

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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ENRICHMENT AND CONTRIBUTION

Ephesians 4: 7-16

DAB In a recent occasion locally we sang hymn 251 and one of the lines in verse 4 is:

The rich one Thou - for us made poor

In singing this it made me think of 2 Corinthians 8: 9: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sakes he, being rich, became poor, in order that ye by *his* poverty might be enriched". There is a wonderful glory conveyed in that verse as to the Lord Jesus, "that ye by *his* poverty might be enriched". What I have in mind therefore for this reading is that we might appreciate the blessed enrichment that has come to us from Christ Himself and through that enrichment we might know what it is to contribute. The tabernacle system was set up according to the pattern (Exod 25: 9), and the pattern was given by God Himself. The 'working' of the tabernacle system involved that persons brought material which was available on the basis of exercise and it is on the basis of exercise that we are enriched. This led me to the passage in Ephesians. Chapters 1-3 is where Paul sets out so fully the whole counsel of God and the blessed height of the truth, and the working of it out is to come into our souls in a substantial way and this is really brought out in the section of scripture which we have read together.

For our interest and encouragement, we started reading at verse 7 where it says, "But to each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ". We cannot really elect ourselves outside of this matter of what God has given, through Christ, as it is for "each one of us". It is also for the enrichment of the body. My exercise is that we arrive at what we have in verse 16: "works for itself the increase of the body to its self-building up in love". While we have the gifts brought out in verse 11, there is the merging in the body, and the gifts are given in view that they might have their place in the body. The result of the giving of the gifts and what we derive from Christ in heaven is what is found in the body of the saints. It has been said that the giving of the gifts is really in view that the saints might become independent of them! There is that substantially wrought in the saints for the glory of God so that what we have at the end of chapter 3 of this epistle is really the result of the enrichment of the saints; there is response Godward. It has all come from this One who has ascended

up above all heavens and therefore what has come from an ascended Christ is for the enrichment of us all.

AEM I think that is very good. Maybe you could just help us in verse 7 as to being “given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ”. We are familiar with the thought of having a measure of faith. God starts His work by doing that.

DAB Firstly, it is “to each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ”. Quite clearly there is the measure of faith, but I think this means that what has come from Christ is according “to the measure”. There is what is measured that is given, but it is to each one and for our building up, according to the grace given.

AEM It has been given. It has been demonstrated in that blessed Man. It is not an abstract thought; it has been seen superlatively and gloriously in Him.

DAB As coming into manhood we might think it is an unusual expression that “by *his* poverty” we have been enriched. That poverty really relates to Him coming into manhood. I was impressed by it:

The rich one Thou - for us made poor.

We can surely say that Christ is rich and we have everything in Him. That really is the glory of the incarnation and as coming into manhood He has bestowed upon us every blessing that God has in mind for His creature.

IMcK Can you open up the link between enrichment and contribution?

DAB We have all been given something. That is why when Christ went on high, the Spirit was given so that we might not be left to our own resources. As being enriched in the fulness of these gifts and what has come from Christ we then become equipped to participate in the greatness of these divine things. I am reading through Mr Darby's letters and what he said in one of them was 'Christianity works *not* by what it brings *but* by what it finds', Letters vol 3 p137. Clericalism encourages persons to come on the basis of what they find, not exactly what they bring. The working of the body, and the inward power of the Holy Spirit, encourages persons to bring through exercise so that we all might participate for the functioning of the body. What has been given to us then is fulfilled in the last verse, “the whole body, fitted together,

and connected by every joint of supply, according to the working in its measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body to its self-building up in love”.

RDP Your illustration from the tabernacle is interesting. If you go back to Exodus 35: 10, it was the “wise-hearted” who contributed. It speaks about “every one whose heart moved him, and every one whose spirit prompted him; they brought Jehovah's heave-offering”, Exod 35: 21. With the description of a heave-offering you see a swelling of affection in relation to it.

DAB We see it particularly in Exodus, and also in Leviticus with the offerings, the sin-offering, the peace-offering, the meat-offering, the burnt-offering; and all were to participate. They were all to bring. God speaks of a “handful” in relation to the oblation. It is what is contributory. That is why I began in verse 7, “But to each one”. It begins on an individual basis. At the end of the section it is what is collective. We then are all merged together and working and participating together and that practically is how it works.

RDP You have already mentioned that the pattern of the tabernacle was from God. It must have been a tremendous movement of heart that brought all that material. That chapter in Exodus brings out the spirit of it.

DAB It does. Where did they get all that material from? Where do we get our substance from? I appreciate older brethren who have been faithful in and supportive of the testimony (this has also stimulated my exercise); are we contributors in helping forward what there is for the divine pleasure while we await our final participation in glory? This section of scripture is really the filling out of the blessed truth which Paul had in his heart for the Ephesian saints.

DAB-r That verse in 2 Corinthians 8 is part of a long section about a collection. We have been reading those chapters at home and seen that the money was not the main point: it was to give everyone, givers and recipients, a practical understanding of the one body. Paul says, “if the readiness be there” (v 12), and “God loves a cheerful giver”, chap 9: 7. I am glad to see the link with these two passages that they illustrate practically that the one body is developed and edified by giving.

DAB I realise 2 Corinthians is to do with the practical giving of the saints, but you think of the giving of Christ. That really is what that verse means; the coming into manhood, the blessed incarnation.

DAB-r We felt it could not just be the point to have three or four chapters about a collection. We then saw that the brethren who might never see each other would understand that they were in one body, and the practical means to that end was to stimulate giving. I wonder if that linked with your exercise. That is the “grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ”. It produces Christ-like activity in His body.

DAB Exactly, so that we are taking character from that blessed One. We are kindred in nature to the Lord Jesus. Therefore we give as He gives; that is what it means here when it says “to each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ”. It is really of that blessed One, what we are given.

AJMCK Is there something of the measure where we get later “that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth?”, and then, “He that descended is the same who has also ascended up above all the heavens”. Is that the measure of the Christ? I was thinking of what has been drawn attention to, the giving of Christ is in one sense beyond calculation, but the measure is there.

DAB That is helpful. It is there so that we can understand it and appreciate it. There is no part of the created sphere that Christ has not been into. He has “ascended up on high”, and then it says “above all the heavens, that he might fill all things”. That is beyond the created sphere. The greatness of who Christ is and where He is gone is really beyond us, but the measure brings that into expression in appreciation in our souls.

AJMCK This is a huge encouragement to us. A simple impression of the greatness of the gift of the Christ and of this measure really sets us in the right position for this all to start. In the light of that we find our place in contributing: is that your exercise?

DAB Yes it is. You can think that the one here who has “ascended up on high, he has led captivity captive”, He is the blessed Victor; He has also “descended into the lower parts of the earth”. That really is lower than any man has ever gone and refers not only to His death, but to His burial, as I understand. We were speaking about measure; Mary was the only disciple who really appreciated the burial of Christ. It says, “She has beforehand anointed my body for the burial”, Mark 14: 8. She could not do it after; so she did it beforehand and she would be in sympathy with what we are talking about.

QAP Does this flow out of John 1, “for of his fulness we all have

received, and grace upon grace”, v 16. His fulness is immeasurable; with us there is a measure, but not with Him.

DAB I think we have that in verse 13: “at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ”, and is something that is arrived at in a collective way. What is individual leads to what is collective. I was thinking of Psalm 51 in that connection. The character of the sin-offering in an individual way leads to the character of the burnt-offering, and we can see this whole matter deriving from Christ, the One who has ascended up on high. He is filling all things and filling us with the blessedness of His love so love really is greater than gift.

QAP The unity of the Spirit in this chapter is linked with the inward affections between the saints whereas the unity of the faith in this section is linked particularly with doctrine and holding the same teaching.

DJW The verse you quoted, 'for us made poor' was His own act. I was thinking of this expression here, “Having ascended... has given gifts”. It is His own act. If we have received a measure of grace, it is His own act, a gift from Him. It might help if you say something as to how we identify what Christ has given me. Is it an impression of Himself?

DAB It says in verse 11, “and *he* has given some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers”. The Lord gave apostles and He filled the apostles with His ministry, but it awaited the Spirit for the fulfilling of what came from the apostles. There was that in the apostles which was enlarged by the Spirit coming here. You ask what has Christ given us? I think this all works because the Spirit is here. We are in the day of the Spirit's power, the Spirit's dispensation; so I think the Spirit comes into this and brings from Christ impressions of Himself and imparts them to us. That is really the working of the body.

DJW 1 Corinthians 12 confirms that. What Christ has given He has given through the actions of the Spirit.

RHB Does the parable of the talents illustrate this thought of what Christ has given, and the measure: each was given a different amount, but they were given it with a view to using it, Matt 25? Is that what you had in mind?

DAB Exactly, so that it is for the benefit of all. What each one of us receives is for the benefit of the whole body. I think that is how things work out with this matter of trading. Christianity is a wonderful system

because what you share you actually gain by. In material things if I have a pound in my pocket and I share it with you, I have fifty pence and you have fifty pence, but in divine things there is an increase by sharing.

RHB We tend perhaps to think of measure as something limiting. You often hear it said that something is beyond my measure, but the scripture thinks of measure as something to be filled out. Timothy was told to “fill up the full measure of thy ministry” 2 Tim 4: 5. There is almost the suggestion that he had more than he was using.

DAB Paul could say of Timothy, “For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”, 2 Tim 1: 7. That would really encourage him to fill out what he had.

PJW We are either enriching among the brethren or making poorer. It was so in connection with Gideon who “threshed wheat in the winepress, to secure it from the Midianites”, Jud 6: 11. I was thinking about what you said at the beginning about what is individual. He worked it out in restricted circumstances in exercise in view of the enrichment of God's people.

DAB It was; it began with an individual exercise. Then it spread out to the whole nation. It began with Gideon's desire for the food supply to be maintained, through exercise. That is another matter which is important: that we should be maintained in exercise. Young men are asked to preach, and I trust they are exercised to participate in the reading meetings as well. I would also encourage them to have exercise for and liberty in the meeting for prophetic ministry, but we should really be in exercise all the time. We should desire to be filled according to the measure that Christ has given us. That is why there is grace given so that our measure might be filled to capacity. As we move according to the Spirit then it is like light. If we move according to light we are given more light and if we move according to the grace we are given we will be given more so that there is substance formed in the soul which is used in this self- building up in love.

PJW The supply of grace is limitless but the question is whether we use it effectively. As you have been speaking a poem came to mind

For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth and giveth and giveth again

Annie Johnson Flint (1866-1932)

It is His unbounded grace that is in mind. For us it is to work with that grace to enrich the saints.

DAB There is what is given by Christ as the ascended, exalted Man through these gifts. What we receive from Christ is to be formed in us through the power of the Holy Spirit so that as these other things come into evidence and become workable we almost become self-sufficient. So we are not dependent on any external power, but we are dependent on Christ in heaven and the Holy Spirit here.

GCB I realise you have helped us to dwell on what each has been given. Would you be free alongside of that to speak of what Christ has given distinctively in the following verses? We are not to divide the thoughts, what each has been given, and what has been given distinctively in these gifts. You referred to the clerical system; may be in the second century that is what began to happen. The saints separated what is apparently distinctive from what each had been given, do you think?

DAB I could use the illustration from the Acts. Men like Peter and John were distinctive men, they were apostles clearly. They go into the temple through the gate called Beautiful and come across the lame man. As taking that person up Peter says, "Silver and gold I have not; but what I have this give I to thee", Acts 3: 6. That really was what they were given individually and was the means whereby that man came in and merged with them in the company. If we stand in the grandeur of our own service we introduce what is clerical. While there is what is distinctive, it is to be used in the working out in a mutual way amongst the saints for the building up of the body.

NJH Your reference in Corinthians to "ye by *his poverty* might be enriched". Not in glory. This is a whole spiritual order of things as we get through to "who is the head, the Christ: from whom the whole body". It is a spiritual order of things; the contributions must be spiritual.

DAB Do you think this whole sphere speaks of what is spiritual? We should not be afraid of that word because it means that Christ is everything to us, and the Spirit is free in our souls and affections, so that contributions made are "for the perfecting of the saints; with a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ; until we all arrive at the unity of the faith". It is all in view of this building up and edification so that we might be persons who are enriched and therefore contribute. We might be endowed by the blessing of what we have in the spiritual realm so that our localities continue in a vital way.

RDP Paul says at the end of his life, "*I am already being poured out*"

(2 Tim 4: 6), but earlier in Philippians he says, “if also I am poured out as a libation on the sacrifice and ministration of your faith, I rejoice”, chap 2: 17. That is a really lovely touch. “I rejoice, and rejoice in common with you all”. It was not a pouring out in view of an answer or a return like man's business dealings, where you make an investment in view of what comes back; “poured out as a libation and on the sacrifice and ministration of your faith”. That brings in the whole gospel.

DAB That is not philanthropy. Men can be philanthropic, but they have themselves in mind. Paul was a libation. He did not have himself in mind at all but the blessing of others. Paul had that in his mind in Ephesians 4; the blessing, edification and filling up of these persons with full thoughts of God for the assembly as we have in chapters 1 to 3.

DAB-r It is important to understand that grace is never measured by the need it meets. If you had a need and God gave you enough grace to meet that need, you would have nothing to enrich anyone else. Grace is always spoken of as abounding. I was thinking of that verse in 2 Corinthians; it was not simply that the Lord had grace for the work He undertook: the grace enabled Him to enrich many. Is that the character of grace? If we seek grace we should seek something that will enrich others as well as what our own need might be.

DAB Yes, exactly. Grace is love in operation. While we have these gifts mentioned here, the working out of what they give is really in love and love remains. Gifts are going to be done away with, but love remains. As to grace, as we are filled with the preciousness of what we find in Christ and as it is formed through exercise in our souls, we are then able to contribute. It is very easy to come along and just sit. My desire is that there might be that formed in us which is contributory to this whole system of grace.

DAB-r Grace was needed for the Lord Jesus to take the place He has on high. That was a movement of grace on His part. What is the first thing He does? Give. That is because He loves His body, He loves His assembly, He loves His people; and that grace which has installed Him in the highest place in glory means He is still a Giver.

DAB Exactly. What lies behind this then is the blessed One who has gone on high and given of His Spirit. The Spirit is given in order that what there is in Christ might be known here below. We are not in any disadvantaged position. It has been referred to recently that the giving of the Spirit was additional, not instead: the Spirit was not given in place

of Christ; the Spirit was given additionally to Him.

AEM This expression “with a view to the work of the ministry” is very interesting as to what you say as to it being easy just to sit. The work of the ministry is not just a job today. The Lord gives you something and the Spirit helps you to set it out, but the work of the ministry includes everyone here and the Spirit's work in everyone here. It is a very inclusive and full thought.

DAB That is it. I had in mind that the gifts and “the work of the ministry” and “the edifying of the body” are in view of “the perfecting of the saints”. You might think, “How can we be perfect?”. We are human creatures; we are in bodies of humiliation. This is in view that there might be no hindrance to divine operations in the soul, so that everything is removed and divine persons have free flow and free scope in our affections. This is what is going on now. It is for everyone in this room to become involved; so it is an inclusive service.

AEM I was thinking that as to this gift of grace: if there is any barrier to this reaching into my heart it is put there by me not by God.

DAB We are all called to serve: “if anyone serve me, him shall the Father honour”, John 12: 26.

AM Reference was made earlier in the reading to what was brought for the tabernacle to make it. There was also what was needed to keep it functioning. The oil had to be supplied and the incense and the wood too. Solomon says, “Where no wood is, the fire goeth out”, Prov 26: 20. It had to be supplied.

DAB Absolutely. It says in Hosea, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (chap 4: 6): that relates to the functioning of the tabernacle. What causes lack of knowledge? Is it a lack of exercise or a lack of desire? I feel the greatness of what is brought into this scripture, “the perfecting of the saints; with a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body”. That is a functioning system. That is what is in view. We do not have apostles, but the authority of the Lord is with us. There are those who can bring in a prophetic word, and the mind of God comes in so that we might be gathered up into appreciation of Christ. There are evangelists, and there are indeed shepherds and teachers. It is all a blessed functioning and living system.

AM There will never be a time when what is needed is not available from the divine side. It has been provided. The testimony will go

through; the question is whether I am having part in providing that.

DAB Surely. I feel the exercise of this self-building up line. It has substantially been given; it is there; we appreciate it, and the testimony is moving forward. Are we going to have a living part in it?

DJW The standard is very high. I was thinking of Paul's word, "stretching out", Phil 3: 13.

DAB We have here "the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ". The full-grown man is what we are collectively according to God. That was what Paul had in mind in writing the first three chapters. "The measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ" is in a blessed and glorious Man. How we arrive at it is through "the knowledge of the Son of God". He is at the centre of the circle and we are brought into that.

DJW It is not an impossibility.

DAB I feel that. John wrote for the last days. John was very old when he wrote his gospel; like him, we are certainly in days of failure, but is there any reference to the public failure of the church in John's gospel? There is absolutely none!

IMcK I was thinking about John 12 after Lazarus had been raised. You have already referred to Mary's distinctive service and that was important, but before that it says, "they made him a supper", v 2. They were working together to contribute.

DAB Yes, they were indeed and that contribution really came from love. There was the circulation of love in that family. They appreciated who Christ was and they were ready. They were not scrabbling around trying to provide; it was there already. We read of Abigail recently; she had that provision. I know it is in a different setting, but it is a question of what we have available.

AMcK It is "until we all arrive", not 'if'. There is a certain confidence about that.

DAB I do not think there is any dubiety when it comes to the operations of divine Persons in the soul. I feel the need for spiritual maturity amongst us, and I do not say that critically. I feel it myself that there is that which is wrought through the gifts, through "the work of the ministry", through "the edifying of the body of Christ" and then it says "until we all arrive". There is no if or doubt at all about that. It is "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God". I was

thinking of these two things running together. We have “the unity of the Spirit” in Eph 4: 3. Here is “the unity of the faith”. I think that is the fulness of Christianity. Then you have “the knowledge of the Son of God”. That really is the Man of another world.

AMcK In verse 15 it says that “we may grow up to him in all things, who is the head, the Christ”. That is the great attraction; things are growing in that direction. It does not make anything of me; it is what is of God that responds and grows up to Him.

DAB The question is - what progress are we making? That is the exercise. I raise that with everyone in this room: what spiritual progress are we making? Are we really drawing from the blessed resource that is in Christ Himself?

ADP Could you say a word as to “the work of the ministry”? Different age groups in this room may view “the ministry” in different ways. What do you see as the work of the ministry?

DAB We are *all* called upon “with a view to the work of the ministry”. Paul possibly had the view of others in mind, but we are all involved in this. You function in your locality in Birmingham as exercised to contribute to what is proceeding. That is all part of the work of the ministry. It is to do with the functioning of the body. We come from a much larger locality, but there are many small localities down here and it is a question of whether the work of the ministry is continuing. Is this functioning amongst us or are we just taking a back seat?

ADP That is what I was trying to get to. Sometimes we think ministry, which can just be books on the shelf, but this is different. This is “the work of the ministry” which involves all of these gifts, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers, and the demonstration. Then there is this key word after the list which says, “**for** the perfecting of the saints”. If you look at the note *f* to ‘for’ it suggests ‘the object’. That is the work of the ministry and is all-enveloping in true Christian behaviour.

DAB Yes, and it includes the fulness of the glad tidings. It is to do with “the perfecting of the saints”, and that means the removal of anything fleshly and of nature which would hinder the operations of the Holy Spirit. That is what “the perfecting of the saints” means.

GJR It says of Elisha that he had “poured water on the hands of Elijah”, 2 Kings 3: 11. He would become a prophet himself; so do you think he had part in the work of the ministry?

DAB He did. What is your understanding about pouring water on the hands of Elijah?

GJR I might become set in my ways and I might repeat myself and readily revert to certain themes of the truth. The brethren might find that a little bit trying, but somebody can pour water on my hands and refresh me. I am just following the question that has been asked as to how wide is “the work of the ministry”? Maybe a sister receives a gift for something she does for the Lord; she writes a letter of thanks, that is part of the work of the ministry.

DAB I was thinking of the part the sisters have in this, and I am glad you refer to it. You might say this is all to do with brothers. It is not. The work of the ministry also includes the sisters and what they contribute; not that they speak in the assembly, but they can contribute in a very vital way in their spirits.

GJR The women spun the thread for the curtains in the tabernacle, Exod 35: 25, 26.

RDP The material brought for the tabernacle was of all kinds. “And they came, both men and women; every one who was of willing heart brought nose-rings, and earrings, and rings, and bracelets, all kinds of utensils of gold”, Exod 35: 22. That was not the tabernacle but was the material. Then you come to the next phase which was about Bezaleel and it describes it as “all manner of workmanship”, v 31. Is that not a bit like the way this chapter develops: “all manner of workmanship”? Persons must have carried things, others were skilled in cutting, skilled in sewing, cutting stones and setting them, and carving wood. All this was executed; all this material was worked. Is that not the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers, all part of “all manner of workmanship”?

DAB That is a fine suggestion. That is exactly what I had in mind so that all the variety in unity is contributing to the functioning of the tabernacle system; and so it is in our own day. We are all here together through the grace of Christ, the Spirit operating in us so that there might be this “fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply”.

DAB-r What was available for the tabernacle was never measured. It was cut off in mid-flow: there was much more, v 35. God never had to compromise His design to accommodate some limitation in what was available. He knew what was among the people, and that the “fulness” as is spoken of here could be expressed by what was among the people.

DAB God does not limit His thoughts because of our inadequacies.

DAB-r Perceived inadequacies; He sees the fulness of what is actually there. Maybe we need to have eyes to see it in one another.

DAB I feel that; the architect when he is designing a building sees the finished article, and Paul was a great architect. There is the foundation, the structure, and then the finished work. The divine pattern is always there in the divine mind. I feel that this section is almost like the filling out of that.

DAB-r I like this idea that it is able to work “for itself”. The body cannot function if it is not complete. God had a complete thought in His mind, but He never entertained the idea that it could not be realised.

DAB He does not work in glorious impossibilities. He provides the wherewithal for this to operate according to the divine pattern and at the divine level.

NJH They had to restrict the material being brought in the wilderness, but not in Solomon’s temple. It suggests the superiority of what is provided in the hearts of the saints during this dispensation.

DAB Yes, I wondered that. What there is in the assembly, and what is contributing to it. We are in the Spirit’s day and there is no restriction. There was before the Spirit was given but we have nothing of that here. This is really the fulness of the divine operation in order that “the whole body, fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply, according to the working in its measure of each one part”. I would like some help as to “works for itself”. It becomes almost independent; not independent of the Head but independent of any fleshly or natural thought or activity.

PJW In connection with that we often think of Joseph’s dream, his sheaf “remained standing”, as applying to the Lord Himself, Gen 37: 7. I notice Mr A J Gardiner speaks of it as the assembly remaining standing in this dispensation where all other bodies perhaps have failed (Piety and Other Addresses p386). Does that link with your thought that it is self-sufficient in the sense it remains standing of its own power and working inwardly from the Spirit?

DAB I think that. It involves our links together “according to the working in its measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body”. It is a question of what we are drawing on. Are we drawing from Christ and also from one another? Are we drawing not only from

Christ, but also from one another? That really is why these gifts have been given, “with a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ” in order that what is referred to in verse 16 works. There is no disconnection or restriction.

NJH Is it partaking of the same order of man as Christ?

DAB Yes it is. I wondered if the meaning of “holding the truth in love” is really holding it as Christ is. It is almost like the divine nature experienced amongst us and holding that truth in love. It is a very spiritual idea, but very attractive; so that we hold it for all. We hold the truth as Christ loves it.

NJH A brother in Glasgow who remembered a visit of Mr Raven said that what changed his life was what Mr Raven said, that we are kindred nature with Christ. It made me think a little as to the fact that if anything was brought out of the tabernacle it required the wood-offering, Neh 10. Everything operationally hung on that matter. The wood-offering was supplied; Nehemiah required it. It is the order of man that was there. Everything ascends from that order of man for the pleasure of the heart of God.

DAB Exactly, so that God's delight in Christ underlies all this and everything flows from that order of man. We might say the character of the body derives from Christ Himself. The saints have a living part in the divine economy. That glorious circle of love that exists in heaven has touched the earth and touched every true heart, bringing us together and therefore contributing to the working of the body.

AEM It says here, “grow up to him in all things”. That does not leave anything out. I was thinking about what you were saying about not only feeding on Christ but drawing from one another. If we see Christ in one another then in all things we can grow up to Him.

DAB Yes. There is wonderful contribution here, growing up to Him. What there is ascending to Christ is of Himself, and what is in the hearts and souls of the saints, has been imparted by the blessed Holy Spirit for the pleasure of divine Persons.

AEM My impression is very simple. If you are growing up to Him in all things your eyes have to be on Him all the time, not going looking sideways at things here in this world.

DAB No, we need to be single-eyed for Christ and if we are single-eyed for Christ we will find that there are others who are also single-

eyed for Christ, and that is the link that we have together.

STE The Lord says of one, “What *she* could she has done” (Mark 14: 8); she was a full contributor. The divine eye saw everything she did. That is not just what we see of others; it is what heaven sees of what we do.

DAB We should not minimise what we have nor minimise what God has given us. Bring it in because it contributes to the functioning of what we have here. That really is what we have in the previous chapter: “to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages”, Eph 3: 21. What we bring is contributory to the working out of that.

TJH Does the fine flour of the oblation (Lev 2: 1), help in what you have in mind? I was thinking of the evenness as seen in Christ and that we are to be in accord with that. You gave the analogy of a building; if one piece was too big it would stick out and it would not be in accord with the architect’s specification. The whole body has to be “fitted together”.

DAB Yes, this is a living matter, “the whole body, fitted together”. You are reminded of the stones taken out of the quarry. They were hewn in the quarry before they were brought and every piece fitted exactly together. I feel the brethren are united together, and I had that experience as coming into this room today. We do not have any other Head but Christ and everything flowing from that blessed One and then flowing out in the power of the Holy Spirit results in that which is flowing back to Him. God has operated from His own side. Christ has come in love to this scene and He has gone back in love to that scene in order to give to us that which is of His character and of His order.

AAC Can you help us in our vision in a day of breakdown? We look around and we get confused. We have to hold on to the few verses before you read where everything is in oneness and it remains so. We cannot see the fulness of it, but as we take our entire source from Christ then we can continue and what we experience, is it not something of eternal life?

DAB Are you referring to the section about “the unity of the Spirit” and the “one body and one Spirit”, Eph 4: 3, 4?

AAC Yes, and “one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father”, v 4, 5. That remains. We must hold on to these things in a day of breakdown. What results from taking our

direction from Christ is not individuality, far from it, but the exact opposite. It is what we will enjoy eternally now; liberty and working together.

DAB Absolutely. There is no division or disunity in anything that is connected with the divine system. Christ as the Son of God is the centre and there is “one body and one Spirit”, “one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all”. What could be more complete or blessed than that?

AAC Could we contemplate heaven being silent?

DAB No.

AAC Therefore, it should not be so now either; which is exactly your exercise.

DAB We are contributing to what is proceeding in heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to have our eyes lifted to see the appreciation that divine Persons have in what we can contribute to. Christ has no other vessel for His satisfaction but the assembly, and we trust there will be many more that come into the appreciation of what the assembly means to the heart of Christ. We often draw from Him and seek to take all the blessings, but there is what is much greater than that, a divine circle of love that has drawn us, livingly, into that blessed sphere above.

QAP His title “the Christ” is mentioned in every chapter in this epistle, and so is the Spirit, and the Father, and love. It shows the wealth of this epistle as to what comes in at every point.

DAB Yes it does, and it is to affect our hearts. This is not a picture on the wall; it is workable, and it is to work in our affections.

Witney

23rd February 2019

Key to initials:

D A Brown, Grangemouth; R H Brown, East Finchley; D A Burr, London; G C Bywater, Buckhurst Hill; A A Croot, London; S T Eagle, Dorking; T J Harvey, East Finchley; N J Henry, Glasgow; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; A J McKay, Witney; I McKay, Witney; A E Mutton, Witney; A D Plant, Birmingham; R D Plant, Birmingham; Q A Poore, Swanage; G J Richards, Malvern; P J Walkinshaw, Strood; D J Willetts, Birmingham

FAITH

David A Brown

Luke 8: 22-25

1 Peter 1: 6-9

Revelation 21: 10-11

Jeremiah 17: 7

I would like to speak very simply dear brethren about the test of faith, the proving of faith, the fruit of faith and the Man of faith. We live in a time when our faith is being tested, and it has always been that way for believers from the beginning of the dispensation. During the Dark Ages, the time of the martyrs, or at any stage in the course of the testimony (we should all have some knowledge of the history of the testimony) there have always been faith's testings. For persons who commit themselves to the Lord Jesus their faith in Him will be tested. There are persons in this room who have experienced and are experiencing pressures in their circumstances; illness, family difficulties, employment, and indeed present assembly exercises. I suppose, and I can only speak from my own personal experience, we sometimes wish these obstacles to be removed but God does not work in the way we wish Him to. If God swept away every obstacle put in our way there would not be any need for faith in our pathway. The day to come would have already arrived! In Luke where we read we have a squall of wind bringing danger on the water. There will be no more trials like these in a day to come. In their place will be nearness to Christ, faith giving place to actuality. The present time is the time of learning and growing, and for the formation of the moral features which we find in that blessed Man our Lord Jesus Christ. So when the time comes for our translation, it is simply a matter of a change of our bodies of humiliation into bodies like unto His own body of glory. What a living and glorious prospect we have in His soon coming: the time of faith gone forever; the time when all these obstacles and difficulties and pressures are gone forever. Meantime, and in this waiting time, may we each be able to say that our path is "the path of the righteous" which "is as the shining light, going on and brightening until the day be fully come", Prov 4: 18.

We read in chapter 8, and this incident took place on one of the days of the thirty three and a half years in which the Lord Jesus lived in this world. On every day of His precious life He lived according to the divine will. We have in Him the blessed pattern Man, for He Himself is "the leader and completer of faith", Heb 12: 2. The Lord lived with His

faith blessedly active in relation to His God and Father, as it says in Isaiah 50: 4, “He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed”. What a Man for our contemplation!

“And it came to pass on one of the days, that *he* entered into a ship, himself and his disciples; and he said to them, Let us pass over to the other side of the lake; and they set off from shore”. For the comfort and encouragement of all the dear souls in this room, I believe that the Lord Jesus will never allow us to go through our exercises alone, as He is ***always*** with us in them. I suppose these disciples may have had doubts, but here the Lord is saying, “Let **us** pass over to the other side of the lake”. The Lord knew perfectly well what was going to happen with the sudden squall of wind. He knew absolutely what was in front of them but He says, “Let us pass over”. What was in the Lord's mind at this point I believe was the period of faith which these disciples would enter into when the He left this scene for glory. There was a bond being formed which was going to remain with these men when Christ went on high and the Spirit came.

The Lord delights to be trusted in everything. If we do not trust the Lord, we really call into question the preciousness of His love and the blessedness of His grace. We know the folly of trying to plan things our way and to move according to our own natural propensities. The Lord Jesus would call forth active faith in Himself. The scripture says, “And as they sailed, he fell asleep”. You might wonder why the Lord fell asleep. He fell asleep because He was restful in His own soul, and restful in the knowledge that everything was in the divine hand. It is wonderful to contemplate the restfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ in circumstances which would agitate us naturally. I love to think of Him in this way. The Lord knew about this sudden squall of wind and when it would happen. We sometimes think, 'Why does the Lord not remove this pressure, or why does He not operate in this way or that way?'. It is a test for our prayers to be according to the divine will, the divine promise, the divine way and indeed according to divine counsel.

Sometimes the Lord does not remove the obstacle. Did He remove the obstacle for believers who gave up their life for the truth, or did He remove the circumstances of tremendous pressure for Stephen? These persons proved divine love and grace in their circumstances, and as proving the reality of the Lord's love for them gave their life for Christ. He wishes us to trust Him even though He may not remove the obstacle; but He gives us more grace to bear the exercise. Now it says, “and they were filled with water, and were in

danger; and coming to him they woke him up". Unbelief would wake the Lord up: faith would leave Him sleeping. Have we got our confidence in Christ? Do we have the faith in that blessed One, such that we can trust Him for everything? These disciples' boat was filling with water, and you might well say what rightful concern they had. An open boat filling with water means that there was a danger of sinking. Think of the difficulties they would have in their own mind. They would say, 'Why did the Lord bring us into these circumstances?'. The Lord was *with* them in these difficult circumstances. The Lord did not say to these men, 'You go by boat, and I will take the journey overland and meet you at the other side'. He was *with* them in the boat. "Master, master, we perish". The Lord could have remained sleeping to test their faith further but He woke up, such is His graciousness. If He thinks that matters are becoming too much for us to bear (and only the Lord Himself is the Judge of that), I think the Lord in His grace will come in as He did here and quell the wind and the raging of the water. "He, rising up, rebuked the wind and the raging of the water; and they ceased, and there was a calm". How blessed is the grace and support of our Lord Jesus Christ. In John 17 the Lord does not demand for His own that they should be taken out of the world, but that they might have the resource to continue in His absence. "I do not demand that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them out of evil", John 17: 15. At present the Lord is testing the reality of our faith and its activity. In the passage in Luke I think the Lord was calling forward this time of faith which these disciples were going to be initiated into in order that they might prove Him in a greater way. He said to them as He would say to us, "Where is your faith?". What did he say to the woman in Simon the Pharisee's house? "Thy faith has saved thee; go in peace", chap 7: 50. There was really something greater at that point with that woman in Luke 7 than there was with the disciples in Luke 8. "And, being afraid, they were astonished, saying to one another, Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?" These men were giving glory to the blessed One who had come into their circumstances.

In Peter's epistle, we have the proving of faith. The scripture says, "that the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold". The Lord said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to have you, to sift you as wheat; but I have besought for thee", Luke 22: 31. It does not say, 'that thou will not fail', but, "that thy faith fail not; and *thou*, when once thou hast been restored, confirm thy brethren". In 1 Peter he is restored and he is confirming his brethren. He is writing to

persons of the dispersion; it says, "Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ, to the sojourners of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia ...", v1. These were persons who had lost their homes, lost their employment, lost everything and had nothing. Peter is writing to them and he is writing to them in this manner: "for a little while ... put to grief by various trials, that the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be proved by fire". We have gone through a little in our own locality of the fire, the deep sorrow of death, and you can see the divine result in persons, something that is "much more precious than of gold which perishes". There is a certain refining going on and this is to bring out purity in the saints. These sojourners were going through this refining process. Peter is not merely saying that he felt sorry for them in their circumstances. He could not change the circumstances, but what he is saying is that "your faith ... be found to praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus Christ". So whatever we might go through is all in view of what is substantially for the heart and pleasure of God Himself. It says, "though it be proved by fire, be found to praise". What is being placed in our treasuries? In a day to come what has been placed in our treasuries is going to come out in glorious display, and I will come on to that in Revelation. It is interesting that the faith mentioned here is compared to gold: "Much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be proved by fire". I think what is being brought about here is an increase in what is in our treasuries. The poor woman who cast in two mites had a wonderful treasury, Luke 21: 2. Not according to this world's estimation, but what she had in her heart and soul was according to God a great treasury. That is what Peter is seeking to bring out in these persons. "Whom, having not seen, ye love": are we all lovers of Jesus in this room? It says, "whom, having not seen, ye love; on whom though not now looking, but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory". How blessedly wonderful that the proving of the faith of these persons was to result in, "receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls". What a complete matter that is. That is the full salvation that we have in our souls, but here I think what we have is really *the fruit* of what that proving is, that there might be "joy unspeakable and filled with the glory". How blessedly true this is. So Peter could speak as one who went through this in his own experience.

So the blessedness of the fruit of faith is brought out in Revelation 21 which was written by the apostle John. It is really the collective result of individual exercise. The assembly is the blessed vessel into which individual exercises are placed so that what is

collective may be established for God. It is the vessel into which all these exercises are deposited with a view to the formation of this holy and heavenly city, Jerusalem. Where Paul takes the church to heaven as the firstborn ones the apostle John brings the church down here as the holy city. John brings what is heavenly down here for display. He is a man for the last days and writes like no other. Read John's gospel, and try to read it again: it brings the Lord Jesus Christ in as the Centre of God's operations, the great Operator in the divine system, which is where the Father's glory pervades, the Spirit gives power, and the Lord Jesus is the great Operator. It says, "coming down out of the heaven". The origin of this holy city is heavenly, and we are heavenly too. "He that sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren", Heb 2: 11. We are of His own stock and kindred, and really of God. That is why He is not ashamed to call us brethren. The blessed fruit of faith is all being gathered up now and will be presented in the time referred to in Revelation 21, the millennial day, the time of display. "Having the glory of God": that is the blessedness of the work of God in each one of us. "Her shining was like a most precious stone, as a crystal-like jasper stone". What is being wrought now in the hearts and souls of the dear saints, and I might say all believers who go through things rightly with God in their own exercise, is what will shine in a coming day. I love to think of this shining: no opaqueness but everything transparent and all of God; everything in this scene is radiant with features which we see in Christ. This holy city can take her place in glory by the side of Christ as indeed she can now. In a coming day she comes down having the glory of God, substantially.

The assembly is therefore brought so near to God, yet a creature vessel, and in that vessel divine Persons find their pleasure. Sometimes we can lose sight of the heavenly character of the assembly and of what there is going to be in a day of display, but this shining is like a most precious stone, like a crystal-like jasper stone. God desires, and will have, everything transparent. It goes on to speak of "a river of water of life, bright as crystal, going out of the throne of God and of the Lamb", chap 22: 1. That gives the idea of purity and transparency. The day of display will be the fruit of faith, the fruit of faithfulness. We sang in our hymn, "faithful amidst unfaithfulness", (Hymn 230). Christ is the Faithful One. How faithful are we in our own testimony and in our own localities? The time calls for faithfulness and that is why I read in Jeremiah.

We are reading Jeremiah at home just now and although it is quite a difficult book to understand there have been several verses

which have caused us to pause and consider, Jeremiah 17: 7 being one of them. We read a scripture this morning in the house in which we are staying and I might just say in passing that it is a good habit for young households (and indeed all of us) to read our Bibles daily and to consider what is being read. If you have a young family just try to find a little time; I know how difficult that is in this area with early morning starts and the like but it is good just to take time together to read a little scripture, whatever the time of day. So we came across this verse recently in our daily reading, "Blessed is the man that confideth in Jehovah, and whose confidence Jehovah is". I would like to ask everyone in this room, Do we confide in Jehovah?'. Is He the one that we find our confidence in? I would also like to relate this reference, "Blessed is the man", to Christ. (The footnote to 'man' refers to the footnote in Job 3: 3: "There is a man child conceived" - 'it refers to strength'). Jeremiah is making a veiled reference to Christ Himself. We had a word recently in Edinburgh from Psalm 37 and a man who confides in Jehovah knows what restfulness means as waiting patiently on Him. One of the greatest tests for us is patience, and waiting on the Lord for a word or for direction in what scripture to read. When brothers are asked to preach it is a question of waiting on and confiding in the Lord for a suitable word. It says in Psalm 37, "Rest in Jehovah, and wait patiently for him", v 7. It also says, "Fret not thyself", v 1. There are many things that we might fret over in our daily lives and in our assembly life but as we realise that the Lord is in control we can be restful. It is His assembly and He will have the last word.

"Blessed is the man that confideth in Jehovah, and whose confidence Jehovah is": it speaks of a Man of faith. Christ set faith on at the beginning of this dispensation and He will complete it when He comes to take His assembly to be with Himself. That is why we speak of the Lord as being the Leader and Completer of faith. For each one of us, let us be those who confide in Jehovah. That is Jesus Himself, and "whose confidence Jehovah is". We have confidence in Him and as believers we cannot really operate outside of that blessed Man. May we know the blessedness of these things for ourselves. The day calls for reality and continuance; God tests our faith so that our treasures might be enriched, and will contribute to the outshining in a day to come of that crystal-like jasper stone.

May it be so for His Name's sake.

Witney

23rd February 2019

COMING INTO GOD'S HOUSE

Roland H Brown

Acts 2: 22, 23, 32-41

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, as described in the opening of this chapter, it was the first indication of that great fact. And it was a fact, not a doctrine; the Holy Spirit came. He came to indwell persons on the earth. You think of the wonder of that. The evidence of it was that immediately the gospel was preached. A divine Person came down from heaven to indwell men. They were simple men, they were young men, some of them had been fishermen, and they had become disciples of Jesus. They had witnessed His rejection and crucifixion and resurrection. What men they were; men that had eaten and drunk with a Man that had been raised from among the dead.

The Holy Spirit came down from heaven to indwell them. At the beginning of chapter 2, a house is mentioned. The “violent impetuous blowing” that marked the coming of the Holy Spirit “filled all the house”. Not only were these individuals indwelt of the Spirit, but He was taking possession of the house, the house of God. The assembly which is spoken of in the Scriptures as God's house, “a habitation of God in the Spirit”, Eph 2: 22. Out of that house, the house of God, went the preaching of the gospel. God wanted persons to come into His house and He still does. He wants to dwell with men. He has given abundant evidence of that: He wants to dwell with men, not on a temporary basis, but for all eternity. I wonder if you have ever thought about that. People think long and hard before they decide to go and live with somebody, whether it is a relation or whether they are thinking of getting married. 'How would I get on?' It is one thing to be friendly with somebody and see them from time to time; it is another thing to live with them. God indicates in the gospel that He wants to live with you. How would you feel? Would you feel comfortable living with God? Or would you feel uneasy about it? Would you feel that it would curb you in some way? You think of God expressing in the gospel His desire, a deeply held desire of God, to dwell with men. When we say men, it means men and women and boys and girls. God wants to dwell with you; He wants you to know His love at close quarters, and He wants that love to be reciprocated.

The amazing thing about this preaching of which I have read, which is the first preaching of this dispensation, is that it was made to

the most guilty responsible people, the very persons who had been active in crucifying God's beloved Son. The preacher did not ignore that in his preaching. He did not just give a sweet word; he addressed the reality there. He says, "ye, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain". These were the guiltiest persons on the earth. There were a lot of people then who were ignorant, but there was none as culpable as those to whom the gospel was first presented. I just want you to think about that because it tells us something about the grace of God. "The grace of God ... carries with it salvation for all men", Titus 2: 11. No one is excluded from the range of divine grace. Before He went up on high the Lord Jesus said to these men who became indwelt by the Spirit "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations **beginning** at Jerusalem", Luke 24: 47. It was to begin there: the very place where Jesus died. You might have thought that if God wanted to live with men He might choose some other men than these, but those were the persons to whom God's appeal through His faithful servant was presented.

This was the first preaching of this dispensation. Many hundreds of years have passed since this preaching, and here we are today at another gospel preaching. The message has not changed. The desires of God that lie behind the message have not changed. What has changed is that, instead of being at the beginning of the dispensation of grace, we are at the end of it. This was the first preaching. You *may* be hearing the last. You may not have another opportunity. I do not know if that weighs with you, but it weighs heavily upon me as asked to preach the gospel because the apostle Paul said to a young man when he urged him to preach the word, "be urgent in season and out of season", 2 Tim 4: 2. "Be urgent". It is very easy to become accustomed to the gospel message. It is very easy to think that because we normally hear a gospel preaching on Sunday that we always will. It is also easy to fall into the delusion that because we associate with Christians and believers who read their Bibles and speak about the Lord we are one of them just for that reason.

As Peter speaks to these persons he says, "Repent, and be baptised, each one of you"; each one of you. If they were to come into blessing they were not going to come into blessing *en masse*. They were not going to come into blessing as a family or as a locality. They were going to come into blessing, if they were to come in at all, one by one. God wants you to come in. He wants you to come into His house.

If you are going to live with God, you have to be suitable to His presence and God has made provision that you should be before Him eternally as suited to His presence. You can “be holy and blameless before him in love”, Eph 1: 4. The gospel brings that message to us. God has made provision for you, such is His desire that you should live with Him, for you to be there and be there without fear. This preacher brings home their guilt, their responsibility. We need to be convicted of that. He urges them to have to do with God for themselves. I would like to raise that question with each of us. Much that is said in a gospel preaching is not remembered. Much of it is heard and not remembered, but we might be able to take away something. One of the things that we could take away is whether we have had to do with God for ourselves. He is spoken of in the Scripture as the God “with whom we have to do”, Heb 4: 13.

Every man woman and child will have to do with God at some stage. God is appealing in the gospel that we might have to do with Him now. He says, “Come now, let us reason together”, Isa 1: 18. The gospel is God's initiative; it is His approach, His appeal; it is *His* appeal. It is not just the word of the preacher. You may like or dislike the preacher, or the way he speaks, or his presentation, or his eccentricities or whatever, but lying behind the appeal in the preaching is the appeal of the blessed God Himself; it is His initiative. He would attract your attention; He has something to say. There are a lot of people in this world who have a lot to say. There is a lot of talk; people talk about this and that, they talk about politics, they talk about the state of the world, the fear of warfare, and the fear of climate change. All these things might disturb life and make them uncomfortable. And they talk about staying in Europe or coming out of Europe and people have an endless amount to say about all that; but God has something to say: He will be heard. What He has to say is not about what is merely for time, but it is the most important thing you will ever hear because it is about the eternal destiny of your soul. He speaks to them about Jesus. If God is going to speak to you and me He has nothing else to speak about but to present Jesus to us. God loves to speak of Jesus. He has been speaking about Him in the preaching; He is being extolled today through the gospel preaching throughout the world. Hundreds of preachers all over the world are speaking about Jesus because God has no one else to speak about but His beloved Son. He wants to share with you and with me the pleasure that He has found in His beloved Son.

The Scriptures tell us how the Father spoke to Him at His baptism: “*Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight*”, Luke 3: 22. That secret life was known only to the Father. But the Father expressed in the hearing of others His delight in that blessed Man. On the mount of transfiguration, He did not exactly speak to Him, but He spoke of Him. “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight: hear him*”, Matt 17: 5. That is what God is saying in the preaching to all of us - to “hear him”. He would have us to listen to those tender accents of which we sang in our hymn (No 232). As Peter begins to preach he speaks of Him as “a man borne witness to by God”, One whom God delights to bear witness to. He speaks of what men did to Him. “Given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain.” What does that tell us about the world in which we live? That God's beloved Son was by the hand of lawless men crucified and slain. That was the world's verdict. He tells us not only what men did, but He tells us what God has done. He says, “This Jesus has God raised up, whereof all we are witnesses”. One who was taken by wicked hands and slain was the One who became the Sin-bearer.

If you were to ever be before God as holy and blameless the matter of your sins has to be addressed. I wonder how you feel about that. Are you convicted that you are a sinner; that you have sins? It was a long time before I was convicted of that; I used to think that I was quite good as things went. I was a good boy; I did not do anything very bad. In His mercy to me God brought conviction of sin. He showed me what I was as a sinner in His sight. If there were people that I might otherwise have looked down upon because of their obvious wickedness, He showed me that everything that they did I was capable of doing. It was not a very pleasant experience to learn that the respectable person that I thought that I was, was a mirage; it was a delusion. I was a sinner in the sight of God, deserving from Him nothing but His judgment. He revealed to me what I was: God does not do that without also pointing you to the Saviour: the Saviour who is great enough “to save completely those who approach by him to God”, Heb 7: 25.

He is a mighty Saviour. He is spoken of here as “Jesus the Nazaræan”; that is how He was known among men, how He was despised by men. We need to make no apology for speaking of Jesus because He is a mighty Saviour. He came into the world to save

sinner. Have you been saved by Him? He is seeking you in the preaching. If you have not yet been found by Him He desires to find you in the preaching and make Himself a reality to your soul, not just someone that we read about in the Bible. It is very blessed to do that, to read your Bible, to read about Jesus in the Bible, but God desires that you should come to know Him, and in coming to know Him that you should come to love Him and in coming to love Him you should devote your life to serving Him. Peter says, "This Jesus has God raised up, whereof all we are witnesses", One who came into the world to save sinners became the Sin-offering. He bore the judgment of God, and that is a solemn consideration. Think of a Man alive on the cross under the judgment of God for sins that were not His own. There were sins that I committed, perhaps lightly committed; perhaps I thought that nobody would ever see them, and I discovered that God had seen them, since nothing escapes His eye, and that if I was to dwell forever in the sunshine of His favour those sins must be faced up to. They were laid upon Jesus: "Jehovah hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53: 6); what a load Jesus bore. If you think of your own sins, perhaps you can think of some of them, but you think of Him bearing the iniquity of all who trust Him, bearing it before God, taking their sins upon Himself as if they were His own and bearing - and not only bearing but exhausting - the judgment of God against them; being made sin. Not only being the Sin-bearer, bearing the sins of believers, but being made the very thing that He hated. Having become the Sin-bearer He died and was buried. He rose again, and these men were witnesses of that; they are witnesses of His resurrection.

They ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. I want you to think about that; the One who was the Sin-bearer, the One, as Peter says, "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pet 2: 24): think of the precious body of Jesus, "thou hast prepared me a body", Heb 10: 5. This morning we put our hands to that loaf of which He said, "This is my body which is given for you" (Luke 22: 19), the body of Jesus. In that body He bore the sins of all those who trust in Him; "bore our sins in His body on the tree". How real it becomes as we think of that. Having borne them, and borne the judgment of God and been buried, He was raised. What does that tell us? What does it tell us that the One who bore our sins in His body "has been raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father", Rom 6: 4? It must mean that those sins have gone from the sight of God. God would not have raised from the dead One who was still bearing my sins in His body. The

resurrection of Jesus is the great testimony to the fact that those sins have been righteously atoned for; they have been covered in God's sight. He is able to say of believers that "their sins and their lawlessnesses I will never remember any more", Heb 8: 12. He is able to say that. They did come in remembrance before God; they came in remembrance before God at the cross of Jesus, a most solemn matter to think of. God did not relinquish His essential integrity, His holiness and His righteousness; He expressed upon the Sin-bearer His utter hatred of sin and of the man that sinned, and He did it without any mitigation.

The One who became the Sin bearer has been raised from the dead, and not only raised, but, as Peter says, "been exalted by the right hand of God"; think of that blessed Man once the Sin-bearer, bearing sins, now installed in the highest place in the universe. No other Man has ever been there, to sit at the right hand of God. He sits there by divine invitation: "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I have put thine enemies to be the footstool of thy feet", Mark 12: 36. We preach a glorified Saviour; He was once here in humiliation as the Nazaræan; He once became the Sin-bearer, but He is now exalted in glory and God presents Him with great delight in the preaching. God has great joy in presenting Christ to men not only as an object for faith, but an object for affection. The way that He has gone for me is the way that He wins my heart because He has done for me what no other could do and what no other would do. He was not only able but He was willing to do it. In the consciousness of that I can say He has won my heart, and He wants to win your heart too; He wants to win your heart. These persons, the more they heard of this remarkable preaching, the more uncomfortable they became. It says, "they were pricked in heart". Their conscience was working on God's behalf. The gospel goes forth, you have a conscience and it works on God's behalf. The word of God is directed at the conscience, but not only is it directed at the conscience, it is directed at the heart. God reaches the heart of man often through the conscience and as they listened to this remarkable testimony it says, "they were pricked in heart". There they were, their guilt presented to them, and in their desperation they say to Peter, "What shall we do, brethren?". What a question that is. It would be a wonderful thing, if as a result of the gospel preaching that question rose in any heart here tonight - what shall we do? You may wonder what they could do. What they had done could never be undone, their lawless and wicked hands had taken God's Son and crucified and slain

Him, there it was: it could not be undone, but there was something they could do.

Peter speaks of repentance. It is the way of salvation for those whose hearts or consciences are pricking them. Repentance is towards God, the God against whom we sin. Peter says, "Repent, and be baptised, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for remission of sins". How wonderful to be free from a pricking conscience. How wonderful to know that your sins have been remitted or forgiven, to receive that and then to receive something even greater than that. In the gospel, God addresses the sinners need; it needs to be addressed and only God can address it. There is much more in mind than simply meeting your need: "ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". Can you think of anything more amazing than that? These persons hearing this preaching were the most guilty persons in the world: they had taken God's Son; there had been an outrage of justice. The apostle speaks of the scandal of the cross (Gal 5: 11); it was an outrage what they did. It could not have been undone by them.

The most unworthy persons were the first to hear that remission of sins was available and, more than that, God was prepared to impart to *them* - people like that - the gift of His own Spirit. What a remarkable thing that is. How it underlines the desire of God to dwell with men. Not only has He operated at tremendous cost to meet all that I have done and all that I am, but in His grace He would impart to me His own Spirit so that I might be comfortable with Him in His house, so that I might have holy affections and emotions that are akin to His own. Can you think of anything more wonderful than that? If people are going to live together in close quarters they are worried about how they are going to get on, whether they are compatible, but you think of God imparting His own Spirit. I once heard Mr Eddie Walkinshaw put it something like this: "If I could give you my spirit you would see things as I see them; you would feel things as I feel them; my tastes would become your tastes. I cannot do that, it is not possible for any of us to give our spirit to somebody else, but it is possible for God to give you His Spirit. He intends those three things: you would see things as I see them, you would feel things as I feel them, and my tastes, likes and dislikes would become yours; and in a word, you would live in my life." I found that a very helpful illustration of what it means to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit so that I might see things differently. I see things as God sees them, not just as I looked at them before, but they come in a new light. Perhaps things that I was casual about and would have carelessly

entered into they look different when you have had the Holy Spirit imparted to you. Suddenly I get a taste for things perhaps that I thought were not of much interest, a taste for the things of God. You only get that through the gift of the Holy Spirit: none of us was born with a taste for the things of God. There are some things in the world that people speak of as an acquired taste. The things of God are an acquired taste; God wants to share them with us, and the Holy Spirit is given to us to reveal to us the things that God has prepared for those that love Him: "Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart", 1 Cor 2: 9. You think of what has been opened up to you through the gift of the Holy Spirit, a whole new world is being opened up to you. The great thing about it is that the things that have been opened up to you are eternal. What you may have found your life and your joy and your satisfaction in before is called temporary; "temporary pleasures of sin", Heb 11: 25. The things that the Spirit of God will open up to you will enrapture your heart. They will produce in your life a profound change, and your view will be lifted above the mundane and the day-to-day. Righteousness will be fulfilled in the power of the Spirit, "life on account of righteousness", Rom 8: 10. You get a view of another Man in another world, and just a glimpse of that will enrapture your heart, and the result will be that you will be comfortable in God's presence. As indwelt by His Spirit, you will be very happy to dwell with Him eternally without fear, because "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4: 18); perfect love is what the Spirit of God will shed abroad in your heart. It is a service that He delights in, to shed abroad in the human heart the love of God; that is that I know consciously, and not just because I sing the hymn, that Jesus loves me. Most of us have sung and learnt that -

Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so.

Anna Bartlett Warner (1827 - 1915)

As the Spirit of God sheds the love of God abroad in my heart, I learn that it is not only in the Bible, but it is the conscious joy and experience of my soul. It is a wonderful thing to be loved, and persons indwelt by the Spirit of God know that they are loved. Paul says, "the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me", Gal 2: 20. Such a person: he was conscious of being loved by the Son of God no less, and that love had been proved in the giving of Himself. These persons heard it and accepted God's word.

The gospel comes to an end: will you accept it or will you be careless about it? Will you put it off to some future date or will you, in exercise of soul, have to do with God now, and be sure that the greatest blessings that are available in the universe are yours, your own property? So that you can be sure of your sins being forgiven, and if you have not received that precious gift of the Holy Spirit, you may ask the Father to give it to you. The Father gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. May the preaching tonight promote exercise with us each to lay hold of these things. One preacher said to a young man, "Lay hold of eternal life" (1 Tim 6: 12); do not let the gospel message and the appeal of God slip through your fingers. Lay hold of what is presented to you and make it your own and enter into the joy and blessedness of it not only for time but for all eternity.

May God bless the word.

Maidstone

25th March 2018