

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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A SAVIOUR WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD

David C Brown

Luke 2: 1-21

This is a wonderful passage; it is the best thing you are going to hear tonight: the word of God is read out, the Scriptures. The Son of God has come in. Perhaps the second best thing is the hymn you have just sung (Hymn 188), a spiritual man having gone over that thought and the wonder of it. I would seek to say a few words as to Christ, as to this wonderful event, the most wonderful thing that has happened in the history of mankind. That covers the whole event, the whole of that perfect and beautiful life that there was. Think of what was here; what is this that we are speaking about? God Himself has come in, to come near, to be with men. Matthew brings in that beautiful name for Jesus, "Emmanuel, God with us", Matt 1: 23. This is what we are seeing, "God with us". The hymn changes a little what is in Mr Darby's original poem, in which he says -

Come now and view that manger -
The Lord of glory see,
A houseless, homeless Stranger
In this poor world for thee - J N Darby 'Man of Sorrows'.

It is for you that He is here. Think of that One having come in. We view that manger; what a beautiful scene! We have spoken earlier today about the Lord Jesus coming into restriction. Think of that, God Himself, the Creator of the universe, the One who made all these worlds, who knows about them, who keeps them going, "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb 1: 3), and there He is - in a manger. That is a feeding trough for the cattle; that is what He was in. The world did not have a place for Him; it says, "there was no room for them". It has often been pointed out that it does not say there was no room in the inn, "no room for them". Is there room now? Is there anyone here who has a heart that does not have Jesus in it, who is prepared to give Him room today? Will you give Him room in your heart today? The world is still the same; it still has no room for Jesus. You could say it has less and less room for Jesus. Maybe it is a cause for a so-called celebration, but if you spoke of Him at that celebration, what would the world say? Do they want Him? No, the world does not want Him. He needs a room, He needs a place in this scene, and He needs that room to be in your heart, for your heart to be opened to make room

for Jesus. Is there anyone here who has not opened their heart to Jesus? He is calling; He is desiring; He wants that room today.

And if He has a place in your heart - and I know that He has a place in the hearts of very many here, how thankful we are for that.- does He have the first place? Does He have the first place? Our brother Mr John Gray of Saltcoats wrote the poem in which he speaks of the heart:

Except, Lord, the door of the throne-room's still closed
from My Heart, A Selection of Christian Verse

Is Christ in the throne room of your heart? Or have you given Him just a little bit of space in your heart, a little bit of space in your life, or a big bit, or almost all? Does He have control there? There was no room for Him when He came into this scene, and someone wrote about that, saying of this world,

And, as at first, still lodge Him in a manger.
Anonymous 16th Century

The world has not changed.

The background to all this in the chapter is very interesting because it speaks about this man Caesar Augustus, the ruler of the world at that time, probably one of the greatest men in history. He desired a census; he wanted to get a numbering of all that belonged to him, to show the greatness and the grandeur of his power. And the world is still the same, and its rulers are still the same; they want to accrue to themselves the fame and all that is attached to being a ruler. Augustus was, in the world's scene, a successful man; I think he said that he found Rome of brick and left it of marble. Think of that, there was a man who could do so much, could bring peace, could bring a kind of peace in this scene, or relative peace. And there are men on this scene, and there will be a man on this scene who will say, 'I am going to produce peace', and for a time it will be true. But all is to come down; all that pomp and glory is to come down, to be absolutely shrivelled into insignificance in comparison to the majesty and the glory of the One who is that Babe in the manger.

Has He eclipsed your view of other men? Has He eclipsed your view of what is great in this world? Because He must. Think of that, in His smallness, in His willingness to come into restriction, He has the features that the world does not value. We have already spoken of

these. Think of that, the wonderful, morally beautiful features that the world does not value, but God values; and the believer values. Have you come to get a true valuation of things, because we all have an attraction to Caesars of the world; there are powerful persons, and persons are attached to them, and persons are attracted to them. That is what is natural to us. Perhaps it is not rulers that attract you; there are other persons who may attract your view and your attention, and they become your heroes, and they are all going to be brought down in insignificance compared to the glory and the majesty of this One, who we see here, in restriction; there He is, a Child in a manger. Why is He there? It is God come in to come near to you. Why has God come in to come near to you? Because of your need. What need am I speaking about? Well, in one sense I could say, the need is your need to have a Saviour because you are a sinner. On the other side I would say, the need is to have a Man to satisfy your heart. He will do that; He will be that. He has come in, and cost what it might, He has secured blessing, salvation, redemption, and He came in for that purpose.

But not only that, He has come in to satisfy your heart. And nobody else will. Not only that, He will satisfy your heart eternally, not just for this time or this scene. How do we have a Man that is able to satisfy our hearts eternally? Because He satisfies God's heart. Think of God's heart as satisfied by this One. So we think of heaven's interest in this scene. What a marvellous time it was; these angels had honoured God, they had served God, from the time of their creation to this, and they served God without once wavering from the perfection of their service, because they are beings that have not fallen. They could not accomplish redemption for you, and they had never seen what they saw in this passage in Luke. They had never thought of the marvel of the fact that God would come in, and God would come in to bring in what there was for the accomplishment of His own pleasure. How wonderful that they should see Him; He "has appeared to angels" (1 Tim 3: 16), angels seeing their God for the first time, and here in the form of a Babe, and you can see how the whole of the heaven is opened up in acclaim. There was one angel here who had come down as a messenger, but the other angels were breaking forth in their jubilation, that God had come in in this way, to bring in what there is for His own pleasure, and to secure what is greater than He will have in angels, redeemed persons, persons who are attached to the Lord Jesus, persons whose hearts are satisfied by Him. I would not say that the angel's hearts are not satisfied by Him; I have no doubt they are, but what He is looking for is in man.

And because of His interest and His concern and His desire for man, God Himself has come in in Christ. The Son of God has come here; One who is God in His Person has come into this scene and into such smallness and restriction, so that He should be able to be a blessing to you. Of course, His incoming in itself did not bring in redemption; that required that way that He had to go; the way that began at the manger is the way that ended at the cross and it was inevitable that it should be so, and your blessing depended upon it entirely.

We see how blessed it was that He came in, walking in this scene, doing what was good, securing what was for divine pleasure; He broke down what was contrary. Hymn 189 speaks of it -

Disease, and death, and demon,
All fled before Thy word

All that affected mankind, and still affects mankind. What blessed scenes there were when the Lord Jesus was here; what joy it must have been for persons when disease or death or demon fled before Him. How blessed it was, but He has not in mind simply to relieve men, He has not to simply take away what there was that was affecting mankind immediately; He was going to go to the source and to the root of what it is, and that is a matter of sin and sins. So that the announcement is, "to-day a Saviour has been born to you in David's city, who is Christ the Lord".

What a range of glories belongs to this Person, but He is presented first to you as a Saviour; you need to know Him first in that way, as a Saviour. He is always a Saviour, not simply saving from disease and death and demon, however wonderful and blessed that is, but saving you from your sins, saving you from judgment, the judgment of God upon sin, saving you from an eternity away from God. That is what He has come in to be, a Saviour to the uttermost, a Saviour from all that might distract you, take away from God. But He needs to be in your heart. I have asked about your heart; your heart remains the question and the issue. This scene here has affected the sentiment of many, and still affects the sentiment of many in the world. It gives some good feelings in relation to God's thoughts and so on without it affecting their heart, but the issue is your heart, and the sin that is in your heart, and because you act as a sinner. A Man has come in in glory and beauty and perfection, as a contrast to a whole world and scene which requires a Saviour because the sin in the heart of man has acted so that they go forward as sinners, and act as sinners.

Have you thought that the first child born grew up to be a murderer? It has characterised this scene, murder, murder that ended up, that culminated in the murder of this blessed One, this Saviour. It is man that is responsible, and you are responsible as a sinner, because it is your sins that brought Him to the cross; it is your sins. In part at least, each one of us has been a rejecter of Jesus - thank God for everyone where the grace of God has broken them down so that they have trusted in Jesus and have given Him a place in their heart - but still, it remains true that there is in your heart what is against Jesus, what is contrary to Him, because you want your own will, you want your own way. Think of Jesus in perfection, perfection even as a Babe here in the manger. Mr A J Gardiner said about Him, 'at every stage of human growth, God had perfection in Jesus',. He was a perfect babe, a perfect boy, a perfect teenager. What age are you? Up to that age of thirty three and a half you can think of Him; there was a day when Jesus was the same age as you today. Then He was cut off in the midst of His days (Ps 102: 24), of course. Have you thought of that, that there was a day when Jesus was your age? Those who are younger: there He was in perfection on that day, as a child, as a boy, as a teenager, as a young man. Then cut off, in the midst of His days. But perfection in every day. And as for ourselves, what have we been? From a babe onward, from the very smallest we were, that activity of will, self-will, was in us.

What is sin? A different principle from anything whatever that was acting in Jesus in His life: "in him sin is not", 1 John 3: 5. That principle is in you and it is in me and it causes us to act as sinners, and it causes us to act in a way that is contrary to God and it causes us to have a desperate, a dire need of a Saviour. And there He is; God says, 'I see your need, I see the need of mankind, I am going to provide for it'. Had they asked for a Saviour? I do not know exactly whether they had, but He says 'I am going to give you one': "a Saviour ... who is Christ the Lord". He is One whom God can anoint, One of whom God can express the fullness of His approval. But if He is to be a Saviour, He has got to take the issue that is on you and on me and bear the sins; He is not going to overlook one of them. If you are a believer, you may have forgotten some of your sins; no doubt you have. The sins you have committed you may have long since forgotten. But if you have trusted in Him you can say, 'He bore them'. He did not forget them; He never overlooked one of them. He knows my sins far better than I know them, because He bore them, because He took every one upon Himself. He has come in, "a Saviour ... who is Christ the Lord". But there He is: we

can present Him as a Saviour. This is the beginning of the pathway that has got to end at the cross, but at the cross He was going to take up every issue that was against you.

All the handwriting set out against me,
Christ took up at the cross to efface;
He took on what is contrary to me:
I am saved by His wonderful grace!

Colossians 2 verse 14 speaks of this: all those words of condemnation.

What a wonderful Person we have to present, not for your sentimentality, not for anything like that, but for your heart. And that requires that you have to move. Here, these men were out on the fields; they were doing their duties; there is nothing to suggest they were particularly bad men. In fact, the world would perhaps think that they were good men; they seem to be peacefully doing their duty. But they needed a Saviour. And immediately the word came, and the gospel, in the light in which it could be was presented to them; what did they do? Did they wait until tomorrow? Will you wait until tomorrow? They did not. You may not have tomorrow. They went immediately. "Let us make our way then now ... and they came with haste". If you do not know the Saviour, make haste. It is not a matter that you can leave until you say your prayers tonight. It is not a matter that you can leave for a moment. Now is the time, now is the day of salvation, now is the time of the gospel. If you have not opened your heart to Him, do so now. The word is to you, "now". How blessed that everyone, everyone who turns to Him, is going to be welcomed. There is room in His heart for you. I trust that there is room in your heart for Him, but I can tell you that there is room in His heart for you. The heart of God is toward you, and the heart of Christ is towards you; how blessed it is, the room there; He will embrace you, He will receive you as you come in haste, as you come as a repenting person. And I think that we are entitled to read that into this passage, repenting persons, persons who saw their need, saw the greatness of their need, and moved from their own scene, moved from depending on themselves, moved to Jesus.

Have you done that? Because you need to, and you need to do it now. Now is the accepted time. How blessed it is when they come to this scene, how blessed it is when they come to this scene and they see the Saviour. You might say, 'Well, that is just a babe in a manger', but what a scene, what a scene of glory, what a scene of blessing. Because He has come in, He is going to take up everything; and if He is

“a Saviour ... who is Christ the Lord”, if He is presented by God in that way at His birth, you can be assured the work will be accomplished. And the work has been accomplished, it has been accomplished in glory and perfection. And many can say, He “is Christ the Lord”. He is God's Christ; He is the Lord.

I understand that you are reading Luke's gospel here. And Luke's gospel is very often, and very rightly, associated with grace. You see the grace of One who came in; how blessed it is that He has come in in grace, the grace that secured you, the grace that would reach you, come to you where you are: He has come to you where you are. You needed someone to come to you where you are, and He has done that in grace. But not only that, you will find in Luke's gospel, time and again there is reference to this One as 'Lord', as “the Lord”. And also, only in this gospel, there are references to Him as “Master”. And that means He is entitled to take control of your life. You may not accept Him as Lord; you may want to do your own will like you have always done, all the earlier years of your life. He is entitled to that place as Lord, and He is entitled to that place as Master. Have you submitted to Him? That is part of it in the gospel: you have to submit to Him. You have to acknowledge Him as Lord. That, of course, is what comes out in Romans 10: 9, “if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from among the dead”. Have you done that? Have you accepted Him, accepted the glory and majesty that are here, this One who is Christ the Lord? You need to, you need to be subject to Him. All of us who have trusted Him, no doubt are conscious of the many times when we have slipped away, slipped away from the full enjoyment and blessedness of what this is. He is still your Lord; He is still there ready, and He is ready to wait to take you into His service again. If you have slipped out of His service, He is ready, graciously but authoritatively, to take you into service again, to keep you under control and to be that blessed One who is Christ the Lord.

Well, what is the result? What is the result if there are persons who have done this? What is the result as the gospel goes out? It is inevitable that there is going to be glory to God. And I would trust that there is glory to God from the hearts of many here tonight. Do you give glory to God as you hear this passage read? The One who has come in, come so close, the One who has blessed you so much, He has come in this nearness so that there is a response. “And the shepherds

returned, glorifying and praising God for all things which they had heard and seen, as it had been said to them". He would desire that from you. God has the right to two things from you, it has been said, obedience, so that is when you come to know Him as Lord, and praise, JND Collected Writings vol 7 p252. He is entitled to your praise. But then, He does not work exactly on the line of entitlement: He just magnifies Himself in all His beauty and glories to your sight, so that you are induced, you are drawn in, you are constrained to that service of praise to Him. I trust that everyone has had part in that too. You know Him, if you have trusted in Him you know Him as Saviour; have you praised Him? We all sing the hymns; we all sing together, but we know the hymns, and are we praising Him? Are we praising Him or just singing? Is it really your heart going out to Him? I trust that it is. I would admit sometimes my mind drifts off somewhere else, but we need to be there engaged in praise, that God should be glorified, that there should be a result from the gospel in that this One is praised.

How wonderful these things are, and I have only drawn from a few things in this passage; how blessed it is, God has come out in this way. I trust you have answered to it. Think of the glory of what can be announced, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men". God Himself glorified, "on earth peace". You do not see it outside, you do not see it in Augustus Caesar's world, but there is peace there, there is peace in the hearts and souls of those who have received the Saviour. "Good pleasure in men": God does not have pleasure in what is outside; He does not have pleasure in what is in a scene that continues on its lawless way. But He has good pleasure in those who gather to the name of the Lord Jesus. He has good pleasure in those who remember the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread. He has good pleasure in those who walk faithfully to Him. I trust you belong to that company. If not, make haste.

May the Lord bless the word.

Preaching of the gospel at Kirkcaldy

31st July 2016

PEACE

Richard M Fry

Mark 5: 24-34

Romans 4: 13-16; 21-25; 5: 1

Colossians 1: 17-20

Ephesians 2: 13-15

Isaiah 26: 3

I had an impression this morning, dear hearers, as to the thought of peace. We live in a world of turmoil and uncertainty where peace is not known to any great extent. But I do not want to speak of world peace. What I would like to speak about is the peace that God has brought to pass, and is available to each one; the peace that comes from believing in the Lord Jesus; the peace that comes from having a personal link with Him; the peace - as this woman that we have read of found - that comes from coming into contact with this blessed One.

I suppose the story of this woman has been used many times in the glad tidings and we are familiar with the way it is used to show how we can come into blessing. This woman had a serious condition (we are not told exactly what it was), and I am sure doctors today would be able to hypothesise about what might have been the problem. If you look back to the law in the Old Testament, you will find that her problem would have rendered her unclean. She was unclean: she had a flux of blood; there was something issuing from her which according to the law rendered her unclean, Lev 15: 25. Is this not a picture of mankind affected by sin? The Lord Jesus said that it is not what goes into a man that defiled the man, but what comes out, Mark 7: 18-23. What comes out of our hearts! He lists a number of things in that passage, the things that come out of our hearts. Dear friends, we are sinners away from God, and these things are natural to every man, woman and child in this world. This woman knew, and you have to learn, dear friend, that the condition of sin that you find in yourself renders you unclean. According to the law, it would render a person unable to enter into the presence of God. And so it is with your condition, as a sinner away from God: the issue which comes from within renders you unsuitable and unfit for God's presence.

There are a number of things that attract me to this passage. This woman had suffered much under many physicians and had spent everything that she had and had found no advantage. Perhaps that

speaks to someone here who has been trying hard to make themselves fit, knowing that that weight of sin has been bearing upon them: perhaps you might think there would be some way, some means, some cure to render yourself suitable for God's presence. Dear friend, you will find as this woman did, that whatever you try there is no advantage. Another thing that attracts me to this passage is this it says that she had got worse. When the Spirit works with one and another and He brings to their attention their state as before God, things may appear to have become very much worse. They may not be so actually, but as bringing the light of God to bear upon your sinful condition, you will find how terrible it really is. But this woman hears concerning Jesus. Have you heard concerning Jesus? I am sure you have, and that is why you are here today. I know each one here has heard concerning Jesus: what a wonderful Person He is! She had heard concerning Him, but she was unsure how to approach Him. So she comes up rather timidly and touches His clothes. She knew "if I shall touch but his clothes I shall be healed". She did not feel confident to touch Him Himself, but she knew that if she reached out and even touched His clothes, she would receive that healing influence. Well, as the story goes on, she did; she had the faith to touch His clothes. How important that is, that you should have faith. There are many instances in Scripture of one and another who had faith but did not quite get the full blessing; and this woman was close to missing the full blessing. She knew that that flux had gone; she was cured, she was healed, and she could have just disappeared into the crowd and have gone. But the Lord in His grace stops and says, "Who touched me?". Beloved friend, perhaps you have known something of the healing of your condition, but perhaps you have not had that close, personal link with the Lord Jesus. So she comes "frightened and trembling", and falls down before Him; and told Him all the truth. How wonderful it is to tell the Lord Jesus all about yourself! Perhaps you have been on the fringe for many years; perhaps you have known something of salvation but never really entered into it in its fullest meaning, never fully grasped the fulness of what God has in mind for you in the glad tidings. If we relate this to the gospel, I suppose you could say she was saved from the wrath to come, but she did not really have peace. She knew in herself that there was a change but how could she know the flux would not come back? Would the cure last? Perhaps there was something still lurking there, something that could cause the flux to start again? Well, beloved, the Lord Jesus does not want you in that condition. This woman was still "frightened and trembling", and the Lord speaks to her: "Daughter, thy

faith has healed thee; go in peace, and be well of thy scourge". What a difference those words must have meant to this woman, the words of the Lord Jesus; what a difference they would have made, knowing now not only that she had benefitted through contact with the Lord Jesus, but His own words confirmed it and it was sure. Nothing could change it: "be well of thy scourge". It was removed; that which for these twelve years had rendered her in this terrible unclean state was gone! And those words would have given her assurance, and peace in her soul that there was no going back. It was all well. Is this woman not like us? I suppose we all come different ways, but my desire is that each one of us might have this living link with Jesus, and that you might be able to say for yourself that you have heard these words by faith, "go in peace, and be well of thy scourge".

I read in Romans because here we get some of the teaching behind this, and I started at verse 13 just to get the context: "For it was not by law that the promise was to Abraham, or to his seed, that he should be heir of the world, but by righteousness of faith. For if they which are of law be heirs, faith is made vain, and the promise made of no effect. For law works wrath; but where no law is neither is there transgression. Therefore it is on the principle of faith, that it might be according to grace, in order to the promise being sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of Abraham's faith, who is father of us all".

The promise was given not because the Jewish people had kept the law - they had not; but it was given on the principle of righteousness, but righteousness of faith: "Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ". How wonderful that is, being justified on the principle of faith. There is nothing that we can do; it is not on the principle of law; it is of grace as it says here: "Therefore it is on the principle of faith, that it might be according to grace" - the principle of faith. Beloved friends, how wonderful this is. As that woman found, there was nothing she could do; no keeping of the law was going to cure her of her scourge; it was on the principle of faith that she became well. It was in coming in contact with the Lord Jesus. So it says here, "Now it was not written on his account alone that it was reckoned to him, but on ours also, to whom, believing on him who has raised him from among the dead, Jesus our Lord, who has been delivered for our offences and has been raised for our justification, it will be reckoned".

These things we have been speaking of, that scourge which cannot be cured by any means, have been removed by the work of the Lord Jesus. He has been “delivered for our offences” - He went into death. We read in Colossians of “the blood of his cross”. But He “has been raised for our justification”. Do you have that sense in your heart, that you have been justified? What does that mean? It includes that, before the eyes of God, you are seen as guiltless. The Lord Jesus took that guilt upon Himself, and you are now justified in the eyes of God if you have faith in that beloved One. Does it not give you peace in your heart? Look to Him; think of all that He has done: “Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ”. It is *through Him*, beloved; there is nothing we can do. We cannot effect anything, try as we might; it only leads to further uncertainty and turmoil of heart. Beloved friend, the gospel is all about that beloved One, our Lord Jesus Christ. He has raised Him from among the dead; what a glorious fact that is!

And then in Colossians, we get a further thought. It speaks of His greatness: “And *he* is before all, and all things subsist together by him”. Earlier in the chapter it says, “firstborn of all creation; because by him were created all things, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or authorities: all things have been created by him and for him. And *he* is before all, and all things subsist together by him”. This is the One we are speaking about, beloved friends; how great a Person He is, the Lord Jesus! How glorious He is; nothing is too hard for Him, whatever troubles come into your life, He is the Creator of this whole sphere that we live in and the whole universe. How great it is! “And *he* is before all, and all things subsist together by him”: think of that - all things subsisting together by Jesus! This is the One we present to you in the glad tidings. This is the One who came here to deal with the question of your sins. “And *he* is the head of the body, the assembly; who is the beginning, firstborn from among the dead, that *he* might have the first place in all things”.

Dear friend, does He have the first place in your heart? Can you imagine that woman, as she went back to her house and to her friends and the neighbours, and to the synagogue? She would not just have gone back and said nothing; she would have been speaking of Jesus and the wonders of that Man and all that He had done for her. No doubt she would have thanked Him daily for what He had done for her. The scripture continues, “for in him all the fulness of the Godhead was

pleased to dwell, and by him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of his cross”

How wonderful! Think of that great Person, the Lord Jesus, coming down into manhood's form. As we read in Philipians, “but emptied himself ... becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross”, chap 2: 7, 8. His blood was shed. God needed that; it was the righteous requirement of God, that those sins, those lawlessnesses, that you and I have committed, should be removed from the sight of God, and we can stand before Him in absolute certainty that we are there fit for His presence.

And so it says in Ephesians, “*he* is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of enclosure, having annulled the enmity in his flesh, the law of commandments in ordinances, that he might form the two in himself into one new man, making peace; and might reconcile both in one body to God by the cross, having by it slain the enmity, and, coming, he has preached the glad tidings of peace to you who were afar off, and the glad tidings of peace to those who were nigh”. Dear friends: “the glad tidings of peace” are what we preach today. Those who were afar off are the nations - ourselves; and those who were nigh were the Jewish people. Romans tells us that “God hath shut up together all in unbelief”, chap 11: 32. He is not making a distinction now between Jew and Gentile: “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”, Rom 3: 23. He is preaching the glad tidings of peace to the Jew, and He is preaching the glad tidings of peace to the nations, and that is what we preach today, “the glad tidings of peace”; and we can preach that because He has reconciled both in one body to God by the cross. Everything that stood between God and man, and between man and man, has been removed in the work of Christ upon the cross. How mighty that work is! Have you taken advantage of it; have you accepted the Lord Jesus as your Saviour? Can you say that He died for you; can you say that he shed His blood for you? Do you know that peace in your heart; do you know that, when you die, you will go to be with Jesus? Do you know without doubt in your heart that you will stand in the presence of God in the worth of Jesus? You cannot stand there in your own worth; God has condemned sin in the flesh, Rom 8: 3. But you can stand there in the worth of His beloved Son. How wonderful that is!

I read that final verse in Isaiah because, speaking from my own history and experience, we sometimes wonder whether all this is true.

Is it true of me? I like to quote that man in the gospels who said, "I believe, help mine unbelief", Mark 9: 24. He believed - of course he did; he was there before Jesus; but perhaps he did not feel he quite believed enough. And perhaps you are like that too; perhaps troubles come up into your life - whatever they might be, maybe at school, maybe at work, maybe in the family, or between brethren. Troubles come in, and as Peter found, he started to sink, and the winds and the waves seemed so big; and yet, he called out to Jesus, "Lord, save me", Matt 14: 30. Dear friend, if you have put your faith and trust in Jesus, you can be certain that your eternal destiny is secure; but sometimes in your life - perhaps often - you feel unsure, you are uncertain. You do not feel that peace and you begin to doubt as Peter did. And I thought I would just read this verse because it seems to me that this is the answer to those fears and problems: "Thou wilt keep in perfect peace the mind stayed on thee". I think that word "stayed" translated into modern language would be 'focussed': 'thou wilt keep in perfect peace the mind focussed on Thee'. If you think about it, when fears and doubts come in, it is usually for one of two reasons. We may be looking at ourselves and doubting ourselves or we may be occupied with things around us. If we look into our hearts and see what is in there, who of us would not doubt? Your salvation is not secured by what you are: we established that in Romans. It is not on the principle of law, it is on the principle of faith. Do not look inward, dear friend; look outward; look outward to Jesus. "Thou wilt keep in perfect peace the mind stayed on thee". The other reason is that we get occupied with things around us, things in the world and other matters - perhaps they loom large in our vision and we lose sight of Jesus that way.

Beloved friends, it is my simple desire that we might each one have our hearts and minds focussed on that blessed One, our Saviour: how great He is! And in having our minds focussed upon Him, He will keep us in perfect peace. Despite anything that comes up in our lives - and I am not saying that there are not exercises and things to be worked through; we all have to go through these things in our lives privately, family-wise or whatever it might be - we can go through them knowing that Jesus is there and, focussing upon Him, we can have a sense of peace in our souls.

West Norwood

5th March 2017

HEAVENLY THINGS

Doug J Klassen

John 3: 13

I was thinking about heavenly things. John presents heavenly things to us which would link on with what we have already had in this meeting in relation to the apostle Paul, Aquila, Priscilla and Apollos. Their desire was not only to be in the gain of, but to present, heavenly things. We need to be able to help one another. If we take account of one another, we are really taking account of what is heavenly. It has been said before that the assembly, which is the saints, is heavenly in origin and destiny, JBS vol 7: 14, 15.

This verse presents to us heavenly things. It says in verse 12, "If I have said the earthly things to you, and ye believe not, how, if I say the heavenly things to you, will ye believe?" I was impressed thinking of this in relation to the Person of the Lord Jesus. Here was One who came out of heaven - who better to speak about heavenly things than One who had been there! I find it a great challenge for myself especially when facing the opposition, and facing earthly things, to remember that I have been introduced to heavenly things. What does that mean to you and me, dear hearer? Does it affect us so much inwardly that the earthly things are of no effect, that the things that the enemy brings against us are of no effect? It should.

I would encourage the brethren to read, even if quickly, as much as possible of what John brings before us in all of these chapters. I find it very helpful to see that the gospel of John is broken into two volumes. The first twelve chapters are heavenly things presented in relation to you and me. You think of how the Lord is presenting things; He came in as "the Word" (John 1: 1), that He might express and make known something. No doubt it would be God Himself who introduced heavenly things. He speaks about that too.

He comes to John taking account of Him, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world", chap 1: 29. These are heavenly things in relation to you and me. We all know that we are sinners before God; we have been made righteous through Him. The Lord Jesus is the Lamb of God. There is much more that I am skimming over but when we come to chapter 2, you get the marriage, where there was a shortage. He in His grace comes in and turns the water to wine. Again, it is heavenly things for you and me. We could keep going on;

chapter 3 introduces Nicodemus for us and the Lord speaks about the Spirit. He says, "he that practises the truth comes to the light", v 21. He speaks about the light. It goes on, all through the different chapters.

We know chapter 4 brings in the woman at the well. She had a great need and the Lord met that need; He met her in her need. He provided heavenly things for this woman, and heavenly things for us. In chapter 9 you have the blind man: look at the system of men there questioning this man. The Lord had healed him; He had caused Him to see, and these persons cast him out. You might say they cast him out of the old fold. Then you come to chapter 10 and you get the new fold: "he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter opens; and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name", v 2,3.

What is interesting is that, when you come to chapter 13, a new volume begins; here we have heavenly things in relation to Christ. The things that are introduced there are things that are going to be related to Him and for Him. It begins with Him washing the feet of the disciples, and He says, "If I therefore, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example that, as I have done to you, ye should do also", v 14. What a wonderful thing to see the inheritance that God has in the saints. The Lord Jesus has taken up this service for the sake of what is for Himself. This changes the way that we view one another. It changes the way that we view things in relation to Christ and what is precious to Him and His assembly. I mention these things because I feel it is paramount at the present time that our focus is not taken away from what is heavenly. Our gaze must be kept on the One who has come from there, so that we are occupied with the greatness and glory of His Person and all that He has given to us, and all that He is, and all that He is seeking from us.

There would be response Godward, towards Himself. We move in the power of the Holy Spirit that things do not drag us down and bring us where we are occupied with what is earthly, where the enemy can have his way. We are going to overcome the enemy by being occupied with another sphere where the Lord Jesus is pre-eminently before us; where He occupies us with the place that He has come from and the place that He has gone to. I trust that each one of us will be encouraged. There is much pressure upon us at the present time and the enemy is very active and we know that, but are we going to triumph over that and recognise the heavenly things that have been given to us

for our overcoming?

May the Lord bless the word for His Name's sake.

Aberdeen, ID

29th March 2017

STAND UP FOR JESUS

Colin J Brien

Romans 10: 8, 9

Romans 8: 31-39

Ephesians 6: 10-18

We often use the scripture, “now is the well-accepted time” (2 Cor 6: 2), and that is true, because yesterday is already past and tomorrow has not come. It is a good time for the glad tidings to be preached and to be accepted. From the beginning of Scripture, we read of an opposition to God, Satan, an angel who lies and is against God entirely; and who lied to mankind, and brought in sin in the flesh. There is no way that God, if He is true, and is a God of love, and a God of righteousness, can ever allow the presence of evil to be near Him. He guards the way to life, the tree of life, so vehemently, with the flame of the flashing sword (Gen 3: 24), indicating that there is no way that any form of evil will be allowed in His presence; none. That is the reality of it. Although thousands of years have passed already, it is very clear that nothing has changed regarding God's position in relation to sin. We have a foe, an enemy, who is against not only us, but especially against God; and who is determined to ruin everything that God has done and accomplished. He is determined. You might say that is a negative way to start the glad tidings, but it magnifies the greatness of God and His plan of salvation.

Almost every form of entertainment is about good and evil and they are in battle against one another. I think the children probably know this because most of their stories are about good and evil. In the glad tidings, there is a solution because evil has already been conquered by good - or by righteousness. That is because God came in the form of a Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. He came in in the form of a babe. Every babe that has been born in this locality has reminded all of us of the preciousness of how the Lord Jesus Christ came in, a “holy thing”, Luke 1: 35. He grew up and fulfilled the will of God perfectly. He fulfilled the law, He fulfilled the love of God, and He fulfilled everything that the Father stands for, and thus has revealed the heart of God, which is love. God is love. He is absolutely different from the angel of hate and lying who is determined to deceive every single man on earth about the righteousness of God.

The Lord Jesus defied all that Satan attempted. There was no

way that any taint of sin could fall upon the Man of righteousness, the One who stood here in flesh. The reality of it is that He walked here in perfection. It is hard to imagine, almost hard to comprehend, the One who should have been King indeed, once they tried to make Him king (John 6: 15); yet the enemy came in, and the heart of man was revealed. They put the Lord Jesus up on that cross; they nailed His hands and His feet to that cross, and one stabbed that spear into His side, and the blood and the water came forth. He had said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit", Luke 23: 46. There were three hours of darkness when He bore God's wrath. We cannot fathom what those three hours of darkness really were for the Lord Jesus. He took upon Himself upon the cross everything that stood between man and God so that we might be delivered.

When we think about our own pathway, we have a sense of the grace that we have been shown in the glad tidings. What a thrill that is! What does God require from us? That we might realise the sinfulness of our nature, and that we might respond to His call of love and His gift of salvation, which is available today, and perhaps only today. If we are here tomorrow, it might be available tomorrow, but we do not know that; today is the well accepted time for the glad tidings. Have you come before God in repentance for your sins? This is an important part of the gospel, because if I do not realise that I am a sinner before God then I cannot make any progress in my soul. I cannot come into His presence. I can have nothing to do with the God of righteousness because He is perfect, He is righteous. How attractive this is to the believer!

The scripture here in Romans 10 is so simple, "if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord". It is not pretending, not lying, but confessing; speaking it out that Jesus is Lord. Jesus is my Lord, Jesus is my Saviour! Have you put your faith and trust in Jesus, because He took care of everything for you. This is the wonder of the glad tidings; have you responded to that. You might say, 'Yes, I have done that; I have confessed Jesus as Lord; yes, He is my Saviour. I love the Lord Jesus'. That is wonderful! The glad tidings has so much to offer. If you have confessed and you have believed in your heart that Jesus is Lord, then you are saved! Have you ever told somebody that you are saved? 'Satan cannot touch me; he has no claim on me because Jesus is my Lord'. What a matter to confess Jesus as Lord. He is my Lord, He is my Saviour, and I rejoice in it each day I am alive

because of the wonderful work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 6 it says, “For the rest, brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the might of his strength. Put on the panoply of God”. I read this passage because there is one thing that I think is very striking. Satan desires to have the earth and all in it for himself; he desires to be god over us. What an enemy, to think that he would oppose God; he is the deceitful angel. Everything he does, everything he has told man, was a deception. In this passage it says “For the rest, brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the might of his strength. Put on the panoply of God”. Christ is risen; that is the wonder of the glad tidings; He is risen and ascended. He is not here on this earth, but He desires that you should stand here for Him. Are you standing here for the Lord? He desires that you will stand here, and that you would stake a claim for Him and His glory, because this earth is going to be all His, and there is no doubt about that. When He appears, we will not be here waiting for His appearing; we will be with Him; and He will come and He will take that claim. Does that thrill your heart? But does it magnify the awfulness of sin, and the awfulness of Satan when you think about this passage? We are to stand for Christ. What a matter that is to stand for Jesus, having on the panoply of God.

Think about people in Scripture who have stood for Jesus. Peter stood up and preached the glad tidings; he made a claim for Christ here. Think about Stephen; his face shone like an angel in the light of the glad tidings. He stood for Christ that there might be a testimony here, not in his own power. This is not *my* panoply; this is not my shield, not my sword, not my shoes. This is the panoply of God. He desires that we should put it on, and that we should stand for Jesus here, until His coming for us. Then we will be gone, and very quickly Satan will try to take over as much as possible, and then Christ will come with us and He will take His claim on the earth and He will be King and His enemies will be as the footstool of His feet, Acts 2: 35. That is guaranteed. You might say that was guaranteed with the blood of Christ. There is no other outcome except for that; but what does that mean to you? Have you said, 'Well, I am saved, that is good enough for me I have a lot to do, I have a job to go to, I have to be occupied with these things and I need to get this and that done'. What about Christ's claim here? What does it mean to you? Do you think it is important to Him? Yes, it is. His heart of love demonstrated perfectly everything that needed to be done. He fulfilled the will of the Father and He took all

upon Himself that we might have an understanding and appreciation of the grace and the love of God.

Why should we have to put on the panoply of God? We are running towards Christ, “the leader and completer of faith” (Heb 12: 2), but who is seeking to stop us? That enemy, Satan, is determined to try to stop us in every moment on that pathway. And if we stand with that panoply of God we will withstand all attack. You think about the wonder of it, a girdle of truth! Satan is a liar. How do we know he is lying? We read the word of God and realise this is truth; God is love, and Satan is the enemy of God, the angel of deception. That is how we know truth, through the word of God and the power of Christ, by the Spirit. The Lord is “the way, and the truth, and the life”, John 14: 6. How wonderful! And He brings glad tidings of peace. We do not need to stand in fear. We do not need to stand wondering where the enemy is. If you look through all the history of wars, the best generals looked at the enemy and tried to figure out what the enemy was going to do. You cannot see Satan; you do not even know what he looks like! How are we going to be able to defend ourselves? We have the panoply of God. We have that “shield of faith”. What does that mean? I put my faith and trust in things I cannot see. I cannot see the Lord Jesus right now, but I know that He loves me and that His love is in the heart. There is no piece of armour that has the word love on it. Love is in the heart, because the heart of God is love and God is love. That love is there and that is what we use on one another, His love. We do not use the armour for fighting one another. The armour is against all of these wicked things, the principalities and the authorities and spiritual powers of wickedness. I used to read this scripture and it made me a little bit afraid, a bit intimidated. We cannot see these things. How do we know they are there? What are we going to do? How do we know if they crop up? That is why we have that “shield of faith”, to deflect the darts of the wicked one, the “inflamed darts of the wicked one”. He desires to maim and to wound the people of God to make sure that they do not worship God or stand here and keep the claim for Christ when He returns. Satan is against that.

Have you considered that God has provided everything that we need? The two-edged sword, the “sword of the Spirit” which is the word of God. We need that; it is two-edged? Do you have the Spirit? We need the Spirit and the word of God for ourselves and to defend. How important that sword is, to make sure that we know the word of God.

When was the last time you read the word of God? Maybe you read it every day, many times a day, or maybe it has been a little while. Maybe you just read with your family when they read the word of God at the dinner table. Maybe you have not taken it up and made it your own. I have heard it said that you ought to read the scriptures as if they were written for you, personally, with your name there. Then you pray about it, you have faith, and you depend upon the Spirit for guidance and everything can be opened up suddenly to you. The Holy Spirit is the power by which we *can* stand here for Christ.

It is remarkable that we might read a certain scripture over and over and over, and then it might come up in a reading, and it will be opened up in a completely new way. What piece of literature is like that? And the Scriptures are not just a piece of literature; they are the word of God. They contain nearly every form of literature that is possible, and the word is living and it is operative; and it is to become living in us by the Spirit. Are you going to stand against the enemy for Christ and His rights here and for the glory of God, that God might have His way in the end? To think that we can do this together in love and in the power of the Spirit! You are not alone; there are others. Someone was remarking about one of the Old Testament prophets, he thought he was all by himself, all alone, 1 Kings 19: 10-18. Sometimes when we go through difficulty we might feel like we are all by ourselves but "The Lord is near" (Phil 4: 5), and the brethren are near. We need one another, and we use love on one another; we are to love one another. We can stand against the enemy and all that has been provided, but you have to take it on. I wish I could speak a bit more intelligently, but I do not know that I can really grasp how wonderful it is to just put on the panoply of God. Have you done that, have you read this passage and said, 'Yes, I have faith in that, which means I have a shield. I am reading the word of God, I know I have the Spirit and the word of God is attractive to me. Then I have the sword'? And there are the glad tidings of peace. I can walk through this life even though I go through difficulties, I can have the peace of Christ, I can have shoes ready to walk. Am I going to walk towards the enemy? No, I am going to walk towards Christ and I am going to have everything that He has provided for protection so that I can continue running towards Christ "the leader and the completer of faith".

When we come to Romans 8, that is exactly what we find. We find here a person who has the love of God in his heart. He says "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who against us?".

Look at the confidence of the writer here. Does that thrill your heart, to think you have so much confidence in the God of love that you can say this, "If God be for us, who against us? He who, yea, has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all"? The glad tidings are of peace. "How shall he not also with him grant us all things?" Armour is for protection, "It is God who justifies: who is he that condemns?". The enemy has been conquered. The work is finished. It is complete, whatever Satan may try. When we have God, there is no way that the enemy can overtake us. We need to pray daily for strength and the help of the Spirit.

The Lord taught His disciples to pray that the Father will keep them from evil and from temptation, Matt. 6: 13. What a prayer! I have not always thought to pray like that, but the Lord instructed his disciples to do so. Each day, we can pray that the Father will keep us from temptation, and that He will save us from evil. That is simple faith of recognising that Christ is our Lord, but there is an enemy and we want to stay faithful and true to Christ and keep our eye on "the leader and completer of faith". Then, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?". Love is described in many ways in 1 Corinthians 13, and yet it is so true because it becomes something that is so precious. It has been demonstrated. The Lord did not just tell us that here is what love is all about; He opened up to us the heart of the Father. Read through John 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17; all these aspects of the Father coming out in grace, the power of the Spirit, the love of the Father; the wonder of Christ and His perfect obedience, and how we have been given to Christ. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?"; all these things that are on the earth but, "Who shall separate us?". Are you attached to Christ? Are you a lover of Jesus? Have you confessed His Name? "For thy sake we are put to death all the day long".

There is nothing in this world that is more attractive to the writer of the epistle to the Romans than Christ himself: not one single thing. He has Christ, and He has all he needs; and he goes about doing his daily activities; you might say, working, loving the saints, ministering to the saints, but there is nothing in this world that is more attractive to him, nothing. How do we know that? Paul says, "we have been reckoned as sheep for slaughter. But in all these things we more than conquer through him that has loved us". Do we conquer? Christ is the

Conqueror. Jesus, the Leader and Completer of faith, He has overcome death. I was so struck that He has gone “into the lower parts of the earth” (Eph 4:9); you might say He could not go lower, and He is raised and ascended to the highest height. There is nothing higher and nothing lower in a certain sense. I hope it is safe to say that; there can be nothing lower or higher than the pathway that Christ has gone.

Now Paul says, “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”. Is He your Lord and your Saviour? There is nothing that can separate you from the love of the Lord Jesus. He is speaking not just about things on the earth, but these principalities and authorities and spiritual powers of darkness; there is nothing that will separate you from the love of Jesus. How much does Christ mean to you? Just the Name of Jesus impressed me this morning in our brother's thanksgiving, as he brought in the many beautiful titles of the Lord; how precious and attractive each one of them is! Each name magnifies some wonderful aspect of His triumph, of Him being Lord, of Him being our King, of Him being our Saviour, of Him being the One who is love, of Him being “God with us”.

May the Lord bless the word.

Preaching of the glad tidings in Aberdeen, Idaho

2nd April 2017

GOD'S URGING

I Mark Webster

Acts 17:30-31

Luke 14:16-23

Romans 5:7-8

In the first passage that I have read, Paul speaks of God **enjoining** men. In the second passage the man whose great supper it was, and who is a figure of God, says to his bondman "Go out into the ways and fences and **compel** to come in". That word 'enjoin' is not one that we use very often in common English today. Both it and 'compel' convey the thought of urging with a sense of both urgency and importance. I would like to draw on these passages to speak of divine urging in the gospel.

Now this may be something which you have not thought of before. You may have come under the sound of God's word in the gospel preaching many times; the terms of it may be familiar to you. You may have been brought from your youth to the preaching, but you may have remained unaffected. What these scriptures bring out is that there is urgency in the gospel. God Himself is urging. It is not exactly the preacher that is doing it, and it is certainly not the men of this world: it is God. Now if that lays hold on you, dear friend, then it is not only incumbent upon you to heed what He says, but it is urgent for you to do so too. God, and His word, cannot be trifled with.

There are two things that I want to speak about, both of which have been spoken of many times before in the gospel preaching, and I seek to show you that behind both of them is God's love. The first, which Paul takes up with these Athenians, is the matter of repentance. It lies at the start of our moral history with God. Paul says to these godless persons that God "enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent". By the inclusion of "all everywhere" it is clear that Paul had the whole of mankind in mind, and that comes right down to you at the present time. It includes all responsible persons. Sometimes there is a lot of discussion about the age at which we become responsible. Well, in the gospel I think the answer is very simple. If you understand what is presented to you in God's word, you are responsible to heed and obey it. And God is urging you afresh in the gospel tonight that, if you have not come to it before, you come to the point of repentance; it is essential.

Much could be said as to what it means. Sometimes we are

helped in our understanding of things by seeing what they are *not*. So, for example, things may arise in our relations together where we do what is wrong and we apologise; we say we are sorry. Maybe when we are children we do so at our parents' urging rather than as a result of our own concern. We say we are sorry for something we did, some offence that we caused. If I might put it very simply, that is not repentance. Repentance involves that we see things, and see ourselves, sinners as we are, as God sees us. The scripture says, and I am sure that you have read or heard it read before, that "...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God", Rom 3: 23. The truth of that can be readily understood; the whole race is blighted by that disease - sin - and the consequence of it, which is that we sin and come under the penalty of death. Sin came in through one man and it has passed upon all: "For this cause, even as by one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned", Rom 5: 12. The words "all have sinned" in those two scriptures in Romans bring the matter very close home to each one of us. Have you reached that point in your life, dear friend, where you have recognised before God that you are a sinner and on account of that you sin, and that your sins are offensive to God? Sin and sins are an affront to the holy God "with whom we have to do", Heb 4: 13.

Now you might do something which offends another person, and he or she may have their view of it as to whether it is small or big. And one person might have a view and someone else might have a different view. But in the gospel we have to do with **God**: what a view He has of your sins. How obnoxious they are to Him! He is a sin-hating God; sin and sins are offensive to Him. And when you sin, whether the matter be small and insignificant in your eyes, or whether you consider it large, whatever it is, it is offensive to God. What a need there is therefore in your soul history to come to the point when you recognise before God that you are a sinner; that you have offended Him, that whether you have taken account of what you have done in its totality or not, He certainly has. He takes account of everything, every one of your sins. What a God He is! You might readily forget something that you have done that is wrong. You might not even recognise it as such, but God takes account of it. He sees and takes account of everything. And He sees into your heart too, and He sees into mine. He knows what is going on there, the thoughts and intents. What is in the heart becomes expressed through what we do. God not only takes account of what we do, but He knows the motives of our hearts. The heart of man naturally is wicked. Right at the outset of man's history, God observed that every

imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was "only evil continually", Gen 6: 5. What a view He has. And so, as it says here in Acts, He "enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent". How important it is to come to do that; how urgent it is too.

Now there are many reasons why we should consider the matter of repentance to be urgent. One of them is given here in Acts. Paul says that God "has set a day, in which he is going to judge the habitable earth in righteousness by the man whom he has appointed". It does not say when that day will be; it could be very soon. I wonder where you would stand in that day of judgment. Is it a fearsome matter in your eye? It should be, dear friend, if you are in your sins. God cannot overlook anything. He does not desire to judge you; that is not in His heart. Judgment is "his strange work", Isa 28: 21. But on account of what He is in His holiness, He cannot overlook sin. What is unjudged has to be dealt with. And there is one Man alone, the Lord Jesus, who is qualified and able to exercise judgment, and whom God has appointed. Judgment will be undertaken "in righteousness". Nothing will be overlooked; nothing will be unfairly considered; everything will be considered in righteousness before God. What a day that will be. What urgency therefore is attached to this matter of repentance. How important it is that we recognise before God that we are sinners. He is going to judge "by the man he has appointed, giving the proof of it to all in having raised him from among the dead". There is one glorious Man, the Lord Jesus, who alone is able to take up the whole matter of judgment before God. Morally He is fully qualified to do so. All others have failed; you and I have failed and come short. Jesus never came short, and God has given the proof of that, and His qualification to exercise judgment in that He has raised Him from among the dead. His qualification cannot be gainsaid; it cannot be challenged. There it stands in all its proof. One glorious Man will take up the whole matter of judgment for God. What a solemn day that will be. What a solemn day for this poor earth, beset by sin, when everything that has remained unjudged will have to be dealt with summarily.

Now we do not preach judgment. We often say that and it is right. But it is a backdrop, and what a solemn backdrop, to the preaching of the gospel. So I say again, how urgent it is then, if you have not done so already, to come to this point where you recognise before God that you are a sinner. It is the starting point to your blessing. It is not the end; it is the starting point, and how essential it is. And I seek to speak graciously to the children here tonight. Do not think, 'Because I am

young and I have not done very much, and I have been brought up in a Christian household and I have been taught what is right and what is wrong, and there has been that at home and in the company of the brethren that has enfolded me and preserved me from the worst of the world, somehow I am different and I do not need to repent'. Remember "all have sinned, and come short of God's glory". Only one glorious Person has never come short, and that is the Man to whom Paul refers here in relation to judgment, our Lord Jesus.

Now, in Luke there is the matter of the great supper, and that brings me on to the second thing of which I wish to speak. What I have spoken of so far is very solemn, but essential for us all to face in our experiences. But here in the parable of the great supper we are introduced to something which involves what is for the heart of God and for the blessing of men. The great supper is a provision of God to meet His desires and to effect your blessing. I do not want to speak much about those who were invited at first. I suppose they may have been persons that knew the man who arranged the supper, honoured guests who perhaps felt some entitlement to be there if they wished, but they refused the invitation. They speak of God's earthly people Israel. How favoured they were. The invitation was graciously extended to them but they turned their back on it, and the One in whom it came, the Lord Jesus. They had other things to occupy their time and interest. Would God accept that? No; others were brought in from the streets and lanes of the city. But there was still room and it comes to this point where the man says, "Go out into the ways and fences and compel to come in, that my house may be filled". Now that speaks of the day in which we are. It is a day in which those that are in the ways and fences are being compelled to come in. Who are they? I will tell you who they are. They are sinners like you and me. The ways and fences would be a little bit like what you might see in certain parts of London or other big cities; decrepit, gloomy areas where people loiter together and often get up to no good. Such persons paint a picture of what we all are as unsaved and in our sins. There is nothing in us that is pleasing to God, and that merits His favour. Far from it; and yet how wonderful, just like the man here, God is saying, "**compel** them to come in". That is the day in which we are. I would like to convey that to you dear friend. God is *compelling* you. He is *urging* you from the bounty of His heart and with all the resource at His disposal to come in and participate in all He has prepared. What He has prepared is available in a great sphere of blessing. The great supper of Luke's gospel is provided where there is blessing and provision and safely. Where is that? It is the house of

God. How blessed that is. Are you going to come in? Are you going to yield? You can come in through repentance and through faith in our Lord Jesus. The way in is through Him. As we sometimes sing:

By Christ, the door, now enter in. (Hymn 245)

That is the way in.

God has made provision for you as a sinner. How wonderful that is. He has made a provision for you in Christ. He has made a provision for you in Him, the One who has borne and exhausted the judgment of sin at the hand of God Himself, and who has borne in His body the sins of all who believe on Him. Nothing has been overlooked. God could not bring you into the environment of blessing in His house in your sins. How could He do that? It would be unrighteous of God. But oh, what assurance to have, what a joy to know, that God has made full provision for you and for me in the Lord Jesus. That One is now risen and glorified. He is the One in whom everything has been settled for God. I can assure you of this, that as you stretch out in faith and believe on Him, you can have the **absolute** certainty that nothing can take away, that all that you are and all that you have done has been settled at the cross by Jesus. As the hymn writer puts it:

All our sins, so great, so many,
In His blood are washed away. (Hymn 410)

How wonderful that is! What a work has been done, and how great the One that has done it. It is a work that has involved immense suffering for the Lord Jesus on the cross, His death, the shedding of His precious blood and His burial: all necessary in order that everything should be clear before God. And if I can bring it to you, dear fellow believer, I trust, all that relates to your history, and mine, so obnoxious to God has been cleared, totally and fully, with every claim of the throne of God being met. And the One that has done it has been raised. What greater proof do you need that the work has been completed and that God is fully satisfied in the One who has done it? But how wonderful it is: He has raised Him. How right it was. It was impossible that He should remain in death; He has been raised and glorified.

So the way in to the great supper is available to you. And God would compel you through His word. Do not refuse it: come in now. God, in the depth of His love for you would say, 'Come in now; do not put it off'. Do not put it off another moment. You can come in by faith in the Lord Jesus now. I can remember when I was young occasionally a preacher would say, 'You can come in quietness on your knees in your

room and speak to the Lord Jesus'. Well, of course that may be true, but I would say something else: do not leave it until then! Do it *now*, dear friend. The Lord Jesus is available to you now, right where you are. He knows your heart. He knows what is going through your mind and in His love and in His compassion He would cause that you might have to do with Him. How wonderful that is. We sometimes sing, 'God waits in grace', (Hymn 123). He has waited in grace to this moment. Maybe He has waited for *you* to this moment. You know if that is the case but do not keep Him waiting any longer. He would compel you to come in now.

Now what a place of blessing you are brought into in God's house, a place of wonderful provision. It is not heaven; it is here, although the atmosphere in God's house reflects what is happening in heaven. And it expresses and it values the preciousness of the One that fills heaven. How wonderful that is; the house of God. It is a place of safety and certainty, of security, of food and of blessing, where all that is centred in and related to our Lord Jesus is known and experienced with others that have been compelled to come in. You can come into it and enjoy it. God desires that, and He says, "that my house may be filled". It cannot remain unfilled. The provision is fully sufficient for all. He knows how many will be there, and provision is sufficient for everyone. Are you going to come? How sad it would be if you resisted God's compelling and missed His wonderful provision for you. How sad it would be to refuse it when God in His grace has provided so much for your blessing and enjoyment. Do you not owe it to God to yield? Dear friend, do you not owe it to yourself to come in? What glad tidings of divine grace they are. Everything for you is provided and centred in that glorious Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. How blessed that is.

Well, I trust these things, that have been said many times before, might lay hold of you. How urgent is the moment. How urgent that you have to do with God in relation to your sins, in the recognition of what you are and of what you have done, if you have not done so before. And as you do that now you will find that God is not against you. He recognises your condition and He says, 'I have made full provision for that. And not only for that, but I have made full provision for your blessing, because I have you in my heart'.

Now it is often said that the early chapters of Romans bring out the teaching of the glad tidings - and so they do and in an order. When we get to chapter 5 the believer who has received the Holy Spirit, a divine gift that I trust you are conscious of receiving. You can as it were at that point in your experience take a look back over the way God has taken

with you, and on account of the Holy Spirit shedding abroad God's love in your heart, you are able to say, 'Behind it all was His love'. How wonderful that is. Paul says, "scarcely for the just man will one die"; we can understand that, but then he adds, "but God commends *his* love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us". Can you say that? Dear fellow believer, have you looked back on your moral history and reflected on it, and come to the blessed realisation that behind God's operations in your soul, His promptings in your conscience, the wonderful way in which He has operated towards you in Christ is His love, and that He commends it to you, and that the Holy Spirit is shedding it abroad in your heart. How blessed that is. How feeling the glad tidings are.

I have spoken of what is very solemn at the beginning, but the gospel of God's grace goes forth and because it is His grace it brings out the depth and fulness of His feelings. What bounty of love is His. Do not overlook it, dear friend. Do not turn aside; do not say, like those persons in the parable, 'Not for me'. Oh, how solemn it would be if the house were to be filled and you were not in it. Do not allow for that; do not assume anything. Dear young soul, here tonight, may I say to you again, do not assume that because of the congenial circumstances in which you have been brought up in a Christian family, that you are any different. We are all the same; we are all sinners. We all need to go down the same path. Our personal experiences along the way may be different in the detail, but the points reached - repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus - must be the same. I trust these may be established milestones in your history and that consequent upon coming that way you are able to speak of experiencing the blessings of the great supper, the environment of joy and provision that is experienced and known in God's house. And as experiencing that I trust you are able to look back and say, 'Thanks be to God; what love is His; what love has operated towards me!'

May it be so for the Lord's Name's sake.

West Norwood

14th May 2017