

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE TRUTH

Paul A Gray

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I would like, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to say something about the truth. It was a word that I heard often as a child. What did the brethren mean when they spoke about “the truth”? Was it just something that was true? I had the sense there more to it than that. What led me to this was the fact that yesterday in Aberdeen we were at the burial of a brother who I think was characterised by love of the truth. As we gathered with the saints in Aberdeen and others from many places, it seemed to me that what the Lord was indicating was that the understanding of the truth was important, particularly at the present time. We have read in 2 Thessalonians of Paul saying, “the mystery of lawlessness already works”. We can see lawlessness all around, but what is to be said then about the truth?

Well, the first thing we should say about it is that it is exemplified in a Person and that Person is Jesus; so the scripture in Ephesians 4 says, “as the truth is in Jesus”, v 21. So everything that is to be known can be known in Him. It says, “For in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”, Col 2: 9. Now if truth is the expression of the mind of God, then it is complete, and it is completely expressed in Jesus. But then it has to be worked out because it has many aspects.

Where we read in 1 Timothy 2, what was in mind particularly was the reference to “our Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”. So that is the first thing, “the knowledge of the truth”. Well, of course, there is something before that, and that is being saved. Now, what does it mean to be saved? You see, that is part of the truth. It means that you understand that you are a sinner and that you need a Saviour, and you know that that Saviour is Jesus, and that you confess your sins and that you understand that God has forgiven your sins if you confess them, because He laid them on Jesus. Now, there is truth about that. It says in the Bible that “without blood-shedding there is no remission” for sins, (Heb 9: 22), but it says as to the Lord Jesus that after He bowed His head and delivered up His spirit, “one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water. So the

truth is that without the shedding of blood there is no remission for sins, but the truth also is that Jesus shed His blood; that blood was given. He says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you": "for you", Luke 22: 20. You see, that is part of the truth as well, "for you". What Jesus did is "for you", and "God ... desires that all men should be saved".

Now, if I might just take up this matter of a believer's life and how the truth relates to it, first of all we were baptised on the basis of the faith of our parents in the household. Now, that may not be true of everyone here, but if you have been baptised, however it was done and wherever it happened, God accepts that, but we would recognise generally that we here were baptised in the household on the basis of the faith of the parents. Remember that the parents of Moses took him and put him in an ark of reeds in the sedge on the bank of the river. In that way they show that this child needed to go out of the sight of the world in order that he might be put into the hands of God. So when we baptise our children, we baptise them "to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28: 19), and "to the name of the Lord Jesus", Acts 19: 5. Why do we do that? Well, we do it first of all because Scripture gives warrant for it. But then we do it in faith because we recognise that in this present evil world we alone cannot protect our children, but by naming that great Name over them we recognise that we are putting them into the hands of God. It does not bring them to personal salvation, but it puts them in the precincts of the house and the environment of blessing; so that when our children go to school or to further education or out to work, we remember that we baptised them. We hold them on that line and we hold our houses in the light of baptism, each house in Israel having to have a parapet on its roof to be a safe place, Deut 22: 8. Then each of us has to come into the good of baptism for ourselves; so we have to recognise that as our parents put us out of sight of the world, so too ought we to put ourselves out of sight of the world and recognise that by passing through this exercise we come out on resurrection ground. We were referring to the eunuch in Acts 8; when he heard that the Lord's life "is taken from the earth" he says, "Behold water; what hinders my being baptised?", Acts 8: 33, 36. So we recognise that the truth of baptism has to apply to us. This world that rejected Christ is no place for the believer, but we have a better place. Paul says, "*our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens" (Phil 3: 20), but the whole world system has to go. You get that in Romans 6; "the body of sin" (v 6) relates to a whole system of

things that is marked by sin. We need to recognise that we must have no part in that before we can walk in newness of life. Then we come in Romans 7 to “this body of death”, v 24. So there is what is around, “the body of sin”, and there is what is within, “this body of death”.

If we consider that baptism frees us from “the body of sin”, then deliverance is what frees us from “this body of death”, and deliverance is to be found in Christ and Christ alone. So baptism is, you might say, the beginning of the journey to be worked out practically in the soul of the believer. But between baptism in the household and its practical working out in the soul of the believer there must come new birth, which is the work of the Holy Spirit and prepares the ground into which the seed can fall in order that there might be a response in life. So the Lord says, “Except any one be born of water and of Spirit ...”, John 3: 5. What is that but a recognition that in the water of baptism there is a way out, and in the power of the Spirit there is a way in? Because God does not take us out just to leave us in a place of uncertainty, but He would have us come out of the world so that we should come into blessing. The Holy Spirit prepares the ground into which good seed can fall. But there has to be an answer to that new birth. So in John 3 you get that well known verse, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”, v 16. God “desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”. That is how we start as believers in Jesus.

Then there is much to be opened up; if you turn to Romans 12 you are finding your place in the body. You realise you are not alone in this but there is a place for you, and you find your place in the body, you work things out with believers around you, and if anyone here is unsure as to what their place is, remember that the Lord is your Head. Firstly, in Romans He becomes Head to you on moral grounds. We referred in the previous meeting to chapter 5, “by the obedience of the one” (v 19), that is the One who becomes Head to you on moral grounds. In Colossians He becomes Head to you on personal grounds; that is to say, His personal greatness comes before you, “that *he* might have the first place in all things” (Col 1: 18); and then in Ephesians He becomes Head on official grounds because it is God who “gave him to be head over all things to the assembly”, chap 1: 22. You go through that moral process in your soul, that you recognise that there is One who has authority over you. One thing that struck me particularly in a recent occasion was the importance of not only knowing Jesus as Saviour but

knowing Him as Lord. That means that you recognise that He has rights over you, and that is all part of the knowledge of the truth. You find your place in the body. One thing is important: we have been helped to see that you find your company through the Lord; that is, the Lord will lead you to the place that He has for you. You do not simply look for a company; you find right company through the Lord. The Lord leads you to the place that He has for you, and if He sets you in that place He has in mind to keep you there, He has in mind to preserve you there.

So we come to the working out of the truth of the assembly and all that pertains to that, the recognition that there is a Head in heaven and His body is here, and then at the end of a believer's life, you come to the reality of the truth of resurrection. "Thanks to God", Paul says, "who gives us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ", 1 Cor 15: 57. The truth of resurrection is that a Man has been into death, has broken Satan's power and has come out again in triumph, and that Man is Jesus, and that is the Man who has now ascended, and that is the Man who will come out to take His own to be with Himself, and to say to death, "Where, O death, is thy sting?, where, O death, thy victory?", v 55. Those who lie in death will be raised. They will be given bodies of glory, and in resurrection they will stand in victory on this earth in which they have been buried, "then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them ... and thus we shall be always with the Lord". Well can Paul say, "So encourage one another with these words", 1 Thess 4: 18. These matters in a believer's life are all part of the truth. They are not disconnected. They are all part of the truth you can always find in Scripture.

We come in 2 Thessalonians to "the love of the truth". Now it is presented negatively, I know; it says, "they have not received the love of the truth", but the love of the truth is important. The knowledge of the truth is one thing, it provides a framework. Paul writes to Timothy, "Have an outline of sound words" (2 Tim 1: 13), but the **love** of the truth is another thing, and it means that we recognise what Paul says, "as the truth is in Jesus", that we love the One in whom the truth is presented to us, and we love the truth because we see it is the expression of God's mind. Colossians 1 speaks about "growing by the true knowledge of God", v 10. It does not say growing **in** the true knowledge of God, it says, "growing **by** the true knowledge of God". Why is that? Because we grow as we appreciate the manifold glories of divine Persons, and the knowledge of God, I believe, comes to us through the practical

working out of the truth. So our affections are involved. The love of the truth would mean that we understand that what God is presenting here has its own spring in His love for us. He has presented to us a means whereby He may be known and understood. He does it in Christ and He does it by the Spirit, because if the Lord is the truth objectively, that is everything is demonstrated in Him, the Spirit is the truth subjectively, that is, the Spirit is the power whereby I work out the truth and it forms me. You get an interesting expression of that in Psalm 16 and Psalm 17. In Psalm 16 the writer says, "Thou wilt make known to me the path of life: thy countenance is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore", v 11. That is like John's gospel; that is, the truth objectively, "thy countenance is fulness of joy". Then there is Psalm 17, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness", v 15. That is like John's epistles; that is, the truth subjectively as worked out in us. So we see it objectively in the Gospel, and in the Epistles it is worked out subjectively, and where it is worked out subjectively the Spirit is the truth.

So as God presents Himself to us, He does it in a way that is calculated to draw out our affections. Then Paul says as to those believers in Thessalonica, "But we ought to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, that God has chosen you from the beginning to salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth". What I want to say about belief of the truth is that the truth works. You have knowledge of the truth, and affection is involved, but does it really work? Think of the circumstances in which we are, a few brethren, some very scattered, brethren in Barbados, for example, very few, scattered saints in Australia and so on. Some brethren have hundreds, and indeed thousands, of miles to travel in order to have fellowship one with another. Does it really work? It works. Why? Well, "as the truth is in Jesus", and the Spirit is here. It is in divine Persons, who are not bounded by time or distance. How is it that we can pray for brethren that we have not met, that we do not know? That is because the body is functioning; that is because the truth as to the body is actually functioning in reality. The Lord will see to it that the testimony is maintained until the very day when He comes to take His own. How can the scripture otherwise say, "we, the living who remain", 1 Thess 4: 17? There will be what remains until the Lord comes. God grant that you and I may be in it! That is the desire of the divine heart that we should be in things livingly right to the end, right to that very moment when we hear that voice and we go, because it glorifies God, in a scene

of adversity where “the mystery of lawlessness already works”, that the truth is being worked out practically in persons' lives and localities. “... Brethren, beloved of the Lord, that God has chosen you from the beginning to salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereto he has called you by our glad tidings”, Paul's glad tidings. We speak of Paul having two ministries, the ministry of the glad tidings and the ministry of the assembly. In one sense it is one ministry because what would be the point of the glad tidings if the assembly was not in view, and how would the assembly exist if the glad tidings did not go out? We do not separate one from the other. There was conflict many, many years ago over whether some were evangelists or assembly men. Well, you cannot really be one or the other. Of course there are some evangelists, and we recognise the gifts, but they are given in view of the assembly, and it all has in view that assembly material should be secured, Eph 4: 11. The outgoing of the glad tidings is in view of God securing a response for Himself, and where does that response come from? It comes from individuals, of course, but “to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages” (Eph 3: 21) is in view; but do not forget that while that comes into Ephesians 3, at the end of chapter 2 of Ephesians we have a reference to “a habitation of God in the Spirit”, v 22. That is the house of God, and that is where the gospel goes out from. Why does the gospel go out from the house of God? So that there should be glory to God “in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generation of the age of ages. Amen.” Belief of the truth tells us that the truth is workable.

I go on to John's second epistle. Here John is writing of himself as “the elder”. He was an old man by this stage, and he writes to “The elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not I only but also all who have known the truth, for the truth's sake which abides in us and shall be with us to eternity”. The truth is our bond. You might say, 'Surely love is our bond', because the scripture says, “And to all these add love, which is the bond of perfectness”, Col 3: 14. Love is **a** bond, and “the bond of perfectness” means that without love things would be incomplete, but our bond is the truth: “The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not I only but also all who have known the truth”. Why is the truth our bond? Because the truth is the divine standard. When Moses got instruction as to the tabernacle system he was told, “see that thou make them according to the pattern”, Exodus 25: 40. You could say in the tabernacle system there were outstanding expressions of the love of God, such as the mercy-seat; He says, “And

there will I meet with thee, and will speak with thee”, v 22. You can see that in the great day of atonement the blood was sprinkled once on the mercy-seat and seven times before it, God showing in the type that He would be approached through the power and value of the blood of Christ, Lev 16: 14. It is an expression of the love of God that He desired to be approached, and He would provide the means in righteousness whereby He could be approached. The truth expresses the love of God, but the truth is our bond because it is the divine standard and it preserves us therefore from sentiment in dealing with matters, but we can never forget, “holding the truth in love”, Eph 4: 15. That is how it can be worked out, as we hold it in love. You can never hold the truth apart from love, but the truth is our bond, “for the truth's sake which abides in us and shall be with us to eternity”. Think of that: what God is presenting of His mind in the present time will form eternal results and He will not have to change a single thing. He will not have to change any of it, it “shall be with us to eternity”. Think of that. Has anyone ever seen a plan that never had to be changed? If you plan to build a house, then you find there is some problem and you have to change it a little. I do not know much about these things, but I do not think I have ever seen a plan in man's arranging that does not need to be adjusted in some way to take account of something unforeseen, or a change of circumstances. God's plan has never had to be changed. If you go right back to the beginning in Genesis, in the first four days in Genesis conditions are established, light in the first day, atmosphere on the second, food on the third and rule on the fourth; and light, atmosphere, food and rule have always been, and always will be, the basis of conditions in which life can exist, because on the fifth day you get the variety of life and on the sixth day you get man. God set up the conditions in which life could exist. He has never had to change that. On the very first day God said, “Let there be light. And there was light” (Gen 1: 3), and in John's first epistle, “But if we walk in the light as *he* is in the light, we have fellowship with one another”, chap 1: 7. God has never had to change that. God is in the light and remains always true, and “if we walk in the light as *he* is in the light, we have fellowship with one another”. He has never had to change that either. God never has to change or alter what He is doing, or be expedient. All that He does is consistent with who He is, because He is God. Then He says, 'I know you will need help'; so John goes on to say, “Grace shall be with you, mercy, peace from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love”. He says, 'I will give you the

resources to work this out'; then John says, "I rejoiced greatly that I have found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received commandment from the Father". Is that not interesting? It says, "commandment from the Father"; there is authority and there is affection in order that we might work these things out practically.

I just wanted to speak about that, "walking in truth", 3 John 4. That is to say, our walk is regulated by the truth, "walking in truth". What will I do? Well, what does the Scripture say? What does the Lord say? Where will I go? What subjects should I take at school? Ask the Lord; He will help you. These things are simple and practical. You know, the expression "walking in truth", was written when John was an old man, with departure from the truth already evident, no doubt, but he says it is possible to walk in truth and it is possible for each generation to walk in truth, "thy children walking in truth". You say, 'Well, that is what the older brethren do'. No, it is for us all, "walking in truth". You say, 'Things are different now'. I can remember, when I was young, older brethren using expressions about things that I thought, 'Well, that just shows how old-fashioned they are'. I remember a brother using an old fashioned expression in relation to some electronic equipment, but what the brother was saying in reality was that he was concerned if you bring something into your house that is not suitable for a baptised household. So I am not going to tell you a list of things you should have in your house and a list of things you should not. What I am going to say to you is this, if it is a baptised household, is everything you have in it suitable for that house? That is all I will say to you, "walking in truth", because what was a problem a hundred and twenty years ago is different from fifty years ago, is different from thirty years ago, and the pace of things is such that there are changes every year. But I will tell you something simple, if you can commit something to the Lord and ask Him to bless it with a clear conscience, then that I think would be a good guide. "Walking in truth"; it means much more than this: it means walking according to the regulation of assembly principles and it means that the Lord can approve of what you are doing, whatever it is and wherever it is.

Then, in verse 8 of the third epistle, "We therefore ought to receive such, that we may be fellow-workers with the truth". The truth has to be worked out. It does not just happen; it has to be worked out. So "fellow-workers with the truth" are those who are willing to put effort and energy into working it out. The truth is not a set of different coloured books on a bookshelf. If you think of ministry as a set of dusty

volumes, the fastest way to knock the dust off them is to read them - put energy into it. "Fellow-workers with the truth" means we are willing to ask the Spirit's help to work it out, to speak about it in our times of enquiry together, to read about it, to read the Scriptures, to be before the Lord as to it, and if we do not understand something, bring it to the meeting. The Spirit is here and active. If there is something you do not understand, bring it to the meeting and you will get an answer. I assure you that you will. If there is something in your heart and it is a true exercise, you will get an answer amongst the saints. Ask a brother or a sister who has more experience than you do; they will help you. Sisters, ask at home, ask your husbands. If you do not know the answer, then ask the Lord to help you to find it. If you go in for something in divine things, I say without hesitation, you will get ten times, a hundred times more than you put in, because that is the God we have to do with. The Lord says, "Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall be given into your bosom: for with the same measure with which ye mete is shall be measured to you again", Luke 6: 38. God's measure is not our measure. You think of the Lord emphasising over and over again the desires of the divine heart to give, "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over shall be given into your bosom". How often have you picked up the Scriptures to look at them? Maybe you are tired or running out of time, and all of a sudden a light dawns and the whole day has changed just by a few words. I can remember the day my life was changed by Psalm 24, "Who is this King of glory?", v 8. It was a dark day in my experience, and all of a sudden the darkness fled and the Man in the glory came into my view and the whole day was transformed and all the difficulties I had been so worried about just took their place in the distance, and Christ was the Man of the heart. That is what happens, "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over". Oh, beloved brethren, the truth which holds us together is a thing of infinite value because it centres in a Man in the glory and it is made true in our souls by the present service of the Holy Spirit, and it is eternal in its results and its value, and the end will be glory to God.

Well, may the Lord help us for His Name's sake.

Buckie

28th June 2014

GOD CALLING

Craig A McKay

1 Samuel 3: 1-11

Genesis 22: 1-14

Mark 15: 13-19, 33-34

I have in mind to say something about the repetitions of these names. I think there are ten references in the scriptures where names are repeated, and seven of them are God calling persons, which is very interesting. The cry we read in Mark's account (referred to in three of the gospels) is the Lord Jesus speaking to His God, "My God, my God"; and another instance is the Lord Jesus speaking of His longings for the city Jerusalem. The intensity of these cries of the Lord Jesus put me in mind of the definite and clear way that God is calling you and me in the gospel.

By way of introduction perhaps we could say a little about the background to the hymn we have sung together -

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way (Hymn 238).

These hymns are wonderful, but sometimes they become too familiar to us; familiarity is not always a good thing because there is a danger that the words just wash over us. The immensity of what God has accomplished in the death of Christ and secured as a result in the souls of men and women and boys and girls must not lose its import to us. The original of this hymn was written by a man called Horatio Spafford, once a wealthy lawyer in Chicago, and married with a little boy and four girls. First his son died of scarlet fever, which was an awful sadness to him. Then there was a great fire in Chicago which burnt down the property in which he had invested. Having lost much of his money, he sent his wife and four daughters away to England, and while they were crossing the Atlantic, their ship went down: the four girls died and his wife sent him a telegram, "Saved alone". What a further terrible sorrow to him. As he was crossing the Atlantic himself to be with his wife, the captain pointed out the spot where they believed the ship had gone down in the earlier crossing, and he went straight to his cabin and penned this most comforting and triumphant hymn. What I present to you, dear friend, is not a glorious impossibility, it is a reality. The gospel has had its effect on men and women. That man penned this hymn in praise to God that his sins were forgiven, and that he knew the Lord

Jesus as his Saviour. He had known something of 'peace like a river'; perhaps referring to Isaiah 66: 12 where it speaks about God pouring out peace like a river. Have you known something of that for yourself? The river is endless, is not it? Some look to trace them to their sources but if we are standing beside a river it is just pouring forth. We are glad to know 'peace like a river'. But then that man knew 'sorrows like sea billows'. Can you imagine being on that ship? He had seen where his family had been lost. He had lost a little boy, he had lost his four daughters: how he felt that sea billows rolled. These were the sorrows that he felt but, whatever his lot, God had taught him to say,

It is well, it is well with my soul.

Can you say that, dear friend? Can you say 'It is well with my soul'? Whatever happens in this life, if you have the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, you can say 'it is well with my soul'. The hymn-writer was not thinking about the grave, he was not thinking about his sorrows exactly: he was thinking about the Lord Jesus coming. It is a triumphant hymn

... for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal.

What a prospect, dear friend, and it is open to you today! Yes, this hymn was written over one hundred years ago, but it is still as current: the Lord Jesus is unchanged, He is ready, willing and able to save you.

Where we first read, God is speaking to a boy, a young boy. God is speaking to you, dear young friend, dear young boy, dear young girl: God is interested in you. The world perhaps knows little of you: you are of little consequence to the world yet, you are not a great man or a great woman fit to shape the world, but God is interested in you. God wants to have something to do with you. This boy was ministering to Jehovah: God took account of that. I might say simply he was like someone coming to the meetings. He did not know the Lord yet, but he was coming to the meetings. He was doing what his mother had bid him to do and God took account of it, and God called him. How wonderful that is: do you have a sense that God is calling you tonight, calling your name, that the Lord Jesus, your Saviour, is calling your name, tenderly, softly? This was a time like our own, like the day in which the Lord Jesus is rejected in the world generally. We do not face reproach here in the sense that we are beaten and stoned, but there is intellectual reproach. People might say, 'You have faith in God; why would you - a foolish thing like that? We have science to tell us how the

world was made and yet you speak of faith in God - how foolish!. The apostle Paul tells us that God is able to save us “by the foolishness of the preaching”, 1 Cor 1: 21. Men might think it is foolishness. So there is a reproach in confessing the name of the Lord Jesus, but we get a little power as we do it; and perhaps we do not do it enough. If someone says, 'Will you come and do this?', do we ask the Holy Spirit for the courage to say, 'I love the Lord Jesus and I just do not want to do that'? They will no longer be interested, but then there is reproach, they no longer are interested in your friendship. But they may think about what they say in front of you the next time. But how blessed to know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour! So we have this little boy, Samuel: it was in a time when God's word was rare, it says, “a vision was not frequent”, 1 Sam 3: 1. That is perhaps like the world in which we live today, because God has been by-passed by men. God's righteous feelings about sin and morality are ignored in the world in which we live, but are you going to swim against the current like this boy Samuel, who, when Jehovah called to him, “Samuel, Samuel”, said “Speak, for thy servant heareth”? What a word this little boy got! Jehovah told him intimately; He was going to give a word to the people that both the ears of everyone that heard it were going to tingle. What a word Jehovah was going to speak, and He communicated that to a boy. Well, I just wanted to appeal to young ones, to boys and girls, to come to know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, not to be afraid of the trends in the world, not to be afraid of what classmates and others would say about the Lord Jesus and your love of Him; but to put your faith and trust in Him so that you can say,

It is well, it is well with my soul,

and you will know something of that peace for yourself. Perhaps you will know something of sorrows in your life too, but you will have the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, you will prove Him and His love. Put your faith and trust in Him when you are young.

We read too about Abraham: I suppose we would say he was already a believer, but God was going to try him; the footnote says 'tested': what a testing this was. The writer of our hymn was tested; perhaps you are tested in your life. Is your faith going to remain firm? Are you going to be encouraged even at this time in this gospel preaching that God knows what He is doing, God has a plan for you, and all you need to do is put your faith and trust in Him? Abraham was an old man at this point and he had a son, Isaac, whom he loved. God had promised that Isaac would be born and from him there would be a

great multitude: Abraham's seed would be vast as the sand on the sea shore. So Abraham takes God at His word and he goes and takes Isaac his son. It says, "Abraham rose early in the morning": he did not deliberate. What a thing that is to have a sense of God speaking to you and to answer to it. Do not delay in the gospel preaching; do not even wait until tomorrow morning. If you do not know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, hear His cry, He is speaking to you tonight; answer His call as He calls your name, put your faith and trust in Him. Do not delay because we do not know when He is coming again. It is a solemn thought: there is an urgency in the preaching, but it is good news! So Abraham went and he took Isaac and, as he reached for the knife and was about to slay his son, God said, 'No'. God does not ask that of us: He reserved that sacrifice for Himself: He did not spare His own Son, but He would not cause us to do a thing like that. God is not a God like that, no matter what people in the world would say about Him. Why does He cause wars and strife, they say? God does not do that; God has sympathy for His creature. God created you, He loves you, and He wants blessing for you. That is why He gave the Lord Jesus for you: He does not want misery; He is a God of love. So He said, "Abraham, Abraham!". There is urgency in that word and Abraham answered just like Samuel did, "Here am I". "Stretch not out thy hand against the lad"; how tender the feelings of God. Abraham looks, and there is a "ram caught in the thicket by its horns". What does that mean? The ram is a very magnificent-looking animal and there it was, caught and held by its horns. Scriptures are very suggestive. If you are not familiar with them, even as you read them, perhaps you feel that tingling that God spoke to Samuel about. Do you get that tingling, that sense that God is speaking to you? There is something more in it: this is not a story: this is not a cleverly imagined fable, this is God speaking to you. That ram: is it suggestive to you of something? If it is, I would go further and say that perhaps the Holy Spirit of God is working with you, causing you to think of the Lord Jesus, because that is what this ram speaks about. I would suggest to you that, if the Holy Spirit is working with you, you do not spurn His work: answer the call, pick up your Bible, read a few verses, speak to the Lord Jesus, confess your need of Him, tell Him you are a sinner. You cannot enumerate all your sins; He does not need you to: tell Him you are a sinner and you have a need of Him; and put your faith in Him. Then receive the Holy Spirit and you will be able to understand the scriptures in a fuller way, understand the One of whom they speak. So the Lord Jesus is the ram caught in the thicket by its horns, the One

for whom there was no substitute, held in divine love for you and me.

We read of Him in Mark's gospel: I was drawn to it because of the particular reference "Eloi". In other gospels it says "Eli", but here it is "Eloi" which means **'My God, My God'**, it is very personal. Think of the feelings of the Lord Jesus. We read about Him earlier in the gospel: the crown of thorns, what the Lord Jesus endured from men - what mockery! Who was He? Who is Jesus? He is God's own Son, the Son of God, a divine Person come here to earth. We learn from the Scriptures that He was the One by whom God made the worlds, Heb 1: 2. What a One is the Lord Jesus; what power is His. Remember we spoke about the ram caught in the thicket by its horns? Power was seen in the Lord Jesus, power and splendour in creation. Think of the variety in creation; men cannot exhaust the heights of heaven, they are finding new stars all the time, finding new things every year in the depths of the oceans. Oh the power of the Lord Jesus! In fact, the captain said to the hymn-writer, 'It is three miles deep at this point': think of the depths of the ocean. The Lord Jesus knows these things: He is the One who has measured the deep. He has gone to the bottoms of the mountains, gone to the heart of the seas (Jonah 2: 3, 6), and I know that He has done that for me. What a One He is, dear friend, wonderful One! People speak of Him as "*Jesus*" and that is right, "thou shalt call his name Jesus, for *he* shall save his people from their sins", Matt 1: 21. He has many names: the Lord Jesus, Jesus Christ; people take some of these names in vain, but what a One He is! Where we began in Mark we see Him as a lowly Man and here for the will of God, knowing exactly what that will meant: that He was going to die. He knew that the whole of His life, and yet He went through with God's will for Him. What a blessed One He is! Do you know Him? There is no other name "under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved", Acts 4: 12. There is no other, but what a One to put your faith and trust in! He is One who set His face as a flint (Isa 50: 7), as a hard stone: He is a rock. He speaks of a man who dug and went deep and built his house on the rock: that rock is the Lord Jesus, Matt 7: 24, 25. He is a nail in a sure place (Isa 22: 23) - One fastened that cannot be moved: that is the Lord Jesus. He is the "Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last" (Rev 22: 13); "the same yesterday, and today, and to the ages to come", Heb 13: 8. What a One is the Lord Jesus, yet here we see Him as a lowly Man, a real Man with the feelings of a Man, enduring the mockery of a trial. No justice was given to Jesus. Then in further mockery, they clothed Him with purple, the imperial colour, which the Lord had every right to wear,

and He *will* wear it in a coming day. But they mocked Him, plaited a crown of thorns, put it on His head. Do you think about that? Is the gospel so familiar to you now that it has no affect on you? I trust not, dear friend. They took the robe off Jesus and they crucified Him, nailed Him to a cross, lifted Him up. I heard a preacher say that Jesus hung on the cross in the heat of that eastern sun. You think of the Middle East at midday: there was Jesus, hanging on the cross. He is God, He was all-powerful, indeed He was, but He was a real Man and it was as Man He suffered for my sins. These sufferings in the first three hours were not what took away my sins but, nonetheless, they were endured by Jesus. Where we read in verse 33 from the sixth hour to the ninth hour is where God had to do with Jesus in relation to my sins. God took account of sin in perfect righteousness. He knew what lay upon the human race. He poured out His judgment on the head of Jesus and the Lord Jesus exhausted it. Naturally speaking, it might all seem a little strange, an offering for sin. I heard someone say recently: 'sin, that sounds a bit Victorian!' That is what people think today, that the idea of sin is not relevant now. People speak jovially about 'living in sin' with no regard to God's feelings. God feels such things and, more importantly, He feels things in your life. Is your life in order before God? Have you put your faith and trust in Jesus? Have all your sins been washed away: are you conscious of that? Dear friend, that is what is needed from the gospel: it is very personal. It is not about looking at the next person. Sometimes we sit under a word and we think, that is just what so-and-so needs. Dear friend, the gospel is what *you* need, it is what *I* need because it deals with *my* sins.

Then there is this solemn, affecting cry, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?". Jesus says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?". What does that mean? What is the significance? We might pray to God our Father and to the Lord Jesus in the morning, we might even remember Him in the middle of the day, we might give thanks for our food. We might be passing through a time of pressure which causes us to pray more often in the day. We may feel the Lord has placed an exercise upon us - perhaps it is family, perhaps it is work - that might even cause us to pray many times in a day. The Lord Jesus was in communion with His God and Father at *all times*. Think of the Father's feelings about such a Man who was in communion with Him at every moment of every day. What a blessed One is the Lord Jesus: what perfect humanity! I would encourage you to pray, to be simple about it, to start your morning on your knees: ask the Father for strength for the day and the Lord Jesus to be near. Perhaps we are aware a

problem is about to come up; we can ask the Lord Jesus for help that we might be a testimony, that there might be something of Him seen in the way we react, the way that we deal with others. People might know you are a believer and they may see that you do a thing a certain way and they may think, 'Well, that is a kind of life I do not have'. I would like to be like that. Would you not like to be a faithful one with whom the Holy Spirit is free, so that your life is different, changed. And so the Lord Jesus was like that perfectly in every day, in constant communion except here at the cross we find there are three hours of darkness, three hours when God was forsaken this blessed, lowly Man and Jesus was deprived of that communion with His God. Do you have some feeling as to the immensity of this, that the One who was the blessed Son of God went through this great transaction, and it was felt by Him and it was felt by God, in order that your sins and mine - not His own, He had none, He was perfect - might be met in their entirety? The blood of Jesus was shed: God saw it and He was satisfied. My sins are washed away; I can say that, can you? Can you say, 'I am cleansed and redeemed'. I trust that you can.

That was the burden of the word, dear friend. I trust there is a sense of urgency, and a desire to answer to the feelings of God in your life, that there might be more of a response in this day in which we live: how needful it is. You might think that in times gone by there were more believers - outwardly, it seemed, there were more churches and so on. How much more need God has of men and women, boys and girls, who are here speaking about the Lord Jesus and seeking to be like Him in their lives. It will be for your blessing as you put your faith and trust in Jesus, as you receive the Holy Spirit into your life. May it be your portion today, for the Lord's name's sake.

Dundee

29th June 2014

DIGGING WELLS

David A Brown

Genesis 26: 15-33

Numbers 21: 10-18 (“staves”)

Philippians 1: 16-19; 4: 18

The exercise I have had before me for a little while now is that of well-digging, how it is done and what the result of it is. Mr Coates said that the maintenance of vitality and freshness in what ministers to the pleasure of God should be our chief concern, Outline of Deuteronomy, p244. It relates to what we have had in the reading about adjustment, and what the Lord did Himself with persons. I would like to turn this now into our own exercise and what place we give to the blessed Holy Spirit. There is a scripture in Proverbs that speaks of the slothful: “The slothful roasteth not what he took in hunting”, Prov 12: 27. My exercise today is that none of us might be slothful in spiritual matters.

That is why I have read these scriptures. In Genesis it speaks of persons who dug wells. In verse 15, in speaking of Isaac, it says, “And all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father”. Abraham dug wells and he was honoured for that; if we look at the application of the wells which Abraham dug and in our day, I think it would relate to what was taken up in exercise by brothers who have ministered in the course of what we speak of as the recovery, especially those who dug wells at the beginning of the recovery. Think of the cost that has been borne by those who have gone before to bring to us what we treasure (I trust that we all treasure what we have in ministry); the exercise of heart that went into many souls to bring us the truth as we know and appreciate it. Think of what Mr Darby, Mr Raven, and Mr James Taylor, and others had to contend with in bringing out the truth! There was even a great deal of opposition to it. These matters are not to be lost upon us but to be appreciated by us so that we value what we have, both in our hands and on our bookshelves, and that we may take the page of Scripture and the page of ministry and make it live by the Spirit in our affections. May it not just be that we have the books, but may the impact of the truth have a great result as held in our hearts and in our affections.

Isaac was Abraham's son, and it says, “And all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped them and filled them with earth”. Now, I wonder if

your well is stopped up with earth. Have you allowed the Philistine earth to fill your well, or has your well been completely cleared of earth through your own exercise and spiritual diligence so that the free and full sway of the Holy Spirit might be known both in your life and as contributing amongst the dear brethren? My exercise is that we might be spiritually diligent because, when your desire is to serve the Lord, the enemy seeks to come in and spoil impressions; he will seek to bring in the earth; he will seek to fill that well with earth. My desire is that each one of us might indeed have the earth removed from our wells so that there might be the full sway and the full power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is interesting to note that whenever this is done, whenever there is spiritual diligence to make way for the things of God in our lives, and amongst us too, the enemy would always seek to bring in earthly principles. Let us be on our guard! I am not talking about what is evil exactly; I am talking about what is earthly and what might militate against the freshness and vitality which we would each desire to maintain here in view of the service of God.

The scripture says, “the Philistines stopped them and filled them with earth. And Abimelech said to Isaac, Go from us; for thou art become much mightier than we. And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his camp in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac dug again the wells of water that they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and that the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham”. So Isaac continued digging the wells, well after well, and we could speak of what marked him as spiritual tenacity. What is needed with each one of us is spiritual tenacity in divine things. The enemy is always seeking to neutralise or limit our desire to dig wells, but I have this impression that Isaac represents one who had the heavenly view; so he “dug again the wells of water” and “called their names after the names by which his father had called them”. He did not set aside what had gone before and neither should we. We should value what has gone before, value the Scriptures, value the truth, and value too what is coming in the living power of the Holy Spirit to us currently. A brother said to me recently that what he valued amongst the saints was the power and living flow of ministry from Christ as Head; so we need to be on our guard that that flow is neither nullified nor restricted. We need to see that our wells are constantly kept open.

In the digging of a well, we need to remove all the rubbish, all the earth that tends to go into these wells. Of course, in these days there was a lot of dust in the desert and wells had to be constantly dug out, but

I need constantly to have this spiritual diligence and help by the Holy Spirit to keep my well free of earth. You know when earth has got into your well. Each one of us knows it in our own soul. So we need, by exercise and by diligence, to keep our wells free of earth. Then it says, "And Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. But the shepherds of Gerar strove with Isaac's shepherds, saying, The water is ours". The enemy is very real; in fact it has been said that the enemy comes to our occasions of gathering. That is quite a sobering thing, and if we do not make way for the Holy Spirit in our minds and in our affections, spiritual vitality starts to wane.

"And he called the name of the well Esek, because they had quarrelled with him. And they dug another well, and they strove for that also; and he called the name of it Sitnah. And he removed thence". So he did not seek to take on the Philistines at their own level. He separated from them. He did not seek to quarrel exactly with them or for any length of time. They strove for it and moved on "and dug another well; and they did not strive for that. And he called the name of it Rehoboth". They eventually come to dig this well which is not striven for; as we will arrive at a place of green pasture, a place without limitation, a place where the Spirit is free. They came to a place where they could enjoy land conditions. It says, "And he called the name of it Rehoboth", which means 'Broadways' (see note 'g'). Dear brethren, room for us is in the company of the saints. It is where we enjoy eternal life, where we enjoy these things together. There was no striving there. So I appeal to my younger brethren: keep in the company of the saints! Keep by the well where the Spirit is known and loved! Keep digging your well and keep it clear, keep it clear for the pleasure of God, keep it clear for the testimony of our Lord; and come to a place where there is peace, where there is restfulness, where there is that which is for the pleasure of God. I think 'broadways' might also mean that we can expand in our affections. That is what Paul's exercise was to the Corinthian saints: "let *your* heart also expand itself", 2 Cor 6: 13. Paul would never seek to say, 'Well, your pathway can be as wide as the ocean'. It is not that way: our feet in the narrow path, the heart as wide as possible, Letters of JND vol 2 p378. That is how the idea of Rehoboth has been applied. They come to something in their souls that is not striven for, but where there is freedom for the Spirit to operate. And so it says, "For now Jehovah has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land".

Where does faith take us? Faith takes us from Rehoboth to

Beer-sheba. What does Beer-sheba speak of? Beer-sheba speaks of the oath, the whole aspect of God's view of the land. In verse 33 of this chapter Beer-sheba is spoken of as a city: faith would take us to Beer-sheba. Where is our faith taking us; do we have faith for what is of God? The Lord "made as though he would go farther", Luke 24: 28. The Lord will go as far as we wish in divine things, and so let us be spiritually ambitious! The world and its systems promote carnal ambition, but it is right to be spiritually ambitious. It is right to seek greater and higher things. Let us not be content with a low level of things! Let us see what Christ has in His assembly! Let us see what there is in the power of the Holy Spirit and make way for that, because it is an upward way! Scripture does not say, 'he went down thence to Beer-sheba', it says, "And he went up thence to Beer-sheba"; so that is where faith takes us. It takes us where God's full provision is made way for, and where we can enjoy the blessings of the land.

"And Jehovah appeared to him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake. And he built an altar there... pitched his tent ... dug a well". Have we done all of these things? This was in Beer-sheba. Isaac came to something in his own soul which enabled him to build an altar, call upon the name of Jehovah, pitch his tent and dig a well. Have we reached this stability in our souls? Have we reached what enables us to align ourselves with God's thoughts as to matters? It says, "And he built an altar there". Think of what altars mean in Scripture. They speak of persons who have what was for God in their hearts. They wanted to sacrifice to God, and I think that is what it would mean here: "And he built an altar there, and called upon the name of Jehovah". We were speaking in the reading as to remembering the Lord in the breaking of bread. Building an altar there and calling upon the name of Jehovah is really establishing something in our own soul that enables us to call upon the name of Jehovah. Have we really and rightly called upon His name? "And he pitched his tent there;" - I think that would mean that he reached something substantially - "and there Isaacs's servants dug a well".

I read the rest of this section to bring out how and why a man who had faith and was moving in this right way, making way for the Holy Spirit, keeps his well clear. That is how power is gained. These persons, Abimelech and Ahuzzath and Phichol, had to admit that there was power in Isaac. We do not gain moral power by anything of nature.

We gain it through making way for the Holy Spirit, seeking to keep our wells clear, and to honour the Holy Spirit in His service to us. The servants say in verse 32, “We have found water. And he called it Shebah; therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day”. How wonderful, therefore, that we come from a place to a city, in which God's pleasure and what is for God's delight is honoured. Dear brethren, these things are open to each one of us as keeping our wells clear. Let us be good well-diggers!

I was interested to read a comment recently by Mr James Taylor says that Romans is 'so to say, the digging epistle', JT vol 31 p240. The epistle to the Romans establishes the soul in the principles of Christianity, in the basics of Christianity, and in chapter 12 of that epistle you can see how a person arrives at something definite: he is prepared to lay his body on the altar as a sacrifice. As a local brother often says to us, it is not only that a good Roman has somewhere to go, but he needs somewhere to go. So he is desirous then of moving into the Colossian, Philippian and Ephesian epistles. So you can see how as digging and arriving at something substantial in the soul and allowing the Spirit to operate we make progress in the truth. If we have our wells stopped with earth or allow anything to come in that would militate against the fulness and supply of the Spirit, then we know what happens: dullness sets in. Then we perhaps seek to withdraw a little from spiritual activity amongst the saints; maybe we do not fulfil our part as we used to. Laying our body on the altar in Romans 12 is a permanent matter. It is not to be withdrawn. I encourage all the brethren here: let us be committed to the Lord and His interests and let us know what it is to put our body on the altar. As laying it on the altar, we then “prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God”, v 2.

Well, in mentioning Romans, I come now to Numbers chapter 21. This is quite a key point in the history of the children of Israel. There are some special landmarks in this chapter. There is the brazen serpent. There are four aspects to the death of Christ in this history, as we know: the Passover, the Red Sea, the brazen serpent and the Jordan. It is interesting that we have life here brought in by looking at the serpent. The children of Israel had been wandering for thirty-nine years in the wilderness, and maybe you or I have been wandering in our own wilderness for thirty-nine years, but the Lord, in His grace, would bring us to a point in time where we need to take stock, and I think the children of Israel took stock here. “And they removed from Oboth, and encamped at Ijim-Abarim, in the wilderness that is before Moab, toward

the sun-rising". The children of Israel at this point turn "toward the sun-rising". I trust you are turned towards the sun-rising. Is your vision filled with the glory and greatness of that blessed Man? Have you had that blessed Man in your view? Have I? Have we turned "toward the sun-rising"? What a moment this was for the children of Israel! They had been wandering all that time and here they had arrived at a point in their experience where they turned "toward the sun-rising". What a moment it was! Maybe today will be a point when you turn towards the sun-rising in your soul and know what it is to move forward from this point in time. There is not much of a journey between this point and the land! So it says, "From thence they removed, and encamped at the torrent Zered. From thence they removed, and encamped on the other side of the Arnon, which is in the wilderness that comes out of the border of the Amorites. For the Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. Therefore it is said in the book of the wars of Jehovah". Let us not be afraid of conflict! It speaks here of "the wars of Jehovah". They are not our wars; it is the "wars of Jehovah"; and Jehovah would seek to maintain what is true and right amongst us so that the Spirit's operations and liberty are maintained. The Lord is not free where the Spirit is not made way for and when man's natural thinking excludes the operations of the Holy Spirit. I am thinking of the clerical system, and how easily and quickly that can come in. What that system does is remove from each individual the sense of responsibility in what is for Christ and what is for God's pleasure. Let us be warned and guarded against these things because I think digging our well in our own exercises and maintaining that in spiritual vitality will keep us on right lines!

So it is said in "...the book of the wars of Jehovah,
Vaheb in Suphah, and the brooks of Arnon;
And the stream of the brooks which turneth to the dwelling of Ar,
And inclineth toward the border of Moab".

I think there was a substantial point reached here in the history of the children of Israel, and once the serpent had been looked at and they lived, there was an immediate blessing from Jehovah; there was the move "toward the sun-rising" and all these brooks and streams are mentioned. How much water there is, dear brethren; and it says, "And from thence to Beer: that is the well of which Jehovah spoke to Moses, Assemble the people, and I will give them water. Then Israel sang this song, Rise up, well! sing unto it".

How wonderful this is! I think it is possible - and I say this guardedly - to stimulate the service of the Holy Spirit. If it is possible to grieve Him, then I believe it is possible to stimulate the service of the Holy Spirit, both individually and collectively - because here it is a collective matter. We spoke about digging the wells, and I suppose Isaac digging wells represents an individual matter, but here we come to the children of Israel collectively saying, "Then Israel sang this song, Rise up, well! sing unto it"

So I think it is a fine exercise to promote right feelings in relation to the Holy Spirit, and I think that hymn that we sang at the beginning of the address (Hymn 391) is like this. That is really a rising up hymn. That is like saying, 'Rise up, Spirit! sing unto it'; so you can see how this scripture helped the brethren in relation to the worship of the Holy Spirit: if you look into Mr James Taylor's ministry you will find that. When the worship of the Holy Spirit was first brought out, many brethren were not ready for it; it had to be brought out gradually, and most saw the need for it, the rightness of it and the preciousness of it. It was not just an individual matter, but there was that in the Spirit responded to collectively.

It goes on,

"Well which princes digged, which the nobles of the people hollowed out at the word of the lawgiver, with their staves".

I think these are persons of experience. These are persons who have been through things with God Himself and are able then to take the lead in this digging. It is not according to their own interpretation; it is "at the word of the lawgiver". That is acknowledging the authority of Christ in these matters, "the word of the lawgiver"; and that takes us to the epistle to the Corinthians where Paul is seeking to help these brethren by bringing in Christ Himself. It also takes us to Galatians who were in danger of slipping into bondage, and you can see how Paul was one who knew what it was to use the service of the Spirit wisely. I think the exercise of hollowing out with staves is going on now. There are persons of experience, experience with God, who would help us in that way, but let us each cultivate having this experience with God so that we may indeed collectively be able to say,

"Rise up, well! sing unto it".

I was also thinking as to Philippians. I think the Philipian saints would be good well-diggers. The testimony started in Europe in

Philippi and there were certain women there who, by custom, prayed at the river. Lydia is a very fine example for us of one who dug her well. It is said of her, "whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things spoken by Paul", Acts 16: 14. She did not just listen to them - there is a tendency just to listen to ministry and then ignore it; but Lydia was one who attended to the things spoken by Paul. "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house ...", v 15. I do not think there was any limitation or blockage there with Lydia. She was a good well-digger. So Philippi was a good locality, and I think it has been said that Philippians is an epistle written from the side of what is normal, JT vol 40 p221. Although there are obviously things to be taken account of, it is interesting that this was a letter that was written as a result of Epaphroditus taking the gift from Philippi to Paul. That is why I read as to Epaphroditus. He took it and he gave the gift to Paul, and then Paul was now writing back to the Philippian saints by the hand of Epaphroditus. Would you ever have thought that a man who wrote the epistle to the Philippians was in prison? Was he downcast? Was he limited? This was Paul, his public testimony almost finished, and yet here he was writing in this way. What does he say? "But I have all things in full supply and abound; I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things sent from you". Oh, dear brethren, how his heart was full of Christ! His heart, too, was full, I believe, of "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ". There is no limit to "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ", and can I just say, if you have received the Holy Spirit in your life, that is not a once and for all thing? It is not just a matter of asking for the Holy Spirit and then lapsing into what we were before. It is a constant exercise to be maintained in the living flow of "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ", because He would engage our hearts livingly with Christ. Romans 8, for instance, speaks of the Spirit and the flesh, and the Spirit helps us with that, but the Spirit's normal service is to engage our hearts with that blessed Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. So here Paul speaks in chapter 1 of "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ". I think that what sustained Paul in prison while he awaited his trial before that awful emperor, Nero, was "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ". I leave these few impressions with the dear brethren, that we might know individually what it is to maintain our wells free of earth; so that there is a living spring in freshness and vitality in our souls. I think it links with what was arrived at by the woman in John 4. And then in Numbers 21 we have the appreciation of what there is in the Holy Spirit collectively; so that through experience and as under the

authority of Christ, we can then say,

“Rise up, well! sing unto it”,

- to make space for the Holy Spirit to engage our hearts actively with land conditions, indeed, to take us over there, that we might enjoy these things; and then we might know the constancy of the supply of the Holy Spirit. It is not a once and for all thing, but it is constant. Dear brethren, may these few simple thoughts be for our encouragement, and may they also be used for the maintenance of what is vital and fresh in our affections and what is for God's pleasure, for His Name's sake!

Strood

4th October 2014

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Stephen McLaren

Philippians 4: 8

This verse has been with me of late, and I think it is a very full and rich verse, coming, as it does, in such an epistle as the epistle to the Philippians. It is a very rich and full epistle, full of affection, full of the apostle's outpouring of heart, his knowledge of the Lord Jesus. We can hardly pick up the book without thinking of the wonderful section at the beginning of chapter 2 where it speaks about the mind that is to be in us, “For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”, v 5. I am sure the brethren know the passage well.

This verse I have read, which comes after all these other things Paul had to say, says, “For the rest, brethren”. I suppose it is the idea of a final word before he concludes the book, and he is speaking about what we are to think of, what our minds are to be occupied with; it has often been said our minds are very important, and it is important they should be rightly occupied. The apostle here is speaking about things which we can be profitably occupied with in our minds, and things which will tend to us knowing what the peace of God is. We have just been speaking about that, “Be careful about nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses every understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus”, v 6-7. It is a blessed matter to know the peace of God, and I believe as we are occupied with the things which this verse speaks of we will know and enjoy what the peace of God is.

The first thing he says is, “whatsoever things are true”. It is very important we should be occupied with truth and what is true. I suppose we could say all these things are found, of course, in acknowledging Himself and being occupied in our minds with the detail of the things that are given here. We speak much about “the truth”, and when we were reading through John's epistles recently we read, for example, about one, Gaius, who was written to by John. It says, “For I rejoiced exceedingly when the brethren came and bore testimony to thy holding fast the truth, even as *thou* walkest in truth. I have no greater joy than these things that I hear of my children walking in the truth”, 3 John: 3-4. One thing that strikes me is how great a scope it is, a great scope of things which are profitable.

The next thing is, “whatsoever things are noble”. Our brother on Lord's day in the preaching spoke about the Bereans as “more noble than those in Thessalonica”, Acts 17: 11. You might have thought that the Thessalonians were very good, judging by what Paul had to say in his epistle, but in Berea there were some who were more noble than that. They were those who searched the Scriptures. There are plenty of examples in the Scriptures of persons who are noble in character, examples for us to think about.

Then it says, “whatsoever things are just”. It is important that what is just should prevail. As an example I was thinking of Simeon, where it says, “and this man was just and pious, awaiting the consolation of Israel”, Luke 2: 25. He, certainly, when he took the Babe into his arms, would have some knowledge of the peace of God that we have been speaking of.

“Whatsoever things are pure”. Purity is a very desirable feature. I often think of that woman who came and anointed the Lord just at the end of His life and she carried with her a vessel of pure nard. She poured it out upon the Lord's head, Mark 14: 3. She would have been one who would have been thinking about what was pure. How blessed an occupation it is to make much of the Lord Jesus, and what that woman did was to be spoken of as a memorial of her.

Then “whatsoever things are amiable” or, as the footnote says, 'lovable'. I do not think the word “amiable” means what is merely natural, but it is what is lovable in the sight of God. It occurs to me that we continue the work of God in such a thing as that. The work of God is lovable; the work of God that we can see in one another is what is lovable. We can enjoy it and in particular have our minds occupied with that character of things.

“Whatsoever things are of good report”. It is clear we can carry a good report. In the Acts there were those who could be spoken of as having a good report. In Acts 6 there is reference to certain men who were “well reported of, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”, v 3. That was in a situation where there was something that might have disturbed the peace, and the answer was to seek out men like this who were well reported of, and the matter was resolved. It is good to be able to take account of whether there is a good report of someone; do we rightly assess such as of God?

He finishes, “if there be any virtue and if any praise, think on

these things”, “if any praise”. It speaks in one of the epistles as to one “whose praise is not of men, but of God”, Rom 2: 29. We do not want to seek the praise of man but what is worthy in the sight of God. It says, “if there be any virtue and if any praise, think on these things”.

I just wondered about the scope of these suggestions. I have just been sketching over them, and no doubt there are other examples and instances. These things that are referred to in this verse will refer to the brethren. I was just thinking as regards that clause, “whatsoever things are amiable”, that we have a reference in Psalm 84, “How amiable are thy tabernacles” v 1. The psalmist speaks of the time when the saints are gathered together: “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of Jehovah”, and that gathering is spoken of as “amiable”. That is just another example of the extent and character and scope of what the apostle is suggesting in this verse. We live in a world that is very different from these things we have spoken of. We live in a world that is surrounded with what can cause defilement, and I think it is important that, as walking through such a world, we should be different, and our mind occupied with things of this character, and as it is so, we will have the peace of God presiding in our hearts. That is important for all of us, the young ones and the older ones too. We all need to have the effects of that, our minds rightly occupied. As we do so our hearts will be preserved too. We sang at the beginning of the love that drew our hearts to Christ. That can only take place if our minds are occupied with what is of Him.

I trust that something of what is said may bear fruit. May we be blessed in our consideration of it.

For His Name's sake.

Dundee

18th November 2014

MEN SECURED FOR GOD'S PLEASURE

David B Robertson

Ephesians 1: 3-6

One had an impression on Lord's day of God's valuation of persons being near to Him. It is a very great blessing for us to be near to God, and we have that privilege; in our individual history with Him, and in our homes, and especially together, we draw near to God. Hebrews speaks about that, drawing near to God, chap 11: 6. It is a very blessed matter that the way to God is open. That is an incentive provided to us from God's own side. When sin came in man was lost to God, and I believe that when God said to Adam, "Where art thou?" (Gen 3: 10), it disclosed a deep sense of sorrow in God's heart. He had lost man, but in His own operation of divine wisdom, divine grace, He operated and established a basis in redemption through which men can be secured, not merely for their own blessing but for God. We sometimes sing,

For Thou hast brought again to Him
More than by man He lost; (Hymn 431).

The wonderful effect of the great work of redemption is that we have been brought to God Himself. In Revelation, it says that we have been redeemed to God by the blood of the Lamb, Rev 5: 9. We never forget the cost. It has been an infinite cost, more than any one of us could measure, but God has measured it and through redemption He secured man for Himself. What was in my mind in saying that, beloved brethren, is that while redemption was accomplished to bring man out of the distance and bring him to God, we get through to what was in the purpose of God.

This verse was much on my mind as we proceeded on Lord's day, "having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself". What a blessed thing, "marked us out beforehand". The matter lay in the purpose of God and He operated according to the counsels of His own will to bring it to pass, and we can thankfully acknowledge the glory of the wisdom that lay behind it all in securing it. It says, "having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself". What a blessed matter that is, that God has operated "through Jesus Christ to himself". It could not be a greater mode of operation, or a greater Person through whom to operate: it could not be

greater, “through Jesus Christ to himself”. Oh, the glory of incarnation, that one of the Godhead should step into manhood and operate in such a way! All this lay in the purpose of God. It says, “having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will”. You think of the good pleasure of God; it is a remarkable expression really. It brings us into something of the secret of what God finds His pleasure in, “the good pleasure of his will”. His will also involves the glory of God's purpose. This is nothing short of wonderful, beloved brethren, all, “according to the good pleasure of his will”.

I trust that the Holy Spirit would give us some impression of the glory and greatness of it, “the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace”. If we have been brought into the wonder of these things, beloved brethren, it certainly is as a result of divine grace. How marvellous that persons have been thought about by God and secured through His grace to bring us into the glory of these things, not merely for our own blessing, although that is very wonderful and it speaks of that in verse 3, He “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ”. These are blessings that lie outside the reach of death. They are spiritual blessings. We enjoy them in time, but our blessings belong beyond death. Then it says, “wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved”. I do not think there is a stronger expression of the present position of Christ than that. I think it equates with what we get, “the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father”, John 1: 18. There He is: “the Beloved”! I think there is a certain strength of thought in it. There is something very great, it is “in the Beloved”. Christ is before God as the Beloved. He is there as Man, and God is finding today, at this very moment, His delight in Christ and He will find His delight in Him eternally. These are great matters to fill our hearts. Our brother has been speaking of what is to fill our minds, but this is to fill our hearts too - and to fill our minds - with the sense of the glory and the dignity and the value of being brought into these things, and we have been taken into favour in such a Person as that, the Person who means so much to God, the Person whose abiding presence fills and satisfies the heart of God constantly. Think of the glory of these thoughts, the wonder of them, the glory of the grace that has brought us into them, the glory of the position - and I use that word rightly - that God has put us in. He has “taken us into favour in the Beloved”. Now God has found far “more than by man He lost”: He has

secured the glory of His eternal purposes. God secured it for Himself, but we are enfolded in it.

These are great dignified thoughts, beloved brethren. I trust I have been able to convey something of the value of them.

May God bless the word!

Dundee

18th November 2014