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THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Romans 3: 21-31; Hebrews 9: 21-26; Ephesians 1: 3-7

R.M.B. I thought we might consider afresh together the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. We know that the blood is for sinners. Sinners need to be washed in it. But it has been said, and I think it is right, that in the first place the blood is for God. I wondered whether these scriptures would help us to understand that.

In Romans 3 we learn that the blood is for, “the shewing forth of his righteousness”. We might enquire as to what that means. From Hebrews 9 we may get an impression as to the scope of what is covered by His blood. That chapter shows us that the blood was not only necessary to wash guilty sinners, but it was also necessary to clean away from before the sight of God the stain of sin in the whole universe. It is a little more difficult to understand, but I hope it will become clearer as we proceed. Then in Ephesians 1 we see that the blood was necessary if God’s wonderful purpose was to be put into effect. It is very blessed to think of it in that light, that the accomplishment of the whole purpose of God depended on the precious blood of the Lord Jesus.

E.C.B. I have often been impressed with the fact that the Lord’s blood was shed on the cross, He already having died. It must, therefore, have some special meaning. It is not only that His life was laid down, He was already dead. The soldiers saw that He was already dead. But then His blood was shed, as if to make some special presentation of it to us, do you think?

R.M.B. I think so, and that is what comes out in Romans 3. The blood of Jesus is a witness to something, it is for the “shewing forth” of God’s righteousness. We might consider what that means, and why it was necessary that God’s righteousness should be shown forth, do you think?

E.C.B. Yes I do. There seems some special bearing drawn into Christianity from the place the blood had in the earthly system of things, and the scripture in Hebrews brings it out. That would be

understood from Hebrews, would it? Then it is as if the value of the blood having been manifested in that system, if people understood it, the reality of what it meant must be conveyed to us.

R.M.B. We might see when we come to Hebrews 9 that in that chapter the writer is drawing on the great day of atonement, which is in Leviticus 16. But I thought it might be helpful, firstly, to think of this epistle to the Romans. It has been said that in the four gospels we get the Man who is the subject of the glad tidings; in the Acts of the Apostles we have the preaching of the glad tidings; and in Romans we have the teaching of the glad tidings. So it is a very important epistle, especially for preachers. Romans 4 shows us how it is that God can view the *sinner* as righteous. But I thought it was important for us to understand that the first thing the apostle Paul refers to when he sets out the teaching of the glad tidings is how *God* is righteous. We need to have some impression of how it is that God can be righteous and still forgive sinners.

E.C.B. That is because His blood is presented in the way that it is. And the shedding of His blood had a public bearing. Would that bear on what you are saying?

R.M.B. I think so. So that the blood becomes a testimony to anyone who is prepared to consider it; the blood becomes a testimony to the fact that God has not overlooked any of our sins, He has not in any sense compromised His own righteousness. If anyone would raise a question with God as to His right to forgive sinners, He has only to point to the precious blood.

E.C.B. So, in rather oversimplified language, if someone questioned the righteousness of God, God could almost say to him, Did you not see the blood?

R.M.B. I think that.

D.J.H. So the sins were borne in His body on the tree, that is before He died; but this is something additional; this is that a life has been given up, "the life. . . is in the blood", Lev 17: 11. Could you say something as to its bearing here?

R.M.B. We can understand that it was necessary for a life to be given up because we had forfeited our own lives by sinning. If God was to be righteous in forgiving persons who had forfeited their own lives, it could only be because another life had been taken instead of ours.

D.J.H. That helps. So the blood is the evidence that a life has been laid down, and in that respect, as we have in the scripture here, it is for, "the shewing forth of his righteousness".

R.M.B. Yes.

D.A.B. The idea of the blood as a witness comes into John's epistle, with other things that agree with the witness of the blood. We might say it would be rather presumptuous to question the righteousness of God, you might say it was inherent in His very being that He is righteous; but that makes it very wonderful that it should be by a means of something that cost so much, and was so precious, that He has chosen to give us a witness that we can see to His righteousness.

R.M.B. I suppose in Old Testament times no one would have questioned God's righteousness. It was only when He began to freely forgive sinners in this way that it appeared to call His righteousness into question. We might ask: if God really hates sin, if it is intolerable to Him, how is it that He is free to forgive guilty sinners? Or, to put it another way, how is it that God's righteousness can be satisfied in order that His mercy might flow freely towards the sinner?

D.A.B. Indeed, *why* should He do it? As you are bringing out, sin is offensive to God.

R.M.B. While this is an important truth for us all to be established in, I believe it is especially so for those who have any part in the preaching of the gospel. To understand this helps to give a certain depth or substance to the presentation of the gospel. The first thing we need to establish in our souls is that God is satisfied. We speak of the need for the sinner to have peace, but if we can

establish that *God is satisfied* then I shall get all the peace that I need.

E.C.B. Would you say that the shedding of the blood of Christ on the cross brings out into public notice what was not available to public vision in the old dispensation? And that is essential for the realisation of the blessings that we have in Christianity.

R.M.B. So when it says “righteousness of God is revealed” in the glad tidings (Rom 1: 17), one of the things I think that means is that it was never understood before. If, for example, you take a man like David, there was no one who enjoyed the forgiveness of their sins more than he, but I do not think David would have understood *how* God could forgive his sins. I do not think David would have understood how it was God could forgive sinners and still vindicate Himself. It needed, as you say, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and especially the shedding of His precious blood.

D.J.H. That comes in here: “passing by the sins that had taken place before”; that would be David’s sins and others.

R.M.B. Yes; on what basis could God forgive sinners in Old Testament times? How could He do it righteously? It was because God was looking forward.

J.M. The actual shedding of His blood was after He had died, but it was the proof publicly that He had died, and that needed to be established.

A.A.C. Could you say something as to the blood being shed as the result of an action of man, or in reply to an action of man?

R.M.B. I suppose that was simply the means by which it took place, the important thing was that His blood should be shed. The fact that it was done through an act of cruelty only served to expose man’s heart, which throws into relief the wonder of divine grace that the answer should be in the shedding of His blood. What were you thinking about it?

A.A.C. It was still poured out. It was something which, in a sense, was a reaction or result of something that man had done. But it was

still poured out.

R.M.B. There was what was miraculous about that.

E.C.B. The actual occasion of the shedding of His blood really brought out the contempt of man, and thus magnifies the grace of God which has based eternal blessing on the shedding of the blood, and in particular, atonement, would you say?

R.M.B. That is right. So verse 22 says: "Righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ towards all, and upon all those who believe: for there is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." We understand what it means to "have sinned", but what do we make of the fact that we have "come short of the glory of God"?

D.A.B. It has rather laid hold on me that the glory of God is a kind of objective in this epistle, positively and negatively. I was struck that in chapter 1 Paul says that the first thing that God takes issue with is impiety, that is, that they "glorified Him not as God"; and then all "come short of the glory of God". But then in chapter 4 it says that Abraham "found strength in faith, giving glory to God" (v 20). I wondered if the blood of Jesus comes in in that connection. It is not simply that some account was settled, but God was glorified.

R.M.B. We can all understand that we have sinned against God; and that simply means that we have exercised our own will in opposition to God's. But then in addition to that we have been a dishonour to God. Coming short of the glory of God can be illustrated in quite a simple way: Think of a father who has a son.

The son goes out and commits some terrible crime; he steals something or murders someone. It is the son who is guilty; there is no question about that. But the effect of that son's sin is to bring dishonour on his father. It would bring shame on the family name, as men speak. We need to understand, in the same way, that the effect of our sins has been to bring dishonour on God.

D.A.B. In that example the dishonour continues. The son might go to prison for a year or so, then he might think that he has received the rewards of his misdeed. But the family will forever be

remembered as the family that had that son in it. So this is a continuing thing that needs atoning.

R.M.B. When God created us He did so because He had something in mind for us. He had in mind that we should fill out a certain place for His pleasure. It says, for example, that man is “God’s image and glory”, 1 Cor 11: 7. The point of this verse is not only that we have sinned, but we have failed to answer to the place in which God had set us. Do we feel sufficiently that our sins have brought dishonour to God? In that sense we dragged His glory into the dust. The more we understand that, the more it makes it all the more a wonder that His righteousness should so shine forth.

D.A.B. And His righteousness, not just the righteousness that can never be taken away from Him, but the righteousness with which He has met that matter.

H.A.H. Man was made in the image and likeness of God, and therefore as maintained in that status He would glorify God, and be some representation of God. Having sinned and fallen from that, God has been dishonoured.

R.M.B. It raises the question: How is it that God can show mercy to such people, who have not only sinned against Him, but have dishonoured Him? I think it helps to throw into relief what has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus, who not only glorified God on the cross, but in the shedding of His blood has given God a righteous basis to show mercy even to the guiltiest.

H.A.H. Think of how He could say, “I have glorified thee on the earth” (John 17: 4). It was in contrast to every other man.

R.M.B. He glorified God on the earth, as you say, in His walk here; but then supremely in His death. Jesus says, with reference to the cross, “God is glorified in him”, John 13: 31.

A.A.C. You have brought before us the severity of this, but the expression used in scripture “come short of” is not as severe as we might expect it to be. Could you say something about that?

R.M.B. Well, to “come short” in scripture is fatal. If you think of the law, to fail in one point is to come under its curse. So although coming short might not sound too serious to us, as far as God is concerned it is fatal.

A.A.C. That helps. We still put things in grades.

I.A.M. Does it not show how full the work of the Lord Jesus is? It says, “upon all who believe”. That is what God is looking for. It shows that God can be so completely satisfied with the work the Lord Jesus did, that there is nothing else for us to do but to believe in it. That sounds simple, and it is simple, but I think it helps us to lay hold of it, does it not?

R.M.B. Yes; and it gives us great assurance to know, simply, that God’s righteousness has been fully satisfied. It would not have given us any assurance at all if God had had to compromise in some way. But it is the fact that God’s righteousness is satisfied that gives us peace, as we take account of what is set forth in the blood.

I.A.M. In the Passover God said, “when I see the blood” (Exod 12: 13); and that gives us an impression of how He looked and saw that blood being shed, and of the value He put upon it. We often say in the preaching that we cannot put a value on it. But God can, and He had a full appreciation of it.

R.M.B. That word, “when I see the blood”, bears on it because it is brought forward in Leviticus. You will remember that on the great day of atonement the high priest went in and sprinkled the blood on the mercy-seat (see Lev 16: 14), and God looked down on the mercy-seat. When God looked down and saw the blood there He knew that all His rights had been upheld, and because of that, and only because of that, He was then able to move out in blessing towards others. The fact that God saw the blood was the reason why He could then extend mercy to anyone who desired to approach.

D.A.B. One element in which the Passover goes further than the offerings is that although it was celebrated every year, the blood was once and for all in the Passover; God giving that suggestion of what

is mentioned in Hebrews as to the once and for all shedding of His blood.

R.M.B. But then the day of atonement sets out how God could go on for a year because there was going to be this shedding of blood at the end. That really covers the first part of Romans 3 “the shewing forth of his righteousness, in respect of the passing by the sins that had taken place before, through the forbearance of God” (v 25). We see that illustrated in the way God forbore with the sins of the children of Israel through the year, knowing that at the end of it there was going to be this shedding of blood.

E.C.B. The concept of whether man comes short of the glory of God or not does not come out until the basis for man entering into that glory has been laid. It is kept secret from the beginning.

D.J.H. Speaking of the day of atonement, I have often noticed the way it speaks of the blood there, that first of all it says, “sprinkle with his finger upon the front of the mercy-seat eastward”, and then, “before the mercy-seat shall he sprinkle of the blood seven times with his finger”, Lev 16: 14. I was just thinking of that as confirming what you say, it is there “upon the front of the mercy-seat eastward”, and then “before the mercy-seat shall he sprinkle seven times”, all seems to indicate that kind of reaching out.

R.M.B. “On” the mercy-seat emphasises that God’s rights have been satisfied; but then “before” it shows that there is ground to draw near. What it says in Romans 3 is important in that connection, “that he should be just, and justify him that is of the faith of Jesus” (v 26).

The first thing is that God should be just. Once we are established in that, we can then understand how it is that He is able to justify anyone else.

The thought in Hebrews may be a little more difficult to understand, but I thought we could get some impression as to the scope of what is covered by the precious blood of Jesus. In the first place it is good for sinners. But then the whole universe has been stained with sin, and for God’s sake it was necessary that it should be cleansed from

that stain; and that too is by the blood of Jesus. How great He must be that His blood was sufficient for all that.

J.M. Sin, as it came in, had to be removed from before God, and that was effected in the shedding of the blood of Christ, for God's pleasure and God's glory. That is apart altogether from its effect upon sinners. It is what was really for God, and He was satisfied with it.

R.M.B. Hebrews 9 speaks of the heavenly things being "purified" (v 23). Sin has come into the creation, and in that sense it has tarnished everything. It is not that the creation, including the heavens, is guilty like we who are sinners, but it has all been stained by sin, it has become unclean (see Job 15: 15); and it was necessary for God to be perfectly at rest that that stain should be completely cleared away, do you think?

J.M. Yes, I am sure. That gives a certain importance to the shedding of the blood of Christ because it was necessary to clear the sin from God's side, apart altogether from any effect upon us.

R.M.B. The young people might be able to understand it from the illustration that we have here. Hebrews 9 speaks of the entire tabernacle needing to be sprinkled with blood (v 21). The tabernacle was the figurative representation of the things in the heavens. The camp represented the world. Then there were three parts to the tabernacle: there was the court, the holy place and the holy of holies. Enlightened Jews would understand that those three parts would represent the three heavens. It was necessary that all should be covered by the blood.

H.A.H. That is most helpful.

D.A.B. We are shown in Hebrews 1 that the heavens and earth will be rolled up like a garment. We sometimes dispose of old clothes because they cannot be cleaned. But a righteous God cannot roll up the heavens and the earth because there is some irremediable problem about them. The blood of Jesus allows Him to move on from the present order of things to what was in His purpose.

R.M.B. Another scripture we could have read, which says the same thing in a different way, is in Colossians 1, “For in him all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell, and by him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of his cross – by him, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens” (vv 19,20). The point there is the reconciliation of “all things”. Paul goes on to speak of *our* reconciliation in verse 21. But the first thing is the reconciliation of all things. And even if we find it difficult to grasp I would like us to get an impression of how great the Lord Jesus must be, that His blood was not only sufficient to redeem millions of precious souls, but it was also sufficient to cleanse the whole universe from the stain of sin. How great He is!

D.H.B. I was thinking of the hymn:

The perfect righteousness of God
Is witnessed in the Saviour’s blood (Hymn 357)

It is a *perfect* righteousness.

R.M.B. It was necessary that it should be established without question. Old Testament saints such as Abraham and David would never have fully understood how it was that God could forgive them as He did. Furthermore, we can think of the angels. I believe the incoming of sin caused a certain unsettlement even among the angels. It is not that they would ever have doubted what God was able to do, but they would not have understood *how* God was able to do it until the coming of Jesus and the shedding of His precious blood. So that even for their sake it was necessary that the righteousness of God should be established without question, and witnessed to.

A.A.C. We have the thought of God at rest. What you are bringing before us here in Hebrews is essential to that. God could not be at rest if all His creation ‘is marred by man’s ungrateful hand’, as the hymn writer says (Hymn 150). But because of the extent of the blood of Jesus, God can be at rest. Is that an attractive thought to us that our God is a God who is at rest?

R.M.B. And because He is we can be.

E.C.B. Is it not true that this bearing on the universe of the shedding of the blood of Christ is something that is not brought out until the basis for it has been laid? There is no such conception in the Old Testament.

R.M.B. In a certain sense it was prefigured on the day of atonement. It was on that day that the tent of meeting and the altar were cleansed by being sprinkled with the blood. But your point is that none would have understood what God was setting forth in that?

E.C.B. Yes; are you going to come again in another year and cleanse the universe?

R.M.B. The principal point here is that that could never have been established until one blessed Man had gone into heaven itself to appear before the face of God, having gone in in the virtue of His own blood.

D.A.B. The language of the Old Testament illustrates the limitations of that system, because the scapegoat went into a land apart from men, but it was still a land. And the scripture speaks about sins being cast into the depths of the sea, but they are still part of the earth. It may suit us that our sins are out of sight and out of mind, but it does not suit God to go only that far.

R.M.B. That is what I had in mind. We say that the blood is for God in the first place, then for us. I thought these scriptures would expand our view of what we mean by that.

J.M. Every year God would have looked forward to this. God can do that. We are looking at it after the event. But God was looking at it from the other side, and seeing what was actually going to be wrought out in Christ for His own pleasure.

R.M.B. That was the value of the offerings. It was not that they had any intrinsic value, any inherent ability to wash away sins, but their value was that they spoke to God of the precious sacrifice of Jesus.

D.J.H. That is confirmed by the end of verse 26, "now once in the consummation of the ages he has been manifested for the putting away of sin". That is, there it was in certain types maybe, in the day

of atonement and so on, but now “in the consummation of the ages”, that is all the ages that had gone before in which sin had come in and sin had operated, now once in the consummation of those ages everything has been settled.

R.M.B. It is very glorious to apprehend that.

F.S.P. I was pleased you made clear about sufficient for the whole world, not sufficient for the *sins* of the whole world. I like your thought about cleansing the world. But I was also thinking of Hebrews 9 verse 12, if you take some words out it says, “by his own blood, has . . . found an eternal redemption”. I thought about that word “found”; it is not discovered it, but set it up.

R.M.B. That expression, “an eternal redemption”, is in contrast to the temporal nature of the offerings that we have been referring to in the Old Testament. They had to be repeated over and over again. You can understand that this would appeal to a Jewish mind, “an *eternal* redemption”.

E.C.B. Does not what you are saying, and the bearing of these scriptures, expand our view of the “new covenant in my blood”, Luke 22: 20?

R.M.B. I think it does. I have come across the thought in the ministry that the cup at the Lord’s Supper, in its fullest extent, includes the thought of the reconciliation of the whole universe to God.

E.C.B. Is the new covenant different from that? That is it.

R.M.B. That is what I meant.

Now the scripture in Ephesians tells us what God purposed; what God had in His mind to accomplish. But the work of redemption, and, as it says in verse 7, “his blood”, was necessary if all those things which God purposed before the foundation of the world should in fact be brought to pass.

R.M.F. I have just been noticing this word “redemption”. It was in the first scripture that you read, and it came into the one referred to in Hebrews 9 verse 12. From God’s side the blood was the

necessary cost that needed to be paid for the redemption to take place. But the other side of redemption, as we are often told, is that God then has a right to take possession of that which He has redeemed. Is it important to remember that too?

R.M.B. There are well-known three-day meetings with Mr Taylor senior called, 'Eternity to Eternity' (JT vol 33: 198). The impression that Mr Taylor had, which forms the foundation of those meetings, is that in Ephesians 1 you have what is "from eternity", because you get what God purposed before the world; but when you come to the end of chapter 3 you have what is "to eternity", because it speaks of there being "glory to God in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages" (v 21). God purposed things before the foundation of the world, and we know that He had in mind that those things would be put into effect. But between those two things, the past eternity and the future, something awful happened, sin came in, man fell, and the subjects of God purpose were lost to Him through sin. Was God going to be thwarted in the accomplishment of His purpose? Was He going to be cheated of that which He had set His heart upon? I think this scripture shows us what a tremendous thing the work of redemption was, and that the precious blood of Jesus is the only means by which God's purpose could be accomplished.

D.A.B. Redemption is not to put things back, but to allow God to go on to the fulfilment of His purpose.

R.M.B. Yes; redemption here is in order that God might have what is His. Here we have references to "redemption" and "the forgiveness of offences". We might have thought we were beyond that in Ephesians. But it is the blood of Jesus in its highest aspect, as being the means by which God could put into effect all that He had purposed.

D.J.H. So the sinner being forgiven is not the end. I think even that in itself shows that the blood is for God, because the sinner is forgiven in order that he might be for God. That is really what

redemption means. All these things emphasise your concern as to our understanding that the blood is for God.

R.M.B. So what do you understand by the fact that it is, “according to the riches of his grace”?

D.J.H. I would like to understand it more. But it means that it is all from His own side. Has it not been said that mercy meets the need on our side, but is grace in view of the need in His own heart, that He has moved out to satisfy His own heart? Therefore the blood must be for Him because that is the means by which it has been secured. Is that right?

R.M.B. I think it is. There are two expressions which are similar, but present slightly different thoughts. In verse 6 we have, “the *glory* of his grace” and in verse 7 “the *riches* of his grace”. I thought “the riches of His grace” suggests to us the resources that God has.

There was this tremendous challenge to His throne through the incoming of sin, with all the subjects of His purpose having become guilty sinners. But the riches of His grace shows that there was no need on our part that His grace was not equal to.

J.M. One of the things that comes out of what we are saying is that the gospel is not only for man. Certainly it is for the blessing of man. But the gospel is really for God. Go back to the very first verse we read, “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”. But the result of the gospel puts man in a position where he can glorify God.

R.M.B. That is helpful.

D.A.B. There are two aspects to grace, as I understand it: one is the absolutely right answer to the situation in which it is shown by the one who shows it, the other is that He is absolutely true to Himself.

R.M.B. That is good.

D.A.B. I was thinking what a resource it is, what an asset it is to God. He can be perfectly true to Himself and provide an absolute answer to the situation in which we are.

J.S.H. I was glad you referred to the resource that He has. I was thinking of what was said as to what there is for God: it should always be as we preach that there should be a result for Him, for His glory. It has been said that we can come into the enjoyment of it to praise Him. Then it becomes a test for us as to how we continue in that praise towards Him.

R.M.B. You refer to the preaching, I thought too that this would be an encouragement for any who have part in that work, to think of what has been referred to as the “Godward” aspect of the gospel. I believe that is its most glorious aspect. If we can get it into our affections, I think we shall find that it will give us a certain fulness when it comes to the announcement of the gospel.

E.C.B. These things bring out the scope that is open to us when we are preaching to those we would accept are believers. It has occurred to me many times that the gospel for believers is a very very expansive thought. The scope we have touched in this reading is really inexhaustible.

R.M.B. We can understand when we think of what the Lord Jesus has done for God, and how much God owes to Him, why it is that God would have Him honoured in the glad tidings. That is what we delight in; it is to glorify Christ in the gospel, do you think?

E.C.B. Yes, I do. “Father. . . glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee”, John 17: 1.

D.J.H. Paul says that the ministry that he received from the Lord Jesus was “to testify the glad tidings of the grace of God”, Acts 20: 24. The whole scope of it is there in the unfolding of the mystery and so on, all that is secured for the heart of Christ, and all that is secured eternally for the praise of God, it is all there in the gospel.

R.M.B. So what would you say about “the *glory* of his grace”?

D.J.H. Distinction has been drawn attention to. I should like to understand it. It certainly is glorious.

D.A.B. I think it is that God is seen in it. Not a God who has had to lower His sights in any way. It goes back to the scripture in Romans,

that the way God has remedied our falling short of His glory is to manifest it Himself.

R.M.B. An expression we sometimes find in the ministry (and I think it is quite helpful) is that the *glory* of a thing is all that is needed in order to fully express it, to fully set it forth. Now, I think that helps to understand the reference here, because what greater expression could there be of the glory of God's grace than that He has "taken us into favour in the Beloved". You could not think of a greater setting forth of His grace.

D.A.B. I think one of the most wonderful aspects of God's grace is that He does express Himself in that way. As we were saying yesterday, God is light. But then we might just take account of that objectively. But He has chosen to show us what He is by the things He has done for us.

D.J.H. Then it is "to the *praise* of the glory of His grace". So we are coming back to it again, that it is all for God, for His praise.

P.F.E. Ephesians 3 speaks of the, "unsearchable riches of the Christ" (v 8). There are the riches of God's grace, and there are the unsearchable riches of the Christ, there is that which can occupy us once we have come into the goodness of what God has provided for us.

R.M.B. I trust that we shall take away with us some impression of the greatness of the Lord Jesus and the greatness of His blood.

What a great Person the Lord Jesus must be, that not only was His blood enough to cover every single sinner who draws near to God, and there must be millions of them, but also to satisfy God with respect to the whole universe and the accomplishment of all those things He set His heart on before the world.

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Key to initials

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CHRIST'S RESURRECTION VICTORY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Richard Brown

1 Corinthians 15: 3, 4; 20-28; 51-58

I desire to say a few words as to the greatness of our Lord Jesus, and the greatness of His resurrection victory. Think of how tremendous it is that the Lord Jesus has not only been raised from among the dead, but that He is now seated at the right hand of God. I have been especially struck with the opening of Psalm 110: "Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet" (v 1). "Jehovah", that is God, said that to "my Lord", that is Jesus. How great must a man be to be welcomed by God, to be invited by God, to take His place beside God! God has never said that to anyone else, and indeed no other man would be worthy or able to take that place. How great must Jesus be that God should actually invite Him to "sit at my right hand, until I put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet". Think of this too, that God has undertaken to make all His enemies to be the footstool of His feet. God has pledged Himself to do that. The position today is that Jesus is at the right hand of God, and He is waiting for that moment when God will make His enemies the footstool of His feet.

Now, it seems to me that there is something that we need to think very carefully about in this connection. If God would exalt a man like that, there is something that we all need to take account of. What is God saying to us? What is He setting forth in Jesus? What is it about this Man, speaking simply, that has so drawn forth God's approbation? Then to understand that God is to make His enemies the footstool of His feet. That consideration ought to lead all of us to review where we stand in relation to Him. I should not like to be among His enemies. I should not like to be made the footstool of His feet. Until that time God is having Him heralded forth as glad tidings, so that rather than being His enemies persons should be subdued by His grace, and brought into subjection to Him. I want you to lay hold

of what a tremendous thing it is that Jesus should now be seated at the right hand of God.

What I want to show you from the chapter we have read, this great resurrection chapter, is how the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is something which is going to affect every single person who has ever lived. There is no one who will be left untouched, in some way, by the resurrection of Christ. For many it is going to mean unspeakable blessing. For many persons the resurrection of Christ is nothing but good. But we must also accept that for some it is going to mean solemn judgment. The fact is, as a consequence of the resurrection of one blessed Man, every other person will in one way or another be affected.

What the apostle Paul does in this chapter is to begin with the resurrection of Christ, and then to proceed step by step to show us all the glorious consequences that flow from it. I want to look at those briefly tonight.

What we have in the first verses that we read are what we might speak of as the great gospel facts: "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he was raised the third day, according to the scriptures." These are the gospel facts, and you cannot shake them. Whether you believe them or not does not alter them. We would that you might believe them because the salvation of your soul depends upon it.

When Paul says, "Christ died for our sins", he begins where we all need to begin. If there is any one here who is exercised about his relationship with God, he must understand that we have to begin with the question of our sins. I need to understand that because God is holy, and because I am a sinner, my sins stand between me and God. If I am to be brought into right relationship with Him, then this great pile of sins which stands between me and God needs to be dealt with. What is more, it needs to be dealt with to God's satisfaction. There was nothing that we could do to put away those sins. That is what gives meaning to this, "that Christ died for our sins". That is the great thing to understand. The question that I

raise with you is, Are you amongst those persons who can say, "Christ died for our sins"? Paul was writing of himself and the Corinthians. But Paul and the Corinthians are now dead. Therefore, the immediate point in the gospel preaching today is you and your sins, and me and my sins. Can all here say, in sincerity, that "Christ died for our sins"? I am thankful that by God's grace I can say that Christ died for my sins. I do not know how it is with you, but I am finding more and more as time goes by what a tremendous thing it is to understand that Christ actually died for my sins. Sometimes I feel that I have hardly begun to understand it; first of all to think that somebody else should die for my sins, that somebody else should actually suffer for the things that I have done; but more than that, that it should be Christ, God's anointed Man; it should be the one Man who is such an infinite source of pleasure and satisfaction to God, that *He* should die for *my* sins! Peter says, "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Peter 2: 24. Is that true? Can it be that my Lord Jesus actually bore my sins? He actually felt the burden and the pain of the things that I have done. I can hardly believe it. Yet I do believe it. I rest my soul on it. The salvation of my soul depends upon the fact that Jesus has died for my sins. I am thankful that by grace I know what it is to have my sins forgiven, and I know what it is to have peace with God. Now, dear friend, what about you? You say, I would love to know peace with God. You can know it. You say, How can I know it? You must turn to God in repentance and in faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. "Repentance towards God" simply means that you tell God what it is that you have done, and tell Him that you are sorry for what you have done. The more deeply we enter into that the more conscious we shall be of God's forgiveness. Then "faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" means that you believe that when Jesus died on the cross it was for you. It is a fact that He died. It is a matter of faith that He died *for you*. I can assure you, on the clearest testimony of God's word, that if you will turn to God in repentance, and in faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, then God will be free to forgive fully every last one of your sins. How blessed that is! And it is all because Christ has died for them.

The next thing that Paul says is that “he was buried”. I wonder if you have ever thought about that. We have heard before of how Jesus bore our sins upon the cross, and how He died there for guilty sinners, but has it ever occurred to you that Jesus was not raised from the cross? He went into the grave, and He was there for three days and three nights. Why does Paul bring that in here? The apostle is building up to this great resurrection, and he wants to bring home to our souls that Jesus really died. He was laid in a tomb, and the stone was rolled across it. He was left there for three days and three nights. *Jesus lay among the dead.*

Then it says, “he was raised the third day, according to the scriptures”. I want you to get hold of this, for the resurrection of Christ has been well referred to as the cardinal truth of Christianity.

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus is the one truth upon which all else hangs. If Jesus has not been raised from the dead then there is no salvation for you and me. Paul says, “if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (v 17). If Jesus is still lying in the grave, His blood, though ever precious to God, would have no cleansing power for the sinner. The reason why there is salvation for you tonight, is because the Man who died for our sins is now seated at the right hand of God: it is not only because He has He died for our sins, but also because God has raised Him from among the dead. Why is that so important? Because by raising Him from among the dead God is telling us that He is perfectly satisfied with Jesus. In raising Jesus from among the dead God wants you to understand that all that Jesus has done is enough for Him to put away every last one of your sins. The great cardinal truth of the gospel is that *Jesus is with God now*. We have to ask ourselves, Do we really believe that? No one will argue with me about it here, for we have all heard the gospel before. But do we really believe the fact that the Man who died for our sins is now living at the right hand of God?

Where we read in verse 20, the apostle Paul proceeds to expand on some of the glorious consequences that flow from Christ’s wonderful resurrection. He says, “But now Christ is raised

from among the dead, first-fruits of those fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also resurrection of those that are dead.

For as in the Adam all die, thus also in the Christ all shall be made alive". And so, dear friend, what I want you to understand, in the first place, is that as a consequence of Christ's resurrection every other person is going to be raised. You say, I thought it was just believers. No; as a consequence of Christ's resurrection every single soul who has ever lived is going to be raised. They will not all be raised at the same time; this scripture shows us that they are going to be raised according to their rank. It shows us that God has ordered things according to their priority; and I think we can understand therefore why it is that Christ should be in the first rank: "the first-fruits, Christ".

I would like to give you some impression of what has accrued to God personally from the resurrection of Christ, of God's personal pleasure in raising Jesus from among the dead. We sang:

By the glory

Christ *was claimed*, on earth who died. (Hymn 404)

God could not leave Him there, this blessed Man who had glorified Him in His life, and supremely in His death. It was a matter of righteousness that God should raise Him from among the dead. You say, God must raise Him. Yes; and if God must raise Him, then heaven must receive Him. Peter says that He is the one "whom heaven indeed must receive", Acts 3: 21. Think of heaven's gates swinging open to receive this glorious Saviour. The Psalmist says, "Lift up your heads, ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in", Ps 24: 7. Think of Him, the glorious Saviour, going in triumph into the glory. There He is now, as we sang of Him this morning:

Centre of glory and love (Hymn 311)

Think of Him there as the one who is the delight of His Father's heart, the one who is worshipped by the angels, the light and joy of heaven. I love to think of Him in that place where all adore Him. As Hymn 14 describes it:

Grateful incense this, ascending

Ever to the Father's throne;
Every knee to Jesus bending,
All the mind in heav'n is one.

How glorious to think of it! We feel our praises are feeble, but think of Him there; He is in that place where all adore Him: all the mind in heaven is one. There are no questions about Jesus in heaven.

Heaven is alight with His glory. It gives a thrill to my soul to think of Him there. It rejoices my heart, more than I can tell you, to think of my beloved Saviour who suffered so much for me, who bore my sins in His body, in that place there where He is the light and joy of heaven. The world had no place for the lowly Saviour. It says that He was "the stone which the builders cast away as worthless", 1 Peter 2: 7. What words to be used of the precious Saviour! The picture is of a builder taking up a stone, and finding absolutely no use for it whatever, and discarding it just like that. But God has taken Him and given Him the highest place. You say, He is beyond suffering now. Yes, He is beyond suffering. But it is much more than that. For heaven is ablaze with His glory! He fills the place! What a glorious Saviour He is! Well may we sing those words:

Jesus, Lord Jesus, we love and adore Thee;
Glorious Thy Name, all our praises above. (Hymn

4)

I trust that the light of these things may touch your heart, "the first-fruits, Christ".

Then he says, "then those that are the Christ's at his coming". That tells us something else. Not only has Christ been raised, but there is a whole band of persons who belong to Him who are also going to be raised.

Friend, listen carefully, *the resurrection has already begun.*

The first rank has already gone, for Jesus is in the glory. The second rank is getting ready to go, "those that are the Christ's at his coming". We are waiting for Him. We are waiting for that loud triumphant cry. We are waiting for that blessed resurrection morning, when we shall be taken to be with Him too. That is what

we are looking forward to. You say, How can you be so bold about these things? How can you be so sure that you will be included?

There is one simple reason: it is because I know that I am one of “the Christ’s”. It is not through any merit of my own; I have none. It is not because I am a sinner less than anyone else. But for the simple reason that I know that I am Christ’s, I am going to have part in this glorious resurrection harvest. Now, what about you? I want you to understand that the resurrection has begun, and the saints are waiting to go. We have Christ and the glory before us. I ask you soberly, Are you coming with us? We are waiting to go in, and we want you to come too. We would that you might receive Christ, and that you too might take your place among the ranks of the redeemed, awaiting that glorious resurrection morning. As I have said, the first rank has gone in, and the second rank is waiting to move. You cannot lose any time. You dear young people, listen to this, do not think that you can leave it until some other time. We have not a moment to lose, because this great resurrection has already begun. You can come with us; you can be amongst us if you will become one of Christ’s; by receiving the blessed Saviour you will be numbered amongst His own.

Now, there is another side to this. It is not entered into so much as far as this chapter is concerned, but there is what I might refer to as ‘the last rank’. Scripture tells us that there is to be a “resurrection of judgment”, John 5: 29. It is solemn to consider. It is almost too awful to think of persons being raised simply in order that they may be judged. But it is a testimony to the glory of Christ’s resurrection, and His power, that as He Himself says, “Wonder not at this, for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice”, John 5: 28. The other day as we were burying an aged sister in one of those crowded London cemeteries, where there are massed ranks of tombs, stretching one after the other as far as the eye can see, those words came into my mind, “all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice, *and shall go forth*”. How majestic that is! How it brings home to our souls the *power* of Christ. For the unsaved the prospect is too awful to consider, that there are persons

who will be raised in order to face their eternal ruin. Oh may God preserve any here from being among them! May God preserve any one of us from being in the last rank! We would appeal to you, once more, to understand that this great resurrection harvest has begun.

We would that you might find your place among the redeemed, in order that you should have your own blessed part in it. Think of how great the resurrection of Christ is, that it affects every other soul who has ever lived.

The second great consequence of His resurrection that is referred to here, is that all things are to be subjected to him. God will ensure that. It speaks of a time “when all things shall have been brought into subjection to him”. And it presses the point that the only one who is not put into subjection to Him is God Himself. But that only serves to emphasise that every other single soul will, sooner or later, be brought into subjection to Christ. God has already given all things into His hands, and it is His purpose that Christ “might have the first place in all things”, Col. 1: 18. You say, I do not see it.

There is not much evidence in the world to show that all things have been subjected to Christ. Well, the writer to the Hebrews takes up that point. He says, “we see not yet all things subjected to *him*, but we see Jesus. . . crowned with glory and honour”, Heb 2: 8,9. The writer would say, The greatest thing has happened. It is a greater moral triumph that there should be a living man in glory, that Jesus should be crowned with glory and honour, than that one day all things are to be subjected to Him. If God can raise Jesus, if God can crown Him with glory and honour, it is a small thing for Him to bring everything into subjection to Him. The purpose of the gospel is that you and I might be brought into subjection to Him now, that we might be subdued by His grace, and that we might surrender ourselves to Him.

Now, where do you stand in relation to these things? Often one finds that when the gospel is preached we tend to stop at the forgiveness of our sins. But there is a further thought in the gospel, and it is that each of us should be brought to that point where we are prepared to surrender our lives to Christ. What about it? In these

sober moments, as we sit under the sound of the gospel, there is the opportunity for all of us to review where we are, and to review our course. The question I raise with you is, What is the governing principle of your life? If you consider the decisions that you have made, the things that you have done, and the places that you have been to, what do they reveal as to the governing principle of your life? Is it self, or is it Christ? Is it your own will, or is it subjection to Him? We have to face the fact that we prefer our own wills to His.

But one purpose of the gospel is to bring home to us this appeal: look at God's thoughts about Him; what a blessed Person He must be to have so drawn forth God's approbation; is He not worthy to be surrendered to? Then consider too that He was great enough to die for your sins and to accomplish the eternal salvation of your soul. If He was great enough to satisfy God with respect to the putting away of your sins, what can He not do for you now? I trust that you might get some sense of God's appeal in the gospel. God would love you to be brought into subjection to Christ; firstly, because it is full of blessing for you; and secondly, because every time a soul surrenders to Christ, we are another step forward in the accomplishment of God's great plan that Christ should have the first place in all things. So we would appeal to you, on God's behalf, that you might indeed surrender your life to Christ. Some of us, in the very small measure in which we have given ourselves to Him, have proved the unspeakable blessing that comes from so doing.

Again, there is a solemn side to it because there is a day coming when even His enemies will be brought into subjection to Him. That shows us that we cannot trifle with the gospel. We would urge you to take advantage of being subdued by His grace. I would not want to be among His enemies, for if one thing is certain, it is that God is going to vindicate His Christ. We often reflect on the precious suffering pathway of Jesus, and on the way He was reviled by men. But I ask whether you have ever considered what it must have meant for God to look down upon His beloved Son in such incongruous circumstances? I ask you soberly, have you ever thought what it must have meant for God to witness men spitting in

the face of His beloved Son? He heard the taunts that they hurled at Jesus all through His life, and especially at the cross. One of the things that was thrust at Him when He was on the cross was that “He trusted upon God; let him save him now if he will have him”, Matt 27: 43. That was a challenge to God. It is challenge that will not go unanswered. To think that Jesus was there to meet God on behalf of sinners and they could say, “if he will have him”. Oh the provocation of God! Oh the challenge to His throne! As I say, that is a challenge that will not go unanswered. God is going to establish beyond doubt that *He will have Christ*; and He will have Him instead of every other man. God is going to vindicate His Christ, and I want to be on the victorious side. I would not want to be made the footstool of His feet. God is going to show Him to the world, and every one will be made to bow the knee to Him. Would you not do it now? Do you see how much He means to God? Do you see God’s desires for Him? How God loves Him! Would you not be brought into subjection to Him now? The subjecting of all things to Jesus is a very great consequence of His resurrection.

Now I pass on to verse 51, where we have the final great consequence of His glorious resurrection, that not only has Jesus won a great victory for Himself by rising from among the dead, but I want to show how His victory extends to all His saints. It is rather like David of old, who distributed the spoils of his victory among his friends (see 1 Sam 30: 26).

Paul says, “I tell you a mystery”. What is that mystery? I do not think the mystery is that the dead will be raised, because there are plenty of examples of that in the scriptures. I do not even think that the mystery is that the dead will be raised and changed because, as the apostle says in verse 37, you have a testimony to that in creation, that when you plant a seed it grows up into something else. As I understand it, the mystery is this: *there are persons who are going to be changed who have never died at all!* Think of the glory of that! He says, “We shall not all fall asleep”. We do not have that in common. It may be that some in this room will fall asleep, and it may be that others will not fall asleep. Think of the

mighty power of death, this dreaded power, before which every other man, one after another, has gone down, however great or good he may have been. What would men, with all their advancements, not give to overcome the power of death? Yet as the result of one Man's resurrection there are going to be thousands and thousands of saints who will never die at all!

Then he says, "we shall all be changed"; that is the thing we all have in common. We are all going to be changed, "in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must needs put on incorruptibility, and this mortal put on immortality". Oh, dear friends, can we get the glory of this into our souls? It comes home to us especially when we bury some of these aged saints, who were outwardly broken in mind and body, who outwardly were a picture of abject weakness. It is lovely to think that when they are taken their spirits go to be with Jesus. But the next thing they will know, as far as their bodies are concerned, will be incorruptibility and immortality! Who would credit such things to human beings? We could not have guessed at these things. And it is all thanks to the glory of one blessed Man, who has wrought such a change on behalf of His beloved people.

This is something that "must" be: "For this corruptible *must* needs put on incorruptibility, and this mortal put on immortality." Why must it be? Because Jesus wants us in His presence, and wants us there in a condition where there will be nothing to hinder our enjoyment of His love, nor His of ours. For that is what we await.

He has given us the victory. May we get that into our souls. We have to wait for the change, but we have not to wait for the victory. I make that special appeal to the dear older brethren, who face their twilight years: what do we know of present victory over the power of death? He "gives us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ". May we receive it from His hands.

I do not want to occupy you with the change, but with the glory of that one blessed Man who has accomplished it for us. We wait for Him. I look forward to His coming because it will be our first

opportunity to see His face. Have you ever wondered what He will be like? The question was asked, What will Christ be like when He comes? The reply was that He will be “altogether lovely”. He will. I think when we see Him we shall find that He is all that our longing hearts could wish for. Our beloved Saviour is coming to take all His precious ones to be forever with Himself. This scripture tells us that it could happen at any moment. Thus the glorious fruits of Christ’s resurrection victory extend to all His saints.

May His glory lay hold of our souls. That is what we would desire as we come to the end of this occasion, that you should be left with an impression of Him. One’s simple desire in taking up the preaching of the gospel is to honour Him, our beloved Lord Jesus; that you might see Him, the delight of His Father’s heart, the joy of the saints, the One who is worshipped by the angels, the light and joy of heaven. Friend, if you will honour Him tonight, if you will receive Him into your heart, if He will have a greater place in your heart than before, then this gospel will have achieved its purpose. Oh that you might receive Him, our Lord Jesus. We commend Him to you in God’s Name.

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THE PATH OF RECOVERY: HAGGAI'S PROPHECY

Richard M. Brown

While I recognise the present ruined state of the church of God, and bow to the consequences of God's government of His people, and though I see from the Scriptures that lukewarmness is the last state of the church publicly, one's earnest longing and constant prayer is that there might be a return to the devotedness and committal that marked Christians at the beginning, even if it be amongst only a few – because the Lord is about to return. But the question before the minds of godly souls is how this is to be brought about. How are Christians to be weaned away from the things of the world to answer to their place as the heavenly bride of Christ, faithfully witnessing to Him here, while looking out for Him to come at any moment? We need reviving. And while such a work is God's own, it is clear from the Scriptures that it requires that subjective state in the saints that recognises the need for it. It is this one seeks to awaken.

The book of Haggai is striking because it bears on a time in the history of God's earthly people very much like our own, and for the way it sets out so clearly the moral process in us that must form the basis of any revival of God's work amongst us. Haggai's prophecy addresses those who, like ourselves, were in touch with a great work of recovery. They had returned out of captivity to Jerusalem, but the initial enthusiasm for the work had subsided, and the temple remained unfinished.

It is noteworthy that Haggai makes no mention of the external enemies who had hindered the work (see Ezra 4). This establishes an important point. While we can see that the opposition incited by the Jews' enemies was the immediate reason why the building work ceased, Haggai shows that the underlying cause was a state of complacency with the people themselves. It is a question whether this finds its parallel in our own day. Some may say that the present condition of things is the result of the crises which have taken place within the last forty years. Undoubtedly we must recognise and bow to the consequences of God's governmental dealings with us. But I

would venture to suggest that the crises were merely symptomatic of a deeper malaise, that of moral and spiritual weakness. The vigour and freshness that marked the recovery of the truth in the last century, where people were gripped by the light presented to them, had waned: truths such as the body of Christ being the true church of God, the presence and operations of the Holy Spirit here on earth, the imminent rapture of the saints, the millennial reign of Christ and the future restoration of Israel, had, perhaps, become commonplace, and no longer produced the manner of life that had gathered souls out of the various religious bodies of Christendom, often with much personal sacrifice and accompanied by considerable reproach, to meet on scriptural lines alone.

It would appear that the people in Haggai's time, having lost their initial fervour, lost too their appreciation of God's house, with the result that they had become more concerned with their personal comfort than by what was due to God. The prophet asks: "Is it time for you that ye should dwell in your wainscoted houses, while this house lieth waste?" Then, as a true prophet, he not only thus exposes their state, but he also presents them with the remedy. If we desire a word from God we must be prepared for the searching it brings (it would not be God's word without this), but if our hearts are right we shall find that it shows us the way forward. So Haggai sets out in three simple steps the path of recovery. In chapter 1 verse 5, God through His prophet appeals to His people to arrive at an honest assessment of their state. In chapter 2 verse 5 He draws attention to what evidences there were of His presence among them; and in verse 9 He brings them back to the purpose of God. Let us look at each in turn.

“Consider your ways”

One discerns increasing concern with exercised persons about the advance of worldliness amongst us. This concern is right as far as it goes. The next thing to see is that when the people of God own in humility before the Lord our generally low spiritual state, and our responsibility for it, this will provide Him with a basis to come in and revive His work amongst us, *should it please Him to do so.*

Therefore the first step to recovery is to arrive at a sober judgment of our present state.

Some may say that they have never known anything different from what obtains at present, whereas God would have us judge the present by what there was at the beginning. Let us therefore ask: If the Acts of the Apostles sets out what is normal Christian experience, are we really satisfied with what we have today, with the lukewarmness, the worldliness etc.? It says that "they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers. And fear was upon every soul, and many wonders and signs took place through the apostles' means. And all that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and substance, and distributed them to all, according as any had need. And every day, being constantly in the temple with one accord, and breaking bread in the house, they received their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people; and the Lord added to the assembly daily those that were to be saved."

Where today is the devotion, the separation, the sacrifice, the unity, the brightness of testimony, that marked God's people at the beginning? Where is the love of the truth, and the earnest desire to be faithful to it? Where are the distinctive gifts which Christ has given to edify His church? If you do not see these things, dear reader, the question is, why? How do we account for the apparent lack of results from our gospel preachings? The prophet says: "Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but are not satisfied; ye drink, but are not filled; ye clothe yourselves, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages for a bag with holes." They were going through the motions, doing what they had always done, but were not prospering – a form of piety, perhaps, but denying the power of it.

Similarly, when the Lord addressed Ephesus in Revelation 2, very little had changed outwardly. They were still going on with the exalted truths ministered to them by the apostle Paul. They were still doing the same things: working, labouring, enduring, and not

becoming wearied. Yet something had changed, something which perhaps only the Lord and those near Him could discern, since He refers to their fall and asks them to repent. They had left their first love. Though little might have changed outwardly, it was nevertheless motives other than love for Christ that now moved them. Herein lies the root of the church's defection. As it succumbed to the world, the church professed that Christ was not sufficient for it.

Now, the responsibility before God for the present state of the church is that of all those who comprise it. Having received the forgiveness of sins and been sealed with the Holy Spirit we become part of God's house, and as such, we are responsible for its present condition. It is important to see that responsibility for specific acts is something else, and may only apply to certain persons. But if we are not responsible for the sins of our fathers, we are responsible for the state which those sins have produced. The Scriptures afford us with examples, such as the word to Belshazzar (see Dan 5: 22), the Lord's words to the Jews (see Luke 11: 49-51), and Stephen's address in Acts 7, where persons' knowledge of God's past dealings with His people forms the ground of His judgment of them in the present. Thus, when we speak of *state*, it is the responsibility of all.

So Daniel confessed his sin, and the sin of his people. They were the same thing. He accepted the sin of his people as his own, and bore it in humility before God (see also Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 1). Consider how the Lord would love to identify Himself with persons who take this ground, and in such a day, when all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ. Who is able to enter in to how the ruin has affected Him? Who can share sympathetically His own feelings about what has befallen His beloved church? Who feels the blow that has been dealt to the glory of God, the occasion that has been given to His enemies, those "haters of Jehovah", who compare what the church was at the beginning, the glory in which it was first set up and the powers with which it was invested, with what there is today, and ask, "Where is thy God?" If we think of recent assembly history, who feels the shame and sorrow of the departure that has

come even into the recovery of the truth? Above all, what must it mean to the Lord Jesus, just at the moment when He is about to return to receive His heavenly bride to be with Himself, that many of those who form it are preoccupied with the pursuits of the very world that put Him to death! If He could weep over Jerusalem, what must He feel about that which is even nearer to His heart?

The important point is that there can be no recovery without repentance else it would appear that God sanctions the departure.

The importance of self-judgment is that it opens the door for His intervention, and leaves Him free to do what He loves. Thus God was quick to identify Himself with Daniel, and give him fresh light and strength for his path. Indeed, in one sense, He had an obligation to do so, having bound Himself to hear the prayer of His people in captivity long before they fell into that predicament (Deut. 30 & 2 Chron. 6); and I believe we must take this ground ourselves, and acknowledge the rightness of His hand in discipline upon us, if the Lord is in anyway to be free to revive His work amongst us, even if it be with only a few. Have we the courage for it?

“The Word ... and my Spirit, remain among you”

There will never be a restoration publicly of the condition of things that existed in the time of the Acts. This could not be. It is an abiding principle of God's ways dispensationally that He never restores to its original state what once has failed on the ground of responsibility. This was as true for the Jewish remnant brought back to Jerusalem in Ezra's time, as it is for those who seek to walk in the light of the assembly today. It is important therefore, if there is to be any true recovery, to see what is possible in the present conditions, by taking account of those resources that God has vouchsafed to His people *in spite of the conditions*. He says: "The word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, and my Spirit, remain among you: fear ye not." This is both a comment on the ruin and a testimony to the faithfulness of God. On the one hand, there was no ark; there was no re-establishment of the throne at Jerusalem; which previously had represented the public connection of the people to God. Yet, on the other, the word and God's Spirit

remained – in spite of that long catalogue of the people's failures, and those years in captivity – what a God! And so it is for us, dear brethren. There will never be the public manifestation of the unity of the one body since the Lord removed the church's lamp out of its place. But although the church will never be restored to that pristine state in which it was first established, and although its last state publicly is one of lukewarmness, for those who have the heart for it, the word of God and His Holy Spirit remain.

Thus the basis of every true recovery has been a return to the word of God. It is the means by which we can judge where there has been departure, in order that we might "put away the strange gods" from amongst us. I would affirm that there can be no revival until the Holy Scriptures have complete authority over us. That is, not only assenting to the wonderful heavenly side of the truth, but also simple obedience to the instructions given therein as to personal holiness, as to our deportment and dress, and as to all our associations of life. Without this practical application of the word there is the danger that ground which may have been right as far as the *principles* are concerned is denied in *practice*. May we ever remember that the truth is maintained by Christians who practice it.

In addition to this there is the presence and operations of the Holy Spirit. The distinctive feature of this dispensation is the abiding presence of one divine Person in the assembly. When the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost He not only sat upon each individual, but He "filled all the house where they were sitting." The Spirit thus claimed a sphere in which to commence His operations. A definite circle was marked out by Him. I believe this circle exists today. To suggest otherwise would be to imply that the Holy Spirit has been unable to maintain what He took possession of at the outset.

Furthermore, from Revelation 2 and 3 we learn that the Spirit will continue to address the assemblies up until the end of this dispensation. The challenge is as to who will hear Him. It is easy to go on without Him for He is easily quenched. It is not difficult to see how His presence has been usurped in the church publicly. Less obvious, but no less fatal, is when His presence is withdrawn from

those who have known what it is to walk in the truth, but who remain unaware of it because their spiritual sensibilities have become dulled by constant compromise. It says of one that "he knew not that Jehovah had departed from him", Judges 16: 20. It ought to be a vital concern, therefore, and a matter of much prayer, as to how we can be maintained in touch with the present activities of the Holy Spirit, and those He is guiding into all the truth. The working out of the truth of the one body is very distinctly connected with His Person, as in 1 Corinthians 12: 13 and Ephesians 4: 4 for example.

Now the point to be reached is this: that the privileges belonging to the body of Christ can be known and enjoyed by a few who, while accepting responsibility and suffering for the failure of the whole are maintained in subjection to God's word, and in dependence on the Holy Spirit. This is not ground to be presumed, but is to be arrived at by those who have taken the moral road to it.

This was proved by those in Nehemiah's day, who reached a height of things never known even in the time of David and Solomon (Neh 8: 17). It was proved by those Christians first recovered to assembly light in the century; and it is open to us, dear brethren, in the very midst of the breakdown, to provide something precious to the heart of the Lord Jesus just before He returns to catch us away to be with Himself.

"The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former"

As the people responded to Haggai's word and applied themselves to the building work they proved the reality of that principle set forth in the life of Abraham, that as one answers to divine light and takes the consequent step in faith, more light is given. Thus God through His prophet lets them in to the wonderful secret of His purpose regarding His house. "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of hosts." Could this be true? With Jerusalem in ruins, surrounded by enemies without, afflicted by weakness within, who would have dared suggest such a thing? Yet because God's glory is so inextricably bound up with the welfare of His beloved people He will act Himself to vindicate the glory of His

name, and bless them in so doing; and because He cannot be hindered in any of His thoughts the end will demonstrate that there has been no loss to Him or them. Rather the opposite: the latter glory will be greater.

So in Ephesians 1 we see, firstly, that God's purpose is to head up all things in the Christ, and secondly, that Christ's headship will not be complete without the assembly. The Son has been established heir of all things, they having been created by Him and for Him. Every true heart would readily declare that He is worthy of such distinction, and rejoice in God's purpose that He must have the first place in all things. But a further thought, and no less blessed, is that the church shares in His exaltation, with everything predicated of Him as Man. Thus we are called to form His body, united to Him and one another by the Holy Spirit, to be with Him in glory and share in His dominion.

This is precious light, to be cherished in the hearts and enjoyed by those who, while feeling the ruin, seek to answer to God's thoughts about them now. It is remarkable that there should be almost as many references to what is "in Christ Jesus" in Paul's second epistle to Timothy, written in the light of the breakdown, as there are in his epistle to the Ephesians, which presents the very height of the truth. It is the knowledge that all will find its consummation in glory that helps us to be committed to the work.

The very smallness of conditions and the apparent lack of results often weary those who are not in the enjoyment of God's purpose.

But every act of faithfulness is treasured up by God. When the heavenly Jerusalem comes down out of heaven, "having the glory of God" it is not only adorned with gold, speaking of what it has acquired through occupying the place nearest to divine Persons; but also with pearls, which might suggest what has been wrought in the saints through suffering. That is where you and I come in, dear reader. We who live in the day of small things have an opportunity through committal to the interests of Christ here of contributing something to that illustrious vessel which, in its latter glory, will not only be at the centre of all that is for God's praise, but will also be

His eternal dwelling-place. "So then, my beloved brethren, be firm, immovable, abounding always in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

When God brought that tiny remnant back to Jerusalem He had something far greater in view than the blessing of those immediately concerned. The Messiah was coming; and God's people were to be in their appointed place to receive Him. How much more so today when the Bridegroom is coming, should there not be those who, with true bridal affection are watching for Him, and with the Spirit can say, "Come"? The Gospels show that when the Messiah arrived there were only a very few who, having entered into God's thoughts about Him, were able to receive Him. If it must be only a few today then so be it. But if it must be a smaller testimony let it be a brighter one.

Let us seek the strength and support from the Lord needed to renounce the world, and to take our place in suffering with Him now, in the happy knowledge that we shall be glorified with Him then.

R.M.Brown

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Editor's Note:

This is the last edition of A Word in its Season under my editorship.

It seemed to me in 1973 that when similar publications, of which there had been a long succession, were no longer readily available, another might be of service. In those 34 years I have been sustained by the appreciation of those who have received it. But I do not feel now that I should commit myself to a fresh undertaking. The paper on the Path of Recovery seemed an apt closing word. Others will pursue shortly a fresh production and I commend their service to the Lord.

Eric C. Burr

February 2007