory, praise and dwelling. It says, "with God chosen, precious, yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ". We are to prove something of desiring the pure mental milk of the word; it is open to all of us, it is for all of us and it can be taken in by all of us. We taste that the Lord

is good. Reference has been made during these meetings to taste. We take Christ in and we prove for ourselves that He is sweet to our taste. How blessed it is to take Christ in, to give Him the opportunity to prove that He is sweet and good to our taste. I think for young people, and for all of us, the Lord Jesus would love to prove to you how sweet He is. May He be good to your taste and then your desire will be to grow up to know more of Christ and to come to Him, the living stone, the One who imparts life and yet the One who is absolutely reliable and dependable. Do you rely and depend upon Christ? God does, God has established Him as His corner stone, the corner stone upon which all that God is building is being built. He is chosen and precious to God and we are to come to Him as living stones to be built up a spiritual house. The picture here is of those who have taken on the features of Christ, "yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ". How is God going to value what He builds on this corner stone? How is God going to value something He is building on Christ? It says later on, "this is become head of the corner", that is God is building something, the dimensions of which are derived from Christ and the scale and the true measure of which is derived from Christ. How is He going to value something that is founded on and given scale and measure according to Christ? How highly God values what is being built on that foundation! Are you one of those that have come to Him as a living stone and "are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ"? How valuable that is, how valuable the living stones are in the sight of God. May we be exercised to come to Jesus as living stones and then to take our place in this building that is going on. Building has been going on these last two days, building in our hearts of appreciation of Christ and love for Him and committal to Him and God is looking upon that and He values that. How He values anything that is patterned after Christ. You might say, however small it might be, if there is appreciation in your heart of that blessed One, God values it. How He loves to see living stones built together.

Then there is functioning as “a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God”. If the Lord leaves us here until tomorrow morning we will know something of that, indeed we have known something of it as being together, but I think we prove it particularly as we come together to remember the Lord and be engaged together in the service of praise as built upon the foundation of that living stone. As living stones, whether we are giving vocal expression to the appreciation of Christ and appreciation of the Father that is in our hearts, or whether we are worshipping silently, we can function in this way. How valuable, how pleasing, how delightful to the eye of God! He sees what is patterned according to Christ, what takes its dimensions from Him, what takes its moral character from the Head of the corner. Then the point is that there is to be a spiritual house. That means conditions where God can find His pleasure, where God can dwell, conditions where there is priestly function going on, believers thinking for God, thinking of His holiness, not thinking of themselves but thinking of that One and then offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful thing to be taken up in a service that is acceptable to God. I cannot think of anything more blessed. You might say, ‘what is in it for me?’ Friend there is everything in it for you, because as you are found here acceptable and pleasing to God He is able to fill your heart with joy and satisfaction, the way that this world certainly cannot. Friend, the Holy Spirit is here to fill your heart with joy and satisfaction and with thoughts of Christ. Prove Him and see. Speak to the Spirit and ask Him to magnify the Lord Jesus in your heart, to show you fresh glories of that One that you might appreciate Him more. The Spirit loves to help you to be a living stone, coming to the One who is *the* living stone. May we prove these things and may we know what it is to be built up as “a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God”.

I wanted to speak briefly about this scripture in Leviticus 27. You might think that it rather undervalues those who are very young and those who are old and those who are female. What is in mind

here is that there is a full valuation. God has a valuation and it is a full valuation. One thing to say is that there is no difference in God's valuation of the saints between males and females. We learn that in the New Testament. There is full growth in mind for everyone, because we are told in Ephesians that there is work going on in the assembly "until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ; in order that we may be no longer babes" (4: 13,14). I simply wanted to speak from this scripture as to the valuation of full-growth, it is fifty shekels, "When any one devoteth anything by a vow, the persons shall be for Jehovah". I understand that these were referred to as votive offerings, where people vowed themselves, they devoted themselves and then they gave the money to redeem themselves, they gave the money in place of themselves. The valuation of full-growth was, "fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary". I would just encourage myself and everyone here that we might go in for full-growth. We ought not to be content to remain on our way to full-growth, or reaching some plateau, but we ought to go on until we arrive at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ. God values every one, let us make no mistake as to that. Dear young person, God values you and He values you more accurately than you can yourself. You might say, I am not worth anything in God's system, I have very little understanding, I know I love the Lord Jesus but I cannot say much more than that, many of the things that the brethren speak about in the meetings I do not understand. You might say that, but friend, if you love the Lord Jesus then God values *you*. God values you and what I would encourage all of us to do is to identify what is of God in ourselves and to value it and to take care of it. We said that what we value we take care of, we look after. Look after what is of value to God in yourself, dear young friend, and all of us, and then be concerned and be exercised that it might grow in value and that we might grow in our love for Christ and in our appreciation of Him. Let us be exercised that there may be full-growth. I think full-growth is valued according to the shekel of the sanctuary, all these valuations were according to the shekel of

sanctuary, that is valuation by God's standard. The children of Israel were not to change the shekel. That was a very important instruction to them and one of the sad features of their falling away was that they made the shekel great, that is that they made it more difficult for people to pay the shekel. But God's standard is the shekel of the sanctuary, that is what is before Him and I think it would speak to our hearts of the value that He finds in Christ, and God values every expression of Christ that He finds in His own and He values that in you. You may feel that you are worth only three shekels. You may feel very small, I know I do, I feel very small in my appreciation, but God values that. Then His desire is that you should not remain with a small valuation but that your value might increase. As we apply ourselves in committal, love and exercise we will find that our appreciation of Christ increases and we will know something of growing up to Him in all things, something of approaching to that measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ. What a blessing that is! One impression I have is that an indication of increasing growth in us is that we appreciate something of the value and the worth of Christ to God. How valuable He is to us, but how valuable He is to God. There is a hymn which I always find very affecting and touching, a hymn to the Father:

In thy grace Thou now hast brought us
Sharers of Thy joy to be,
And to know the blessed secret
Of His preciousness to Thee. (Hymn 277)

I think there is something about appreciating the blessed secret of Christ's preciousness to God that belongs to full-growth. As we grow up to Christ and increase in our love for Him and our appreciation of Him we will have a greater understanding of His preciousness to God. I think these days together have helped us in that. What encouragement and support there is in this matter of growth and of valuation. Christ's value is infinite, but what is our valuation of Him? What is our appreciation of Him? Is it growing? Friend, as a result of our times together, may our valuation of Christ grow. God would love to see that happen, He would love to see our valuation become

more and more aligned with His. His valuation is perfect and His valuation of Christ is infinite. May the Lord bless His word.

SUNBURY

26 March 2005

[It is expected that the readings and preaching on this occasion will be published separately]

SERVING GOD'S PEOPLE

Andrew Burr

Exodus 3: 20-22; Numbers 11: 10-17

I have a simple thought to say a word of encouragement to those who seek to serve the Lord's people, and to encourage any who may not have yet taken such a service on to commit themselves to it. I do not have any particular kind of service in mind and in particular I do not make any particular emphasis on service in ministry; it is not really my thought to speak about service in ministry particularly although maybe what comes before us would apply to that kind of service. I am thinking more about service in the way it may be needed to sustain the body as it is expressed among the people of God.

There is a scripture which says, "by love serve one another", Gal 5: 13. I recognise in saying this that many have already taken it up. Many in their spirits and activity are committed to the service of the Lord's people in many varied ways. The need at the present time is for all of us to be encouraged to remain committed to that service. I also recognise that the thought of the Lord's people is a very broad one, and indeed it must be so. To imagine that the extent of the Lord's people is the same as the small number with whom we are able to have full fellowship together would, I think, do the Lord a great disservice.

Nevertheless I trust I would be understood if I limit what I have in mind to those with whom we do have fellowship without wishing to discourage anybody from any other kind of service. However, the Lord has set us together – we have to recognise that – and as being set together I believe that He would call upon us to build up one another and through doing that build up what we share and enjoy together.

The brethren will forgive me if I range a little bit away from this scripture and what I have in mind to just explain why I read these two scriptures. They come at a very significant moment, at one of the

main turning points in God's dealings with the world. One of the most signal moments there has ever been in the history of God's dealings with the world takes place in the time in the year to which these two scriptures refer. God had not, up to this point, really dealt with the world in a political sense, He did not recognise the national structure that was forming in the world's affairs but He went on with a man of faith and his family. He was not on the same line as the world. The world was developing politically and God was not, at that time, following or leading that trend. In the beginning of Exodus God calls a people to be His people. That altered the whole structure of the emerging world system because from that moment on there was one nation that was different from all the others, and it was God's intention that that nation should be a fulcrum around which the world's affairs should turn. If that never happened it was because that nation failed and fell away and a lot of things might be said as to what has followed on that. The coming of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit have been another major turning point following which God has not pursued that way of dealing with the world, taking up one nation and organising the affairs of the world at large around His relationship with that nation. As Paul says to Athens, "God therefore ... now enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent", Acts 17: 30. While the structure of national government remains and God uses it to contain the spread of evil and mismanagement of the world, God has actually moved on to dealing with mankind in a universal way.

But this time at which we have read was undoubtedly a very important moment in the history of the world. It may not be so recognised in the history books of the world but it is in this one from which we have read, the Bible. The crux of it is that from this moment on God had a people who were the object of His special care and interest. What we see in Moses, who is very distinctive as a servant, is that God put a lot of time into preparing Moses. Was it to this people? I suppose you could say that, but it was actually to serve them. I am not suggesting that any one here is going to be called to do the kind of work Moses did, but we see in Moses some

pointers which we could use as to the way in which we might be prepared to serve God's people.

These two passages represent the people of God from two opposing points of view and the order in which they are put is interesting. It is of interest that, in the initial instructions Moses was given about the deliverance of God's people in Egypt, God should go out of His way to make this reference to the appropriation of the gold and silver vessels in Egypt. Why should He bring that in at the beginning? It would have been enough to mention it just before they were leaving, because they had nothing to do about it until nearer the time. I would like to make a suggestion and I think I am safe in suggesting that the gold and silver vessels represented God's view of the people: they were in Egyptian service like these vessels. But God has always maintained that the silver and gold are "mine". They do not belong to Egypt in the way in which Egypt is presented here, they do not belong to the world. These vessels to which God had a claim were in fact in service to Egypt, in service to the world. We do not know what use they were put to, no doubt many of the uses were unhallowed and unclean. But, they were gold and silver vessels and they represent something to which God has a claim. They also represent something finished. They were not told to go round and get lumps of gold and silver from people, but to get vessels, utensils, things which were ready to use, or which could be made ready for God to use. If we apply that to the children of Israel, we would say it represented what they were potentially. It represented something that was finished and refined and ready for its part and place in divine service. It is interesting that God should tell Moses that right at the beginning.

I recalled this scripture when we were reading Hebrews 11 on Lord's Day, where it says, "Moses ... esteeming the reproach of the Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt". That is not these treasures, that was the things in the court. Then it says, "for he had respect to the recompense" (vv 24,26). I think we might say that in the reference God makes here to the vessels, the gold and silver, He is drawing Moses' attention to the recompense. As we had in the

reading the person who builds with gold and silver and precious stones will have their reward. It is not as if God pays people for what they do, but nevertheless there is a wonderful sense of fulfilment and satisfaction when in any way one has the opportunity to realise for God the potential of what is His, especially the potential there may be in the people of God. I think that is what Moses would have included in the recompense. He had the privilege of contributing to the bringing of God's people into a place and into an understanding of God's own service. The rest of Moses' life was dedicated to that end, bringing to light among the people what could be suited and used in God's service.

The passage in Numbers reveals what Moses felt, or came to feel, about the actual state of the people. It is a very emotional plea that Moses makes to God. He refers to the "burden" and he refers to himself, "have I brought them forth ... as the nursing-father beareth the suckling". Moses is energised and inspired by what God had shown him as to his own end and purpose for the people of God, and the preciousness, value and permanence of it; and then he has to confront over and over again the actual condition of things among the people. What a burden it was for Moses, what a moment of realisation, or discovery when, as he seeks to bring the people into conformity to God's great thoughts for them, the actual state of things among them comes to light.

So we have to be on the one hand clear and inspired by what God is going to bring to pass among His people. We really do need to have an impression of that. We get it by a sight of the pattern. The Spirit would give it to us, to see God's people arrayed in the glory of the fulfilment of His own purpose, and standing to form the sanctuary in which the presence of God would be eternally. What a precious thing that is! You get a glimpse of it when you come to the Supper. You look round on however few or many: you look at the saints who have had the faith and the love to come to the Supper, and you might think of the boards standing up. They are there to honour Christ even in the day of His reproach. They have come out of the wilderness and there is something substantial there,

something which, under the hand of Christ, can be carried right into the presence of God and used for His pleasure and for His service. What a wonderful thing it is to look at the brethren like that.

But, on the other hand there is bound to be exercise about the practical state of things among the brethren. I am not going to say anything against the state of the brethren. Different local meetings are represented here and everyone knows their local brethren and no doubt they have abundant cause to be thankful for their local brethren. But there is plenty to pray about in every locality. I am not going to suggest now that the general state of things among the brethren is poor. I will come to the reason why in a minute as we look at Moses; but we cannot help but notice that a proportion, a number, of our brethren are passing through some very deep exercise. It is not the kind of exercise which reflects upon the state of those concerned at all but nevertheless there must be a voice to us all in the things through which our brethren are passing. You only have to know what is going on and listen out with a concerned and understanding and loving ear to know that there are sorrows of a variety among the brethren that I believe the Lord would use to speak to us. From one point of view there is nothing unusual about these sorrows, they are not so unique that you will not find them anywhere else, but they affect people we love and for that reason I think the Lord would allow them to speak to us. As I say, none of the things that I have in mind at any rate, reflect upon the people concerned. They do not suggest that there is something wrong with the people who are passing through these exercises, but they do have a voice to us.

I want to be very simple about this, and brethren will forgive me if I sound a bit direct, but we are always concerned when one another of our brethren is seriously ill. When cases of serious illness become protracted, and when they seem to strike in a untimely way and people who have an active and vital part in things are disabled by illness, and when the parents of young children, or children growing up, people who need their mothers and fathers, are affected by serious illness, such as some of our brethren are now; these

things are very deep because they affect not only the person concerned, but they affect the relationships in which they are. They do so in a special way. For example, children and teenage people are not accustomed to the idea that mother and father might not be there for support: in a sense it is one of the things upon which they rely, and in nature they are bound to. We have all been in our teens, and we know about starting to stretch our wings and about thinking it is about time we made a few decisions for ourselves and seek a bit of independence, but you only have to imagine alongside those thoughts what you would do if mother and father were not there to recognise that in fact you depend upon them, however independent you may feel and however ungrateful in some of your sadder moments you might be. Illness has struck a number of our brethren in a way that touches just that particular relationship. Therefore the impact of it is magnified. There are also several very sad cases where families have been disrupted by unfaithfulness and where one or another is harmed by behaviour on the part of those with whom they might have expected to have a confiding and moral relationship. I am not as old as some brethren and I have talked to some who are old, and the oldest brethren here, and there are sorrows of that kind among us which are new even in their experience.

I do not say these things because they reflect upon the brethren, I am not suggesting that they represent some element of rottenness and lack of moral fibre among the brethren, on the contrary. The fact that these things arise among us speaks to us. There is a need among us to be concerned in a lively and affectionate way about the burdens that one and another are carrying. It does not mean to say that we meddle or interfere, and beyond a certain point there is nothing we can do; but we ought to feel these things. That made me think (and I nearly read about this but I felt a bit led away from that), about the passage in Corinthians where Paul says, "many among you are weak and infirm, and a good many are fallen asleep", 1 Cor 11: 30. That seems to me to be a very precious way of putting things. Paul refers to it because he wanted to awaken the spirit of concern among the brethren in

Corinth. There were things that they ought to put right, and that has its place in that scripture, but he refers to those who are “weak and infirm” and then he says, “and a good many are fallen asleep”. Is that not a precious thing? I infer from that expression that no suggestion is made of fault on the part of those who sleep. It is rather a voice to those who remain. There is not even a suggestion of pain or suffering. That seems to me to be a wonderful comfort to some of our brethren in these circumstances. There is plenty of cause to be troubled when you are in circumstances like that, but Paul says, “many are fallen asleep”. He uses that expression elsewhere, he refers to, “those who have fallen asleep through Jesus”, 1 Thess 4: 14. Is that not affecting? I just draw attention to this and I trust I am understood just to show that when these things arise it is not necessarily for any judicial reason or because there is a matter of judgment or an issue, but on the contrary when these things arise, there is ground for all of to be concerned about one another.

I also refer in that connection to Lazarus, he fell ill and died. The Lord tells His own that he had died. First of all He says to His disciples, “Lazarus, our friend, is fallen asleep”, John 11: 11. Think of the time in which Lazarus lived, under reproach, with grounds to be afraid to acknowledge the link he had with the Lord. No doubt he was a faithful man, but he lived in times when those who acknowledged the Lord in the place where he lived did so in fear of their lives. It says, “is fallen asleep” – you might say what a merciful thing that was for Lazarus to be taken out of all that pressure and reproach; but then the Lord says, “but I go that I may awake him out of sleep”. We might think it a mercy that he is released from all these exercises and questions. The Lord says ‘no’, “I go that I may awake him out of sleep”, in other words he has got to come back to this scene of testimony. He has to take it up again, but he will take it up again in a new way because the Lord has woken him up. You see the power and the vigour of his testimony and the impact of his testimony, when he emerges in resurrection power through the Lord’s work and for the glory of God. These things have a voice to

us and that voice is intended to wake us up. I think waking us up is to give us some sense of the value, and the value to God, of one another; and having been given that sense, also to be given a desire in love, whenever opportunity presents itself, whether even only in prayer, to serve one another.

It was to this that Moses was called. What comes out of the section that follows where we have read is that, in spite of all the education that Moses had already had – eighty years had already passed in which Moses had no doubt learned a great deal – he has more humbling lessons to learn about himself before he is ready to serve. I might think, if I am going to serve the brethren, one of the things I would like to do is to point out some things which I think they ought to do differently. God has to say to Moses that, if that is what you are thinking about, it is you who has to do things differently. He takes Moses through some very painful lessons in which Moses has to learn his fear of the power of the Satan and his fear and loathing of any manifestation of the flesh. Think of that! The first reference is to the serpent that he flees from, and then he is given the power to subdue. Then there is perhaps a more sober and humbling lesson, with his hand, the very thing, the very member with which he was going to serve. A hand might link with one's ability to serve, and God says, put your hand where your heart is and find out what your heart is really like. It comes out, "leprous, as snow" (Exod. 4: 6), totally disqualifying him from the path of service on to which he was about to embark. How necessary it is to take up the service of one another in self-judgment. It is so easy to gather quite a long list of things to pray about, this person and that person, 'there are various things one does not like and things that are going on that I think ought to be different, and there is this and that matter in such and such a place which I think could be settled if only people would listen to me', and so on: and God would say, you put your hand in your bosom. If you are going to serve do it in a spirit of humility – you must! Do it in the power of love but in the spirit of humility. I think the way in which the things that arise among the brethren of which I have spoken which touch our affections are intended to form the

spirit in which we serve not only those who are affected, but all those who are within the compass of our service.

So Moses has to recognise that things that he thought he might need to be good at he is not good at, and that is something I certainly feel. I might talk to somebody who is seeking their way, and feel what can I say? I open my mouth to say something and afterwards think should I have said that, did I say too much? Moses says, "I am slow of speech" (Exod 4: 10): some of us are too quick, we say too much and in all our words maybe we do not say what we should have said. I feel my inadequacy and yet how precious it is that in spite of all these things Moses never lost the sense that God was committed to going with him. That is an impression I would like to leave that, as we take up the path of service and the burden of service, we can be assured in everything that we seek to do for the Lord that He will be with us in it. I had an opportunity to go and talk to somebody once and the situation got much more difficult before I had the opportunity to go: and I thought, what shall I say? I thought I could go over everything with the Lord and all the questions I might have to answer when I got there, but what came to me was that all I needed to say in prayer was, 'Lord will you come with us'. It was all that I needed and He was glad to come.

I just leave this final word from Numbers because we see here Moses comes out with all this sense of inadequacy. He sees what is needed to be done and it is very fine to see the way he expresses the need. He does not say to God, these people need a field marshal, he does not say to the Lord, these people need a chief superintendent of police, or an archbishop, or a prime minister, he says they need someone who as a, "nursing-father beareth the suckling". How wonderful it is to see the way that in his communion with God Moses is able to put his finger on what these people need. Someone is needed who is totally committed to the welfare and successful outcome of them, one whose very name is bound up with these people, as if they were his own children; whose own future and continuity depends upon this mission of service succeeding, and who speaks of the people as if he was all heart. But Moses says, "I

am not able to bear all this people alone, for it is too heavy for me". In a sense none of us has the power either. It is very affecting that God does not say, well I will find seventy other people and give them something more. He says he will take of what Moses already has and put it on the seventy. The lesson Moses had to learn was that on account of the Spirit of God he did not need to depend on his own capacity, great or small as he felt it might be; he did not have to depend on how exactly he felt about the people or how his patience might bear with them. All he had to do was to count upon the Spirit of God. God says, "I will take of the Spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them". So the power that was available to carry the people through was not increased. Moses had no less of it than he had before. Had he had eyes to see, as he no doubt did after this, he had all that God thought was needed to accomplish the service which He had given Moses to do. God will never give anyone a service to do without giving them the measure of divine support in the Holy Spirit that is needed to see that service through. If anyone feels in the light of what I have said that they would like to serve God's people, talk to God about it and be sure that He will equip you with the capacity you need, from the Holy Spirit, to see that service through.

The power was not increased but it was manifested in others. I believe that may be the need at the moment. One of the exercises I carry is that the brethren with whom we walk have been greatly blessed by brothers and sisters who were faithful in a time of division among the brethren and who have carried exercise as to the teaching and welfare of God's people for a generation; but others need to carry that forward in the same spirit and the same power. Beloved, both can be found from God and let us be assured of this that He is committed to seeing His interests through. We might leave the difficulties to God, and count on Him for the grace we need with one another to help us through with difficulties. The love we need to serve one another is down to us.

God has brought the most precious things to us in the gospel. Corinthians is a wonderful book, a wonderful treasure of things that

God has brought us into, but His desire is that those things might come into expression, in His people. He would have all of us desire in our spirits to serve them to that end.

May it be so, for His glory.

GRIMSBY

8 October 2005