

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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RECOVERY TO THE TESTIMONY

Jimmy Gray

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I would like help to speak about recovery. We often speak about recovery to the truth, but I would like to speak from a different angle: I would like to speak about recovery to the testimony. What do we mean by that? The testimony is living the life of Jesus here in His Name and in His power - to be here as He was here, to be recovered to that; not just to have light. It is a wonderful thing to have light: what we need is the life that goes with it. The Christian life is meant to go with being a believer in the Lord Jesus.

If you go to the book of Acts you will find chapters 27 and 28 are prophetic. They give the history of Paul's shipwreck, but there is more than that in them. They give the history of the church down through this time period we are in. It is all related to Paul. Why? Paul represents the testimony that God has in mind. The great lesson of chapter 27 is to listen to Paul. When they did not listen to Paul there was disaster; but when they listened to Paul there was recovery, God came in for them. It is really the lesson of the age to the Church: listen to Paul's ministry. There is more in it than *just* listening to Paul; we need to take account of the kind of man that he was. He was a disciple of the Lord Jesus and one who could truly say, "For for me to live is Christ", Phil 1: 21; that is the kind of man Paul was. In spirit, he filled up the full measure of his ministry. Coming to the end of the book of Acts, Paul is there in his own hired lodgings, his stay here was temporary. I feel that the passages that we read in Timothy connect with that, Paul at the end. Here we are at the end of a time period, a similar time prophetically, and Paul is writing these last words to Timothy.

He writes, "use diligence to come to me quickly", and then he goes on to say, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present age" - Demas's name means 'popular', but he loved the present age. I think that is probably a great test in this time in which we live, especially in the kind of country we live in. We live in a very affluent society and how easy it is, and I speak for myself, to get caught up in just living a pleasant life and enjoying things here. Paul was not like that. Paul denied himself because he wanted to follow the Lord Jesus, wanted to

be for Him. Throughout 2 Timothy, Paul speaks to Timothy about what it meant for him to be here for the Lord Jesus. He is appealing to Timothy to follow on from him, to be with him and follow on in what he had set on. He speaks in such an appealing way. He knew his man and knew him well. That is how Christianity works, spiritual people that know somebody well, they love them; and they can appeal to them in a way that no one else can. Timothy was a timid man. He was one, it would seem, who was ready to back down, one ready to give up, and Paul does all he can to shore him up.

I was interested in reading through this epistle that he never once spoke to Timothy about the need for repentance. Timothy had been giving up. Paul encourages him to “rekindle the gift of God which is in thee”, 2 Tim 1: 6. He says, “God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”, 2 Tim 1: 7. He knows his man; he does not reproach Timothy, he simply encourages him. Timothy was the kind of man that needed to be encouraged. Perhaps there is someone like that here tonight, who needs to be encouraged. Paul was recovering Timothy, not to the truth exactly, and not to the light exactly. Timothy already knew the truth, already had the light, but he needed to be recovered to the life of Jesus here. I feel that for myself and perhaps others might feel it too, the need to be recovered to the testimony, to living the life of Jesus.

So Paul mentions “Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present age”. How easy that is to get caught up in the present age and what is open to us for our enjoyment here on earth. Demas had become detached from Paul. Holding right things, representing right things but in some way detached from Paul and what God really had in mind. The other men, Crescens and Titus, must have been a real help to Paul and yet they were no longer with him.

It goes on and says, “Luke alone is with me”; Luke's name means 'light'. Light is not enough; he needed Timothy and he needed Mark. He says to Timothy, “Take Mark, and bring him with thyself, for he is serviceable to me for ministry”. I feel that the Lord is calling our attention to what is needed at the end of the dispensation, this end time, where the present age is such that it would distract people. It needs people like Timothy and Mark. Paul says of Timothy that there is no one else who cares with like manner, with genuine feeling how God's people get on, how the saints get on.

Paul is speaking to Timothy and the Lord would appeal to us here tonight. Paul is desirous that others should come in to fill out the testimony. You could maybe imagine him wondering who could fill it out, and his thoughts then coming to Timothy and he writes this letter to him and speaks to him all about the testimony and how Paul had been in it. He appeals to Timothy to be a “good soldier of Jesus Christ”, 2 Tim 2: 3. He warns Timothy not to get entangled with the affairs of life; a good soldier does not get entangled with the affairs of this world, does not end up like Demas being distracted by the present age, he is committed to serving his Master. He appeals to Timothy to be a good soldier. Paul's life reflected that. He could say, “the world is crucified to me, and I to the world” Gal 6: 14. The whole explanation of Paul's life could be seen in the cross, in the love of Jesus that was there. He could speak to Timothy and appeal to him, “*thou* hast been thoroughly acquainted with my ... sufferings” (2 Tim 3: 10), and he mentions where Timothy came from, Lystra and Iconium and in other places. He was someone who had lived a life which was solely to serve the Lord Jesus as his Master and to be in the testimony for Him.

People that meet us at work meet us in business or maybe meet us at meetings, is there the mark of the cross on us? Paul calls him to take his share in suffering like a good soldier of Jesus Christ, not to look for the easy pathway. How often we can take an easier way, but it does not bring in the blessing that taking the pathway of a good soldier would take.

One of the things that he could say of Timothy was that he cared for the saints with genuine feeling, Phil 2: 20. If something is to be a mark of the testimony in the last days it is genuine feeling. I was drawn to this parable in Luke. The Lord Jesus speaks of the good Samaritan and what comes out in it is genuine feeling. How the Lord Jesus was here, how He was like the good Samaritan in the parable, a man moved by deep compassions. In thinking this passage over, I was interested that it says, “a certain Samaritan journeying”; he was moving with purpose. It said of the the priest that he “happened”. There was a certain chance element. When you come to the good Samaritan journeying there was a certain purpose. The meeting with that man on the Jericho road, the man in a half dead state, was part of the journey. If we take it as a picture of the Lord Jesus coming here, it was a meeting between divine compassion and the need of man. I feel that is what is looked for in the testimony today, to be here as the Lord Jesus was

here, that there should be the mark in the believer's life of divine compassion to meet man's need, whatever that might be. It might not always be a spiritual need, but perhaps a physical need too. Someone said to me once, where you find physical needs or material needs you will find alongside spiritual need.

Here the good Samaritan comes showing divine compassion and does what is needed for this man. How the Lord Jesus has done what is needed for us! How He has taken up our case, helpless like this man at the side of the Jericho road! How the Lord Jesus spared nothing of time and interest to bring you and me to fully recovered health!

If there is any real testimony of Christ here, whatever else is with us, there must be the mark of divine compassion. I would encourage us to be exercised to take that up.

Another thing that crossed my mind was that that the priest and the Levite were positionally right. For their day they were positionally right; but it was the Samaritan who was spiritually right. That is what is needed, people not just holding the truth as a doctrine, but seeking the Holy Spirit's help to express in their lives the love of Jesus to meet man's needs. The man recovered in the parable, if he ever met that priest again, would he listen to him? Would you listen to someone who had passed you by when you were helpless? Who would listen to someone that passed them by like that? Or the Levite? But the good Samaritan, you would listen to him, would you not? If you are able to show the love of Jesus really, helped by the Spirit to do it, it will have an effect, it must have an effect. It will gain an opening.

The parable finishes by saying, "Go, and do *thou* likewise" - the fulness of the parable is the spiritual picture it presents to us of the Lord Jesus coming here, but it does have a literal meaning too which is appropriate, "Go, and do *thou* likewise". The priest and the Levite had come back from Jerusalem, perhaps having been at the service in the temple, but what had they really enjoyed of fellowship with God? If they had really enjoyed fellowship with God would they not have been like the good Samaritan? I feel for myself that there is a danger of leaning on what is positional. We might hold to right principles and right things but that of itself is not enough. It has to be a living link with Christ, our Head in heaven.

Ezra is a book that applies to our day very much, an Old Testament picture of days of recovery. I remember hearing someone

Speak on these two copper vessels; it has stayed with me since. Ezra is taking things back to Jerusalem, but he is bringing back these vessels that are going to have part in the service of God. Young people might ask what we mean by the service of God - think of the service of God as the collective response to divine love. God looks to every believer to have a part in that, the love and the compassion that He has made known to mankind can be responded to. He gives opportunity that each one of us can have our part in that. We could think of these vessels as people who could be used in response to God. It gives this list of the vessels, silver and gold, and yet included with it are two vessels of copper, "shining copper, precious as gold". As far as I understand they are not mentioned earlier before the captivity; so it suggests what comes out of the captivity, what comes out of Babylon, that place of idolatry, the present world we spoke of earlier where we can be captured by man's ideals and his pursuits. How men set themselves to pursue their own happiness and how we can get caught up in these pursuits of men. That might become the most important thing in my life, but God works where there have been failures and shortcomings, and He works in the hearts and souls of believers to bring us to something, to bring us to an appreciation of Himself and what He can do. These two vessels of shining copper speak to me of God's work in moral recovery. People who have come to identify with God in regard to Babylon and regard to God's things; people who have come to something in their soul and they have gotten the gain of the captivity experience. They are no longer living for Babylon, no longer living for the present age, they are living for God's testimony and they want to have part in His service. Two people like Mark and Timothy would be like these vessels of shining copper. How precious they are. Whatever failure there might be, think of God, able to recover things to His thoughts and at the same time to add something. In some way there is something added, "two vessels of shining copper", something added for God's glory and God's praise.

It seems to me too that in the context of the passage they were essential for the service of God in their day; and I think we could say today that that element of recovery is essential for the service of God in our day, not just to the truth but to the testimony to living the life of Jesus here.

Might we be encouraged with these simple thoughts so that we can, like Timothy and Mark, be recovered to the Lord Jesus in the

testimony.

I trust the Lord can use what has been said that each of us might get something from our time together.

Walton-on-the-Naze

3rd November 2006

“THIS JESUS”

James S Gray

Acts 1: 6-11; 2: 22-24, 30-36

2 Corinthians 11: 1-4

In these two passages in the book of the Acts I desire to link together the distinct references to “this Jesus”, and that we might, each of us - and I include myself - consider how we are in relation to “this Jesus”; this blessed One so spoken of. It is not that there is any other, but it is evidently One known, spoken about, indeed, in a certain way, but someone known. Do you know Him, Jesus the Nazaraean? I wonder if there might be anyone here who might say 'I thought He had died'? He did die but He is not dead now, He is living! He is alive from the dead. *This Jesus*.

I want to speak first of chapter 2. There are things that are spoken of there that are quite within the range of all here but I will speak first of all of the name of Jesus; that is His name. “Thou shalt call his name Jesus”, it was said before He was born; “for *he* shall save his people from their sins”, Matt 1: 21. The name Jesus means 'Jah the Saviour'; that is, the eternal One, come into manhood to be our Saviour. I do not apologise in a company like this for asking, does everyone here know Him, each for themselves, as Saviour? Do you? He is living, He is a Saviour now; it was not only about 2,000 years ago when He offered Himself without spot to God. The work was done then certainly. He gave Himself even to death to deal with the sins of those who trust in Him, to remove sin from God's universe as He will finally do, and to put an end to man according to Adam's race, sinful and hateful towards God as you and I have been. So do you know Jesus, the One who came this way? He is available to you, dear friend, and when I say that you can speak to Him where you are, it is just as the prophet said of old, “call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and

the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah", Isa 55: 6, 7. If you are going to call on the name of Jesus you will realise immediately that you must acknowledge that you have sinned against God, but whoever comes through Christ can find salvation for now and for eternity. This Jesus - He came into the world for you, dear friend, to save sinners, as the apostle Paul could say (and truly, I believe) "of whom I am the first", 1 Tim 1: 15. Who of us would have put ourselves first in that list? Then "this Jesus" I think refers to verse 22 - "Jesus the Nazaraean". Oh, you say that when you speak about Jesus nobody wants to hear, nobody wants to listen. You are in a company now who want to listen to what is said about Jesus. There is blessing in that in itself, but He was rejected by the world. He would always speak the truth; He could do nothing else, the Holy One of God. But Jesus the Nazaraean was here, and as it says in that verse, He went about in a way which brought in the proof that God was with Him; because people who had been ill for a long time got cured by the touch or by the word of Jesus. Have you seen power like that in any other man? I call your attention to "this Jesus", so that you might know Him for yourself. Your father may read the Bible in the morning, and he sometimes reads about Jesus; listen to all you can hear, dear friend, and listen especially about Jesus and what He has done for God. He was borne witness to, that is to say that there was proof present by things that happened that it was Jesus come from God as a Saviour, and these works of power were to bring the conviction, the testimony, that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their offences", 2 Cor 5: 19. You may admit that you have some offences, that you have been a sinner: you perhaps would not like to tell others about your course. Well, dear friend, you can tell God about it. If you speak to Jesus you do not need to speak aloud, if you say something to Him in your heart. He will hear you immediately and I think He will answer. You might not have the answer immediately but I am sure He will answer.

Now Jesus the Nazaraean was "a man borne witness to by God ... by works of power and wonders and signs". Why did people not believe on Him? He was so different. He certainly was different but He was always obedient to the commandment of His Father. Have you a child in your household like that, never turning aside from the word of its father? Jesus was perfect in that. That is the reason why He was the only One who could offer Himself to God for our sins, to bear the judgment, to set us free and to cause that God should be righteous in

doing it. There was one spotless Man, perfect and sinless, who could be offered to God, and He offered Himself when He died on the cross - suffered and died - and the work He has accomplished then in going into death and rising again is a complete work by which we who repent can draw near to God.

And so Peter the apostle, in preaching, speaks of these “works of power and wonders and signs, which God wrought by him in your midst, as yourselves know”. Well, dear friend, you may say that you were not there. Well, if you are in any doubt, I point you to the witnesses that are present here who have known that the power of faith in Jesus where He now is has set us free from the power of sin, has caused us to know that God receives us through Christ and every charge is removed. How wonderful to know that! I wonder if you are among those who can say that you stand clear in the presence of God through faith in the finished work and the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe that “this Jesus” includes what is said in the next verse that He was “given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” and “ye, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain.” Oh, dear friend, that is the reason why my outlook on this world is different to what it was, because “this Jesus” whom I know and love, and whom I know is in the presence of God for me, has been crucified and slain here in this world. And with it was the mocking and scourging and insults and the ridicule of the Saviour. “He was led as a sheep to slaughter, and as a lamb is dumb in presence of him that shears him, thus he opens not his mouth”, Acts 8: 32. Dear friend, if you are not saved yet, I present Jesus to you. He opened not His mouth, but hid not His face from shame and spitting (Isa 50: 6), and went the whole way in suffering not only from men but from God when He bore the awful judgment of God in darkness on the cross. And He exhausted it and said, “It is finished”, John 19: 30. Now I know He said 'It is finished' before the end of His period on the cross, but the judgment was borne already while of course it was necessary that His blood should be shed and that He should be buried, having died when He delivered up His spirit.

So this world is different to me now because “this Jesus” has been by the hand of lawless men crucified and slain. If I had been there I would have had part in it but thank God through His mercy He has given light into my soul - and yours, dear friend, if you receive it now. The work is finished; it is whether you will keep your sins or not, whether

you prefer them. You will not prefer them at the judgment seat of God but now is the opportunity - we cannot promise you tomorrow. The apostle goes on in verse 32 to say, "This Jesus has God raised up, whereof all we are witnesses." Who was that? Well, it was the twelve apostles at least. You may wonder at the suggestion or authority behind what I am saying. I trust you realise it, but it is not from me: it is from God's word. The fact is that these twelve men saw Jesus living, alive from among the dead. I believe God's testimony, as it is written down in the word of God, and the apostle Paul, in another place (1 Cor 15: 6), says that he was seen by above five hundred brethren at one time - is that enough witness for you, dear friend? I present the testimony of God concerning the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. "This Jesus has God raised up, whereof all we are witnesses. Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which ye behold and hear", v 32, 33. The consequence of the Lord Jesus having been raised up and glorified is that the Holy Spirit has come. He is not seen; Jesus was seen. The apostle John says of the manhood of Jesus, "that which we contemplated, and our hands handled, concerning the word of life; (and the life has been manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and has been manifested to us:) that which we have seen and heard we report to you, that ye also may have fellowship with us", 1 John 1: 1-3. What testimony there is; undeniable testimony to the raising and glorifying of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the marvellous happening of the Holy Spirit coming, in the presence of a gathered company, and sitting upon each one of them, Acts 2: 3. Wonderful thing! And that has made a difference to men and women and young people ever since. But the apostle goes on referring to the difference between "this Jesus" and David (to whom he has referred as the patriarch and a prophet): David had not ascended into the heavens but he himself says "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I have put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet". Jesus is there in the presence of God at the right hand of power; and it is but a short time, I believe, until what is said in this verse will be fulfilled, that God will put His enemies to be the footstool of His feet. What a prospect for believers that the One whom we love, the One whom we desire to honour, the One we desire to serve, though He is despised here in the world, will very soon be honoured universally. May we really treasure in our hearts that wonderful day!

In chapter 1 of the Acts, I wanted to refer to the reality of what is written concerning the actual ascension of the Lord Jesus to glory. The two men in white clothing stood by the apostles and spoke to them and said “this Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven”. These were not prominent men in this world. These men of Galilee were a despised people. They had taken their place alongside of Jesus in reproach, they accepted that prominence in the world was not for them, but that they would identify with a despised Jesus. But this blessed One spoken of, who is taken up, the Lord Jesus, spoke to them. Just think about this, dear friends. Here is a Man who had been known, “this Jesus” had been known to the apostles; they had gathered with Him in Jerusalem, they had gathered with Him in Galilee. They had been there when crowds had been present, they had been there when He healed people, some of them were there when He raised one and another from being dead to living. It is recorded for the faith of your soul, the fact that Jesus raised from the dead a man who had been four days in that condition, John 11: 39-44. Jesus stood with the eleven apostles and it says He spoke to them. He was saying, “ye will receive power, the Holy Spirit having come upon you, and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. And having said these things he was taken up”. Have you thought about it? The true Jesus, the real Man, this Jesus, was carried up into heaven - “He was taken up, they beholding him, and a cloud received him out of their sight.” God has given to us the testimony of His word and the witness of those who were present, and it is irrefutable that Jesus is now living in the presence of God, received up in glory. The two men who stand by in white clothing say, “This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven.”

Now, the Lord Jesus is certainly going to come, and He is going to come to this very earth. I think I am right in saying that this passage is not exactly referring to the time when He comes to take the whole assembly to be with Himself. That will be a wonderful time, but He will not *then* come to the earth, but later when He comes to reign - when He comes in glory with all who believe from the present dispensation, the assembly, the church of the first-born ones registered in heaven,. Will not our hearts be satisfied then? Will not the joy be full for believers? If there are any here who are uncertain or undecided or hesitant about reproach or how their life will turn out if they do this or that, commit it to

God and have faith in God. Jesus is risen and ascended and is coming again, I cannot say how soon it may be. "This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven." What about the present time?

I shall close with a reference to 2 Corinthians 11. We have here the rather unusual and remarkable expression "another Jesus". There is no other person just like Jesus. He is unique. What is meant, I think, is another person who claims to represent Him. I believe that is the thought. Believers on the Lord Jesus are left here (we do not know for how long, as I have said) but they have a purpose and one of their principle occupations, one of their regular customs, is to gather together. Of course they also pray, of course they read the Bible, they value every word of God. The Lord Jesus told us to assemble and He set it on Himself by assembling His own round Him when He was here and teaching. He spoke about the time when He would no longer be here when those who loved Him were exhorted to gather together to His Name. He said, "For where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them", Matt 18: 20. So believers in the present time (I cannot say all) gather together and look for the Lord Jesus to be in the midst. It is the characteristic way of life for believers in Jesus glorified. We do not expect to see Him in a body of flesh and blood. He is no longer in it, He was sinless in it, but He is not in it now, He is in a glorified condition. But He comes, I may say He comes in Spirit, but He comes really and He speaks. I have known what it is. God has set believers together all over the world. I could not say in every country, because I do not know, but all over the world in companies like this place Corinth. This was a company where believers had been allowing all sorts of wrong things amongst them. The apostle Paul had authority from the Lord Jesus directly to speak about it and he spoke with that authority.

Now it so happened, evidently from this chapter, that there were others coming who did not have the same authority. They were preaching and presenting Jesus in another way from Paul. Paul says, if that was so, if indeed he that comes, (that is, the rival to Christ in Corinth) preaches another Jesus, whom Paul had not preached, or they got a different Spirit which they had not got, or a different glad tidings which they had not received; if it was true they might well bear with it, but it was not. It was not the true Jesus that was being presented by these other preachers. The reference in verse 3 of this chapter

suggests that human thoughts had corrupted, or were being used to attempt to corrupt, the saints of God in Corinth. "I fear" says Paul "lest by any means, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craft, so your thoughts should be corrupted from simplicity as to the Christ".

Now my message from these verses is this. Satan is out to destroy what the Lord Jesus has here on the earth at the present time, but he may not do it by using straight-forward external attack. He may not use a man to say, 'I have no time for this', or to say, 'I do not believe this'. Everybody would realise how wrong it was; but what had happened was that a different kind of man had been presented through the preachers in Corinth. Now the preaching of Paul called attention to one Man, that is what he said, "I have espoused you unto one man, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ." Dear fellow-believer, do you realise the objective of the Lord Jesus in giving such a mission to the apostle Paul (his writings are included in the inspired Holy Scriptures) with such a character that he could say, "For I am jealous as to you with a jealousy which is of God; for I have espoused you unto one man, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ"? I think simply what it meant was that there were preachers in Corinth who were calling attention to themselves, whether it was how well they could preach or how much they knew, or that there was 'this fresh point that I have had light about and which others will come round to a bit later'. I almost hesitate to speak of it like that, but that is how it suggests itself to me. Paul was jealous for the believers in the assembly, with a jealousy which was from God because he had espoused them to one Man to present them a chaste virgin to Christ.

So there is not another Jesus, there is one Man. He is in the glory, He loves His assembly. You may ask me, 'what is the assembly?' I will put it this way, a company of separated believers on the Lord Jesus, who have no part in this world because they accept His rejection, and are built together through affection for that blessed Man in the glory. Paul had espoused these saints in Corinth to that one Man. Now, I think because this passage does not refer in its figure to a marriage but to an espousal, what it means is that there should be now a strengthening of a bond of affection in the heart of every believer with Christ in the glory. That is how Paul had espoused the Corinthian saints to one Man. Do you have that bond with Jesus? Do you know that He is yours and you are His? It will keep you from many things if you do. It will keep you from the mind of man, keep you beside the lowly

Jesus, the despised Jesus - not that He is despised in the circle of His own, but still despised publicly. So I leave this word with you, that I believe Paul was working so that there should be an unbreakable bond, strengthened and established in the souls of all the believers in Corinth that they should realise that they were committed exclusively to Christ in glory. No other had any prior claim. The marriage day is coming, the marriage day will be public but the espousal is in your heart and mine now, through divine service, through the inspired word, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. May our hearts be strengthened in bonds of attachment to the Man in the glory so that human minds bringing in foreign things that the word of God does not support, are rejected, so that our thoughts are not, by craft, corrupted from simplicity as to the Christ.

Let us therefore freshly commit ourselves to this. We need divine help, we can call upon the Holy Spirit for help and guidance, and upon our Saviour and Lord Himself in heaven; He is available. The Lord said when He was about to ascend, "All power has been given me in heaven and upon earth", Matt 28: 18. There is power to answer your prayer, dear fellow believer, if you desire that your thoughts should not be corrupted from simplicity as to the Christ. I think that this is very much linked with what the apostle Paul, and the apostle John also in his epistle, both of them speak of as to clinging to that which was from the beginning so that anything that is rival, whether through deceit or otherwise, should not corrupt our thoughts from simplicity as to the Christ.

Well it is for us each, I believe, beloved brethren, to attend diligently to seeking out the strengthening of our links of affection, bonds which are ours with Him for eternity, strengthening them through faith, through speaking to Him, through reading the word, so that we might for ourselves be guarded against anything that is rival in these last days. May we freshly, if never before, take ground publicly in the world as standing apart from the course of things here which has rejected our Lord Jesus Christ and commit ourselves with affection and energy in practical ways to the support and sharing of precious eternal things with other believers with whom we can walk together in fellowship in the places where we are set; for the Lord's sake.

Tunbridge Wells
13th October 2007

THE LOAF

Jim D Gray

1 Corinthians 11: 23-25; 10: 15-22

I want to speak a little as to the loaf. (I read these scriptures to get the context in which the loaf comes in.) Regarding the Lord's supper, the scripture says He "took bread, and having given thanks broke it, and said, This is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me". We do that each first day of the week. The loaf on the table in this setting represents the body of the Lord Jesus, and as we break it and eat of it we are appropriating that precious body. Christ is before us. We are calling Him to remembrance, "this do in remembrance of me". It is mentioned twice in this passage, both in regard to the loaf and the cup, being an intensified thought; the mind and heart of the believer who participates is fastened on Christ. That is what is before us primarily. It is not exactly the saints that are brought before us - we will come to that in chapter 10 - but what is before us is Christ and the remembrance of Him and the calling of Him to mind. The believer, as participating in the thanksgiving, the loaf, the bread, has in mind the death of the Lord, and both the bread and the cup, bringing in the death of the Lord. His resurrection would come in also. We remember One who is alive. He was once dead, but He is alive now. These are thoughts that fill the heart and soul and affections of the believer, linking them with a Man in the glory, a Man who is about to come to us. That is the great thought in coming up to the Supper, that Christ is going to come to us.

It is not so much the saints. The saints gather, and you take account of them as they come, you see the brethren gathering together, and you view them as the brethren of Christ. That is the company that gathers. You see the saints first of all. The table is set; someone has set the table, love has acted in that. You come in and sit down and look at the table, and take account of the memorial. It means something to the believer who is about to participate in the service of the Supper that has been set on by the Lord Jesus. He sees the brethren sitting around the emblems; it is a collective thought, be there few or be there many, That is what is the intent of the heart and mind of the believer at that time - Christ is being made way for. The Lord comes amongst us as the Son of God, comes in and takes up His rights in our hearts. He does not take up His rights in the world yet, but takes up His rights in the hearts of the believers, those present. That is the setting of the Supper.

Last Lord's day we were breaking bread in another place and it came to me in giving thanks, as we finished eating, that we had all participated of that one loaf; everyone that was there had eaten of the one loaf, and participated in the celebration. It was a fresh dedication on my part and the part of each one to the Lord Jesus and to the fellowship. That is what I want to draw attention to.

In chapter 10 it says, "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of the Christ? Because we, being many, are one loaf", it is not exactly the main thought in the Supper. But it is a thought which has to enter into the mind and life of the believer, "we, being many, are one loaf". That same loaf represents all the saints. That is something to grasp hold of too. It comes into the heart from that point of view, out of the death of Christ has sprung, 'that wondrous living throng', Hymn 152, John 12: 24.

The one loaf represents the fellowship, "we, being many, are one loaf", and in putting our hands to that one loaf we are committing ourselves to the Lord Jesus and to His testimony. We belong to a fellowship and that fellowship is described in chapter 1, "God is faithful, by whom ye have been called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord", 1 Cor 1: 9. There is one Christian fellowship. Here it is referred to in verse 21, "ye cannot partake of the Lord's table, and of the table of demons"; that means you cannot be in fellowship with the Lord and in fellowship with demons, and I am not thinking in any way that any of the saints are associated with anything to do with demons. I do not think that at all. But, partaking of the Lord's table is a view, it seems to me, similar to chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, "the fellowship of his Son". All believers belong to that fellowship; there is only one fellowship in the world and that is the fellowship of God's Son. At the time when Paul wrote the Corinthian epistle there was only one fellowship. It has often been said that in Corinth there were three kinds of gatherings, the Christian gathering, the Jewish synagogue gathering and the pagan temple gathering. That is what was in Corinth. In our day, with the public breakdown of the church, there are many Christians breaking bread together, independent companies. I use that in a general sense. There are Christian companies in this city, apart from ourselves, who break bread together. But you and I are not committed to them in a practical sense, in what they go on with, because we have taken our escape, according to 2 Timothy 2, "Yet the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, The Lord knows those that are his; and, Let

every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity", v 19. So that in acting according to that, it then says, "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master", v 21. By withdrawing from iniquity we are not responsible for what other believers go on with, but we are responsible to one another and to the Lord for what we do in participating together in the celebration of the Supper. When you put your hand to the loaf you are committed to the fellowship of God's Son, you are committed to the company with whom you are breaking bread. It is an expression of committal to the Lord and to one another. All we who participate put our hands to the loaf, we take of it and eat of it. We are expressing Christian fellowship together. It is a broken day, thus the expression of fellowship limits it to those with whom we express fellowship in the breaking of bread.

So in this setting, "we, being many, are one loaf, one body", immediately involves those of us who express fellowship together at the Lord's supper, we all partake of that one loaf. We are committed to one another, to the Lord, to Christian principles, we understand fellowship. We are associated with one another in a most intimate way, we are partners together. Where I go, I take you; where you go, you take me. How intimate that is. In all our committals we take one another wherever we go, whatever we do. I am not suggesting or thinking that anyone is doing anything wrong; that is not what is in my mind. What is in my mind is this matter of the one loaf and the intimacy of the bond that binds believers together as expressing fellowship together. The bond is in the Holy Spirit, that bond is in consecration to Christ. It is a practical thing and every Lord's day we do that freshly and it remains through the week, and next Lord's day we express it again freshly. If we miss the Supper it does not alter the fact that we are in fellowship together - we might be ill, but I am speaking about the normality of things, "we, being many, are one loaf, one body". All the saints are in that loaf abstractly. In our hearts and affections there is love for all the saints, there is nobody excluded. Practically it comes down to those with whom we express fellowship and we, brethren, are bound up with one another as expressing fellowship together in a most *intimate* way. We are partakers with one another, partners with one another, in the fellowship of God's Son. We are all committed to the understanding of the truth as we know it. "Have an outline of sound words" (1 Tim 1: 13); that outline is in my heart and in your heart, and I am governed by my understanding of the truth, and I am governed by

the understanding that the saints have of the truth. So if I do not understand it fully, I will come into the understanding of it. That is what the reading meetings and the ministry meetings do, help us to come into an understanding of the truth.

I just had these thoughts in my heart and my mind to commend them to each of us: to see the dignity that attaches to the fellowship, and the intimacy that attaches to the fellowship, and the responsibility attached to the fellowship so that we are careful where we go, how we go, what we do, every one of us because we want to represent Christ in every setting in which we are, and carry with us the confidence of the saints. We are acting with dignity in relation to the circle of the saints with whom we break bread together. I leave these thoughts with us for our encouragement, but also for the responsibility that attaches to us, especially in the partaking of the loaf.

Edinburgh

13th November 2007

THE GOSPEL IN LUKE

David W Scougal

Luke 2: 7-17; 7: 11-17; 10: 29-37; 18: 35-43; 23: 44-46, 52-53;

24: 1-9, 44-51

Acts 1: 10-12

I have read quite a few scriptures, beloved, but I was impressed with the gospel as it comes to us in Luke. During the week we read that verse in Zechariah which says, "And he shall say, I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the ground; for man acquired me as bondman from my youth", chap 13: 5. Luke's presentation is of a blessed, humble, devoted Man coming into this scene to do the will of His God and Father. We sang,

We'll sing of God's wonderful gospel,
Glad tidings concerning His Son! (Hymn 53).

These scriptures that we have read take us through the full story, the full display of the gospel concerning Jesus, and I would like to draw your attention, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to features in these various scriptures. I remember once when I was quite young an older brother

preaching the gospel and talking about the pictures in Luke's Gospel. When you see an old master on the wall it looks perfect if you stand away from it, but if you go close up to it you see the lines and the cracks in the paint. But the pictures in Luke's Gospel, the closer you get to them, the more you look at them, the more you take them in, the more perfect they are.

I would just draw attention to these pictures we have read of so that we get some impression of the greatness of the Saviour that we have to do with in the gospel, a blessed, holy Saviour, the One who came in in dependence on the will of His God and Father. He came in and the scripture says, "thou hast prepared me a body", Heb 10: 5. Think of the way that the Lord came. It says of Him in Philipians 2, "For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, subsisting in the form of God, did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself", v 5-7. Think of the way that the Lord Jesus, One who is God Himself, came in and took a bodily form in the likeness of men, think of that, but as a Man sin apart, One on whom sin could have no claim. Sin has a claim on each one of us, it tells us so in the scripture that by the offence of one man sin has come upon each one of us (Rom 5), and that is what we are according to nature. This One who came in on God's behalf, the One who subsisted in the form of God, the One who emptied Himself and took a bodily form, but sin apart. What a precious matter to consider in the gospel, beloved, that there was One here who was perfect in every way in the sight of God, and that is the One we want to present to you in the gospel from these scriptures.

In the first scripture it speaks of Him being born, and it says, "She wrapped him up in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in the manger, because there was no room for them in the inn". There was no room for this dependent Man in the organisations of men. The inn would speak about what man has set up for himself, what man has put together for his own pleasure, for his own enjoyment, but there is no room for Christ there, no room for Christ in the inn, no room for that One who was dependent upon His Father, dependent on what He would provide. As we have said, "thou hast prepared me a body", but here there is a manger prepared, I think, by the Father for that blessed holy One to be laid in. "Wrapped ... in swaddling-clothes", think of the provision for that One who came into this scene in dependence, and who came in to do the will of the Father. What a precious One we can present to you in the

gospel, the One who came that way. And so the word came to these shepherds in the country, to tell them about it. In Matthew's Gospel we see magi from the east, who see the star, and the star draws them to the place where Jesus was. It is more of an official presentation of the glories of Christ, but here we see the moral glories of Christ in that One who came in in such humility and devotion to the will of His Father. It says, "And there were shepherds in that country abiding without ... And lo, an angel of the Lord was there by them". Shepherds would be persons who are prepared to be concerned about others perhaps at the expense of their own lives, at the expense of their own welfare. They are concerned about others. These are the persons to whom God can manifest what He is doing in this time. It says, "and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they feared with great fear. And the angel said to them, Fear not". "Fear not", beloved. As I said, we are all sinners in the sight of God, but it says, "Fear not". A Saviour has been provided for you, beloved. It says, "a Saviour has been born to you in David's city, who is Christ the Lord". It does not say, 'Who will be Christ the Lord' or who will become that, but it says, "who is Christ the Lord". It links on with what we have said already in relation to the One who laid aside His glory, the One who emptied Himself and took a bondman's form, One who was seen in Bethlehem's manger, "Christ the Lord". What a wonderful consideration it is, beloved, that such a One should come in in such a way! Outward weakness - a babe speaks of such weakness, dependence on its mother for everything that it needs, but oh, what moral glory we see presented here! Although it was outward weakness, yet heaven's attention was centred on that, centred on that manger. Heaven's attention was centred on what was happening there, the incoming of Christ, the great incarnation of that blessed One into this scene. How wonderful to consider the way He came in. It says, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men". The shepherds went to see what it was, and "they came ... and found ... the babe lying in the manger". There was no room for Him in the inn, but there is a provision for that blessed, holy One in that manger there.

That is the incoming of the Saviour, beloved, the way that He came into this scene, as a lowly dependent One. He had great resources, He could have come in in power. He had a right to come in in power in judgment on this scene because of the wickedness and the sin that was there, but He comes in in love, love for His own, love for you and love for me. Oh beloved, the gospel has widened out not only to

the people of Israel, but to all the nations. It has come down to you tonight. The gospel is available to you tonight in this room in Loanhead. Whatever your need may be, even if you are still in your sins. If there is anyone here in their sins, lay hold on the Saviour tonight! Do not go out from the room without knowing Christ as your Saviour. He is available to you tonight, He is available to you here, the One who came in by way of Bethlehem's manger, that dependent One. He is available to you tonight as a blessed Saviour. Lay hold of Him if you do not already know Him.

In Luke's Gospel chapter 7 we come to this sad scene at the city of Nain. It says that "a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she a widow". There is no hope there. In Ephesians it says, "Wherefore remember that ye, once nations in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that called circumcision in the flesh done with the hand; that ye were at that time without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world", chap 2: 11,12. What a position! What a scene this is. It speaks typically, I suppose, in relation to Israel and to the land of Israel, the people of Israel, but it would apply to each one of us. It is our condition as according to flesh, without hope, dead in our offences, with no way out of that condition. There was a great crowd there coming out of Nain, and there was a crowd with the Lord Jesus; and there was none there that could effect anything in relation to that young man except for one Man, the Man that we present to you in the gospel tonight, the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who came in in such a humble way, in such a dependent way. He was available to bring in a result in that man's life. What a change! He was carried out dead, but it says of the Lord Jesus that He "was moved with compassion". Think of the compassions of Christ. The Lord Jesus would look on you tonight with compassion, beloved. If, as I have said, you do not yet know Christ as your Saviour, if there is still something between you and the Saviour, still something between you and God, something stopping you, the Lord Jesus would look on you with compassion tonight because He desires to bless you, He desires that you should be blessed. God "desires that all men should be saved", 1 Tim 2: 4. Do you really believe that, beloved? That is not just as a great crowd, but it comes down to you individually. God desires that you should be saved. He desires that I should be saved. Thank God that I know Jesus as my Saviour, but He desires that you should know Him as your Saviour. He desires that everyone here should know Jesus as

their own personal Saviour. How great the thoughts of God are towards you, beloved! And so we look on this weakness here, this hopeless case coming out of Nain. The Lord is moved with compassion and it says, "he touched the bier, and the bearers stopped". Death had to stop in the presence of that One of whom the scriptures speak as the "the originator of life" (Acts 3: 15), the One "by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb 1: 2), the One who created the heavens and the earth. Death had to stop in His presence; it could not move forward. It says, "And he said, Youth, I say to thee, Wake up". Oh, beloved, have you ever heard the voice of the Saviour speaking to you, speaking to you personally? There are many places in the scriptures where the Lord speaks to young men, or in the Old Testament where Jehovah speaks to them, and sometimes He says their name twice, "Samuel, Samuel!", 1 Sam 3: 10. A soft gentle voice is speaking to you in the gospel. Think of that occasion on the mountain where Elijah was before God and there was the wind and the fire and the earthquake, and then there was a "soft gentle voice", 1 Kings 19: 12. Have you ever heard that soft gentle voice speaking to your soul, asking you where you are? "Youth, I say to thee, Wake up". Have we all wakened up? Do we all know Jesus as our Saviour? Is there anyone here who would refuse that quiet, gentle voice as He speaks, "Youth, I say to thee, Wake up"? It says, "And the dead sat up and began to speak; and he gave him to his mother". Oh what a change! No longer without God, without hope in this world, but now a new order of things, a new man, one who has changed altogether from his previous dead condition. What a blessed change!

So we come to this man in Luke 10. We have the Lord here speaking to this lawyer who had come up tempting Him. The Lord is able for all who come up to Him, able for all our needs. And He is able to bring in a word here, a word which would challenge this man. He speaks about the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, a man who went down. It says, "A certain man descended from Jerusalem to Jericho". It does not say whether he was young or whether he was old, it says, "A certain man descended" from a place of privilege, he moved out of that and went on a downward course. How easy it is for us to do that, how easy it is for us to become involved in that, moving from a privileged position. Most of us, if not all of us, have been brought up in privileged conditions, privileged family conditions, brought to the meetings, brought to hear about Jesus, told about Him from an early age, but sometimes, we know it in our histories, we want

to go a different way. There is nothing but sorrow in going that way, but, thank God, there is One who is able to come up and pour in oil and wine. There were two other men there, a priest and a Levite, official persons who should have been able to help but were not able to help. But here was One who came up, "pouring in oil and wine". Someone has said that the man was cured, carried and cared for, J B Stoney vol 2: 248. Beloved, He poured in oil and wine and then, because the man could not do anything, He "having put him on his own beast took him to the inn". He put him on His own beast so that he would be carried; he could not walk, he could not do anything for himself. That is our condition, the same condition as the man at Nain, he could not do anything for himself, but he is carried and he is taken to the inn. Now the inn here is a different thought to the inn that we read of in the first scripture. This is the inn which is a place of cheer, a place of safety. It would speak to us of the assembly, a place where persons are looked after, where they are cared for, and the Samaritan says, "Take care of him, and whatsoever thou shalt expend more, I will render to thee on my coming back". Oh, beloved, how wonderful that is to think of, that there will be a coming back. That good Samaritan will return. We will speak about that shortly, but it is wonderful to consider the way that the man turned his back on his privileged position, but that there is One able to come up to him and help him, One who did even more. It says of Him prophetically, "The weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the bars of the earth closed upon me for ever", John 2: 5, 6. Think of the depths to which the Lord Jesus went, beloved, that He might effect *your* salvation and *my* salvation. What a way the Lord Jesus went! If He had not gone that way we would not have been saved, we would still have been in our sins, but the Lord Jesus went that way and from that position He can come up to us and draw near to us and care for us and provide for us. What a Saviour we present in the gospel, the One that is available for you tonight.

In Luke 23 it speaks of the time of the death of our Lord, when He died on Calvary's tree. What a time that was, beloved! Does it not affect your soul every time that you read of it or hear of it, the way that the Lord Jesus went, the way that He went in love for you, the way that He went in love for me to Calvary's cross? What sufferings He endured at the hands of men! But then, beloved, what intense sufferings He endured at the hands of a holy God when He took the whole question of sin upon Himself, when He went that way, the One whom we spoke of earlier as the One who was sinless, to whom sin and death could only

be vicarious. We are all under the judgment of death. If the Lord does not come we will all die one day. There is no alternative, we will all die one day, but the Lord Jesus, beloved, He went into death. Death had no claim on the Lord Jesus but He went that way for you and for me, and even here in His death we find Him still that devoted Servant. He says, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit". Oh, beloved, think of the Lord there! We do not get it the same way here as we do in other gospels where it speaks of the forsaking and how the Lord could cry, "Why hast thou forsaken me?", but then there are three hours of darkness that we read of here, all that enters into that time when the Lord felt what it was to be forsaken of His God. But then at the end of it He cries, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit"; a dependent Man all the way through from His incoming to the time that He went out of this scene, for the last time that He was seen publicly was when He was seen upon the cross. What a Saviour we can present to you in the gospel, a Saviour who is so available tonight for each one of us! Oh that we might lay hold of Him! That verse further down that we read speaks of Joseph wrapping Him in fine linen. We found Him wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and now we find Him wrapped in fine linen what is provided, the preparation for the care for the Lord's body. How wonderful it is just to contemplate that there were those there who were prepared to look after Him in that place.

And then we come to chapter 24, and oh, how glorious that is! The Lord having cried to the Father, it says, "And having said this, he expired". The Lord died, He really died, beloved. The One who had a right to live, He died on the cross, and He died for you and for me, and He was buried. They rolled a stone across the tomb and they put a seal upon it. It does not tell us about that in this scripture, but that is what they did. The officers put a seal on the tomb (Matt 27: 66). The Jews thought that the disciples would come and roll away the stone and take the Lord's body out because they remembered His words, but it tells us here in chapter 24 about these faithful persons who came to the tomb brought "aromatic spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And when they had entered they found not the body of the Lord Jesus". The stone was not rolled away to let the Lord Jesus come out, the Lord Jesus had risen from amongst the dead before the stone was rolled away. An old brother preaching once said, 'When the Lord rose from the grave not a blade of grass stirred as He rose in power from amongst the dead'. What a movement by Him! He is risen, glorious Saviour, risen from amongst the dead. He went

into death, beloved. As we have said, and as I have tried to explain, death was final for Christ. The bars of the earth closed upon Him for ever. But oh, beloved, having gone that way and having overcome death, He could rise righteously from amongst the dead. What a wonderful matter!

It is most difficult for persons to accept, but it is the truth. Do you accept it, beloved, that Jesus rose from amongst the dead? There were persons in Athens that Paul spoke to about this. It says, "Some mocked, and some said, We will hear thee again also concerning this", Acts 17: 32. Christ really arose from amongst the dead and He is alive today. These two men say, "Why seek ye the living one among the dead? He is not here, but is risen". Oh, beloved, that glorious One speaks to John in Patmos and says, "I am the first and the last, and the living one: and I became dead". He became what He never was before. As we said already, death had no hold on that Saviour, but He went that way, He went into death for you and for me. He became dead, but then it says, "and behold, I am living to the ages of ages", Rev 1: 17, 18. He is risen, risen triumphant from amongst the dead! Death had no claim on Him, death could not touch Him. Oh, beloved, what a glorious Saviour is available to you tonight, not a dead Saviour but a living Saviour, One who has risen from among the dead.

It says, "two men suddenly stood by them in shining raiment", persons who are linked to a risen Saviour, persons that we should be like, beloved, persons that we should be like in this scene, persons who are like Christ in this scene. The only place before where the gospels refer to shining raiment is on the mount of transfiguration, and we see Christ there and it says that "His garments became shining, exceeding white as snow, such as fuller on earth could not whiten them, Mark 9: 3. Here we have persons who are in accord. It does not say that they are angels, it is "two men", men who are in accord with a risen Christ. In chapter 2: 14 it says, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men", men who are like Christ in this scene, men who are like that blessed Saviour, related to Him in every way, and in accord with Him. How wonderful to consider, persons that we can be like as receiving power from on high. The Lord Jesus says, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was yet with you, that all that is written concerning me in the law of Moses and prophets and psalms must be fulfilled". The Spirit of God can show you from the Old Testament the things that relate to Christ, the things that relate to God's gospel. And all has been brought to pass in the precious life of our Lord

Jesus Christ: in the way that He went, the way that He came in and the way that He went out by the cross, and the way that He was buried and rose the third day.

So we come to this point where the Lord Jesus says, "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you". Have you got the promise of the Father upon you? Do we all know what it is to have the Holy Spirit, to have the gift of the Spirit? Without the gift of the Spirit we cannot really enjoy our present salvation, we cannot really enjoy what it is to be here for Christ in this scene. We would never know what it is to be clothed with shining garments if we did not have the gift of the Holy Spirit, never know what it is to enjoy the service of God and enjoy the breaking of bread fully, if we did not have the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is by His power and in His power that we can enjoy it, and it is only as knowing the power of the Holy Spirit that we can come into the blessing of receiving God's voice as it comes to us. Then it goes on and it says, "And he led them out as far as Bethany, and having lifted up his hands, he blessed them. And it came to pass as he was blessing them, he was separated from them", a glorious, risen Saviour, ascended now above all the heavens, and sat down. I know it is later that that happens, but He sat down at the right hand of the throne on high (Heb 8: 1), and it is from that place of glory that He would speak to you tonight in the gospel. The Lord Jesus would speak to you from that place in glory where you are in your seat in this hall in Loanhead, and He would draw near to you where you are. Whatever your need may be, the Lord Jesus would draw near to you in the gospel. Beloved, what a Saviour He is! As we have already said, how available to each one of us to meet our need whatever it may be, whether it be our sinful condition, or whether it be our needs as a believer. As we go along the pathway, He is available for each one of us. If you have a need in your heart, if you have a need in your life, you just have to speak to Jesus and He is able to meet it, able to come in to draw near to you.

I just referred to Acts because it is the same writer, and it is almost a continuation of the same scripture, and it speaks about the eleven. "And as they were gazing into heaven, as he was going" it says again here, "behold, also two men". I do not know if it was the same two men, but it is two men and they say, "This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld him". O what a glorious hope! The Saviour who was here, the Saviour who suffered, who died, who rose from the dead, who

ascended up above all the heavens, that same Saviour is coming back again, beloved. He is coming back again to receive all who believe in Him. What a glorious day that will be when we see the Saviour, when we hear His voice, when we go in to be with Him, never more to come out. Are you waiting, are you watching for that Saviour? Have you got the hope in your heart of the Saviour coming to take you to be with Him? I challenge each one of us here as to whether we really have that hope in our hearts, that we are going to see the Saviour when He comes for us. We speak about it as the rapture, the time when He "with archangel's voice and trump of God, shall descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds", and it says, "thus we shall be always with the Lord", see 1 Thess 4: 15-17. What a prospect! What a hope the believer has, a hope that is outside of this world, this world which rejected the Saviour, this world which has no place for the Saviour, this world which has no place for those who love Jesus, this world which has no place for those who know Jesus as their Saviour. It has no conception of what is about to take place, but there is a hope in the heart of the believer that Christ is going to come for us. As someone has said, 'perhaps today He will come for us and take us to be with Himself'. What a day! What a prospect! What a hope! I trust that everyone here is fully assured of their link with the Saviour, and knows Christ as their own personal Saviour. Let none go from the room tonight without knowing Jesus as your own personal Saviour and the Hope of your heart for your eternal salvation. May it be so for His Name's sake.

Edinburgh

18th November 2007

THE POTTER

Jim Macfarlane

Jeremiah 18: 1-6

Luke 3: 21, 22; 7: 36-50

Those of us who were at the fellowship meetings yesterday will recognise the first passage; it was also read first in the reading yesterday. Our brother used it very profitably to lead a discussion on what God can make us. It is a word suitably addressed to Christians,

those who belong to the Lord Jesus, and such would have accounted for most of yesterday's company. There would, nevertheless, have been different stages of development, different distances along the Christian pathway, differences in detail of experience with God. I feel, however, that a word on what God can make us is one which can also be spoken in a way which carries hope and reassurance as to the attitude of God to someone who does not know anything about the Christian way. The prophet is told to "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words". The word was not available to him where he was located at the time of God's speaking to him at the beginning of the chapter; it was to come to him in the potter's house. So he went down to the potter's house and his first experience was to see something; he saw the potter in action: "...and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made was marred, as clay, in the hand of the potter; and he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make". The prophet followed the instruction of God but it was not at the instant at which he crossed the threshold of the potter's house that he got the word which he was promised.

He was given a demonstration before he got a word. I think that it is useful for anyone who comes to hear the preaching of God's glad tidings to have some sense of an individual demonstration of the necessity for the word. There needs to be a condition where the word is seen as significant and having force for the one who hears it. What was demonstrated, then, to the prophet was the potter making a work on the wheels which "was marred, as clay, in the hand of the potter". Now the word recorded by the prophet is skillfully phrased. He does not say that the potter made a mistake, everything went wrong, the clay had to be collapsed into a lump and he had to start all over again. The account is not written in a way that suggests that the potter was at fault. It might be contended that this can be the only conclusion but I should like to convey that, when the prophet says that the vessel was marred, he is very deliberately avoiding any indication of fault on the part of the potter.

I should like to apply the word in this way, that every one of us is the creation of God and, because of this, He has the Creator's claim on each of us. In the creation account in Genesis, mankind is represented as the high point in God's creation. The early part of Genesis, however, also gives account of the way in which the present circumstances of humanity came about. Early Genesis describes what is spoken of as

the fall of mankind and this was not the consequence of any action of God. It was the result of the activity of an intelligent being, who already existed in the universe and was hostile to God. This, of course, is Satan who presented himself to man and beguiled him so that man should listen to him instead of to God and to act according to Satan's suggestions. Adam had had communication with God; it is His will to communicate with man, as our passage in Jeremiah indicates, but Satan intruded with another communication which raised a question as to the nature of God and Adam chose to listen to Satan. As a result of this we are part of a fallen race, and the whole of creation suffers as a consequence, chap 3.

We cannot, however, attribute our circumstances simply to the fact that there is no escape from connection with the fall of Adam. We must look within and see that our own condition, our marred condition, is a result of our own failure, and we must do this because we are responsible persons. This is a central part of the word of the glad tidings, that men, women and also children, in increasing degree as they grow older, are responsible. We have an adversary, who exercises evil influence in the world, and, in failed responsibility, we have responded as Adam did to his blandishments, instead of finding a pathway directed by the will of God. I think that this is represented in what Jeremiah sees in the house of the potter. The pot is initially formed perfectly; there is nothing wrong with God's creation but it has subsequently become marred. How grateful we must be, however, that the Potter does not withdraw His hand when the vessel becomes marred. Sin is attached to every one of us. Adam knew immediately that he had sinned and knew that this made him unsuited to the presence of God. God wished to communicate directly with Adam in His presence and Adam knew that he was unsuited to this. The circumstances of God are divine glory and Paul's word to the Romans is that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God", Rom 3: 23. However, the potter does not discard the vessel; "... and he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make". That conveys to me something of the wonderful grace of God that the second vessel is one which can be described as seeming good to the potter to make. God sets requirements and addresses a word to you, to which you have a responsibility to respond but, as doing so, you can come into the sense of favour that is conveyed in the making of another vessel "as seemed good to the potter to make." This one is not marred; it will go through the processes that are required to turn it into

something of permanent pleasure for God, according to His purpose.

I have read in the gospel according to Luke, because the word which we preach is not about the prophet Jeremiah and it is not about the way in which a potter operates. The word of God's glad tidings refers to the person of Jesus Christ. This is the key to the Old Testament. Much of it is occupied with the way in which God takes up the nation of Israel but the elaborate system of religious ritual prescribed to the nation only makes sense if you discern in it the way in which God would, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, ultimately solve the question of evil. What is foreshadowed is someone who would be completely different from anyone else who had lived on this earth. All others, because of their histories as viewed from a moral perspective, are represented as marred vessels. Jesus was completely morally distinctive. In chapter 3 of Luke's gospel there is a clear statement from heaven of the distinction of Jesus Christ. He associated Himself with those who submitted to the baptism of John, who were repenting in recognition of their moral condition before God. Luke gives His Father's appraisal of Him: "*Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight.*" Every other person who had ever lived is represented by the marred vessel. This acclamation from heaven was not the response to a single incident. It was a statement on the thirty years of Jesus' life up to this point and God declares without qualification that He had found delight in Him; this required perfection.

In the Jewish law there was provision for a ritual reconciliation with God by the offering of a sacrifice and there is elaborate specification of the perfection required of the sacrificial animal. The purpose in giving the detail of the perfection required in this animal is solely to represent the way in which Jesus would provide a perfect offering for sin. At the end of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi takes issue with the offering of animals which were blemished, chap 1: 7, 8. This was offensive to God because the value to Him of a sacrificial animal was its representation of the flawless perfection of Jesus. The potter made another vessel as it seemed good to him: thus God has dealt so completely with the moral condition of those once unsuitable to Him that they can become the objects of His pleasure. God found complete satisfaction of His requirements for the resolution of the issue of sin by the perfection of the sacrifice of Jesus. You may find this hard to understand; the only approach to understanding it is by accepting what God pleases to make known. The word of scripture is that "the

wages of sin is death", Rom 6: 23. Jesus took the burden of sin upon Himself, bore the judgment of God upon it and went into death as bearing the penalty attached to sin. Paul also tells the Romans, however, that "...death has dominion over him no more" (chap 6: 9) and in His resurrection there is the evidence that sin no longer attaches to Him. Sin has been removed completely from before God. The moral obstacle, to which the marring of the vessel in the hand of the potter refers, has been removed and it can be made again in a way which pleases the potter.

I read in Luke 7 because I think that the scene in the house of Simon exemplifies the process through which the prophet was put. We are shown the house of the Pharisee, Jesus invited there, and a woman also there, but not invited. According to Simon the Pharisee, she was a sinner and Luke has already characterised her in this way. It was unthinkable that such a disreputable individual should be found in the house of a Pharisee; social convention was being turned completely on its head. However could this woman find it possible to act as she did? She did so because Jesus was there. We have considered the divine assessment of His distinctiveness in chapter 3 of Luke, the impact on heaven, might we say, of His life of obscurity, and in this chapter we see the exceptional power of the impact of this Person in the ordinary affairs of men. The hostility radiating from Simon and those with him would, in other circumstances, have been formidable but it was silent because of the extraordinary force of the presence of Jesus. For the woman, the power of this presence was powerfully attractive and more than sufficient to give her liberty to overcome the impediments which, in the absence of Jesus, would have been overwhelming.

Luke tells us that she took "an alabaster box of myrrh, and standing at his feet behind him weeping, began to wash his feet with tears; and she wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the myrrh", v 37,38). This was her service to the Man who had had the acclaim of heaven in chapter 3 and her perfect harmony with it is declared by her activity. In principle, everything she possessed was devotedly and intelligently bestowed on Him. She was silent. She mentioned nothing of her history to Jesus, nor did He raise any detail with her but, in anointing His feet with myrrh, she acknowledged that He must take a suffering way for her and she expressed how greatly she appreciated Him. Simon's self-righteous instincts could not be suppressed but he restrained the expression of them in the powerful presence of Jesus. Having had the

demonstration, just as Jeremiah had in the house of the potter, Simon was given a word. The word referred to two debtors and raised the question with Simon as to which of the creditor's two debtors would love him most. Jesus did not say to Simon, 'You saw what she did'. Rather, He went over the detail of the woman's activity towards Him by which she expressed the love of the forgiven five hundred pence debtor. She had not entered the house as one proud of her history. The position she took, standing behind Him weeping, was not that of someone who was proud of her history. This was a woman who was evidently repentant and this is one of the calls in the word of the glad tidings. Paul announced in Ephesus "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20: 21), and how clearly the woman's actions reflected both. Simon had expressed unease earlier because the woman was a sinner and Jesus concluded His word to Him with the clear statement that her moral condition was resolved. Jesus then turned to the woman and she received the word directly: "Thy sins are forgiven". The others who were at table have another question, again restrained in its expression, because it was clear to them that, if He was administering forgiveness of sins, He was taking the place of God. The woman's homage to Him made it evident that she was clear as to who He was. No word is offered to the questioners; His response is a further communication to the woman, "Thy faith has saved thee; go in peace".

So the vessel that was marred remained in the hand of the potter and we see the process by which it was made again according to the pleasure of the potter. My desire is that you will have some sense of personal encounter by faith with this extraordinary, immense Person and that you will have the sense of this word being addressed to you: "Thy faith has saved thee; go in peace." Wonderful, simple word, especially in a world of turmoil and conflict on every hand. If the whole world could have this, it would be the greatest transformation in history. This transformation will occur on the earth in a time yet to come, when the Lord Jesus will establish His rule on earth as Prince of Peace. With Jesus as your Lord, that rule of peace can be yours now. May it be so for His Name's sake.

Brechin
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