

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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GOD AMONG HIS PEOPLE

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NJH My exercise is related to the assurance that God is with His people. It is not something to presume or be settled at one point; it is a continuing exercise to be conscious of the divine presence amidst His people.

I have taken up Rahab because she is a peculiar case where she recognised the presence of God amongst His people Israel more than the people themselves. She was an amazing person; she was in the land before any of them, and while they were still zig-zagging across the wilderness, as has been said, 'without inheritance, without a country of their own'. The children of Israel had come to the plains of Moab; the land of promise was now in view. Joshua sends two spies into the land in view of entering it. These two spies come to the roadblock - Jericho was in the way of the people taking up their inheritance which was God's mind for them - and they are received into Rahab's house. I think that is very wonderful; God has His reserves. If He has something in mind for us, He has His reserves to accomplish it; is that not assuring? And they come there and there is something that marks Rahab: she gives them the whole line of the history of the children of Israel from the Red Sea (which for us is Christ's death for us), and the destruction of Sihon and Og (which come after the section as to the springing well and for us involves the recognition of the Holy Spirit amidst His people). Then she is laying the ground for the overthrow of Jericho where she lived. This woman is a remarkable woman! We read in chapter 6 that "she dwelt in the midst of Israel", but she is of the genealogy of Christ; she became the mother of Boaz. She was part of God's people while not literally with them. Now the spies leave this certain sign, the thread of scarlet, that she provided for their escape from Jericho; she hangs it outside her window from the moment they left. When Israel came and went round the city, every time they went round, there it was! Faithful woman! She knew that God was in the midst of His people; she would get an impression of the ark going round the city; she would see the ark in the midst of the camp and say, "That is the secret". Whatever was under that covering was the secret of the divine presence amongst His people.

I thought that 1 Timothy 3 sets out the truth of the assembly.

Paul says to Timothy “that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house, which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth”. And then it goes on to “the mystery of piety”.

The assembling to break bread in Troas has the divine presence in mind. They had Paul's discourse, then Eutychus was healed, then they broke bread, and then they communed. All was an evidence of the Lord's presence in the midst of His people. We know there is a need for that, and we are longing to see results of healing, but we have to go on. I wonder if that might be helpful.

AMB It sounds very positive indeed. I would just like to ask about the matter of God being with His people, because with the Israelites it was a matter of promise and then birth; it was those of the children of Israel who had descended from Abraham. But then in the Christian dispensation it is not like that: it is by faith and by giving place to the Holy Spirit. I would like to hear what you say about the moral conditions necessary for God to dwell with His people.

NJH The kingdom must be there for persons to come into, and that gives the ground for God to be amongst His people; it needs a moral basis. When you come to 2 Timothy 2, it is called 'our charter', we have the law of the house in the public setting of departure. So much has failed in the public setting, and we must be maintaining the principle of separation; that is obvious. If there is no separation, there is no divine dwelling, but one difference is that piety is not much further developed in second Timothy. 1 Timothy emphasises piety; and God has been manifested in these conditions. I think we get back to the house presented in 1 Timothy from judging conditions in the great house referred to in 2 Timothy. There is no thought of dwelling until redemption, the Red Sea and what was secured through it; there is no dwelling for God until after going through the Red Sea.

AMB Do you think for us there has to be a desire to provide conditions in which the Lord can be free and in which God can dwell? It is not accidental; it involves deep exercise and desire and commitment on our part, and also subjection to the Holy Spirit. I was impressed by what you said in prayer as to that.

NJH Yes; you said earlier that it is not by birth but now it is a moral basis. Coming into the assembly involves a moral basis, and it is not automatic. None of us have been born into Christianity; none of us

have come into the assembly by birth, but through divine operations. The subject spirit is supplied, and God can say, 'I am going to dwell with that person'. Rahab was dwelling in the midst of Israel; she was a remarkable person.

PAG In John 17 the Lord says, "Righteous Father, - and the world has not known thee, but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me", v 25. But if you look at Romans 12 it says, "be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (v 2), and what is in view is the living sacrifice. Really Romans 12 would involve the moral conditions that have been spoken of, but there is a place where God is known, and He is known in Christ and in those that believe on Him.

NJH Exactly; He is known in Christ. The revelation of God is in Christ, and it is going to come down to who is in the wealth and the good of that; and that involves a moral exercise in all our souls. But it is in grace; His relations with His people are in grace, yet "*he abides faithful*", 2 Tim 2: 13.

GBG Moses says, "If thy presence do not go, bring us not up hence", Exod 33: 15. Moses valued God's presence more than the land. He goes on to say, "And how shall it be known then that I have found grace in thine eyes - I and thy people?" (v 16); so grace comes into this as well in God's dealing with His people.

NJH How gracious He is, but I think your reference is good. In one sense Moses did not need the land. So he saw it, but he did not need to go into the land to have the full enjoyment of the presence of God. He knew where to pitch the tent outside the camp, Exod 33: 7. He knew the requirement of God in doing that, and Joshua remained in the tent, v 11. But Moses had freedom because he was the mediator, and he had liberty to go into the camp, but God was no longer in the camp. And he could not bring into the camp the two tables of stone that God had made and written on; there were not conditions in the camp for it.

JCG Rahab comes into Hebrews 11; she "did not perish along with the unbelieving" (v 31), which means she had strength in her faith. And that is one matter we need to assure us; she says, "I know that Jehovah has given you the land"; that was before anything had happened as yet. Is there a need for us to have a forward look in faith?

NJH I like your thought that she had God's mind for the people before they entered into it, and I think that is what we hold on to; there are twos

and threes but as gathered together they must keep the divine thought in mind. So they are believing persons, and God will come into that; God will answer that.

DCB She speaks of the Red Sea, and then of the conquest of the lands of the two kings of the Amorites, with nothing in between; she does not take into account the diversions; she does not have a view on the diversions of the people of Israel. She is looking at normal progress so that the coming through the Red Sea would be immediately followed in the divine mind by the eleven day's journey.

NJH Obsession with what is negative has a diluting effect on your convictions. We judge what is wrong, but we are not hindered by it; what God is doing is the thing to pursue. I think what you have said is good. She looks at a straight path; she was not looking at the forty years; she had God's view and mind. She does not suffer or perish with the unbelieving, she has God's thoughts, and she is going forward, and she is already in the land, already established in it. And even having the flax stalks on her roof shows she is on right lines for the divine presence.

JTB It says at the beginning of chapter 6 that Jericho was shut up and barred because of the children of Israel; do you think that suggests that Rahab was morally bound up with the children of Israel, with the people of God? Nothing could deter the progress or establishment of the work of God in her heart; she was conscious of these links with the people of God.

NJH Yes; it was intentional to have her dwelling on the wall: it was a way out.

JTB I thought that: she would see the people, and she would be strengthened by that.

NJH She would see them going round; her faith was strengthened. 'There they go again; there is that ark in the middle; there is power with God; the ark is the power of God.'

WMP In these two matters that have been drawn to our attention, the first is what Jehovah did, but the second is what Israel did; what would you say about that as a mark of the divine presence?

NJH She was respectful that they had overcome these two kings; so we do not write off the genuine conflict that has taken place. What do you think?

WMP I was thinking about the point at which they did that; it was the point in the journey typically after the recognition of the Spirit in the springing well, Num 21: 17. 18.

NJH I am glad you have said that; after the typical recognition of the Spirit they moved forward rapidly in the journey, and then they get to this point where they could have been hindered. You have Balaam's prophecies, everything to hinder the people, but the way forward was in Rahab's heart. There would be no question but that they would succeed. They would surround Jericho! How God was going to do it was a divine matter; this whole conflict was unique; an army going round, and all they were doing was going round with the trumpets and so on. It was an extraordinary overcoming of a city, and yet it stood in the way of God having His people in the inheritance. Rahab did not refer to the power that was evident in the Egyptian armies, but that Jehovah dried up the waters of the Red sea. They saw the salvation of Jehovah, but when it came to the Jordan it was the power of the ark. The ark went into the Jordan and the waters went back; what divine power was evidenced! And then the going round the city; Joshua would have wondered, 'How are we going to overcome this city?' It had been barred. Well, the power of God was in that company going round. When that woman looked - I am sure she was looking every day at the cord - it was a certain sign, and it had let down the two spies, and allowed them to return to Joshua, and it was still there as the people were going round. This woman was an overcomer in a difficult situation.

NCMcK You said the secret was in the ark. Does it involve the place that Christ has in the affections of the saints? You have spoken about the side of righteousness, and that is important, but what is vital in the way of affection for Christ is also important.

NJH That is what Rahab eventually comes to. The secret was in the ark; it was enshrined in the affections of the saints. The great type of the ark, as central for God and His people now, will finally be seen in Christ in the whole universe of glory for God eternally. But it involves our affections now; that is why the suggestion of the Spirit is there in Numbers 21. There is an area in believers as gathered for Christ to come in. I think that is Matthew 18, "where two or three are gathered together unto my name" (v 20); so there is agreement there, which allows for the Spirit to be made room for, so that the Lord says, "there am I in the midst".

TRC Have you something more in your mind as to the stalks of flax in the roof? It seemed to be a prepared place that Rahab had there on the house. My mind went to Daniel, the place that he had, the upper chamber with his windows opened towards Jerusalem, chap 6: 10. Is there a thought in that that there was somewhere which Rahab frequented, so that she had the divine view?

NJH She secreted the spies under the stalks of flax. She must have laid hold of the protection required, in keeping with the tabernacle. Out of flax comes linen; in principle I suppose it is priestly instincts, not yet priestly clothing, but priestly instincts; it does not cause the flesh to rise up. She had right instincts, and you find that with believers; they come, and sooner or later there is some instinct that comes up that is compatible to the divine presence, although maybe they have never proved it. I think it is wonderful to see that coming out in a young believer as seeking fellowship. Daniel was in keeping with the mind of God as to the city.

AB In Colossians, which is on the way, as we know, it says; “for ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God. When the Christ is manifested who is our life, then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory”, chap 3: 3, 4. There is a secret life that is going through; I wondered if that is critical.

NJH Yes, it would be. “When the Christ is manifested ...”, but the divine presence is to be known before that. Our “life is hid with the Christ in God”; that is, we have a life, and it is not known to the world, and that is where God dwells in the affections of His people. He will not dwell with our will, but He dwells where there is affection for Himself, and it is wonderful to see that. It is important that our affections are kept for Christ. He is the Centre of God's world; He is the Centre of God's people; and this ark was going through, going round and round, and the city was going to be overthrown. How different Jericho was to the city of Ai. The conflict was to be the same in chapter 8: 2, but Achan's household was corrupted which hindered the overthrow of Ai. Rahab's house was right, and she provided conditions that the people came through and the ark was going to have its place.

PAG The ark was on the way to victory; it had to come through the Jordan. The great victory was assured, to Rahab's faith. Do you think the flax shows that Rahab was in total sympathy with how God was going to get the victory? The priests carried the ark, and that was where her sympathies lay. You have said the flax would relate to the

linen which would be the clothing of the priests; so although she had not formally become part of Israel, which comes in in chapter 6, her sympathies were already there. The ark was in victory, and she was on the side of the priests.

NJH Yes, exactly; that is the great matter, because if young people want to break bread, do they have instincts and sympathy with the people of God? Do you love the brethren? You are going to dwell with them eternally! Rahab loved them; she was going to dwell for the rest of her days in the midst of Israel.

BWL They are spoken of as spies where we have read in Joshua; James in his epistle speaks of them as messengers: they were not spies to Rahab they were messengers, Jas 2: 25. I think it links with what is being said: it is where our sympathies are. There had been a testimony, "we have heard", but how many were affected in Jericho? Well, Rahab was: she believed the testimony. The messengers have the mind of God.

NJH Yes, they were fully representing Joshua in the mind of God. Joshua represents Christ's inward leadership. So the messengers are coming, and they have got the authority. We sang that hymn, 'Lord Spirit ...' (hymn 412); the Spirit has authority linked with Himself, as a divine Person.

AMB Would you say then that Rahab was in the good of what the crossing of the Jordan meant morally, although it had not actually happened yet? It is in chapter 4, but she was in the good of it, the world was judged in her eyes, and I think what she was as an inhabitant of Jericho was judged in her eyes.

NJH Absolutely, and she knew her circle; she no longer had social links with Jericho; she says, "that ye will let my father live, and my mother, and my brethren, and all that belong to them, and deliver our souls from death". Speaking in our own language, she was to have a little sanctified company there in that dark city that stood in total opposition to the mind of God.

AMB That was a result of the sovereign activity of God, God's sovereign activity in Rahab meeting the stirrings of her own affection, and her own moral assessment.

NJH That is good; that is how God acts in sovereignty. You would look for that: something appears, and you see the hand of God in that person.

AMB Does this connect with what we had last Saturday as to baptism, Christ's death for us? It is those that have gone that way, including our death with Christ, who have this in common, and then can provide conditions in the company where the Lord is free, and the Spirit unhindered.

NJH Yes; at the Red Sea, they had been chased out of Egypt; and all depended on the power of God for salvation. Through the blood, we are clear of divine judgment, but the Red Sea was the breaking of the power of the world. Now we have an object: what an object it is! The two thousand cubits (Josh 3: 4) means we all have the same object. When it comes to the Jordan it is attraction: get your eye on Christ.

JCG The Spirit would help us in relation to nearness to Christ, a very important matter that brings assurance. In Hebrews 3 it says, "For we are become companions of the Christ" - that is the nearness of it - "if indeed we hold the beginning of the assurance firm to the end", v 14. Faith is strengthened as we are in the presence of Christ and divine Persons. There is a tendency when we are younger to begin to look at other things, and other faults and this and that, but being with Christ is a perfect area.

NJH Nearness to Christ meets every distraction. Your reference to Hebrews 3 is very helpful. It says, "he who has built all things is God, (v 4), and then it refers to "Christ, as son over his house, whose house are we" (v6); we are brought into great nearness. So "companions of the Christ" is a very close circle.

JSS Rahab's house has a roof and a door and a window. Is part of the exercise that she had been responsible for all that, which provides suitable conditions?

NJH She was to be righteous in every relationship and in every part of her life. The door would allow those of her father's house to come in as in verse 18. In verse 19 "whoever goes out of the doors of thy house into the street, - his blood shall be upon his own head". Her window was very important to her. We are to have such a window; that is how we are preserved from the world and its influence.

JSS Her window would be like her outlook, away from the world towards the ark.

NJH And what would fill her vision would be the ark and those surrounding it. The armed men went before, then the priests who blew with the trumpets, and then the rear guard. What holy protection of the

ark! The ark is an inanimate symbol, but it is a very great type of Christ.

DAB You mentioned at the beginning that Rahab appears in the genealogy in Matthew. Why do you think she is there, and what that would mean for us?

NJH I think it is sovereignty, and it is justified. Tell us what you are thinking.

DAB Obviously the Spirit of God saw these features in Rahab that were Christ-like; the way she moves and acts is all in accordance with the divine mind. It is very blessed that as she comes in on that royal line; she becomes totally apart from everything that would speak of Jericho, and something emerges that speaks of Christ.

NJH She is really like a bridge between the actual experience of the children of Israel at this point and them coming into possession of the land; she is a link. It says first of all that she let them down, and then it refers to the thread, the cord, and one might ask, 'How is that going to support things?'. Do not worry: it will support what is needed. There is maybe not much in a local meeting, but there is what can sustain it to overcome what is opposing the testimony. So I think she is like a link.

JAB There was also great wisdom there. She almost becomes the spies' director of strategy; she tells them how to evade those whom she knew would be searching for them; she said to wait for three days; she was a very wise woman. Do you think Boaz would have taken some of that from her?

NJH Very interesting! We are not ignorant of Satan's devices. She knew what the men of the city would be liable to do, and she directs.

JAB I have just been thinking as you have been speaking of faith and divine sovereignty that someone of this moral character becomes influential. In Matt 1: 5 it says, "Salmon begat Boaz of Rachab". In Boaz, we see the character that he had that comes out in the book of Ruth; he would have drawn some of that from this woman that we are speaking about now, in her faith and her wisdom and her appreciation of what God's people were.

NJH There are moral features that have come down through godly persons, parents and fathers in our localities.

JAB It does not do away with what you say about sovereignty, and you also said that with us it is not hereditary; but nevertheless influence in a right sense in families and gatherings is a most important thing. It

seems that this woman would have had influence. The spies did not argue with her; they were the military men and this woman suggested how they should proceed.

NJH Yes, I agree with that. I would say that certain older brothers were spiritual fathers to me. One of them gave us the index of Mr Darby's ministry. There are fathers in our localities whose influence conveys spiritual and moral teaching to the young coming on.

JAB Yes; there are fathers and there are mothers too.

NJH Exactly.

AMB Do you think that what we are is more influential than what we say?

NJH Things that were said and done bore home; you knew that they were used of the Lord just to speak to your conscience.

APG It says she put them forth by another way; you were speaking about what belongs to that way, which is different from the world, entirely different: it is God's way.

NJH Yes. The magi were divinely instructed to use another way, Matt 2: 12. God was over it; He can protect the ark, and He can protect the messengers that have been referred to. He will protect Rahab; she was really betraying the city. There was probably no one in such a locked-up city to be so daring to undermine its determination to stand in the way of Israel and the people of God, but she overcame. She was going to do it and she did it!

ADM Why does her history not inhibit her in any way? According to Deuteronomy this kind of person would have no part among the people of God. Is it a question of God's sovereign operations and choice?

NJH Yes; histories can be cleared with God. When we read from Eph 2: 1-3 we find the depraved and immoral state of the Gentiles. How is it going to be met? History can be cleared by God Himself. Peter in Acts 10 says, 'They of the nations are unclean'; the answer was, "What God has cleansed, do not *thou* make common".

PAG The four women in the genealogy each have a history; Tamar, Rachab, Ruth and "her that had been the wife of Urias". They represent in that sequence righteousness, faith, love and peace. God clears the history and brings about the conditions in which He can dwell.

NJH Well, that says it all.

GBG In Isaiah 57 it says, “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, and whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (v 15): that meets history, does it not?

NJH Exactly, and God deals with the person in a moment, in an instant; God can do that.

GAB How do you understand the fact that the wall fell down flat? Rahab's house had been in that wall! And yet it seemed to be a place of safety.

NJH What do you think?

GAB I just had the impression that a believer's house has a certain immunity; it is a place of safety really, and nothing that is going to collapse in this world is going to affect that house.

NJH Exactly. I am glad you have said that because a believer's house is immune from the judgment that is coming on round about us; I think that is a word to go by.

JCG You read in chapter 6 about her continuance to the end, “she dwelt in the midst of Israel to this day”; verse 17 says, “only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house”, which indicates that she was rescued there before the destruction.

NJH In verse 21, they destroyed everything that was in the city, men and women and livestock and then in verse 24 they burned the city with fire. A believer's house as baptised is protected from the destruction that is taking place in the world. The death of Christ is the way to leave the judged system that surrounds us.

In 1 Timothy, I was thinking of what we are brought into, the house of God and how we conduct ourselves in it. In 2 Timothy there is 'a great house', what it has become in man's hand, chap 2: 20.

AMB You are referring to the assembly of the living God, and we could desire, as believers, to provide conditions that are consistent with this. It is not from man's hand; it derives from Christ Himself. It is to be “the pillar and base of the truth”. What would you say about that? It must be absolutely committed. The assembly is absolutely committed to the truth of Christ because Christ is her head; so that there is strength in that, the pillar and the base, but there is also adornment; it is not simple utility; it is what is for Christ; it upholds what is for Him and of Him.

NJH I think that when the overcomer in Philadelphia is made a pillar it has adornment in mind (Rev 3: 12); it adorns the position that stood out particularly as to overcoming: "him will I make a pillar in the temple of my God". But I would suggest that the assembly is supportive and expressive of what is in Christ. Now these things are to be carried on; we cannot let go of anything however small we may be; two or three persons are able to maintain this at its height.

JCG Referring to the house, is that why Paul brings in, "God has been manifested in the flesh", and so on; that is the secret of the maintenance of the house, is it not? The greatness of the revelation of God in Christ really is the manifestation of the fact that He is Son over His house, and that brings us into the nearness and restfulness of continuing. Your point about assurance is important, as the house continues.

NJH We need that assurance. There are tremendous pressures on men, and we are not unmindful of what pressures men are going through, and we trust that many will turn to God and find Him as a Saviour God, but there is a lot of pressure in maintaining what represents the assembly in our localities. It is among the greatest privileges we have. You are going on to a wider thought. First of all Paul says what it is, "in order that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house, which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. And confessedly the mystery of piety is great. God has been manifested in flesh, has been justified in the Spirit ..."; whole wide things are coming into your soul.

TWL To get these conditions and to maintain them in relation to the house are there two things that are important, the word, and the Lord's name: keeping His word, and maintaining His Name? I was thinking about it when you made reference to Philadelphia, and earlier on in relation to where our brother made reference to in John's gospel, but in John's gospel it speaks about the conditions for God being amongst them are by keeping God's word. In Philadelphia they held what is necessary for the testimony because they kept His word and have not denied His Name. Keeping His word is secret; so they are the moral conditions of the house, and in the public conditions of the house they have not denied His Name.

NJH That must link on with the mystery of piety. The divine mind is going to come in here; there is no question as to it. It is going on, a very wide matter, but I think the word of the Christ is involved in that, and that

is why throughout 1 Timothy piety is stressed, and it is not emphasised in the same way in the second. It speaks about those “having a form of piety but denying the power of it”, 2 Tim 3: 4. This is the power of piety that is being touched on here.

TWL Absolutely, because we have been taught that piety is absolute trust in, and absolute committal to, God; that is what marks it.

NJH In such conditions God can move. There is no question in my mind that if conditions are right God is going to move in relation to these conditions; so I think that is why piety comes in and we see “the mystery of piety is great. God has been manifested in flesh”. It is a tremendous thought.

JAB Yes; it is a tremendous thought, and also I am thinking of the person who wrote these words, Paul, and I am very interested in what you have read in Acts because something of “the assembly of the living God” was being proved in that upper room at Troas; and to “know how one ought to conduct oneself in God’s house” is really a very elevated thing, but that did not stop Paul going right down to bring Eutychus back. It is put before us subjectively in what Paul writes to Timothy, but we see it in operation in Troas, speaking until day break and also in breaking bread, but also there was recovery of that young man; that is all part of what we are speaking about.

NJH I think what you have said is right. When it comes to them breaking bread there is a certain equality. The young man is brought up. We might go ahead and just go on without him; that is not in the heart of a lover of Christ and His people. They want the young to be brought up to the same level in the breaking of bread. Think of that young man Eutychus, who had fallen, breaking bread with the apostle Paul.

JAB I was thinking it was good to see these two scriptures alongside each other: the glory of what we have read about in the epistle, and the practice of it in what Paul did at Troas, both in his teaching and his discoursing and his concern for young life.

NJH I am fully with you in that I think the two are very closely linked together. What is going on is inwardly strong; our links are strong in the Lord. It is rather interesting that when you come to Troas the first day of the week is mentioned. Paul had already visited Corinth; he had already sent the first epistle, and now he is at Troas. In the forming of assemblies it was worked out under the wisdom of the Lord that they

were regulated weekly, and if it is regulated weekly then there must be a first day of the week; that changes it: it is the assembly week, speaking simply. That was how it started and at Troas they wanted to start at the height, and that was that they broke bread together in blessed harmony on the first day of the week. That is a wonderful thing.

DS I wondered if you could give me some instruction as to what it means to be “justified in the Spirit”.

NJH Think of such a One, God taking a position where He is justified in the Spirit. It shows the unity of the Godhead. Everything that Christ said and did was justified in the Spirit. Christ was manifesting God, for the revelation of God was in Christ, but the Spirit was wholly with it.

DS That is very helpful; so can we bring that forward to what is found in the saints in this particular dispensation that we find ourselves in? Not only was He seen in Christ, but God is “justified in the Spirit” as seen in the saints in this present dispensation.

NJH “Justified in the Spirit” was said to be seen by the way the Lord did things, and as the Spirit is here everything as to Christ is justified now.

TWL And He has been “justified in the Spirit”, not *by* Him. I was thinking about it in relation to how the Lord moved, and what was said was the Man “justified in the Spirit”.

NJH Yes, that is good; it is 'in Spirit'; the 'the' is just put in to give the sense.

TWL I was thinking about it in the light of what has just been said about it being seen in the saints, because that is seen in Paul taking up Eutychus in his arms; it is the same character. The action was justified in the Spirit.

NJH Piety is in the saints, and in that way we see the characteristics of God

PAG When the Lord came in as a Babe, it says, “power of the Highest overshadow thee”; that would be the action of the Holy Spirit: “the holy thing also which shall be born”, Luke 1: 35. And then in His life He says, “if I by the finger of God” (Luke 11: 20): that was the Spirit. And there was the anointing at the waters of baptism, but then “who by the eternal Spirit offered himself spotless to God” (Heb 9: 14), and then it says He was “made alive in the Spirit”, (1 Pet 3: 18). He was “justified in the Spirit” in every aspect of His being as Man.

NJH By extension it is seen in the saints. Anything that is of credit in the saints must be “in the Spirit”.

PAG It says in John 16 the Spirit having come “he will bring demonstration to the world, of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (v 8); so that carries on in the saints. What was set on in Christ who has been “justified in the Spirit” now.

NJH Exactly, the demonstration is in the saints.

We will go on to Acts 20: “we being assembled”, which is a very dignified gathering together. Persons coming to this would have the divine presence in mind; they would anticipate it.

AMB The thought of being assembled is part of the whole coming together; we belong together, and therefore we want to assemble with one object in mind. Would you encourage us in preparing to come together to assemble to remember the Lord to express our desire to the Lord in prayer that we might prove His presence and have the assurance of that?

NJH Yes; it is the body, the function of the body, that we assemble in the light of.

GBG What has been said is important: we are to be individually exercised because simply claiming things is not sufficient. “Jehovah is with you while ye are with Him”, 2 Chron 15: 2. So what we have been saying about individual moral conditions is so important. It has been said that the Lord does not come to any nominal Christian company; you cannot just say because I go along I will know the Lord's presence; individual exercise is so important.

NJH In Revelation 2 and 3 all the members of the assembly are cared for, but when it comes to conditions to know the Lord's presence that is what we are exercised about.

JTB James and Cephas and John were pillars (Gal 2: 9); I wondered if that is a case of what we have in 1 Timothy, but that brought to bear that they extended the right hand of fellowship. I wondered if that linked on with this scripture here, “we being assembled”. They were morally and sympathetically together do you think?

NJH You are speaking about Galatians when Peter was going to the circumcision, and Paul was going to the uncircumcision; that was sufficient to tear the brethren apart but the Lord was over that; the right hand of fellowship meant that they were still acting in total unity of the

body. They acted whether Jews were being cared for or whether the Gentiles were being served; it was all one thing under the Lord. So Peter refers to, “our beloved brother Paul”, 2 Pet 3: 15.

JSS I was just going to ask about divine communication; is that an evidence of God's presence with His people? Is one of the ways He reassures them with His word?

NJH Very much so! It has been said that where the truth is the Lord is, and that is how we have to go on. Here they are assembling, and it is all a good company; there are many lights in the upper room. There must have been quite notable brothers there! They would all be wanting to have their input but Paul was ready to act.

JCG I was thinking on the same line; it says, “they brought away the boy alive”; that would involve that he was quickened. We have had ministry locally about being in the presence of the living God and quickening power, and that was the secret of the presence of the Lord. The Spirit would manifest that to us.

NJH Yes; the boy did not need to be carried up after he fell down; he was quickened by the Spirit through Paul enfolding him in his arms. A person needs to know something of quickening in their affections to have part in the assembly. What a company it was where there were easy communications of the Lord's mind to them.

PAG I wanted to emphasise your point about breaking bread on the first day of the week. Not only is it taken up by Paul but John, who writes as we know for the last day, emphasises in His gospel that the Lord was raised on the first day of the week. And Mark who is recovered also emphasises that it is the first day of the week. Matthew and Luke say it is the day after the Sabbath, which is a different perspective, but John writes for the last days and Mark writes as a recovered man and they both emphasise the first day of the week, and of course Paul says it! So we do not really need to go any further than the testimony of Scripture to see what is required.

NJH Yes, and if we consider it, if the first day of the week is the beginning of our week, we start with what speaks of the death of Christ. Everything we have comes out of the death of Christ. Appropriation of the tokens of the death of Christ leads us into the service of God; to me it entirely confirms the right thing.

AMB Do you think too that being livingly at the Supper is a tremendously strengthening thing? One thing it would save us from is

being overpowered as Eutychus was. He must have been distracted; I do not know what he had been doing, but we are not to be overpowered, and the quickening sense of being in the Lord's presence and being led by Him in the worship of the Father is a wonderfully assuring and strengthening matter. I am sure that is what you had in mind in speaking about it, but we should covet to experience it by the Spirit.

NJH So that the arrangement that we have is confirmed from Scripture. It was after Paul's visit to Corinth, then his first epistle, all involved in the forming of assemblies, then in Troas the weekly matter came in and you start the first day for the Lord Jesus.

WMP There is a fine reference here to "having long spoken", 'communed', as the footnote tells us (see note f). It seems to me that there is something very precious about that in the present time, not only the sense of the divine support but the opportunity for spiritual communications, one with the other.

NJH I am glad you referred to that because that type of conversation is very attractive. Joseph's cup comes into my mind that he had a right to make his mind known. So here it is communing, your affections are drawn into it. There is something very real if the affections of the saints are toward Christ, and toward the Father, and He sings to the Father through the affections of the saints; I think that is very fine.

Grangemouth

8 March 2020

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WHAT THE BELIEVER HAS

John S Speirs

Exodus 4: 1-5

2 Kings 4: 1-7

1 Samuel 21: 1-10

John 6: 5-13

Luke 24: 40-43

Sometimes we may get downcast because we think of the things that we do not have, and the things that we wished we did have; we may become a little disappointed or discouraged as a result. It is hardly surprising in one way because this whole world's system depends on dissatisfaction for it to work. The whole advertising system is about making you realise that you do not have something and suggesting that you might want to have it; it works on that principle. I know what it is like; as a believer in the Lord Jesus, sometimes you feel that you are having to give a lot of things up, that you do not have certain things that other people around you have - maybe the people in your class at school or the people in the office, and maybe you become a little disappointed or discouraged.

Well, beloved, my simple exercise in this occasion is that God might draw your attention to what you *do* have. And He might ask you if you realise what it is that you have. He might also ask you what you are doing with it. He has given you something precious, and He expects you to use it. Mr C A Coates said, 'if we want to please God we must appropriate boldly what He puts within our reach', Notes of Readings on Matthew (vol 28) p83. God has given us much, beloved. You might say, 'I do not have very much; I do not really know what God has given me'. Well, you can start with the basics. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus you can say, as we sang in our hymn,

... we have Thee, Jesus, still (Hymn 229).

You can say, 'I have a Saviour!'. Perhaps some of the people at your work or at your school cannot say that. Whatever else *they* might have, *you* have a Saviour! What a wonderful fact to lay hold of: you have Jesus!

I read these scriptures because that kind of question comes in to each of them. 'What do you have?' God asks Moses, "What is that in thy hand?". It was the thing that he had. Sometimes we do not realise fully what we have. How great the things are that we have, that God

has given us. "What is that in thy hand?" God knew what it was, of course, but sometimes God asks us things to prove whether or not we realise what it is that we have. Moses says, "A staff". It is quite simple, is it not? It is not anything complicated. Well, the staff would speak to us about our experience with God. A staff is something that you lean on. If you go walking in the hills and the ground is uneven, a staff or a stick or a pole is something good to lean on, and you prove that it is worthwhile. Maybe Moses used it in his work as a shepherd, for guiding the sheep, comforting them. This is no ordinary staff; you can see what it becomes. It becomes the staff of God, v 20. But, beloved, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus one of the things that you can say that you have is experience with God. It might not have been for very long; it may only be a few years, but value the experience that you have with God and reflect on it. Perhaps you are going through a time when you are feeling a little discouraged or dissatisfied; have a look back over your history and see where God has helped you. See the times when you have been able to lean on Him; see where He supported you like that staff.

So we have experience with God. Moses gets somewhat of a warning here also; it is good for us to have warnings from time to time. He cast the staff on the ground and it became a serpent. You see, if you take yourself away from God's authority, if you choose not to be subject to the Lord Jesus, you are exposing yourself to the enemy and his influences. But Moses takes it up again; he "caught it, and it became a staff in his hand". By the fall, God lost man to sin and Satan, but by Christ He has him again, and if He has him in Christ, he can never lose him again. God has Christ before Him forever, and those that have Christ have certainty in the realisation that the faith that you began with in your Christian pathway, when you first trusted in God, will never let you down throughout your whole life.

This woman in Kings had something, but I am not sure that she fully realised the value of what she had. The question comes similarly, "what hast thou in the house?". Beloved, what do you have in the way of resource to help you through, to meet responsibilities, to help you to not become indebted? Well, you have the Holy Spirit. I trust you do; I trust every believer here has the Holy Spirit. Have you asked God? He freely gives the Holy Spirit. If you put your trust in Jesus He will give you the Spirit. But perhaps we have neglected Him. I have often neglected the Holy Spirit, I say to my shame. That is when I begin to be in debt, demands are placed upon me that I cannot fulfil. It is because I am not

relying on and using what God has given me; I am not relying on His resource. The Holy Spirit is a wonderful Person; He comes to the believer when he receives Him, and He never leaves him. He is the Caller's Spring (Judg 15: 19, note) - He is always there. No matter how low you might be feeling or how difficult your circumstances may be, call on the Spirit. He will be there; He will refresh you; He will revive you; He will provide just what you need. He will tell you about Jesus: that is something you always need. The man of God says, in effect, 'Well, you do have *something*'. She says, 'I do not have anything at all except a pot of oil'. It is as if she had almost forgotten about it. Do not forget that you have the Holy Spirit. Rely on Him; make room for Him. That is effectively what she did here. She got lots of different vessels. I suppose there would be all different shapes and sizes of vessel, but every single one of them was filled. No matter what your exercise is, whatever kind of exercise it is, ask the Holy Spirit for help in it. He will be able to help you fulfil responsibility.

So she says, "Bring me yet a vessel". There will never be a lack when you rely on what God gives you, and the Holy Spirit will never let you down. "Bring me yet a vessel". And what is the result? Instead of death and debt there is life! "Sell the oil, and pay thy debt and live thou and thy sons on the rest". There is surplus. God always gives you more than you expect, He is a God of abundance. He is a God who is rich in grace that will pour out more than merely enough to meet your need. Beloved, if you have the Holy Spirit do not forget that. He is within your reach. He is there, ready and willing; willing to serve in a way that will magnify Christ, a way that will help you through in your practical circumstances. A way, too, that will help you in your response to God because that is what God is looking for. "Live on the rest". Life towards God, that is what we need to be marked by.

Now, where we read in Samuel, David comes to the priest; he was a man in need. What a sad situation it is. This is God's anointed king, and yet he is fleeing for his life. What a situation, the rejection of God's king. The person who was reigning, Saul, was seeking David's life; he would have killed David. We have been reading 1 Samuel at home and noticed how unpredictable and unreliable Saul is. How unreliable my flesh is! One minute he is saying, 'I will be friendly towards you, David'; the next minute he is trying to kill him. Do not rely on the flesh: you cannot rely on it; it is unreliable, and it will always oppose what speaks of Christ, just as Saul would have destroyed David. But now David comes to the house of God. The Lord Jesus

speaks about this passage in the New Testament. It is interesting that the Lord refers to this as the section of Abiathar, not the section of Ahimelech. David comes, and he asks a similar question to what we have considered already: "what is under thy hand?". David was hungry; he needed food. Beloved, we need spiritual nourishment. We need sustenance because the pathway of the believer through this world is not always an easy one, it can drain you and weary you with the demands that it places on you. You may well feel that more and more in working life, especially the younger people. There are great demands being placed on you. And you might be a little like David here and have a need and feel hungry spiritually. Beloved, what I just wanted to draw attention to is that there is food available for you. There is food available for you and it is holy food! The priest said, "There is no common bread under my hand, but there is holy bread". This is the shewbread, and these are the twelve loaves that were on the table in God's presence. God had been taking account of them. God is taking account of all believers in the Lord Jesus, viewing them in their dignity, viewing them in their association with Christ. Think of the life of Christ seen in believers, how pleasing that is to God. Is the life of Christ seen in you? I find that a test for myself. But here it is, the food you might say that God had been appreciating. And it was really just for the priests to eat, but you know sadly the priestly system here in its official character had broken down. Mr F E Raven said as to David's comment that "the bread is in a manner common" that it was because "things were all out of joint in Israel" (vol 7, p411) - institutions that had been owned in their day when God was revered, lose their force or power when the anointed of the Lord is refused. So although this was priest's food, David was not acting as an official priest, but one with true priestly feelings, and so he availed himself of this holy bread. Beloved, there is good spiritual food available to you. You have it; it is just at your hand: it is in the Scriptures. It is available in the local meetings. Come along to the meetings, get some of this kind of food, the food that God delights in, the food that He would delight to share with you. I feel limited about what I can say about it, but David gets the benefit of it. He does not demand *all* of it. What does it say? "What is under thy hand? give me five loaves in my hand, or what may be found"; think of that. Are you willing to avail yourselves of whatever it is you may find in the local meeting? Not to place demands on the brethren, just to make the most of what you find there. A young brother makes a remark in the reading; do not minimise that: make the most of it. A brother prays for the first time, preaches for the

first time; make the most of it! It is holy food if he is speaking of Christ. God is delighting in it and we should delight in it too.

Now here, as you might say lurking in the brackets in verse 7, is "Doeg, the Edomite". He is an enemy; why is he in God's house? Perhaps he had got in there because the official priesthood was not working as it should, not availing itself of the things that were to hand, the sword of Goliath, for example. Why was it wrapped up? The ephod - why was it not being worn? Beloved, these things have been given to us. What does a sword speak of? One of the interpretations would be that it is the word of God used in the power of the Spirit. Paul speaks about that to the Ephesians. "The sword of the Spirit, which is God's word", 6: 17. Paul also says to the Corinthians, "... or life, or death ... all are yours", 1 Cor 3: 22. Let us realise that the word of God in its penetrating character, like we get in Hebrews chapter 4, is available to you. It is just at your hand; do not wrap it up and put it away. Do not say, 'I know I have a Bible - somewhere'. Do not be like that: go to the Scriptures regularly; see what they mean; ask the Spirit to help you understand them. Ask Him to see how they apply to your life here and now. Do not be afraid to apply that sword to yourself. It will expose what is really there. And beloved, how gracious God is; He does not only expose. What comes immediately after the sword in Hebrews 4? The High Priest! What a wonderful combination of God's grace that while His word will in a clear way expose what may be there that needs to be corrected, the High Priest is ready to support and sympathise.

So the ephod is there. Later on David says, "Bring near to me ... the ephod", 1 Sam 30: 7. He knew that there was a need to have communication from God, confirmation from God. Beloved, that is available to you. Every believer here today is really a priest. You are fully entitled to be a priest. There is not an official system any more. We have a great High Priest in our Lord Jesus, and we belong to a priestly family. Let us all endeavour to act in a priestly way. The means by which we can do so is available to us. What does a priest do? He serves God. Are you serving God? Are you praising Him? Are you having your part in worship and praise to God? If not, why not? Beloved, everything has been made available for you. There is priestly clothing. The Lord Jesus would supply everything that we need; the word of God, that we might be kept in self-judgment, that we might keep out wrong influences. What a terrible thing it was that such a person as Doeg should be in the house of God. We were reading in Galatians recently about those who were spying out their liberty, chap 2: 4. I think

this man was like that, spying out liberty. David was at liberty; free to eat the priestly bread, free to take the great sword that had fallen into disuse, and free later to ask for the ephod. God desires that the things that He gives us should be freely used; He desires that we should avail ourselves of them for our benefit, but for His glory too.

I read in John's gospel because there we see what the Lord Jesus makes of what is at hand. There was a lack of food for the company which had gathered, and as the brethren gather there is a need for them to be fed. As we had in the reading there is an exercise for each one of us to bring something. The Lord Jesus tests them. He asks them another similar question: "Whence shall we buy loaves that these may eat"? I love what it says in verse 6: "But this he said trying him, for he knew what he was going to do". Beloved, the Lord Jesus *always* knows what He is going to do! Just trust Him in relation to that. Andrew says, "There is a little boy here". It is interesting the language he uses. "A *little* boy" and "*small* fishes; ... what is it for so many?". He seems to be running things down all the time. But what does the Lord Jesus say? "Make the men sit down". The Lord Jesus will show you what He is capable of doing with whatever small impression of Him that you may bring, whatever you *have*. You might say, 'I do not have much'. Well, bring it anyway, and see what He is able to make of it. He will be able to bring in something that will satisfy the whole company, and there will even be something left over! You may say, 'It was just a small thing I brought'. Beloved, it is not *your* estimation that counts, it is *Christ's* estimation and His power that counts; it is not your power. We are only weak, but He is powerful, and He is able to make much of a real impression of Himself. The size of the impression does not affect its reality. If you have a real impression of Christ, bring it! Bring it into the meeting. Speak about it to other believers, and Christ will make much of it; everyone can be satisfied, and there will be something left over. What a wonderful system of supply and grace that the Lord Jesus causes to abound. It is interesting that this miracle is mentioned in all four gospels, suggesting there must be some importance to it. The Lord Jesus would draw our attention to the fact that even if it is a little boy, even if that is how you feel - and I often feel like that - and even if you have only five barley loaves and two fishes, an apparently small impression of Christ, He would encourage you to bring it. It is at your hand; it is available; Christ in His grace has given it to you. Bring it into the company where He is loved and honoured. Bring it into circulation and the people will be satisfied.

Beloved, the Lord Jesus also asks what we have for Himself. In Luke's gospel chapter 24 He says, "Have ye anything here to eat?". What a wonderful question that is. This question is to the company now, like a company of persons who have proved faith in God to work in their lives, who have proved that the Holy Spirit is able to fulfil their every need, and give them something to live on. Perhaps they have known what it is to make use of the sword of the Spirit, to have put to death the deeds of the body, and as a result are living to God. Maybe they have eaten holy bread which speaks of Christ. Maybe they have enquired of God with the ephod, and have been given divine direction. Maybe they have been acting in a priestly way. What is the result in such a company? Where such persons as that come together, there will be a good result. "They gave him part of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb". It was something that was already there. You might say it was a measure of the state in the place. They did not have to go and prepare it: it was already there. Beloved, in our local meetings, if the Lord Jesus comes, He is entitled to something, is He not? In this case, too, there was the aspect where in His grace He was just drawing near to them and showing the reality of His presence. But there is what is due to Him as He comes in; I think He loves to come in and see what is there. Remember the time in Judges when it is said of Samson, about the carcass of the lion, "he turned aside to see", chap 14: 8. Think of that, the Lord Jesus looking to see. He desires to know what the result of His death has been. 'What has the result been in those that love me?' He comes into the local meeting, and asks, "Have ye anything here to eat?". Well, what have we? Have we got something? He would enjoy what the saints have produced as a result of what they have enjoyed themselves, what is mutual. The honeycomb would speak of that, what is sweet to His taste, resulting from the working of what is mutual. Beloved, realise that what you have, even if you may think it is small, as you bring it into the local meeting it is something that can delight the Lord Jesus Himself. He comes in, and He is looking for something from His own. He loves them. He is not placing demands on them; He is just asking gently, 'What do you have here? What are you enjoying here at the moment?'. Well, are you someone who has contributed to it? Have you had your mutual part in contributing to the honeycomb? All the bees have to work together to produce what is sweet in the honeycomb. I cannot say much about the broiled fish, but it is *part* of it. Maybe they had already enjoyed another part of it. So there is what is mutual there, what is shared. The Lord Jesus promises

elsewhere that He will, “sup with him and he with me”, Rev. 3: 20. Think of the Lord Jesus willing to do that, to enjoy things in a mutual way with us. What a Lord and Saviour we have! What a glorious Object. What a Head we have.

Beloved, do not be downcast because you think you do not have much. You have much more that you maybe realise. As a believer of any age, you have experience with God. You have the Holy Spirit, if you have received Him; you have the priestly garments, and the sword of the Spirit which is God's word. You have fellow believers: look at the company you have, what a privilege, what a blessing. You have the Lord Jesus as the One who is able to make much of whatever you might bring into the local company. And you have Him as your Object whom you can minister to when He does come in. What a system of supply and grace that God has brought us into. Let us not be discouraged by what we feel do not have, but lay hold of and make use of what we *do* have for our satisfaction and for God's glory.

May the Lord bless the word.

Dundee

1st June 2019

RECEIVING THE GOSPEL

Richard J Gray

1 Corinthians 15: 1-8

Colossians 2: 5-7

Acts 2: 37-39

I felt impressed to speak about the way the gospel is to be received. What is it that we receive? Speaking very simply, the gospel is not just a passive thing. It involves what God has done, a great and wonderful thing, but it also involves movement on our side: it is to be received. We are to receive the blessing. Paul says to the Corinthians, "I make known to you, brethren, the glad tidings which I announced to you, which also ye received". They had received the gospel. He goes on to speak about what *he himself* had received from the Lord: "For I delivered to you, in the first place, what also I had received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures". We are indebted to the apostle Paul for the light of the glad tidings that we preach, Paul's glad tidings. In that way we see Christ in glory. Paul received it. He says elsewhere that he "was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26: 19); he was faithful to pass on the gospel that he had received. The other apostles had preached as well. They had received things directly from the Lord. Paul particularly received light from the Lord; it is for the gentiles; you might say for persons such as you and me, that we might come into the blessing of the glad tidings. The thought of reception, of receiving the gospel, is very important. It is not just that we hear the word and say that it is good and important, and we agree with it; the question is whether we have received it. That is my simple impression.

I was thinking firstly of the greatness of what God has given. If we receive a gift, we think about the gift itself and the giver; the Giver is God Himself. Paul speaks here about what he had received as to the glad tidings, "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he was raised the third day, according to the scriptures". Paul does not enlarge upon it here, but reading these verses you get a sense of the scope of what has been given, the greatness of the sacrifice that was involved in the work of Christ. How remarkable that is when you think of the gospel going out. How great the need of man, your need and mine as sinners. Paul presents One who has died for our sins; how remarkable! The gospel message is well known to us, but it should never cease to amaze us that God has moved in this way in order to bring about salvation for guilty sinners. It

says in Romans, “we being still sinners, Christ has died for us”, chap 5: 8. How impressive that is. The giving involves that One has taken your place and died in your stead: “which also I had received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and that he was buried”. A great cost is involved in the gospel going out and salvation being available to all: the Lord Jesus bore sins in His body on the tree and went into death. Burial was really the complete matter; the One who had been here went out of sight in burial.

He teaches His disciples as to the way He would be rejected and “delivered up into the hands of sinners, and be crucified, and rise the third day”, Luke 24: 7. You think of the Lord Jesus being buried, a very sobering thought, that He should go into the heart of the earth. Jonah speaks of that prophetically:

I went down to the bottoms of the mountains;
The bars of the earth closed upon me for ever, Jonah 2: 6.

Burial is a final matter. Man is a sinner, he has to go completely out of sight, and the Lord Jesus took all that matter on: He was buried. It is as if the apostle, as setting out the gospel, received a sense of the greatness and completeness of it; that the matter of our sins was dealt with on the cross and the question of death was dealt with. I speak carefully; it was no light matter; the Lord Jesus was buried and then “he was raised the third day, according to the scriptures”. The Lord Jesus has shed His precious blood; He has been raised the third day; He has broken the power of death. The scripture tell us He has been raised up, and has ascended to the highest place of glory, Eph 4: 10. That is all involved in what God has given.

Paul says to the Romans, “He who, yea, has not spared his own Son”, chap 8: 32. God has not held anything back. The giving was complete, so that we might come into blessing. What could we do, what could we give? The Lord Jesus asks, “what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”, Matt 16: 26. We were guilty sinners, undone and away from God; God has given all this so that we might come into blessing.

To emphasise the reality of it, Paul then says the resurrection was witnessed. There was testimony as to it, Acts 17: 31. As many as five hundred brethren saw the Lord Jesus in resurrection. Paul is seeking to stress the reality and greatness of the glad tidings. John in his gospel bears witness to the shedding of the blood of the Lord Jesus.

He says that “his witness is true” (John 19: 35), and so the gospel has come down to us. We hear it on the faithful testimony of these apostles. That is what God has given; how great it is. My simple exercise is to ask what the answer has been in our hearts; has it has been received? Has the greatness of the glad tidings had an effect in our hearts and in our consciences?

The apostle says he “announced” the glad tidings. They were glad tidings; how joyful this message is, an answer to the need of the sinner. There is One who has borne the judgment, One who has broken the power of death. What good news it is; but then Paul adds, “which also ye received”. In the first instance this must involve the matter of repentance. If we are to receive the gospel we must come to God's view of ourselves, we must come to God's view of the work of Christ and that we need it, that we need salvation, and we must turn in that way to God, on the principle of “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ”, Acts 20: 21. There must be an active answer; we come into blessing on the basis of repentance and faith in Christ. That can be the portion of all here down to the youngest. You recognise that you are a sinner, the blessing is presented to you, and you are to receive it. You are to receive it on the basis of repentance and faith in Christ; how simple it is. The gift is presented. We all know about giving and receiving; something is given to us and we have to accept it. You have to accept the gift that is given to you and you must receive it. What a simple principle that is. God has drawn near to us on that basis, He has provided everything for our salvation, and we are to receive it.

I was thinking of the great blessing of receiving the Saviour personally and receiving Him into our hearts. As we think of our need, and think of the work of Christ, we are brought into touch with the Saviour Himself. It is not only that there is an answer presented, and we just have to take it. But it is all presented to us in a Person; all in Christ Himself. We are to receive *Him*; He is to come into our hearts. Our conscience is affected as we think of our sins and our need. We should be affected by the greatness of the work that the Lord Jesus accomplished, and that He was prepared to stand in the breach. He did not leave the matter to anyone else. Who else would do it? Who else was qualified to take up the question of our sins? It was only the precious Saviour Himself. If we are to receive the gospel, we must come to Him, and we must receive Him into our hearts. What a

precious thing that is. I am sure that is what the Corinthians had done. As Paul preached to them, they received the word; and they received Christ into their hearts.

He goes on to say, “in which also ye stand”. That is where we come in on this basis of repentance and faith. As we look away from ourselves and look to Christ and His precious work, we come onto solid ground in our souls. It is solid ground for our souls, that One has taken our place, that One has satisfied all God's holy righteous claims as to our sins, and as to the whole question of sin. As we accept that He has met all our need, and that He has met all God's holy claims, we come onto sure ground. We come on to this standing as others have spoken of it in Christ: “in which also ye stand, by which also ye are saved”. You get a sense as you read these verses of how sure the apostle was as to the truth of it. He was sure of it for himself; and he desired that the Corinthians too should be brought on to certain and sure ground. I trust that is the position of each one under the sound of the gospel tonight that you might receive Christ, and that you might have peace with God as recognising that your position before Him as a forgiven sinner is not because of any merit or worth in what you are or what you have done, but because of the worth of Christ and because of all that He has accomplished. What a position to come to in faith in our souls that we are settled in Christ. It is “by which also ye are saved”.

We need eternal salvation, and that is to be found in Christ, but we also need present salvation and the present service of the Saviour if we are to be maintained in a hostile and dark world. The apostle makes it very pressing and current; it was not only something that they *had* stood in, but they were standing in it. He says, “by which also ye are saved”. The Corinthians were in the present good and gain of the glad tidings which the apostle preached.

I would like to emphasise what Paul says to the Colossians. He rejoiced “seeing your order, and the firmness of your faith in Christ”. You might ask, 'How was it that the saints could exhibit such firmness?'. What was it that meant that they were so firm and immoveable? It goes on to explain that they had “received the Christ, Jesus the Lord”. That would be my appeal, that we might receive Christ. Everything for our blessing eternally, and for our present enjoyment and blessing, is to be found as we receive the Lord Jesus. The Colossians had done that; they had “received the Christ, Jesus the Lord”. Then Paul exhorts them to be “rooted and built up in him”. They had made a good start; they had

come to Christ, and they had received the blessing of salvation. If they were to be maintained in the firmness of their faith in Christ, they needed to be rooted and built up in Christ. How important that we listen to the gospel regularly, that we might be increased in our attachment to the precious Saviour, and that we might be built up and assured in the faith. It is very interesting the way Paul credits the saints he writes to with the certainty of their faith. He speaks about “the firmness of your faith in Christ” and that they were to be assured in the faith, “abounding in it with thanksgiving”. The gospel has come down to us; I am impressed by that. The gospel that was presented by the apostle in its clarity and simplicity still shines in the greatness of what it brings, and it must be received. We too can receive the Lord Jesus and all the blessings that are available in Him. It is only on that ground that we can become persons who are assured, built up, rooted in Christ and assured in the faith. May we increasingly know the greatness and the blessing of it.

I read in Acts, because I was thinking of the reception of the Holy Spirit. Peter says in this preaching that it is an answer to persons who are exercised. “They were pricked in heart”, their consciences were affected, and the answer is that they were to “Repent, and be baptised, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”. I have been impressed with the greatness of that gift; the greatness of receiving the remission of sins and the greatness of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul speaks elsewhere of “his unspeakable free gift”, 2 Cor 9: 15. How great it is that God should give such a gift. We were impressed in our earlier reading by the way that the Holy Spirit would be a Comforter, One who would assure us in the absence of Christ. He would not exactly take the place of Christ, because we have the Lord Jesus also; but He is “another Comforter”. I would leave the question with all of us as to whether we have received this great gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit. One thing that should be true of any gift is that are we conscious of having received it. It is not a passive thing that we receive something and we are not aware of it, or unaffected by it. You think of the great blessing of receiving the gift of God's own Spirit, One who would bring the glories of Christ before us and give us a present insight into heavenly blessings. He would give us peace and joy in our hearts, and give us a present link with the precious Saviour where He is in glory. That gift is to be received. I cannot tell you of any greater gift than what God can provide by blessing us in Christ and giving the gift of the Holy Spirit. It would raise

exercise and challenge us in our own hearts and consciences as to the place that we give to the Holy Spirit and how much we are in the present gain of having received Him. It is a gift that is to be received. God has given everything from His side. He is the giving God, He is the Saviour God, One “who desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”, 1 Tim 2: 4. On our side we have to be exercised to receive the word.

In 1 Thessalonians Paul says that they had “turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God” (chap 1: 9), but then he says, “for this cause we also give thanks to God unceasingly that, having received the word of the report of God by us, ye accepted, not men's word, but, even as it is truly, God's word, which also works in you who believe”, chap 2: 13. It is God's word that comes to us in the glad tidings. We are to accept it, accept it on the principle of faith, and we are to receive the precious Saviour. What a blessing, what joy on that day when we receive Christ for the first time. We are to be “rooted and built up in him”. We are to go on and grow in our knowledge and appreciation of the One who has been provided as the Saviour and we are to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. How wonderful the giving is; how important that we should receive it.

May we be encouraged for the Lord's name's sake.

West Norwood

10th November 2019