

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE GLAD TIDINGS OF JESUS

Andrew Martin

Acts 8: 26-40

These two men of whom we have read were both under direction from heaven. One of them was aware of it; the other may not have been. Nevertheless, he was directed by heaven; he was directed to leave Jerusalem at a particular time and to take with him a copy of the book of Isaiah. I suppose that would have been the largest book they had at that time, the book of Isaiah. You might have thought if you were going on a journey you would take something a bit more manageable, but he took Isaiah and he had been reading it. It is a very precious thing to read the Scriptures; he was reading while he was travelling. It is one of the great advantages, I always found, of travelling on the train, on the underground, that you could read. I confess that I did not read aloud like this man did, he was reading aloud.

I remember one occasion when I was going to work and a man was reading aloud on the train, and he was reading the Bible just like this man was. Somebody called a guard and asked for him to be ejected from the train: such is the state of Christian England that if someone reads the Scriptures aloud, a fellow citizen would say, 'Put him off the train; we do not want to hear that'. What a state the world is in! It goes to show that the One of whom the Scriptures speak has not been accepted in this world; not even in Christendom is He accepted. He has been rejected by men - "cast away", the scripture says, cast out. I find that scripture in Peter so affecting, "cast away indeed as worthless by men", 1 Pet 2: 4. How can you read that passage without being affected by it? This is the Lord Jesus and what men said of Him, the One who came here. Some acknowledged Him as Saviour of the world, and there were some who found that He was all that they ever desired but what did men generally say? "Worthless"! What a word to use about the Son of God. He came to this scene as a Man and He came full of blessing, displaying the heart of God and they said, 'He is worthless'. The Lord could never fit into man's world; natural man can never fit into God's world. We need to change.

This man had a change. He was reading Isaiah; he did not know what he was reading. The man whom I saw, when someone demanded that he be turned off the train, looked amazed and said, 'But I am reading about Jesus'. He knew who he was reading about. This man we have read of did not know. He was going on this journey which

would probably have taken him many days. His way went down from Israel, across the Sinai Peninsula, through Egypt, and down to Ethiopia. It would have taken him a long time, and he was reading Isaiah, the great gospel prophet. If he had read to chapter 53, and I suppose he might have started at the beginning, then he would have read about many things, including woes and many burdens. He would have gone through them all and may have thought, 'What does it mean?'. He would have come to this section where he was reading, and he would have read of One, a Man. God could say, "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee - his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the children of men", Isa 52: 13, 14. Isaiah, in that beautiful section, is speaking of the Lord Jesus. Then he says, "Who hath believed our report?", who has believed it? This man says, "How should I then be able unless someone guide me?". He wanted guidance and he begged Philip to come up and sit with him. He was into what is now chapter 53, "And the passage of the scripture which he read was this: He was led as a sheep to slaughter, and as a lamb is dumb in the presence of him who shears him, thus he opens not his mouth". He was reading of One who was here not at all in relation to His own interests. His interests were God's; He was a Man of another order, "led as a sheep to slaughter". You think of that, a sheep to slaughter; a full mature thought of One who was here: the Lord Jesus, a Man at the peak of maturity. We know He was thirty-three and a half years old when He was taken. It is not long after that age when naturally decline begins to be realised: not that there ever could have been decline with Him. But He was at the peak of manhood. "He was led as a sheep to slaughter, and as a lamb is dumb in the presence of him that shears him, thus he opens not his mouth". You think of the tenderness of the lamb, the tenderness of the One who was here. The figure of the lamb is presented in two ways in Scripture. It is presented as the suffering One, and it is presented as the sacrificial One. You think of the Lord Jesus here, the One who suffered.

It says, "He was led as a sheep to slaughter"; He was led. You think of the Lord Jesus being led. It says many times in the gospels that they led Him. At one point the Holy Spirit led Him, led Him in the wilderness, when He was tempted by Satan and the perfection of His manhood came out in those forty days - what perfection it was! He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness. Wonderful perfection; moral glory that had never before been seen in such a way upon the earth, came

out as He was led there by the Spirit in the wilderness. The Lord Jesus submitted to that leading and He submitted to other leading too. In Matthew, "Jesus rose up and followed" Jairus to his daughter, chap 9: 19. There He was led in compassion, but this is not speaking of that, no. You read the end of the gospels and you find that they led Him to the high priest and they led Him to Pilate.

He knew where He was going: think of the Lord, with all that was at His disposal. He said to Peter there is no need to resist now: "thinkest thou that I cannot now call upon my Father, and he will furnish me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt 26: 53); that would have been unimaginable to these men. Twelve legions of men would have been a large Roman army. I believe that Claudius needed two and a half legions to conquer this country. This is twelve legions, not of men, but of angels, and you think of what one angel can do: "it came to pass that night, that an angel of Jehovah went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and eighty-five thousand", 2 Kings 19: 35. But twelve legions of angels! This was not the time for that. The time will come when military power will be used, but this was the time to be led: "He was led as a sheep to slaughter, and as a lamb is dumb in the presence of him that shears him, thus he opened not his mouth". Pilate wondered at Him. Jesus did not answer in His defence. The only things He spoke were things that related to the rights of God. He also answered a voice of adjuration, but He would not plead His own defence. "As a lamb is dumb in the presence of him that shears him, thus he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment has been taken away". What humiliation! He humbled Himself, and man could not accept One who humbled Himself; that does not fit into man's world. He humbled Himself but, as having humbled Himself, men still inflicted every humiliation they could upon Him. They took away whatever man might claim as his rights as man: "In his humiliation his judgment has been taken away". Judgment was taken away. They considered that He was not worth a fair trial. His judgment was taken away. You see that in the gospels. They had the sentence pronounced before the trial; He was not worth a fair trial, men said: "In his humiliation his judgment has been taken away". Who would stand up for Him? Where was the counsel for the defence? Where were the witnesses? One spoke of 'the judge washing his hands of condemning innocence, the priests interceding against the guiltless instead of for the guilty', JND Collected Writings vol 7 p169. "In his humiliation his judgment has been taken away". What an object for our contemplation, to take account of One

who was entirely here for the will of Another, the will of God. He offered no defence for Himself. He was unique: "who shall declare his generation?" (Isa 53: 8); He stands alone. There is none in His generation; He is alone, apart from all other men.

I have no doubt that Philip went on through chapter 53 as he spoke to this man. He would have come to the words that there is another generation, but the scripture speaks before that not only of what men did, but what God was to do. "When thou shalt make his soul and offering for sin", v 10. How the feelings of Jesus were involved in that, His soul. The gospels speak of His soul and His spirit. "My soul is very sorrowful even unto death", Matt 26: 38. "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin". This was no light matter, no easy matter.

In Luke 5, after they lowered down the man who was unable to walk, the Lord Jesus said, "thy sins are forgiven thee", v 20. Those present said, "Who is able to forgive sins but God alone?", v 21. The Lord Jesus said, "which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?", v 23. Was either an easy thing? I have often wondered at the word easy. "Which is easier"? To say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee" meant that His holy soul would be made an offering for sin; "thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin".

Then it says, "he shall see a seed": there is the generation secured. He stands alone in His generation, intrinsically holy, but a generation is secured of His own order: "he shall see a seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand". Wonderful thing to think of that! This is the One to whom God has committed everything; His pleasure will prosper in His hand.

The word in this section goes on, "who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth". I like this rendering; in the prophet as we read it, it says, "for he was cut off from the land of the living". That has its bearing too. For Him death was really death. He knew what death was. He knew what it was to go to those regions that were so foreign to Him; regions which had been held in Satan's power - the fear of death at least had been held in Satan's power - and He knew what it was to go into those regions; He speaks of "the heart of the earth", Matt 12: 40.

Elsewhere in the typical teaching it speaks of "a land apart from men", Lev 16: 22. He knew what that was. Jonah too, went -

... down to the bottoms of the mountains;

The bars of the earth closed upon me for ever”, Jonah 2: 6.

The Lord was cut off from the land of the living. That is as men saw it, He was cut off. He actually entered into death itself. The One in whom was life went into death. What an amazing thing that is: He had borne the suffering, He bore all that was due to those who trust Him upon the cross. The terrible governmental judgment of God lay upon man; He bore that too in going into death. When the Lord Jesus went into death, in Matthew it says there was an earthquake (chap 27: 51); that is a demonstration of God's power. That dear sister who wrote hymn 13 looked at it from a slightly different point of view. She says,

Earth shuddered as He died (Hymn 13).

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men”, John 1: 4. But He went into death, He died, He lay down in death; what a momentous thing that was. You might say the greatest miracle that could ever take place, that such a One should actually go into death itself, something so foreign to Him. He knew what death was. He knew the judgment of God, God's vengeance, Satan's power, He knew it all, but He went into death and that hymn says -

Earth shuddered as He died,
God's well-beloved Son.

You can understand that. It strikes a chord in my heart that such a momentous thing should take place, and it was in power. That was a moment when God's power was seen. You remember “the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom”, Mark 15: 38. It is God coming out in blessing towards men because the judgment had been borne by Jesus on the cross in those three hours of darkness, and then He went into death. Everything which lay upon man had been taken up by Him and borne by Him. He went into death, not as death having any claim upon Him: no, far be the thought.

When I was younger we were sometimes told He went into death as an invader; He invaded that territory. Death was foreign to the Lord. It was foreign to Him - He is the Centre of a world of life, a sphere of life. He is there eternally; He went into death in order to break its power. The power of death was broken as Jesus went in. This was the first time that had happened - that power had never been broken before and it is broken for ever for the believer. We have many first times. When the Lord Jesus was here upon the earth it was the first time there had been One here who did not exercise His own will, but was here for the will of Another, the first time that had happened. It was the first time

there had ever been One in whom God's pleasure was found totally; the first time that had happened. The first time One went into death upon whom death had no claim at all. He went in; it was His initiative; He laid down His life. Pilate wondered because He was already dead. Crucifixion brought out the worst in man, it was a barbaric thing, that men should gather round and find their entertainment in watching people dying. What an unfeeling thing! How unfeeling man can be! The Lord Jesus went into death in dignity. "Having bowed his head, he delivered up his spirit", John 19: 30. He never did anything that was not in dignity, even going into death, the point of man's weakness naturally; He went in in dignity. He delivered up His Spirit, something that no one else can do. We cannot do that; He went in Himself. He spent three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. I do not feel I can say anything about that time. One thing I know is that God was deprived of what He had had in Christ on the earth at that time; in a certain sense He was deprived of it. That perfect humanity on earth was not shining out upon the earth at that time: He was in death. He did not remain there; having gone into death, and His precious blood shed, every moral claim met, God's pleasure in Him fully secured, He was raised. His life taken from the earth. He was raised out of death and not only was He raised from among the dead but He was exalted in glory.

In the previous chapter in Acts, Stephen saw Him. His life was taken from the earth, but that blessed One still lives in another condition. Certainly, never again in flesh and blood: His life, taken from the earth, is now in heaven. He is living there, beloved. How wonderful to think of the Lord Jesus now as having completed the work. Having borne all that lay upon man, He is now given the place of exaltation and glory and honour. How wonderful to take account of Him there! His life is taken from the earth. Is there nothing then upon the earth that continues? Is there no testimony to that life? We find that in the next chapter. We find the Lord Jesus personally in chapter 7, that life taken from the earth and now in heaven. We find it in testimony in chapter 9 when He speaks from heaven and says to one, "why dost thou persecute me?", v 4.

There was that upon the earth which continues because the Holy Spirit is here. The Holy Spirit is here indwelling men, women and children. Since Pentecost, the presence of the Holy Spirit has never ceased and cannot and will not. He has not ceased to be amongst God's people on earth. We may not know entirely when and how and who the Holy Spirit was engaged with throughout this dispensation.

There are what some refer to as the dark ages, but there must have been some because He was here. The Lord Jesus says, "that he may be with you for ever", John 14: 16. Forever! - think of that. He will be with you forever. He will be with us for our time here and His service is to engage us with Christ up there. What a precious service that is. It will not cease even when we are called to glory. We have another hymn which I enjoy which refers to the Holy Spirit and it speaks about that time when we hear that wonderful call. It says -

As, rising, changed, and **still with Thee**,
We reach our home. (Hymn 182)

'Still with Thee!' He will never leave us. He will be with us forever.

It is a wonderful thing to think of the way in which divine persons are totally committed both for time and for eternity. The Lord Jesus has taken up the whole matter of our sins, and established an answer for God. The Holy Spirit here, linking our hearts, ourselves, to that Man in the glory, and empowering us for the testimony here so that there should be that continued here that the Lord Jesus can take account of which is of Himself: "he shall see a seed", Isa 53: 10. There is that which He will take account of which is of Himself. It says here, "Philip, opening his mouth and beginning from that scripture"; what it means is that there was something welling up in his heart. He had heard this man's question, he opened his mouth and what was welling up in his heart came out. I find that a test; how much is that true of me? You go through life and you see missed opportunity after missed opportunity; I do anyway. You think, 'I could have said that, I should have said this'. Here was a man who did not miss opportunities; he opened his mouth and what was welling up was the glad tidings of Jesus.

It is the Man, Jesus, the Man who was here that the eunuch was reading about, the One who was here of whom I have been speaking. We do not know what Philip covered; it does not give the detail here, but he must have covered a lot more than just to speak about the works of the Lord Jesus in Galilee and Judæa. He must have spoken a lot more than that because, as they were going along the way, they came upon water and the man knew about baptism. How did he know about baptism? To whom was he baptised? The glad tidings had been unfolded to him, how that God had come out in a blessed Man, the Lord Jesus, One who John had foretold would baptise with the Holy Spirit and power. Divine Persons were in activity, and the eunuch says, 'I have to go out of sight'. Christ is the subject of the glad tidings: then I

have to go out of sight. How would he go back to Ethiopia? He was over all the Queen's treasure. I am not referring to any particular person, but generally I would imagine that the Chancellors of the Exchequer would not be known for humility. They would tend to be people who know what they want, and people are expected to fall in line. Here was a man who had heard the glad tidings of Jesus. He went back a different man; he went back as one who had come to the end of himself. He says, "Behold water". I like to think that this was another divine provision. I suppose God had made the water there. We read at the beginning of the section that this was a desert. I do not suppose he expected to find any water, and maybe God put it there for the purpose, just to prove the work of God in this man. He could say, 'If the Lord Jesus has gone that way, the way of suffering and humiliation and reproach and being cast out from the world then the world has no place for me, I must go out of sight too', and that is what baptism means.

The Lord Jesus has gone into death; then it is my place to accept death with Him. In whatever setting I see the Lord Jesus, that is where I take my place. If it means that I go out of sight from this world, what do I have? I have another world, a world that opens up, of which Christ is the Centre, in which the love of God is known, in which the love of God is responded to, where everything is in keeping with His mind and heart. It is a scene of blessing, a scene of joy, a scene, beloved, where everything redounds to the glory of God Himself and that is the place that you and I can know, and I believe we do know. We touch it, momentarily perhaps, but we touch it. Our experience on Lord's day morning would lead us to it, a scene where our hearts are moved. Our minds are moved too; there has to be what is intelligent in what we do, but the response is from the heart. There is response based upon what He has done for us, but more than that, response based on what He is Himself. Think of what He is. Such a One, found here in such moral perfection in lowliness, now exalted at the right hand of God: God is presenting Him there as a Prince and a Saviour. He is One who is in the presence of God, and God is appealing to you to come to Him; be attached to Him; find your life in Him because that is the only way of true satisfaction for any person in this world today, to find their life bound up with a Man in the glory. May the Lord bless the word.

East Finchley

19th August 2018

“MY PEACE” AND “MY JOY”

John 14: 27

John 20: 19, 20

John 15: 9-11

John 17: 12, 13

KJW We sang Hymn 339 this morning and I was very affected by the words -

Thy peace, Thy joy Thou bringest here
Our souls to bless, our hearts to cheer. (Hymn 339)

I wondered if we might consider the Lord's peace and the Lord's joy. The lines of the hymn brought home to me that it was the Lord's peace and the Lord's joy that was brought. That is not something we may have brought, or anyone else could bring, but what the Lord Himself brought; His peace and His joy. I feel the need of this for myself at the moment, as I am sure we all do. I wondered if we could focus not on *our* peace necessarily, although I think that would be the result; the particular character of this is that it is the Lord's peace and the Lord's joy. It would give us peace and it would give us joy, but I was particularly impressed that, apart from the second one we read, these scriptures refer specifically to what is His: “*my* joy”, and “I give *my* peace to you”. In that second scripture, I thought we might see an example of the Lord bringing His peace in to the company.

Then in chapter 15, the Lord says, “that my joy may be in you, and your joy be full”. The result of this would be that we would have peace and joy. I think there is something special about this, that it is as a result of being the Lord's peace and the Lord's joy. It is not a striving on our part for peace or joy in their own right, but it is something that the Lord has. We can enquire and get help together as to the Lord's peace and joy. It is what He would bring.

The final scripture we read speaks of “my joy fulfilled in them”. I feel challenged as to these things, but I wonder whether we might find encouragement, particularly at this time, by looking at them.

AJET You can see an application of these things at the end of where you read in chapter 14: “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it fear”. These things would encourage us on in that way.

KJW I wondered that. It is a peace like no other, the peace that the Lord can give. I wonder whether that is as a result of it being *His* peace

that He would bring. It is not necessarily that we are at peace just by contemplating the Lord, but this is something that He would bring as well, Himself. That seems to be another aspect of this.

AJET It comes into that hymn that you quoted - 'Thou bringest here'. I do like the way this verse 27 begins. The Lord says, "I leave peace with you". He leaves it with them, but then it is almost as if He makes it more intimate when He says, "I give *my* peace to you". It is not that He will just leave it with us, but He will give it; almost as if He is personally handing it over and passing it on. These scriptures are generally in regard of what is collective or what applies to a company, but as you are thinking the matter through, there would be individual application as well. He says, "I give"; the Lord is so ready to give.

KJW I would think that; what you say is helpful. This was something that the Lord left. I get the impression that it is something that He continues to give. "I give *my* peace to you"; this would be something that goes on.

AJET Yes, that would link again with the last part of the verse: "Let not your heart be troubled". We do not exactly want to dwell on that side. Whatever might trouble us, He has that which is His to bring in, to give us: "I leave peace with you". That suggests that He brought it with Him. Being who He is, that would be so. He leaves what He has with us. He does not just leave it: He makes a gift of it.

RJF Do you think we see the Lord's own touch? There is that which is given by Him; it is something that is communicated. It is not just communication in words; it is something to be experienced. If somebody gives you something, there is the gift that they have given, but there is the giver of that gift. What you are encouraging us to contemplate is the Giver as much as the gift itself; it takes character from the Giver. It is His peace and His joy.

KJW That is absolutely right. It is something that He brings as the hymn puts it. 'Thou bringest here'; that is because it is His peace, which is what He would bring and what He would give. Yes; we should contemplate that. It is different to anything else that we could find; that the Lord would bring His peace and give it to us.

DAB Do you have anything in mind in relation to the fact that peace is spoken of before the Lord went on to the cross? You might say He had peace even when He knew what was before Him as to what He was to bear.

KJW That is helpful. More can be said as to the character of His peace and how He had it here. He is referred to elsewhere as “Prince of Peace”, Isa 9: 6. There is something that the Lord has in the way of peace, perfectly.

DAB That is a helpful reference. That is one of His names, “Prince of Peace”. His path here was outwardly anything but peaceful: how much He bore in relation to righteousness before men here. But it speaks of Him being “as a tender sapling, and as a root out of dry ground”, Isa 53: 2. Another scripture that went through my mind was, “I do always the things that are pleasing to him”, John 8: 29. That seems to have a bearing on His peace.

KJW Again, these are things that we can contemplate. You think of the knowledge that the Lord had of what lay ahead and the knowledge He had of how it would impact on His own; and the perfection therefore of Him saying this to His own at this time.

RJF We tend to think of peace as being something in the absence of warfare or fighting or argument, but it is not so in divine terms. Peace is knowing that there is nothing that comes between the individual and the Father. That is the beauty of the Lord's peace, that there is not an iota of divergence between the Lord's will and the Father's will. The Father's love was upon Him. He knew that love; He knew that His reception before the Father was something that was absolute.

PHM I was thinking about where the Lord comes in to His own in chapter 20; what lies behind the work, when He says “*my* peace”, is what the Lord has done which was necessary to bring about that peace. In Timothy it tells us to “pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart”, 2 Tim 2: 22. That is the way in. He was the only one whom God could use to deal with sin. He is the righteous One. When you think of “*my* peace”, what is behind that is the peace of the righteous One that has dealt with sin. Without dealing with sin we cannot have peace. It involves believing. We come into the good of His peace, “*my* peace”, by believing in faith.

KJW Yes, certainly. It is helpful what you bring in as to the work and the fundamental aspect of that. Maybe that moves us on to chapter 20. I was thinking that this was after the Lord had completed that work. The disciples were very unsure about what would happen; they were in fear of the Jews. The Lord “came and stood in the midst, and says to them, Peace be to you”. I wondered whether that would be a real example to

us of the Lord bringing His peace: “Peace be to you”. It says at the end of verse 20, “The disciples rejoiced therefore, having seen the Lord”. That seems to be the key to it. The first aspect is to believe in the Lord, to have peace, peace through believing; but then the Lord brings His own peace here as well.

PHM The Lord has to adjust Thomas; He was very gracious with the finger, but He says, “Because thou hast seen me thou hast believed: blessed they who have not seen and have believed”, v 29. He is referring to such as ourselves who have not seen and believed; that is “my peace”, is it not? It brings that in as a reality.

LEM Have you any thought as to the Holy Spirit in this? In the verse before where you read in chapter 14, the Holy Spirit is referred to as “the Comforter”; and just after you read here in John 20, the Lord “breathed into them, and says to them, Receive the Holy Spirit”, v 22. Do you think that is part of knowing the Lord's peace?

KJW I do absolutely. And part of the fruit of the Spirit is peace (Gal 5: 22), and joy, which we will come on to, is also. I think you are absolutely right. The timing has been referred to, “another Comforter” (John 14: 16), is referred to; that was the backdrop to the Lord saying, “I leave peace with you; I give *my* peace to you”. He speaks of “the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name”, v 26. The Holy Spirit would prompt us as the Lord would bring His peace; the Holy Spirit would prompt us to respond to that and to recognise it.

PHM What has been drawn attention to would connect the two, peace and joy. It is a progression. You cannot really think about having joy without having peace. What you are bringing before us is more than peace; the end in mind is joy. The Lord is drawing attention to the way into the joy. It is through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, but it begins with peace. The Holy Spirit plays that important role, dwelling in us to connect peace and joy.

KJW The Holy Spirit would enable us to recognise the Lord bringing His peace and His joy which then gives us peace and joy.

RJF We speak about these things in words, but they are to be experiences. The experience of these things is limited by how much space or opportunity we give to the Holy Spirit and to the Lord Himself. If I feel that I do not really have much enjoyment experiencing these things, the fault is not with the Lord or the Holy Spirit, it is with me, but if I am prayerful in relation to it, these things are open. The Lord will pour

them in and the result of that is the experience of joy.

KJW That may have heightened my impression this morning, that really there may be a lack on our part, we may have been distracted greatly by other things, but the Lord will always be faithful and bring His peace and His joy. What a thing that is.

AJET Do you think Mary, in the previous paragraph, was a characteristic person to receive in this way? She was so sorrowful, "Jesus says to her, Woman, why dost thou weep?", John 20: 15. The Lord, as in all things, knew just what was required; He said, "Mary". That was sufficient; in one word the Lord really conveys His peace and brought her in to His joy. She says to Him, "Rabboni" (v 16), which we understand means 'my teacher' or 'my very own teacher'. She concentrates on Him immediately.

KJW That is very helpful. It is good to see the connection in the preceding paragraph; it is another example of the Lord bringing His joy and His peace to an individual. We have spoken about the company, and we experienced that this morning, but this was an individual that the Lord could equally bring His peace and His joy to.

PSB I was thinking of another Mary, the example we find with Martha and Mary. Martha is troubled, but Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus, Luke 10: 39. I was thinking of the comment earlier as to it not being words: she was just sitting there. She knew that peace. The Lord's peace is not something He had to achieve; it is what He always had. When we come to John chapter 20 there are now the conditions for us to enter truly into that peace.

KJW We cannot achieve peace on our own. The Lord was always at peace. That is a good thing to remember as we speak over these things. In His pathway the Lord always had peace, and always has peace now; that is what He brings.

PSB Do you think that in chapter 20 His desire is to bring them into joy? I was thinking of what has already been said regarding peace, He wants them to enter into His peace and to be in the reality of it is for His joy.

KJW Yes; "The disciples rejoiced therefore, having seen the Lord"; that was the result for them. What a result for the Lord as well to see the joy that they had again and know that it was His joy.

RJF He has "made peace by the blood of His cross", Col 1: 20. I was

interested in what has been said, and I think it is very helpful, that that was peace secured in relation to everyone else, but there was no need for peace to be made between Him and the Father. The possibility of Him being able to give that peace was made by the blood of His cross.

KJW There is something distinctive about His peace and the way that we can experience it.

DAB “Peace be to you” comes in twice here. It comes in in relation to Him manifesting Himself, and then it comes in in relation to what He has done. It was what He was at the outset; He gives us that peace, and then in relation to what He has done He gives us that peace too. He shares. Peace can manifest itself in different ways from the Lord, and He will share both with us: both who He is and what He has done.

KJW Once we have our sins forgiven, we are at peace from that perspective, and it never changes, that we have peace in that way. It seems that this is a different aspect of the Lord bringing peace to us, bringing His peace and bringing His joy to us.

DAB In all things in relation to the Lord, the more you think about them the more they seems to expand. Your first scripture brings in the two thoughts. “I leave peace with you”; and “I give *my* peace to you”. Then here the Lord twice says, “Peace be to you”. Whatever aspect of the Lord you contemplate it seems to expand.

KJW We could perhaps view, “I leave peace with you” as something arrived at once we have our sins forgiven, we have that peace, but “I give *my* peace to you” could be an additional thought of the Lord, as we said, bringing His peace and His joy to us.

PSB Do you think in what has been said you get a touch as to that, because at the first when He says, “Peace be to you”; they were in fear? He establishes in their hearts that all that stood against them has been entirely removed. He “stood in the midst” and “he shewed to them his hands and his side”; He showed them that it was all finished. Then the scripture goes on, “Jesus said therefore again to them, Peace be to you”. It might have immediately gone on to Jesus saying, “as the Father sent me forth, I also send you”, but do you think you get that progression? You have the peace and what the peace is: what He has enjoyed with the Father; then He adds, “as the Father sent me forth”, from the abiding joy and peace and love that He had with the Father. He now says this, and this is what is for them to send them forth.

KJW That is very helpful and illuminating.

RJF How do you think this relates to communion?

KJW I think it must be related; for the Lord to give His peace to us and His joy, there must be communion there.

RJF I was reflecting that what we are speaking about here is a very practical example of that thought of communion; that is the enjoyment of the presence of divine Persons, without fear. Mary has been referred to; she was there in His presence and enjoying that presence. Whether that goes as far as what we understand as communion I do not know, possibly not. The enjoyment of these things is in that realm where we should be in communion. It may be that relates more to the first thought, and ascending relates more to consecration, but these are quite deep subjects. As the experience is entered into, there is also that which goes forth in what is referred to here: "as the Father sent me forth, I also send you".

KJW If we look at chapter 15, there seems to be the thought there of abiding in the Lord's love. That may be a different thought to communion, abiding in His love. That is necessary as well. It goes on to verse 11: "I have spoken these things to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy be full". Again, it is the Lord's joy being in us, and seems to be as a consequence of abiding in the Lord's love.

RJF Maybe one side is the inward and the other is the outward. Communion is what is enjoyed inwardly, and particularly what we might experience for ourselves on a Lord's day morning. Abiding in His love is not something that is for a particular time; it should be something that is continuing. That should be the Christian experience, abiding in His love.

KJW Yes certainly; I feel tested as to all these things.

BDM As you were drawing attention to abiding in His love and coming into joy, I was wondering if Christ's peace may be something you enter into when you first know Christ's love. You come to know His love, you know salvation, you know there is no longer that strife between yourself and God; and then you can come into the knowledge of Christ's peace. The enjoyment of that is when you move from knowing His love to abiding in His love. It becomes a current thing, and then through the power of the Spirit that progresses into more of a response. Peace is a very restful thing; joy is walking, leaping and praising God, Acts 3: 8.

KJW These things all seem to be connected. The central thing is that it is all of the Lord; the Lord's love, abiding in His love, knowing His peace and His joy as they come in. The first thing is to know the peace in believing, then you can come to know the Lord's own peace, as you say, and know what it is to abide in His love. These are all testing things, but they are all connected.

DAB This is the first time, I think, in the scriptures you have read, that we have a condition: "If ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love". There does not seem to be any condition set for the Lord bringing His peace at any point. Whether I feel it or not, it is still true that I have peace with God. I may not feel it, I may not understand it, but from God's side it is true, and I am seen in Him. In the eyes of God, I have Christ's peace upon me. As has been said, there is a condition and a joy, abiding in His love. Then, having a sense of peace before God I have joy too because I am abiding in His love. Would that be a helpful way to see it?

KJW Yes, it would. "If ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love". That is another thing that is there. "I have spoken these things to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy be full". It does seem that there is a requirement there, to go in for the full enjoyment of these things, to be keeping His commandments and abiding in His love.

DAB It asks for obedience, obedience to the One we love; and these things flow out from that.

PSB The Lord goes on to say, "as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love". It was never conditional in Him; it is what He was. Someone referred earlier to the verse, "I do always the things that are pleasing" to the Father. There was never any hesitation with the Lord at all, and not only did He keep the Father's commandments, but He knew what it was to abide in the Father's love. Is that the true entering into the Lord's peace; to know what it is to abide in the Father's love? At the beginning of John the disciples ask, "where abidest thou? ... and they abode with him that day", chap 1: 38, 39. We get earlier in chapter 14, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life", v 6. Where does it lead to? It leads to where the Father is, and the Father's abode. Is that the real root and joy of the peace that we get from the Lord?

KJW I think that is helpful. It probably leads us on to the final

scripture because that seems to bring out the relationship between the Father and the Lord. It ends “that they may have my joy fulfilled in them”. Verse 12 says, “When I was with them I kept them in thy name”. There seems very much to be a link back to the Father here. That was what the Lord enjoyed, abiding in His love, His will in perfect accord with the Father. He goes on “that they may have my joy fulfilled in them”. It just brings out wonder really that the Lord would speak to His Father in this way of His own.

AJET What would be involved in “my joy fulfilled”? We can understand the thought where He says, “that the scripture might be fulfilled”. But then He says, “that they may have my joy fulfilled”, not that they may fulfil my joy in them; it is “my joy fulfilled”.

KJW It stands out that this is something that the Lord had in mind and would certainly link back to what was brought in about the Holy Spirit. It would be impossible for this to happen without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. That would really enable this to happen that His joy be fulfilled in us.

RJF It comes back again to what we touched on earlier as to a real experience, a tangible experience. When something is fulfilled it is brought into being, brought to pass: “that they might have my joy fulfilled in them”. It is something that we can actually know.

KJW That takes us back to where we started, that this is the Lord's desire to bring His joy and bring His peace that it might be in us.

RJF I was looking at the words at the beginning of verse 13: “And now I come to thee”. We might feel that there is an arbitrary placement to these sentences, but because the Lord was going to the Father, He asked for His joy to be fulfilled in His disciples and His own, because He is suited to the presence of the Father.

DAB You touched earlier on the thought of thinking perhaps that I do not really know much about this, and at the time I was thinking that if I think that, that is the prompting of the Holy Spirit. If I feel that I am missing something that is the touch of “another Comforter” who would set us on in the way of this. It was said that this was to be experienced. Any feeling of a lack on my own part can only be traced to the promptings of the Holy Spirit Himself, that I will be exercised to go in for these things.

KJW I certainly feel challenged myself to go in for these things more.

As you are saying it is a collective thing. We have experienced this often; the Lord bringing His peace and joy, but it is to be experienced individually as well.

Sunbury

1st November 2020

List of initials (all local):-

D A Barlow; P S Barlow; R J Flowerdew; B D Morris; L E Morris; P H Morris; A J E Temple; K J Walkinshaw

A JUST GOD AND A SAVIOUR

Glen M Barlow

Isaiah 45: 21 (from “And ...”) -24 (to “... strength”)

Leviticus 16: 7-10, 15-16, 20-22

Hebrews 9: 26 (from “But now ...”) -28

2 Corinthians 5:21

I have been thinking of this verse in Isaiah 45 a little since it was read here a few weeks ago. What struck me as to it is what God says as to Himself, that He is “a just God and a Saviour”. This section we have read begins, “And there is no God else beside me”. I think perhaps that is the starting point in the gospel; God is speaking and He will be heard. Think of those times in the Old Testament when one could say, “Put away the strange gods that are among you”; Jacob says it (Gen 35: 2), and Joshua says it, Josh 24: 23. I think the gospel is a time to put away the strange gods: the one true God is speaking. There are gods of clay, metal and wood, gods of culture and commerce and politics, the gods of this world, the gods that man has made for himself; but when we come to the gospel preaching it is time to put away those strange gods and listen to the one true God. And what is it that the one true God has to say in the gospel? “And there is no God else beside me; a just God *and* a Saviour”.

We read that hymn at the beginning -

God could not pass the sinner by,
Justice demands that he should die (Hymn 357)

What impressed me as to this verse in Isaiah is that, to the mind of man it is an impossibility that one God could be both a just God *and* a Saviour. Those two things, when we consider the sin question as it is often termed, would seem to be irreconcilable. The justice of God demands that the sinner should die, but that same just God is a Saviour! The sinner must die because of the holiness of God and because of the righteousness of God. The nature of holiness and righteousness is such that it cannot accept unholiness and unrighteousness, because it would immediately be polluted; and God is a righteous God, God is a holy God. So when man sinned, the answer of God was that distance must be brought in. You get the feelings of God as to it in Genesis; He says, “And now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever ...!”, Gen 3: 22. It gives a sense of the horror to God of the thought that man in sin could abide forever and that

unrighteousness, that unholiness, could abide forever.

So justice required that sin must be judged. We read in the scripture in Hebrews, "it is the portion of men once to die, and after this judgment", a requirement of a just God. Yet God speaks in the gospel because He has glad tidings to convey; that He is both a just God and a Saviour. I am sure all in this room know why, but if we asked the question as to where the just God and the Saviour is found, where through the exercise of that judgment salvation was attained, we would point to the cross. It was at the cross of Jesus where the requirements of a just God were met and where the salvation of man was secured; all in the work of one precious perfect Man. It is little wonder that He is the theme of the glad tidings, that He is the One that God is seeking to convey to every heart, because, when God says in this scripture "a just God and a Saviour", He looked forward to that One who on that cross would accomplish that glorious salvation; but do so in maintaining the requirements of a just God. The judgment fell on Jesus' head.

I read in Leviticus 16 because I wonder if in these two goats we see these two sides of the cross of Christ. There is the side in which the Lord Jesus met in perfection the claims of God's righteousness and holiness, and the side in which He became a Saviour by virtue of that precious work. The first goat was to be presented for a sin offering; it was to be presented before God. It speaks of that sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, the way that He took in offering Himself as a sacrifice: here Aaron was offering a goat as a sacrifice, but the Lord Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice. The first thing about that sacrifice was that it satisfied God. It entirely satisfied God, as to the matter of sin in its entirety! Think of how this type falls short in that this day of atonement had to be repeated once a year; this blood, as Hebrews 10: 4 brings out, was not sufficient; but the blood of Jesus was sufficient. I read the scripture in Hebrews really as a counterpart to the one in Leviticus: "now once in the consummation of the ages he has been manifested for the putting away of sin by his sacrifice". The spotlessness of the sacrifice, the perfection of the One who bore the penalty that belonged to sin and sins, was such that it has satisfied God as to every righteous requirement. It has formed a basis on which He can be just in coming out in blessing, because that judgment that was required by justice fell on another. It fell on One who could bear it, fell on One who could exhaust it, and fell on One who did! He satisfied God. I think this really brings out what propitiation is: He satisfied God entirely as to His holiness and righteousness.

I came across a definition that Mr Darby provided on propitiation, and I will just read it for accuracy; he says, 'Propitiation is presenting to a holy God what the righteousness and holiness of that God necessarily claim, while infinite love has provided, and infinite love has offered, the spotless sacrifice', JND Collected Writings vol 23 p241. Although it falls far short in the type, this first goat represents the propitiation that the Lord Jesus has accomplished by offering Himself on our account and exhausting God's wrath against sin. So when the Lord Jesus hung upon that cross and when He suffered at the hands of a holy and righteous God, there could be no question of some forbearance, of some point at which God would withdraw the judgment sword. Think of a time in the Old Testament when that happened, at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite; the sword was withdrawn, 1 Chron 21: 15. But at the cross of Jesus the sword was not withdrawn; the judgment in its entirety fell on Jesus' head. There was no mitigation by virtue of who He was, because He was made sin, and all God's wrath against sin was poured out on the head of Jesus. So what lies behind "a just God and a Saviour" is incomparable love; infinite love has provided and infinite love has offered the sacrifice. Think of the heart of God that He should give such a One, that He should accomplish such a way, the only way in which He could be known as "a just God and a Saviour". Think of the Lord Jesus as taking that way in love with the desire for the salvation of man.

I think one thing to say as to propitiation is that God is satisfied as to the matter of sin entirely. We are told in the New Testament that "*he* is the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world", (1 John 2: 2); so there is no question in the gospel as to whether God can be satisfied as to *your* sin. Sin in its entirety has been met; He has been made a propitiation not for our sins only, but "for the whole world". That is why the world is referred to as being in provisional reconciliation. When it comes to God's side the sacrifice has entirely satisfied Him, and so the question of sin has been resolved. But then in the gospel preaching we come to our responsibility, because in the second part of the scripture we read in Hebrews it says, "thus the Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many", not the sins of all. Did He bear your sins? We have those spoken of in relation to the second goat in Leviticus; the second goat bore their sins. If the first goat represents propitiation, the second goat represents substitution: the fact that Jesus took my place. He satisfied God in the offering of Himself, in that blood that was sprinkled, in His going into death. The

satisfaction of God as to His claims, as to His righteousness, as to His holiness, as to justice being satisfied, are evidenced completely in the fact that the Lord Jesus has been raised from among the dead. If that work was incomplete, if there was any dissatisfaction on the part of God as to the work of Jesus, He could not have been raised, but He has been raised and He has been glorified. God is satisfied in that work.

But, is it for you? I can tell you that from God's side the way is open, the way is open for the just God to be a Saviour to you, but did the Lord Jesus bear your sins? Christ offered to bear the sins of *many*! These sins are carried into a land afar off. It says, "to a land apart from men". Perhaps others have heard the recording of a preaching where, in recognising that this type falls short, a brother said very touchingly that the goat went to a land apart from men, but the Lord Jesus went, as it were, to a land apart from God. The Lord Jesus was forsaken of God in order that He might be your substitute, in order that He might take your place and bear the penalty for every sin that you have committed or will commit, and for the matter of sin itself that dwells in your flesh. He has borne it all: precious, precious Saviour. Can you put your faith and trust in Him now? He is available to faith. If your faith and trust is not yet in Him, He is available. God's claims are satisfied, and the Saviour is available, and you can have perfect peace if you rely on that work because God is satisfied as to the work. No more judgment has to be borne; Jesus has borne it all. No more condemnation has to be borne; Jesus has borne the condemnation. And now the message of love and grace and mercy proceeds from the throne of God, from a glorified Man, the same Man who took that place, who would be your Substitute if you will accept Him tonight.

That scripture in Isaiah 45 goes on to say, "Only in Jehovah, shall one say, have I righteousness and strength". I wonder if this brings out to our hearts a further aspect of the work of the Lord Jesus, a further aspect of what it means for the God we know to be "a just God and a Saviour"; and that is that He has not only delivered us from judgment but He has made us righteous, and as righteous we can be reconciled to Him. That scripture in 2 Corinthians 5 speaks of reconciliation; it says, "how that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their offences; ... Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him". The Lord Jesus was made sin on our account, and we are made righteousness on His account! The fact that He has dealt with that question and exhausted it, the fact that He has laid the basis for

man in righteousness before God, means that you can be in righteousness before God in the righteousness of Christ Himself!

So God has a desire in the gospel. We speak of the fact that He is “a just God and a Saviour”, and what a wonderful thing that is, that He has delivered all who believe on the Lord Jesus from judgment, but He has a desire. There is a desire in the heart of God underlying His work, underlying His presentation of Himself as “a just God and a Saviour”, and it is the desire that man would be reconciled to Him, brought into nearness. That was mentioned in the gospel here too recently, brought into nearness. Where there was distance, the righteous basis has been established for nearness, for God to have the answer to His heart that He desires. The fact that the Lord Jesus has established righteousness means that we are to become God’s righteousness in Him. We can stand before God on the same ground as the One who has secured our redemption. The One who has reconciled us has brought us near, has brought us into that glorious place that has been established. So there is an appeal in the gospel, an appeal to the believer as well as the unbeliever, as to the response that God desires by virtue of the way that He has gone. He has held nothing back. Let there be no doubt that the love of God has not stopped at anything to secure you, and, having secured you, He wants you for Himself. So that there are those that can say, “Only in Jehovah ... have I righteousness and strength”. The Spirit is the power to enter into these things and the glad tidings extend to that glorious gift. Having been glorified by virtue of the perfection of His work, the Lord Jesus has sent Another who would establish us and bring us in to the present knowledge of that nearness. We know that it is the prospect of every believer to be in nearness and to answer eternally to the One who has accomplished this work; the ones who “look for him the second time without sin for salvation”. But there is the opportunity *now* to be in nearness and the Spirit’s power is available for it.

The last thing I wanted to draw attention to in this scripture in Isaiah 45 was that God says, “I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear”. That would take us back to where we began, that the one true God is speaking; and if He is speaking He must be listened to. What a glorious message this is, what glad tidings they are, that the speaking of God at this moment is such as it is! He might have spoken in many other ways but the heart of God is such that He is speaking in love and grace and mercy, and He is offering

it, He is commending it. What a wonderful section of scripture Romans 5: 8 is: "God commends *his* love". It is not only that God has made the way but He is commending His love; He is saying take it! *But* "every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear". The opportunity is *now* for salvation! The opportunity to put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, to say He bore my sins, He delivered me from judgment, is now; and it may only be now. There may not be another moment; it may only be now that that opportunity remains available, but "every knee shall bow". We are often reminded that if the knee does not bow now voluntarily it will be forced to bow in a day to come. The gospel is a solemn thing because if God has presented Himself in such a way, if He has shown such love, if He has given so much, there must be an answer to it. How can we be negligent of so great a salvation, Heb 2: 3? I just leave that final word with us because the message is one of love, the message is one of mercy and grace, of how a just God could also be a Saviour to you, and the wonderful way that has been accomplished through the precious work of the Lord Jesus; but it must be relied upon in the heart and soul for it to be availed of, for that salvation to be known and for that nearness to be enjoyed.

May that be the portion of all here, for His Name's sake.

Sidcup

14th March 2021

DIVINELY APPOINTED RESTRICTIONS

William J House

Ecclesiastes 10: 8

Numbers 21:4-9

Acts 28: 1-6

As taking account of the terrible conditions in the world through which we are passing one realises that there is great power in what is objective; the secret of being held here for God lies in having a right object. We are here in the wilderness, and we need to be on our guard that we do not fall into the hands of the enemy. Satan is presented to us in the Scriptures as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour; his opposition and destructiveness are manifest, and looking back we see that there have been periods when Satan was active in that way, but the people of God have been wonderfully preserved. The roaring lion is manifest, he can be heard and seen; his activities are in the open, and that casts the saints on God. We can see that in the persecution in the early church, when Herod took James and slew him with the sword, and proceeded to take Peter, and all the distress and persecution that followed; what days of spiritual prosperity they were, because the enemy was located and known, and the saints prayed; they had to do with God.

So it was in the period that followed, referred to in the address to Smyrna. So it was in Luther's day. But the other character of Satan's activities is much more serious to us. He is the old serpent, not only the devil and Satan, but he is the old serpent, which means that from ancient times part of his activities have been on the line of deceiving men, stealthily moving about in secret, often unnoticed, like a serpent. Those who have met them in the bush will know that one can scarcely distinguish them at times from their surroundings; they are so hidden, and they are so marked that they are disguised; so it is with Satan. One has in mind to say a few words that might put us on our guard against the serpent, against the subtle deceptive influences that would draw us into his power.

The writer of Ecclesiastes says, "whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent *shall* bite him" - not it *might*. There is no doubt about it; it is one of those many statements of Scripture that are absolute - that if anyone breaks a hedge a serpent *will* bite him. What I understand by a hedge is a divinely established restriction, a barrier that God has instituted.

Every creature has been placed by God within hedges. Only God knows no restriction. As David says, "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me", Ps 139: 8-10. Indeed, God says of Himself, "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" Jer 23: 24. More than that, dear brethren, He not only fills the creation that He has made, but He extends beyond it; for the Psalmist says, "He shall call to the heavens from above", Ps 50: 4. A wonderful passage - God calls to the heavens as above them.

In the creation of the first responsible creature the principle of restriction was imposed. Satan may have been the first and perhaps the greatest of God's creatures, but limitation was put upon him, and there came a moment, we do not know when, in which he decided to break down the hedge, to overthrow the restriction that creatorial power and wisdom had imposed. As we read in Peter, there were "the angels that sinned", and Jude tells us that they "kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation". That means, they broke the barriers God had imposed. Satan as the serpent came to man in Eden in that same way. God set man within hedges, limited, restricted by His will, and the serpent induced him to break the divinely established hedge in order to poison him.

Now, before I speak of that further I would like to speak about Christ, for as in everything He is in manhood the great Model for us. While Scripture tells us that He was holy, it also tells us that He was undefiled; never a taint of the serpent's poison entered there. He never at any time broke down a hedge. From His birth to His being carried up into heaven He never, at any time, moved contrary to one principle of restraint that God in His wisdom had imposed upon man. It does us good to think of Him. Think of Him first in relation to the first limits that come upon mankind - the authority of parents. Every child of Adam's race comes within the hedge of that authority, by divine institution. Of the Lord Jesus we read that "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them" - to Joseph and Mary. Then think of Him as recognising divinely appointed government here. The Lord said to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power at all ... except it were given thee from above". Never did the Lord lift a finger to disturb the principle of government in the earth: He accepted it. He said to those who tempted Him, "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which be Cæsar's"; showing how the Lord in manhood recognised the

hedge of constituted government as ordained of God. Greater than all this, He had, in becoming Man, accepted the place of dependence upon and obedience to God. Satan sought to induce the Lord, in the temptations, to disobey, showing Him, it says, all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; suggesting to Him how He could become conspicuous before all in casting Himself down, and proving God on His side. But the Lord says, "Get thee behind me, Satan". He remains perfectly within the restrictions that applied to the position which as Man He accepted. Later on, Satan drew near on another line; the Lord was going up to Jerusalem to suffer and to be put to death; He was treading a path of suffering. He had accepted the path of obedience to God's will at all costs. It was said in Micah 5, "thou Bethlehem Ephratah ... out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel" - a wonderful passage. "Out of thee shall he come forth *unto me*", indicating that every step of the path of Jesus would be unto God, not one step for Himself. Wherever that path led He would tread it to God. The Lord saw where it was leading, and told His disciples. Peter said, "Be it far from thee, Lord". Or in another place, "Pity thyself, Lord". Self-consideration would have set aside the will of God. The Lord recognised behind Peter's remark the subtle working of Satan, and the Lord said, "Get thee behind me, Satan". I have no doubt at Gethsemane the serpent was there, hoping that the Lord would step aside from the path of the will of God. One has often thought of the pressure of that scene, for the pathway the Lord was treading was leading to those awful sufferings, and Satan appears again seeking to move the Lord so that he might have Him in his power; but though the Lord sees where the road is leading, He says, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt".

If we are to escape the poison of the serpent we must live within the divinely established hedges; there is no other way. The other side of every divine restriction is the serpent, and if we break through he will bite us. There are not many children here tonight, but one would refer to them first. How often the tempter seeks to induce a child to break the authority of its parents, to abandon it; holding out benefits and present gain, but really with the intention of poisoning the soul. So with every relationship; each divinely established relationship constitutes a hedge which God has set up. I speak to those who are young, who may be contemplating marriage. Scripture indicates a hedge; it says, "only in the Lord"; that is to say, as both under His control. The serpent will, no doubt, and does, alas, with many induce them to break the hedge of "in

the Lord", in order to poison, in order to damage, in order, if he can, to slay them. So it is, dear friends, with every relationship, the enemy is constantly knocking at the door of believers' hearts, to induce them to break the restraints connected with divinely established relationships. He said to Eve: "the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil". There are great advantages to be secured, says the serpent, in breaking the hedges. And alas, the foolish heart listens. We have all done it; and we have suffered governmentally, and have been weakened through it, perhaps all our days.

I want to appeal specially to those who are young to recognise that God has set those hedges to save you from the serpent. You do not know what is on the other side, but God does, and every hedge is to save you. They are not arbitrary, but for your salvation. So with relationships of servants: how often the serpent has put his head over the hedge, as it were, and whispered the gain of not being marked by fidelity; but oh! the awful loss to the soul that listens. The apostle says to servants, "shewing all good fidelity". Servants are under obligations to be true to the trust imposed upon them. It is a hedge, and on the other side of the hedge is the serpent. I appeal to the young particularly, and to all of us. Never heed his entreaties as to the gain of letting go fidelity. Faithfulness to trust placed upon us is a hedge that God would have us maintain. So it is, dear brethren, with regard to the powers that be. The governments of the world, whatever they may be, are not for our destruction; they are for our protection, and subjection to authority saves us from the serpent.

Then there is the hedge of fellowship; for Christian fellowship is a barrier. What for? To save us. How often it does save us if we are true to it. We have been called to the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; therefore we cannot have fellowship with darkness. Oh, but the gain, says the serpent, of having a wider path, of having links with the world, having associations that are not in keeping with Christ and the truth. Dear friends, it is only to poison you. Break the hedge, and the serpent will bite you, is the word. The holy fellowship is to save us from what is outside, that is, the serpent. Do not let us look upon it as arbitrary, as irksome. The apostle says, What fellowship has light with darkness? If as having light we break the barrier we shall get into darkness. What fellowship has Christ with Belial? What fellowship has a believer with an unbeliever? You say, that is a narrow path! It is to save us from the serpent; do not let us break it. Many a time in your

history, if the Lord tarries, the serpent will come to you on this line, and you will come under the poisonous influences of the serpent if you forsake or break down the hedge that God has established. What a world we are living in! Every divinely established restraint is disappearing, and who knows where it will end? Both men and women are giving up restraint. Man was made in the image of God, to represent God. Oh, what departure as we look upon men! What departure from God's great thought! How necessary it is for the people of God in accepting Christ as Lord to abide within the divinely appointed hedges. The epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, which deal with such great and holy subjects, also refer to husbands, wives, parents, children, masters, servants. The apostle indicates that the Christian, as recovered for the pleasure of God, accepts the hedges which divine wisdom has established, and thus shall we be preserved.

Now, I read the other two passages just to enlarge a little on that. What brought about the activity of the fiery serpents was that the people became discontented in the wilderness; they were murmurers. They had been delivered from Egypt, from slavery and hard bondage, from a land that was under the judgment of God. They had been freed from that power, that was something, was it not? Then they had a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, the guidance of heaven. To be guided by heaven through a wilderness is no small matter, for heaven is the source of all true guidance. Then they had Moses - typically, the Lord Jesus Christ. What a man Moses was! God's prophet, who wielded the rod of God, symbol of God's power. And they had Aaron the priest to support them, to pray for them, to teach them. And they had the manna each morning coming down from heaven. And they had the rock that followed them. Wonderful thing! So that they were never without water. But they murmured, they were discontented, they complained about the way; and it opened the door for the serpents to come in. Dear brethren, let us not murmur; the way is hard at times, especially to the flesh; it is always hard to the flesh, for there is nothing in the wilderness that will minister to the lust of the flesh or to the lust of the eyes or to the pride of life. That all belongs to Egypt, to the world; but the wilderness is a place of constant self-judgment, where there is constant conflict. "Put to death ... your members which are upon the earth". But what provision there is on the part of the Lord. Though the wilderness is a great howling wilderness, God is with His people as were the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, and the Lord is with us for protection and to support us as High Priest. We are supplied

with support for each day. Let us not murmur, for it is the avenue by which Satan will reach us. A complaining and murmuring spirit will soon find you in the serpent's hands. As sure as we are marked by discontent or murmuring, so surely will the serpents be upon us. We can never go on until we judge that. So the serpent of brass was put on a pole and the thing was condemned. That is the idea - the murmuring and complaining spirit that tempts God is condemned, and every one that looks, lives. Let us remember this - if the wilderness is barren to the flesh, as it is - if it is a place of constant exercise, constant conflict, constant necessity to be ready to move - and that is what we do not like naturally, for we would like to settle down at some point - the spirit of murmuring will open the door to the serpents.

The passage in Acts 28 gives us another view. We see there a man that could not be poisoned. Things are difficult; he is on an island; the ship had been broken up. It is a figure of the present state of things in the professing church. There they were on an island with all the limitations that an island imposes, but there is a man who cannot be poisoned; the serpent cannot bite him. Why can he not bite him? I have no doubt the first two scriptures were understood by Paul. He had said to Jesus: "Lord"; thus he came inside the hedge of God's kingdom and never went out of it; and whatever came upon him in the wilderness, he did not murmur. He suffered more in the wilderness than we know - peril of robbers, nakedness, hunger, having no certain dwelling-place; of the Jews five times he received forty stripes save one. Are you complaining, Paul? Never! What is he doing? He is using his hands to provide for the warmth and support of those who are with him. The viper fastens on his hand. Satan says, I cannot allow a hand like that to continue, I will poison it. That kind of hand cannot be poisoned. They thought he would swell, but he had judged all that. "To me", he says, "less than the least of all saints, is this grace given". "In nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing". That man could not swell; the poison could not work in a man like that. In spite of all the brokenness of the day, his hand was engaged in providing for the comfort and warmth of those who were entrusted to him. "God hath given thee all that sail with thee". What are our hands doing? Scripture says, "Lift up the hands which hang down". I often challenge myself, especially lately, as to what there is in one's Christianity more than talk. It is a wholesome exercise for all of us to face What are our hands doing? The serpent did not fasten on his lips, he fastened on his hand; he resented a hand like that. "These hands

have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive". No serpent can touch a hand like that. If our relationship with God is in word only, then, dear brethren, we are exposed to the serpent, and if a viper comes out we shall be affected. But if we are in accord with the apostle who said, "Ourselves your bondmen for Jesus' sake", and we use our hands for the comfort of God's people, then if the viper appears there is an antidote in our moral being that will not allow the poison to work. It says, "They looked when he should have ... fallen down dead. They looked a long while, but they never would see a man like that fall down dead.

The Lord help us first to remember that on the other side of every hedge the hedge for children, the hedge for husband, for wife, for man, for woman, for masters, for servants, the hedge of governments, the hedge of fellowship; on the other side of every hedge there lies the serpent, waiting for the man or woman or child that breaks the hedge. Let us remember also that when we begin a line of discontent or complaint of what God allows in the wilderness, we are opening the door to the fiery serpents. But let us use the strength of our hands as well as our lips for the support of what is of God in a broken day, and if a viper comes we will not be affected, thus shall we be preserved.

Date and place not given

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