

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 108

March 2016

CONTENTS

**Knowing The One
Who is Able**
Daan Dekker
Page 1

**Divine Feelings
and Their Effect**
Alistair M Brown
Page 12

“It Is The Lord”
Peter S Barlow
Page 20

The Ways of God
Derek Walker
Page 26

God’s Approach to Men
John Strachan
Page 29

KNOWING THE ONE WHO IS ABLE

Daan Dekker

Exodus 6: 2-3

Romans 16: 25-27

Ephesians 3: 14-21

Jude 1-3; 24-25

One of the things we spoke about in the reading was the revelation of God. I want to speak now of how in the old dispensation, God was known, but not in the same way as in this dispensation; and then to see how it is in our day.

We read in Exodus that God spoke to Moses, and said that in a former day He was not known as Jehovah, as He had made Himself known to Moses; He was known to the patriarchs as “the Almighty God”. By extension we can say that in the days of Israel God had not come out into the light of the blessed revelation of Himself in Christ and by the Person of the Holy Spirit. But there was something known of Him to the patriarchs; that He was the Almighty God. I wanted to extend that thought to the scriptures that we have read in the New Testament, the thought of “him that is able”, the One who is able. We can say that Abraham had proved the name of God. At the beginning God appeared and spoke to him, and brought him out of the area where he was being brought up, Acts 7: 2-4. After a considerable time, God appeared to him again in Genesis 17 and said, “I am the Almighty God: walk before my face, and be perfect”, v 1. In other words, in the language of our New Testament scriptures, He said, 'I am the One who is able for all things'. In chapter 16 Abraham had listened to Sarah his wife to go in to Hagar. Perhaps we could say that when God appeared to him, it was a gentle rebuke by God for what Abraham had done. He said to Abraham, 'I am the One who is able for all things, simply trust Me, simply cling to My promise, and all that I have done' - “walk before my face, and be perfect”. As far as I know, the only reference to the Almighty God in the New Testament outside the book of Revelation is in 2 Corinthians 6, where the name of the Father is connected with Jehovah and the Almighty God. So the way in which God was formerly known is not lost to us, but it is all accumulated in the way in which we know God now, and that is very wonderful.

Think now for a moment about Abraham and his faith. God called him when he was alone. Abraham had no counsel with other men: God “called him when he was alone”, Isa 51: 2. Then He gave the

promise to him to be “a father of a multitude of nations”, Gen 17: 4. He received a son in Isaac and then God said to him that he must offer up Isaac, the one in whom His promises were. And Abraham was willing even to do that. We read in Hebrews 11: 17-19, “By faith Abraham, when tried, offered up Isaac, and he who had received to himself the promises offered up his only begotten son, as to whom it had been said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: counting that God was able to raise him even from among the dead, whence also he received him in a figure”. It is a marvellous thought that Abraham not only had the light of the resurrection, as we see in Genesis 23 when he was buying a burial place for his wife Sarah, but he counted on the God of the resurrection; he counted that God was able to raise his son from the dead. It says “he received him in a figure”; wonderful faith of Abraham. So it is completely justified that Abraham is called the father of all believers in Romans 4 v 11-12, not only of the believers from Israel, but also of the believers from the Gentiles, Gen 15: 5.

Well, as we come to the New Testament, we can come to know God in a greater way. In Old Testament days it was known that God was able for all things, but it was not known what 'all things' really meant because God had not been revealed in the light as yet.

In Romans Paul is directing the saints in Rome to “him that is able”. He has written this epistle, and his longing was to be with them. Many times he wanted to come to them he said, in order to establish them in the truth of his glad tidings, Rom. 1: 11-13. But in the ways of God it had not happened yet; so now we have this precious letter, the epistle to the Romans. When he had written all these truths of the foundation of the gospel, and leading on to the glorious gospel that was committed to him, he could refer to it as, “my glad tidings”. God had especially committed it to him, the gospel of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Rom 1: 3, 4. You see it straightway when he was converted that in the synagogues “he preached Jesus that *he* is the Son of God”, Acts 9: 20. I think that all was involved there already, namely that Christ is the Centre of a new world before God. This was already established in the place that the Lord Jesus has as glorified, and that is our place with Him. But now we must look to ourselves and review how much we are established according to this letter. I think it is good from time to time to ask ourselves this question. We have heard the glad tidings many times. Every Lord's day the word of God is preached in our meeting rooms, and I have never met a brother who has said that we do not need the preaching of the word of God. We always need to be

taught; we always need to become more established. I do not think there will be anyone who dares to say that he is thoroughly established in all the truth!

I wanted to just go briefly over five points in this letter and see how we are in relation to it in our own souls. I take it for granted that we already have our faith in the Lord Jesus, and have appreciated the precious price which He has paid for us, He “whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood”, Rom 3: 25. We believe in God who has raised Him from among the dead (Rom 4: 24-25); so we have the same character of faith as Abraham had. We have been justified on the principle of faith, and we stand in favour and we boast in hope of the glory of God, Rom 5: 1, 2.

The first point I want to touch upon is in Romans 5: 11, where it says, “we are making our boast in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom now we have received the reconciliation”. I was wondering if we are amongst those who are making our boast in God. Are we those that give God all the credit for our salvation; that we have been reconciled to Him, that we are in such intimacy, that we have been brought so nigh? Do we give God all the credit for all He has done? Well, you may say, 'I have faith', and the Lord would give you credit for that (Luke 7: 50), but faith comes from God, Phil 1: 29. We were completely powerless, as you read in the verses before this section in chapter 5. We were enemies, and still sinners when Christ died for us. But now we are making our boast in God. You see it illustrated in the Israelites who went through the Red Sea. They saw the dead bodies of the Egyptians upon the sea shore, and when they got over, Moses and the children of Israel sang! They were making their boast in God! They gave God all the credit for their salvation! They spoke of what God had done, “The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea”, Exod 15: 1; they were wholly occupied with Himself. We see it too in the Samaritan leper, one of the ten, in Luke's gospel. The ten lepers were all cleansed but there was only one who came back to the Lord Jesus, “glorifying God with a loud voice”, Luke 17: 15. There was one who was making his boast in God, and the exercise is, are we amongst those who make their boast in God?

The second point that I wish to raise is at the beginning of chapter 8. “There is then now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death”, v 1, 2. I think that is another landmark in this epistle, and a very important one! Can we all say that for us there

is no condemnation, and that we are set free? When we are in Christ, then there is no condemnation for us, and we experience that there is power in us to fulfil our obligations. Or are we still struggling with ourselves, with our flesh, as seen in chapter 7? It is very important to know something of chapter 7, the struggle of the flesh in us. It is of the utmost importance that we come to it that we are completely powerless in ourselves. Our desire is to please God, but we see that we have no power to do this. Then we come to the point where we feel ourselves the most wretched of men because we are completely powerless to fulfil our desires according to God. It is good to come to that, "that in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell", v 18. But Paul also says, "it is no longer / that do it, but the sin that dwells in me", v 20. Have you come to that point? There is something in us that is from God, and that is our "I", and the rest is not from God. If we reach that, we have made some progress. But there is a way out of this misery! We must not remain in this state, because "There is then now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus", because the One who bore our sins in His body on the tree, is also the One in whom God has dealt with our sinful state, and now we can be free! "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set **me** free": it is a personal exercise to come to it. There is great joy in being delivered, and even more, to know the Deliverer, the One who is able to deliver me, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord", chap 7: 25. Someone who is established according to Paul's gospel is one who knows of these things experimentally and is now able to fulfil their responsibilities.

In verse 4 of chapter 8 it speaks of "the righteous requirement of the law"; that means what is due to God and what is due to our neighbour. To love God above all, and "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself", Mark 12: 30-31. But there is really an additional thought as in the words of Elisha to the widow: "live thou and thy sons on the rest", 2 Kings 4: 7. In the power of the Holy Spirit we can now go on from that point, we can now enjoy what is according to God, what is in His purpose, what is our inheritance; we can "live on the rest". It says in verse 13, "if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live", and that is what we have. If you are not free, the purpose of God is something that is beyond you, and you are not able to enjoy this. It is something that you cannot enjoy when you are completely occupied with yourself. When you are free of yourself you can be in liberty with God, have the power of the Holy Spirit in you, and have the experience of being a conqueror; you can overcome.

Now the third point I want to point you to, is what we have in verse 28. There it speaks of “those who are called according to purpose”; so that means God has a purpose. What is God's purpose? It is to glory Himself in Christ. It says in verse 29 that we have been “predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son”, and that Christ “should be the firstborn among many brethren”; is that not wonderful! We can have the enjoyment of it in our hearts already. Seeing the place that the Lord Jesus has already would help us to come to this. The place He has is according to God's purpose. From that point on we can see ourselves in relation to the Lord Jesus, “that he should be the firstborn among many brethren”. It was in God's purpose to distinguish His Son in order that He should be surrounded by the many sons who should bear His image, be like Him. Being occupied with God's purpose gives stability to your soul which you cannot find elsewhere because God will not be hindered in any thought of His. The enemy is trying to do that. In Psalm 2: 2 we see something of that. There we see the nations against God and Christ, but you see God's thought: “/ have anointed my king upon Zion, the hill of my holiness”, v 6. That cannot be moved at all; how wonderful to come to that in your soul. After severe and prolonged exercises Job came to it: “I know that thou canst do everything, and that thou canst be hindered in no thought of thine”, Job 42: 2.

The fourth point that I want to point to is also in chapter 8. We are now occupied with God's purpose, but what about our walk here? We have our lives here; we have our exercises here; we are going through a scene of sin and death. People are against us; circumstances are against us. Well, let us look at verse 39; there is nothing that “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”. As we go through this scene we have the distinct assurance in our souls that there is nothing that can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. Paul says, and can we say in our measure, “I am persuaded”? Can we say that in the things that we may go through, “tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword”, v 35? Perhaps we know only very little practically about these things; other believers are perhaps more tested. But we do go through a scene where all these things are seen, and we can be more than conquerors because of One who has loved us. One who is established knows something of this, that there is nothing, “nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

Well, the last thing I want to point out is in the beginning of chapter 12; “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God”. Paul is saying 'I have presented to you such wonderful blessings, what are you going to do now? I do not command you, I do not put you under a law to do certain things; “I beseech you ... by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice”. I trust that in a measure we have all done this, that we have presented our bodies to God in order to serve Him to be able to see and discern what this perfect will is; “which is your intelligent service”. If we really have learnt these former four points in our souls, we cannot do anything else than put our bodies on the altar and be for God.

I think when we review these things most of us feel the need of being more established. Paul commits the saints “to him that is able to establish” us, establish us according to his glad tidings. His glad tidings involve more than Romans, I know, because almost every epistle says something about this glorious gospel. But this is the foundational epistle, and I trust we shall not leave this epistle but take it with us, take the blessings and exercises with us in going to other thoughts of God for us. I have read (see *The Worship of God* - A J Gardiner p 16) that Mr Darby said that a good Roman can go anywhere. That is, if you are once established in Romans, which involves a complete judgment of the flesh, and the definite recognition of the Spirit, you have no difficulty in following anything that the Spirit opens up in the truth; you are established according to Paul's glad tidings. But there is a very attractive additional thought, because it says “according to my glad tidings and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery”. What is that? Paul did not speak about it in this epistle. When this epistle came to these Roman believers, they already knew some things because by then they were believers; perhaps they received confirmation, but certainly this was something completely new, “the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery”.

Well, that brings us to the epistle of the Ephesians especially. Romans says, “silence has been kept in the times of the ages, but which has now been made manifest, and by prophetic scriptures, according to commandment of the eternal God, made known for obedience of faith to all the nations”. It is almost the same language as in chapter 1: 5 where he speaks about his gospel that is going to be preached amongst all the nations. He writes of the mystery, the wonderful truth about Christ and the assembly, the assembly as

composed of Jews and Gentiles, reconciled to God in one body, that glorious vessel in which God shall eternally be glorified. This thought of the mystery must certainly have made these Roman believers attracted to search the scriptures. I understand that the epistle to the Ephesians and Colossians had not been written by the time that Paul wrote this letter to the Romans. So perhaps this is a prophetic statement, although the ministry of Paul had certainly been preached. He says to the Ephesian elders in chapter 20 of Acts, "I have not shrunk from announcing to you all the counsel of God", v 27. He said this before he had written his epistle to them. His preaching was in that direction, and it is for obedience of faith. So we see here that we can never separate the gospel and the assembly. I think it is very helpful that the point in this epistle is that Paul does not want to separate his gospel from the mystery, from Christ and the assembly. He says, "made known for obedience of faith to all the nations - the only wise God"; we can see some of the reasons why silence had been kept in the times of the ages. It was not for the believers in Old Testament times, but I think also that those believers were not able to bear it. Even in the Lord's time with His disciples the Lord said to them, "I have yet many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now. But when *he* is come, the Spirit of truth, he shall guide you into all the truth", John 16: 12, 13. Well, what is the result of knowing God as the One who is able to establish us? The result is that there is glory to Him. God is always working towards His glory. He wants to establish His people, but the result is that there should be glory to Him.

In the scripture we have read in Ephesians we also have the thought of the One who is able. Here it is not in relation to knowing certain things, to be established in the truth of the glad tidings of Paul, or know the truth of Christ and the mystery. Now it is to enjoy what I would call the choicest of assembly experiences, and this is why Paul is bowing his knees. He has already prayed in chapter 1, that the saints may become enlightened about certain things, v 18. Now he is bowing his knees in order that God should work out things in them. Ministry in itself is not enough. Paul is bowing his knees in order that certain things should be known in an experimental way by us: "that Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts". Is that not a precious thought! I think it is the answer to the Lord's prayer in John 17, "that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them" (v 26), that Christ should have the same place in our affections as He has in the Father's affections, which is a very precious thought.

This cannot come to pass just through ministry. We become attracted to certain things, and it helps us to go in for certain things ourselves. I think Paul was praying for the saints in this direction; it is important that we should do the same. This in order that the people of God should enjoy here in the fullest possible way what is the love of Christ, what is their inheritance, and the precious relationships in which we are with Christ and the Father. It says, "that ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God"; that is a very high level. This is not something we come to on our own, but when we are together. It says "that ye may be fully able to apprehend with all the saints". To be filled "to all the fulness of God" seems to me to mean what we can enjoy as creatures in the light in which God has revealed Himself. And this in the fullest way possible in the mixed conditions in which we still are. This is perhaps a foretaste of what it will be, "that God may be all in all", 1 Cor 15: 28.

It says in verse 20, "But to him that is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think"; what are we asking? What are we thinking? Are we asking to enjoy to the full these great thoughts of God for ourselves, for our local brethren, for all the saints? Because it is only in connection with all the saints that we can enjoy these things. So Paul says that God "is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think". We can apply this scripture to many things. Why are we praying? We are praying because we cannot do something ourselves, and because we have to do with One who is able! We are simply saying in prayer to our God and Father that He is able in relation to ourselves, in relation to our families, in relation to our local companies, in relation to the testimony, in relation to all the saints. He is able! It is fine to realise in our prayers that we have to do with One who is able for all things. Perhaps when we think of that we think of our need, but in this connection it is not at all about our need. What God is doing is something far above the need of our souls: "that ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God. But to him that is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think, according to the power which works in us". We can experience that in the service of God. It is not something that we can make, not something that we can approach from a human standpoint; all God's power is there operating in us to bring this to pass, and He is "able to do far exceedingly above". It is not only "above", but it is "far exceedingly above all which we ask or think". God is able to do that, and it is for the blessing of His people, but it is for the glory of God. There will be "glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages"; that means the glory is already there now! It will be unto all generations, but it is already there now in the assembly. I think

everyone here will realise that we need the One who is able to do these things. When we look back to the Old Testament, God was known as One who was able, but He had not made Himself fully known. It was not possible for believers then to have an inkling that God would be able to do all these things: to bring the saints into the full enjoyment of Himself, to bring them in the full enjoyment of the love of God in Christ, and to bring them in full response to Himself.

Now that reminds me of a document called the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The first question in it is, 'What is the chief end of man', and the answer is, 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever'. I think that is a very blessed statement. But what is so wonderful is that before there is glory to God we enjoy Him, and as a result of enjoying Him we glorify Him, and this "in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen". We need the help of God's power operating in us to bring us to experience this in the service of God, that we can say indeed that He has done far above all that we ask or think. There is always a greater understanding and enjoyment possible as we experience these things collectively.

Now we come to the passage in Jude, and it says in verse 3: "Beloved, using all diligence to write to you of our common salvation, I have been obliged to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints". I want to apply it in this way: Jude was saying that his desire was to speak about these precious truths in Romans and Ephesians, but for the moment he had to write about something different because certain things had come in. And in order that these blessed truths of Romans and Ephesians, and the blessed answer to God, should be preserved, we must be warned about certain things, "to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints". Well, when you read further in this letter you see what an awful situation had already come to pass in Christendom in the day of Jude; and how much more in our day. I wonder if we are feeling enough about what has come to pass in Christendom. Are we feeling things with the Lord? It has been said of Mr Darby that the sorrows of the church were never absent from his spirit for an hour at a time, see *Ministry by P Lyon* vol 2 p104. Think of that! That man, and the depth that was in his soul in relation to what had come in! I think it is important that we have a sense of that too, and it should remain with us, and keep us humble.

But then it says "exhorting you": who are the "you"? Well, it is you and me, and in fact every saint. It is not only those who are taking responsibility in the meetings, or our older brethren, but it comes to you

and me. Jude said in the first verse that he was writing “to the called ones beloved in God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ”; are you amongst those? Are you conscious of the love of the Father? Are you conscious that the Lord Jesus is the One who is going to preserve you? If that is the case, these words, “to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints”, are for you and for me.

I think one of the things that has come to light in certain present exercises amongst us is that everyone is responsible. We are all responsible for standing for the precious truth that God has given us. I say without a shadow of doubt that we are amongst the most privileged believers on the face of the earth. But that also means we have a great responsibility to hold what we have and to stand for the truth, to cling to it with all our might, not to trespass the principles of fellowship or to lower the standards, or to support those who are lowering the standards. On the other hand, I also see more and more the need to support one another; that we help one another to fulfil our responsibilities in regard to the testimony and in regard to the Lord Jesus Himself, in order that precious things might be preserved.

Well, you may say this sounds somewhat negative, and therefore I want to make some remarks about what the Lord says in Luke 14. We have two things there: in verses 16-24, we see that the Lord speaks about a great supper and many are invited to come; everyone refuses, and then the invitation goes out to others, and many were brought in to enjoy that great supper. If I can apply it, we are here to enjoy the greatest things that God has supplied for us in these precious truths of Christ and the assembly, the precious truths of Paul's ministry and what is involved in it all, and that has been committed to us. But then after that it says that great crowds went with Him, went with the Lord Jesus, v 25. He said to them, “whoever does not carry his cross and come after me”, v 27. I think that is a searching word! Who is able to follow Him? I think those who are really enjoying and absorbing these precious truths that are involved in Paul's ministry about Christ and the assembly, they are the ones who are able to follow the Lord Jesus. You could say, 'Well this word is hard'. It is not, because certain things must be protected, must be held. We must accept that the way we are going involves responsibility to hold these precious truths, to hold them fast in an attractive way, and to hold one another; not to lose sight of this and not to lower standards, but to hold to it.

You may ask who is able for these things; well, Jude says at the end of this epistle in verse 24, “But to him that is able to keep you without stumbling”. I know for myself that we stumble in many things. I

looked up the English translation and it says, “we all often offend”, James 3: 2. In the Dutch Authorised Version it says “we stumble in many things”. That is very true; we stumble in many things in our practical lives, in our lives together, in our meetings. But that brings before our view again the One who is able, “him that is able to keep you without stumbling”. That is wonderful!

You may ask how it is possible that we can be kept without stumbling. That must be for a coming day! No, it will be seen in a coming day, but it is for now. Let us cling to that; let us seek to know God and to prove Him in this way. Abraham counted on the One who was able; let us count on the One who is able. He is not only able to keep us without stumbling but there is an additional thought, “and to set you with exultation blameless before his glory”. How great and wonderful that is! Think of Jude writing this letter; his heart was full of sorrow, anxiety for the saints that they should be preserved, and he warned them. But now he comes to the end of the epistle and his eye is directed to the One who is able and he commits the saints to the One “that is able ... to set you with exultation blameless before his glory”. There is something very special in that! In a coming day we shall experience this, but do we not think that we can experience this in measure in our hearts already now? That we shall be set before the One who is able to do these things, wonderful! Well, that is the God with whom we have to do. He wants to bless His people abundantly, preserve His people in every way, in order that there may be glory to Him. Then it says, “to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might and authority, from before the whole age, and now, and to all the ages”. So Jude had in mind that there should be glory to God now. Is that before us, that God should have His glory? That there should be response to God in praise and adoration and worship from the hearts of His own, from the assembly as a collective entity together, the assembly in Christ Jesus?

Well, I trust our hearts are uplifted and stimulated towards the One who is able to establish us, to do far exceedingly above all that which we ask or think, to keep us from stumbling and to set us with exultation blameless before His glory. May there be glory to Him!

I commit the word now to Him that is able. In the name of the Lord Jesus.

Grangemouth

14th November 2015

DIVINE FEELINGS AND THEIR EFFECT

Alistair M. Brown

John 3: 35

John 16: 26-30

2 Corinthians 11: 2

Philippians 2: 19-21

I seek the Lord's help to speak from these scriptures about divine feelings, and the effect they are to have in us as believers. As we speak about God's feelings, we would think first of all of the great and blessed fact that God is love (1 John 4: 8); that is His nature; it is an unqualified statement. We bless Him for the fact that He is love. It would give us feelings of confidence in that blessed One. Everything that God does is governed by the fact that He is love. We read about that particularly in John's first epistle, and also in his gospel. We learn from John's gospel that love was there before the foundation of the world. Before there were any people, before there was any matter, before a physical creation existed and before time existed (they were all brought into being by the word of God), there was love. One divine Person is able to say to another, "thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world", John 17: 24. Love was there: it was in expression between divine Persons. What a thought that is! It is not power that the Lord speaks of, or wisdom, or righteousness, but love is spoken of, love in expression and activity between divine Persons: "thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world".

God's love was so great that He needed to express it towards objects outside of Himself, and He had man in mind from the beginning. First He made the physical creation as a theatre into which He would introduce mankind. In the first chapter of Genesis we learn that God made things very favourable, and put man in the most favourable position. Man was the object of God's interest and of God's love. We know that he failed, and the close communications that God had sought with His creature at the first were disrupted through disobedience and sin. But God's heart did not change. When God brought in man, He foresaw all that would take place. But He was looking forward to something greater: He was looking forward to bringing in Christ. That was God's thought in making man: He had Christ in mind. He is the Firstborn of all creation; He has the prime place in God's mind in making man. Christ is, of course, unique: He is not a creature, He is not a

creation: but He is the Firstborn. He is the pattern, the One that comes first. He is also the One who drew out the unqualified and unconstrained love of God as Father. As soon as that blessed One came into this scene at His birth; there was joy in heaven. Then when He came out of the waters of baptism at the very beginning of His period of public ministry, the heavens were opened and that voice was heard, “*Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight*”, Luke 3: 22. The feelings of God the Father were poured out upon that One who so delighted Him.

It is wonderful to see that God has feelings. He has feelings like no other: they are powerful, perfect and holy. They all proceed from His heart of love, and Christ was the great Object of the expression of these feelings. What satisfaction the Father had in that blessed One, whose private walk of thirty years under the eye of God was flawless and morally glorious at every step. Every morning His ear was opened “to hear as the instructed”, Isa 50: 4. He was wakened “morning by morning” by God. What moral perfection, what flawlessness: the first time heaven had ever been able to take account of such a Person, a sinless, flawless, holy Man. What it drew out was the love of God upon that blessed One: wonderful matter!

God's love is effective - it has results. I draw attention to the action and the result that we read about in John chapter 3, “the Father loves the Son”; that is an unqualified statement. How wonderful that is. The footnote to John 21: 15 explains the word used shows this to be a matter of the Father's settled disposition. There was nothing whatsoever in the blessed Lord Jesus that could possibly interrupt the complacent, settled disposition of the Father's love towards the Son, “the Father loves the Son”. It is a continuing, uninterrupted flow of satisfied affection from the Father to that blessed One. And then there is a result: it says, “and has given all things to be in his hand”. The love is expressing itself in action, resulting from the complete confidence that the Father has in this blessed One. The Father's love puts Christ in a position of power and authority by giving all things to be in His hand. What a matter that God should find a Man upon whom His love could rest fully and complacently and into whose hand He could commit everything with entire confidence. What an object of the Father's love, and what results! The Scripture gives us some impression of the glory of who the Son is: He was the blessed and flawless Object of the love of heaven, the love of the Father; and He was entirely capable of fulfilling

everything that the Father committed into His hand. He was the Man who was accomplishing, and still accomplishes, everything for God, in a manner consistent with those characteristics that drew out the affection of the Father. He is the Centre of the Father's love and the Centre of the Father's operations. The Father does not have anyone else in mind: He does not have one who is the object of His affection, and another who is the man of power and wisdom and skill and energy to effectuate everything for Him. No, He has one Man in mind, One in whom all these blessed glories and characteristics come together.

You and I have been brought by divine grace to know that wonderful Person as our Saviour and as Lord. He who is the Centre of the Father's affections has become the wonderful Object of our love, confidence and interest! What a matter it is!

Another example of the effectiveness of God's love is in John 3: 16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him may not perish, but have life eternal". What a full demonstration of God's love that was: how active God's love has become, active in the most remarkable sacrifice. It is wonderful that God should give the One that He loved more than any, the One upon whom His love rested so fully and complacently, that One whose very flawlessness drew out His love. The very same flawlessness that so drew out the love of God fitted His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. As sinless, He was able to bear the righteous judgment of God so that the guilt that was due to me - and which I could never bear - He bore instead. What a matter! The One who is the supreme Object of the Father's love was given up in the love of God to secure men and women and children for God eternally. What a demonstration, what a filling out of the love of God that He gave that One! His love was effective in giving Christ. Christ's flawlessness was fully demonstrated in His obedience to the Father's will and in His complete subjection that took Him to the cross. The love of God was seen in the giving of Jesus, and His heart was never more satisfied in the blessedness and perfection of that beloved One than when He was upon the cross in complete subjection to the Father's will. The greatest suffering, the greatest test, brought out the fulness of His perfection and thus gave God further cause to love Him. What matters these are for our hearts! The way that God's affections become effective in the hearts of people is through the demonstration of His love in the giving of Christ. That giving draws out affection in the hearts of those who receive the word. So that God's

love becomes effective, through Christ, in you and in me; what a wonderful thing that is!

In John 16 we see how love had become effective in the hearts of the disciples. Christ, in His availability and in His blessed, gracious humanity, had come near to these disciples and so appealed to their hearts that they had affection for Him. That is another word for love. The word used there is '*phileo*', which is the intense love of friendship. So here we have the One who is the Object of God's love, and embodies it, walking in gracious, humble manhood in this scene and demonstrating the love of God in such a way that it had an effect in the hearts of those whom He drew round Him, those whom the Father had drawn to Him, John 6: 44. So divine affections were at work, the Lord's affections; then the Father drawing these disciples to Christ, and their hearts so affected that they have affection for Him. Their devotion for Him was taken account of in heaven: the Father saw that they had had affection for Christ. That leads to the Father having affection for them. "The Father himself has affection for you, because ye have had affection for me". What a circle of love we see here: the Father, God Himself, is the source of it all, and that love is expressed in the One who is the Son, in the Lord Jesus Christ. Love is brought into expression and circulation in God's disposition towards mankind, expressed in and by the Son. But particularly it is known and expressed in the circle of His disciples who were devoted to Him. The result was affection in their hearts towards Christ Himself. He was the Centre of their circle; they formed a circle of love for Him. The Father takes note of that and He Himself has affection for them because the disciples had affection for the Lord Jesus. The result of that affection was that their eyes were opened to see and to believe that He came out from God. They were beginning to see something of what was in God's mind in giving this blessed One, and that He came out from God. The Lord goes on to say, "I came out from the Father, and have come into the world; again, I leave the world and go to the Father". He is making things known to them: He is making things known to those that love Him, things that concern His own relations with the Father and the mission that He had as the one who "came out from God and was going to God" (John 13: 3), and into whose hands everything had been committed. As a result of affection in operation, He is able to share with His own these blessed spiritual insights of huge significance to heaven and to the heart of God. How touching that the affection of God Himself, resting upon and expressed in and through the Son, has such an effect in the hearts of

people that they form a circle of affection and confidence in which the blessed purposes of God can be made known and appreciated. The result is that His disciples say, "Lo, now thou speakest openly and utterest no allegory". Their hearts and their minds were being opened up by the outpouring of the insights they were being given into the heart of God Himself, and into His purpose in sending the Son into the world. "Now we know that thou knowest all things, and hast not need that anyone should demand of thee." The disciples' hearts were being opened to appreciate the glory of the Lord Jesus, and they add, "By this we believe that thou art come from God". Their eyes were being opened to see something of who this One really was. It would not be until later, after the Lord had gone on high and the incoming of the Holy Spirit, that they would fully understand who this One was. Meantime their hearts were being prepared to see more and more of His glory.

Divine love was becoming effective in their hearts in this way. I think these words "By this we believe that thou art come from God" would be taken account of in heaven. The Father would hear these words. These were thoughts that had until then been in the Father's mind and heart, and had been shared with the Son; they had been until that time the subject of communication and shared enjoyment between the Father and the Son, but now the disciples were beginning to appreciate the greatness of who Christ is, and of His mission as having come from God and going to God. That appreciation in turn brings out these words of the Lord Jesus, "Do ye now believe?" (v 31); and then He turns in prayer to the Father. The impression I have, which I think is conveyed in the scripture here, is that the opening of the minds and the hearts of the disciples, seen in what they say to the Lord, is a consequence of what the Lord says to them as to their affection for Him and the Father's affection for them. Then immediately the Lord Jesus turns in thanksgiving and in prayer to His Father. As we know, in His prayer in John 17, He speaks very largely of His own: it is a most wonderful matter. And again verse 20 of John 17 brings you and me right into what the Lord has to say to the Father: "for those that believe on me through their word" includes us. These scriptures help to show how the love that is flowing from the Father to the Son has expressed itself towards us in Christ, and has had and is having wonderful results in the hearts of the saints. This was seen in these disciples.

In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul speaks about certain feelings that he had. He refers to jealousy; it is jealousy that is of God; so it is a divine feeling, and Paul shared it. Jealousy is a consequence of love;

'jealousy' does not mean 'envy'. It is a feeling that God has. We can infer this from what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11: jealousy is the feeling that God has towards the bride of Christ, towards the church, the assembly. His jealousy is because He wants that blessed vessel to be wholly and entirely for Christ Himself as His counterpart. That is part of His purpose in love, part of His thought in making man. He had Christ in mind, and He had the assembly in mind, and together they fulfil God's wonderful thoughts in love in making man. In His love for Christ and for the assembly, "which he has purchased with the blood of his own" (Acts 20: 28), He is jealous. What love that God should be prepared to give the blood of His own to purchase this vessel. How do we feel about the assembly? Do we share God's view of the church that He has purchased with the blood of His own? God does not want anything to come in to deceive, or spoil, or divert. That is how Paul felt, too; the feelings of God were in Paul's heart. He spent time in God's presence, and was told things that were told to nobody else, things that, "it is not allowed to man to utter", 2 Cor 12: 4. Paul had impressions from the Man in the glory, particularly impressions about the church. He shared God's feeling of love and jealousy for that vessel, and he laboured so that nothing should come in to corrupt or divert the assembly from being a chaste virgin for Christ. "Assembly" means a body of people called out: to be only for Christ. The feelings of God were burning in Paul's heart as he wrote to these dear believers in Corinth. The feelings that Paul had were the feelings of an apostle evidently, but they flowed from his heart as an exercised believer who desired that God's feelings should be respected, honoured and answered to. God's feelings as to the assembly resonated in the soul of the apostle Paul. It is to be the same with me: my feelings are to resonate as Paul's did with the desire that saints should be, as a called-out company, set apart for the pleasure and honour of Christ. Furthermore, I am to find my part in that company, and to promote its prosperity spiritually, because the feelings of God are so precious, and have had such a result in me and in my life. The feelings of God are not ethereal; they have been expressed tangibly and concretely, and they have had and are having an effect. They have had an eternal effect in the blood of Christ being given, "purchased with the blood of his own", but they are having an eternal effect, too, in the hearts and souls of myriads of believers. God's feelings towards the church are feelings of love, and thus of jealousy. He desires that the assembly should be according to His mind, and held wholly for Christ. So, as Paul's feelings had been so stirred up by these

feelings of God, feelings of the Father, and the feelings of the Lord Jesus for His own, may ours be stirred up too.

In Philippians 2 we read of Paul wanting to send Timothy to Philippi to bring back a report of how the dear brethren there were getting on. He was looking forward to being refreshed by first hand news from Timothy, who cared “with genuine feeling how the saints get on”. First of all, God cares how the saints get on. A scripture that bears that out is in Deuteronomy 5:29, “Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments continually, that it might be well with them and with their sons forever!”. The feelings of God are conveyed in that expression, “Oh!”. God's desire for His people was that it might be well with them and their sons forever. God's feelings are magnanimous and extensive, and they have blessing in mind. It is clear that God cares very much how the saints get on; His feelings are very definitely engaged in that matter. How extensive God's interest is in His people; every sorrow and every sadness is taken account of, every joy too. God also takes account of every example of persecution; how many believers are being persecuted in this world today, some giving up their lives because of their faith; God cares about that. So Timothy was a man who shared God's feelings as to the saints. Timothy was a man who had faith. He was also afflicted by some cowardice: Paul has to speak to him about having “a spirit ... of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”, not a spirit of cowardice, 2 Tim 1: 7. That is like me. Timothy was a faithful man, but he did suffer from certain doubts and fears. However, he cared with genuine feeling how the saints got on. Timothy's heart had been so affected by the love of God expressed in Christ that he shared in his measure (and all we can do is share in measure) in the feelings of the Father Himself and of Christ for the saints. He did not seek his own things, but the things of Jesus Christ: he was concerned about how the saints got on. The love of God had been effective in Timothy's heart, bringing out in what at one time had been an unregenerate heart - just like our hearts have been - features of the very feelings and love of God Himself.

I commend to each one of us that we might have feelings towards one another as Timothy had. I do not think Timothy was partial; he cared with genuine feeling about all the saints, not just in Philippi. He would care about them all in Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche, and Lydia and her household, and the jailor and his household; and he

would love them all. If you went to the next locality, Timothy would know and love the saints there too; He cared with genuine feeling how the saints got on, not because he was naturally an affectionate kind of man, but because his heart had been affected by the outshining of the love of God and his feelings were, in their measure, like God's feelings.

All of this starts with the God of love. It has come into wonderful expression, perfectly and fully, in Christ, and it is being worked out under the hand of Christ here in this long period of grace and under the care of the blessed Holy Spirit. Divine feelings are being worked out into effect now, and everything that is of God is being gathered up and it will come into expression in the day to come. It will be maintained through eternity. These feelings of which God is the author and source are returning and will return to Him. Everything has come out from Him, and everything will return to Him; it will all be according to Him. We thus see something of the scope, magnitude, and blessedness of what God has originated and what in His grace and mercy He has drawn us into. He sustains us and will sustain us; so there is a full return to Him, and the God of love will dwell eternally with men in conditions of love. There will be no distance then; God's love will be fully requited. Hearts will resonate, full of love towards Him. We can enter into this even in the practical things that we have mentioned as to Paul and as to Timothy.

May these be real experiences to us, beloved, for the Lord's name's sake!

Grangemouth

24th January 2015

“IT IS THE LORD”

Peter S Barlow

Acts 9: 3-5 (to “I am Jesus”)

Luke 5: 5-8; 10 (from “And Jesus”)

John 21: 5-7

These four words in the last portion we have read have been very much upon my heart this week: “It is the Lord”. Particularly in this day, how far is there any recognition of divine authority? They are beautiful words: “It is the Lord”; they point to a wonderful glorious Man. We think of the clamour and the noise that is around us, and particularly in this day and age we find in the affairs of men that everyone stands for their own rights and what belongs to themselves. There is generally a loss of fear or acknowledgement of God.

Considering this scripture drew me to the other two scriptures and in both of them you see the words of the speaker referring to the Lord Jesus as Lord. I believe that the only way you come into what God is freely offering through the glad tidings is to acknowledge the One that has secured the basis for God to come out in blessing, and to acknowledge Him as Lord.

I do not decry the many signs we see about, 'Jesus saves' and 'Jesus lives'; they are beautiful. That is how the Lord introduces Himself to Saul. He says, “I am Jesus”, Acts 9: 5. The way into the joy of blessing and salvation is to come to acknowledge that there is a far greater authority than anything here. There is a far greater Person, and He is the Lord. Saul was a very great man in his day: naturally speaking, he was a man of much ability; and, in persecuting the saints, he thought he was doing it for God. As the Lord spoke to him as that light shone out of heaven he fell to the ground. I would that each one of us would have that experience of seeing the light out of heaven shine round about; that we should fall to the ground. It puts me entirely out of sight. It puts a man that is at enmity with God out of the way. It has been spoken of as Saul being smashed here (JND Synopsis on Acts p25); and what was the end in view? What is the end in view in the gospel preaching for every one of us? It is not that we should merely know what it is to be prostrate, but that God can raise us up to something new. “Who art thou, Lord?”. I would judge that Saul probably knew very few greater than himself. There was some acknowledgement of God, “Pharisee, son of Pharisees” (Acts 23: 6),

“brought up in this city, at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22: 3); he was a very great, intelligent and capable man, but immediately as that light shone round about him he recognised Someone far greater: “Who art thou, Lord?”.

Beloved, have you made that cry? Have you felt that touch? Have you felt that feeling of God speaking directly to you? Do you feel that shaft of light reaching into the very inmost of your heart? Have you realised that you have to do with a great and eternal God? Acknowledge the One who speaks, the One who is the Son; acknowledge Him as Lord. I really believe that joy, salvation, peace with God can only be found as accepting Jesus as Lord. That glorious One would love to have that touch with you. He says, “I am Jesus”; He wants that wonderful personal relationship with you. He cannot have that if I am in the way; He cannot have that relationship if I come first. He can only come in as I acknowledge His greatness and glory; acknowledge Him as Lord; and He will present Himself as Jesus. Is not that a wonderful blessing? Did He do that to make little of you? No; He does that because His heart is so full He wants you for Himself. He wants you to know the fulness and greatness of His love towards you. He wants you to acknowledge who He is, to acknowledge what He has done, and to find in Him your joy, and rest, and peace, and everlasting, and eternal salvation; all this is to be found in the one who is Lord.

Another scripture that has been very much on my heart is Psalm 2: 6:

And I have anointed my king upon Zion, the hill of my holiness.

That is what God has done; why has He done that? He has done that because He only had one Man before Him, and that One is the One who desires to be Lord to you. That is what God has done, and that is the One God is presenting in the gospel tonight, beloved hearer; the One whom He has anointed upon Zion, upon “the hill of my holiness”. Consider that: the hill of his holiness. When Saul was struck down here he came to recognise he was nothing. If we recognise that, what part can we have with the hill of His holiness? What part can we have in the presence of God?

That is why I read the second scripture, in Luke. Peter journeyed with the Lord. He knew what it was to go about with the Lord, to see the Lord carry out healing, and all that the Lord had done; what a blessed portion was this. There is a blessed portion available to each

one of us. We can have to do with this glorious One that Peter knew and journeyed with. We can have to do with Him as now in glory: that is very much better. We need to understand that the Lord was here as the One whom God had sent; we were very much impressed with that today: what God has secured in the Lord Jesus in all that He has done in coming into this scene.

The holiness of God has been ignored, man has set himself apart from it, and man has come short of the glory of God. He has sinned, he has forfeited a place in what God has prepared, but God has provided the answer to that for you and for me in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter journeyed with the Lord here; the Lord's journey would have been in a very limited area, but the Lord reaches out to every heart, to every man, woman and child in every corner of the globe. He is reaching out even in a way much closer today than when He was walking amongst them; He is reaching out to you from the glory. He has drawn nigh and God presents Him in the glad tidings to you, to claim Him for yourself and own Him as Lord.

Here was Peter, and we have here with Peter another feature for entering into blessing; he is obedient. He says, "having laboured through the whole night we have taken nothing, but at thy word ...". How often do I hear the word of God and I do not believe it? I believe I know better. God is so gracious and so wonderful that He will speak again. He will reach out yet again; why, is it for me? Yes, He wants me to have peace and joy with Him, but it is for the satisfaction of His own heart of love. Beloved, can you grasp that? The gospel is setting us free; it goes towards our liberty, but it goes towards satisfying the heart of God. He wants you, He wants me; He wants us to enjoy His love and to answer to it. That is where the gospel comes from; it comes from a God of love, and He is reaching out to you tonight. Here Peter is obedient. We just have to trust; we just have to accept what is said and to trust and to go on. God will make it clear. Peter says he will obey, and what an abundance he received: fishes so that the nets were breaking and they had to call upon their partners: what a God of provision we have! How much He provides, how much He has given, but what can compare with the giving of His only begotten Son? What can compare with the giving of the Lord Jesus, the One who was most precious to Him, the One whom He opened the heavens upon? Never was there One who walked before God as Jesus did. Never did God find delight in such a man as Jesus, His only begotten Son; He gave

Him up for me: beloved, He gave Him up for you. He gave Him up to the cruellest death that man could devise. The constant rejection by man was because of the glory that shone out in that One, the perfection there. What did man do but hang Him upon the cross; they nailed Him there; they thought that was the end. Beloved, for God that was the beginning for you and me. He established in the death of Christ a righteous basis on which He could come out in wondrous blessing. Can we have our part there, that hill of holiness? Thank God for every believer that places their faith and trust in the completed work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has confidence in that precious shed blood. Surely we can know what it is to enter into God's presence, to know that hill of holiness, to know the One who is anointed, "anointed my king upon Zion". The King is reaching out to you tonight, beloved hearer, through the gospel.

Peter here is so overcome by the abundance that he says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord". I can assure you the last thing Peter wanted was the Lord to depart from him. While he was fully exposed - oh that I knew what it was to be fully exposed in the presence of God - he realised that he was in the presence of God here; he realised what he was and how unfit he was to be there; but the One who is God could say to him, "Fear not". That is what God says to you tonight. Do you feel your need? Do you feel that burden? Do you feel the darkness of sin you are in, that is bringing you down? Come to have to do with Jesus. Come into the presence of God. Yes, everything will be exposed but you can hear those glorious words, "Fear not". If the Creator of the universe says to you, "Fear not", be assured you have nothing to fear. They left everything. You might say, 'What abundance to leave!'. Now there is one Man occupying them, the One who in His Person was God, and the One who for God has secured the basis on which God can come out in wonderful blessing to you tonight.

It is good to study Peter through the Scriptures. It is good to study all those with whom the Lord had to do because it links you back to Him. You see the grace and glory of the One with whom those in the Scriptures had to do. That is what the gospel seeks to do. It would lead you to Jesus, that you should have your part with Him where He is. We find Peter off fishing again; it is so easy to be distracted. It is so easy to turn aside. We have had a good day today, we have touched some very special things, but I wonder where I will be tomorrow. Peter says, "I go to fish" and sadly he took others with him. How easy that is: we

may be involved in taking others with us in something that seems innocuous. The wonderful thing with Peter is that he is very quickly recovered. (No longer is Peter fearful or cast down here when John - the disciple whom Jesus loved - says to him, "It is the Lord".) He had an appreciation that what had been done for him was not done for just a moment; it was done for eternity. "It is the Lord": no hesitation with Peter now.

If you hear those words, beloved, "It is the Lord", what is your answer to them? Is there hesitation? Do you say, 'I must go and do this or that?'. Become more like Peter: it says, "having heard that it was the Lord". Do those words find an answer in your heart? When you hear those words does it stir something up in your heart; "It is the Lord"? I wish I knew it more. If you see some presentation of the Lord, does it cause an answer in your heart? Beloved, if you know the efficacy of the completeness of the Lord's work, if you know what it is to be outside of the clamour and of the scene in which we move, if you know what it is to have to do with Jesus, there will be an answer in your heart as you hear those words, "It is the Lord". There is no hesitation with Peter, even though he was fully exposed yet again. He was exposed the first time and he says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord". Now I think he was in the appreciation of the complete fulness of the work of Christ. It says, "Simon Peter therefore, having heard that it was the Lord, girded his overcoat on him (for he was naked), and cast himself into the sea". I would speak carefully, but I believe that he realised that all that he was was entirely covered, and it was covered by the work of Christ. They had been fishing all night and they caught nothing, but here are a hundred and fifty-three fishes, a multitude of fishes.

Every provision is in this glorious One: "It is the Lord". He has everything to meet your need. He has entirely met all the claims of God upon you. God condemned sin completely and utterly at the cross and put it out of His sight; and - more blessed - He has also put out of sight the man that sinned, because Jesus has gone into the grave. But He is risen, He is glorified, He is exalted; He spoke to Saul from the glory. "Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus". He speaks to you tonight, beloved. He speaks to you as a glorious and risen Saviour, exalted at God's right hand. Beloved, truly "It is the Lord". I believe the Lord is the answer to everything - be it in the world, be it exercises we have, be it concerns we have; take it to the Lord. It is the Lord that has the answer, and He alone, and He will give you the answer and He will

provide; “fish laid on it, and bread”. What provision the Lord has! He meets every need. He has everything for you; trust in Him. He has been received up into glory.

How can I be assured that He has the answer? He has given the gift of the blessed Holy Spirit that we should be sustained and maintained in this scene, and that we should be drawn to Him. The Spirit's great work is drawing us to Christ, drawing us to Christ where He is; One who is far above, One who is exalted, One who is risen and glorified, a most blessed Man who has fully made known the heart of God, but the One who is reaching out to you tonight because He wants you for Himself; entirely in liberty in His presence, so that you too can say, “It is the Lord”.

May it be the portion of each and every one, for His Name's sake.

Witney

1st March 2015

THE WAYS OF GOD

Derek Walker

James 5: 11;

Job 1: 1; 37: 11-17

I have a simple impression to speak about God's ways. What wondrous ways they are; indeed we can read that God's way is perfect, Ps 18: 30. But perhaps sometimes God's ways can be quite hard for us to understand in *our* ways. God's ways for us sometimes do not seem to work out the way we may expect them to but what I would like to emphasise is that there is an end in God's ways; there is always an end in them.

The epistle of James says, "Ye have heard of the endurance of Job, and seen the end of the Lord". What a wondrous thing to come into, the Lord having to do with our end. What a great matter that is. There is much pressure amongst men at the moment; many of the saints also are going through much exercise and pressure. Perhaps it is beyond us to understand how some can have such extreme pressure, but the hymn writer says the Spirit is given here for us to help us to understand these things, Hymn 288. At least in measure we can understand them a little through the help of the Spirit. What a wondrous thing it is to have an acknowledgement of the end of God's ways. Philippians 1 says, "he who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day", v 6. What a blessed thing it is that there is a work going on in each and every one of us. We all have our own individual pathways; perhaps some going through more pressure than others, but there is an end in these things, and He will help us. What a wondrous thing it is that we can be helped and guided in these things, and there is a wondrous end in all these matters. Indeed, we could read in Hebrews where it says, "*he* has said, I will not leave thee", chap 11: 5. So there is Someone who can help: the Lord is there and He can help us and guide us through these pressures.

And I would just like to touch on these passages in Job. What I read in chapter 1 brings out the character of Job; I would just like to touch on the character of Job. It says, "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and this man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and abstained from evil". So if we go through the book of Job, we see that he went through exercise and pressure physically, as well as loss of possessions, more than any of us. He

went through a lot of pressure but I do not think it was down to his personal failure here, because it says, “this man was perfect and upright”. God was working in this man - God has a way with each and every one, and He worked. The more that we go under pressure and the more we come in for exercise and burdens, the more we have to turn to divine Persons, to rely on the help of the Holy Spirit, and to turn to the Lord in our pathways. And we see at the very end of this book how much Job progressed and prospered in all that he had.

What a matter it is that God allows certain things to happen. He allows things to happen not only in our individual lives, our personal lives, but in things general in the world; it is all under God's hand. What a matter it is that it is all under God's hand. We perhaps question various things, but there is an end in all His ways.

What I read in chapter 37 speaks of the clouds: “he loadeth the thick clouds”. Think of the pressure which would come out in these thick clouds. We can see a lot of that in the present day, the thick clouds. But if we go down further to verse 16 it says, “Dost thou know about the balancing of the clouds, the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge?”. So, despite the pressure God, in His wondrous ways, balances the clouds. So there is sunshine that comes into our pathways; there is something bright, and we have bright spots in our pathways. I think it is good to look on the bright spots and when these matters come in, it helps us appreciate the ways of God and how the Lord would come into our pathways in blessing. We have been reading in our recent Lord's day readings about where the Lord says, “I AM” in the gospels and how we can see the Lord as these towers and the great things that the Lord has done. The many titles He owns and much of these things can help us to look on the Lord in every aspect of our lives here. Scripture also tells us that we will not be under more pressure that we can cope with, 1 Cor 10: 13. These things are there so that we may grow in our appreciation of and exercise with divine Persons.

I was just impressed by how Job overcame all these things. As you continue reading through this book, there was some of his friends who perhaps were a hindrance to him in his progress, but there was one man who guided him and helped him. Elihu helped him to see God's ways and the end of His ways. I would just like to encourage us to appreciate these things more. It speaks at the end where I read about the south wind. It says in verse 17, “How thy garments become warm when he quieteth the earth by the south wind?” I think that would speak

of God's favour. What a favour we have been blessed with; we can go on in our spiritual pathways knowing that - despite the many exercises and burdens - there is One who will see us through all the way. He will not leave us in the midst of any commotion or circumstances. It is by faith we can see there is a wondrous end in all His ways.

I would just like to encourage us in these few simple thoughts. May the Lord bless these words.

From a meeting for ministry in Dundee

28th July 2015

GOD'S APPROACH TO MEN

John Strachan

Luke 2: 8-20

I felt encouraged to refer to this scripture, which has been on my heart for a long time, as to the incoming of the Lord Jesus, and the lowly way He came into this world. Luke gives us God's approach to men and the lowly way He has taken is intended to make us feel that God has all men in His mind. No one need feel excluded as we take account of this wonderful way the Lord came in.

The reference we have just had to shepherds was of much interest to me, and my mind travelled to the history of Moses. He had been brought up for probably about forty years in the court of Pharaoh in Egypt, but he had to learn to take on the lowly service of a shepherd for another forty years, to unlearn what he had learned in Egypt, and to get accustomed to what was good and profitable in the eye of God. So the whole surroundings in Luke's gospel relate to the shepherds. Matthew gives us different surroundings as to the magi from the east, but Luke gives us these lowly surroundings of shepherds watching their flock by night. And we get the angel of the Lord appearing to them, and he has got a message for them: "Fear not, for behold, I announce to you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people; for to-day a Saviour has been born to you in David's city, who is Christ the Lord". So he has these glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; this was the way that God approached men with these glad tidings. The lowliness of the way that God has approached men has greatly impressed me in recent days. I have been greatly struck with J N Darby's poem, "The Man of Sorrows".

Come now, and view that manger -
The Lord of glory see,
A houseless, homeless Stranger
In this poor world for thee.

Another verse says:

Oh, strange yet fit beginning
Of all that life of woe,
In which Thy grace was winning
Poor man his God to know!

I think it is a wonderful way that God has taken to secure each one of us - and to be available for all men, for the world. So they were told they would find this Babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger. What lowly conditions the Lord Jesus actually came into: a Babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes lying in a manger! Then we get suddenly the heavenly host appearing, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest": that would be what was for God in it. "And on earth peace, good pleasure in men"; I think it is a wonderful thing that this is the way that God has taken to secure His pleasure in men, so that men should be for His pleasure eternally.

So these shepherds are immediately interested. They said, "Let us make our way then now as far as Bethlehem, and let us see this thing that is come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. And they came with haste, and found both Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger; and having seen it they made known about the country the thing which had been said to them concerning this child". I would take it that would be the angelic message about glad tidings of great joy to all the people because the Saviour had been born. So they were affected by this and I think it is right that we should be affected by this wonderful way that God has approached us: approached men, indeed. "And all who heard it wondered at the things said to them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things in her mind, pondering them in her heart". I think it is intended that as we ponder these things, our minds are useful under the power of the Spirit, and our hearts are to be reached, our affections are to be reached: Christ is to have a greater place in our affections. So "the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all things which they had heard and seen, as it had been said to them". I think it is very fine to think of the immediate response there is in the glorification of God.

Well, I think Paul must have been affected very much by this because he speaks about "overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God", 2 Cor 10: 5. I think it shows how Paul was governed by the thought of lowliness, and the overthrowing of high things that were against the knowledge of God.

May the Lord bless the word.

From a meeting for ministry in Dundee

11th August 2015

