

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 130

January 2018

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THE WAITING TIME

1 Samuel 10: 1-8

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EJM There is a similar thought running through these three passages, beloved brethren. The first one is the prophet Samuel telling king Saul to go down to Gilgal and wait seven days “until I come to thee and inform thee what thou shalt do”. There is a waiting time, and that is really the testing time, even though it is only seven days. In Timothy, Paul is on his travels and he is writing to Timothy from Ephesus and he says, “Till I come”. He had begged Timothy to remain at Ephesus and he told him to remain there in order that the truth might be established amongst them, but now he says, “Till I come”, and in the waiting time he is exhorting Timothy what to do: “give thyself to reading, to exhortation, to teaching”, and not to be “negligent of the gift that is in” him. Finally, in 1 Corinthians 11 as to the Lord's supper, Paul received the light of the Supper from heaven. He received it from the glory, received it from the Lord, and he says, “For as often as ye shall eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye announce the death of the Lord, until he come”. That is the exercise for these three scriptures, beloved brethren. We find ourselves in the waiting time, and that is testing, whether we remain true to the Lord, whether we remain faithful to Him, and we await His coming for us because that is really the hope of the church. If we do not maintain it, decline sets in; while we maintain it, we are glad to be together every first day of the week, at the only meeting that is not announced, but we gather together out of our love and affection for Himself.

I thought of Samuel because of the necessity of the word of God; the prophetic word is very necessary amongst us today: it always has been. God brought His earthly people out of Egypt by way of the Red Sea into the wilderness and He says in one of the minor prophets, “And by a prophet Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved” (Hos 12: 13), and I think we need to maintain the prophetic word amongst us because really it brings in God amongst us. The presence of God comes in really through His word. We know the history in the last few chapters of Judges and the beginning of Samuel; there is hardly any mention in Judges of the prophet. The prophetic word was rare, as we are told (1 Sam 3: 1), and I think what we have in Samuel is really the restoring of the prophetic

word, which I think is vital, beloved brethren. Deborah was a prophetess, and she comes in in the Judges. She was one who had the mind of God; she could stimulate the responsible element to act. She says, "Up; for this is the day in which Jehovah hath given Sisera into thy hand!" Judg 4: 14. Sisera was quite an enemy. Think of the nine hundred chariots of iron and how he oppressed the people, yet Deborah in her skill and in her wisdom exhorted Barak to get into action, and Jael, the wife of Heber, brought the matter to an issue, v 21.

Then in chapter 6 when the Midianites were all over the land and the people were denied bread and denied food, it says, "Jehovah sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, Thus saith Jehovah the God of Israel: I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians ...", v 8, 9.

You can see how important, how necessary, the prophetic word is; so in this book it says in chapter 3 that "all Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, knew that Samuel was established a prophet of Jehovah", v 20. So I think the prophetic word has its bearing universally. There may be specific times when it might have a local bearing, but I think largely the prophetic word is for the whole inheritance "from Dan even to Beer-sheba". I think the results where we have read are gradual; they are not coming overnight, but gradually there is an answer to Samuel's prophecy. It says that not a word of his fell to the ground, chap 3: 19. I think we see something of the results in this chapter, and maybe in the chapter before with the maidens: it says, "As they went up the ascent to the city, they met maidens going forth to draw water" (v 11), and these maidens were important because they knew about Samuel, knew about the man of God and his movements. In this chapter in the few verses we have read there are "two men" and then there are "three men going up to God", and then coming "to the hill of God". There is a movement to what is of God through the prophetic ministry. The fulness, I suppose, of Samuel's ministry comes in in Abigail when she comes to light in chapter 25.

JCG In the word to Philadelphia the Lord says, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience" (Rev 3: 10). Does that bear on it, "the word" involving the prophetic word in our day?

EJM That is the test to us. Here we believe we are at the close of a wonderful dispensation. What are we keeping? For something to be kept it must have tremendous value.

GBG Does what our brother refers to imply that we are waiting, but do the Lord's words show that He is also waiting, "the word of my patience"? Through the whole dispensation it is His patience, but He is speaking throughout the whole dispensation in "the word of my patience".

EJM I think so. He is a Man of patience. He is also a Man of joy; He is the true Isaac. He is the heavenly Man; He is the Man of joy because He is waiting in patience. In Thessalonians it speaks of "the patience of the Christ", 2 Thess 3: 5. He is waiting to have His own, but He is also waiting to come and as a Man take up His rights, establish His rights in the scene where He has been rejected.

GAB Whilst there are distinctive prophets who operate individually, we have here the thought of a company of prophets, and it is related to the hill of God. Perhaps you could say something about that.

EJM It is good to draw attention to it. We really work in view of the company. As you say, He sent his prophets, but He also has them here. There are "two men by Rachel's sepulchre", and then there are "three men going up to God". I think the whole matter here is working in view of the hill of God and the house of God.

GAB I just feel the importance of what we speak of frequently as to the ministry meeting. That does not shut out the prophetic word coming in in any other meeting, like this one, for instance, but there is something specific about that occasion, which we should attend, for a start, and pay attention to what is said.

EJM The prophetic meeting is a very important meeting, and it involves exercise. Very often we get something on Lord's day that the Lord has in mind for the week. We need to be exercised to be available in order that the Lord's mind might come in amongst us.

JTB "Samuel took the vial of oil"; does that suggest that the prophet himself must be in communion and in accord with the mind of heaven, a soul prepared to deliver the prophetic word?

EJM I think that is good.

JTB I was thinking of the reference in Peter, "Concerning which salvation prophets, who have prophesied of the grace towards you, sought out and searched out", 1 Pet 1: 10. They were diligent in relation to that, foreshadowing the incoming of Christ, do you think?

EJM I think so. It is good to be a vessel that is available for the Spirit because it has power and it would have conviction. It says in 1 Corinthians the word is for “edification, and encouragement, and consolation”, chap 14: 3. There is a definite point that we reach through the prophetic word in the company.

JL Is it especially important to make way for the prophetic word in view of *specific* guidance during the waiting time? Other things have continuous application during the waiting time; for instance, we do not exactly need a prophetic word to guide us to remember the Lord Jesus: that has application throughout the entire period. There are various other matters as to truth that continually apply, but is the prophetic word so important for specific direction at a particular time?

EJM I would think that is right. It says in 1 Timothy that “the Spirit speaks expressly”, chap 4: 1. There might be that in the prophetic word, something that has come in that is very needed. Is that what you have in mind? In the recovery there has been that word. As things have opened up since the recovery began, there has been express speaking of the Spirit in matters as to the truth of the Holy Spirit, the sonship of Christ, the house of God and the assembly. These are very specific things in the recovery.

JL I was thinking in that respect that the Lord so loves His assembly that He will not fail us in providing that if we have a hearing ear and a readiness to receive it, do you think?

EJM So it really calls for the overcomer. We really need to be overcomers because in the last four assemblies the overcomer is spoken of first before the appeal to him who has an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying to the assemblies. Revelation 2 and 3 cover the dispensation, but the part to the last four assemblies runs on together, and the Spirit will be speaking right to the very end, will He not?

TCM I was wondering if you could say something about these prophets and what they brought with them, these musical instruments. I was thinking of your reference to Corinthians about the prophetic word being for “edification, and encouragement, and consolation”.

EJM I wondered if it was to lift up the spirits of the saints. The exercises of the time can dim us, but I think these instruments would lift the saints up, and that would be an exercise, in what we have to say, that we are lifting up the sights of the brethren.

AMB Would you say a bit more about the service of the Holy Spirit in the waiting time because clearly He must be deeply involved in giving the prophetic word? He is the power by which such words would be uttered. Would you say more for our help as to the activities of the Holy Spirit in the time that you are speaking of?

EJM Well, we often refer to Genesis 24, rightly so. The servant came forth from with the father, freighted with the father's feelings, and we would say that: the Holy Spirit has come forth in our dispensation from an ascended Christ and He would bring the divine feelings in. What do you think yourself?

AMB We often speak of the Holy Spirit as being able to bring in the current mind of heaven, a fresh word from the Lord, and I think we prove that in measure, but then it is a challenge for each one of us to make room for the Spirit, and then to be exercised to be available to Him as a vessel or a conduit for the communication of the mind of heaven, do you think?

EJM The servant says, "Is there room ...?" in Genesis 24: 23. We have to make room; we have to make way and set outside what may be of the flesh in us, the first order, and make room for the Spirit and His operations in bringing in His mind.

AMB It is very important as to making no room for the flesh and making all room for the Spirit. Saul was to go down to Gilgal, which speaks of the judgment of the flesh and its cutting off. That is always important but particularly at the present time.

EJM Yes; the flesh has to be under control. "The flesh profits nothing", John 6: 63. "For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit life and peace", Rom 8: 6. Also, "The fear of Jehovah tendeth to life", Prov 19: 23.

PAG Do you have some thought about the expression in verse 7, "And it shall be, when these signs shall come to thee, thou shalt do as thy hand shall find"?

EJM Well, do you think it would mean that Saul, as having come under the prophetic word, would be moved because really the prophetic word creates exercise in our souls? Instead of settling down, which is so easy to do, the Spirit through the prophetic word would cause exercise, movement.

PAG I am sure it would. I just thought that up until that point the

instructions had been quite precise, the two men, and the three men, and the company of prophets, and where they would be found, and what they would do, but do you think if we are attentive to the prophetic word, “thou shalt do as thy hand shall find” also suggests it would create a trustworthy person?

EJM Which Samuel was, do you think? When he got the word from the Lord in relation to Eli and his house, he delivered it; he did not detract from it (chap 3); he did not add to it; but he was a trustworthy person to deliver the message, do you think?

PAG And as we listen to it and are formed by it, not to add anything to ourselves, but as persons who listen to the prophetic word and accept it and are formed by it, we too become trustworthy. Saul was not given precise instructions; it was just “do as thy hand shall find”. I know Saul had a bad history later, but God was working so that he might have been a person who was trustworthy in the testimony.

EJM I think so and we would think on those lines of him being anointed. A vial of oil is poured upon him, and Samuel kisses him and so on. What this suggests is like someone coming into fellowship. We had a brother who used to say that this was like a young person coming into fellowship: favour is showered upon us as we come in amongst the people of God, and then we have to prove ourselves. When we come under the word, we are to be affected by it ourselves. I think Deborah was one really who was affected by the word. She dwelt under a palm tree. She did not come to anything but she was in the victory.

BWL Are these verses we have read really to impress Saul with the greatness of what God is going on with? Saul is really to be drawn into that, into the current of the Spirit's present mind in relation to things. He is to be livingly in it, but things are already operating livingly, are they not?

EJM I would put it all down to Samuel's prophetic ministry, do you think, little by little bringing forth fruit with patience? The maidens in the last chapter and these two men by Rachel's sepulchre, then three men: it is small, but there are living conditions as a result of prophetic ministry. What do you say?

BWL That is good, and it is to encourage us in relation to our localities and then in relation to what is wider, that things are proceeding normally.

EJM I think there is an upward movement in these verses. They are going up to God and then we have, “Rachel’s sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say to thee, The asses are found” and so on. There is a genuine move, really as a result of the prophetic word, and going up, going on and going forward.

JCG The going up is followed by the prophet coming down from the high place. The Spirit brings to us what is from Christ in glory. We often say that but we need to be in the reality of it. Do you think the high place might suggest our experience at the Supper of the presence of the Lord, and the mind of God flows out from our answers in response to divine Persons at that time?

EJM I think that is right because it is really the Lord coming in. We have to realise that the One who comes in amongst us and He brings in all the resources, not only has in mind the Lord’s day, but I think the whole week. I think He sets us up for the week, and so the prayer meeting is important. We may say it is a very simple occasion, but the prayer meeting is a very important meeting, an opportunity to pray together. There is much individual prayer, much household prayer, all necessary, but then the prayer meeting; and then the meeting for ministry is the opportunity for God to speak.

GAB Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14, “What is it then brethren? whenever ye come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation”, v 26. He is not suggesting that everyone is going to speak; that needs to be limited, of course, but everybody should have something prophetic. We are really coming in that occasion into a sphere of wealth.

EJM And then an unbeliever coming in may say that God is there, v 25. The presence of God is known there. God comes in; His mind is known through His word; and these verses show men going up to God, and, “After that thou shalt come to the hill of God”. The whole matter is bringing God in; God is amongst His people through His word.

GAB I was thinking of what was said earlier as to what “thy hand shall find”; when we come together, there is a great deal of wealth, which we did not bring ourselves, but we should have brought something, and thus there is wealth to draw upon. It is not only that we have the ministry meeting, but there are other occasions, like this one, where we can all prophesy one by one, v 31.

EJM In Exodus 2 it says, “Moses rose and helped them, and watered

their flock” (v 17); it was what his hand found to do to maintain life amongst the people of God who needed water and to be fed.

JL It would be safe enough for Samuel to say to Saul, “do as thy hand shall find;” provided these additional words could be added, “for God is with thee”? So long as the presence of God is known, we are on safe ground, are we not?

EJM The close of the last chapter is that Samuel said to Saul, “that I may cause thee to hear the word of God”.

JL Yes; I was linking it in my mind with the prophetic word again and Paul's comment about that in 1 Corinthians, “God is indeed amongst you”, v 25. The prophetic word seems to make way for the presence of God to be known and experienced, do you think?

EJM It is really in a powerful way. An unbeliever falls down upon his face; “the secrets of his heart are manifested”; there is power in the word.

JTB It says in Psalm 99, “Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name: they called unto Jehovah, and *he* answered them”, v 6. Is that spirit of dependence necessary in the prophet to get the divine word?

EJM I think so. We come to it later on in 1 Samuel where he called and Jehovah answered immediately, chap 12: 18.

GBG Do you think the word would not be aimless? Do you think the divine presence is the objective in the prophetic word?

EJM Very much so. That is right.

GBG We referred to immediate objectives, but there are the great divine objectives that are always in the divine mind in securing material for the assembly, securing that great vessel, God's great thoughts for us. That is the end that we reach in the prophetic word, but I think you have in mind what might specially be needed at the present time. Is there some end to be reached?

EJM I think so, and if it does not reach the divine end, that prophetic word does not lead to Christ. God brings in Christ. Sometimes we like to adorn ourselves, and promote ourselves and so on, but the character of the prophetic word is: “For the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus”, Rev 19: 10.

JAB Is the objective that we are speaking about seen in the last verse that we read? This sequence of verses culminates in what is in principle the service of God proceeding in power. Is that really what the prophetic word has in mind, something formed in those who receive it that can then respond to God? You have spoken about the waiting time. It has been a feature of the waiting time - I am thinking about the dispensation - that the service of God has been enriched as a result of the prophetic word.

EJM So really we have to put divine things first. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you", Matt 6: 33. If we put the Lord first, "Christ is everything" (Col 3: 11), everything else will come into line, I think.

JAB I was thinking of what has been said very often. The words in a meeting for ministry flow from impressions received at the Supper. The Supper is not exactly the place for ministry, as such, but these impressions can flow into the meeting for prophetic ministry, and the result of that is a further broadening and deepening of response. I was thinking of the way in which the Spirit would operate in that way. You get a touch on a Tuesday evening; we may not bring it in verbatim into our thanksgiving on a Lord's day morning, but our hearts are freshly affected to do so, do you think?

EJM Yes, I think so. In every meeting, even today, we would look for something prophetic, and God comes in really through His word. Basically that is what it is, the mind of God, the mind of heaven.

Maybe we should pass on to Timothy. One thing we are impressed with about Timothy is that Paul and Timothy went on together, went on well, and I think we need to preserve our links, the young with the old and the old with the young. It is a question of going on together. Here Timothy and Paul had been at Ephesus, I think. Paul is on the move, going round, visiting local assemblies. In chapter 1 of this epistle he says, "Even as I begged thee to remain in Ephesus, when I was going to Macedonia, that thou mightest enjoin some not to teach other doctrines" (v 3) and other things. I think Paul was enjoining Timothy to maintain the truth of the assembly, the truth of the house of God, and it was obviously in the apostle's mind that he was going to come again to Timothy. He says, "Till I come, give thyself to reading" and so on; so we are to be occupied in the waiting time. Our minds have to be occupied; and one thing is that we must read. We have current ministry, which is very much valued; we have the written

ministry; and then we have the Scriptures which are most important. In days like those we have read about “give thyself to reading” would probably be mainly the Scriptures. Timothy knew the Scriptures as a child; he knew the word.

APG It says in Luke, “Trade while I am coming”, chap 19: 13. Is that like this trading, “reading”, “exhortation” and “teaching”? The result of trading is spiritual increase for all.

EJM The Lord brings out in the gospels sometimes that some settle down: “to eat and to drink and to be drunken”, Luke 12: 45. It is easy just to settle down and say, “My lord delays to come”, but I think the fact that the coming of the Lord is kept before us means that we are engaged, we are trading and making gain, making profit.

JSS The Bereans received the word but then they also searched the Scriptures, Acts 17: 11. Do you think both go together? They received the prophetic word but then they also searched the Scriptures.

EJM That is good; so that things are confirmed. We are not going on in a haphazard way. If you read the Scriptures, you get confirmed in what we proceed with, what we go on with and often attention is drawn to “readiness of mind”.

DAB Do you think Timothy was another dependable person, a trustworthy person of whom Paul could speak in that way? I am thinking of Paul's comment in writing to the Philippians that he had “no one like-minded”, Phil 2: 20. That seemed to be suggesting that Timothy was keeping in step with Paul in his mind for the saints and his desire. Is that a good feature?

EJM I think so. Paul could send him to Corinth. Timothy obviously was with him in Ephesus; so that there was something very dependable in Timothy. Timothy was weak and sometimes needed a bit of encouragement, as we all do sometimes. I think the beauty of this is that the young and the old are going on together. We sung in our opening hymn

O teach us more of Thy blest ways (Hymn 172).

The Scriptures are basic, and the good teaching we have and have had is needed for every one of us to be established in, because the enemy is always attacking it.

DAB In Christendom sometimes you see that they have children's

meetings or young people's meetings but when the young and old are going on together, that really brings in proper growth and understanding of what we have in this section. We do not divide up the truth according to age groups.

EJM The Lord took notice of the ass and the colt, the young and old, Matt 21: 2. We need to pray on these lines that these elements are preserved amongst us. It is not just for old people but the young. Then instructions come in in 1 Timothy in relation to the young, how to behave ourselves and our conduct in the house of God, which is not just when we are together but it is our conduct always, chap 3: 15.

GBG "Give thyself to reading"; I know might be 'reading out' (to others)' (note), but do you think that reading builds up our own souls in substance? The action causes you to have communion. You read and you have an impression; you turn to divine Persons, and it builds up the soul of the reader. We need that for teaching, do we not?

EJM As you say, the footnote says 'Or 'reading out' (to others)'. Sometimes the older ones cannot get to the meetings; sometimes the old ones go through sorrows and pressures and it is a fine thing if we have the ability to read the Scriptures because they bring in tremendous comfort, do they not?

JCG This matter, "give thyself", involves spiritual energy. We spoke earlier as to the Spirit's activities amongst us and with us individually helping in relation to the energy. I was thinking the Lord in His addresses to the assemblies, which you referred to, says "I know thy works" and particularly in relation to Ephesus "thy labour, and thine endurance, and that thou canst not bear evil men", Rev 2: 2. "Thy works" involves spiritual energy in view of building up.

EJM I think it is good for us all to be conscious that we are under the Lord's eye. Every believer in Christendom really is under His eye, and we should be conscious that we are under the Lord's eye. In Luke 7 the Lord says of the woman, "from the time I came in", v 45. When we come to the Lord, we are under His eye. You may say the Lord does not take His eye off us, and He knows if we are given to reading, reading the Scriptures, reading good teaching and so on. There is a list of things but it is really that we are occupied. Mary sat down at His feet and "was listening to his word", Luke 10: 39. She was occupied in that way. We have a hymn that speaks of 'idle nature's poor delight' (hymn 254), but in spiritual things persons that are occupied are "wholly in them"; things

will continue and grow in that way.

JL Is Daniel an example of such a person? He said, “I Daniel understood by the books” (Dan 9: 2), and he tells us some of the things he learned from them, Jeremiah's prophetic word and so forth. It enlightened him in relation to God's ways.

EJM That is fine because you get Daniel and these three young men and it is interesting to see that there was a question of what he was reading. “Give thyself to reading”: they did not partake of the king's dainties or anything like that, and it says of Daniel through the reign of two kings that he “prospered”, chap 6: 28. It was really down to the food that he was building his soul on.

JAB I wondered if you had anything in mind as to verse 15. It has already been referred to: “Occupy thyself with these things; be wholly in them”. One of the ways in which our enjoyment of the truth is weakened is that we might enjoy reading some ministry but then we go and read something else and the effect of the ministry that we have read is weakened. “Be wholly in them”: the note refers to the Lord's words as a boy of twelve: “did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business?” Luke 2: 49. The wholehearted application to these things would feed us and cause us not to turn to other things because they only weaken the force of what God has in mind for us.

EJM It says of the Lord Jesus that He was “hearing them and asking them questions”, v 46. How suitable that was for a boy of twelve to listen, and then He asked questions: “Did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business?”. He was wholly in it, an example for us all.

RG I was thinking of the verse that has just been referred to, “Occupy thyself with these things; be wholly in them, that thy progress may be manifest to all”. This is a time in which we should be making progress. We might say things are difficult, and they are, but we need to hold the ground that is true: “hold fast what thou hast”, Rev 3: 11. God is not merely holding the ground; He would lead us on through the experiences we are passing through so that progress might come in for His praise.

EJM So Paul is an outstanding vessel in that way; he was pursuing towards a certain objective. Acts 13 speaks about “Paul and his company”, v 13. Those in the company of Paul would have been greatly affected by the enthusiasm, the committal, that was seen in

Paul.

RG So “progress” does not just mean that I might happen to know a little more than I did before, but “progress” involves formation after Christ, do you think?

EJM That is very good.

RG The psalmist says, “I say what I have composed touching the king”, Ps 45: 1. The foot note there is 'my occupation'.

EJM That is really progress and I think that is having the goal before us. Paul says, “Not that I have already obtained the prize, or am already perfected; but I pursue ... looking towards the goal”, Phil 3: 12, 14. He had a certain objective. That is really Psalm 45: “I say what I have composed touching the king”, touching Christ really.

AMB Timothy was not to be “negligent”; he was to be committed and “wholly in them”, as the apostle says, in “these things”. “These things” referred to in verse 15 would be everything that the apostle had spoken of, which are very largely practical matters of piety. Do you think we should embrace in our minds the whole scope of divine things? We have to be “wholly in them” and not “negligent” of them.

EJM One thing that is important in 1 Timothy and in 2 Timothy is the position of being “in Christ Jesus”. Mr Alex Craig used to suggest that “Jesus Christ” was the anointed Man here for the pleasure of God, but “Christ Jesus” is the anointed Man there, and that was really what Paul kept bringing before Timothy.

AMB What comes into my mind is the importance of seeking the Spirit's help to be occupied with God's view of what He is bringing about in this waiting time. It might be our view of it, and it might be sometimes we get a bit depressed, and it seems a long time or we are waiting for something to happen, but we have to get God's view. God's view is that believers, by the Spirit, are being formed after Christ in this present time, that is, like that Man in the glory, and yet here and bearing testimony to it.

EJM That is fine. I was thinking that in the first chapter he speaks of “Christ Jesus our hope”, v 1. It is not so much the event of the rapture but it is as if his whole soul is focused on the Man at God's right hand, that is Christ Jesus, and everything centred and secured there. Things may be insecure in the confusion that the next epistle speaks of, but in Christ Jesus there is no confusion.

PAG I was just thinking about the benefit of “Give heed to thyself and to the teaching”, and what we have said before as to reading. Practically speaking, younger brethren will have households with children and they will be asked questions. It would be good if we could answer these questions from Scripture, but in order to be able to do that, you would have to have read it. It is just a practical matter in our households, as well as when a question comes up amongst us; we should be able to say how Scripture applies. It would encourage all of us that the reading of the Scriptures brings Christ before us but it helps us in the practical matters that may arise in our lives.

EJM So 1 Timothy is really the bearing of the house of God on us as individuals, do you think? When we come to Corinthians, it is the house of God collectively; in Matthew it is the same thing too: it is the house of God collectively; but certain things bear on us as individuals, which Paul brings out here. In 1 Corinthians the truth of the house of God is brought out and how it operates together.

PAG Christ personally is greatly assailed in the world today, and the truth of Scripture is also under assault, but reading the Scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit provides a foundation in our souls that helps us to withstand these things. One feature of the waiting time is that the attacks on the Lord personally increase; they will not decrease. The attacks on the Scriptures will increase; they will not decrease. We need a solid foundation in our souls, do you think?

EJM It is basic for progress in everything else.

JS “Cutting in a straight line the word of truth”, 2 Tim 2: 15.

EJM That is it, no cutting corners or anything, “cutting in a straight line the word of truth”.

RB You referred to Daniel continuing. That is what comes in here as well, “Give heed to thyself and to the teaching; continue in them”. Did you have more in mind about that?

EJM That is really the test as to the continuance of a thing. In our local meetings we continue what has been stood for and the truth that has gone before. We continue in them because the Lord is in it. If we are asked why we do things, we should be able to give the reason with the authority of Scripture to begin with, and then the help that has come in in the recovery of the truth. Mr Darby's ministry helps us as to the public bearing of things. He brought in the word of God to bear on

everything in Christendom because the power of Rome at that time was quite strong, what they were teaching and preaching was not the truth at all; so he judged everything, went through Christendom with the Scriptures, with the Word of God, and we can establish things on that basis. Ministry is a great help to us because it gives us others' experiences. What do you think yourself?

RB That is helpful. I feel it is something that is to mark the waiting time, continuance at the level at which things have been handed to us.

EJM Yes, the Lord speaks of "they who have persevered with me" (Luke 22: 28), which would include the women who stood by the cross. What committal that was! Mr Darby says about the women who stood by the cross that it was absolute consecration to Christ, the strongest bond between human hearts, Synopsis vol 3 p402.

Well, we could finish with Corinthians. It is really good, brethren, to go over these verses, but to go over the two chapters together. Chapter 10 is the Lord's table; it has a public bearing really, and the word was, "Wherefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry", v 14. The cup comes before the bread in chapter 10 and the footnote to "communion" is that it is 'fellowship'. Chapter 10 is the exclusive character of the fellowship from God's side, especially regarding idolatry, which is anything that displaces Christ in our affections. In chapter 11 it is really the inside position. Chapter 10 is the outside, but chapter 11 is the inside, the great matter of headship, God, Christ, man and woman. "But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered puts her own head to shame; for it is one and the same as a shaved woman" (v 5), and then the glory of a woman is her long hair, v 15. He goes over all these important matters and then he brings in the Supper, "I received from the Lord, that which I also delivered to you". That is the crux of Christianity. It is the only meeting we do not announce; we announce every other meeting we have so they come under the dignity of the anointing according to His will, but the Supper is where we break bread as He has directed, and we gather together, and He is the sole Object.

GBG It says, "as often as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me" and then "as often as ye shall eat this bread, and drink the cup". That suggests we would continue in the waiting time.

EJM That is right. When the Lord went on high at the beginning of the Acts, we read of them breaking bread every day. I believe it was

Paul's teaching to set the matter of the Supper in relation to the first day of the week. I think it is Luke that speaks of the first day of the week in Acts 20: "And the first day of the week, we being assembled to break bread" (v 7); so we can see how it fitted into what had become the routine of assembly occasions.

JTB It does not say 'each time' but "as often". Would that suggest a growing affection for the Lord?

EJM I think so, and really our minds are active: it is a calling of Him to mind. But I think "the night in which he was delivered up" really touches our affections. What a night it was! Everything was against Him! The darkness was great. I like that hymn we sometimes sing:

O there Thy grace unbounded
And perfect love we see (Hymn 435).

His heart was above all the pressure, and He laid on this occasion for us. Love to Himself is what it brings out.

GAB "As often": it has been recorded apparently that Mr Stoney on one occasion was walking very purposefully away after the breaking of bread and someone said, 'Where are you going?' He said 'I am going to the Supper'. Short of the Lord's actual coming for us, should the Lord's supper be the predominant feature in our lives?

EJM I think so. The Supper is really very important. It draws us together as one and we are to remain faithful to Him because if the Lord comes today, it is over. "In an instant, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor 15: 52) the dispensation is over; so we are really to encourage one another to give the Lord a greater place.

JCG The affections towards the Lord are related to the remembrance side as we have been taught. The announcing "until he come" is more the public side of it. Would you say something more about how that bears on the testimony?

EJM I suppose it is simple. Do you think as we gather together, there is a testimony? Would that be right? Publicly that is how it is. We have been faithful to Him; we are gathering together and showing forth His death. We are calling Him into mind, into our affections, do you think?

JL Is the one related to the coming of the bridegroom, and the other related to the coming of the Lord to take His rights up?

EJM That is a very good suggestion. So we not only love the Lord

but we love His appearing, do you think? Paul says “not only to me, but also to all who love his appearing”, 2 Tim 4: 8. There is a reward laid up for faithfulness to Himself. I feel very small when I think of it, think of persons who have laid down their lives for the testimony and so on, but it is all going to be rewarded when He comes.

APG In verse 26 eating and drinking are mentioned. Do you think eating gives strength to continue, and drinking suggests satisfaction? These two things come into it.

EJM I think so. He brings in drinking in the next chapter, that we “have all been given to drink of one Spirit”, 1 Cor 12: 13. The body comes in, and the function of it, and he says, we “have all been given to drink of one Spirit”: that is, that the believer is satisfied. We drink into the cup on Lord's day morning and our hearts are refreshed, are satisfied, because of God's love, Christ's personal love. “Drink of one Spirit” is that the body is a company of persons who are satisfied.

DS Can you help us as to why this matter was distinctly given to Paul after it had already been given to His own?

EJM Paul received much from the Lord; he says, “I received from the Lord”. He received the truth as to the assembly and it was really from the glory. When the Lord set the Supper on, it was in the night of His delivering up, the night of His rejection; He set it up in that condition, but Paul received everything from the Man in glory, the Man who arrested him on the Damascus road. The Lord said then, “Go, for this man is an elect vessel to me”, Acts 9: 15. Paul was special in the ways of the Lord.

GBG You would not know from Matthew if the Supper was to continue, but being given to Paul, you can see that it is to continue through the dispensation, and probably Luke gained impressions from Paul's account, do you think?

EJM I think so. That is good because Luke makes it historical. He says, “This is my body which is given for you”, Luke 22: 19. Here it is what is for us: “This is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me”.

PAG The side of sacrifice comes into the Lord's presentation of it in the gospels. You mentioned “which is given for you”. It also says in Luke, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you”, v 20. But here do you think the sacrifice is seen as complete? The sacrifice has been made, and what we come into is the benefits of

the sacrifice. The sacrifice never has to be made again.

EJM I think that is good. We can really come into the gain of the covenant, do you think? Is that what is in your mind? As we drink into the cup, we are persons who are liberated, really free for a response, are we not?

PAG Yes. The Lord says, "This is my body, which is for you". In that sense we are entirely bound up with His affections. In the new covenant the love of God is flowing towards us. The hymn says,

His hand, His house, His heart are free (Hymn 431).

I hope it is the right expression to use that God is in liberty with His creature, with man, because all is settled.

EJM So that really through the Supper we enter into what is eternal, do we not? All the relationships that spring out of His death are eternal, the brethren of Christ, the bride of Christ, sons of the Father. Through the Supper we enter into that great area of privilege and the service of God is sustained. So it is "until he come" so that the Lord's supper in that way is special to the assembly.

AMB Can we infer clearly from this that the Lord intended the affections of His own would be maintained towards Himself, livingly, faithfully, until the time comes when this remembrance ceases because the Lord comes. It is a tremendous example of divine consideration, of the Lord's consideration for His own, that He could give this instruction through the apostle.

EJM So as we go through the week it is a test to us. The tests and trials can get us down at times, but then the next Lord's day we are revived in our souls as we gather together.

AMB The act of remembering the Lord, when our affections are fastened on Him and we are consciously making way for Him to come in, leads on to something that is of a heavenly character, into the service of God Himself. That is never an ordinary thing. Although we come together to take the Supper every week, it never becomes ordinary.

EJM I think the forty days (Acts 1: 3) bears very much on it because it is a period of instruction as to how the Lord operates as having come out of death. He has not yet gone into heaven, but the Lord's supper is a spiritual experience, is it not? It is not physical; it is a spiritual

experience of the Lord coming in amongst His own. I think that was the bearing of the forty days, a learning time.

JTB The “continual fire” that was “kept burning on the altar” in relation to the law of the burnt-offering “shall never go out”, Lev 6: 13. Is that how we view the Supper as ongoing, deepening affection for the One who gave Himself in such a way?

EJM That is a good reference because it is really kept going in the affections of the saints. Lydia was one who said, “If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord”, Acts 16: 15. Her heart was opened by the Lord and was burning with affection for Him.

GAB I would just like to ask if I could take you back to chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians. It says, “The cup of blessing which we bless” (v 16), and also, “The bread which we break”. That is in chapter 10, not chapter 11. Do you think the blessing of the cup is something that extends beyond the actual occasion of the breaking of bread?

EJM Yes, I think so. It has been said blessing the cup is like a eulogy. We are speaking well of it. Is that what you have in mind?

GAB Well, I have often thought, being practical, that there might be situations when the devil would present something to you which perhaps you should not be doing and you just think, 'Well, I put my lips to that cup on Lord's day, and will do it again if the Lord will'; so you do not succumb. So you have reason to bless the cup throughout the whole week. I think it is important that it is in chapter 10 rather than chapter 11, the blessing of the cup, and then, “The bread which we break”; it is a characteristic thing, not just a specific incident.

EJM I think that is helpful.

PAG The blood was for God; so the cup comes first in 1 Corinthians 10 because God's rights come first: so “The cup of blessing which we bless” applies to the whole of the responsible week. God's rights apply to the whole of the responsible week. The principles of the fellowship apply to the whole of the responsible week, not just to Lord's day morning, but there is a cup of blessing. God's rights are for our blessing.

EJM I thought it was good to see the difference between the two chapters; chapter 10 has a very public bearing, the fellowship, and then chapter 11 is what is going on amongst us. As our brother said, the fire was kept burning through the night until the morning as if our affections

are on fire. We sing that often, 'whose hearts were on fire' (Hymn 194).

Grangemouth

2nd September 2017

List of initials:-

A M Brown, Grangemouth; D A Brown, Grangemouth; G A Brown, Grangemouth; J A Brown, Grangemouth; J T Brown, Edinburgh; R Brown, Grangemouth; A P Grant, Dundee; G B Grant, Dundee; J C Gray, Grangemouth; P A Gray, Grangemouth; R Gray, Grangemouth; J Laurie, Brechin; B W Lovie, Aberdeen; E J Mair, Buckie; T C Munro, Grangemouth; J S Speirs, Grangemouth; D Spinks, Grangemouth; J Spinks, Grangemouth

REPAIRING

Stephen McLaren

Mark 1: 16-20

Isaiah 58: 6-12

What I am particularly impressed with is this remark of the gospel writer's as to these two disciples in verse 19, and their activity: "these were in the ship repairing the trawl-nets". The Lord Jesus, I am sure, had had to do with these disciples before, and as He came along here He elevates Simon and Andrew's activities beyond what they could have imagined. He speaks of making them "become fishers of men". They were engaging in the activity of fishing, and the Lord speaks to them of how He is going to take up what they were engaged in and bring it into an entirely new sphere. Under His direction they can "become fishers of men".

When He comes to James and John, the Spirit gives the comment that "these were in the ship repairing the trawl-nets; and straightway he called them". It simply says "he called them", and "leaving their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, they went away after him". It does not comment any further as to what their activity was, but I think the indication is that it had His approval. The activity they were engaged in was good and an activity to be approved of, the action of repairing. Our brother has spoken about what is valuable, and no doubt a net would be valuable to these fishermen. Obviously they could not engage in the activity without a net that was complete and whole. To make that possible when damage has come in, it has to be repaired. Sometimes repair jobs are meticulous and take a lot of patience and skill, and you can apply that in many ways. It is not always an easy activity, but it is a very necessary one if the net is to become whole again and be useable. I think the same applies in other spheres too. The activity of repairing is to be lauded. When breaches come in, there is a need for the activity of repairing. Of course, it has to be on a right moral basis - that would be obvious - but I think the activity is a right one, one that we can all engage in.

It led me to that scripture where we read in Isaiah. I do not mean to say much about it but I was just struck in reading it. It speaks of repairing and puts things on a moral basis, God speaking to His people about the fast that they held, and about how He is not wanting outward correctness or superficiality. What is acceptable to Him is that they "loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, and to send forth free the crushed, and ... break every yoke ... deal thy bread

to the hungry". They are all activities that God would approve of. He says, if you are on that line, "Then shall thy light break forth as the dawn, and thy health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee, the glory of Jehovah shall be thy rearguard". What a change of aspect that indicates! It speaks about the need to "take away from the midst of thee the yoke", that is, putting burdens upon persons unduly, "the putting forth of the finger and the unjust speech, and thou proffer thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul". All these activities are right and pleasing in the sight of God; that is what He is interested in. "Then shall thy light rise in the darkness, and thine obscurity be as mid-day; and Jehovah will guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought" and so on. "And they that come of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations that have remained from generation to generation" - there was the going back and establishing what was right in God's sight - "and thou shalt be called, Repairer of the breaches, restorer of frequented paths" or 'paths of habitation' as the note says.

I just feel the desirability of being occupied on this line, the line of repairing what is broken, "Repairer of the breaches", and the way that God speaks here indicates the kind of realm where He takes account of things and indicates what is morally right in His sight. I think the word speaks for itself, and I desire that we should be all exercised if breaches come in that we should be before God and perhaps identify in ourselves anything that is not according to God that may be contributing to such a condition, and see that we judge that in ourselves; and then, having done that, we are competent to address these issues which God raises with His people. We must seek to act rightly in His sight if there is anything of these activities that God speaks of so seriously, that these things are all judged and a right basis is laid for the establishment of what is good and right in God's sight, and repair can take place. *It is much easier to rend a garment than it is to repair it.*

I trust that the word will be for profit and for our blessing in our consideration of this matter. I trust that we will all be engaged in this activity of repairing or, as Matthew's gospel speaks of it, "mending", Matt 4: 21. I believe the Lord would have us to consider this matter before Him.

May it be so for His Name's sake!

Word in meeting for ministry in Dundee

28th February 2017

THANKFULNESS

Andrew Grant

Luke 17: 11-19

Daniel 6: 3-4, 10

1 Corinthians. 1: 4-5

Colossians 1: 12-13

I was encouraged to say a simple word, dear brethren, as to the matter of being thankful. I was encouraged after what we had on Lord's day in our reading. In Ephesians we are to give thanks for all things (chap 5: 20), and I have been thinking a little about this recently. I was struck with a verse in Romans. It is something of a negative context but in Romans 1: 21, Paul is speaking about those who were unrighteous. He says, "Because, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful". I was just struck with that. I might have thought if he had said, 'glorifying not as God' that would be bad enough, but I thought the fact that he adds, "neither were thankful" was something additional. I think divine Persons get pleasure from those who are thankful towards them. We see men around us in the world, and I suppose it applies to ourselves naturally as well, that we are not thankful for things as we should be. You see that generally - men are not thankful towards God. They do not recognise what comes from God, or even that what God has ordered is for our benefit; the government and such like - men are not generally thankful for these things. It is more an attitude of complaining, but I just think for the believer it should be the complete opposite. We are to be marked by being thankful and it is a blessed thing and maybe a preserving thing too. It would keep us closer to divine Persons.

I thought of this reference in Luke with ten lepers. It is often read in the glad tidings, the story of how they were all blessed. They all felt their need and they were all blessed, but there was only one that went back to the Lord - and he was marked by thanksgiving. I suppose they would all be thankful for being relieved, but only one of them expressed that thankfulness and was marked by thanksgiving towards God, towards the Lord. It says he glorified God, and then the Lord says this as to them, "There have not been found to return and give glory to God save this stranger". So really glory to God is from one who is marked by this spirit of thanksgiving. How we can be thankful for the blessing we have been brought into! We have been brought to know

the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. How thankful we should be for that! It is open to all, as we know, not through any merit of our own, but it is God who has worked with us to bring us to know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. How thankful we can be for that and for the blessing of having been brought to have a knowledge of God through Him. How blessed a thing that is. And this man gets a word from the Lord as a result of his expressing his thankfulness. "Rise up and go thy way: thy faith has made thee well". So he is brought into relation with the Lord, and I think one who is thankful and expresses it has communion with the Lord Jesus in that way.

Daniel is another example. He was in difficult times. I suppose we are in difficult times too, but one thing that marked Daniel was that he was preserved through the difficulties. As we see here, there is something that marked him continually. It says, "he kneeled on his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God". So I do not think it would be any question of formality or routine with Daniel, but he was genuinely prayerful and thankful, and dependent too. So I believe thankfulness goes along with being dependent. Daniel was in a difficult situation here. He knew what the decree was; he could easily have just laid low for a few days, but he did not do that. He was relying on God, and God came in for him. I think the spirit that marked Daniel - an excellent spirit and a thankful spirit - is an example for us. These ones who sought him could not find anything against him. I was interested in the note to the comment that "they could not find any pretext or fault", it says or 'corruption' (*note a*). It would remind us of the way the Lord was here too. I was thinking of the passage in Matthew 11 when He had been rejected. It was a difficult time for the Lord because John was doubting, and then these cities rejected Him, but he says, "I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth", Matt 11: 25. He was really marked by thankfulness towards His Father. That spirit marked the Lord when here and you see something of that spirit in Daniel here too. Despite the difficulty that was around he maintains his links, and is still thankful, towards his God.

I was thinking too, in Corinthians of how Paul often thanks God about the saints, and that is another thing we can be thankful for. We have links together in practical fellowship and we can be thankful for that. The reason I read the verse in Corinthians is because Paul had a lot to say to these saints that was corrective and necessary to say, but it did not stop him being thankful for them, and thankful for what they

were before God. "I thank my God always about you, in respect of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus; that in everything ye have been enriched in him". They had been brought from darkness into the light of Christianity and Paul gave thanks for that. He had been amongst them and he genuinely appreciated the saints there, as he did the other assemblies to which he wrote. That is one thing that we can be thankful for - one another.

In Colossians, it is quite an elevated reference, but I was thinking of how Paul speaks of "giving thanks to the Father, who has made us fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light". That would be what we can enjoy together as to the inheritance. We are brought in through divine grace to have a knowledge and relationship with divine Persons. So we have been brought to the Source of our blessing in the Father. How thankful we should be for that. We have so much - even the Scriptures that have been preserved to us, and the ministry, and we have our links together in the truth that has been preserved to us. Perhaps especially on a Lord's day morning, we can give thanks for all these blessed things and I think we should be marked by thankfulness as to them. I feel that for myself: I should be more thankful for these things and I thought how preserving a thing it is if we are maintained in thankfulness towards divine Persons. We should not, as it were, worry about the things that are of this world, but we can be in relation to divine Persons and marked by this thankful spirit. It is something that is necessary in the current day and I feel the need of for myself. The circumstances around us - they could be work or school or anything - can get on top of us, but think of how we can be brought into this sphere of blessing and relationship, and if we are maintained in thankfulness then we can be above all these temporal things.

We have been reading locally recently as to the overcomer. I think thankfulness is a feature of overcoming. It is a very simple thought that I had but I was encouraged after what we had in the reading on Lord's day. We have been blessed with so much, and I feel the need of just being marked by thankfulness. And there is glory to divine Persons as a result of those who go on in a thankful spirit. So may we just be helped in it for the Lord's name's sake.

Word in a Ministry Meeting, Dundee

8th August 2017

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON

John N Darby

Luke 15

This chapter is familiar to all of us. It presents divine love to us in touching ways.

The Lord had to justify Himself for manifesting God's goodness (v 1); this is sad to say, but that is how it was. Jesus was not seeking the self-righteous; He came from heaven because man was a sinner, to bring back hearts to God by grace, however degraded they were, and nothing could hinder God from thus drawing near to man in his misery. The most degraded by sin understood that there was grace for them, and that God was able to do what was needed to set them in His presence without question of sin.

There are many things to produce and awake in the heart to exercise it and lead it back. We are as hard as stone. There are indeed certain natural affections in man, but that does not stop selfishness being the spring of all that is done in the world. His own interest: that is what governs man under one form or another. This is what came to light in the discourse of the older son: "to me hast thou never given a kid that I might **make merry** with my friends". To enjoy himself with his friends, to have what satisfies his selfishness, that is his whole thought. With such a heart, who could be happy in heaven? He would suffer, as the elder son, from not being treated according to his importance. No, a man occupied with himself would not find in heaven a single feeling which answers to this seeking. Happiness consists precisely in having finished with this.

Someone absolutely degraded, and who is obliged to own it, has lost all pretension of this sort. But where do you find somebody who feels they have sinned so much as not to seek to justify themselves? The worst sinner will tell you that he has only harmed himself. In one way or another, one always keeps a good opinion of oneself, and finds something to one's credit to avoid saying: I am wicked and nothing but that. It needs the work of grace to be there, and it is this work which the Lord illustrates here.

God uses two means to lead the soul back to Himself: needs and affections.

One can understand the word 'need' for the sinner in two ways.

If I am lost, I have need to be saved. There is then the need to enjoy God, the breathing of the heart after Him, the desire to possess Him. The prodigal reckoned the position of the hired servants to be happy, though the least close to the father, because they would be in his house. To be there, to have the father, even were it in this way, that is the object of his heart. But that is linked with the feeling of sin and of responsibility before God. It is necessary above all to know where we are in that. And the Lord depicts the operation of His perfect grace, in showing us the prodigal awakening, “coming to himself”.

He remained for a long time in his sad state without knowing this awakening. He had needs, urgent ones even, but not of this kind. Indeed, certain needs, entirely selfish needs, were not at all attached to the knowledge of God. Nature asserts itself, the mind becomes restless and is active, and all this energy of nature produces a certain joy for a time. Then, when all that disappears, a void is left which one does not know how to fill. The prodigal, in the far country, shows us this; he surely went a long way in this direction, to the point of losing all dignity. One sees man degrading himself, making himself drunk, or worse still, to forget what he is, making use of the world so as not to be left to himself, a thing which, for the natural man, is already a hell. If he manages to harden his conscience to the point of not having any remorse whatever, what will become of him, his life ended? He will have managed to forget his miserable condition down here, and that is all; but then the judgment of all that has produced such a state will come, with a righteous God as judge! If his conscience speaks, on the other hand, the more he reproaches these things, the more unhappy he is, to the point of cursing himself, and he will try to hide this from his own eyes. There is nothing for him in this world ruled by famine. One cannot bear it oneself, and one finds no meaningful compassion whatever. One will find companions to try to stifle things, but no true affection, in this kind of need. At the bottom of it, these are the needs of absolute selfishness. To eat husks is to try to suppress the remorse, and to want to remain there at all costs. It is a selfish need which still hardens the heart. We have an extreme case in this picture. The destitution of the prodigal did not bring him back, rather the opposite. But his moral state is the same from the beginning: he was as wicked when he dissipated his goods and only sought his own satisfaction, as when he had turned his back on the father's house, or when he was eating the husks with the swine. All this history makes us understand that this kind of need, which leads him to this point, although very real,

does not relate to true affection. On the contrary, he defiles himself by more and more degraded means, even striving for the husks of the swine, but he remains there.

See now the grace which acts; then the needs, very real and felt the more, link themselves to new affections. The prodigal comes to himself; he feels his sorrow in a way so much more profound that he remembers his father's house where the hired servants have abundance of bread. He connects another thought with this: I perish! It is not only that I am hungry, I am in misery, but I perish! His sorrow is now felt in an entirely different way because he has seen it from the side of the father's house. What makes him see that he is perishing is the remembrance of the father's house. It is the thought of a God of goodness which makes him understand how miserable he is to prefer to be with the swine. God is revealed; affections are awakened, affections which accompany the needs of the soul and which bring it back to God. The elder son had not the least idea of that; there was no such need with him, as with the Pharisees, as with every self-righteous man. They do not say, 'I perish'; they blame God. The prodigal blames himself. The repenting sinner says: 'I perish, in spite of God's goodness, far from God! I have sought pleasures where the swine could seek them, the house is full of goodness and I am not there!' Behold the converted man; 'I will go', he says. Up to that point where the prodigal's conscience did not judge him, he sought to forget, to forget himself, and even more to forget his father - the only way, he thought, to be happy. Now all is changed: his need links with both the conscience and the affections. He sees that he perishes, and he has a new knowledge of the father and of his house. The awakened conscience is not awakened exclusively to the feeling that God is just. There is more in the "I have sinned against ... thee; I am no longer worthy to be called thy son". It is the feeling of having sinned against a God full of this goodness, through which even hired servants would be happy. It is a God whose goodness attracts, and to think that one has despised Him produces even more the feeling of horror of self than of fear. One does not get angry against God for being condemned; there is affection for Him in this horror of oneself. How have you been able to forsake a God who has given His Son? You have preferred the world, its pleasures, its emptiness, the swine's husks! You have made God a convenience! - It is thus that the awakened conscience speaks, judging all man's ways, producing true repentance: one does not only fear being judged, one judges oneself; one is no longer overcome by sin,

one judges it. The awakened sinner does not excuse himself; he detests himself; he will excuse others rather than himself; he sees God, as one might say, and it is this God worthy of being loved that he hates himself for having sinned against. The conscience recognises God's righteousness, and that one deserves to perish, but it turns back towards God. "I will rise up and go ...". If I could be at the house! - How, if you think of returning there, are you going to present yourself before God? Impossible! God is righteous and cannot behold iniquity! The conscience takes the double-edged sword of God's righteousness, speaks in the name of the rights of justice: 'You cannot find yourself there!' - This would be true, if all was not grace.

There is still no free play of affections in the heart. One is not yet reconciled. I cannot prove the feelings of a child close to his father as long as I do not know if he wants to receive me in his house. We have only yet the state of an awakened man. It would indeed be happy if he was allowed to go back into the house, even as a hired servant. But he is still not in the position of enjoying the house in any capacity. Notice that even great progress in spiritual things will not be enough for it. The prodigal returns, draws near to the house, but the nearer he draws, the more his unease must increase, the more he is aware of his rags. The more he has a conscience about what the father's house is, the more he has the feeling of being unworthy of being found there! Thus it is when one approaches God with one's sins; needs, destitution and awakening of conscience are always felt more, even if moreover hope rises as the land of famine gets farther away. The prodigal in arriving always says: "I am no longer worthy!". Peace is not in progress; the affections are just and true, and have a good object, but as long as one does not have the certainty of the full goodness of God, the more affections are true, the more anxiety one has in wondering how one will be received. There is a key question to be resolved. One does not doubt having been in the far country and having left it, but now, can one have some hope of being reconciled with God?

That does not depend on us. It is necessary to have the thought of God Himself about it; He must answer Himself. This is what He has done in a perfect way in Christ. I see Christ suffering on the cross, and I find there the divine answer to the fearful question. I say: 'Why was He there?'. Ah! it is because my Father loved me when I was still far from him. And from then on everything changes.

I learn to know the will of God in grace. It is represented to us in

the first two parables of this chapter as searching for the sinner. The shepherd goes after his lost sheep: it is not the sheep who seeks the shepherd, it is the shepherd who seeks it, who is interested in it. I did not seek God when Christ came to die for me; I sought my pleasure; sin had the upper hand in my heart. There is nobody who seeks God. But Christ came to seek the sheep because they were lost. Grace seeks, and all its joy is to bring back; but even more, to carry the lost sheep. In the same way one sees the same in the woman expending herself to seek the lost drachma.

There, therefore, are the glad tidings answering to the soul; although the conscience protests that God cannot bear sin, that sin must be removed, it comes to say that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin, that Jesus has come for this, that all is accomplished. Grace can have its free course towards a defiled sinner. The father falls upon the neck of the prodigal son while still in his rags. It is not that he loved his rags; he loved his son. This joy of the father is the peace of the child. Nothing else could satisfy him. To have left the debauchery could not stop him from thinking that he had broken the father's heart; to have fled the country of famine did not assure him that the house would be open to him, but to see his father happy to receive him, embracing him in spite of his rags, sufficed for ever. What gives pleasure to the repentant sinner is to find in God, instead of the justice which smites, the joy of the Father in possessing His child. To kill the fatted calf satisfies the father's own affections, God is glorified, content Himself in blessing. His pleasure is to take poor sinners and to make their heart happy by the testimony of His grace. I am happy in thinking, not of myself, but of the joy which the Father finds in blessing me because He is love. The proof of it is given in the sacrifice of Christ. Sin which kept us far away is removed by Him; God has glorified His grace by His goodness towards us in Jesus. The rags are removed. Instead of the righteousness of the law, God clothes me in His own righteousness, and holds me clothed in Christ in God's presence. Christ is our righteousness, we will appear in Him before God, and God does not impute the sins to us that Christ has removed by the sacrifice of Himself.

Every need is satisfied from now on. I have Christ; I can need nothing else: He is my righteousness, my holiness, my High Priest, my life. He gives me everything, and He can answer to all that concerns me, for He who is the highest in heaven has been the humblest on earth. He has come down here to make me rise to Him. It is impossible

that I should lack anything.

I can even say that needs no longer exist. If I am hungry and one sets a good meal before me, I enjoy the meal and there is no longer a question of hunger. In Christ, all my affections are rejoicing; their enjoyment replaces the needs themselves. I enjoy them in liberty, under the eye of a Father happy to give. It is an established relationship; I am there as child, the conscience as at ease as the heart. The prodigal son could only be astonished at all the goodness of which he was the object: all the affections, and all the activity of the house were in his favour. His father's fortune would always be at his disposal, it would still be the father's pleasure to have him. He knew his father as he had never known him before. He had known him through his needs, his sorrow, his sin, but he now knew that he had with him enough riches to receive him when he had spent all far from him. Thus God reveals Himself according to the riches of His grace; the heart proves the attraction of His goodness; but yet more, it finds peace, the answer to all its needs, a perfect rest. The precious blood of Christ which removes sin sets all the affections in liberty towards God.

I will find still in me the lusts which I have to resist; but the heart is satisfied, it knows grace and it proves that this grace suffices me, the power of the Lord made perfect in its weakness. Abiding now in the house, I know the Father better. Not that there would be change or advance in what the Father is for me, but I learn to know Him better. My heart can deceive me, but Jesus never deceives; He is always there to lift me up, so as to introduce me as the fruit of the travail of His soul, without sin, into the Father's house for eternity. How blessed to have to do with Him.

Translated from '*Le Messager Evangélique*'