

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE WALL AND ITS GATES

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I seek help, beloved, to say a little as to the wall and the gates of Jerusalem as described in this book. I have in mind that the wall speaks of fellowship, and that the gates would speak of administration. Israel had been taken into captivity because of their unfaithfulness but there came a point where the captivity had had its effect, the discipline had had its effect, and God allowed some of the people to go back to Jerusalem. A recovery began in Ezra's day. At the beginning of the book of Ezra, we get the historical account of the return to Jerusalem.

When we come to Nehemiah, he gives us something which took place many years later; just as in the recovery of the truth things have been recovered to us, but not everything at once. What God placed in the hearts of exercised men in the beginning was not everything; the recovery to the truth has developed; there has been progression in recovery to the truth; and it comes down to our day. A wall has been built, as it were, but the important thing for each one of us in the day that we find ourselves in is that the wall is maintained. That simply means that each and every one of us need to be a builder; we need to have part in the building that has not only taken place but is going on. In the history of Christendom, things have broken down to a great extent; but think of how God moved in recovery. Look at how the truth of the gospel was almost lost sight of, and how God used Luther and others to bring forward justification through faith; that truth had largely been lost, and what a wonderful truth it is. In our day a wonderful recovery has taken place, but we need to be livingly in things; that means that we need to understand something of what the wall protects. When the children of Israel came back, they built the altar first, what was for God, Ezra 3: 2. Then there was the house (chap 3: 10): they were thinking first of what was for God; but there comes a point where, if what is for God is to be maintained and protected, the wall is needed. If there is no wall the enemies have plenty of scope to attack. The enemy is always looking to attack.

We began in chapter 2 where Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem. He had heard about its condition, and he had been exercised about it;

witness had been borne to him about the state of the walls of Jerusalem, and he felt that. He felt that as God feels it, and God used him; God raised him up. So he comes back to Jerusalem and he does not begin straight away; he takes three days: "I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days". Reference was made in the reading to the Lord being in death for three days, and what did the Father have? Think of the Father's patience in waiting those three days! What a matter that the Father waited these three days! It shows that death was real for the Lord Jesus. The Father did not leave Him in death any longer than He needed to, but He was left these three days; the truth of death was real. So Nehemiah waits three days. Sometimes we are tested as to our patience, but Nehemiah waits. The Lord Jesus knew what it was to wait too: think of that in John 11; Lazarus was sick and the Lord waited two days. Maybe the Lord tests our patience and He is waiting on His own time.

Well, the first thing that Nehemiah does is to move out, "I went out by night by the valley-gate". I felt encouraged when our brother read in Philippians 2 this morning because Philippians 2 really seems to correspond to the valley-gate. Think of the way that the Lord Jesus has come, the Lord Jesus being on an equality with God, taking up a condition of flesh and blood, the likeness of men! Think of the way that the Lord Jesus has moved, what lowliness, what down-stooping love; God Himself has become Man, taking a bondman's form. It has been remarked that there are seven downward movements in those verses (Phil 2: 6-8); how wonderful to be occupied with the way that the Lord Jesus has moved; "becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross". These things are to affect our hearts; they are to soften our hearts. If ministry in relation to the cross of Christ does not soften our hearts, what will? Our hearts are to be soft and, as they are soft, they become impressionable; and that makes room for Christ. As these meetings proceed, may we make room for Christ! May the ministry have its effect on our hearts; we have to be impressionable.

So the first thing we began with today was the descent of the Lord Jesus, and the first thing we begin with now is the valley-gate; we are thinking about the cross of Christ and all that it was to Him, the way that He has gone.

The first gate when they started building was the sheep-gate. The sheep-gate is wide open - it is not spoken of as having locks and bars. Think of that; the Lord Jesus could say, "Come to me", Matt 11:

28. That gate is wide open but you need to go through it. I trust everyone here knows the Lord Jesus as Saviour, but if you do not believe, dear friend, the sheep-gate is open to you. You need to go through it; you need to put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus. I trust everyone here has their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus. It is not a question just of being here at the meeting; we are glad of everyone that is here! But are you a believer in the Lord Jesus, have you put your faith and trust in Him and in His finished work that He accomplished on the cross? We have been speaking about Him going to that cross and all that He suffered: has that touched your heart, or have you still got a cold heart that has not made room for Christ? You need to open your heart; you need to go through the sheep-gate. That is like Luke's gospel, the Lord is seeking there and He is seeking now. While this is not the gospel meeting the Lord has never stopped seeking. In the beginning of Luke 15, He goes after the one sheep. Maybe there is one in this room; the Lord will go after you, dear friend: He is going after you now, and He wants to bring you back. You are here at the meeting, but He wants you in the full enjoyment of the blessedness of forgiveness of sins. The Lord Jesus wants you to know Him as Saviour; so the sheep-gate is open and the Lord is going after you. Let Him in; let Him find you where you are! So the sheep-gate is set up.

It is very interesting as you go through this chapter that there are all sorts of different persons that are building. There are the perfumers - we spoke today as to the fragrant incense, and we might say there are some who would appreciate the sufferings of Christ. But we are all to appreciate the sufferings of Christ; there are no specialists in Christianity; we are to appreciate all of these things that this chapter speaks to us of.

We could say that the goldsmiths would appreciate something as to the righteousness of God: what a wonderful matter that is, that God can come out in blessing towards all, and that He has a righteous basis to do so. The death of Christ on the cross has given God a righteous basis to come out in blessing to all. So the goldsmiths have to do with the building of the wall; we could say that they know that, if things are to be maintained, divine righteousness needs to be upheld by you and me.

There are all sorts of other persons doing the work here. You say that they are not builders, but they are doing the work. Are you doing the work, the things need to be built up in each one of us? We

need to be built up in our localities. Jerusalem would speak of what is universal, and the wall relates to what is universal; things need to be built up and they need to be maintained. If things are not maintained, and there is a breach in the wall in Aberdeen, you can see, as we are using this chapter, that that affects not only those that are building there but it affects the fellowship in Glasgow, it affects the saints in The Hague, and in Indianapolis, it affects the saints on the other side of the world. Let us be exercised that there are no breaches so that the building is to go on; it has to be maintained.

Next to the sheep-gate was the tower of Meah. The word means 'a hundred' and that recalls Luke's gospel as well because there you have seed bearing a hundred-fold. There is neither decline nor increase in Luke; he simply gives the result that there should be, one hundred-fold, Luke 8: 8! And that is what God is looking for in response to His outgoings in grace in the glad tidings. Are you responsive or am I responsive? The tower of Meah would suggest that there is a full response.

Then it is “to the tower of Hananeel”; that name means that God is gracious: we have proved that God is gracious, have we not? Think of God giving His very best, giving Christ, think of the cost to God Himself, “He who, yea, has **not spared** his own Son” (Rom 8: 32); think of God's feelings involved in that; how grace has been displayed towards us! I think as we prove God's grace in our pathway it leads us on to grace on the level of Ephesians. It speaks there of “the glory of His grace” (Eph 1: 6), and it speaks of displaying in the coming age “the surpassing riches of His grace”, Eph 2: 7. Think of all that has been extended by God Himself and the great return that there is as a result of God's grace; how appreciative are we of it? We need to be fully appreciative of it. These are towers, how wonderful the towers are!

So we move on to the fish-gate, and I suppose as we appreciate something of the glory of His grace, and the riches of His grace in Ephesians, we see there that we have been brought in and God had us in mind before the world was, chap 1: 4. Fish did not belong to Jerusalem; Jerusalem was land-locked; the fish had to come some distance: what a distance we have come! God had us in His purpose before the world was; what a distance - it has all been covered, and the fish are brought in. It speaks of fish in Matthew 13, many fish, and they are counted and there are those that are worthless, v 48. I trust everyone here knows the Lord Jesus as

Saviour - you are among the good fish. You become one of the good fish and you are put in a vessel. What does that mean? If a fish is put in a vessel it dies; and that means that my will is gone, but I am ready to be set up in a locality. We should appreciate the fish-gate, the sovereignty of God, God's goodness. You need to come in your responsibility to know the Lord Jesus as Saviour, and to know God in His goodness, but then you realise that you have been chosen in Christ before the world's foundation; you have some appreciation of what the fish-gate may suggest.

The building goes on, and I do not want to be negative, but there are those that do not build here. They are the only ones that I think that are mentioned: "the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord". We need to be in things; it is little use other persons doing things for us, otherwise we will never truly appreciate what we are in the gain of. What do we value? These persons repaired another piece later on (v 27). Another opportunity is given, and the nobles are not even mentioned. Did they come into things? How are we influencing others? Are we influencing for good? The daughters of Zelophehad influenced in a right way. Think of that influence! There are sisters spoken of here; sisters have part in this building; there are the daughters involved. Most of the ones related are sons, which might speak of something of the dignity of sonship involved in these things; do we recognise the dignity of what we are as set up as in Christ, sons of God? What wonderful dignity belongs to the saints - may we appreciate that too. So we are all to have part in the building.

Then there is the gate of the old wall; that might speak of principles. The principles are always under attack. You have to keep your eye on the Lord; it is wonderful salvation to keep your eye on the Lord. What is the Lord doing, how does the Lord act, how does the Lord move? As you go through John's gospel there is wonderful dignity seen in His movements, despite attacks. Think of the glory of the One that was there. Things are under attack. You may say that these things were needed in times past, and that we are in a different day now: do we need these things? Do these truths apply now? The gate of the old wall needs to be built up. The last time our brother David Robertson spoke to me he said, 'If we do not have the principles, what do we have?'. The gate of the old wall is a vital gate. It is being attacked at the present time; and has always been under attack. Do we value the principles? We need to value them; if we do

not have the principles, what do we have? It says, “they laid its beams, and set up its doors and its locks, and its bars”. Things are operating: you need the doors, yes, you need the gates, you need the bars, you need the locks. We need to be able to shut things out in ourselves; we need to be able to shut out what is not right.

Nehemiah was tested; the work was going on and the attacks come. Chapter 2 speaks of three persons, “Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobijah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian”, v19. These might represent what is natural, what is national, and what is religious; these are elements that are in each one of us and they need to be shut out. Maybe they are outward as well. A few chapters later on, there comes a suggestion, “let us meet together in the villages in the plain”, chap 6: 2. What was Nehemiah's answer? He said. 'No'; they tried four times to get him to come down and he knew that it was for his harm. It may be that you receive an invitation: is it going to do you harm? Nehemiah perceived that it would have been for his harm, and he would have to leave off building the wall, he would have to leave the work. He knew and he understood how vital the work is. There was something in the city, at the altar and in the house of God, and it needed protected. Nehemiah understood that. As we proceed we find that the service of God is supported by the wall; the wall is needed, and these principles are needed; they are vital at the present time. So that the gate of the old wall was repaired. How wonderful these things are; they are current; the gate of the old wall was repaired. What part am I having in that? It says, “And next to them”; it is a wonderful matter that things are going on, persons are exercised, and they are going on.

“The tower of the furnaces” would speak possibly in relation to judgment, the need to have right judgment as to things. Think of what the Lord Jesus endured, what no one else could endure! That is suggested in the idea of brass. We find when the vessels taken back, that there were “two vessels of shining copper, precious as gold”, Ezra 8: 27. That is like the saints. It has been said that, in days of recovery and in days of breakdown, the moral side is upgraded; what a wonderful matter that is to consider, that these vessels of copper are as precious as gold. They will have come through the furnace. There is that in ourselves that needs to be burnt off. We are in the last hour and refinement should be taking place. I suppose the furnace might relate to that too; what refinement should be taking place in our souls at the present time. And as we are at these meetings, God would be

refining His work in each and every one of us, and it may be that He needs to use the heat to burn off that which is extraneous.

Then we come back to the valley-gate; this is how we apply the valley-gate. We have seen how the valley-gate applies to Christ, but then it says, "let this mind be in you" (Phil 2: 5); that is how the valley-gate applies to us, so that we are moving in lowliness, as we have the mind that goes down. When matters come in perhaps we feel we have been right in relation to a thing and that we have been wronged; maybe we are looking for vindication. Well, the Lord Jesus never looked for vindication publicly. The Lord Jesus had the mind to go down; He waited for God to vindicate Him. God vindicated Him in raising Him from among the dead and exalting Him, giving Him "a name, that which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow", Phil 2: 9,10. The Lord Jesus did not exalt Himself; He waited for God to exalt Him: what a wonderful matter that is! Do we have the mind to go down? Abigail was spoken of this morning; she knew what it was to go down, 1 Sam 25. When matters come up, situations may be saved by going down. Going down is not at the expense of the truth, or at the expense of principles, but when it comes to personal matters, dear brethren, we need to know what it is to go down, and to have that mind to go down, to be ready to go down. How wonderful it is that the valley-gate is there.

Then we come to the dung-gate and that recalls Philipians 3. Think of all that Paul counted to be loss. We have all these things that he added up, things were not the horrible things of the flesh, sinful or degrading; these things that he counted seem the best things of the flesh, but then they all have to go, do they not? In the death of Christ, they have all gone. How sobering it is to be able to use the dung-gate in relation to ourselves. I think a brother recently pointed out that Paul speaks of filth; he said dung might be useful in your gardens, but when it comes to filth there is no use for filth. And that is what we are in the flesh, the best of the flesh! So there is no place for it before God because Christ has suffered and died, and God has one Man before Him and that Man is Christ. If we are before God, we are before Him as in Christ; that is the only Man that God has before Him. The best of the flesh has to go. So the dung-gate speaks of what helps us in self-judgment.

We come on to the fountain-gate! We are coming to what may speak to us of the Spirit. Another of the gates that is referred to is the water-gate; later on, we find that the people gather at the water-gate.

The water-gate is not spoken of as being repaired - that may speak of the glory of the Person of the Spirit, and how the Spirit came in at Pentecost. The Spirit came from an ascended Christ to indwell believers, to dwell in the assembly. There is no break-down in the Spirit's service, and the water-gate is not rebuilt - there is no failure in a divine Person; there could be no failure in a divine Person; the Spirit is God. But when we come to the fountain-gate, we remember all that the Spirit speaks of; all that was shut up in the clerical system in which the Spirit was shut out. The fountain suggests a wonderful release: we need to make way for the Spirit. As a believer, it would be normal for you to receive the gift of the Spirit; and the Lord says that in John 4, "the water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life", v 14. That is the enjoyment of the presence of the Spirit - "shall become in him"; it is progressive, "a fountain of water". We know it individually, but we are to know this fountain of water collectively. So the fountain-gate was rebuilt: for us, room is made for the Spirit. I suppose it is like Numbers 21, "Rise up, well! sing unto it", v 17. How wonderful it is to make way for the Spirit, to know His leading.

So we come to the "pool of Shelah by the king's garden"; the king's garden suggests there should be something there for God. God always had, even in the dark ages, that which was real; there is that cord that runs right through the dispensation in relation to the Spirit's work, but how wonderful it is to consider in days of recovery that there is a current fresh ministry, the pool of Shelah, and that which is sent. It is the same as Siloam (John 9: 7); what we have enjoyed today under the Spirit's power is fresh and current and living. We are to enjoy that, "the king's garden"; there is what is for Christ's own heart; there is what is for Christ's own heart in the gathering of the saints; how wonderful that is! Then we come to "the pool that was made". Perhaps that might be like the ministry that has gone before; we need to be in the gain of the Spirit to enjoy it, to enjoy the flow of it. We need the help of the Spirit in the reading of ministry. Think of what has been made available, "the pool that was made" is recovered; everything is now functioning again - may we know these things!

We have then the great tower that lies out, and then the water-gate - this gate that is not spoken of as repaired - which is "toward the east". The Spirit would delight to bring the coming of the Lord Jesus before us. We find that there is a watchman, "the keeper of the east gate". Are we looking out for the Lord's coming? It is not just a matter

of just saying that, but is there evidence in our walk that we are looking for the Lord's coming?

There are those that repair over against their houses; that is a word to those of us who are householders. This is a word to the householders, to build over against your house. That means that you are concerned as to your house. We often hear that the households of the saints are the bulwark of the local assemblies and that is true, but the way that it is presented here is that the assembly is a great salvation for the house. The wall needs to be built and these persons are concerned as to the building of the wall because they are concerned as to their house; it would be like a baptised house. In all these things that we have been going over our households would cherish these wonderful truths. That is a responsibility, that you are building over against your house. If you are not building the wall, then you are leaving your house open. Let us be exercised that we are building over against our houses. That means that the younger ones in our houses are brought up under the discipline and admonition of the Lord; that would be one thing. How important the households of the saints are! These things are real. We have known of some going away, and how that brings in sorrow, and perhaps we may be able to say of them that they know what is right: they have been in a household where the building has been going on. We pray for them; we are looking for recovery; it is a day of recovery. On one of Mr James Taylor's visits to the Moray coast, a sister spoke to him, she was concerned about her sons who were going off. He asked her if she had had them baptised, and she said she had; and he said, 'Where is your faith?'. He put the responsibility back on her, and as householders the responsibility comes back on us.

Dear young one, you are in a wonderful sphere, a wonderful area where there is preservation, where there is salvation; it is a spiritual realm: may you appreciate it; you need to come into it yourself. Now you might say you have come into the wonderful blessings, most of us have been brought up in believing households, most of us have been 'brought up in fellowship' - if we can use that expression - knowing these things, but you need to come into it yourself, and it is your responsibility that you do that. I trust that each one here may find these things attractive because what underlies all this is love for Christ; what is due to Him.

Well the repairing goes on and there is the great tower; that is not a comparative idea. We mentioned that this morning too, the

greatness of Christ; He stands out! It is not comparative: “*He shall be great*”, Luke 1: 32. He is great; the great tower! As things go on in our lives, and in any progress we may make spiritually, is Christ becoming greater and greater? Is He eclipsing everything? Do we have God's appreciation of Christ, “the great tower”? Christ stands out alone! What a wonderful thing it is to have an appreciation of Him like that.

Well, we finish in the chapter with the sheep-gate again, and that suggests to me John's view of the sheep-gate because the Lord speaks in John of being the good Shepherd; “I am the door of the sheep”, John 10: 7. The wonderful thing in John's gospel is that there are no straying sheep. There is that which is real; the gold is there: the gold has been found. John's sheep find the Lord attractive. Do you find the Lord attractive? Is He holding you, in all that He is to you, in attraction, as attracted to Him? Oh may we be more and more attracted to Christ and held by Him; “My sheep hear my voice”, v 27. Have you heard the voice of the Lord Jesus today? What has He said to you today? What has He said to me today? Have we heard His voice and found it attractive? Have we known what it is to go in and go out and to find pasture, v 9? These things are available and may we appreciate them.

There is progress in chapter 8. We have been together one day now; the first day of these meetings is coming to a close; what have we got? There are many here in this room that, as it were, “gathered together as one man to the open place that was before the water-gate”; have we made way for the Spirit? Has what has been said today affected our hearts; has there been that which has been formed in us? We do not have to wait until the second day literally. When we come to verse 13 we come to the second day literally, but we do not have to wait until we come together tomorrow if the Lord leaves us. Those that gather on the second day here are “the chief fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites”. There is to be spiritual formation as we have come under the word, as we have heard the Spirit's current voice, as we have heard what has come before us; it should have had an effect so that those that come the second day are there as having features that speak of royalty, and priestliness, and spirituality; there is depth. Have we touched these things today? We do not literally need to wait until the second day. Have we touched these things today in our hearts?

Then we come on to what is spoken of in the feast of booths; “Go forth to the mount” involves spiritual exercise. There is that which

has come before us - our brother has been exercised, the local brethren have been exercised - but have you been exercised to get something, to come away with something? That is a responsibility on each one of us. So that they had to "Go forth to the mount" - that involves spiritual exercise - "and fetch olive-branches, and wild olive-branches, and myrtle-branches, and palm-branches". Victory is spoken of in a palm. Myrtle-branches are green; they speak of life: are you moving in victory and a sense of life? Wild olive-branches may represent what is in you and me, that is the Gentiles. I suppose the olive-branches would be like believing Jews. Then the wild olive-branches would bring us to Ephesians. Think of how great the need has been, "and *you*, being dead in your offences and sins - in which ye once walked according to the age of this world", chap 2: 1. Have you been dead in them? In Romans we are living in our sins, but in Ephesians we are dead in them "and *you*, being dead in your offences and sins - in which ye once walked according to the age of this world", that is the Gentile, that is you and me; but wild olive branches have been brought in. What a building is taking place here; it is the booths, it is a spiritual environment'. It really speaks of what Israel will come into in a day to come and it goes on to the eighth day which is a touch of eternity. Have we known something of that in our experience today as being amongst the saints?

The Lord knows the circumstances of the saints because He has ordered them and, in piety, we order our circumstances so that God can come into them; but what it is to get out of our circumstances; that is what the feast of booths speaks of. We can get out of our circumstances and get into God's circumstances. Have we touched something of that today? Have you touched something of that? It is open to you. Beloved, may we know what it is to get into God's circumstances: "And the people went forth and brought them, and made themselves booths"; what a time this is. It is the last days, these are days of recovery; and there had not been a time like it since Joshua the son of Nun. You read the Old Testament and you might think that Solomon's day was the greatest day, but Nehemiah shows days of recovery; and we are in such a time at the end. You say you would have liked to have lived at the beginning of the dispensation when things were pristine, when there was no breakdown, but "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former", Hag 2: 9. What a matter it is to consider that it is the Spirit's day, and the Spirit has not failed in His service. There is increase, there is at the end of the dispensation what was not there at the beginning! I believe there

is to be what is represented by the Philadelphian overcomer

The horse-gate was another gate; the horse might speak of power, and the Lord says to that overcomer, "thou hast a little power", Rev 3: 8. Why? Because "thou ... hast not denied my name" (v 8), and "thou hast kept the word of my patience", (v 10), and the footnote to verse 10 makes reference to endurance, that which was seen in Christ and is seen in the saints; "thou hast kept the word of my patience" and "thou ... hast not denied my name". The Lord says, "thou hast a little power", and it is seen to the end of the dispensation. Are we enjoying it?

In chapter 12, we come to the service of God. The wall sustains the service of God. You can see how the wall is needed so that we come back, if the Lord will, to remember the Lord Jesus in the Supper on Lord's day morning, if He does not come for us; we will come together to remember Him in the time of His absence. And all that flows out of that is the service of God. It has been said many times that we are left here for two reasons: one is the testimony and the other is the service of God. Now if I cherish in my heart what is involved in that, I will be sure to have part in the building of the wall. The truth has been unfolded in the dispensation, and refinement has been brought in in recovery, and that which was needed to protect. The greatest privilege that believers knew at the beginning of the dispensation was the presence of the Son of God. What is the greatest privilege we enjoy? It is the presence of the Son of God. We know it if we know it, and if we do know it we will have part in the building of the wall, because we will want to know it again!

May we be helped and exercised in relation to the building of the wall. Let us not be allowing things which would hinder the Lord from making Himself known to us. Nothing can stop Him; it is His prerogative to come in. I am not claiming anything, but if we have the light as to things, and we have the truth as to things, we need to be moving on these lines. May we be affected by the valley-gate, the way that Christ has gone; may our hearts be softened and affected; may we make room for His word; and may we be exercised to have part in the building so that we can enjoy His presence until He come.

May it be so for His Name's sake.

Address at three day meetings Glasgow

14th August 2015

“NOTHING SHALL BE IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD”

Paul A Gray

Luke 1: 37

Isaiah 35: 1-10

It would be quite impossible for a rose to blossom in the desert. Where would its source of water be? And would it not die quickly in the heat of the sun? But, “...nothing shall be impossible with God”. And it may be that there are issues in your life which you believe to be impossible, or family exercises or assembly exercises that look impossible too, but “nothing shall be impossible with God”. Job came to that, “I know that thou canst do everything, and that thou canst be hindered in no thought of thine”, Job 42: 2.

Think of the incoming of sin. The scripture says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”, Gen 1: 1. Isaiah tells us, “not as waste did he create it: he formed it to be inhabited”, (chap 45: 18), and yet in the beginning of Genesis it says “the earth was waste and empty”, chap 1: 2. An impossible situation seemed to have arisen; something had come in to disrupt God's creation - sin had come into the universe. And “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”. God was looking for a response and there was none. So “God said, Let there be light. And there was light”, v 3. That is how God has acted in your life too.

The apostle Paul describes his commission in Acts 26, when the Lord spoke to him, saying “taking thee out from among the nations, to whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God”, v 17-18. An apparently impossible situation arose through the incoming of sin, and Saul, who became Paul, would have appeared to be an impossible candidate for blessing: “a blasphemer and persecutor, and an insolent overbearing man”, 1 Tim 1: 13. But the Lord intervened in his life and the light shone in the middle of the day, above the brightness of the sun. It shone on Saul on the Damascus road, and turned that impossible man right round; it brought him not only into blessing, but made him useful. The Lord who spoke to him there gave him that commission to open the eyes of the nations “that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God”. In the darkness everything may be impossible. You cannot see anything, and you do not know what you might trip over next. In the light everything is possible. It says in

the Old Testament “in thy light shall we see light”, Ps 36: 9. What of the next step after turning “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God”? It is to “receive remission of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me”. Every unsaved sinner is in an impossible situation. You and I were sinners far from God and the scripture says that God is “of purer eyes than to behold evil”, (Hab 1: 13); He cannot look upon sin. So our situation was impossible, and God intervened through the Lord Jesus and brought Him before you as your Saviour, and turned that impossible situation round.

It also says in the Scriptures that God would give them “the valley of Achor for a door of hope”, Hos 2: 14. The valley of Achor was the valley of trouble; it was the place where Achan was stoned for taking the beautiful mantle of Shinar, Josh 7. It was the valley of trouble and yet God says that He would give them “the valley of Achor for a door of hope”. If you look at the cross you will see there, above all else, a place of trouble. The Saviour of the world was mocked, despised, crucified and slain there, and yet for every believer it is the door of hope, a hope of eternal salvation, the hope of glory centred on the Man who was there, and who has been into death and risen victorious. The power of death was impossible; it says, “all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage”, Heb 2: 15. And yet that impossible power has been broken because the Lord went into death. He bowed His head and delivered up His spirit, and He came out of death. He says of His life, “I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again”, John 10:18. And that impossible enemy of our souls, Satan, of whom it says that he “dismissed not his prisoners homewards”, (Isa 14: 17) has been defeated. The Lord Jesus has taken away Satan's “panoply in which he trusted” (Luke 11: 22), and He preaches “the opening of the prison to them that are bound”, Isa 61: 1. For nothing is impossible with God!

The relatives and friends of Lazarus came to his grave, and they told the Lord that He could not do anything, for Lazarus had been there four days, and, “Lord, he stinks already”, John 11: 39. Not only was Lazarus dead but corruption had set in, and the Lord says, “Lazarus, come forth. And the dead came forth”, v 43, 44. The Son of Man was glorified, and God was glorified in that the Lord could say to death, “Lazarus, come forth. And the dead came forth”. So I say, to encourage our hearts, that nothing is impossible with God.

I remember a brother speaking at the burial of a believer about

the time of the rapture, and he recalled that the Lord will come “with archangel's voice and with trump of God the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall be always with the Lord”, 1 Thess 4: 16-17. He turned to those who were there present and asked, 'Do you know how God will do that?'. He said, 'I do not know either, but the Bible says it, and the Lord is going to do it, and I believe it and it will be so': “nothing shall be impossible with God”.

We do not have to know how God will do everything. But we need to believe that He can do everything that He pleases, and that He will! “By faith we apprehend that the worlds were framed by the word of God”, Heb 11: 3. The Lord says, “say to this mountain ...”, (Mark 11: 23); faith can move mountains; not because of something we have of ourselves, but because of what God can do! The first chapter of Genesis gives testimony to this. “Let there be light. And there was light.”; “God divided between the light and the darkness”, (v 4); and then on the second day He divided between the waters that were beneath the expanse and the waters that were above the expanse; the third day, “let the dry land appear”, (v 9); the green grass seen, life coming in on the third day, the resurrection day; on the fourth day “the great light to rule the day, and the small light to rule the night”, (v 16); on the fifth day the variety of life, the animal creation coming in; on the sixth day, man. Who brought that about? God did it; nothing is impossible with God! He brought in light where there was darkness, and in light He worked in creation and established a world in which He would make Himself known to man. He established a world in which Christ would be seen as Man, and would justify God in a scene in which He had been defied!

So chapter 35 of Isaiah tells us what God can do. What it describes is still to happen, and it will happen when the Lord returns to take up His rights on earth. But I would like to apply it to the present time because “as many things as have been written before have been written for our instruction” (Rom 15: 4); these scriptures have their present bearing on us today. This is not only a future event, although it will be so, “The wilderness and the dry land shall be gladdened”. When we are away from God we are like the wilderness and the dry land, but God is able to bring life and joy! The mind of the Spirit is “life and peace”, Rom 8: 6. “The mind of the flesh is death”, and that is like the desert, but “the mind of the Spirit life and peace”; “the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose”. Think of that; there is something

fruitful for God, delightful to His heart, something in a place that had previously been barren which is for the pleasure of God, and that can be so with each one of us. And then it says, "It shall blossom abundantly". The gift of the Spirit brings in abundance of life. The Lord also said, "I am come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly", John 10: 10. Not life on a subsistence basis, but "It shall blossom abundantly". So by the gift of the Spirit there is response Godward that demonstrates this abundance of life. It shall "rejoice even with joy and shouting", means that it comes into expression too. God grant that each of us may bring in to expression that which we enjoy in relation to Christ.

Certain things are given: "the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it". The cedars of Lebanon speak of what is dignified. Consider that God has not only given His Son to die for you, and poured out the gift of the Spirit, but He has dignified you with sonship, "the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon". You need only look back to chapter 33 where, "The land mourneth, it languisheth; Lebanon is ashamed, is withered; the Sharon is become as a desert, and Bashan and Carmel are stripped", v 9. You may say all these great and good things are all gone! Not so, beloved hearers, Carmel is a mountain; it would be an area of dignity. So there is not only sonship's dignity in the cedars of Lebanon, but there is also an area of dignity in which that can be enjoyed. We speak of it sometimes as eternal life, and Sharon is spoken of in 1 Chronicles as a place where the flocks would feed. Sharon is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 27: 29 where you get the thought of the herds, and there is the thought of a valley. So God is a God of the mountains as well as a God of the valleys and in these valleys the flocks find a place to feed. In God's arrangements dignity is provided, and a place where that dignity can be enjoyed, and a place where the flocks are fed - and all of this in what had previously been a desert.

"They shall see the glory of Jehovah, the excellency of our God". It says of the Lord Jesus, "who being the effulgence of his" - that is, God's - "glory and the expression of his substance", Heb 1: 3. That is the way in which God makes His glory known: He makes it known in Christ, and we see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ", 2 Cor 4: 6. You might have thought that Corinth was an impossible locality given the difficulties there, and yet that is the place to whom Paul says that the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ. And the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ for every believer and for every

locality in which believers are set. That never changes: the glory of God always shines in the face of Jesus Christ. There is a point in the Old Testament where the writer says,

How is the gold become dim! Lam 4: 1.

It is not that the gold had lost its value, but it had lost its glory in the sight of those that were looking at it; "How is the gold become dim!". The glory of God continues to shine in the face of Jesus Christ, and it will never stop shining because that is where it is set.

When we have an impression of that glory we are able to help one another, "Strengthen the weak hands and confirm the tottering knees". God never says to discard the weak hands and get rid of the tottering knees, He says "Strengthen the weak hands and confirm the tottering knees". If you say, 'That brother or that sister is not able to do very much', the answer is to "Strengthen the weak hands". If the walk of a brother or that sister is not what it should be, "confirm the tottering knees". God's ways are ways of recovery; the work of creation in Genesis 1, is a work of recovery; that is God's way.

This is the day of grace. Grace reigns through righteousness, (Rom 5: 21); righteousness is never overlooked, "Say to them that are of a timid heart, Be strong, fear not; behold your God". You may say that the situation is very difficult, but "Be strong, fear not; behold your God". Look at the occasions in the gospels where the Lord says to His own, "Fear not", such as, "Fear not, little flock, for it has been the good pleasure of your Father to give you the kingdom", Luke 12: 32. "Fear not; behold your God".

"Vengeance, cometh, the recompense of God!": Israel will know that in a day to come, when those who have surrounded them will be dealt with, "He will come himself, and save you". The Lord will not send a messenger to save Israel. He will come Himself for them, but He also came Himself for you and for me. It is worth looking at the things the Lord does Himself; "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 24. He did it Himself! When the two were going on the way to Emmaus, heading off in the wrong direction it says, "Jesus himself drawing nigh, went with them", Luke 24: 15. And at the rapture it says "the Lord himself, with an assembling shout, with archangel's voice and with trump of God" (1 Thess 4: 16): the Lord Himself! He is not delegating that to anyone else. He did not delegate your salvation to anyone else; He did not delegate the recovery of those souls to anyone

else; and He will not delegate the rapture to anyone else. He does it Himself; “He will come himself, and save you”.

And the work is effective: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped”. There is no doubt here about what is going to happen. We preach on the principle of faith to faith; we do not preach the gospel doubtfully. These things will happen, “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped”. We might say we have appealed to a brother or a sister, and it does not seem to be working. God is able; “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as a hart”. Think of the man there at the beginning of the Acts; he looked at Peter and John expecting to receive something, but Peter says, “Silver and gold I have not; but what I have this give I to thee: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazaræan rise up and walk” (chap 3: 6); “then shall the lame man leap as a hart”. He was “walking, and leaping, and praising God” (v 8); I think we can say that the leaping was also inward in the man's spirit. God saw it; there was that which was springing up into eternal life. “And the tongue of the dumb sing”; not just speak but sing, as responsive to God. Younger brothers in the service of God might think that they do not quite know what to say, but it says, “the tongue of the dumb shall sing”; the Spirit's power is available. Of course, this applies in measure to everyone, “the tongue of the dumb sing”. We can all join in the singing; we can all have our part in the service of praise. The sisters are not an addition to the service of praise; they are part of it. Sisters are an intrinsic part of the body of Christ, and an intrinsic part of the service of praise.

“For in the wilderness shall waters break out, and torrents in the desert”: think of the effect of free way being given to the Spirit; it is not just a trickle of water, “torrents in the desert”. Think of the beginning of the Acts when three thousand souls were added! The torrents were breaking out in the desert, that very place, Jerusalem, which had been so unresponsive to God; a place given up to falseness and formal religion, and by the incoming of the Spirit the torrents broke out in the desert, “and the Lord added to the assembly daily those that were to be saved”, Acts 2: 47. “And the mirage shall become a pool”: a mirage is something that might give you a vain hope. We know that, when the sun is beating down, people in the desert see something that they hope might turn out to be refreshment, and they are disappointed. But under the hand of God there is no false hope; there is no disappointment, “the

mirage shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water". By the presence of the Spirit refreshment is always available.

Then we read of "the habitation of wild dogs". You would not really want to go there; it is a place where you would fear to go, but it "shall be grass with reeds and rushes". The reeds and the rushes would form what is useful, so that God is able to turn a place that is inaccessible and not useful, into a place where what is useful is available. An ark of reeds was used for Moses (Exod 2: 3). The note to "rushes" says 'papyrus' material for something to be written on. Paul says to Timothy, "bring ... the books, especially the parchments", 2 Tim 4: 13. In a sense professing Christendom has become a place of wild dogs. At the time when Mr Darby and others were exercised to leave the established church there was opposition, but what appeared was a place of "grass with reeds and rushes". Ministry began to flow, from Christ the ascended Head. Written ministry was distributed and Mr Darby was also given power to write correcting what was false. The way opened up, "And a highway shall be there and a way", a way above the world, "and it shall be called, The way of holiness". Separation from the world is an important thing. The world is an impossible place but the way of holiness is the way through. It says in Isaiah 30: 21, "when ye turn to the right hand or when ye turn to the left, thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it", and that is the way of holiness, the way of separation from the world and all its doings. It also says, "Those that go this way - even fools - shall not err therein". If you keep within the confines of the truth, that is preservative; keep within the confines of the truth, and you will not err in it. Next it says, "Those that go this way - even fools - shall not err therein". You may say, 'I do not know much'. I would never call a brother or a sister a fool; it would be wrong to do so, though I would say of myself that I have been foolish. But even a foolish person will not err in keeping to this one highway, the way where the Lord would lead, the way that is upward, the way that would acknowledge the truth and keep to it; "shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor shall ravenous beast go up thereon, nor be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there". Remember, "nothing shall be impossible with God", and that the word is that, "None can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him", Ps 49: 7. But there are "the redeemed", because Christ has done the work of redemption - impossible for man, but possible with God! And if you are redeemed you have been bought with a price, and if you have been bought with a price then the Purchaser has a right over you.

Acknowledging the Lord's rights over you is a great preservative; and “the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of Jehovah shall return, and come to Zion with singing”. God would always give a way back to His original thoughts. Come back to the purpose of God, “the ransomed of Jehovah shall return, and come to Zion with singing”. If there is difficulty, whatever it may be, come back to the purpose of God. God has purposed a place for you, and He means you to have it. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, Eph 1: 4.

If you have gone away, come back to the purpose of God. Do not be like the younger son who thought to say, “make me as one of thy hired servants”, Luke 15: 17. His father did not allow him to say that. In effect his father said, 'Come back to the purpose of God': “Bring out the best robe and clothe him in it, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet”. Come back to the purpose of God, and “everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away”. Well, we are in a world of sorrow and sighing, and there are exercises upon us that cause sorrow and sighing, and it is right that we should feel things. But when you come to Christ where He is, sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Let us see that nothing is impossible with God. He has begun a good work in each believer and He “will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day”, Phil 1: 6. He has purposed that Christ should have the assembly for Himself, and that will be so. He has purposed to have families for Himself eternally, and that will be so. Nothing of what God has purposed shall fail, for nothing is impossible with God.

May we be encouraged for His Name's sake.

Brechin

16th April 2016

PRAYER AND THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

Allan P Grant

Luke 3: 21, 22; 11: 13

Philippians 1: 19

Jude: 20, 21

I have been thinking of the feature of prayer that these scriptures refer to and the way that prayer, the spirit of dependence, makes way for the power of the Holy Spirit. Our brother prayed at the beginning of this meeting that there would be room for the Holy Spirit. I think it is a principle we see perfectly, first of all, in the Lord Jesus Himself, as a Man here entirely for God's pleasure. Matthew, Mark and Luke give us the Lord's baptism at the commencement of His public service. Luke adds a touch that He was praying, which is in keeping with the way that Luke's gospel presents the dependent Man. Then we have the Holy Spirit coming upon Him. There was nothing in Christ that would hinder or disturb the Spirit. Everything was perfectly in accord with God's will and with the Holy Spirit's perfect feelings. It says, "the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form as a dove upon him". We know the dove speaks of sensitive feelings of the Holy Spirit. It says, "a voice came out of heaven". This is a remarkable scene, involving three divine Persons, the Father's delight expressed in Christ, and the Holy Spirit descending upon Christ as Man, the perfect expression of all that God looked for in man. Luke says of the Lord, "having been baptised and praying". This was the time of John's baptism of repentance, not that there was anything in Jesus that needed repentance, but in a lowly way He identifies Himself with a repenting people.

In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit came upon a company that was marked by prayer. It says in Acts 1: 14, "These gave themselves all with one accord to continual prayer", and it was upon such a company that the Spirit came, a company that was in accord with divine thoughts, a company of persons who were like Christ, the fruit of His work.

We read in Luke 11. This section begins with the disciples asking, "Lord, teach us to pray", v 1. The Lord summarises this instruction in verse 13 with His word as to the readiness of the Father to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. He speaks of "the Father who is of heaven", suggesting that the Father's character is "of heaven", the heavenly Father, One who is ready to dispense blessing. The Lord is encouraging the disciples to ask the Father for the greatest blessings.

He is suggesting here that the greatest blessing that could be given to men is the gift of the Holy Spirit. We know how ready parents are to give gifts to their children. The Lord uses this as an illustration of the Father's readiness to "give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him".

The Scriptures speak of various ways that the gift of the Spirit is known by persons: those who obey the glad tidings (Acts 5); those who were hearing the word (Acts 11); also to those who have faith (Gal 3); but in Luke 11 the Spirit is given on the basis of prayer. There is that longing for, and the feeling of the need of, divine power. Our brother referred to Caleb and to Achsah, Caleb's daughter. It says she asked for "springs of water", Josh 15: 19. We could say she felt the need of divine power. She had been given a heavenly inheritance: "for thou hast given me a southern land; give me also springs of water". She was an example of one who felt the need of the Spirit, the power to enjoy divine things. We have been given the greatest things, we have them by faith, but then we need the power of the Spirit to enjoy them. "Then he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs". The "lower springs" are often connected with the Holy Spirit in Romans 8, the power we need that our walk here might be according to the divine pleasure, that we might "not walk according to flesh but according to Spirit", (v 4); and then, "the Spirit life on account of righteousness", v 10. Righteousness is a feature to be seen in believers. That can only be through the power of the Spirit.

The Spirit is also spoken of in the epistle to the Ephesians. Paul bowed his knees to the Father that the saints might "be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph 3: 16), so that we might know the greatness of the divine realm, the greatness of divine thoughts and divine love, that we might have the capacity to appreciate the greatness of divine thoughts and be responsive in that heavenly realm. I think that is what the "upper springs" refer to. It is only in the power of the Holy Spirit that the heavenly realm can be appreciated and known. How necessary is this feature of prayer! May we be maintained on this line of asking that the Lord spoke of to His disciples.

We read in Philippians of "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ". How much Paul had suffered in Philippi, but he overcame "through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ". I was impressed by the way Paul puts those two things together. Paul valued the prayers of the saints. In most of the epistles he asks the saints to pray for him. He felt the need of the support of the prayers of

the saints. There is also the answer to the prayer in the supply, “the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”. What an infinite supply, the Spirit of that Man, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, referring to the order of Man that was here for God's pleasure. What a blessing to draw from that supply! Our brother spoke of the resources available to us, and Paul knew what that was. We see in Acts 16 how Paul was marked by the Spirit of Christ. When he was suffering, he and Silas “in praying, were praising God with singing”, v 25. He was thinking of the blessing of those who persecuted him; that is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. No matter how difficult the testing, or how difficult the situation we may be in, there is power in this supply to be an overcomer, “the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”, and it is connected too with “your supplication”. They were praying for him, earnestly praying for Paul, and it says that the preaching of those who were seeking “to arouse tribulation” for him would turn out “to salvation” for him through this supply; so may we be helped as drawing from the “supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”! It is seen specially in time of testing. Stephen too is a model for believers in the way he was marked by the Spirit of Christ in suffering, praying for his persecutors.

Then Jude refers to “praying in the Holy Spirit”, that particular character of prayer, prayer in the power of the Spirit. Jude is writing about a very dark day. He says first of all he meant to write as to “our common salvation” (v 3), and I think that this verse that we read would describe what that “common salvation” is, what we enjoy with one another. “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”. That was because of what had come in in the way of apostasy, but in this dark day, as we are in now, he turns to them here in verse 20 and says, “But ye, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith”. He speaks of the value of what we have through one another in the way of building up and edification, “building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit”. That would be a prayer that was in freshness, not marked by mere formality, but prayer in accord with what the Spirit is doing, as John says in his epistle, praying according to the will of God, 1 John 5: 14,15. That kind of prayer is heard. That would be a similar thought here, “praying in the Holy Spirit”. That character of prayer, I think, is particularly appreciated by God, “praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God”. That is a service we can render to one another, helping to keep one another in the enjoyment of the greatest things, things that belong to God's love and to divine purpose,

and then, “awaiting”; that is the character of the present time. It is the time of waiting, “awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life”.

I have been impressed with these references to the spirit of dependence and the Holy Spirit's power. This dispensation is characterised by the indwelling Spirit. Elisha asked for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah, suggesting the abundance that there is in the Spirit. It is available to us. There is room for the Spirit as we are maintained in this dependent and lowly attitude, making way for divine power.

So may we be encouraged for His Name's sake!

Word in a Ministry Meeting, Dundee

15th March 2016

BEING MAINTAINED IN LIFE

Kenneth J Walker

Isaiah 53: 2 (to “ground”)

Joshua 14: 10-12 (to “day”)

Psalms 92: 13, 14; 110: 7 (to “way”)

I was thinking about the need of being maintained in spiritual life and spiritual vigour; freshness and life should mark us as Christians. We all know what it is to be jaded and tired, and to know the pressures and exercises of the wilderness. Sometimes, speaking for myself, you get into a routine and get jaded; so there is a need of being maintained in freshness and life. The key to it is where we are drawing our resources from. What is filling our hearts and our minds? The woman in John 4, before the Lord spoke to her, had been to the well many times. She had been to the well day after day, perhaps a few times a day. She had gone back to the same source and had found no lasting satisfaction. If you apply it to our day, she was just going on in the routine of her circumstances, day after day going back to the well; and she found no lasting satisfaction until that blessed day when the Lord Jesus came into her life. The Lord Jesus came into her life; He came along and sat, waiting for her at Sychar's well. What does He say? “The water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life”, v 14. From that day onward she knew a different power and was drawing from a different source. You can see that in the way she speaks thereafter: “Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done: is not he the Christ?”, v 29. She was drawing from another source, and after that she was not merely going on with the routine of her life. She had come to find everything in the Lord Jesus and, as it applies to us, in the Holy Spirit, that “fountain of water, springing up into eternal life”.

So, as we go on, there is a need of being constantly refreshed and drawing from another source. I have thought about even this company who have come through the day; we have been to work and school, and all the things of life come in; but at a time like this we can come together and be refreshed. We can get a touch from the Lord in such an occasion as coming together. It is refreshing to see one another, refreshing to come together, whether it is for prayer or for ministry or to read the Scriptures; wherever we come together there is refreshment. We are making room for the Lord Jesus and the Holy

Spirit and are refreshed.

I thought of the scripture in Isaiah 53 because it draws attention to the Lord Jesus, and it is wonderful to go back to Him, and just consider Him. Think of Him growing up before the Father “as a tender sapling”! He was drawing from another source. Think of Him even in His young years, as it would apply, those years as a boy! As it says in Luke's gospel, “occupied in my Father's business” (chap 2: 49); He was drawing from another source! What motivated Him was His Father's business. The Father's will was what motivated Him. Every other man was doing his own will, doing as he pleased, but there was a blessed Man, the Lord Jesus, who was drawing from another source. Think of Him growing up before the Father “as a tender sapling, and as a root out of dry ground”. He was drawing from another source; His food was the Father's will, John 4: 34. He was drawing from heaven and from the Father day by day. That is what sustained Him day by day, and He is a wonderful Model for us as we go through our lives here; we are to feed on Him and be like Him. I think it is wonderful to consider Him, as the One, as has been said in ministry, who was not drawing from the traditionalism of Judaism; He was drawing from another source. He was not drawing from the ritual of the day, the routine of the day, the law of the day. He was drawing from another source. What was in His heart and His mind was the Father's will! He is a wonderful example for us. We go back to Him, and go back to Him, and realise that He is the One we can feed upon to be refreshed.

I thought of Caleb where we read in the book of Joshua. He is an old man, eighty-five years old, one who had wandered in the wilderness with the people. He had been sustained by Jehovah in the wilderness as he says, “Jehovah has kept me alive”. What kept him alive was his affection for the land. God had given him an insight into the land, the freshness of the land and the richness of the land, and he moved through the wilderness and knew its rigours, but he had in his heart the inheritance in the land. That is something we should keep before us. We had that before us last weekend, as to the purpose of God, and what would sustain us would be to keep that before us, keep God's purpose before us. It says that he desired Hebron which “had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt”, Num 13: 22. It was what was in God's thoughts before the foundation of the world. That is what it suggests, that God had these rich things in mind before the foundation of the world which, as our brother brought before us, are stable and

sure and certain. As we get in other scriptures, the land is fresh and living and sustained by the Holy Spirit of God and, in one sense, that is what kept Caleb alive. It was what was in his heart and, I think that is an essential thing, that we keep God's things, keep the Lord Jesus, keep the great things of God, the inheritance, in our hearts.

Think of this man going through the wilderness. He heard the moans and groans of the people but he knew the beauty of the land, and he knew something of the freshness of it, the goodness of it, the blessedness of it. He comes to this point here, "I am this day eighty-five years old". Looking at things naturally, in a way what he wanted was impossible, but he says, "give me this mountain". 'Give me it! I want it! It is mine to claim'. That is what he had in his affections. All of us are to claim it, go in for these things and enjoy something of the richness and the freshness of the land. And he passes it on. In the next chapter he passes it on to his family. They had some sense of the blessedness of the land. Achsah says, "Give me a blessing; for thou hast given me a southern land; give me also springs of water. Then he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs", chap 15: 19. She had some sense of what was in God's heart and she was sustained in freshness and life too.

I read in Psalm 92. I suppose it links on a little with Caleb: "Those that are planted in the house of Jehovah shall flourish in the courts of our God". There are those who are living in this area, "planted in the house of Jehovah". You might say, they are drawing from Jehovah. They are not just there for a season; they are living their lives in relation to God and His things. That is like "planted in the house of Jehovah", drawing from another source. For us it would be drawing from the heavenly Man, drawing from the heavenly realm, "the house of Jehovah". God's dwelling-place would relate to it. I suppose in our time we could say we are in an area where God dwells. We are brought into the assembly, God's dwelling-place, and we are living in relation to that. We had that before us recently as to the local assembly, and the assembly and its preciousness to God, but it would be precious to ourselves if we were "planted" in that area and flourishing "in the courts of our God": flourishing gives a sense of freshness and life. "The courts of our God" - elsewhere it speaks of "palaces" - are a rich area, a royal area of things. "They are still vigorous in old age", like Caleb, I suppose, and like many whom we know and have known, "vigorous in old age, they are full of sap and green". There is a freshness that marks

them; there is life that marks them; they are responsive, “vigorous in old age”; they are an example to us, and we are to learn from them and be like them. Let us be like Caleb! Let us be like those who are “vigorous in old age” “in the courts of our God”!

I close with the reference in Psalm 110. These things are to be maintained in us so that we are retained in freshness and life, but what is it in view of? I was thinking of this recently, “He shall drink of the brook in the way”, as if there is something worked out. We are to be maintained in life and in freshness and in vigour in our Christianity, but it says, “He shall drink of the brook in the way”. I think there is something worked out which is for the refreshment of Christ, if I can put it that way: “He shall drink of the brook in the way”. I think it is a suggestion as to our local meeting. We spoke about local assemblies. Is there something in our local meeting that is for the refreshment of the heart of Christ, drinking “of the brook in the way”? It is not the full stream of things. I am only making this suggestion, drinking “of the brook in the way”, there is something tributary, but it is coming from the same source as refreshment and life and is a place where Christ receives something.

I feel that we can be encouraged, we can be refreshed; we need to go on in life and vigour, and drawing on the Holy Spirit, but, dear brethren, there is to be something for the heart of Christ, something for Him. Let us refresh Him more and more! Let us respond to Him more and more! Let Him be able to “drink of the brook in the way”! Let us make more room for Him in our lives and in our gatherings!

May it be so for His Name's sake!

Word in a Ministry Meeting, Dundee

15th March 2016

SPIRITUAL FOOD

G Allan Brown

Exodus 16: 14-15; 31

Leviticus 2: 1-3; 6: 14-16

These scriptures refer to two different kinds of food which the Israelites were given to eat as they journeyed through the wilderness. We read these Old Testament scriptures in the light of the New Testament - in the light of Christianity, and we find that these foods speak to us of the Lord Jesus, food for the believer. It has been said often enough that we are what we eat. I was told when I was young that what you eat today becomes you tomorrow - if that is true in material things it is true in spiritual things too. If we feast on the Lord Jesus we shall become like Him. I read these scriptures at the present time since we are in the presence the body of a beloved brother who is with the Lord, whose life bore features of the Lord Jesus because he had fed upon Him.

So we begin with the manna; that was the daily food: everyone was to gather the manna and to eat it daily. The first feature of the manna was that it was heavenly. It came down from heaven; it did not grow out of the earth; it owed nothing to the earth. How like the Lord Jesus that was: He was a heavenly Man upon the earth! It is a cause of wonderment to consider that the Creator of the worlds - all the worlds, however many there are - actually came down to this earth. It says of the manna that it lay upon the ground. He actually came here and trod the dusty roads of Palestine and walked in the streets of Jerusalem - the city of the great King, yet unrecognised. He was here, a Man among men, outwardly the same yet heavenly, completely different. This, beloved, is your food - daily food for the believer. It was like coriander seed and it tasted like cake with honey: what these features suggest came out in Jesus, but they came out also in our brother, because he fed on that food daily. I do not know about coriander but the idea of seed would suggest that there was something springing out in life that would be transmitted to others. Sometimes we sing,

Lord in Thee we taste the sweetness (Hymn 50).

Even in the darkest days of the assembly's history, we have such precious compositions as:

Jesus! the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills the breast; (Hymn 279).

Nothing can change the sweetness of the love of Jesus to those who know Him

Let us look now at the oblation we read about in Leviticus. This was food for the priests. Now a priest, as I understand it, is one who thinks first for God, and thence for others. That is the character of this offering; firstly, it was offered up to God, speaking of the perfect humanity of Jesus; then what remained was to be eaten by the priests in a holy place. All believers are priests (1 Pet 2: 9), though not all act in a priestly manner. But our brother was a true priest - he thought for God first in every matter, as a result of feeding on this priestly food. The fine flour speaks of evenness - think of the pathway of the Lord Jesus day by day, meeting every circumstance in divine perfection, walking always in the Father's favour. Oil was poured upon the offering, speaking to us of the Holy Spirit, and frankincense, speaking of the fragrance of that life to God. Our brother fed on that blessed One; therefore he became like Him.

We are not here to magnify our brother - that is the last thing he would have wanted - but I do believe when the Lord takes a person He would direct our attention to what that person's life has been, so that we ourselves might develop in features seen in it. I knew our brother closely since childhood, from close to eighty years ago. I never knew him to lose his temper, or get agitated; he was always the same. I say this because there are practical results from feeding on this food. Of course, the Lord Jesus was perfect, and we can only grow in measure. None of us can be perfect while we are down here; yet Paul was able to say, "Be my imitators, even as I also am of Christ", 1 Cor. 11:1. Now, as you see features of Christ develop in a person, such as in our beloved brother whom the Lord has taken, we learn to feed on the food which he fed on, and therefore become more like the blessed Man of whom these foods speak, the Lord Jesus Christ, the One of whom we sang,

The traits of thy face, Lord,
Once marred through Thy grace,
With joy we shall trace at Thy coming again; (Hymn 19).

What a day it will be when we see Him face to face!

May the Lord bless the word.

Kirkcaldy

4th April 2016

(At the meeting for the burial of David Pye)

