

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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ATTACHMENT TO CHRIST

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GBG What I had in mind was living personal attachment to Christ; I feel that is the vital thing. It underlies all our Christian experience, our part in the testimony, and our part in the service of God. I wondered if first of all if we could speak of His attachment to ourselves. That is the reason I read in Deuteronomy 7 because we get the expression, "Not because ye were more in number than all the peoples, **hath Jehovah been attached to you**". For ourselves that would involve the Father, and the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Each of the Persons of the Godhead is attached to us.

But I wondered if we could speak in relation to the Lord Jesus being attached to us firstly. What is in ourselves can be variable; not so with the Lord Jesus. Think of the Lord Jesus in the three and half years of public service, how attached He was to His own. He continually served them, He taught them, He went in and out amongst them. He cared for them because He loved them, and then He went into death and He rose. He says, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God", John 20: 17, but He did not immediately ascend; He was so attached to them that He stayed with them forty days and went in and out amongst them, had to do with them. He only had to do with His own in those forty days.

The proof of attachment to Christ is in these women in John; that they were prepared to stand by the cross of Jesus; that was not an easy thing to do. These were difficult circumstances, with everyone else opposed to the Lord, and yet they were prepared to stand by the cross of Jesus; that was affection, living affection for that Man in a suffering position. That is the proof of attachment to Christ.

In Philippians Paul is an example or a model of a believer. For these persons in John, it was Christ here in humiliation, but Paul specially sets out attachment to Christ where He is. That is the Person he came to know on the Damascus road; the Lord apprehended Him and His life from then on was changed because of his attachment to this Person. I wondered if that would be profitable for us.

RJC It will keep us right through to the end, save us from wearying. We are up and down quite a bit, but attachment to Christ would keep us

steady, and see us right through to the end, do you think?

GBG I think that is the vital thing. Thankfully we have great light, and we have many occasions of gathering together, which are very precious, but personal attachment to Christ is absolutely essential. It is a great encouragement in individual exercises to have One who you can always turn to, rest in, completely trust; He is always there for you. Even if we feel discouraged or down, the Lord never changes, He is always accessible, and things that He passes us through, or exercises amongst the saints, are all to tend towards greater personal attachment to Christ.

I thought first of all we could speak of His attachment to ourselves; it is a wonderful thing to think of each of the Persons of the Godhead attached to us. You think of the Father; He is attached to us, constantly caring for us. The Lord says, "the Father himself has affection for you", John 16: 27. There is the Spirit's attachment to us as individuals; He never leaves us. He is committed in service to us; but then we have the Lord too, that Person we have been brought to know and love. Love can be a more general thing - these two thoughts are very close, love and attachment, but when you speak of attachment it is a very personal thing; you are attached to a particular person. You know that in natural things; there is attachment to a person. It is a personal thing between the individual believer and the Lord.

NJH Is there a difference between attachment, as Jehovah here is attached, to His people and what transpires now through the economy?

GBG Well, Jehovah was attached to His earthly people; how He cared for them! How difficult they were! But now we have a Man, which is distinctive to Christianity; God has come into manhood.

NJH His promises were proof of His committal or attachment to His people. And then through redemption and through the tabernacle being set up, it was all a proof of His attachment to His people. I was thinking of your reference to the end of John and then Philipians, it involves something new in the believer, that He is not attached to what is old, the old order of man, but it involves what is new in the believer, is that right?

GBG Yes, it is what is of Himself. He is attached to us personally. Of course He could never help us with what is of the order of the first man. What you say is good about the attachment of Jehovah to His earthly people. You see His faithfulness, His attachment. However they

behaved He was faithful to them.

WMP At the outset of Exodus God said, “I am come down to deliver them”, Exod 3: 8. Is that the way in which divine Persons have drawn near to us by a down-stooping movement?

GBG Yes, You can see that in the Lord Jesus, in the way He has gone, in His suffering pathway, His attachment to us in going the way He did go, and that in itself brings us into attachment to Him, does it not? It is suffering love that draws the affections out to Him personally.

TDB It says in John 13, “having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end” (v 1); that was His attachment to His own.

GBG Yes, I was thinking about that scripture; it is a good one to bring in. He was departing out of the world to the Father, “having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end”; His love went through with everything. That was in view of the Lord in His present position; that is what He had in mind there. He was to be leaving them but He was to love them through everything in His present position. I am glad you mentioned that because that brings in an added thought. The Lord was attached to His own while here, but He is still attached to His own in His present position. You can see that in His constant service to us. Think of His priestly service to us; that brings out His attachment to us. Even when we fail, before there is any movement on our side, He is still attached to us as believers, but He serves us in view of our recovery, in view of our being brought into enjoying the living attachment we have to Him.

NCMcK Do you see somewhat of that on the Damascus road, “Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me?”, Acts 9: 4. The Lord was entirely and fully associated and attached to a suffering company on earth whom He considered to be His body. He felt that; He was in entire sympathy with it, was He not? And He acted on their behalf.

GBG Yes; that is a good reference also, “why dost thou persecute me?”. There is an indissoluble link between Christ and His own in His present position. The Lord Jesus is addressed as Lord in that section of scripture, and He was protecting these few Christians, and He protected them was from the greatest opposer of Christianity. But the Lord looks down on us with affection because we are His own, and considers for us, cares for us, and feeds us.

PAG I was thinking about the Lord in John 11 where it particularly draws attention to the fact that He saw Mary weeping, and He was

deeply moved in spirit. He was not only moved in relation to His own sorrow, His own feelings in relation to the death of Lazarus, but He was moved in relation to Mary's feelings too, v 33.

GBG Yes; so He could sympathise with Mary. He felt for Mary in her sorrow, and how many sorrows and how much suffering there is amongst the saints at the present time. The Lord is not unfeeling as to these things. He feels with us and He has ample grace. I have often been impressed by that; there is grace for everything that we pass through as believers on the Lord Jesus. In 2 Timothy it says, "be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus", chap 2: 1. That grace is there in any case, but it is in Christ Jesus, and we need to go to Him to benefit from the grace that is in Him. It is that personal link with Him, going to Him; you draw from the resource which is in Him, and there is grace for every single situation that the Lord passes us through, to sustain us in having part in the testimony, and what is for divine pleasure.

JSp In John 17 it says, "They were thine, and thou gavest them me", verse 6. Does the attachment go back to that?

GBG I thought that came into this scripture in Deuteronomy. It says, "Not because ye were more in number than all the peoples"; we have nothing to pride ourselves in at all, and there is nothing to mark us out, in man's eyes; "... hath Jehovah been attached to you and chosen you"; I think that relates to what you say as to John 17, "They were thine". And it says here, "... hath Jehovah been attached to you and chosen you, for ye are the fewest of all the peoples; and because Jehovah loved you". God's love and His sovereign choice, I think that is basically the reason for the Lord's love for us: in divine purpose we were chosen. It says in John 17, "They were thine and thou gavest them me". You might ask why the Lord loves us. Well, He loved John; there was lovability in John, but He loves us because the Father has given us to Him, so we are special, is that right?

JL We learn in our experience that certain things draw out divine love, but love itself needs no motive, does it?

GBG That is right; divine love does not need a motive; it is what it is. But then your point is that there is what is lovable in persons.

JL Yes; I was thinking both things apply. The compassion, for instance, that was drawn out from the Lord on account of the sorrows that Mary and Martha were passing through show that, but nevertheless divine love of itself needs no motive: it is so perfect in

itself.

GBG Yes: the Lord has been here, and He knows first hand what we might pass through, and what He passes us through; so He feels perfectly and can succour us in these things, and it is all to draw us closer to Himself.

NJH I was thinking, following what has been said, that attachment really starts with God Himself; not only the truth but the function of it. I was thinking of what was said: is it not when they were few in number that the covenant was there; but there was also the oath? God had to set things on Himself to bring His people into attachment and into response.

GBG Yes; so there was attachment: they were a special people, were they not? That brings out God's right. God chose Abraham. God wanted Abraham; He had Abraham; He called him out. And it is God's right in relation to men. He wanted Abraham; so He chose him, and then He had the nation of Israel. Then God decided, since God has rights in relation to the earth, to put Israel in Canaan, and He did that. That shows God's rights in relation to humanity and in relation to the earth. He has rights and He is the Creator, but He decided to have a nation on the earth, and He chose out Abraham. That was the beginning of it; so it began with God, and therefore God was attached to these people, and again they will soon come into their proper place. He will not give up; He is not giving up His promises and love for that nation. But it is from God's side: that is your point.

NJH Yes, and obviously David was lovable to the eye of God, even though his failures are recorded, but David was attached to his God and that runs right through to Revelation; so God holds these things as examples is that right?

APG God's word to Joshua was, "I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee", Josh 1: 5. That scripture comes into Hebrews, (chap 13: 5), and it is stressed that "*he* has said". Is that an encouragement for us, that God is saying that?

GBG That is a great encouragement for us. Divine Persons are fully committed to what is of Themselves here, individually. Jacob would speak of it as well, "the God that shepherded me all my life long to this day", Gen 48: 15. It is a great comfort and encouragement that divine Persons are absolutely reliable in their attachment to us. That should stimulate and encourage us to commit ourselves.

GAB Romans 5 says that “God commends *his* love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us”, verse 8. But, as has been suggested, divine love goes back before we had any sinful history at all.

GBG Yes, as to us as individuals. It is amazing that it says He “commends *his* love to us”; it is great in itself, but He is commending it to us. Then “Christ has died for us”; there is the proof of love. , God has thought about us before we had any sinful history: there is a way of salvation, redemption. Redemption is that God wants us for Himself.

I was thinking of the Lord in the gospels; that is where you see His attachment: how He continually served them, how He was patient with them. Sometimes they did not grasp what the Lord was saying, but that did not change His attitude towards them; He went on with them constantly served them. In Luke's gospel up to chapter 7, the Lord served on His own; in the beginning of chapter 8 you get these women who ministered to Him of their substance. After that you get the twelve and the seventy. It is the Lord's personal service that secured these women that were attached to Him. How attractive it must have been to have the Lord personally serving you while He was here. Well, we know that personal service to ourselves, and it is all to bring about attachment to Him.

TRC When Peter walked on the water he called, “Lord, save me” (Matt 14: 30), and it says, “immediately Jesus ... caught hold of him”. I wondered whether in Peter's experience you can see the Lord's personal attachment to Peter, but then when you come to John 21 the Lord was educating Peter that if he was going to be preserved in the testimony it is only on one basis, and that is attachment to Himself.

GBG Yes; I am glad you mentioned Peter because I was thinking about him. What you say about walking on the water is good and he cried, “Lord, save me”, and the Lord immediately served him. That is like the Lord's priestly service to us at the present time, and whatever situation we are in and we cry to the Lord He is there for us to serve us. Satan could work on Peter's flesh, but he could not dislodge the love that Peter had for the Lord: he just could not do that! Peter had to learn a good bit; self-assertiveness and self-confidence were there, and the Lord worked with Peter so that they might be removed, but Peter loved the Lord. He was attached to the Lord and the third time in John 21 the Lord says, “Art thou attached to me?”, v 17. He had to get Peter divested of himself, and the Lord before him, but it was on the basis of Peter being attached to the Lord that He could commit the lambs and

the sheep to him. He could be trustworthy then.

CE Things from the divine side are constant, are they not? From what I remember from school they spoke about certain things that are constants; they are unaffected, they do not change regardless of what is there; and that is divine affection, divine attachment, is it not? The affection of the father in Luke 15 for his sons was always the same; it never diminished. The younger son who went away knew that; regardless of the passage of time that it took for him to dissipate his fortune when he came to himself, he said, "How many hired servants of my father have abundance of bread", v 17. How did he know? How was he assured of that? How did he know the father had not changed? It was a constant; he knew with full certainty that the father was exactly as he was when he left it; that is a real assurance to our souls, is it not?

GBG Yes, and it is very stabilising to realise there is no change with divine Persons. I am sure every day the father would look out to see whether the son was returning. He would be on the lookout for that. And that is the case with ourselves; persons might turn aside, but even in natural things there is an attachment, and you are on the lookout, constantly praying, with it constantly on your spirit that persons might be recovered, brought back to what they once enjoyed, or might never have enjoyed, but that you are enjoying yourself. But in divine Persons that constancy is perfect!

RGr Do you think this matter of recovery that you have touched on bears on this? We find certain blessedness in God's goodness and His sovereign favour, but we really see the depth of His attachment when He reaches out and touches us in recovery?

GBG Yes; that is good. We get away from the Lord but then the Lord in His affection, since we are on His heart, and He is Advocate, serves us when we fail, brings us to repentance; that is His attachment to us. He wants us in right relations with Himself. I do not think there is such a thing in Christianity as we have in Song of Songs where it says, "I sought him, but I found him not" (chap 3: 2); that is not Christianity. Whenever we seek the Lord He is there for us.

RJC He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and to the ages to come", Heb 13: 8. That would confirm what you said; He never changes: He is constant.

GBG It warms your heart to realise that is the kind of Person we have to do with.

Moving on to John's gospel, "And by the cross of Jesus stood his mother, and the sister of his mother, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala". Think of what it must have meant to the Lord Jesus: "Jesus therefore, seeing his mother". John does not initially say he was there; he says that "Jesus therefore, seeing his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved" - that is how he brings himself in - "says to his mother, Woman behold thy son". They were near enough to the cross of Jesus to hear Jesus speak, and they stood there! What thoughts must have been going through their minds and their affections; the One they could not do without, they loved, and who had served them so well, was there on the cross. The hatred of man put Him there. God used it. They were personally attached to the Person who was there.

NJH John was expressing his own experience with Christ, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was he not? He was special to Christ, but every believer should be conscious of that; it is not just a unique place he had, but we should be very conscious that we do not need to put a name on the disciple whom Jesus loved; it was a product of attachment, was it not?

GBG Yes, that is right. In chapter 20 it says Mary "comes to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, to whom Jesus was attached", verse 2. So "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (chap 21: 20) is how John speaks of himself when he is in the enjoyment of that love. Sometimes he speaks of himself in other ways, but when he is in the enjoyment of the love of Christ he speaks of himself in this way. But think of the Lord Jesus there on the cross. It says earlier, "he went out, bearing his cross" (v 17); what dignity; how the Lord Jesus carried Himself at such a time, how He bore Himself!

JL There was no evidence of great service or activity on the part of these persons just at this point; was there true attachment shown in their evident faithful love shown for the Lord, that they were standing by near where He was?

GBG I remember three day meetings thirty years ago with Mr Willie Dickson in Aberdeen, and the title of the book was "Attachment to Christ", and he said in the course of the readings that this scene here was the acid test of attachment to Christ: the Lord Jesus in a suffering position and persons prepared to identify themselves with Him. He also said that underlying all attachment to Christ is affection. Mr Raven puts it in a different way, attraction, attachment and affection. But Mr

Dickson said affection underlies all attachment. These three day meetings were a great help to me at the time, and I have never forgotten them: personal attachment to Christ. Mr Raven in his ministry says we are attracted to Christ, we become attached to Him, and then there is affection, vol 18 p119. We are attracted to Christ by what He has done for us, how He serves us; we become attached to Him, which is a personal bond which can never be dissolved. And I wondered for a long time why he put it in that order, but then he says affection. But what I think he had in mind was mature affection. He gives an example in his ministry of a husband and wife, before they are married there might be a certain amount of affection, but full affection is after the bond is made. That link is made, you get mature full affection; it is attraction, attachment then affection, p118.

NJH John did not check up to see what the other ten were doing. He did not ask what company he would get there: it was personal attachment to Christ, and taking up that place in the face of universal opposition to Christ. So you are standing on your own feet in that attachment.

GBG Yes, and then what you find there is that it links them together. It is a little company here, brought together because of personal attachment to Christ and that applies to ourselves. By the cross of Jesus stood His mother and these others; they were together in this attachment to Christ.

RGr Is attachment then not general, but specific? I was thinking of what you said about your own experience; you remember something, the Lord gave you some word at a meeting; that is something that has remained with you. That is part of attachment, do you think?

GBG Yes; it is actual experience, is it not, and it is personal to you? So you benefit from ministry and from others experiences, and the Lord's service to us in ministry attaches us to Him.

DC I was thinking about what you were saying about the Lord giving lovers of His one another to look after. The practical outcome of what you have been speaking of is attachment to the saints. I was thinking of Ruth; Naomi made very clear what she was going back to, but Ruth gives that wonderful touch finishing up with "where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried", Ruth 1: 17. And it says in verse 14, "Ruth clave to her"; is that true attachment, the practical side of it, do you think?

GBG Yes; the effect of being attached to Christ means that we are detached from other things, but we are attached to what He is attached to, we are attached to what means so much to Him. So we become attached to His own, we become attached to the assembly, but there is detachment also in becoming attached to Christ. Peter had to prove that, detachment from certain things, but attachment to Christ, and the cross of Jesus. Well, we can stand by the cross today; it is the proof of our attachment to Christ. Paul stood by the cross in relation to Corinth. He would not have anything else. The problem in Corinth was they were reinstating the man that had been removed in the cross of Jesus; so Paul was standing by the cross in Corinth, 1 Cor 2: 2.

TDB Does persecution bring out true attachment? I was thinking of your prayer at the beginning of the meeting.

GBG It brings out reality in believers. In affection and attachment to the Lord, whatever the cost, they are prepared to be loyal to Him. That is overcoming! Overcoming may not be doing anything great; it is just going on not giving up what is of God, not giving up the truth.

WMP So, what is it that gives us the moral constitution for this?

GBG Well, I think it is the personal attachment to Christ, love for Christ that prepares us for taking this position. It has been said you are not qualified by being there, but you need to be qualified to be there. I think they were qualified to be there because there was a love and attachment to the Person. It was so strong that nothing would deter them; so they associated themselves with Christ on the cross. It was not a popular thing to do, was it? Do you have any help yourself as to this?

WMP There is a reference in Leviticus to the priest eating of the breast of the wave offering, chap 10: 14. I wondered if there is something in the personal love of Jesus that becomes formative in ourselves so that we might have this kind of constitution to take this position.

GBG So they were here as strengthened by the Lord's love for them. That is good; that would be continuing. It says, "Jesus therefore, seeing his mother"; what that meant to the Lord Jesus! We would be sustained in the present time; the Lord would sustain us in a scene of testimony to be faithful to Him, faithful to His cross, because that means the setting aside of every other man, and what is of man.

JL In the time of the Lord's absence now, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit must have a very clear link with this subject, does it not?

GBG Yes. I think so, because normally as soon as we exercise faith, obedience of faith, we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit; so we are Christ's, and we have that living link with Him where He is by the Spirit, in living attachment to Him.

JL We are in the time of Christ's absence. These persons were standing faithfully in His presence, although He was on the cross suffering, but in the time of His absence our bond with Christ in firm attachment is really by the Spirit; that is something to be cultivated, is it?

GBG Yes, that is right; by faith and the Spirit we are attached to Him. The Spirit keeps us in living fresh affection and attachment to this Person.

AB In Romans 8 where Paul says, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come ... nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord", v 38-39. Is it an inseparable position do you think?

GBG Yes, that is very good; and you get it earlier as well where He intercedes for us, the Lord as priest. Now, what is in "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"? That is Christ as mediator; so you get the Priest and the Mediator. Christ's mediatorship is constant; all that comes from God comes through Him, all that goes back to God goes through Him. We need Christ as the Mediator, but nothing can separate "from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord".

Going on to Philipians, I think you see personal attachment to Christ in Paul in a marked way.

NJH He is nearing the end of his service for the Lord, as labourer of the Lord, and it is a summing up with increased energy, is it?

GBG This section is stimulating, is it not? It is stimulating, to cause us to be energetic in relation to Christ where He is. It is amazing that it says, "and to know Him". Paul knew the Lord very well; the Lord had appeared to Him, time and time again; He knew the Lord, but he realised that there was so much in the Lord there was still yet more to know, "to know him". But his great objective here was "the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus". We were speaking of these women at the cross in John; that was Jesus in humiliation; Paul had not had to do with the Lord in that way, but he had to do with the "me"; they were humble persons here "why dost thou persecute me?", Acts 9: 4. Paul as a believer had to do with Christ where He is, and he got such an

impression of the glory of that Man that what was in his heart was “the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”. The “calling on high” is a morally elevated calling. Paul was in prison, and he had seen the moral glory in Christ in His descending movements, “becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross”, chap 2: 8. What he saw there was excellent moral glory; that is involved in “the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”. It is a morally elevated calling; obedience is one of the moral features of that in that Man. Paul saw the excellence of that, and he therefore saw the attractiveness of that moral feature, and so he accepted being in prison; he accepted that in obedience, he accepted persons preaching Christ out of contention (Phil 1: 17), he accepted all these things as the Lord accepted the path of God's will for Him, and he saw moral excellence in it, and he desired to be more like Him. And that is “the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”; that heavenly Man here, marked by moral features that are pleasing to God, and the only way there could be a heavenly order of manhood was that One of the Persons of the Godhead came into manhood. I think that is an amazing thing! And we, by the Spirit, are formed after that Man. The only way there could be a heavenly order of manhood is that one of the Persons of the Godhead came into manhood and we through redemption, and the gift of the Spirit, partake of the life and order of that Man. And throughout our whole lives divine Persons are operating so that we are formed after that Man. Paul was in large measure formed after Christ in prison. But even Paul realised he had not reached the complete divine end in relation to himself, because he says in verse 12, “Brethren, I do not count to have got possession myself”; he says, “Not that I ... am already perfected”; then in verse 15, “As many therefore as are perfect”. That is a different thought, that is full growth, but, “Not that I have already obtained the prize, or am already perfected”, that is being completely like Christ; that is the thought there; morally conformed to Christ. Everything the Lord put him through was to that end, but the apostle Paul knew, that he had still a way to go, therefore he is stretching out, and what the Lord was passing him through all contributed towards that formation after Himself.

QAP The Lord Jesus says, “I am meek and lowly in heart”, Matt 11: 29. That is a remarkable reference, because it is to His heart. But there is what continues although He is glorified because Paul entreated the Corinthians “by the meekness and gentleness of the Christ”, 2 Cor 10: 1. Could you help us as to that?

GBG “Meek and lowly in heart”; are you suggesting that we have to be formed in these features?

QAP Well, that is what has drawn us to Him. Although He is in glory in His present position, even a child or a young person can come to the Lord Jesus and receive an impression of Him.

GBG Yes, that is very good. So that the Lord was a very approachable Person while He was here, “meek and lowly in heart”. So He says, “Come to me”; so that is available to every one of us, and He is still the same.

JL Christ in all His excellence meant so much to Paul that he says in another part of the epistle, “For for me to live is Christ”, chap 1: 21. Life really meant nothing for Paul apart from firm attachment to Christ, did it?

GBG Yes; he was prepared to count other things loss in the light of “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”. He wanted to gain Christ, know more about Him, learn more about Him, become more like Him, have Him as his absorbing object. And what our object is, is important, is it not: “the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”? He wanted to lay hold of what he had been apprehended for, and this is what we have been laid hold of for, this heavenly calling, “the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”. Each believer has been laid hold of in view of this.

DCB Could you say something about “the power of His resurrection”? We can see in the context in which you are speaking how great the desire “to know him”, but Paul goes on to “the power of his resurrection”.

GBG Yes, “and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead”. Do you think that power is towards us now, the power of His resurrection? And he wanted to have part in the fellowship of His sufferings, because he saw moral glory in these things, “being conformed to His death”, moral conformity to His death; “if any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead”. There is no greater power than resurrection, “the power of his resurrection”! There is one Man raised and that brings in the display of God's great power, “the power of his resurrection”; that power is towards us. Paul was quickened in his affections here, was he not, in relation to his object? We will know the power of resurrection ultimately But, “if any way I

arrive at the resurrection from among the dead”: there is no doubt about Paul's ultimate resurrection, as with every believer, but Paul was seeking to arrive at this now, and that is a sanctifying thing in that it is “resurrection from among the dead”. God has left what displeases Him in death, and He has raised what pleases Him; so I think that is a sanctifying thing, if we take the moral bearing of that. He only raised one Man from amongst the dead.

NJH You said earlier that He brought them in attachment on to resurrection ground, and therefore when you have the power of His resurrection you can go on to “the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”. He is the ascending Man; He had them in view of new ground; that is why this is needed, is it?

GBG Yes; this is a process here, you might say, going through these things: “to know him, and the power of his resurrection”, “the fellowship of His sufferings”. I thought of these women at the cross in John; that is “fellowship of his sufferings”, is it not? Then “conformed to his death”; that must be a moral thought.

NCMcK Philippians is written by Paul in a mutual way as a bondman; he is not asserting his authority. He is bringing out his own experience, so this is attachment to Christ, and certain blessings and desires that flow out from it. It brings right desires in the believer and right affections, everything is in right channels, the whole believer is used rightly for Christ, and one of these things you have been drawing to our attention is that we become like the One who we are attracted and attached to.

GBG This is proper Christian experience, is it not? And Paul is “a delineation of those about to believe on him to life eternal”, 1 Tim 1: 16. He is a model here. And in a very gracious way he links others with him, “as you have us for a model”. So models are a great help; you see how others are attached to Christ. Peter could see how John was attached to Christ, closer to Christ. But it helps us in our individual Christian pathway that there is the desire, as Paul says here, that they “may be found in him”; I find that is very attractive. Paul was already in Christ, but he says here, “that I may be found in him”. Receiving the glad tidings, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit we are in Christ and Christ is in us, but he says, “that I may be found in him”. All the time we are here there will still be certain features of the flesh, but Paul looked on with great delight to the time when it would still be Paul, but there would be nothing of the natural Paul to be seen; there would only be Christ: that is

the “calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”. The process goes on now, but there will come a point when there will be nothing of ourselves after nature left; it will only be what the Spirit has formed after Christ, and that is Paul's longing desire: “the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”. I find it a great encouragement that God's thought in purpose for us is to be altogether like Christ, and that is “the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”. The Lord Jesus where He is personally sets forth that calling in Himself; so Paul had that Man as an object: he saw a glorified Christ. John says, “what we shall be has not yet been manifested” (1 John 3: 2), but he was in touch with a glorified Christ; it still laid hold of him.

JL The calling is referred to in several other places in scripture, but this is “the calling on high”. Is it the climax of Paul's objective to be with Christ, and to be like Him, which would be the climax of “the calling on high”?

GBG Yes; that is the fulness of it, “the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”. The moral process takes a lifetime, conformity to Christ, and Paul in prison here was being conformed to Christ still at this point morally, but then the twinkling of an eye will take care of the body side of it; is that right?

RGr So do you think what has been referred to once or twice already would bear on this, that is, our links with the Spirit? If as we say Christ is before us, and He is, and the Spirit's service is to magnify Him, and it is, our entering into these things, and our enjoyment of them must involve clear constant links with the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our lives, do you think?

GBG Yes, I think that it is absolutely essential. The Spirit, as we know, is with us forever; so that shows from His side His attachment to us: He never leaves the believer once the believer receives Him, and He is there to be called upon. He is not the ‘caller's spring’ unless I call upon Him, Judg 15: 17, 19. We have to call upon Him; that is daily attachment to the Spirit, calling upon Him, turning to Him. There is no other way in view of being kept, having Christ as our object before us.

RGr I wondered if the ministry as to the Spirit a long time ago now in 1947, and the way the Holy Spirit has found His full place, or His place in the service of God would bear on all this.

GBG Yes; we might see the present as the time of the finishing touches of the Spirit's work in view of her being translated. And the Lord serves the assembly continually at the present time; it is His one object

here; He has got His own here.

PAG Would “the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus” mean that when we do finally see the Lord face to face we will not have to be introduced to Him; we will meet Someone we know already; we will know as we have been known, 1 Cor 13: 12. His attachment to us, and our attachment to Him, mean that when we see Him we will know Him as He knows us.

GBG Very good, yes. It is a well-known love. We have not seen Him actually, but that will be bliss, to see the Lord Jesus actually for the first time! We are engaged with Him by faith, and the Spirit, but the actuality will be greater than we can imagine!

PAG Yes; to know even as I have been known. What else is there for us, but that! There will be much more of course in praise and eternal response Godward, but there is a Man in the glory who loves us, and we love Him, and we are going to see Him, and be with Him for ever!

GBG So He is going to rapture the assembly, but we will also be there as individuals, will we not? That will never be lost while we are with Him.

TWL Does what John says in his epistle fit in with what we are having: “Herein has love been perfected with us that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, that even as *he* is, we also are in this world”, 1 John 4: 17? I was thinking in relation to what we were saying about resurrection, and so on; love in perfection is the shining of Christ, and those who are precious to Him, “as *he* is”, that is in His ascended position, “we also are”. The translation, when the Lord comes, will be a change of body, a change of condition, but not a change of affection.

GBG Yes, “even as *he* is”; He is currently enjoying the Father's affection; He is currently enjoying that; “even as *he* is, we also are in this world”. We are enjoying divine affection.

TWL Would it be right to say that is attachment both ways. That is, attachment that God has for us, and attachment that we have for Christ. It is both ways, is it not?

GBG That is really very good; yes. The more we enjoy divine attachment to ourselves the more we are attached to divine Persons.

NJH It may be going off the subject a little but I was thinking there is a lot of pressure in the minds and hearts of the brethren; we are going through such times. My mind went to John in the beginning of

Revelation; he was one that knew attachment to Christ. Christ touched Him, but the Lord laid His hand upon him. He does not take it off, so as to sustain him as he faces with sorrow what comes in to the public profession, Rev 1: 17. Is that not something we should cleave to, our desire to have a sense of His hand and His power coming in to sustain us in our concerns?

GBG Yes; the Lord says, “Fear not”. That would cause John to be an overcomer, strengthen him to be an overcomer in difficult days; and in all these churches there were overcomers. And we all have things to overcome, but there is power in Christ and the Spirit to be an overcomer, and overcomers are very precious to the Lord at the present time. But there is always something in ourselves and in the testimony to be overcome.

Glasgow

29th November 2014

List of initials:-

D C Brown, Edinburgh; G A Brown, Grangemouth; T D Beveridge, Kirkcaldy; A Buchan, Kirkcaldy; D Crozier Jnr, Warrenpoint; R J Campbell, Glasgow; T R Campbell, Glasgow; C English, Glasgow; A P Grant, Dundee; G B Grant, Dundee; P A Gray, Grangemouth; R Gray, Grangemouth; N J Henry, Glasgow; J Laurie, Brechin; N C McKay, Glasgow; W M Patterson, Glasgow; Q A Poore, Swanage; J Spinks, Grangemouth

THE CALL

Roland J Flowerdew

Genesis 11: 27; 12: 1-20; 13: 4, 18

I seek help in speaking about this man, Abraham - or Abram as he was called here - in the beginning of his pathway in response to the call, the call of God. The glad tidings comes as a call. We sang in our hymn (No 439) about the call, and how it might be refused; and how often we refuse the call of God in the glad tidings! But I desire to speak about Abraham as a man who answered to the call. I have in mind to encourage each of us to lay hold of the great invitation that God puts before us in the gospel, and the desire that God has that we might move in response to confessing the Lord Jesus as Saviour if we have not already done so - not in movement physically, but spiritually in our souls towards the place of blessing.

I would like to put before you something of the scope of the glad tidings, and the blessings that God has in His desires toward you. We often speak about the necessity of having to do with God in regard to sin and sins. Each of us, before God, is a sinner. I was going to say we are *regarded* by God as sinners, but it is deeper than that: it is not a question of regard but of state. Before God, we are sinners; and it is essential, if we are to have to do with God, that we come by the way of which He speaks, the way that He has appointed. There is only one way, and that is to accept Jesus, because Jesus is the One who has done everything for God. He has met the question of sin; He met it by taking that full load, that full burden of sin upon Himself. In the reading today we touched some of the depths to which He went in order to answer that question of sin. He was "made sin" (2 Cor 5: 21); communion between God and the Lord Jesus was interrupted. Now, you might ask why that communion was interrupted, and one of the answers we come to as appreciating the glad tidings, is that it was on *our* account: on *your* account and on *my* account.

I began reading this section of Scripture about the generations of Terah, the father of Abram. Terah had three sons, one of whom was Abram. I do not want to draw on all the detail in the verses I have read, although the instruction in them is very rich. What we see is that Terah began to move; Terah, his son Abram, his grandson Lot and his daughter-in-law Sarai "went forth together out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to go into the land of Canaan". It says that they "came as far as Haran and dwelt there". So it seems that there was the beginning of a move,

something happening in Terah's life, a move in response to a call that was made. Interestingly, it would seem from the way that chapter 12 begins - we do not know for sure - that Terah moved because of the faith that *Abram* had. God says to Abram, "Go out of thy land, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, to the land that I will show thee".

I liken this to an initial call in the gospel. The call proclaimed - not just here but everywhere that the glad tidings goes out - is a call to all men and women and children. God is not restricted in the scope of His thoughts. It is not as if He has blessing in mind for just one or two, or a handful, or even hundreds; God has blessing in mind for all. And it is essential to see that the work of Christ is sufficient to cover all. In one scripture it speaks of giving "His life a ransom for many" (Matt 20: 28); and in another it says, He "gave himself a ransom for all", 1 Tim 2: 6. So the invitation is very broad, and the question is whether we respond to that call. It appears that there was *some* movement with Terah, but in his life he only gets a certain distance. They moved out of Ur of the Chaldeans; it says they "came as far as Haran, and dwelt there". We were touching earlier today on the teaching from the geography of Scripture, but another interesting detail that comes out in these early chapters of the Bible is the meaning of the place names. They were called out of this city of Ur of the Chaldeans. Ur means 'light', and one of the things we find as the call of the glad tidings comes to us is that there is that which is attractive that holds us in this scene. That is a bit like the 'light' of Ur of the Chaldeans, and the question when that call comes - and that call is being addressed to you this afternoon in the outgoing of the glad tidings - is whether that call is more attractive to you than the lights, the attractions, of this world. You might say to me that I am middle-aged, and can put behind all that kind of thing, but I can say to those who are a little bit younger than me that the attractiveness of the lights of the world does not diminish. Some things lessen in their attraction, and I am sure we could all argue about what those things might be; but the question is whether the beauty and greatness of Christ, and the One who has done everything for God, and the One who has given Himself for me, and has given Himself for you, is something that is more attractive than the lights of this world. Terah, Abram and Lot might all have continued on this journey; they would have come to the land that would be shown to Abram.

Terah only got so far along this journey: perhaps we hear the call of the glad tidings, and we begin to move a little way; then things crop up in our lives and we become a little distracted, and perhaps become occupied with things that would hold us and detain us. It is like

what the Lord says in the parable of the Sower sowing the seed. Some falls into the rocky places, and it begins to sprout and shoot up for a time, and then because it has no root it begins to wither and fade away, Matt 13: 20, 21. There might be that initial attraction of response with you to the call of the gospel, but God desires that there might be with you what the Lord speaks about in the parable as the good ground, where it is possible to draw on the nutrients of the good ground, where the water can come and be held, and there are conditions which are propitious for full fruitfulness towards God. As the call of the glad tidings comes, it might be that we hear about Christ and we appreciate what He has done, the way that He has gone for us, the way His blood was shed on the cross for us, and we realise that something has been done that we do not fully understand. I do not think we will ever fully understand what Christ has accomplished at the cross. God understands it; God knows what was accomplished at the cross; not only did Christ die at the cross to meet and atone for our sins, but He established the conditions so that God could shine out in fulness, so that the richness of the glory of God could shine forth. That is like what we have here: "And Jehovah had said to Abram, Go out of thy land, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, to the land that I will shew thee". He goes on to say, "I will make of thee a great nation, and bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing". What God holds out to us in the glad tidings is an invitation into the greatest of divine things. He does not spell out the details of that invitation; He just says it is very great. That is like what we have here; Jehovah speaks to Abram about "the land that I will shew thee". There comes a day in our Christian experience when we prove that moving in response to the glad tidings is an entrance into something very great. But have you begun to make that move? Jehovah says to Abram here, "Go out of thy land, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house". We become used to our circumstances, and yet the glory of the glad tidings is intended to move us out of them. It may be a place with which we are familiar, the land perhaps speaks of that; it may be that we are held back by our relations and our friends, and that kind of thing. I wonder what So-and-so is going to think if I confess the Lord Jesus to be my Saviour. Confession is essential in the glad tidings. So it speaks about kindred, and then it says, "Go out ... from thy father's house". It may be there are things, possessions, which are dear to us and we do not really want to move from them. But the call comes, and God intends us to be set free from them. And that is what the invitation in the gospel is: Christ has accomplished that work so that we might be set free from all these things. You might say they are natural things, they are right things; and,

yes, we need to take care of things that we have, our families. We need to earn our living; but the invitation in the glad tidings is intended to enable us to see that there is something far greater that God has in mind, and it is a very rich blessing. There is an interesting detail in verse 3 of chapter 12: God says, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" - you might say it is a small detail but there are more blessers than cursers: the blessers here are in the plural, but it says, "**him** that curseth thee". There may be reproach in answering to the call in the glad tidings, and yet the blessing is so much greater. God has set these details here for us to take account of, and to appreciate; and as we realise the greatness of the blessing in what Christ has accomplished, and as we move as impelled by the glad tidings, then we come into an appreciation of these things.

And so what we have in verse 4 is that "Abram departed as Jehovah had said to him". That brings about a question of our responsibility. Have we answered to that call? Have we been obedient to it; do we know what it is to answer to God's call in the glad tidings? And so they move. I do not want to go through this verse by verse, but it is interesting to see that they gain possessions on the way. And it says, "they went out to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came". Now, I like that detail of scripture, because in answering to the call of the glad tidings, God does not require us to go through a period of qualification: if you confess the Lord Jesus as Saviour, the conditions are set for the full riches of divine blessing to be made available to you. There is nothing that God would withhold from you. You might not understand it - who of us understands the fulness of the things of God? But it is all there, all available; that is what I bring out of this verse: "they went out to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came". Everything is immediately available to you in answering to the call of the gospel.

Then we have, "And Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh". One of the meanings of the name Moreh is 'teacher'. As we begin on our Christian pathway, we realise that God intends us to be taught by Him. There are means provided for our teaching, and it is the second great gift that God has provided. The first is the gift of the Lord Jesus as the One who has accomplished everything; and the second is the gift of the Holy Spirit. God provides Him so that He may guide us, and lead us into all the truth; and that I associate in my thought with this oak of Moreh. It is a place of teaching and instruction. It says, "And the Canaanite was then in the land": in the midst of what would oppose there is teaching and

instruction.

And God goes on: “And Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land. And there he built an altar to Jehovah who had appeared to him”. It is very interesting in looking at the history of Abram to see that he is a great altar-builder. Given the fulness of the glad tidings, are we rich towards God? The altar represents a place where God is worshipped. It brings out in the illustration the fulness of God's thought that He might be served; it brings out the service of the priest. The highest service of the priest is to God Himself. In the world around us, a priest is often thought about as somebody who serves man, perhaps religiously; but really the thought of what is priestly in Scripture is that which serves God. God in the fulness of His thoughts desires that we *all* might be priestly towards Him. As knowing the blessing of salvation, having called upon the name of the Lord Jesus, and energised by the power of the Holy Spirit, the desire of God is that we might answer, that we might serve Him. It says, “he built an altar to Jehovah who had appeared to him.” This is the first altar he is said to have built.

Then it goes on: “he removed thence towards the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent”. We could speak about these places but then it says a second time, “and there he built an altar to Jehovah, and called on the name of Jehovah”. Now that is another point in the glad tidings: do you call upon the name of the Lord Jesus? You receive Him and what He has done, you accept the great blessings of salvation, you have received the gift of the Holy Spirit into your heart; but to what effect? Have you “called on the name of Jehovah”? It indicates that there is not only an altar, something set up for service, but the yielding of praise: “called on the name of Jehovah”. It implies to me that there is something greater than the building of the altar; it implies that he was in communion. That is something that is opened out to the believer, that he might know not only the blessing of salvation, but what it is to be a worshipper of God, to be in communion with God. If you are in communion with God, the secrets of His mind are opened out to you. I can only speak about these things in a very limited way, but the illustrations of scripture help us to appreciate and begin to understand these things, and you can see how far the gospel extends: God desires not only that we should receive salvation, but that we should be found as worshippers of Himself, and in communion with Himself.

I did think that I might stop reading at that point, because we see in the next section that Abram starts to fail. The glad tidings comes not

only to those who have *not* heeded the call of the gospel, but the call comes to those who *have* heeded the call. We have begun on the Christian pathway and, as often happens in our lives, there is that to which we answer the light that we have reached in initial confession and turning towards the Lord Jesus (how great that is); and then we find that things come in in our lives and we begin to get dull. What this section shows is that God has an answer to that too. So, it says, "And Abram moved onward, going on still toward the south. And there was a famine in the land. And Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was grievous in the land." We know at this point that he had many goods and possessions, so that a famine was something that was of great concern to him. If there was a limited food supply, and it had just been Abram and his wife, perhaps they would have managed as they were; but at this point we see that he is no longer moving under the call of God. That sometimes happens to us. So we see what happens as he goes down - he seeks to go in his own strength; and more than that, he starts to become a little devious. We can understand that naturally - but he is operating in his own thoughts and his own strength. However, God can use these things to turn us about and bring further blessing upon us. It was not Abram that extricated himself from this situation in Egypt. Egypt speaks to us of the attractiveness of the things of the world in a slightly different way, perhaps the sophistication of the world, the civilisation and culture - a place where there was food and nourishment, and where prosperity would come about. You can see from verse 16 what happened: Pharaoh "treated Abram well ... and he had sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and bondmen, and bondwomen, and she-asses, and camels". There was a multitude of things there, and yet it was not a place of blessing. So Abram is sent away. How good God is toward us so that He operates in our lives so that we are sent away. I think it is the continuing effect of the glad tidings. You may say that you believe in the Lord Jesus; why do we need to come and hear the gospel again, and again, and again? The reason for hearing that call is that once again we see the greatness of Christ, and we are lifted up out of the circumstances which are perhaps beginning to entangle us; it brings before us once again the greatness of God in His thoughts.

So, you see in the beginning of chapter 13 that Abram went up out of Egypt, and it says once again that he is heading towards the south. You might think he is going to the same place but the difference this time is that he is going in the other direction. If we fail in our lives, we need to head back to where we were before. You can see that this is

what is happening here: “And he went on his journeys from the south as far as Bethel; as far as the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai; to the place of the altar that he had made there at the first”. He goes back, but he does not go back just anywhere; he goes back to the altar. How essential it is that we go back to the realisation of what Christ has done for us, and that we are kept fresh in it. So, again it says, “And there Abram called on the name of Jehovah”. Are you one who calls on the name of Jehovah? Are you one who is responding to the greatness of the gospel message, and is found to be rich towards God? At the end of this chapter it says, “Then Abram moved his tents, and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron”, v 18. This time it is not the oak of Moreh, but the oaks of Mamre, which I understand means 'fatness'. What God has in mind for the believer is the full richness of divine blessing. It is a place where we find later in the book that God comes and speaks to Abram, where there is that which is opened out to him. It is a place of fatness and richness and, once again, it is a place where he builds an altar to Jehovah.

Well, these thoughts are simple but the typical teaching is very instructive. We can see what God has in mind in relation to Abram. He was one who moved in faith. God desires that you might move in faith; that you might answer in faith to the call of the glad tidings. If you do not have faith, ask God for it! He has given you a Saviour; He has given you everything from His side. You might say you find it difficult to believe: ask God for faith, ask God for help; because He has not only provided a Saviour but He has provided the Holy Spirit, and He would give you faith and give you understanding. And He will give what we have here - He desires to give you the fulness of the richness of divine things.

May each of us answer to the call of God in the glad tidings. The invitation is held out before us; God holds Christ out as an Object for our affections - not exactly as an Object of desire, but as an Object for our affections. God has given Him in love; He desires that we might answer and respond to Him in love: may each of us do so for His Name's sake.

Witney

28th August 2014

“JUDGMENT AND MERCY AND FAITH”

Jim M Macfarlane

Matthew 23: 23

Luke 10: 25-29, 36-37

Jeremiah 9: 23-24

I think we all felt profited by our considerations on Lord's day afternoon, when we took account of what our brother brought before us with regard to Mount Zion, what it represents as to the sovereign mercy of God, and the privileges that flow out to those who have been shown mercy. Psalm 48 takes account of her towers, her bulwarks and her palaces; we can consider how we have been brought into a realm of privilege and elevation, and learn that the love of God has been expressed in the mercy which has been shown to us. In the verse I have read in Matthew, the words of the Lord are not addressed to the scribes and Pharisees in terms of the blessings of being the objects of mercy, but rather that, even in terms of the law, the exercise of mercy should be central to the regulation of their own practice.

The law required that everything be tithed and, in order to comply perfectly with this, the scribes and Pharisees tithed even the smallest and most trivial of things; the Lord refers to the herbs which were added in tiny quantity to give flavour to food. The Lord contrasts this with what He describes as “the weightier matters of the law, judgment and mercy and faith”. I think that it is of note that He does not refer to these three things as more elevated than the law, or as superseding the law, but speaks of them as its weightier matters. These are judgment and mercy and faith, and of them He says “these ye ought to have done and not have left those aside”.

I think that, whenever the exercise of a moral faculty is required, the three things which the Lord mentions here must be taken together. The first requirement is judgment. This means that there is a moral assessment of every circumstance that is presented to us. The writer to the Hebrews refers to “full-grown men, who, on account of habit, have their senses exercised for distinguishing both good and evil”, chap 5:14. The ability to judge is not only a capability that we have as a result of the possession of the Holy Spirit but a duty in every circumstance. Along with judgment, the Lord mentions mercy. There may be a tendency to seek some kind of balance between judgment

and mercy, with concern as to having too much of one or the other. The Lord speaks of them together and neither is compromised by the activity of the other. A sense of the mercy which has been shown to us will regulate us in the exercise of judgment. A sense of being always under the eye of God will also regulate the activity of judgment and mercy; hence the Lord's reference to faith.

We have read in Luke because the lawyer in chapter 10 was led by the Lord to speak of mercy. The Lord Jesus did not use the word in this passage; the lawyer was compelled to. He was seeking to put the Lord to the test by asking, "having done what, shall I inherit life eternal?". He was put to the test by the Lord, who asked him, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" No one was better qualified to answer a question about the law. This man's life had been devoted, not only to what God had given Moses, but also to the vast body of knowledge that the Lord, elsewhere, calls "your traditional teaching", Matthew 15: 3, 6. The Lord gave full approval to his answer, along with an exhortation to let his answer guide his practice. The lawyer, "desirous of justifying himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbour?". We know how the parable unfolds and it finishes with the lawyer having to answer his own question. The Lord Jesus developed the parable in a way that did not allow the lawyer to offer criticism of the man's descent from Jerusalem to Jericho; he might have felt well qualified to do so. The question which he had to answer was the one which he himself put to Jesus, by whom he was directed to focus on what was necessary to restore the man. He was compelled, in the presence of Jesus, to identify it as the activity of mercy. However he may have wished to justify himself, the last word belonged to Jesus, with an exhortation: "Go, and do *thou* likewise".

I read in Jeremiah 9, because others have connected it with the passage in Matthew. The prophet speaks about the things in which the natural man glories, in a summary which is as appropriate today as it was when Jeremiah spoke. He continues, "but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am Jehovah, who exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith Jehovah". What elevation for a person to know and understand Jehovah and to learn what He delights in. In Matthew 9, Jesus says, "But go and learn what that is - I will have mercy and not sacrifice", v 13. This is a reference to Hosea 6: 6, where "loving-kindness" is used where the Lord, in quoting it, uses "mercy". If

we can consider the correspondence between the two words to apply in the passage in Matthew 23, the Lord would seem to be indicating that the weightier matters of the law were not simply more important for man's attention, but are things in which God delights.

The accounts of the Lord's own practice in the gospels provide perfect examples. In John 8, the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman before the Lord, stating that Moses had commanded that she should be stoned for the sin which she had committed. He applied the weightier matters of the law to all present, to the scribes and Pharisees as well as to the woman. When He said, "go, and sin no more" (v 11), He did not leave any question as to the moral character of what she had done. This, however, was after He had said, "Neither do I condemn thee". Do we not all know the unearned blessing of "no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus", Romans 8: 1? May we be encouraged by these things and may the Lord be able to bless the word to us all.

Dundee

19th May 2015

ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

John N Darby

1 Kings 17

Notice how the word of God introduces the person of Elijah in the midst of the sorrows of Israel. The preceding chapter contains only awful things. God's judgment is upon the land, for the last king did worse than all the others; he marries the daughter of the king of Zidon and introduces in Israel the idolatry of the Canaanites, more abominable idolatry than that of the golden calf. It is then, the people being reduced to this state, that Elijah the Tishbite appears suddenly upon the scene. Thus God always raises up a testimony in the midst of His people, a testimony the more powerful as the iniquity is the greater.

Elijah stands in the presence of Jehovah, and that was his strength. I want to show you how God strengthens him and makes him able to go forward. Elijah was not always occupied in testifying and accomplishing acts of power before the people. His normal position was to stand in the presence of Jehovah, so that when difficult circumstances arose, he was prepared for everything. Another remark: for three and a half years, Elijah had the providence of the land at his will. One would have been able to see an extraordinary manifestation of the prophet's power, but James tells us, "Elias was a man of like passions to us, and he **prayed** with prayer that it should not rain; and it did not rain upon the earth three years and six months", Jas 5: 17. That came from the fact that he stood in the presence of God, finding divine power in his communion. He prayed and so ordered everything. Elijah was very troubled about the state of iniquity of the people, and became the instrument of chastening, but as participating in this chastening himself. God told him to hide by the torrent Cherith, because Ahab was seeking for him everywhere to destroy him, 1 Kings 18: 10. God supported him there, while putting his faith to the test by the state of famine of the people; but the torrent ended up dry. God grants us the relief that we are lacking. Our faith is thus tested anew because we do not lean on the resources that God gives.

Elijah's mission to Zarephath presents us with several remarkable points. It was the last place where one could suspect that God would send His prophet. Zarephath was in Zidon, the country of

Jezebel who was seeking for Elijah to destroy him. But it is there that God's sovereign grace manifests itself. He says, "Arise, go to Zarephath, which is by Zidon". Jesus says, "There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, so that a great famine came upon all the land, and to none of them was Elias sent ...", Luke 4: 25. God left aside the widows of Israel, and His sovereign grace sent the prophet to a Zidonian widow who was dying of the famine. Men certainly would not have sent him to be nourished there, at the house of a widowed stranger who possessed nothing; it was the opposite of all human prudence, and the opposite of every Jewish idea. We are no further from God in the most painful circumstances than in the most favourable. Moreover, the former are the occasion for God to manifest Himself.

The woman is full of good will (v 11) and Elijah reveals his needs to her. Here, God knew something which the prophet did not know. This woman knew Jehovah, the God of Israel (v 12), and God knew her well; He sends this visitor to the poor widow. Like Rahab, she recognised the power of God with His people; the link is thus made at once. Elijah tells her that God would provide everything; she has entire faith in his word and recognises the word of God in the mouth of His prophet.

We find here a touching lesson on the grace of God. This poor woman was not expecting the coming of Elijah, and did not know that God thought of her. Her faith is put to the test, but God visits her at just the right moment. She has no more than one last handful of meal, but *God is there* to concern Himself with this widow, a stranger to the covenant of Israel. When God's grace acts to visit somebody, they find faith in the word of God, and God answers to this faith. This woman learns thus to become much more familiar with God's ways.

But the presence of God through the word always tends to 'bring our iniquity to remembrance', v 18. It brings chastening upon us so that we learn to know it and to obey Him. When God acts powerfully by His Spirit, He prunes the vine shoots so that they bear more fruit. The widow's son falls sick and dies. When God's chastening is manifest among His own, it is the sign that He wants to bless. One sees in Hebrews 4 that the word of God is living and operative, judging the thoughts and intents of the heart, and that everything is naked to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, v 12, 13. The word searches all,

and as we are judged, the priesthood of Christ, which quickens, restores and blesses, is there. God only blesses us in searching us. His presence meets the evil and removes it, but this work is accompanied by boldness to approach the throne of grace. The presence of Satan destroys confidence; the word brings us near to God and produces confidence. This woman did not have full confidence, being conscious of all that she was. Elijah intercedes and becomes, as the instrument, the source of life for her child. The woman now knows that, God having answered in grace, his word is truly the word of God, and she has the practical certainty of the power and of the truth of this word for blessing, life and restoration, v 24.

Let us not avoid the effect of the word acting on our conscience and bringing everything to remembrance; for if God does it, if He searches us, it is to bless us. Full grace introduces the word that judges, but which is inseparable from the grace.

Let us have confidence. If the torrent fails us, we will find a widow of Zarephath. Who then at the court of Ahab would have thought to look for Elijah in Zarephath, in Jezebel's country? Sovereign grace keeps us and uses all its resources to bless us. May God teach us to count by faith on His sovereign grace!

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