

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 62

May 2012

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LOVE ADAPTING ITSELF TO NEED

David B Robertson

Numbers 10: 33

1 Corinthians 10: 1-4

I have a simple but definite impression, dear brethren, about the way divine love would adapt itself to need. It is seen in many scriptures, for instance in John 4, where divine love adapted itself to meet the need of a poor sinful woman. I would like to say a brief word that might bring a touch of rest into our spirits. It says of the ark here, "And they set forward from the mountain of Jehovah and went three days' journey; and the ark of the covenant of Jehovah went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting-place for them". I believe that Christ Himself would come into this situation today in His own way and give a touch that would bring rest. The ark going before is a remarkable thing because it left its normal place! The normal place of the ark was in the midst of the encampment surrounded by military, priestly and levitical circles. The ark obviously left that place. It is the way that it is expressed typically, how divine love adapts itself to need. The ark is a type of the Lord Jesus. Think of where He is! We have sung of that. He is not only risen, but He is ascended and He is the Centre of a great system of glory. We may say great things are in His hand, and yet He would move into an occasion like this. It would be love adapting itself to our need. What are our needs? A need for comfort, a need for rest; and who can lead us into rest like the Lord Jesus Christ? He says, "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest", Matt 11: 28. I would say that to any burdened soul here today, that there is rest for you if you come to Christ. I believe that Christ would come into this occasion in His own inimitable way and give us a touch. He would lead us. He would lead us to see that the ark would secure rest for us. Think of that! What grace! What blessedness to understand the leading of the Lord Jesus! Glorious type of the Lord, the ark! That really sets out the glory and power of God. There is more than that in the movement here. There is divine love moving towards us today in order to lead us, so that we may find rest. Mr Darby's hymn says,

There is rest for the weary soul (hymn 85)

- and for every weary soul here, especially for those who are bereaved, and we are all bereaved, there is rest.

It is three days' journey, not an easy way. There were no roads, no way; it was the wilderness. We might say, 'How are we going to get on?'. How are things going to be? The answer is in the leading of Christ. That is the answer. In the earlier verses Moses slipped a little; he had wanted a child of the wilderness to lead them, but God Himself, typically, in Christ, moved. He moved out of His normal place to take this journey. Think of that in the three days' journey, and the people followed His lead! I trust we will be able to follow the leading of Christ. The people must have looked at the ark as it moved. No doubt it was carried, but it does not say so, just that the ark journeyed. It is the glorious power of grace through Christ in a display of divine love, searching out a resting place! I trust something of the ark comes into the occasion; I believe it has already come into it, some sense of the personal touch of Christ. There is nothing to compare with that. You could give a lecture of great eloquence, but what would it mean if Christ is not there? What would our meeting be if Christ did not come to it? We would be nothing more than traditionalists. But we are not traditionalists. We have a living faith in a living Man. We have sung of that and our hearts were stirred by it. That living Man has operated, coming into this scene in His own way to lead us, and to secure rest for our souls in a fresh way.

We come to 1 Corinthians 10, and I read of the rock that followed them. What a wonderful thing! Scriptures speak of that and says, "the rock was the Christ". Who else could it be? There is no doubt this suggestion flowed out of Exodus 17. It is not the idea of a stationary object, but it is a living matter. The rock is following them. It is a spiritual matter, and they all drank of it. The drinking of it brought refreshment. What is the effect on my spirit and yours of the departure of our beloved brother? At such a time maybe I have found rest and refreshment from a living Christ. It is a very touching matter. He would do that for every soul here. "And all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them". How beautiful, our Rock, who is the Christ! What is Christ able to give you in the way of spiritual drink? He gives living water. What a vital need there is to have a personal link with the Lord Jesus. He is bringing it home to us freshly, a vital need of a personal link with the Lord Jesus, that in and through Him we may find both rest and satisfaction.

I trust our beloved sister and the family, and all of us, know what it is to be led by the One who would secure rest for us and who would

provide spiritual drink for us. These two thoughts were in my mind, laid upon my spirit, that we might find rest and that we might find satisfaction as it is only found in Christ.

May God bless the word!

Grangemouth

4th August 2011

(At the meeting for the burial of Mr William Lamont)

THE DIVINE END

Jim D Gray

Ecclesiastes 7: 8 (to “beginning”); 12: 1 (to “youth”), 13, 14

Luke 22: 37

1 Corinthians 1: 4-8

Philippians 1: 6, 9-11

1 Corinthians 15: 24-28

It will be evident that I desire, with the Lord's help, to speak a little about the end; not a gloomy end but a gladsome end.

Firstly I want to speak about Solomon. He says, “Better is the end of a thing than its beginning”. Now, Solomon was king in Jerusalem. He was blessed with wisdom from God and he ruled in that wisdom for a time. I would think he wrote this book at the end of his life. He was able to enjoy everything in nature to the full and, beyond the full, you might say, gratify every desire; then he writes this book. It is a book that delivers you from life under the sun. There is another life than the life under the sun, far more satisfying, but here he says, “Better is the end of a thing than its beginning”. I just want to caution everyone. Is that true, true of my pathway? It finally became untrue of Solomon's pathway. Solomon is looked on as a type, but I am not speaking in type just now. He magnifies all that gratified his heart, and it resulted in him being influenced by those around him to introduce idol worship in Israel. That is what he did, and God, as a result, came in in judgment on him and divided the kingdom after his death, took it away and rent the kingdom so that his son had two tribes and the other ten tribes went to Jeroboam. It was not a very fine end, was it? But I think in Ecclesiastes he comes to a judgement of his course.

In chapter 12 he states at the beginning, “And remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth”. It is a good word. An old brother I knew in Saltcoats used to say, 'You cannot bend a tree when it is old; you have to bend it when it is young'. Come into subjection to Christ, dear younger brethren, when you are young! Come into subjection to Him! That is, you delight in His will. Come to Christ as your Saviour. “And remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth”. You are going to have to meet your Maker. Men speak about it lightly, but it is going to be true. They are all going to meet their Maker.

Then he comes to this matter: “Let us hear the end of the whole

matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments”. I think Solomon came to that. I would like to think that Solomon personally came to that, came to a judgment of his whole course of departure from God, and came to this: “Let us hear the end of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of man”. Personally, from this point of view, he ended well, but he left a legacy that was disastrous. We do not want to do that.

I pass over to the other matter which I want to speak about, the divine end. I will begin with Luke 22. I am seeking to impart some impressions I have had. The Lord Jesus had a beginning in relation to this life. He is a divine Person, but He had a beginning in relation to this life. He came in as a babe:

O strange yet fit beginning
Of all that life of woe (Hymn 188).

He knew what the sorrows of humanity were, but the time came for Him to depart. Scripture says, “his time had come that he should depart out of this world to the Father”. That is John's gospel (chap 13: 1); but Luke does not present that; he presents another view of Christ. We went through Luke's gospel in our own place, a Man available for men. Blessed Man, available in grace for men! He is still available yet, but here He says, most touchingly, “And he was reckoned with the lawless: for also the things concerning me have an end”. I suppose that end is the fulfilment. Another has said the cross is 'the centre of the history of eternity', JND Synopsis, vol 3 p361. That is a remarkable statement, the centre of the history of eternity. Everything hinges on Him. All that I am going to speak about after this hinges on Christ on the cross and His work on the cross: “the things concerning me have an end”. How feeling it must have been, how touching, to hear the Lord Jesus say of Himself, “And he was reckoned with the lawless”. Isaiah said it before that, many hundreds of years before that, prophetically, but here is a blessed Man saying He, Himself "was reckoned with the lawless". Isaiah says a little further on He “made intercession for the transgressors”, chap 53: 12. On the cross He “made intercession for the transgressors”. “He was reckoned with the lawless”; He was crucified with lawless men, by lawless men, but He says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23: 34): He “made intercession for the transgressors“. Another has said, on the cross the thief was suffering for his own sins, and Christ was suffering for the thief's sins. That is the Lord Jesus.

“For also the things concerning me have an end”, but what was the end? That God might be glorified. The end was that the matter of sin and of sins would be finished and dealt with completely and the man that sinned would go out of sight; so, “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”, 1 Cor 15: 3, 4. Scriptures are brought in in regard to His death and His resurrection, but it says “he was buried”, a salutary matter to grasp hold of. The line of humanity that had displeased God and had been lawless was ended in the burial of Christ. The atonement involved the burial of Christ, completed there, finished there, all the history of our sins finished in the grave of Christ. He “has been raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father”, Rom 6: 4. What an end! He glorified God in His death, and then was exalted above. It was not man's end. Man thought they had finished with Him when they saw Him on the cross and when He died, but it was not God's end. The things concerning Christ had an end: “he was reckoned with the lawless”. How affecting: let it sink into your soul that the Lord Jesus should say that! What it was for Him, a holy Person, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners” (Heb 7: 26), to be “reckoned with the lawless” and have to declare on the cross that God had forsaken Him! That was included in the end. But then He was “raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father”. A new hope opens up, a new vista. You know, young friend, the end that we are going to speak about finally is when time ceases to be. Time is a creation. “Even from eternity to eternity thou art God”, Ps 90: 2. God came into time. Mr Darby said that it presented itself to him in this way; that all time was a kind of parenthesis in eternity, Letters vol 3 p213. The Lord Jesus came into that parenthesis, into time, as a Person, a blessed Man, and a Man who is going to live for ever, a Man that we delight in as believers, a Man we are going to delight in, a Man we are going to be like: “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is”, 1 John 3: 2. What a prospect! What an end for the believer!

Well, on the way to that you get Corinthians and this remarkable statement by Paul, “so that ye come short in no gift, awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall also confirm you to the end, unimpeachable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ”. God is going to do that. God came into the life of these Corinthian saints, and they were converted, and they had the gift of the Spirit; but they departed from the dignity and the characteristics of one who had the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were not characteristically spiritual persons. But Paul

says, before he enters into the state of the Corinthian saints, and there was a bad state, 'In the day of our Lord Jesus Christ you are going to be there "unimpeachable"'. What does that mean? You are going to be without reproach. What a thing to say! They were squabbling and fighting amongst themselves as the following verses state, but Paul says, first of all, 'You are going to be presented before God in the day of our Lord Jesus - that is when He comes to reign - "unimpeachable". There will be no charge against you'. What a thing to say! I am not accusing anyone here of fighting or squabbling, but the scripture speaks about the state of this locality, Corinth, and that is what they were doing. Paul introduces this thought about being unimpeachable. When it would be read, what would they think? 'Wait a minute', they would say, 'We are not in that state of unimpeachability now. We are not without reproach now.' The Corinthians were certainly not without reproach, but Paul says to them 'In the day of our Lord Jesus Christ you will be without reproach'. Why? Because He "bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 24. They are all gone. At the judgment seat of Christ, if a Corinthian saint came there and he had never adjusted these matters, he would "be saved, but so as through the fire", 1 Cor 3: 15. The Lord may have to say to him, 'I bore your sins in My body on the tree and you know it. Everything is gone. Your behaviour in life after your conversion was not approved of God, it fell far short of that; but through God's salvation "your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake"', 1 John 2: 12. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin", 1 John 1: 7.

If you have a true link with Christ, young friend and older friend, your behaviour does not alter your final destination, but it will alter the Lord's commendation to you. But I say to you this much: if we do not adjust ourselves in relation to being "unimpeachable" now, and we wait until the judgment seat, we will miss out in formation spiritually after Christ. God has intended that the exercises on the way lead to spirituality, lead to the development of features of Christ in each one of us on the way, and we will get the gain of them. Every Corinthian saint who had adjusted his ways in the light of the death of Christ and the work of Christ would come into the commendation, "Well done", when he meets Christ at the judgment seat, Luke 19: 17. Paul opens this up to reach the conscience of these persons, to reach the conscience of the Corinthians, when he says, 'In the day of the Lord Jesus Christ you will be there "unimpeachable"'. You are in the presence of God now. It is God's grace. He says, "in respect of the grace of God given to you in

Christ Jesus”, v 4. They had received the grace of God. How had they handled that? How had they lived in relation to the grace of God? At the time he wrote they were not “unimpeachable”; they were not without reproach. But he says, 'In the day of the Lord Jesus you will be without reproach'. Why? Because of the work of atonement of the Lord Jesus. The reading of this passage became a lever in the hearts of the Corinthian saints, before he went on to show that they were certainly not without reproach, and caused them to judge themselves. Let the matter of unimpeachability finally, if we are not in line with it now, cause us to judge ourselves.

Now Philippians is a happier matter. These saints were going on well. Happy conditions, brotherly conditions, sisterly conditions, in large measure existed at Philippi, “each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves”, chap 2: 3. Happy matter! Happy fellowship! And he says, “having confidence of this very thing, that he who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day”. They had fellowship with the gospel. That is, they had fellowship with the gospel and all that related to the going forth of the gospel, the reproach of the Christ and all that related to it in this world, despised persons. They were in fellowship with that. Publicly they were Christians. They were known as that in their city and amongst themselves. He says, “he who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day”, and then he says again, “that ye may judge of and approve the things that are more excellent, in order that ye may be pure and without offence for Christ's day, being complete as regards the fruit of righteousness”. Keep up the good work, dear brethren! Keep up the good relationships! In Philippians, salvation is at the end of the road. You are going to get salvation, from this point of view, when you reach heaven, when you reach Christ. That is how it is presented: it is all at the end of the road. You get help on the way. 'I take the heav'nly road', Hymn 228. They are on the heavenly road. They are drawing their resources from heaven, but they have to keep up the good work until Christ comes; so He has nothing to rebuke them about. They were “unimpeachable”, I believe, at the time. They had completed the “good work”: “unimpeachable”. What a joy to heaven to see believers set together and “unimpeachable” now, without reproach now. He says, 'You keep that up!'. He says, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”, chap 2: 12. You are working it out along with others in your place, “your own salvation”, kept from the world, kept for Christ, and, in the end of the day, looking

forward to that body of glory, "into conformity to his body of glory", chap 3: 21. What a prospect! I encourage us all here with all the pressures on the way, whatever they are, if relations are good in your locality, and I believe they are, keep it up! Keep it up! Patience is needed. Endurance is needed. The way is still continuing in God's hands. The testimony is still going on. He has not closed the day of grace yet. But you need help on the way. Paul says, 'I am convinced that that good work He has begun in you He will complete unto Jesus Christ's day'. What a completion! The Lord will say to you, "Well done, thou good bondman". What a commendation at the judgment seat of the Christ!

Well, then in Corinthians - I only touch on these things - the Lord Jesus Christ at the end "gives up the kingdom to him who is God and Father". What a moment! I believe it is the last act in time. I think this matter of the Lord committing the kingdom to the Father is the last act in time. It is right on the verge of eternity. What a moment! You will be there, friend, if you belong to Christ! You will see Him do it. You will be there when He hands over the kingdom to the Father. In the day to come when He reigns over the earth, it is the mediatorial kingdom. He is reigning on behalf of God and in that time, and in the gospel time too, He subdues persons. You and I are among the persons who have been subjugated, brought into subjection, in time, for the praise of God, but He will do it finally in judgment. It says, "when he shall have annulled all rule and all authority and power". He will have dealt with the last rebellion on earth; that is at the end of the millennium, Rev 20: 10. The Lord has dealt with that at this point. He has dealt with the wicked dead. It says, "The last enemy that is annulled is death". He has dealt with that. The great white throne is past before this; He has dealt with that. Persons who died in their sins, raised in their sins, have a place in the lake of fire. What an end! He has brought all things into subjection under His feet, then He is going to hand over the kingdom to the Father, and He Himself is going to be in subjection to the Father.

He was in subjection to the Father in His lifetime here, and He is going to take that same subjection in eternity; so you can understand the Lord saying in His prayer, "thy kingdom come", Matt 6: 10. He is anticipating this moment when the Father would be supreme and take over rule: so it is the Father's kingdom. Christ's mediatorial kingdom ceases and ceases for ever. We will be there, dear brethren.

Everything will be in subjection to God. It says, "then the Son also himself shall be placed in subjection to him who put all things in

subjection to him, that God may be all in all". He is placed in subjection to the Father as a Man. When Christ hands over the kingdom to the Father, He takes a place in subjection, Man in His true place. We are in our true place when we are in subjection to Christ, in subjection to God. And then it says, "that God may be all in all". What a moment, dear brethren. Christ has His place in that as a divine Person. It is beyond our understanding, but not beyond our appreciation of divine Persons, the Father, the Son and the Spirit, "that God may be all in all". The new heavens and the new earth are there. There is a sphere in which God is going to rule and time is going to be ended. What a prospect! We shall have bodies of glory like to His own body of glory: what an end, the divine end!

May it cheer our hearts, may it encourage us on the way, to be like the Philippians and continue in patience and earnestness and desire and sincerity, to be on the path, pleasing to the Lord Jesus; and if, indeed, my heart is like the Corinthians, to adjust myself in accordance with that divine word. No matter what I do, if I belong to Christ I am going to be "unimpeachable". What a work Christ undertook! Every redeemed creature there will be "unimpeachable": not one will be able to be charged with anything because of the work of Christ. Let us be in accord with the work of the Lord Jesus and appreciation of what He has done for us and walk here as guided and helped by Him for His Name's sake!

Glasgow

3rd September 2011

ON FIRE FOR CHRIST

Alan J McSeveney

John 5: 33-35

Luke 1: 15, 18; 3: 2-8, 15-20

Matthew 11: 2-6

Mark 6: 17-29

The great need of the day is for persons to be on fire for Christ. It is not a day for half-heartedness; it is not a day for lukewarmness. My Saviour deserves everything from me. He loved me and gave Himself for me; so I ought to live for His glory. We need to be on fire for Christ.

John the baptist was one who was on fire for Christ. I know that a little one in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than him (Matt 11:11), but I want to submit to you that we can learn much from John the baptist. The testimony of the Lord Jesus is that John the baptist was "the burning and shining lamp". He was a man who was on fire for Christ, and we will find in the scriptures that we have read that characteristically his life was lived for Christ's glory. It is not that he did not make mistakes; it is not that his faith did not waver, but characteristically he was out and out for Christ. If a man can do that who did not have the indwelling Spirit, then we as having the indwelling Spirit should be out and out for Christ.

The first thing is that we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. With John the baptist, that was a miracle. He was "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb", Luke 1: 15. You were not filled with the Holy Spirit from your mother's womb. You needed to repent of your sins first and believe the glad tidings, before God could give you the Holy Spirit. The moment when God gave you the Holy Spirit, you would normally be filled with the Holy Spirit, but we also need to be *continually* filled with the Holy Spirit. Please bear in mind that is a divine commandment. Paul says to the Ephesians, "And be not drunk with wine, in which is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit", Eph 5: 18. I have to own how much I have disobeyed that divine commandment, but my desire now is to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. How can we be filled with the Holy Spirit? We need to go into our closets and shut the door. We need to kneel before Christ. We need to confess that we are not what we ought to be. We need to believe that there is more to Christianity than what we have realised, and not leave our closet until we are filled with the Holy Spirit. If you have to wait an hour or ten hours, stay there until you are filled with the Holy Spirit. I tell you, dear friends,

your life will never be the same. You will be on fire for Christ. He will be everything to you, and the rest of your life you will live for His glory.

John the baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, but the rest of his life he made way for the Holy Spirit. Let us also remember that John the baptist died in his early thirties; so he made way for the Holy Spirit when he was a young man. In verse 80 of Luke 1, we find that as a young man he was in the deserts, and I tell you, dear soul, you will be nothing for God unless you have a desert experience. There needs to be a time when you get alone with God. There needs to be a time when you turn your back on even legitimate things. You need to wait on God, and minister to God, and you need to allow God to change your character. There are many younger persons here, and older persons too, and we all need to learn this lesson. I wonder if you feel lonely. I can understand it if you feel lonely. I have often felt lonely myself, but I am going to tell you what the cure for loneliness is. The cure for loneliness is to get alone with God, because once you get alone with God you become satisfied with God, and you find something in God's presence you cannot find anywhere else. That is when you begin to get a bit of power into your soul. That is when God begins to train you for His service, and it is that time alone with God that helps you to stand alone for God. John the baptist was in the deserts so that he could be continually filled with the Holy Spirit, and if we are going to be continually filled with the Spirit, we need to get alone with God. Half an hour in the morning is not enough. Ten minutes in the evening is not enough. We need to commit ourselves unreservedly to getting alone with God. Perhaps God has arranged your circumstances so that you might get alone with Him. You are not in a place where there are many brethren, and I can understand that being difficult, but my dear soul, you can get alone with God, and you will find alone in your closet with God something that you cannot get anywhere else. Will you accept the desert? Will you accept what it is to be alone with God? Will you set yourself from this day to pray in God's presence and remain there until He speaks to you? That will form your character. That will make you a man of God or a woman of God.

John the baptist "grew and was strengthened in spirit; and he was in the deserts until the day of his shewing to Israel". There has never been a day like this when God needs men and women who are going to be on fire for Christ. God has something to say to this world, and He is not giving that message to angels: He is giving it to men. The Western world has largely turned its back on God, and yet you know

Christ as your Saviour, you have confessed Him as Lord. Perhaps God has placed you here to testify for Him. You say, 'I am young'. So was John the baptist. It is not a question of being young; it is a question of getting alone with God. John the baptist may have only served publicly for six months, but he was in preparation for thirty years. His private life was greater than his public life, and I wonder as a preacher whether that is so with me. I am humbled by the time brethren have spent travelling here. I ask myself, have I spent enough time in praying in private so that a word might come to the brethren? There are too many meetings that do not have the weight that they should have. I feel for myself there are too many meetings when we are just going through the motions. Dear brethren, we have come here to meet God, and it is the responsibility of His servants to be alone with Him, so that they have a word for God's people. You could read ministry, and that is not wrong, but I would say this to you, if you pray for an hour for every address you read, you will not get through the ministry so quickly, but you will grow far more in your soul before God. Prayer is the great thing. It is prayer that gives power, and I say again, we need power in our meetings. We need persons to be convicted in our meetings. If I am not convicted in my soul as a preacher, how can I expect those who are listening to me to be convicted? John the baptist was a burning and shining lamp. He was a man who was on fire for Christ, and what underlay that was his private life before God.

Well, God did bring him forward. He came forth as the forerunner. Perhaps he only preached for six months, but what months they were. There were two things that characterised his preaching. The first thing was that he preached repentance, and the second thing was that he exalted Christ. If we are going to preach rightly, we need to be repentance preachers, and we need to exalt Christ. To preach repentance is not easy because it demands a moral answer in those who hear. Not everyone likes being told to repent but if men do not repent, they cannot be forgiven: so a preacher needs to preach repentance. What does repentance mean? Repentance means that a person needs to accept God's judgment upon the whole course of their life and turn their back on sin. I might think I am getting along very well, but what does God think about my life? That is the test, dear friend, and the preacher who will preach repentance is preaching to glorify God. God "enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent", Acts 17: 30. It has been said that the preacher does not deliver a compromise; the preacher delivers an ultimatum. Men must repent, and *all* men must

repent. You will notice how unbiased John the baptist was in his preaching. He preached to the crowd, he preached to soldiers, he preached to tax-gatherers, he preached to royalty, and the same basic message was that they should repent. It has been well said that preaching is not a boys' game; it requires a man to preach, it requires courage to preach, and it requires the fullness of the Holy Spirit to preach. John the baptist was on fire for Christ, and if he became biased in his preaching, he would lose that fire, the Spirit would be quenched and he would not glorify God. God is no respecter of persons. It does not matter to God if you are royalty or a tax-gatherer. There is the same message for everyone: they need to repent. Even the Jews needed to repent although they had Abraham as their father, but they needed to repent as well. It is not just drunkards who need to repent; those brought up in Christian households also need to repent. God is enjoining all men everywhere to repent, and I would say to the preachers here, preach repentance whoever is listening. Persons' souls depend upon it, and one day you will need to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ and give an account of your preaching. Brethren might tell you your preaching is good. What does the Lord think about your preaching? What does the Lord think about this address? I will need to answer before the judgment-seat of Christ for this address. Will this address merit Christ's approval, or will I suffer loss, 1 Cor 3: 5?

Oh, we need to preach repentance, but when preaching repentance remember to exalt Christ. You know, it is the goodness of God that leads men to repent, and the goodness of God was expressed in the giving of His Son. If God loved me so much as to give His Son for me, I am only too willing to repent. God did not save His best, He gave Him. God did not save what was most precious to Him, He gave Him. If He gave His Son for me, then I should repent of my sins. Every preacher ought to exalt Christ. Do not try to make up a sermon. It is all Christ! Make much of Him! He is the Saviour. You will find in the preachings of the Acts in chapter 2 with Peter, and in chapter 13 with Paul, that when they preach, everything leads up to Christ. There is no one like Him. It is a wonderful privilege to mention His Name. Every preacher ought to exalt Him, lift Him up as the Saviour, the Saviour of sinners. John the baptist was a man who was full of the Holy Spirit. He was a man who was on fire for Christ. He was a man who preached repentance. He was a man who exalted Christ. John the baptist only preached for six months and then Herod put him in prison.

That brings me to Matthew 11. There is only one perfect Man in Scripture, the Man Christ Jesus. Even John the baptist, great man that he was, had a time when his faith wavered. There was a time when the fullness of the Spirit receded within him. There was a time when his faith was shaken, and so he says, "Art *thou* the coming one? or are we to wait for another?". This is the man who had exalted Christ, and now he is the man who is doubting Christ. Why is this left in Scripture? Is it not because we have known the same thing in our lives? Has your faith ever been shaken? Mine has. John the baptist was not doing anything wrong, he was exalting Christ, yet God brought him into circumstances where his faith wavered. Maybe you are in those circumstances now. Maybe you are saying with another, "Why am I thus?", Gen 25: 22. 'Why have these things befallen me? I do not understand why God would do this to me'. Your faith is shaken. What a thing that is. John the baptist was in the prison. The prison is a place of testing. The prison is a place of discipline. Prisons in those days were so difficult that I can see why John the baptist's faith would waver. What was God doing in John the baptist's life? God was helping John the baptist to see what he was in the flesh. John the baptist had no power in himself. The only power that he had was given to him by God. God can bring us down, He can bring us very low, and He can humble us in a way that only He can humble us until we learn that the power is in God alone. John the baptist's faith wavered, but that is not what he was characteristically. Characteristically he was a man who was on fire for Christ, and as he had been in the past, so he would be in the future; indeed he was stronger when he faced martyrdom. You know, dear friend, God has not finished with you. He has something more for you in your life, and if God is going to leave you here on this earth any longer, it will be that you might glorify Him in a new way. John the baptist went out of this scene in a blaze of glory. He went out as a martyr. Would you be prepared to die for Christ? There are persons in this world at the present time that are prepared to die for Christ. There are persons in the past few years who have been martyred for Christ. Christ meant so much to them that they laid their lives down.

John the baptist recovered, and he was a martyr. How do I know that? Well, in Mark 6 it says that Herod heard John the baptist, and did many things that John told him. Now I judge that Mark 6 is after Matthew 11. John the baptist is fully recovered, and the same preaching that he preached on the banks of the Jordan, he preached in the prison cell. He will not alter his preaching for Herod, he will not alter his preaching for Herodias. He will preach repentance just the same

and Herod, weak person that he was, was prepared to listen to him until the feast day in Mark 6. I do not want to say too much about that feast day, it is too sorrowful to see the way that God's servant was martyred, too sorrowful to see the way that a faithful man died. We have read the scripture, and I am not going to read it again, but I am going to say this. We should avoid the set of circumstances in Mark 6 at all cost. Herod had listened to John the baptist and "having heard him, did many things, and heard him gladly" but he lost any conviction he had gained under John the baptist's preaching through the circumstances in Mark 6. That is what this world can do to us. May God preserve us from these things.

What it must have meant that day to John the baptist when the guard came to his cell door. The guard took him out, raised the axe, and when the axe came down, John the baptist was beheaded. That was John the baptist's entrance into glory. He died for being faithful to Christ, and yet the sequel is very, very sad in this scripture. John the baptist's head was taken to Herodias, and his disciples took his body and buried it. You might say, 'What a sad end', but that is not the end. There is going to come a time when the dead in Christ shall rise and John the baptist's head will be reunited with his body. John the baptist will have a body of glory. He will put on incorruptibility. He will go up at the first resurrection. He is going to sit down with the twenty-four elders. In Revelation 4 and 5, they include the New Testament saints and the Old Testament saints; so even though John the baptist is not part of the assembly, he is part of the twenty-four elders. Those twenty-four elders have crowns, and John the baptist will have a crown. Do you know what John the baptist will do with that crown? He will cast it at the feet of Christ, and as he was on earth, so shall he be in glory, exalting Christ, making much of Christ.

My dear friend, John the baptist was a man who was on fire for Christ. Are you going to give your life to Christ? I am not preaching the gospel; but I am preaching to believers. Are you going to present your body a living sacrifice, Rom 12: 1? If he is not Lord of all he is not Lord at all. Do you want the fullness of the Holy Spirit? Then lay your body down on the altar and give yourself entirely over to Christ.

May the Lord bless the word.

Endbach

24th September 2011

JUSTIFIED IN THE POWER OF HIS BLOOD

Jim R Walkinshaw

1 John 1: 7 (from 'and the blood')

Romans 5: 9, 10

Ephesians 2: 12, 13

Hebrews 10: 19, 20 (to 'veil')

1 John 5: 6-8

1 Corinthians 11: 24-26

It will be noticed that the scriptures I have read make reference to the blood of Jesus. I felt led in this gospel preaching to draw attention to that; and desire that we might lay hold in our hearts of the blessing that is available on the basis of the blood of Jesus. There are many scriptures that could have been read; so I make no apology for reading more than perhaps is usual. What I have particularly in mind is that we might, first of all, come into the experience and the joy of salvation and to see how that depends upon the blood of Jesus and what it has secured. Then we have the thought of justification, and what peace and stability it brings to the soul; that we might realise as Paul says in the Romans, "having been now justified in the power of his blood". Having been justified, as the teaching continues, we are reconciled and then brought into the very presence of God Himself. These are very wonderful matters that all rest on what has been secured in the shedding of the precious blood of Jesus.

The first scripture that we have read is very plain, "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin". Have you had some experience of that, dear brother, dear sister, in your own soul? Have you had some experience of feeling the need of salvation, of feeling the distance that has come in through sin, of feeling the condemnation that rests upon man because of sin? We can tell you that the answer to that is in the precious blood of Jesus. As the hymn writer says,

Shed for rebels, shed for sinners,
Shed for me. (Hymn 167)

The main thing, perhaps the first thing, to get established is that the blood of Jesus has satisfied God; it has satisfied God in relation to every claim of His throne, every claim that His righteousness required, and everything that His holiness required. The blood of Jesus satisfies God in respect of that. So you remember another scripture that we

might have read in Exodus, “And they shall take of the blood, and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel”, chap 12: 7. On that dark night when judgment came across the whole land of Egypt, God says, “when I see the blood” (v 13) - “when I see the blood, I will pass over you”. What that must have meant to those Israelites at that time, knowing that they had put the blood on the doorposts and on the lintel, and hearing through Moses prophetically the words of God, “when I see the blood, I will pass over you”. What I love about that scripture, if you read it carefully, is that you will see that God says, “And the blood shall be for you ...”. The blood is for you on the doorposts and on the lintel. And then He says, “and when I see the blood, I will pass over you”. That is, you see that God is satisfied. He says “when I see the blood”. If you are sheltering under the precious blood of Jesus, God says, “I will pass over you”; but He also says it is for you, and in the gospel dear friend, dear young friend, we can tell you that the blood of Jesus is available for you. The work that Jesus accomplished upon Calvary's tree can be the way of your salvation and “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin”.

A little later on in this epistle, if you read through the next few verses, it speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ. It says, “Jesus Christ the righteous; and *he* is the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world”, chap 2: 2. What does propitiation mean? It means that what Jesus has done has satisfied the claims of God to such an extent that God can come out and offer forgiveness to you. If you are prepared to accept the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, you can know the power of what He has accomplished on Calvary's tree. You can know the power of His precious blood that cleanses us from all sin. It can do that, you see, because the claims of God have been satisfied.

In Romans, we see the blood spoken of as the power for various things. Again I would suggest to the younger ones, and all of us, that we read the verses before and after where we have read. I picked out these verses in an attempt to be brief in getting the point across that is in my mind. You will see how the love of God enters into what has been done. It says, “but God commends *his* love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us”, v 8. But you see the point is that there is power in what has been secured and that power is for justification. So you may feel your need of a Saviour and we would desire in the gospel that God might bring conviction to hearts as to their lost estate. The apostle says a little later on in this book, “the wages of sin is death” (chap 6: 23), and how evident the truth of that is, as we look at this world

in which we are, “the wages of sin is death”; but then he speaks of “the act of favour of God, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”. I want to speak to you about the “act of favour of God, eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord”. So what is envisaged in this scripture here is justification. A little earlier on in the epistle the apostle has been speaking about God's righteousness; he has been speaking about how that is available to us; how God is able to offer that righteously, and he speaks about the mercy seat which God has set forth through faith in His blood. That would be the side that we have been speaking of, that salvation is available through faith in the precious blood of Jesus; but then it speaks here of being “justified in the power of his blood”. It is very difficult to find an example of that in this world's system of things. If a man comes to court, and is found innocent of the things for which he was charged, then he can leave the court without a stain on his character in relation to that charge. The judge can pronounce him innocent. However, if a man has been found guilty of an offence, then the law has no way in which he can be justified righteously. The hymn writer says,

God could not pass the sinner by,
Justice demands that he should die (Hymn 357).

You see, the righteousness of God cannot pass by sin. So you might say to me, 'how then can a sinner be justified?'. The answer comes in this verse which we have read: “having been now justified in the power of his blood”. There is a consequence to that, it says, “we shall be saved by him from wrath”. The preacher is not here exactly to preach the wrath that is to come, although that is a terrible reality for those that refuse the gospel. For those who refuse God's offer of grace and mercy in the gospel, all that remains is wrath; the wrath that is to come. This is a very sobering thing to consider; but the one that has faith and trust in Jesus can enter into the joy and the peace and the stability of what justification means, in the power of His blood. Now what that means is that when you are a believer what was due to you, the sentence that was due to you and the judgment that was due to you, has been borne. It is not that it has been passed over. It is not, speaking carefully and reverently, that God has just passed it by. It is not as though He has just turned over another leaf in relation to your history and mine and your sins and mine. Men do that. They speak of amnesties, and prisoners are released from jail, and things like that. It is not like that; the judgment and the penalty that was due to you have been borne, have

been paid for, have been meted out. The wonder of the gospel is that the One who has borne it all is the One that is your Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ. He has borne the judgment, and the witness to that is that His precious blood has been shed, meaning that death has come in. That blessed One, the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who came from the heights of glory, the One who came into this earth here as a lowly babe, the One who, as the apostle says, "did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself", (Phil 2: 6) was found here in figure as a man and as here He became "obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross", v 8. The way that the Lord Jesus went involved Him taking on the great question of sin and sins, that had brought such offence against the holy claims of the throne of God, and if your faith and your trust is in Him and in His precious blood, you can say with the apostle, "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 24. You think of what that meant for Him. It speaks of God setting Him "forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood", Rom 3: 25. That meant that Jesus had to come here and He came to die; He came here in obedience to the will and the pleasure of God. He was here entirely sin apart. He was here entirely pleasing to his God and Father. He was here for the good of man, and yet as we were reminded earlier today, He was rejected, He was despised, He was spat upon, He was nailed upon a cross, even though Pilate who was there sitting on the judgment seat brought him out and gave testimony to His being without fault. He says, "I find in him no fault whatever", John 19: 4. That was what Pilate said to the crowds; yet nevertheless that blessed One was led to the cross, and He was nailed there. He hung there and He was subjected to the ridicule, to the derision, to the despising, the spitting, the buffeting, all that man could heap upon Him. He became, as the apostle said, "obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross". You think of that, the worst and cruellest death that man could devise, involving, as we are taught, the question of the curse. He was despised and He was rejected and He hung there - He hung there, the sinless One. He hung there, despised and rejected of men, but what He went through at the hands of men was not sufficient to justify one sin or to justify one sinner. It involved more than that; it involved those three hours of darkness in which that blessed sinless One, "Him who knew not sin", was "made sin for us", 2 Cor 5: 21. You think of those three hours of darkness, when darkness came across the whole land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. In those three hours of darkness, God's wrath and God's judgment in

relation to sin and sins was poured out upon the head of that sinless One. "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us". You think of what it meant for Jesus to go that way. We can only get some small impression of it, the enormity of that mighty transaction that was wrought out in those three hours of darkness, when that blessed One hung there and God's wrath was poured out upon His head. During those three hours of darkness He says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", Matt 27: 46. As made sin there, God turned His face from Him. What a terrible thing, and yet how necessary it was that the judgment of sin should be meted out and that it should be exhausted; and that the holy claims of God's throne should be met. All was met in that offering, in that supreme offering, when that blessed sinless One was made sin for us. At the end of those three hours of darkness He uttered a loud cry and delivered up His spirit, v 50. The Lord Jesus went into death; not only was the question of sins met to the eternal and entire satisfaction of God, but the man that sinned has been removed in judgment forever from before the eye of God. So in that way, justification is available to you in the power of the blood of Jesus. John says in relation to that, the soldiers came along and they were going to break the legs of the persons that were on the cross. How cruel that was. They broke their legs to hasten their death; but when they came to Jesus it says, "they saw that he was already dead" (John 19: 33), and the soldier pierced his side in hatred. It says, "immediately there came out blood and water", v 34. John says, "he who saw it bears witness, and his witness is true", v 35. The witness is there, you see, the precious blood of Jesus that flowed from His dead side. It is through the power of that precious blood we can know justification and we can be saved by Him from wrath. How wonderful the gospel is. Is He your Saviour? Can you put yourself in these things that the preacher is speaking of? Do you know what it is to be justified? That is, that what was due to you has been borne entirely by Another, and you can walk free because the judgment has been born by Jesus. How wonderful that is and because of that the apostle goes on to speak of being "reconciled to God" and he can speak of being "saved in the power of his life". What wonderful things these are. One does not have the ability nor the time to go into the detail of it, and there are those here that could bring it out better than I can, but just that we might have some impression in our hearts of what has been secured for the believer through the precious blood of Jesus, justified in the power of His blood.

So we find in Hebrews that we can enter into the very presence

of God, as it says, “by the blood of Jesus, the new and living way”. How wonderful that is. The sinner can know the joy and the peace of salvation, and he can enter into the stability of being justified, of knowing that every claim has been met. The enemy would seek to disturb souls in relation to that. The enemy would seek to get into hearts of men that have their faith in Jesus, and point to various things and bring in doubts. You -

Can point to the atoning blood
And say, This made my peace with God. (Hymn 357)

You can know the stability of being justified in the power of His blood, and you can know the joy of what it is to be brought in nearness to God Himself “by the blood of Jesus, the new and living way”. In the old dispensation, as we are often told, there was the holy of holies, which suggested the divine presence, and the priest could only go in there once a year. It was not open to the common people. The priest could go in there once a year and then, as it says, he went in with blood not his own (Heb 9), but the wonder of what is for the believer is that you can enter into the presence of God at any time. That is a mark of the efficacy of what the Lord Jesus has secured, that the way is open now “into the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, the new and living way”.

And the witness to that is the Holy Spirit. That is why I read in 1 John 5, because “it is the Spirit”, it says here, “that bears witness, for the Spirit is the truth”. He is another wonderful blessing that we can speak to you about in the gospel. If you know what it is to have your sins forgiven through faith in the Saviour, through putting your faith and trust in what He has done and in the shedding of His precious blood, if you know what it is to be justified and point to what He has done as bearing what was due to you, if you know what it is to be brought into the nearness of God, the Holy Spirit is available, given consequent upon the exaltation of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is available to bring the witness to the believer in relation to all these things, not only the witness but the present and current enjoyment of them. Do you know what it is to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? We were speaking about that earlier and how we might know that we have the gift of the Spirit. It is that you find the things of the Lord Jesus attractive to you. When His precious blood is spoken of, you find something in your heart that is attracted to it; when we speak of justification, when we speak of reconciliation, when we speak of being brought into nearness to God, the Holy Spirit would make these things attractive to us. He would bear witness in the

hearts and souls of the believer as to the truth of these precious things. How wonderful the gospel is!

What we are presenting to you are things that are real and living and they are living because they are centred in a risen and living Saviour. We have spoken of Him going into death. We have spoken of Him shedding His precious blood and laying the great basis whereby God can come out in blessing. Indeed, you will remember that the scripture records at that time “the veil of the temple was rent in two” (Matt 27: 51); that is, that God has now come out in blessing to men. But you see more than that, the witness to God's satisfaction with the work of Jesus is that He has raised Him from among the dead. He has set Him at His right hand in glory, a Prince and a Saviour; and consequent upon His exaltation the Spirit has come to link our hearts with the Lord Jesus where He is above. God has seen to it that that blessed One is being proclaimed throughout this earth as a Saviour. As we have already said, “*he* is the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world”. I think that is a very wonderful verse and gives confidence, I believe, to the preacher. Wherever the preaching goes forth throughout this earth and, in God's goodness, the Name of Jesus will be announced, every one that puts their faith and trust in Him can know the joy and peace of their sins being forgiven, of knowing what it is to be justified, being able to hold their head up as it were and being brought into nearness to God and the witness to it, the power of it being known in the blessed Holy Spirit, the Gift consequent upon the exultation of Jesus on high.

So I just close with this reference in Corinthians because it is a very practical matter in relation to the breaking of bread as we speak of it. I just thought of this in relation to the blood because this is something that the believer in Jesus can do for Him. There is so much that He has done for us. There is a poem that says,

I gave, I gave My life for thee, what hast thou given for Me?
(Frances R Havergal 1858)

Well, here is a very simple request by the Lord Jesus; He says, “this do in remembrance of me”; and what particularly attracted me to this scripture is that He says, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood”. As we look at the cup on the table on Lord's day morning we think of what has been secured for us in that, because of the precious blood of Jesus. “This cup is the new covenant”. That is, God's promises in

relation to men in His love are all secured in our Lord Jesus Christ; they are all centred in Him: what blessings there are. We have spoken of some of them: we have spoken of salvation, we have spoken of justification, we have spoken of reconciliation, being reconciled with God, we have spoken of being brought in nearness into the very presence of God. What blessings are open to the believer, and all secured in our Lord Jesus Christ. They are all centred in Him, indeed the One, as the scripture tells us, into whose hands the Father has given everything: "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things to be in his hand", John 3: 35. Everything, dear friend, dear brother, dear sister, is centred in that blessed One at God's right hand in glory, One who is soon coming, and in the meantime He has requested that we do this. He says, "this do in remembrance of me. In like manner also the cup after having supped, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as often as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye shall eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye announce the death of the Lord, until he come". That is the great moment that we are looking for, when the Lord Jesus comes, when He comes to take all His own to be with Himself; and then that time soon coming when He will come out in display. When, as the scripture says, "every eye shall see him, and they which have pierced him, and all the tribes of the land shall wail because of him", Rev 1: 7. What a day that will be, when that blessed One who at the moment is rejected and despised in this poor earth, that blessed One will come out and be publicly vindicated, when as the scripture says, "every knee should bow, of heavenly and earthly and infernal beings, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father's glory", Phil 2: 10.

May each one that hears the gospel tonight own Him as Saviour and Lord, put their faith and trust in Him, come to know Him as Saviour, rely on His precious blood and the untold blessings that can bring; and be prepared to commit themselves in simplicity to Him in the breaking of bread until He come. May these things be the portion and joy of all for His Name's sake and God's glory.

West Norwood

18th December 2011

SOUL PROSPERITY IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Jim M Macfarlane

Malachi 3: 13-17

Luke 2: 22-27 (to “temple”), 36-38

3 John 1-4

I should like to say a few words about the way in which there can be that which pleases God in difficult times, in days of decline like those described in Malachi. The history of the people of God is one of periods of prosperity and public power followed by decline and public weakness. This is seen in the history of the children of Israel and it is evident in the public history of the church. We read in Numbers of the children of Israel moving with purpose towards the land of promise, after the deep moral experience which required them to look at the serpent of brass and then to drink of the springing well in chapter 21. They moved resolutely forward, their enemies collapsing before them. Once across the river Jordan, their way into the purpose of God for them was obstructed by Jericho and its wall was demolished by a display of the power of God, in which the people were directly involved, Josh 6. Immediately after this, there was failure at Ai as a result of disobedience at Jericho. Ai was finally taken, as the people submitted to the detailed direction of God. The subsequent history of Israel over many centuries is one of cycles of failure and consequent decline followed by periods of restoration, attributable ultimately to the faithfulness of God.

A dreadful state of affairs is described at the beginning of the passage which we have read in Malachi 3. Earlier in this book, we read of the way in which the people recognise the requirement for sacrifice but have the effrontery to offer to Jehovah those animals which were not a commercial proposition. It was essential that a sacrifice should be without blemish, in order to represent to God what He would find perfect in Christ. All this had been lost completely. The people evidently felt obliged to maintain a traditional sacrificial system but it had become one of mere ceremony and procedure and anything which was unfit for other use was considered adequate for this purpose. The period in which this was happening was one which followed the recovery in the time of Nehemiah, when two choirs stood in the house of God, the service of God proceeded and “God had made them to rejoice with great joy; and also the women and the children rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.” chap 12: 43. God's words by

Haggai and Zechariah indicate that the energy of the people in the things of God was beginning to diminish, probably very shortly after the high point described by Nehemiah. By the time of Malachi, the prophet had to say, "Your words have been stout against me, saith Jehovah; but ye say, What have we been speaking against thee? Ye say, It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we keep his charge we hold the proud for happy; yea, they that work wickedness are built up; yea, they tempt God, and they escape". The people were saying, in effect, that you can do what you like and you will get away with it.

However, in times as bad as these, there were those who spoke very differently. They are identified as those "that feared Jehovah" and they have an attitude of mind and a manner of life that is in complete contrast to what existed around them. That they "spoke often one to another", and they "thought upon his name", seems to suggest a whole manner of life. Their personal lives and their dealings with one another were pervaded by the fear of Jehovah; and "Jehovah observed it, and heard". The prophet then proceeds to describe how precious this was to God, saying, "And they shall be unto me a peculiar treasure in the day that I prepare; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him". These verses are more familiar to us than many passages in the prophets and the warmth of God's appreciation of those described in them is a source of great encouragement for those who live in difficult times.

The holy Scriptures are largely silent as to the hundreds of years which elapsed between the time of Malachi and the time of Simeon and Anna, of whom we read in Luke's gospel. Daniel refers to it, and secular history tells us that the people of God suffered very difficult times. The empire of Alexander the Great split ultimately into four kingdoms. At different times, the people of God were subjected to two of them and the land of Judah was a battleground between them. The domination of the kingdom to the north of the land of Israel brought particularly severe persecution and there is a partial fulfilment, during this period, of the prophecy of Daniel 11, which speaks of the profaning of the sanctuary and "the abomination that maketh desolate." The history books tell us that the king to whom Daniel refers burned pigs on the temple altar and compelled the people of God to eat pig meat. In Matthew 24, from verse 15, the Lord refers to further fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy. We might well wonder what could survive centuries of oppression of such severity, which, no doubt, had the character of the

government of God on prolonged moral deterioration. Luke gives us a view of what comes through these times. We have read about Simeon and Anna, but there was also what God had in Mary, Elizabeth, Zacharias, and "all those who waited for redemption in Jerusalem". Simeon "was just and pious" and had a divine communication "by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he should see the Lord's Christ". There are three references to the Holy Spirit in respect of Simeon within three verses: the Spirit was upon him, he was open to communication by the Spirit, and he entered the temple in the Spirit. We might ask what could come through centuries of decline: the excellence of what is found in Simeon provides an answer. Luke describes what took place in Herod's temple, and we might wonder what could be said in its favour. However, Jesus was there and so was a faithful man who was completely under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Finally, he receives Jesus into his arms, blesses God and speaks of His salvation and the immense consequent scope of blessing for the whole of mankind. As we consider the emergence in Simeon of a vessel of such capacity from difficult days, may we find encouragement for our own times and circumstances.

I read in John's third epistle because, a few decades into the Christian era, we find a man in prosperity of soul in spite of prevailing decline. There was evidence of this in his holding fast the truth, his walking in the truth and in his faithful work towards the brethren, even if they were strangers, in setting them forward on their journey in a way that was worthy of God. If those who came along were strangers, he would have to exercise discernment in respect of them and John is confident of Gaius's capacity in this regard. John's desire is that Gaius, in all things should "prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospers". What a commendation, that a standard of prosperity should be set by a brother's state of soul! I have much for which to be grateful in my health and general prosperity, in the Father's goodness. The evidence for this is clear and it might be thought of me that it would be good if there was as much evidence of prosperity of soul. How remarkable that the prominent feature with Gaius was his soul prosperity!

When John wrote to Gaius, the public power of Pentecostal days had passed, but the Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost was still here fortifying believers like Gaius, a service which He has continued to render for nearly two millennia since that time. John refers to a specific

difficulty with which Gaius had to contend. There was a brother who was exercising oppressive rule in the assembly. Diotrephes viewed the Christian circle as an environment for self-promotion. This is an evil which began early, as we see from Paul's address to the elders in Ephesus in Acts 20. He had to take issue with it at Corinth and it has continued to beset collective Christian experience through two millennia. In spite of the difficulties set by Diotrephes, Gaius continues to have testimony borne to soul prosperity which allows John to rejoice exceedingly. He would seem not to be alone: less is said about Demetrius but he "has witness borne of him by all, and by the truth itself", v 12. May such prosperity, even in difficult times, be the portion of each of us.

Dundee

10th January 2012

THE TWO COVENANTS

Exodus 24

We find here a principle which there had never been an example of before, namely a covenant founded on the blood. The covenant of the law is distinguished from the new covenant. The first was founded on the commitment which Israel had undertaken to do all that God had said; that is to say, to observe the law, v 3, 7.

Moses goes up the mountain, but bounds are placed to stop the people going up there. The church is in a quite different position; it goes up with its Head. Under the law, the way of the holy of holies was not yet manifested; and there was a veil. Moses alone can draw near to Jehovah. But there is still a mystery, hidden from the foundation of the world, not yet manifested under the law, which is the unity of the church with Christ her Head, as being His body, a body inseparable from every movement of the Head. Even as He *is*, so we are in this world. As for our experience, it is quite another thing; we are far from what Christ was; but by the fact of our union with Christ we can say that we are necessarily as He *is*. To say that one must be as He *was* is folly; He was, as to His body, born of the Holy Spirit. What is true is that we must walk in His steps; our body will only be changed in the resurrection. That which Christ is, we are in this world, because we are united to Him by the Holy Spirit, in virtue of the life which He has communicated to us. Such a fact was an unknown thing before the glorification of the Lord Jesus. The mystery (Rom 16: 25-26; Eph 3: 5-9; etc) now revealed is the union of Christ with the church which is His body. The faithful ones of the Old Testament had no knowledge of it, while those who are Christ's know now that they are united to Him, John 14: 20.

The people commit themselves to observe the law, and the covenant is introduced by the blood with which they were sprinkled, in this condition. Such is the old covenant. It is evident that this covenant, and the blessing which flowed from it, depended on two things - on the faithfulness of God and on the faithfulness of the people. The blessing is here the result of their obedience; for us, it is the result of the obedience of Christ (*in the detail* too, it is true, the consequence of our own obedience). There is no blessing at all without obedience.

As the blessing depended on the faithfulness of the people, and as the people were wicked, there could be no blessing. God had to demand obedience under the covenant of the law. Now, He had to

bless us, us who are under grace. When the blessing depends on the obedience of man, there is no blessing at all for him. If the people fail to keep their word, God must remain faithful to His and, as a consequence, He must refuse the blessing.

The word covenant in the Word does not necessarily require two contracting parties. A covenant is a disposition of God. The old covenant was made with the Israel, the new covenant also. It is not made with us, but we enjoy all the benefits of it, because the promises which it contains and which we must enjoy as Christians, have been made to Christ *alone* as seed of the woman and as seed of Abraham. If we are of Christ, we are therefore heirs of the promise. God cannot fail in His faithfulness. The new covenant rests on a promise made to Christ. The question is therefore: 'Is God faithful to His Son?'

Being faithful to Christ, nothing can fail. God has received Christ; He receives *me*. The new covenant does not therefore depend in the least on the conduct of two parties, but on the promise of God to Christ and on the faithfulness of God to His promise.

Such is the comforting principle of grace. Christ is the object of a love which gives and promises; He has part in it as perfect and accomplished. We share in it by the blood of Christ who has entered into the holiest as Head of His people. The blood of the covenant (Heb 13: 20) is the proof that the disobedience has been expiated and that obedience has been accomplished. Christ obeyed unto death. There is the obedience on which the new covenant is founded, and the blood which has been shed by the obedience of Christ is the expiation of our disobedience. *Every disobedience is effaced; all obedience is accomplished.* It is not in a future obedience on our part that we find peace, but in the obedience of Christ already accomplished. God has made promises so that we can enjoy them with Christ, but for this we must be perfectly cleansed; and for this the pouring out of His blood is necessary. The new covenant which will be made with Israel rests on a promise of God to Christ, the seed, and we have the benefit of it because we are united to Christ. The Jew, under the law, began with the necessity of obedience; the Christian, by the certainty that God is for him, by the certainty of his salvation, of the faithfulness of God, and of that which Christ has accomplished completely.

A thought which often pre-occupies souls is the necessity of being sprinkled again in the blood of Christ; and thus the joy of a

complete peace with God is often hindered. Under the law, there were only three occasions where there was the sprinkling of blood. 1) On the people to establish the covenant. 2) On the leper for his purification. 3) On the priests for their consecration. The blood has been put once for all on the people, on me as a sinner, on us as priests. It has never been shed again and it never will be any more. If the sprinkling of the blood of Christ is on me, can this blood lose its value? Could this value be effaced by something? Impossible! My conscience is purified for ever. It is the true position of a believer, to know that the blood of Christ is for him before God with its imperishable value. I therefore have no longer conscience of sin. The more I feel that sin is not imputed to me, the more I judge it. It is in the presence of his father who forgives him that a child feels his fault the most. This grace makes the conscience sensitive. The one whose clothes are clean takes care not to soil them.

The principle of the old covenant was the obligation of the people to obedience; it depended as much on the faithfulness of the people as on that of God; the new covenant depends on the faithfulness of God alone.

Exodus 34: 5-11 is a modification of the old covenant which is often confounded with the new. We do not belong to a covenant where the child is punished for the father. It was impossible after the golden calf that God could introduce Israel into Canaan on the simple footing of the first covenant. The sovereignty of God intervenes here when all is lost without it, for all was lost for Israel after the golden calf. If God had acted in justice, He would have finished with the people; then God reveals Himself as the merciful God, showing grace, slow to anger, and there is hope. We must come to grace so that our souls can have hope. From the moment that someone thinks he is lost, he is very happy that God is sovereign and disposed to show mercy to whom He will. Those who do not believe in the sovereignty of God do not know that they are lost; otherwise they would be happy to have recourse to it so that He would show mercy. Our pride alone hinders us from feeling we are lost.

Translated from *Le Messager Evangélique*