

A
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GOD'S PURPOSE

Ephesians 1: 13-23; 3: 13-21

A.McS. In the beginning of this epistle, Paul shows us that God has taken us up for sonship and to enjoy every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. After a person is converted, usually in God's ways they are left here for a little while. It is remarkable to see that everything that comes between our conversion and going to be with Christ is in the ways of God, but the purpose of God is that we might be before His face as His sons for all eternity. Where we read in Ephesians we get some insight as to how we begin to understand God's purpose. It is blessed to know your sins forgiven but it is wonderful to get an insight as to what you are before the Father and what you are as united to Christ. There is only one way that we can understand these things and that is through the Holy Spirit. That is why in both these sections we have read there is a clear reference to that divine Person. In Ephesians 1, it is the Holy Spirit of promise.

He is the One who is able to help us understand God's purpose because promise is the expression of purpose. As making room for the Spirit, we are enlightened in the eyes of our heart as to this great matter of God's calling. That relates to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory. It is God and Man in Ephesians 1 and the Father and Son in Ephesians 3. I read from verse 13 in Ephesians 3 to show the way that God brings us into these things.

Most of us would have to admit that we are characteristically earth dwellers. However, God would have us set in relation to His world where Christ is the Centre and where we can be before the Father in unhindered liberty. That is why He has taken us up but in the meantime, we need the help of the Holy Spirit in order that we might enter vitally into these things.

So in Ephesians chapter 1, it is a question of whether we have believed "the word of the truth, the glad tidings of your salvation", because it is from that basis that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. What do you think?

G.R. It is a very attractive matter. It opens up a great vista of glory. We are much occupied with things down here, but as you say that is to do with God's ways and our education. It is wonderful that God has great thoughts before Him and He is not going to be defeated, despite the difficult material. I was thinking of the woman in John 4.

The Lord could speak to such a one as to the Father seeking worshippers and in verse 14 to "the water which I shall give". How essential the Spirit is that we should answer to God's thoughts in purpose for us.

A.McS. I am glad that woman is on the page of scripture. It shows how the Lord looked on a wretch and saw a potential worshipper.

He saw something in that woman in the way of new birth, no doubt, and that through receiving Him as her Saviour she could receive the Holy Spirit and become a worshipper. Is that the way we regard men whom we come across? We may see a man lying in the gutter. How do we view him? He may well be a wretch, but he may well be a potential worshipper. Do you think?

G.R. Yes, God has not written us off, so we should not write anybody else off.

A.McS. Just so. I am impressed with the cost to God in order that we might receive the Holy Spirit. The "word of the truth" really involves the expression of all that God is. To put that simply, it involves that God has shown to the whole universe what is right and what is wrong. Where man was removed, God was expressed and now there is a Man in the glory of God. That is the word of the truth. It is a question of whether we have received that. The men in Acts 19 were believers in some sense. They had faith in Christ, but they needed to accept the word of the truth, the gospel of their salvation.

G.J.R. The reaction on their part was that they were baptised to the name of the Lord Jesus. They would have known about the axe laid at the root of the tree and the principle of one man increasing and another man decreasing. That was a good foundation but what a lack there was!

A.McS. Many of us know the Lord Jesus for some time before we are conscious of having received the Holy Spirit. We ought to know that we have the Holy Spirit. One way that you know is the power you have to overcome evil. When you do not have the Holy Spirit, you might have right desires, but you do not have any power to fulfil that desire. However, when you receive the Holy Spirit there is power in the soul to overcome evil. There is more than that, but that is one thing. The way the Holy Spirit is presented here is connected with the seal. When God puts His hand on a person, it is for ever.

You might have your ups and downs but the seal is there. We should lay hold of the unchangeableness of God's purpose.

Ecclesiastes 3 says, "I know that whatever God doeth, it shall be for ever; there is nothing to be added to it, nor anything to be taken from it" (v 14). That is the surety that God will see His purpose through.

G.R. So we, living in this dispensation, have a very great advantage over the saints of the Old Testament.

A.McS. Yes. We need to remember, when we view the saints in the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit came upon them in the way of power at times, but the Holy Spirit was not indwelling them. It required man to be judged and ended in the cross of Christ before the Holy Spirit could be given. That is the teaching of Exodus 17, is it not? The rock had to be smitten before the water could flow. Say some more, please.

G.R. I was just thinking of David. We enjoy reading the Psalms, especially David's history, but he could say, "take not the spirit of thy holiness from me", Psalm 51: 11. We do not have to think that way at all.

Would you say some more about the necessity for the Lord to be taken up to heaven before the Spirit could come? The movement of one divine Person seems to be dependent upon the movement of another.

A.McS. That involves the economy that we have come into. If we look through the Old Testament, we will find many references to the Spirit but in the present dispensation, He is sent from the standpoint

of the Son being in the presence of the Father. It required the Lord Jesus to go into death, come out of death, and ascend to God's right hand and from that standpoint to send forth the gift of the Holy Spirit. Is that how you understand it?

G.R. Yes. I wonder whether I value the gift of the Spirit enough. The Lord said, "It is profitable for you that I go away" (John 16: 7), because the Spirit would then come. What a wonderful thing for the Lord to say! The disciples might have said 'Well, it is profitable for us if you stay here'.

A.McS. Even as having the Spirit, it is possible not to value such a wonderful gift. However, God can bring things into our lives that cause us to turn to the Spirit and seek His power. It might be to overcome temptation or in order that our understanding might be enlightened as to what God's calling is

P.D. I was impressed with this remarkable reference to the sealing with the Holy Spirit of promise. I am very interested in what you said last night about the Holy Spirit being the guarantee of our having heavenly bodies in a day to come. I think Paul refers to that again in Ephesians 4, "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which ye have been sealed for the day of redemption" (v 30). That would be the day when we would have the body of glory, would you say?

A.McS. I think so. In Ephesians 1, we have a reference to the forgiveness of offences – a very, simple but precious matter that we should never forget. However, in Ephesians 1, redemption has in view the whole universe (v 14). All that Christ created, He will take up as Redeemer. That is clearly set out in Revelation 5. He is the One who has the title deeds to the whole world. In Ephesians 4, redemption relates to the time when the body itself will be claimed by God. Redemption extends to the body. Do you think that?

P.D. Yes. That is connected with Romans 8.

A.McS. Just so. I have been thinking a lot about Romans 8, because there is a clear link in that chapter to the way that we are formed practically for what is set out in Ephesians. What do you think?

B.E. I would be grateful if you could just briefly help us to understand what you said at the beginning as to God's ways and God's purpose.

A.McS. The height of God's purpose is set out for us in these verses in Ephesians, particularly at the very beginning of the chapter. We have been chosen "in him before the world's foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love; having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will", Ephesians 1: 4,5. That gives us God's *purpose*. We get an indication of God's *ways* in 2 Corinthians (see 2 Cor 4: 7-10). There we read, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassingness of the power may be of God, and not from us: every way afflicted, but not straitened; seeing no apparent issue, but our way not entirely shut up; persecuted, but not abandoned; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body" and so on. That is the way God takes us so that we may substantially enter into His purpose by being set free from this world. We are all sons. There is no question about that, but God is working to form Christ in His sons, so that they have a state equal to that relationship. What do you think?

B.E. I am glad of your help. The purpose of God may almost overwhelm us at times. It is outside of time, while we could not limit or contain God, the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, but in the main the ways of God are in time.

A.McS. "From eternity to eternity thou art God", Psalm 90: 2. In order that God's purpose may be brought to pass there had to be the 'dip into time'. That involves the created sphere into which Christ entered as Man in order that we might come to know God and that there might be a substantial answer to God's purpose, in persons who are *real*. If God never touches your life, there is a lack of reality with you. It is a person like Paul, who has been through the depths, who is recognisable as a real Christian. Do you think?

B.E. Yes, that is formation and it is a beautiful thing when seen substantially. I feel that I need help in my mind when I think of God's purpose because you are close to thinking of God's sovereignty. It has been said, (and I know for myself) that there is hardly a thing that we quarrel with more than God's sovereignty. On the one hand, if we are not guided by the Spirit, we could become careless or think if everything has been predestined, there is nothing for me to do. Do you think we need preservation from that? Or it may lead to anxiety, so we certainly need the Spirit in contemplating these things, do we not?

A.McS. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are two parallel lines that coalesce in eternity. They never meet down here, but they will coalesce in eternity. We cannot understand fully God's ways down here, but we will understand them in relation to ourselves at the judgment seat of Christ when we have bodies of glory.

B.E. I trust this is not departing from your line too much. A child enquired yesterday, if God is infinitely fair, why have I been brought up in a Christian household and some of my friends have not? How would you answer that?

A.McS. I think that definitely comes down to God's sovereignty but that does not set aside man's responsibility. For instance, the grown children of Christians who do not believe in Christ will be subject to judgment as any other person. Proximity and privilege are no guarantee of having an eternal portion with Christ. In regard to our subject, it is important to see that there is preparation at the present time in order that there might be a substantial answer to God's purpose. One of the reasons we go through experience down here is to equip us to rule with Christ in the world to come. That is what is involved in the end of Ephesians 1. The saints will be associated with Christ as His bride as He reigns over the whole universe. Can we take that in? We do not need to look for a place down here. We have an eternal portion and we need the Spirit to get some understanding in our souls of what God has done and is doing according to His purpose in Christ.

M.J.C. I would be glad if you could open up the latter part of Ephesians 1 verse 14. Redemption comes in again but I have not found it too clear and would be glad if you could say something as to it.

A.McS. I think “the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance” is the pledge that we will share with Christ in all that He redeems as Man. As God He created it but as Man He redeems it and the guarantee that we will share with Him in that is the gift of the Holy Spirit. I think “the redemption of the acquired possession to the praise of his glory” involves the universe. Christ is the One who has the title deeds to the universe. As we have said, He is the only One that is able to open the book of Revelation 4 and what He created as God in that chapter, He redeems as Man in the next chapter. Do you think?

M.J.C. Yes, that certainly bears thinking about. I would also like to clarify what you said yesterday as to the distinction between the “earnest of the inheritance” and “the earnest of the Spirit” (2 Cor 5: 55), which you said was to do with our glorified bodies.

A.McS. That is how I understand it. Ephesians gives us the finality of God’s purpose. The world that we are seeking to contemplate is more real than this present world. This world lives in appearances and sometimes you find out through bitter experience that the world is not all that it appears to be. It is all built on false appearances but the world that we are contemplating in Ephesians is eternal in character and actually is what it says it is.

G.J.R. Following on from what has been said, I was interested in the verse in Romans 8, “But if the Spirit of him that has raised up Jesus from among the dead dwell in you, he that has raised up Christ from among the dead shall quicken your mortal bodies also on account of his Spirit which dwells in you”, (v 11).

A.McS. That verse does not exactly relate to those who are asleep in Jesus. It refers to those who will be alive at the rapture. It is remarkable that our bodies will be changed. What a wonderful prospect that is! Do we lose sight of that in going about our daily

business attending to matters that are legitimate in their place? If the Spirit is free within us and we sow to the Spirit, we will reap eternal life and that includes the enjoyment of what we are speaking about in Ephesians 1.

G.R. I was going to ask if you could say something simple, as to how we sow to the Spirit.

A.McS. It is put in contrast to sowing to the flesh. The way that you sow to the flesh is by giving in to the flesh. The flesh suggests something in the way of a temptation and you give in to it. It may be a wrong thought that you allow. When you give in to that, you effectively cultivate that thought and that leads ultimately to corruption. However, the Spirit would also prompt you in a certain direction. He would prompt you to get down on your knees and pray. As you heed that prompting, you cultivate your prayer life. Or it may be to read the Scriptures or go the meetings. The Spirit would also cause you to think of what your eternal portion is. It is wonderful at that moment to allow the Spirit to take control and set you in relation to the world of God's purpose. In other words, when we sow to the Spirit and cultivate our links with the Spirit, we ultimately reap eternal life. Is that the way you understood it?

G.R. That is very helpful.

A.McS. Do I pray like Paul in this chapter? If we have had any experience as to what we are speaking about, our great desire should be to get down on our knees and pray that our brethren might also enter into it. It is not exactly that we want brethren to understand what the scripture says about it. That will help so far, but it is a question of "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him" (v 17). Our intelligence and affections require to be enlightened in order to understand fully all that God has in mind in these verses. It is a question whether that enters into our private prayers and the prayer meeting. At the very least, it would save us from having wrong thoughts about God. The full knowledge of Him involves all that God is as to His attributes and nature.

P.D. I was wondering about 1 Corinthians 2, which speaks about the Spirit searching all things and God revealing to us by His Spirit (v 10).

A.McS. 1 Corinthians 2 is a good reference to bring in. The depths of God relate to the revelation of God. It is a wonderful thing to remember that the hearts of the saints have been formed in relation to that. So in a meeting like this, as the Spirit is free, He brings out an impression from your heart and from someone else's heart. What comes to light are the depths of God in the measure that the saints have been formed in the love of God and the counsel of God. Does that commend itself to you?

P.D. Yes. We drink of the same Spirit and we taste the same things as together.

A.McS. Yes.

B.E. I used to think that having a taste of the reality of the world to come would preserve me from going back to the beggarly principles of this world but that has not exactly been my own personal experience. I read a remark that was simple, but it helped me, that we are not exactly given a supply of power but we get power as looking away to Christ. Is that what is going to keep us in the spirit and light of the world to come?

A.McS. We need to see that the appreciation of Ephesians does not mean that we can leave Romans behind. In fact, others have said that you do not fully understand Romans until you have some experience of Ephesians. We have to keep the two things going together and our exercise today is that the spiritual side might really be our portion. We always have to carry forward the moral side as well. That is stressed even in the last three chapters of this epistle where some very plain language is used. In Ephesians 5, we read, "be not drunk with wine" (v 18). These exhortations show that it does not matter how far on we are, if we do not use the Spirit to judge ourselves, we can fall just the same. Do you think?

B.E. I do think that very much.

A.McS. The calling here involves that we are going to be associated with Christ. It is good to get some sense in our souls of the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. The saints are precious to God's heart. He will have before Him what His heart was set on before the ages of time. Many things have come in but His purpose is certain and assured. We do not want to lose heart in any way.

We want to get some sense in our souls of the myriads that are going to be before God for all eternity. God has wonderful power as well. He showed it supremely in raising Christ from among the dead. That power is towards us.

G.J.R. I would just like to understand better the force of His calling in this epistle. In 1 Corinthians 1, we are called into the fellowship of God's Son (see v 9), Jesus Christ our Lord, and that is in connection with the faithfulness of God. Here we are to know "what is the hope of His calling". We recognise that His calling is irrevocable, a most powerful thing, but what is the hope of it? Can you just give us a touch as to the distinctive character of God's calling in this epistle, please?

A.McS. In 1 Corinthians, the calling involves our association with Christ in the scene of testimony where He was rejected. The world cast Him out and as being called into that fellowship we have a judgment of the world and are prepared to suffer with Him. Again, that is Romans 8. It is not just suffering for Him, but suffering with Him. The hope of His calling I think is that we are going to share with Christ in His reign over the whole universe. There is the mystery of His will in Ephesians 1 verse 9. That relates to all things being headed up in the Christ (v 10). That is Christ Himself, but at the end of the chapter, we find that the dear saints are going to share with Him in that. How unselfish Christ is! It belongs to Him alone in one sense, but His grace is such that He will have the saints to share with Him in His reign over the whole universe! That is the hope of God's calling in this chapter. We are strangers and sojourners down here but there is a time coming when we will reign over the universe, as associated with the Lord Jesus Christ.

G.R. Is that seen in Joseph in his exaltation in Egypt? I was thinking of the way in which he worked patiently with his brethren to have them with him.

A.McS. God has been patient with us all and we surely should show the same amount of patience towards the brethren (remembering also, of course, how patient they are towards us!). The Lord Jesus is working with each one of us in order that finally and substantially we may be able to share with Him in His rights over the universe.

G.R. I was thinking before we go on, that God's purpose is outside of time but His ways involve the creature time. He has made that and wisdom marks the way in which he uses every moment of time.

I thought the conception of time as being God's creature and the greatness of the One who operates in this scene bows our hearts in worship, does it not?

A.McS. It does. As you know, in Scripture, with Israel, time is generally a matter of months, but the assembly calendar is weekly.

However, with the individual Christian it is a question of every day. Every day is a day of fresh experience with God. Every morning, you need to ask God for the grace that will see you through the day.

At the present time, we can have the experience of being united to the One who is the Head of the body "which is the assembly", Col 1: 24. In that way, we prove the blessedness of what flows from the Head as we draw from Him and respond to God.

What we have here as to "head over all things to the assembly", is the Lord's headship in the way of administration. It is for the blessing of man. The Christian is a person who goes through this world, serves God, and has the blessing of man before him. That qualifies him practically to have part alongside with Christ in administrating in the world to come.

In Ephesians 3, it is not just the power that is towards us but it is the power that works in us. The power that works in us helps us to share with the Father in His appreciation of His Son. It is the Spirit of the Father here. In Galatians 4, we get the reference to "the Spirit of his Son" (v 6). That involves the Son's appreciation of the Father,

but the Spirit of the Father involves the Father's appreciation of the Son. It is wonderful to share with the Father in His appreciation of Christ but we cannot enter into that naturally and that is why tribulations come in.

G.R. Perhaps you would open that up a bit.

A.McS. One of the first things that was said about Paul in Acts 9 was "I will shew to him how much he must suffer for my name" (v 16). Paul's distinctive light was Christ and the assembly and that involves a heavenly vessel. God will take up Israel in a day to come as an earthly nation, and they will have certain things that belong to this world that are right and proper for an earthly nation. The political and military thought will be seen with Israel in connection with this earth. However, the assembly is a heavenly family. It has no part in what is political or military at the present time. Yet we know these elements are in our hearts. It is necessary therefore for God to wean us away from this world. He does that through tribulations in order that we might be set in relation to what is heavenly. Do you think?

G.R. Yes, I think that is very attractive. It would be a wonderful privilege to be like the sand on the seashore, but how much greater to be like the stars of heaven!

A.McS. Yes, it is wonderful to think of Israel as God's chosen earthly people, but what a privilege it is to be in the assembly and to know the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has named every family.

God has been working throughout time to secure families for His pleasure. At the end of the millennium, what is national will be put to one side and families will go into eternity in the enjoyment of the Father's love. If Christ dwells in our hearts and we are rooted and founded in love then we can be helped to apprehend fully the whole extent of what has been secured for God's pleasure. Such is the greatness of God's purpose that even the inanimate creation will yield glory to Him. It is figurative language but Isaiah says "the trees of the field shall clap their hands", Isa 55: 12.

G.J.R. We had a touch in the reading here last week as to "the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost", Luke 19:

10. Not simply he or she that was lost, but “*that* which was lost”.

A.McS. Christ has the rights to the whole universe. The psalmist says, “The earth is Jehovah’s, and the fulness thereof”, Ps 24: 1.

They belong to Him and He will take them up and will lift the curse.

Even the flowers are not half as nice as they will be in the world to come. Then “to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge” is a paradox – we have to know it and yet it surpasses knowledge. You can grasp a little of it in your soul, but there is so much of it; you could not take it all in but the little that you have is *your* impression of the love of the Christ. “That ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God,” indicates that everything that can be known of God as revealed will be formed in the assembly. Finally, Paul says, “but to him that is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think”. There should be no doubt as to His power.

That relates to more than our conversion or His help in our circumstances. It involves the substantial enjoyment of the purpose of God.

P.D. We have not to be satisfied to have the power of God working to extricate us from evil, which is Roman truth, but we need to go on to the power that works in us to make us understand God’s purpose, which is Ephesian truth.

A.McS. Exactly. That is the whole bearing of what was in mind for the reading today, to get some vital sense of the purpose of God.

The Christian’s future is glory, nothing less than that.

P.D. It is really experienced through the Holy Spirit. Is it not objective in Ephesians 1 and subjective in Ephesians 3?

A.McS. Just so, and it is discipline that makes what is objective become subjective. The end of God’s purpose and His ways are found in the assembly. For all eternity, it will be a substantially formed vessel in which there is glory to God.

MALVERN

10 July 2005

Key to Initials

P.D. P.Deriaz, Vevey B.E. Ben Eastwood, Worcester; A.McS.
A.McSeveney, Twickenham; G.R. G.Richards, Malvern; G.J.R.
G.J.Richards, Malvern;

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

Isaiah 53: 1-6

I want to speak tonight about the Lord Jesus as the Sin-bearer. Only He was great enough to take up the question of sin and sins, and settle it entirely for God's pleasure. He is the only One who did no sin and knew no sin and in whom sin is not. He is the only One that was able to be a sacrifice and substitute for sin.

How sad it would be if you go out of time into eternity living without Christ and dying without Christ. Dear friend, if you die without Christ, you will be raised by Christ and stand before Him and have to answer for all you have done. Alas, having died without Christ, having been raised by Christ and being judged by Christ, you will be condemned by Christ to suffer for all eternity. Yet, you do not need to go out of time and into eternity without Christ. Every provision has been made from God's side. If men die without Christ, it will not be because God did not love them. God has made full provision for every person here. He has made full provision for every person in the whole world. It does not matter how far they have gone. It does not matter what they have done. Their sins may have piled up until they have become obnoxious to God. God has the means to forgive every sin and to retain the sinner. He can free the sinner from the penalty of his sins.

Are *you* under the power of sin? If you are, there is a way out of your bondage. Those who know the Saviour God can look back to a time in their history when they heard God's report and the arm of Jehovah was revealed. They can recall when God's power came into their lives, when God "laid help upon a mighty one", Psalm 89: 19. They can rejoice that they were freed by the power of God from all they were involved in and known for. God still has that power tonight. Persons say, 'I can't get free'. Dear friend, there *is* power in God tonight that can free you completely from the bondage of sin.

We desire to testify to you as to the greatness of Christ. He is a wonderful Saviour. How good it would be if you came to know him.

He loves you. You may say, 'Well, I don't want Him', but I can assure you that He wants you. If you do not know God, it is not because He will not have you; it is because you will not have Him. Yet, He is patient and is still appealing to you. He is waiting on you. He is waiting for a move from your side. He has moved from His side in the work of Christ. He is waiting for a move from your side.

Dear friend, the question is whether you have "believed our report" (v 1). There are only two kinds of people in this room tonight. It is not rich and poor or those who come from Worcester and those who come from Malvern. The only two kinds of people in this room tonight are those who are saved and those who are lost. Not who *will be* lost but those who *are* lost. Those who are lost are away from God in the darkness of sin. Dear friend, you do not need to remain in the darkness. The glory of God is shining in the face of Jesus Christ. There is One who had the power and the ability to bear the judgment of God. There is One who was buried and raised and who now stands in the glory of God. The Lord Jesus is "the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world", 1 John 2: 2. That just simply means that because God is satisfied with the work of Christ, He can come out in blessing to every single person in this world.

One loves, especially before the preaching, to read that tract, 'The Power of the Redeeming Blood'. Could God save a Nazi war criminal? Did God have the power to forgive a person like that? Praise God, He did. He had the means and the basis in the work of Christ to forgive a Nazi war criminal. He can work with men in their last hours and cause them to judge their heinous crimes and cause them to see a Man that has borne the judgment of God for sin. Thank God, there is no man that has gone too far. The Lord Jesus can search until He finds and brings back the sheep that is lost.

The great thing for you, dear friend, is to believe the report. What does the report refer to? It refers to a Man who grew up before God "as a tender sapling" (v 2). The Lord Jesus was a different kind of man. Every one of us from the minute we are born is out to please ourselves. That is what we are all like. It is not that

some people are like that and others are not. Every one of us is like that. We all have a fallen nature and are sinful creatures. We are out to please ourselves. The Lord Jesus was entirely different from that. He grew up as “a tender sapling”, before God. His whole life was lived for the pleasure of God and the blessing of men. If persons were too difficult for the Jews to help, they were not too hard for Christ. If the Priest and the Levite could not help the man lying half-dead (see Luke 10: 31,32), Christ could help him. He could help you too, dear friend. He felt for men no matter what they had done. He did not condone their sins and He is not condoning yours either. He hates your sin but still longs to bless you.

We have been reminded recently of what pity really means. The Lord Jesus was perfect and holy. It was impossible for Him to sin but when He saw men who were suffering because of their sins, He had pity on them. He never condoned sins, but such was His love that He had pity on sinners. He saw what sin had done to man. He saw how sin was destroying man. He saw the effects of sin and He sought to free men from the power of sin. It is a wonderful thing if the truth sets you free but it is even greater if the Son sets you free (see John 8: 32-6). That involves wondrous liberty. The things that used to bind you, bind you no longer and you rejoice in the great things of God. Only Christ can do that for you.

The Lord Jesus was a humble, meek and lowly man. He took a very low place. He could say, “man acquired me as bondman from my youth”, Zec 13: 5. He took a lowly place in order that He might serve men. That is in keeping with the way He came into this world. While all the kings sat in palaces in their pomp and their glory, He was cradled in a manger. Think of Him, the Man who had the rights to the whole world, being cradled in a manger. Alas, “He came to his own, and his own received him not”, John 1: 11. The persons who had the greatest privilege rejected Him. That takes us back to what we said in the reading that persons brought up in a Christian household have the greatest privilege but also the greatest responsibility. The Lord gave the Jews the first opportunity and what did they do? Did they receive Him? Dear friend, they rejected Him

and crucified Him. There is no more painful death that a man can suffer than crucifixion. Man had no room for Christ and we are no different to the Jews. If we were there, still in our sins, we would also be calling out “crucify him”, Luke 23: 21.

The Lord Jesus stands alone in all His perfection and beauty. Perhaps you think the world is an attractive place. However, if you go in for the world, eventually you will find out what the world truly is. By that time, your life may be destroyed. Perhaps your body will be ravaged with the effects of sin, and you will find out, we trust not too late, exactly what the world really is. There is something far more attractive than the world and that is Christ. What a precious, blessed Man. “He is altogether lovely”, Song of Songs 5: 16. There is no one or nothing great enough to be compared to Him. He is the only one who can fill your heart.

Dear friend, because of what you are, there is a void in your life. Do you realise that? There is something missing in your life.

You can try what you like, you can go where you like, you can do what you like, but you will find that the only thing that can fill that void is Jesus Christ. Do you feel dissatisfied? Do you feel that you cannot find the joy you are looking for? Why are you surprised?

There is none but Christ can satisfy you. If you are drinking at broken cisterns (Jer. 2: 13) be assured that they will never satisfy your heart. There is only one thing that will satisfy your heart and that is Christ. Come to the Lord Jesus tonight. Get things settled tonight. Forget about putting it off until next week or even until tomorrow. Settle things *tonight*. This is the time for putting things right. Do you have things to put right? Why not tonight? The hymn writer says ‘thou wouldst be saved, why not tonight?’

Dear friend, there was One who was “despised and left alone” (v 3). Do you feel lonely? Loneliness is a real thing. You can even feel lonely in a crowd. There was One lonelier than you and that was Christ. When He was here, there was no one who understood Him. Not even His disciples fully understood Him. He understands if persons are lonely and He longs to give them His company. We spoke last night about the Lord looking for your company. If you feel

lonely tonight, He would love to draw near. It has been well said that God does not say in the gospel, come to Me because you are a sinner. God says, I come to *you* because you are a sinner. The Lord Jesus loves to draw alongside. In His life here, He was prepared to do that at the height of the noonday sun. He sat down at Jacob's well and poured the secrets of the love of God into the heart of a sinner. Dear friend, He would sit down beside you at your chair and speak to you about the love of God. It is not being fanciful to say this. The Lord Jesus is a real man with a real heart and He comes to the preaching Himself. It says in Ephesians, "He has preached the glad tidings of peace to you," Eph 2: 17. You may say that you can take or leave the preacher's word but what about Christ's word? He Himself is speaking in the gospel. He would come alongside you and heal your broken heart. There is no one like Christ. Perhaps you are looking to some other man. Perhaps someone else has the place in your heart that only Christ should have. Let me ask you, who can be compared with Christ? There is no one who can fill the place that only Christ can fill in your life. Would you not have Him? If dear friend, the preciousness of His life is not enough to attract you, think about all that He suffered for you.

I just want to finish with a word as to the sufferings of Christ. As a man, He carried the sorrows that other men had. He felt for men and drew alongside to comfort them but His sufferings surpass anything that man has had to go through. The Lord Jesus was "wounded" (v 4). That is what He suffered *vicariously*. That just means it was on behalf of others. He was entirely pleasurable to God, yet He suffered at the hands of God. Further down the chapter, it says, "Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him" (v 10). Do not ask me to explain that. No one can fully understand the depth of that scripture. Yet sinners can understand that Christ took their place. He is the Sin-bearer and as you are a sinner, you must come to know Him in this way. What sins have you committed today? Have you told any lies? Have you been disobedient? Have you had any bad thoughts that you know you ought not to think? You say, well these things do not matter, but they *do* matter. One sin is enough to

condemn you to punishment for all eternity. Dear friend, there was One who never had a bad thought. There was One who was always obedient. There was One who always spoke the truth. The Lord Jesus said that He was “a man who has spoken the truth”, John 8: 40. Yet, He bore the judgment for liars that confess their sins. He bore the judgment for disobedient persons who repent from their sins. He took the sinner’s place. Being wounded, bruised, chastised and enduring stripes does not refer to His sufferings at the hand of men, terrible as they were. They refer rather to God judging sin in the Person of His Son. Every repentant sinner can say that He “who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree”, 1 Peter 2: 24.

Are you going to go on with your sins another day, dear friend? They only cause you sorrow and pain. You know they only cause you grief. *You* know that. God does not want you to be in grief and pain because of your sins. He has done all He can for you in judging sin in the person of His Son. If you trust Christ, you can be free from the burden of your sins. God will send you on your way rejoicing. What a change will take place in your life when you come to know Christ! He has done everything that is possible from His side to save you. The work has been done. What about your sins? You need to be forgiven. You need to be converted. You need to repent. You need to make up your mind tonight that you have finished with your sins and that you will never go back to them. You need to make a decision. It is either Christ or the world – you cannot have both. You need to make a clean break. It is time to make a decision tonight. Do not leave it until tomorrow. You may never see tomorrow. You need to come to know God and Christ *now*.

If you come to the Lord Jesus, you will have an eternal salvation and God will give you the Holy Spirit. It is a wonderful gift. What a tremendous thing it is to experience the love of God being shed abroad in your heart. Perhaps you think that being a Christian is a doleful thing. Perhaps you think that if you become a Christian there is no more joy for you. Dear friend, you do not know the half of the blessings that God has in mind for you. God gives so many things in the gospel. He gives peace, joy and sonship. He gives the

Holy Spirit to help enjoy these blessings. If you are not a Christian, you do not know what you are missing. It is the best life that any man could have. There is nothing to be compared with it. It is wonderful to be a Christian. No matter what you go through in the way of sorrows and difficulties of life, at the end of it all, you can say 'it is good to know the Saviour'. Come to Christ tonight. Make Him your Saviour and Lord tonight. Trust Him. He is the Sin-bearer. May the Lord bless the word.

MALVERN

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