

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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MEASURABLE PROGRESS

John Laurie

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I seek help, beloved brethren, to say something about measurable progress. That would be quite an exercise for us all to consider. Are we making measurable progress? Is there something discernible in the way of advancement amongst us in spiritual growth?

I have been thinking of one of the things that John, the apostle, was given to do which is mentioned in Revelation. Largely he was given to look and to listen but he was also asked to write, and we are very thankful for what he has written, and what has been preserved to us in that wonderful exposition written out. But in addition to that, at one point he was given a measuring instrument and he was told to take it and to rise and measure the temple and the altar and them that worship in it, chap 11: 1. How would you set about to measure worshippers? I suppose it is indicative of intelligence on the part of John to be able to take account of some discernible formation in the worshippers, so that he could rightly evaluate and truly consider before the Lord.

I find it quite a searching thing that we should be found, not only as those who in some degree have been preserved through divine grace and have continued in the course of the testimony, but as those of whom it can be said that we are continuing in such a way that there is measurable progress with us. Is there constant increase for the pleasure of divine Persons? Such, I think, was the case with Samuel. These several references to his growth are very interesting. It is very evident that it is not merely an allusion to physical growth of a very young boy, advancing in height, and in a general way progressing in what would be expected of any child, but he grew before Jehovah; there was measurable progress in relation to the things of God found with him.

Largely what was initially found with Samuel was the fruit of the remarkable exercise taken up by his mother and her godly concern in relation to the interests of God. She apparently discerned that there was something lacking in the priesthood. She carried deep exercise that there would be someone available to be useable in view of God's

interests being maintained in a right way. She carried deep and godly exercise before God about that; her prayer clearly reflects that. She had the ability to evaluate that measurable progress with Samuel as he grew before Jehovah. In these visits made year by year she seemed to anticipate that there would be progress. In that respect she, in addition to being an intercessor before God, clearly moved in the steps of faith and anticipated that God would work in response to her pleadings. It is evident that in visiting Samuel every year she made a larger coat proportionate to the extent of his growth.

What about me, and what about you? Is there discernible increase as we move on among the saints? Oh to be able to grow before Jehovah! To grow in the sight of the Lord. One would seek to grow in knowledge in a greater understanding of divine things, but may our growth not be limited to knowledge only but may there be substantial formation with us in affection and in features of Christ Himself. May there be increasing conformity to Him at the present time. It is said so beautifully of Samuel that he “grew before Jehovah”, and then we read further down, “And the boy Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with Jehovah and also with men”. What a remarkable similarity to the words used concerning the Lord Jesus Himself. Samuel is a beautiful type in that respect of the attractiveness of the growth that was found with the Lord Jesus. We must always say, of course, that Christ stands out distinctively in all His glory at every stage.

We sometimes feel that we know but little of the early stages of the Lord's life here, but we do have the precious record that He grew: He grew in favour with God and men, Luke 2. Samuel sets out a similar thought. How beautiful to see a suggestion there in relation to progress in the life of the Lord Jesus. Think of Samuel growing before Jehovah. Can we gain some impression of the delight of God's in looking down upon Samuel and seeing progress that was soon to be found in fulness in His own beloved Son here? The Lord Jesus took up a condition of flesh and blood in which He moved on this earth. He was the One concerning whom the Father's voice was heard from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight”, Matt 3: 17. Steps in growth and increase were found with the Lord Jesus. It is said of Him that He “advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men”. Likewise Samuel, in his measure, “grew on, and was in favour both with Jehovah and also with men”. I do not think that means Samuel was in any way conforming to worldly interests amongst men. I think it brings out some distinctiveness in his character that preserved

him from being offensive to men. In measure he rightly represented God in testimony here as he grew on.

We read later in chapter 3:19, "And Samuel grew, and Jehovah was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground". What measurable progress! I think it is true, that at the beginning it was very largely the fruit of his mother's godly exercise, but as he grew something came into evidence in personal exercise with Samuel himself. He had a hearing ear; he was attentive to what God would say. As he hearkened and took in the words of Jehovah, so he gained ability as helped of God to be able to speak, and in such a way that none of his words fell to the ground. Further progress was to be seen there; I use the words again, 'measurable progress'. Brethren will discern that I am rather emphasising what can be truly taken account of, and not just a general thought in relation to progress, something specific involving real exercise before God as we move on that provides evidence of a fruitful result pleasing to God. Such is what took place in the life of Samuel, growing on and with his hearing ear attentive to what God would say. Firstly, he was useable in communicating God's mind to Eli, which he faithfully did; that would be an important thing too. If anyone feels directed of the Lord to say something in particular, then it should be said with all the import and clarity of the Lord's mind and voice behind it. There should be no confusion, but rather distinctiveness in what is said in view of edification and blessing being the result of it. None of his words fell to the ground. He did not say things that were of no importance and of no relevance in relation to the interests of God. What he did say was according to the mind of God and upheld by God. There is something very attractive about that. Oh to be preserved in usefulness and in steady growth in the interests of the Lord here!

In Chronicles we have another beautiful example of one with whom remarkable progress was found. Once again there was the occasion of godly exercise with his mother. His name stood as a reminder of that: "His mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bore him with pain". Now we might feel we are passing through difficult and testing times. There is no doubt that the mother of Jabez felt that. She bore him with pain; it was an occasion of difficulty in her life. There was much exercise and cost involved in this child coming into life. If there is to be in any measure fruitfulness or an answer to God in spiritual measurable growth amongst us, it must involve real exercise before God. It does not come about through carelessness or inactivity. We may say, from one point of view, that it is entirely of God and God's

own work. I do not doubt that nor detract from the importance of that for a moment, but I do think it has to be taken up in the way of godly exercise on our part; that is what characterized Jabez. He had this somewhat brief but remarkable prayer before God that is recorded for us. He took things up in an earnest way. He called on the God of Israel. And he says, "Oh that thou wouldest richly bless me"; "Richly bless me". What a fine thing to carry exercise before God to go in for the very best. Why should I seek for something inferior or less than the fulness of God's great thoughts? We were reminded in the reading of the purpose of God. Why should I in any way think less of what is to be wrought out and secured than what God has in His own mind for the saints? Jabez was a man who took that up in his exercise and asked that God might richly bless him and "enlarge my border". How beautiful. Have you ever come across a brother, or a sister, and been able to discern progress and say, 'I see advancement in growth and spiritual substance with that person'? Such a person's border being enlarged and being able to enjoy more than formerly, enlarged in the understanding of the truth, it may be, and enriched in capacity to answer to it. Firstly, toward God, but secondly, in an outward way in the testimony too.

Think of the border of Jabez being enlarged. I have often wondered about that. You might think that if his border was enlarged that would mean that someone else's border was reduced a little. I cannot fully answer that but all I can say is that God took account of his prayer and granted his request. In the wisdom of God what Jabez asked for was made available. I do think if things are taken up in true spiritual exercise by us before God, God will surely bring in an answer in blessing. I say that as understanding that God is a Rewarder; He delights to bless. I cannot in any way put God under obligation to do anything; far be the thought! But it is God's delight to bless. We have a perfect example of it in this little section concerning Jabez. He presented these exercises in such a distinctive way before God: "enlarge my border, and that thy hand might be with me". Think of a man seeking that the hand of God would be with him. That shows he was intending proceeding in dependence upon God. He was not assuming that he could go forward with independency of thought, outlook or strength in any way, but he felt the need of divine help and guidance in view of being able to fill out what he was asking for. So he says, "that thy hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me"!

What need there is for us to be preserved in our thoughts,

beloved brethren. I take that very much home to myself because there is a great deal in this world, all around us, that would so quickly grieve us and hinder our measurable spiritual progress if we are not preserved carefully in our thoughts and ways and walk. May we rather prove the value of the Spirit's help and know what it is to be divinely strengthened in view of not only being enlarged in the inheritance, but enlarged in the enjoyment of it. I have no doubt that as having his border enlarged it was in view of there being greater productiveness in the portion of his inheritance. A richer answer would thus be secured for God.

The closing words in the section are very attractive: "And God brought about what he had requested". How beautiful that is! What an answer to this man's fervent prayer! May I encourage each and all of us to take up this exercise for ourselves. There was an answer to Hannah's prayer as well. There are a good many young children here today; thank God for them all. May their parents carry exercise - the mothers and the fathers - to pray for the preservation of these children. Mothers in Israel amongst us, and true fathers amongst us, taking up the exercise, too, to pray for the preservation and prosperity of the children. But then we need to take up things personally as we go on in our lives. We give thanks for the care and interest of our parents, if having had godly parents. We can give thanks for the love and care and interest of others who have taken a spiritual interest in our welfare and prayed for us. I can say I am amongst those who have known of that. I have known of persons whom I never met previously in my life to have been praying for me. That is a very precious thing. But then there comes a point when there must be exercise to take up these things for ourselves, and like Jabez seek that there might be an enlargement of our border. May God's hand keep us and preserve us in the holy things that we seek to grow in.

Think of the hand of the Lord coming in to preserve us and to keep us. Think of the Lord stretching out His hand to rescue Peter at one point. Peter had great exercise and desire, I have no doubt, but he needed the hand of the Lord to keep him and preserve him too. There was a point in his life where he felt he was going to sink, but that hand came out to preserve him and to hold him. How beautiful to think of the interest of divine Persons that we may be maintained and preserved in view of Their own joy. May we be indeed vessels for the divine pleasure in the course of things at the present time.

With Ezekiel there was very great evidence of measurable

progress. Ezekiel was brought into touch with one who had a line in his hand. He had two measuring instruments. This man had a reed but he also had a line. I wondered about that some time back when I read it and then I was interested to think that you cannot measure over waters with a measuring reed: you need a line. You need a line to measure out from a fixed point and measure the progress. I pass that on as a little point of interest. Here was someone furnished to measure a thousand cubits at a time. Ezekiel was brought back to the door of the house, to this place of wonderful resource, indicative of where God was dwelling. He was being brought to gain some apprehension of the great wealth of all that was before God. I might just say that was not a back door of the house, because he was brought to the front door which faced eastwards. That door of the house gives some apprehension of the wealth of all that was flowing out from, we may say, the place where God dwells - in His house. He was given some understanding of the great flow of things going out in the waters which ran out from the right side of the house. "When the man went forth eastward, a line was in his hand; and he measured a thousand cubits, and he caused me to pass through the waters: the waters were to the ankles". What a wonderful illustration of measurable progress. Ezekiel was helped to go forward.

I have been speaking of the need of ourselves taking up godly exercise and praying about things, but there is a further thought here in that Ezekiel was guided. The man went forth and "he caused me" Ezekiel says; here is a man *causing* Ezekiel to go forward. It seems to me as if it is a service that divine Persons would render to us. No doubt through the Lord and by the Spirit we are caused to go forward. What grace that there should be such support and help available in relation to divine interests. He was *caused* to go forward, and he moved a thousand cubits in progress forward, and found the waters were up to his ankles.

What can I say about the ankles? Does it not remind us of the man in the early Acts? His feet and ankle bones were made strong and the result of that was that he walked and leapt and praised God, chap 3: 7, 8. What progress! The man had previously been paralysed; he was carried to the gate. He had not the ability to do a thing of himself and was carried to the gate and laid there. But here now was measurable progress in that man's life. We may say the waters had reached his ankles, and he was strengthened and he was able to walk and to leap and to praise God. What progress would be evident. It was discernible and measurable in that man's life. Then Ezekiel was enabled to go

further: “he measured a thousand cubits, and caused me to pass through the waters: the waters were to the knees”.

I was wondering about the knees. I was thinking of Paul, the apostle Paul: how beautifully he makes reference to bowing his knees. Think of his knees bowed before the Father in intercession for the saints at Ephesus, chap 3: 14. What a beautiful thought concerning the knees. We may say the water had clearly reached Paul's knees, and he had some impression of the wealth of all that was flowing out from God in view of divine blessing. He bows his knees before the Father in order that there should be enrichment for these saints in Ephesus, interceding before God for the blessing of the saints. What high thoughts he had in mind; he had some understanding of the wealth of the flow of the waters. That section leads on to the final thought of glory to God in the assembly in Christ Jesus, v 21. What enlargement was coming into the mind and heart of Paul as he was bowing his knees before the Father. So he branches out into a doxology in praise to God. How wonderful to have our knees affected in that way! I take it up by way of illustration and figuratively. It may be suggestive of our prayers, thoughts and exercises before the Father or before the Lord or in relation to the Holy Spirit. What favour to consider divine Persons whom we are enabled to approach and speak to.

Then there was further measurement: “He measured a thousand and caused me to pass through: the waters were to the loins”. Think of the increasing depth that Ezekiel was helped to go forward into. I love to think of John the apostle in regard of that. “To him who loves us”, Rev 1: 5. You read John's gospel, and you get a wonderful impression of John having a depth of understanding of the love of Christ, and the way that divine love had come out into such blessed expression in the One upon whose bosom he lay. Think of the waters in effect reaching to his loins. His affections were brought into the wonderful flow of divine love. He speaks as a man in the enjoyment of it: “To him who loves us”. He was sustained in the flow and consciousness of that wonderful love. It is a love that has washed us from our sins; I trust we can all say that we have been washed from our sins in His precious blood. If you have not made a start in the wonderful course of the flow of things to be enjoyed, may you be deeply exercised to resolve that difficulty and have it put right. Oh to grow in the appreciation of the love that has secured us. “To him who loves us”: a love from which nothing can separate us. How wonderful to be held in the power of that love, held in the hands of the Lord Jesus. I have often

thought of the reference in the Song of Songs: "His hands gold rings, set with the chrysolite", chap 5: 14. Think of being encircled by the mighty power of the Lord's love. The love expressed in His hands holding us so firmly forever: "To him who loves us".

But he went on further still in this progress. "He measured a thousand: it was a river that I could not pass through, for the waters were risen". You might say, 'Well, Ezekiel had you then just to turn back?'. No, that is not what Ezekiel said. He said, "waters to swim in". What a wonderful thought that is: "waters to swim in", sustained in the enjoyment of the fulness of the flow. Would God ever say to us, 'There is a limitation here and restrictions must be imposed'? There was no sense of that in the way that Ezekiel was led on. He reached this point of fulness in what the river was conveying as coming out from the house and came to waters to swim in. I believe it shows how divine Persons would be desirous of leading us on into the fulness of all that can be enjoyed. I am not in any way suggesting that we as creatures can enter into what is infinite in greatness. That exclusively belongs to God, but all that has been revealed and expressed of God, which the outflow of the river would suggest, is there for our enjoyment in fullest measure; waters to swim in.

Oh to be able to swim in the fulness of all that is to be enjoyed. I do not wish to be careless in my language but he would not just be floating there in the depths. He would be enabled to swim! He was in spiritual energy, exploring the fulness of all that was conveyed in the depth of the river at this point. I use these applications, as I have no doubt the prophet would have done so on God's behalf, to seek to stimulate our desire to go in, in fullest measure, for all that is to be enjoyed.

Lastly, I wanted to make a reference to Onesimus. Clearly there was progress in the life of Onesimus. He fled as a runaway slave from Philemon but he was returned, not just as a bondman. Paul says, "not any longer as a bondman, but above a bondman, a beloved brother". Think of Paul, as it were, presenting to Philemon the progress that he was able to measure. He would in effect say to Philemon, 'Well, he went away as an unfaithful bondman but now he is coming back, and not just as a bondman but above a bondman, a beloved brother', someone to be really valued. There was a work of God in his soul that was not there before when he went away. Now he was coming back to Philemon to be taken into Philemon's care and household again: to be

received as a brother. It may be he would again resume some bondman service before Philemon, but he had this additional growth and evidence about him that he was there as a brother, one with whom fellowship could be enjoyed. Paul says, “above a bondman, a beloved brother, specially to me, and how much rather to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord”; beautiful language.

Well, I think the brethren will clearly discern my exercise that as before the Lord there might be true and steady progress found with us in view of the delight of the Lord's own heart. I come back to this point of things being measurable. We do not only want to be concerned with generalities and apparently being in the right place and in the right circumstances where we enjoy fellowship among the saints. These things are all important and clearly to be valued and to be preserved; but then is there real evidence of spiritual growth and advancement with me in relation to true stature before the Lord? I think that is looked for; it is an Ephesian thought. It says in Ephesians, “until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ”, chap 4: 13. He adds, “in order that we may be no longer babes”, v 14. No longer babes: measurable progress reaching out to full growth in relation to Christ.

Well, may the Lord encourage our hearts and strengthen us to go on as taking up these exercises in earnest supplication before Himself, and availing ourselves of the resource in the Spirit to ensure that they should be fulfilled to His glory.

Grangemouth

20th January 2018

THE GLORY OF THE LORD JESUS

A Barrie Brown

Isaiah 9: 6

I have been carrying this verse for a little while, particularly in relation to the glories of the Lord Jesus. I thought it might be for our encouragement to consider the verse briefly, and to bring the application to the present time. Soon the time will come when the Lord Jesus will be received by the remnant of Israel and what a transformation will take place. It says at the beginning of John, when the Lord Jesus came in, "He came to his own, and his own received him not", chap 1: 11. We know there were some that did receive Him, but this scripture says, "unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given", and I think this applies to ourselves as believers, the Christian 'us'. Think of the wonder of the Lord Jesus coming in; the language is choice, "unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given". Think of the dignity of that! God said, "Thou art my Son; / this day have begotten thee", (Ps 2: 7); the Lord's sonship although foreknown, is presented in Scripture as belonging to the Lord Jesus in manhood.

I am just affected by this second clause of the verse; "and the government shall be upon his shoulder". We recently had a prayer meeting where the brethren were very exercised that we should continue to be able to gather, and we besought the blessed God Himself as to the government. One of the things at the present time that has struck me is that that my prayers should be in earnest, and I should mean what I say. And I really felt the power in that meeting; we really besought that we should be able to gather, and I think the way was kept open to us at that time in God's mercy. I have been thinking a little about the government at the moment, God being over all, but divine government is indirect; I suppose it is direct in relation to the saints and the assembly, but God is behind the scenes at the present time, and, in principle, secular government is of God. Another lesson at the present time is that, while we rightly feel some of the restrictions that are put upon us, the whole matter is certainly for my education. For example, I seek to learn to understand Romans 13 where Paul says: "Let every soul be subject to the authorities that are above him. For there is no authority except from God" (v 1), and "For rulers are not a terror to a good work", (v 3), and so on. The Lord Himself said to Pilate, "Thou hadst no authority whatever against me if it were not given to thee from above", John 19: 11. All this would encourage us to pray for

the government. We might have our own opinion about things, but I think there is blessing in acknowledging and accepting government as set up by God. It might perhaps be of men, and all their failings and all these things; but then I was affected by this, a time soon to come: “the government shall be upon his shoulder”.

We do not need to look too far to consider who the “his” is; this is referring to the millennial day when government will be taken up directly by Christ, when righteousness will reign. What a wonderful time it will be; the Lord Jesus will deal with all the problems and trials of the present time. I carry an impression as to the millennial day; no doubt there is power in it, but I do not think in that sense there is effort; the power of the Person of the Lord Jesus is able to deal with all these things. We know that before it there will be a terrible time, spoken of as Jacob's trouble, and tribulation coming soon upon this earth, and that would make us urgent in season and out of season in relation to our fellow men. But “the government shall be upon his shoulder”. I am sure the brethren remember that reference to the lost sheep that went astray, and the Lord Jesus says, in the parable, the sheep is found and put upon His *shoulders* (Luke 15: 5), so that when it comes to dealing with a soul all the strength and love of the Lord Jesus is involved. But one shoulder is enough here; how mighty the Lord Jesus is, and the government will soon be upon His shoulder!

Then we have the latter part of the verse, as to His Name, and again that must refer to the Lord Jesus. These titles that we know will be acknowledged in the millennium, particularly perhaps “Father of eternity”, but I think these are titles that we can know as to the Lord Jesus now, and we are often reminded that what will come out in the day of display is actually being worked out in secret here: in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, the knowledge of divine things. We can meditate by the Holy Spirit on some of these titles. It is one Name; it is very interesting. We can look at the individual titles that come into it.

The first one is, “Wonderful”, and I think we know the Lord Jesus is wonderful. He was wonderful when we first went to Him for refuge, to have Him as our Saviour; He was wonderful in His work on the cross and the shedding of His blood; wonderful as the One who gave the Holy Spirit. But He is still wonderful. The note refers to Judges 13: 18, where it says, “How is it that thou askest after my name, seeing it is wonderful?” It is a word that I perhaps have to stop myself using in relation to worldly things; I think really it is only applicable to divine

Persons and applicable to divine things, but is He not wonderful to our hearts?

That seems to be the first point to prove, dear brethren, because if we prove that He is wonderful we will want to know Him as “Counsellor”, One who can draw alongside us and help us, perhaps with a touch of His priesthood, a touch of His blessed headship. We read recently in James as to the wisdom that comes from above (chap 3: 17), which would be resident in Jesus. The song of Solomon tells us of His head being “as the finest gold”, chap 5: 11. So we prove these things. Think of Solomon as the great type; nothing will be too hard for the Lord in that millennial day. We can prove that now! There is no diminution; outward circumstances do not hinder us; there is no less access to this “Counsellor”, to Him to whom no man has given counsel. The Lord Jesus is never at a loss. We should not just approach this Counsellor when we are at a loss; we should habitually go to Him as the Counsellor.

Then there is that reference to “Mighty God”. I think that would help us to be kept in a spirit of reverence. When the Lord Jesus comes in on a Lord's day morning, as He does in His goodness, faithful to His promise; that is one of the first things, that we are in worship before Him as to the greatness of His Person.

And then He is “Father of Eternity”; the note is helpful, simply, 'Father of the age', note b. We do not want to confuse titles of divine Persons; this has been described as applying to the millennial day, as a man or a person might be described as the father of a country, giving character to that nation. Think of the character that the Lord Jesus will give to the millennial day. There is perhaps an illustration at the end of Luke. The Lord Jesus was at table with the two who had gone to Emmaüs, and He took the house-father's place, and blessed; so there are fatherly traits and characters of care and love that we see in the Lord Jesus, and I am sure we are proving that at the present time.

And then this final and lovely clause, “Prince of Peace”; again it will mark that millennial day. I suppose the Prince might refer to the greatness of His Person, and too to the administration of peace; I think it is to the One who is characterised by peace, the One who dispenses peace, the One who has “made peace by the blood of his cross”, Col 1: 20. So these things will come out in a public way, acknowledged and wondered at by all those who believe, and wondered at by all, but I just felt that at this time when things perhaps seem very restricted when you

look at a verse like this you see how wonderfully unrestricted divine things are.

Then you have, “Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end” (v 7); the One who came in, “unto us a child is born”: “Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end”. In a sense the millennial scene then merges into the eternal day when God will be all in all.

Maybe these few thoughts as to the Lord Jesus and His greatness will be for our encouragement. We had in the hymn, hymn 412, that the blessed Spirit loves to bring these things of Jesus to us. May we just be set forward and to look into this name of the blessed Lord Jesus.

May it be so for His Name's sake.

THE SERVICE OF THE SPIRIT

Rodney Brown

Genesis 1: 2; 8: 6-12

Luke 3: 21-22

Song of Songs 2: 12

The hymn that we started with (No 412) confirmed the few thoughts that I had in my mind. This scripture in Genesis 1 was referred to in one of our readings recently, and reference was made to the Holy Spirit hovering being the same word that comes in in Deuteronomy as to the eagle stirring up her nest, chap 32: 11. I found that helpful. What it suggests to me is the ceaseless interest that the Holy Spirit has in what is available on the earth in which divine Persons can rest. At this point in Genesis the earth is waste and empty. The Spirit of God hovering might suggest affection and anticipation of what would be brought about on the earth. Anything that comes about for the divine pleasure depends on the Spirit of God operating, as He loves to do, to draw our attention to Christ and to bring about some answer for the heart of God.

The scripture in Genesis 8 relates to Noah in the ark and the new earth about to appear, the cleansed earth. The dove could not find any place to rest; there was nothing here except death; she goes forth ceaselessly, seeking something that answers to what Noah was looking for. The thought of affection and the relationship between Noah and the dove is evident in this passage, "he put forth his hand, and took her, and brought her to him into the ark". We see a suggestion of the consonance between divine Persons and the way that the Spirit operates selflessly in order to bring about what is for the divine pleasure. Then there is reference to the dove at eventide, speaking of the way in which the Spirit operates and works tirelessly. It is a full day's work; eventide suggests that. It is like this dispensation, in which the Spirit has worked ceaselessly and unselfishly, and then at the end of it there is a glorious result and this evidence of life, "an olive-leaf plucked off". It is not something floating on the surface of the water, but evidence of new life. The olive-leaf would suggest to Noah that the waters had become low, and then there was another seven days, another complete period, and the dove could go out and not return. Think of the way that the Spirit has come of His own volition in an unselfish way to draw hearts to Christ but too, to mark Christ out.

That is what we have in Luke 3; there is no hovering as there might be when He looks for something from us, but there is a perfect point of complacency here that the Spirit can rest on, He “descended in a bodily form as a dove upon him”. Think of the complacency here, the three Persons of the Godhead, as is often remarked, coming together to a point on earth when the Lord Jesus was here; and the Holy Spirit can descend and abide on Him, and a voice came out of heaven, “*Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight*”. That voice is still sounding out; here it is personal to the Lord, but elsewhere it is, “This is my beloved Son”, Matt 3: 17. We were reminded of it in the hymn that was read at the outset: how the Spirit loves to draw our attention to Christ. Heaven's delight centres on Him, the Spirit operates in order that our delight should too. He loves to bring out these features that are so pleasurable to heaven, but we come into the benefit; we share heaven's appreciation of this blessed One.

We are very favoured in that sense to be in the environment where “the voice of the turtle dove is heard”. We might take it for granted, but that is so. The voice of the turtle dove is heard, the time of singing is come: this might speak to us particularly of the service of praise when the Spirit is operating, but then the voice of the turtle dove is characteristically heard in the land. It is where you expect that voice to be heard and it is a particularly sweet note and it results in what is pleasurable. But then in all this tireless service and the detail of it and all the perfection of the service let us not forget that there is what is proper to the Holy Spirit Himself; as was mentioned in prayer, it is right to worship Him as we do. We think of that particularly in the service of God, and I am tested as to what I can say to the Spirit by way of worship in the service. We are very favoured to have light as to who the Spirit is, and it is only right and proper that we should acknowledge Him and respond to Him. While we benefit from His service He should be acknowledged and answered to.

May these thoughts be for our encouragement.

THE LOVE OF THE SPIRIT

David A Brown

Romans 5: 5

Acts 20: 36-38

2 Corinthians 13: 14

I have been encouraged to say a few words after the hymn that we commenced our occasion with (No 412) and the previous words given. There was a question asked in the reading a few weeks ago why there are so few references in the Bible to the love of the Spirit. I just thought after what our brother has said in his word that the love of the Spirit would lie behind all the activities of the Holy Spirit, from Genesis chapter 1: 2, "and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters", to Revelation 22: 17: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come". I think we can say that the love of the Spirit is seen throughout scripture.

I was thinking too about the Lord Jesus speaking to His disciples in John's gospel about "another Comforter" (chap 14: 16); this would mean that the character of love that the Lord Jesus had for His own was going to be continued by and in the Holy Spirit; the love that was in the heart of the Lord Jesus continued now in the Holy Spirit. He would serve us individually, and He would serve us collectively. How wonderful it is to get a fresh touch in our souls that the love of divine Persons lies behind all their gracious activities. So I have been thinking a little about the love of the Spirit.

I read in Romans: this is one of the initial matters that the believer would arrive at and enjoy in his soul, the love of God being "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" Rom 5: 5. Think of the joy of the Holy Spirit, and indeed His own love involved in the shedding abroad of the love of God. I love that term, shedding abroad, as if there is to be no dark part with us. There is certainly no reservation with divine Persons in relation to their love for us, and how wonderful it would be if there was that reciprocated with us. I was also thinking about the reference in Romans 15: "But I beseech you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in prayers for me to God; that I may be saved from those that do not believe in Judæa; and that my ministry which I have for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints", v 30, 31. It is as if Paul is calling on the saints to support him in his service and in that way mutuality is arrived at in what was requested by Paul in these

saints in Rome, where we understand Paul would meet death. He was beseeching them “by the love of the Spirit”; how gracious that is, and you get the impression as you go on to chapter 16 that the love of the Spirit really runs throughout that chapter. How wonderful it is that our relations together are based on our knowledge of the Lord Jesus and of our blessings from God. The love of the Spirit suggests the feeling side that our brother has referred to, and His love is involved in bringing these wonderful divine thoughts of the Lord Jesus from heaven into our minds. It is because the Spirit loves us; and His desire is that we might grow in divine things and our knowledge of divine Persons, as He is intimately aware and intimately knowledgeable of the desires of the Lord Jesus and of the Father Himself.

I was wondering how the love of the Spirit would be seen, and in that connection was thinking of Paul's ministry to the saints at Ephesus. It is very wonderful that the account in chapter 20 of Acts begins with Paul embracing the disciples, and ends with his own brethren embracing him: “And having said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore; and falling upon the neck of Paul they ardently kissed him, specially pained by the word which he had said, that they would no more see his face” Acts 20: 36-38. I would like to link on with what has been said already that, in these times of restriction, I believe more and more the love, confidence and mutuality that is amongst the brethren is based on the Spirit's operations and is even more pronounced. We are breaking bread in our homes, and yet when we have come together there has been an immediate linking on with one another in our spirits and in our affections; the love of the Spirit lies behind these things. I think it is the working out mutually and in a horizontal way of what we receive from our Head in heaven, and the blessings that we receive from God Himself.

So here was Paul, and what did he have for these Ephesian saints? He says for instance, “do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (Eph 4: 30); a warning to and for us. I feel that very much in my own life that I might grieve Him; it is a very sensitive matter. Paul had staked his own neck for many brethren, and here these brethren were falling upon his neck. The love of the Spirit, I believe, was underpinning what was happening at this time of Paul's departure from Ephesus. The love of the Spirit in a full way lies behind the Acts of the Apostles for, as we have been taught, it could be retitled the Acts of the Holy Spirit. This gives a special hue to what I am seeking to bring before the brethren, the love of

the Spirit in operation, and what lay behind these affections that Paul had for the brethren and the brethren had for Paul.

We then have the thought of the fellowship of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 13: 14, and what it would mean. It is a wonderful benediction at the end of Paul's ministry to the Corinthian saints. Certain things had been reached through his ministry and he says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" - so we need grace and love in operation - "and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all". I would like to know more of what the fellowship of the Spirit is and means. Paul addressing the Philippian saints says, "if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and compassions", chap 2: 1. That does not mean to say that the fellowship of the Spirit was lacking; I think he was calling on these dear saints to make use of the divine resources available to them and in their relations together. These "bowels and compassions" are things that are in operation amongst the saints now: how wonderful it is therefore that what we have had tonight calls forth a response in our hearts as prompted by the Holy Spirit to give God the greater glory.

The operation of the body and the functioning of the assembly is underpinned by the love of the Holy Spirit. I would like to know more of it; I would like to have in my heart a greater understanding of the fulness of what there is in the Holy Spirit; He is God in His own Person. How wonderful that we have been brought to the realisation and understanding of the importance of the Spirit's part in the Godhead. He is one with the Father and the Son as One in the hallowed Trinity, and that is why we worship Him. We are very much tested as to what we can say as to the Person of the Holy Spirit Himself. I just thought of this wonderful feature, the characteristic of the Holy Spirit that I have in mind is love. May we enjoy it more and may we live in the sunshine and blessedness of it.

For the Lord's name's sake.

Words in a meeting for ministry in Linlithgow

3rd December 2020

TWO NIGHT SCENES

Alex G Mair

Daniel 5: 1-6, 13-31

Acts 16: 22-34

My attention was drawn to a public figure who was diagnosed positive with Covid 19: the first question he had asked was, 'Will I die?'. It struck me. Death is upon every man; death is something that people are afraid of. There was a great out-spoken atheist who was dying and as he was getting weaker he was getting more fretful. His friends who were surrounding his death bed said to him, 'Come, come, do not lose heart. You have lived your whole life as an atheist you can face death this way'. And he said, 'It is not death I am afraid of; it is the hereafter'. Scripture says, "it is the portion of men once to die, and after this judgment", Heb. 9: 27.

The two scenes that I have read of are very similar. Both are night scenes; both men in them, Belshazzar and the jailor, were heathens. They had no idea what God was requiring. Belshazzar should have known, but he ignored it. What God in His grace drew to the attention of both of them was the course they were on. One received the blessing; one did not receive the blessing - he was totally indifferent. Both those men were convicted; conviction is not enough. You have to do with the Lord Jesus as to the matter of your sins and as to your eternal welfare. It may be that there is someone listening behind the doors. That sometimes happens, so I will speak to the unbeliever. Where will *you* spend eternity? There is one man here that we have read of and, as far as we can tell, he is going to spend eternity away from God. What an awful, awful position. It ends up that he was slain that night. The other received the word that came to him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved". That is the only way of salvation. Now he was a heathen man. The reason I say that is that he rejoiced having believed in God: he did not believe in God before. Now that you might say is a very extreme situation. Most persons in this country will accept that there is a God. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God", Ps 14: 1. There are people like that, but the gospel is presented to every kind of man. God has in mind your blessing and my blessing, but first I must make you aware of the seriousness of ignoring God's overtures of grace.

So I want to speak therefore about this king. He was very powerful; he thought he could do anything he wanted. That is man

away from God, energised, we might say, by Satan. He was one of Satan's dupes. You think of it. He made this great feast around himself and his greatness. Then he thought he would use the vessels from the house of God that were brought to Babylon when the people were taken into captivity. Not only was the man away from God but he was going to despise the very things that God had pleasure in. That is you and I, as away from God. God in his grace intervenes. You might say, 'Well, it was a pronouncement of judgment'. Yes, but God intervenes. If Belshazzar had been affected he would have fallen down and asked for forgiveness as happened to Nebuchadnezzar, who came to know that God was the God that ruled the kingdoms of men, Dan 4. This man, Belshazzar, should have known what happened to Nebuchadnezzar his father, but he was going to do everything that he could in his power to despise anything of God. That is the extremity that the enemy would drive man to.

But then there are the fingers of a man's hand, writing over against the candlestick on the plaster of the wall. Oh! you think of the clarity of it. Man uses this expression in his everyday language, 'the writing is on the wall'. Tonight, dear friend, the writing *is* on the wall: neglect the glad tidings at your peril. You cannot afford to say, 'I will leave it until tomorrow'; for you tomorrow may not be. That is the solemnity and urgency of the glad tidings. This man died that night and he apparently died unrepentant and away from God. But all the while, you see the grace of God in that there was a Daniel there. God has his messengers. And Daniel tells him it was that God that sent the fingers of that man's hand. Tonight, the gospel is going forth and the message is telling you of your condition away from God in order that you might turn to Christ, because the whole matter of your sins, and your state, can be met by the Lord Jesus. The gospel does not go forward presenting judgment; it is preached to present the love of God, and God's love is seen in this chapter in the way that Daniel is available to bring the truth of Belshazzar's sin to bear upon him.

The king tried to get the magicians and the wise men to interpret the writing. How often persons are deluded with what those wise men may say. How can an unconverted man unfold the greatness and glory of Christ, and the work that He has done? How can he? It is an impossibility. I always ask a clergyman, or a priest when I meet them, 'I want your confession; where do you stand regarding Christ?'. I asked a priest that question and he just looked at me, and I said, 'Well, I am a believer in the Lord Jesus'. Then he said, 'Yes, so am I. The blood of

Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses us from all sin'. So I said to him 'Well, you preach that on Lord's day - it is the gospel'. He said, 'Well it might not be too well accepted'. Oh! think of the awfulness of persons pulling back and not presenting the Saviour to sinners. The gospel has to be preached regardless of the opposition, regardless of anything and that is Daniel's position.

He draws attention to Belshazzar himself, because in verse 22 he says, "And **thou**, Belshazzar"; there is no missing the point. Tonight, God in His grace is presenting the glad tidings to *you* - not only to the person next to you, not your father, not your mother, not your brother, not your sister, but to you. It is presented to the individual. People like to be spoken to *en masse* because they can hide in the company. Adam did not like the thought of God speaking to him after he had sinned; he hid himself. He hid amongst the trees. But God singled him out; He says, "Where art thou?", Gen 3:9, 10. 'Thou' is the important matter in the glad tidings. Where do *you* stand regarding your salvation?

But then it says at the end of verse 23, "and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified". Have we ever considered that every breath that we draw is God-given? Elihu says,

If he only thought of himself, and gathered unto him his spirit
and his breath,
All flesh would expire together, and man would return to the
dust,

Job 34: 14,15.

God in His grace has not withdrawn His breath - it is still the day of grace at this very moment for you. I cannot speak for later, but today is the day of salvation. Paul announces that to the Corinthians, "now the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6: 2); do not leave it until tomorrow.

Let us have a look now at the writing that was on the wall. "MENE, God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it". Here is one of the greatest men in the world at that time, and God has overruled saying He has numbered his kingdom and finished it; He has just disposed of it. That is the God with whom we have to do. He is all powerful, omniscient; He sees everything; He knows everything. He knows what is in the heart of man; He knows everything about us. What He has set out regarding judgment He has set out in grace. But there is no recovery for this man; he was indifferent to it. God has alerted him, but he is totally indifferent as to it.

But then it goes on: "TEKEL, Thou art weighed in the balances". Oh, how do we measure up in the balances? These are not the balances of man: this is the balance of God: It is a righteous balance, and where do you stand? It is not a case of all your good deeds against all your bad deeds - that is a delusion of the devil and men try good works and try to live a good life and hope to get to heaven. Dear friend, it cost God too much to allow anything of that order. Romans 8: 32 tells us, "He who, yea, has not spared his own Son...". Indeed, anything that you may seek to do would only spoil it; the work of Christ is complete and is entirely satisfactory to God - that is the value of the glad tidings. It is a completed work and God is entirely satisfied.

Now someone might ask, 'How is God entirely satisfied'? Well, there was One, the Lord Jesus, who knew not sin. We sometimes sing,

God come down, a heavenly stranger, (Hymn 112).

He took up manhood's condition (sin apart) in order to draw near to man, and not only draw near to man but to take up all the liabilities that lay upon man and discharge them before a righteous and holy God. And He has done it. How has He done it? He went to the cross. You think of the cost to the Lord Jesus. He says, "I lay down my life that I may take it again... I have received this commandment of my Father", John 10: 17,18. That is how He has done it. He has carried everything out on the basis of obedience. Over against man's disobedience there is the obedience of the Lord Jesus to the will of God. What a glorious Person He is; never was the like seen on this earth. And that Man had to die on the tree; He had to suffer. What He suffered at the hands of men! But think of what He had to suffer at the hands of a holy and righteous God in order that sins might be dealt with. What suffering! We cannot fathom the greatness of that work undertaken by the Lord Jesus, when "the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53: 6) was put upon Him and He bore it. He took my place. Can you say that? Did he take your place there? It is open for all, but the blessing is not for all: it is only for those that believe. The Lord Jesus taking my place there on the cross, and bearing my sins, is one of the very great blessings in the glad tidings.

Now in the last part is, "PERES, Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians". That is, that it is given to another. Later on it says that that night Belshazzar the king was slain; as far as we can see, he was totally indifferent to God's word. Had he turned and pleaded for mercy God would have seen that Daniel was there to be able to help him, but when he heard the message, he was totally

indifferent.

Now we get another night scene in the Acts. Here it is in a jail. Consider what kind of man this jailor would have been. Philippi was the centre of the commercial world at that time, so he would have to deal with robbers, thieves, murderers, crooked men, persons that would cheat, everything evil. He would probably have been a brutal type of person. Paul and Silas, their backs bleeding, were in this jailor's inner prison, their feet in the stocks; and they were praising God with singing. It is interesting that the prisoners listened to them. The prisoners listening were affected by those two men, so that when the earthquake came they did not run. They were held by the power of what Paul and Silas were singing about. With the earthquake you find the jailor at his extremity. Like Belshazzar, the jailor was trembling, but he was really convicted. How was he convicted? There was this voice coming from the deep recesses of that prison, "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here". How did Paul know that he had drawn a sword and was going to kill himself in the middle of the night, the blackness of night? The Spirit of God uses the servant Paul to give that word for that man. It is the same God that sent forth the fingers of a man's hand to bring conviction to Belshazzar. The jailor is not indifferent to God's message. It says he called for lights and rushing in fell down trembling before Paul and Silas, and led them out, saying, "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?". Have you ever asked that question? How do I come into the good of salvation? It is only by way of a transaction with the Lord Jesus. Each one, each believer, has had to do with the Lord Jesus. In 2 Timothy 2 there is the first side of the seal, "The Lord knows those that are his", v 19. Every one that is a believer has had to do personally with the Lord Jesus. What about you?

Paul says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved". It was not exactly, 'believe on Jesus'; that would be important, but "believe on the Lord Jesus". He is using the assembly title in order that there might be something secured for the pleasure of God and the satisfaction for the heart of Christ. So he says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved". It was not only the side of relief for the jailor but it was the clearance of all the past history, and he is brought into blessing. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from *all* sin. The whole matter is ended and God is entirely satisfied, and He can come out in such wondrous blessing. Paul and Silas say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house. And they spoke to him the word of the Lord". And that is very important. The jailor is now

coming under a different authority: what a wonderful thing. He is no longer a man away from God, he is no longer a man like that, he is coming under the authority of the Lord. Peter's first preaching concludes, "God has made him, this Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ", Acts 2: 36. That is, He is there in glory as having satisfied every matter for God, and He is there as the One that we are to come into subjection to.

Now, just before I close, I want to mention the epistle to Philippians. You find that when Paul writes to the saints at Philippi he does not mention the jailor, nor does he mention Lydia: it would not be in keeping with that epistle. He only mentions two sisters, exhorting them to be of the same mind in the Lord, and the brother who was local there who had been very ill. There is something in that, because what the jailor was and what Lydia was before they were converted has been removed in the death of Christ. They are now among the saints in Philippi. If you read in the beginning of Philippians, the apostle mentions his remembrance of them from the first day, and this section of scripture in the Acts where we have read was that first day. This was the gospel going into Europe. There was Lydia and the jailor and his house among the saints there. We can see from the epistle what a good locality Philippi would have been. This is the model, we might say, for every gospel preaching - that persons are converted and brought into the enjoyment of the assembly. So you too might be able to praise God with singing, even in difficult circumstances.

What a wonderful matter that God has His own object in your blessing. Your blessing is almost incidental, although very necessary. God is looking for His own pleasure, as we touched this morning: men in sonship. What an experience. Sonship is one of God's great gifts; it is for the heart of God. Our pleasure is involved in it, but this is what is secured for God and it is secured in persons like the jailor, through the work of Christ. What a work it has been. The Lord Jesus went into death, "that the death of the cross", Phil 2: 8. His blood was shed; He was buried and He has come out of death; He was raised by the glory of the Father, and He is installed in glory! God is entirely satisfied with Jesus and His work. What about you? Are you satisfied with Jesus?

May it be so for His Name's sake.

GRIMSBY

4th October 2020

GOD'S ANSWER FOR MAN

David A Barlow

Jeremiah 30: 12-13

Hebrews 2: 14-15

Galatians 4: 4-7

John 16: 13-14

1 John 4: 8 ("God is love")

It struck me earlier this week how these two verses in Jeremiah really show the terrible condition man - which includes you and me - finds himself in, as under the power of sin. But the first thing I would like to say to you is this, that despite all that you are, God looks upon you with compassion. God looks upon man with compassion. "Thy bruise is incurable, thy wound is grievous. There is none to plead thy cause, to bind up thy wound; thou hast no healing medicines". But what is also terrible about the situation is that many people do not even know that this is their condition. Man, as made by God, is an intelligent being. In his own mind, he could point out many things he has accomplished - and so he has; there are many impressive inventions and achievements that man would attribute to himself. But the fundamental point of all that is that, whatever man sets his mind to do, it will always, without fail, be the route that leads him away from God, and thus away from the knowledge of what he is before God - without fail. Even in the religious sphere of things, you see these great buildings men have built - great churches or synagogues or mosques or whatever it is, which make much of the builder, but take him away from God.

Take, for example, man's reasonings, his deductions in science, theories that would attempt to explain a world without God. I was affected by what a government minister said recently; he said to the country, 'Trust in the science'. What a word that is: 'Trust in the science'. How men, even in such a time of extremity as they are in today, would put their trust in their own intelligence, and not trust in God. "Thy bruise is incurable, thy wound is grievous". The mark of sin, how terrible it is, but do you recognise it as such? Or can you be somewhat blasé about it? How often we are tempted to dabble in things that are for our destruction and pursue the things of this world that are passing. We have a hymn that says;

The world to doom is passing,
And you passing too.

(Hymn 220)

And that can be written across the whole world. Whatever exercise or pursuit man wants to find, that is the banner above it

The world to doom is passing,
And you are passing too.

Scripture is clear; it says here, "There is none to plead thy cause"; elsewhere the psalmist could say,

For the redemption of their soul is costly, and must be given up forever Ps 49: 8.

And another scripture says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and incurable", Jer 17: 9. There is no hope looking to fellow men, beloved, and there is no way that you could somehow be seen as guiltless, because the mark of sin is upon you, as it is upon me; it is there. It says, "none to plead thy cause" and, "thou hast no healing medicines". There is no way of redeeming oneself, no way of curing oneself.

But the wonderful truth of the gospel is, that the heart of God is love. And God is a compassionate God; He is not willing the death of the sinner. So, my desire in the gospel is to draw out from these four other scriptures how God, in the fulness of who He is, has moved from His side to present a way of salvation. It is a wonderful truth: God has moved, and He has moved to secure you and me for Himself. We had an impression this morning, as the Lord Himself took us up into the Father's presence, having our part with the many myriads that can answer to the Father's heart in Christ, that there was no other way to secure such a response. The Father's way was perfect. The way He moved, the way the Lord moved, the way the blessed Holy Spirit moves, is absolutely perfect for your blessing and mine, and to secure a wonderful, glorious response for the heart of God.

So let us move on to Hebrews, where it speaks of the movements of the Lord Himself. "Since therefore the children partake of blood and flesh, he also, in like manner, took part in the same". Think of the wonder of that, beloved. He was the Creator of the universe, and He came into the world which He had created - the wonder of the stoop into manhood. He took part in blood and flesh. Man had fallen from God; you and I have been corrupted in our sin against God; He took part in blood and flesh; He humbled himself. Another scripture that helps open this out is in Philippians: He "did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God", chap 2: 6. Because of who He is, the Lord "did not esteem it an object of rapine", or robbery, "to be on an

equality with God; but emptied Himself, taking a bondman's form, taking his place in the likeness of men; and having been found in figure as a man, humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross", v 6-8. What a stoop, beloved, what a stoop into manhood! He "took part in the same, that through death he might annul him who has the might of death, that is, the devil". The Lord Himself came in, expressing so fully and perfectly the love and compassion of God. There is another hymn that comes to mind in that regard:

The Lord who healed the leper
Is looking on thee now;
And, though thy case discerning,
No frown is on His brow. (Hymn 363)

Think of the look of the Lord, even now. As we sit here in the gospel preaching, is there someone here who yet still has the mark of sin upon them? Someone who yet still does not know the love of the Saviour, who has not accepted Him despite His appeal again and again? Does He now look upon you with a frown because you have not yet accepted Him? No, not with a frown -

Though thy case discerning,
No frown is on His brow.

What a Lord we have to do with, One that came into this scene, stooped into manhood, and stooped into death. The scripture says, that He "might set free all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage". What power death has on the human race - how men fear it; how every effort of man, even today, is to evade it. As the world is in the midst of a pandemic, all men's efforts are set to preserve and extend the life of man for as long as possible, but still evidence of the power of death can be seen all around; there is a fear of it. Beloved, the Lord came into this scene to break us free from that bondage of death, by going into death itself, by breaking its power. What a deliverance that is. What a deliverance for the believer. I have often been impressed that the Lord has come in to save us from sin in three ways: He has saved us from sin's penalty, that is, death; He can save us from sin's power; and, in a coming day, He will save us from sin's presence entirely. How full that is - sin's penalty, sin's power, and sin's presence. That is the offer of the gospel, Will you accept Him as your Saviour?

Well, now I would like to move on to speak about what the Father has done. We have spoken of the Lord coming into manhood. He took up that condition. It says, "Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do, O God, thy will", Heb 10: 7. He came and took up a place in a bondman's form, He took that place Himself, He stooped into manhood. But now I would like to speak of the Father's love. The Father, beloved, loved you this much, that He sent His Son into the world (John 3: 17): His Son, the One who, as He grew up, entirely delighted the heart of the Father. We have the Father's testimony as to that several times in the gospels. "*Thou* art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight", Mark 1: 11. What joy and delight the Father had in His only beloved Son as here upon the earth - the One who fully answered to all that He sought from man. How perfect the Lord was in every way. How the communion between the Lord and the Father was entirely unbroken as He walked here; it is beautiful to contemplate. And yet what does the scripture say? - "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, come of woman, come under law, that he might redeem those under law" - "might redeem them": what did that involve? It involved that God, the Father, sent His Son to die, to be a propitiation for our sins. And the scripture goes on to say, "not for ours alone, but also for the whole world", 1 John 2: 2. The gospel is available to all. We have elsewhere that God does not have pleasure in the death of the wicked, Ezek 33: 11. And, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal", John 3: 16. What a God we have to do with, who sent His Son into the world, who made His Son an offering for sin. It was because of His love for you that He sent His Son as the sacrifice. And the Lord Himself, "bore our **sins** in His body on the tree" (1 Pet 2: 24); and a holy and righteous God, "has condemned **sin** in the flesh", Rom 8: 3. Who could speak of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in that moment, beloved? And who could speak of the feelings of God too at that moment, when His Son was made an offering for sin, all so that there would be a way of salvation open to you. What love was displayed by the heart of God. Have you availed yourself of what that love has provided? I would like to be sure that everyone here knows the Lord as their Saviour; but God would give us a fresh impression of the greatness of His love, as we contemplate the way He has moved.

But the gospel does not end there: not only are we to be saved, but Galatians goes on to say, "that we might receive sonship". That is, that we have another life, on the other side of death, clothed in the worth

of Christ, as sons before the Father - think of that. There is no greater love than the love the Father has for His Son, and that same love of the Father is upon you as a believer. He loves you that way. He sees you in His beloved Son, and He would have you in sonship, free in His house, at liberty there. That is why we speak of the full gospel. It is not only to be saved from sins; it is not only a matter of removing everything that was for my condemnation. The Father has more in mind: He desires to have sons before Him in glory. What a difference from the incurable heart; what a difference from the bruise and the wound that we read of in our first scripture. The Father would have you with Him as sons, and not only that: what else has the Father done? It goes on to say, "God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts". It is not only that He would have us there as sons, but He would have us to be in the conscious knowledge that we are sons too. So He "has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father". Beloved, the wonderful gift of the precious Holy Spirit, the Father has sent into our hearts so that we can answer to the Father's heart in the sphere He would have us to be. The wonderful fulness of the gospel; how glorious it is! The heart of God is love. Yea, not only are we sons before God, in Christ, but He has sent forth His Holy Spirit, His magnificent, His wonderful free gift; into our hearts.

Now I would like to say a little about what the Holy Spirit does, which we have here in John's gospel. "But when *he* is come, the Spirit of truth, he shall guide you into all the truth". There are a few scriptures that can be read regarding the service of the Holy Spirit, and the reason I chose this one was because recently I was listening to old recordings of the preaching, and it affected me how one preacher always emphasised the Holy Spirit as being a guide. That is what I would like to draw attention to now: "when *he* is come", and we can say now that He has come, "the Spirit of truth, he shall guide you into all the truth". Not only is it that we can know power of the Holy Spirit, in being in the Father's presence, and conscious of our place in sonship there, but He is also a guide for us here, One that will guide us into all the truth. Being guided into all the truth is not about an extensive knowledge of the ministry - it is not exactly that we need to know our scriptures: to be guided into "all the truth", is being dependent on the Holy Spirit. And the wonderful thing about it is, and this is true of all God's gifts, it is available to every one of the Lord's own. Think of that, beloved. The same guide to those great servants of God that have gone before, that have contributed to the great wealth of ministry that we have today, that same

guide is available to the simplest, youngest believer; to be proved. You can prove His power; He shall guide you into all the truth. It is available to the youngest as much as it is available to the oldest person in this room - "he shall guide you into all the truth". How do we get that guidance? Ask for His help; ask for it. Do you know the power of the Holy Spirit? He would like to guide you; He would like to show you the things of Jesus Christ. He would like to show you more about the blessed One whose company you are going to enjoy eternally.

And so, the Lord says, "but whatsoever he shall hear, he shall speak; and he will announce to you what is coming". That is another thing, beloved. The Spirit, sent to indwell us, hears what goes on in heaven and tells us of it. How intimate that is. He hears the speaking of the Lord about you, and He hears the communications in heaven going on about you and He enters into them feelingly. And then, He would speak to you of them. He would draw your attention to Christ in a way that would guide you and help you here. That is the individual service of the Holy Spirit for you; He is a Friend who is here with you, sent to indwell you and to guide you. Maybe you do not understand a scripture, do not understand what it means. Just be simple and ask the Holy Spirit and He will guide you. He will guide you into all the truth. At the end of his gospel John finishes with this; he says, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they were written one by one, I suppose that not even the world itself would contain the books written", chap 21: 25. The world itself could not contain the books written, but the Holy Spirit can, as a divine Person. I have often thought what John is saying is that the Holy Scriptures, the canon of scripture, the word of God written down in testimony here, is complete. But there is so much more the Holy Spirit has to convey to those who would accept His guidance, to those who would subject themselves to Him. The Holy Spirit Himself would present glories of the Lord Jesus Christ to you, help you to understand the privilege of your place in sonship, and your glorious portion to be with the Lord forever. He is your guide, He is your faithful Friend. And scripture says He shall be with you forever. He is here with you in time; He will be with you eternally. Wonderful privilege, wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit - let us avail ourselves of that power the more.

Just to conclude, this final scripture, I feel, is a banner written over all that we have spoken of: "God is love". If you can bear with me, we will finish with a story. A number of years ago, there was a very serious coal mine disaster and many of the miners lost their lives. The

bishop at that time went to the mine entrance to try to comfort the sorrowing, the wives, and the sisters, and the mothers, of all those men that had died. Almost at a loss of what to say, he opened his Bible and a bookmark fell out, and on the bookmark, written in silk thread were the words we have just read, "God is love". On the one side the words were clear, and on the other was a tangled mess of silk threads. He felt that he was given his word for those dear sorrowing souls. He said, 'This disaster, with all its loss and sorrow that is unintelligible to you is like this bookmark,' and he showed them the back with all its tangled threads; 'but like everything in this life that we do not understand, it tells us God is love'. And he turned the bookmark over to show those words bold and clear. I just leave that word with you: in everything we know, whatever circumstances we are passing through, and the trials are very real, and in a way unheard of before now, in everything, absolutely everything, "God is love". That is a principle that governs the entire universe, and over all that has been accumulated for the eternal day, even all that has happened over this past year, God is love. Be sure of that. Accept His wonderful appeal of grace and mercy while you can. Come to know the Lord as your Saviour, go in more for the glory that is on offer, go in more for the wonderful blessings that God would have for you. He is entirely for you, the compassionate God, the One who loves you and has given His only Son for you.

May we all know it the more, for the Lord's Name sake.

Sunbury

10 January 2021