

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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FOOD IN FAMINES

Gary M Chellberg

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I would like to begin by asking a question: why did you come here this weekend? It is a challenging question. Each one of us would probably answer in a slightly different way. Perhaps some were made to come here by their parents; some came here because they just wanted to come for the weekend, or some came for family or friends. All of those reasons are true in measure, but I wonder if any of us could answer that question by saying that we came here for food. I know it is Thanksgiving, in America anyway, and everybody is thinking about food to some degree. What I am going to speak about today is a different kind of food. We live in a day of great information and great communication. Each one of you probably has a cell phone in your pocket or your purse that has access to more information than I suppose the greatest library on earth contains. With a few taps of your finger, you can access just about anything that you can imagine: that is information. I want to speak about food, not information - especially to the young people, for there is a danger today of mistaking information for food. Just because your parents may have two hundred volumes of ministry in your home does not make you anything, if you do not read it properly in the power of the Holy Spirit. A man once said that sitting in church does not make you a Christian any more than sitting in your garage makes you a mechanic: there is a lot of truth in that. The only way for any one of us to get the kind of food that I would like to speak to you about is to get near to the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot access the kind of food that I am speaking about through any modern information technology. It is the living Word of God. We touched a little bit on it in the reading - the words of God involve what is current and living. The Word of God we have in front of us, written down for us as the Word of God in Scripture. That is the Word of God. The words of God, as I understand it, involve what is living and what is real. That is the kind of food that is going to 'stick to your bones'. The food that you get in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, alone, is the only food that is going to strengthen you and build you up from the inside out and have any lasting change on your life.

If you came to these meetings for the weekend to have a good time, I can assure you that you will have a good time. But you may not go away with any change or anything built up in you for the better. That is a very sobering thing. Sometimes you go to a three-day meeting and you pick up one thing. That is how simple it can be; just one point that you remember. It may even be off the subject of what was being spoken about, but if you come away with that one thing, *that* becomes formed in you and that results in something for God.

In order to find that kind of food, I would suggest that we could begin by considering the scripture in Amos that we read, because Amos says there will be a famine in the land - not of food and water but a famine "of hearing the words of Jehovah." That is the kind of famine I would like to suggest to you that we live in today. We live in a world marked by all kinds of communication, but I believe we live, in the present age, in days of famine of "the words of Jehovah". We have to begin in our own individual pathway to recognise where we are today. If we want to move forward in the testimony, if we want to grow as Christians, if we want to grow as worshippers, it has to begin, I believe, with recognising that there is nothing in the world around that we can access that will help us in our Christian pathway. It is only found in one place and that is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is what led my thoughts in reading to Genesis 45. As Joseph, one of the most perfect types of the Lord Jesus portrayed in Scripture, began his pathway we know that his father gave him that coat of many colours. It is like the Lord Jesus when He was marked out on earth. At that instant the enemy had to rise up against Him. The persecution began as soon as Jacob gave Joseph that coat of many colours. It came in immediately through his own brothers, his own brethren. You may say they should have known better, but they did not. The persecution came in through them. He was thrown into the pit. He was taken up and sold into bondage, into Egypt, a type of the world. He is falsely accused of a crime in Egypt, thrown in prison. So there he is, a slave, in bondage, in prison, in the world as a young man, and you think, 'Well, if anybody had a right to be mad and upset it was Joseph'. But he was not. That is why he can be a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. He stayed in that place because he had something that the enemy could not touch, and that was the word of God. It comes out later. We do not know the detail of that but it comes out later as we read. Joseph's brothers had to go through a process of eliminating all the different

types of food. God came in with a famine. I think there are something like twelve famines in Scripture: you can look them up and find them. Most of them are caused directly by God through a drought, like this one. Some are caused by God but indirectly, through an army, or something of that nature. These famines are all under His hands and the purpose is not only to make you hungry and thirsty for something else, but it is to create movement. That is what we see in the book of Genesis here; God brought in a famine to the point where Jacob says, 'We are going to die; there is nothing here any more in this land'. They were where they were supposed to be, but they were missing the word of God.

The same thing happened in Amos's day where we read. In chapter 7 it is Amaziah the priest who gets so annoyed with Amos prophesying what God was about to do to his realm that he tells him to go somewhere else and do his prophesying: 'Do not bother us. We are happy where we are. I am the priest. Do not disturb the king's house. Go to Judah. Give them your prophecy. Just go away'. That is what created the famine that we read about in chapter 8. It began with the prophetic word being rejected. That is one of the ways that God speaks to us today, through the prophetic word. A very important function of assembly life, I would say, is the prophetic word. God may speak through any brother, whoever He will. As long it is God's word, that is what matters. The famine came in here in the book of Genesis. Jacob said, 'You need to go to Egypt to get food'. He was partly right. At least he had heard that there was food in Egypt, but it was not enough to know where there was food. That is not enough for a young person to say, 'I know where there are happy Christians gathering together'. 'I know where you can hear a good gospel'. That is nice, but that is not enough. God has something more in mind. He brought in a famine because He wanted movement in these brothers and He got it. There was a very bad famine and they go to Egypt. Joseph speaks roughly to them, chap 42: 7. Then he puts the money back in their bags, v 35. They had to go through this process of experience that God was bringing out in them before Joseph in this chapter finally can make himself known to them. The important thing is not to know that there is food in Egypt, but to know that the food is only under the hand of Joseph. That is what I want to bring to your attention today. For you to find out where the word of God is active and living you need to identify the only place where you can find God's word. God says in one of the prophets, "My word ... and my Spirit, remain among you", Hag 2: 5. We

can be thankful for that. We not only have just His word, but we have His Spirit to help us to understand that, a very wonderful blessing. You come to a stage in your life where you have identified, as we read in Amos, that we live in famine conditions. You start to hunger for something more, something that is real, that is going to last and make a change in your life, to change you completely from the inside out. Then you need to identify where Joseph is and go to Joseph. Do not just go to Egypt where there is food - that is, you might say, just to a company of people. Do not satisfy yourself going just to that. You may find it there, but find where Joseph is, and where Joseph is speaking.

The last verse that I read, verse 12, is the main part that I wanted to call your attention to. It says, "behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth which speaks to you". Each one of us individually has to go through this process of identifying where we are in the world today where we live in famine conditions. I have been told that Christ will not be your *everything* until He is your *only* thing. These brothers had to come to the realisation that the only food that was going to sustain them in life was found with Joseph, and the only way to get access to that food was to draw near to him; as you must draw near to the Lord, personally, yourself, and identify that it is *His* mouth which speaks to *you*. We have to go through that process ourselves, individually get through to where the Lord Jesus really is. It is the only way that we can ever find this type of food that is going to produce growth and life in you. Now you might be saying, 'That sounds really nice, sounds good. I would like to do that sometime, but I do not really feel able for that'. I tried for many years to get through to that kind of food by myself. You can fight for it and try for it and you wonder why you do not understand something, and you battle away at it under your own power. You will not get there. Think of what Joseph is going to provide here for them. He is not happy just to say, 'Here is another bag of food: take it back to your father and enjoy it, and when it runs out come back and I will give you another bag'. He says, 'I want you to come and abide with me'. That is what God is trying to get through to you and me, to bring us out of this world to an area where we can be sustained with this type of food. What I would tell you by way of encouragement is that you cannot get there in your own power, or your own thoughts and abilities. Only Joseph provides the wagons, a type of the Holy Spirit as we know in Scripture. He sends the wagons to bring them back so that they can abide with him and live with him and enjoy what Joseph had. It is a wonderful point in our life when we reach that;

that the only place that you can find this type of food is with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is encouraging because we live in a day of information that can be so confusing. As an example, I was trying to find that scripture in Amos. I thought it was in the Book of Joel, and I did not have my concordance with me; so I went to a website and typed in roughly what I thought it said and I found it. On the same page where it listed the verse, there were nine Bible dictionaries, thirty-four Bible commentaries, and 143 different translations of the Bible. If you had a question about the verse, you could click on a link and listen to somebody read it to you, or you could link it to another website that would open it up even more. Seeing all of this, I thought to myself how confusing all this would be if you did not know the Lord Jesus Christ! Where would you start? How could you trace your way through an entire library of information? It is confusing! However, it is encouraging to think that there is only one place where we can get the true words of God, and that is with the Lord Jesus Christ. That is all you need to know.

Years ago, a brother, A B Parker, who worked in a bank, said that when the bank hires a new teller, they do not teach the new hire what counterfeit money looks like; they teach him what real money looks like; because, he said, if you know what real money looks like you can identify any counterfeit money. Get through to the Lord Jesus Christ, alone, the One Man from whom God is speaking, and you will have eliminated all the confusion in what is in the world around us. The most confusing information that you will run into is the religious voice. The hardest thing to find your way through is the religious element. Do not settle for religion. People try to compare Christianity with Islam, Buddhism, hundreds of different religions, but you cannot compare Christianity to religion. Christianity is not a religion: it is a relationship. When you get through to that, it eliminates a lot of the religious chatter that is out there.

I read the Scripture in 2 Kings 4 because that is something that you may come to in your experience and in your pathway. It is coming up against the religious mind, the mind of man in the things of God, and the confusion that that brings in. This scripture here speaks about Elisha. He came again to Gilgal, a very familiar place to all of us. It represents circumcision. That is, you might say, our side, our view, cutting off of the flesh. If we look at it, according to God's purpose, it was really sanctification from Egypt. It was what was accomplished

there, the cutting off - the final cutting off of what had been of man in Egypt, Josh 5: 9. This was removed before they enter into the full purposes of God, what He had in mind for them. Elisha had been there before with Elijah. But now he is coming back to it, and you will notice our little word shows up again, "And there was a famine in the land". This is one word that will keep popping up if you read through Scripture. Abraham experienced it, Isaac, Jacob, Naomi and David. You can read all the familiar names that you have heard of, they all came to a point like this. Each one of us has to deal with this famine, the day in which we live. There are a lot of bad things that could be said about the sons of the prophets, I know, but there are some good things that could be said about them. They are here with Elisha. In this setting they are listening to his word. They act on his word. They do certain things. But in that setting a danger comes in that can affect the entire company. I find that very sobering, how one small thing can enter in and affect a large group of people. There are a hundred of them. Elisha says to them, in a day of famine, 'I think you need some food'. Have you ever heard that before? You think of another gathering in the New Testament, five thousand plus people. The Lord raises the question, "Give ye them to eat", Luke 9: 13. What are we going to feed these people? They are hungry. I think they were like people that came to three-day meetings only to take something away. They were hungering for something but they had not prepared anything ahead of time, not even something small. You know the story of the small boy: he had the five loaves and the two fishes. He had something with him, however small. I think that is like preparing ahead of time for occasions like we are enjoying this weekend, to come with something. Bring something, however small. It may be an exercise just to start a meeting with a hymn, or to open or close with prayer, or bring in a remark, or a comment, one scripture that you have had on your mind for the last few weeks or a month. That practically speaking is how simple what I am speaking about is. God can take that small thing, however small you may say and insignificant in the world's eyes. They say, 'Oh, you are not going to feed this many people with that little basket of food'. But they gave it to the Lord, and the Lord blessed it. He prayed, they pass it out, and there was more than enough for everybody. They were filled.

We see a man of God here in Elisha; we see a man of God who had the word of God. He was a prophet. He knew what God was doing. He knew exactly why the famine was there in the first place. He understood what God was doing and he had access to the type of food

that I am speaking about. He had access to heaven itself. You may say, 'How do you know that'? I can tell you because he says, "Set on the great pot". If you are living in a famine, are you going to bring out a tiny saucepan, and say, 'Well, I hope we can scrape up a handful of something and put it in there and cook it for everybody?'. A person that has identified the famine has identified that there is only one source for this kind of food; and the full riches of heaven become available to him. You can say, "Set on the great pot". Get the biggest one you have got and put it on. That is the mindset of Elisha because he is in accord with what heaven is doing. He knows what is available through God. He says, 'Bring out the biggest one you have got: let us make food for all of these men, the sons of the prophets. Let us give them something real. Let us give them something that is going to build them up; something substantial'. But - this is what I want to call attention to - immediately one of them goes out and gathers up wild colocynths. He gathers this plant matter off of a wild vine. Now you would say there is probably nothing wrong outwardly with that plant. It was used in the adornment of the temple. Do you know the buds and the half opened flowers that were carved in the woodwork of the temple? That was this plant. And this man went out and he went to a wild vine. I think that is like what you can run into when you look through the religious mind to find this kind of food. You are going to find something that is wild. It does not have a place in this great pot. It does not belong there, because the end of it is death. If you bring anything into a meeting that does not promote life, it is of the enemy. It is wild. It does not belong there, and that may sound harsh, but I believe it is true. There was one man, one son of the prophet here, who went and gathered that bad food and it was about to affect the entire company with what was of the enemy. Now, did Elisha say, 'Dump the pot out and scrub it, and let us start again'? Do we need to throw away everything that we have had before, the ministries that we have enjoyed? Do we need to blot them out and say, 'Well, that was for a time. Paul's ministry was good, but it was for those days - we do not apply that one any more. I do not like this thing that Paul said. That was for that day - let us tear that page out'? Or the earlier ministries - were they just for their day? Do we need to wash the pot out and reinvent it today? I do not think so. We get the answer provided for us very nicely. Elisha says in verse 41, "Then bring meal". That would be a very challenging sentence for you and me if we were in that situation. You have got this great pot of food bubbling away nicely and he would ask you, 'What do you have that would help this situation?'. I think the

meal here is a type of Christ that is brought in that is greater than what was wild and poisonous in character that would result in death. What they brought in was something, a feature of Christ that they could work out on their own. It was meal. It had been processed. It is not the raw material exactly. It was like an impression that each one might have of the Lord Jesus Christ. What He means to *me* is what is important - however small that may be. It may have been ground over a long period of time, many years; I think that is how this works out. But he says, "bring meal". You say, 'Well, it is a time of famine. Where am I going to find enough meal to deal with that poison?'. That is not the question. It is not a question of volume. He does not say x number of bushels or a bag or something in pounds of meal; he just says, "bring meal", because that is the answer.

We have found that we are living in a time of famine and that there is only one place that we can go to for food of the right character, that is to Joseph, the true type of Christ. If we get through to that type of food we can bring something, however small; it counteracts what was happening here in 2 Kings. Elisha says, "bring meal". We had quoted in the reading, "because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world", 1 John 4: 4. Here is an example of that Scripture. You wonder, you say, 'Well, that sounds good, but show me, what does that mean?'. That is what I would show to you right now. Here is the answer. Elisha says, "bring meal". Bring whatever you have, some impression of Christ that you have worked out individually. All of you bring something: put it into the pot. And what happened? What was there of man's mind, that was poisonous in character, what was not really food, becomes neutralised. It is taken away. The danger of it is broken, and they are able to be fed. It says, "And there was no harm in the pot". Think of that. All these people were then able to feed on that meal, something that would sustain them and cause them to grow. I find it very encouraging that it can be so simple to be sustained in this world. It is marked by hardship, marked by testing of every kind: it is a famine. Whether the famine is produced by conditions around you, whether it is a moral famine, issues that you have in your life that are wrong, whatever type of testing and problems that you have, they are all famines. If we get through to see and identify them for what they are, say, 'That is a famine', and then look for where we can hear the words of Jesus. We can hear the word, "behold ... that it is my mouth which speaks to thee". Get through to that. Then when problems and trials come up, it becomes very simple because there is only one

answer to whatever the problem is. There is one source for power and there is one answer. We do not need myriad different translations of the Bible to understand what God is speaking to us today. We try to make it more complicated because of our religious minds but I would caution each one of us not to do that.

Information technology has its place, but I would like to give a warning to each one of us that what we look to for help should not be mere information. It should not be something that is arrived at by the religious mind, something that sounds good, or looks good; but that we should get through to the real true words of Christ. That alone is where the answer lies. I find that very encouraging, very stimulating and challenging as well. It is as simple as getting through, individually, to the Lord Jesus Christ. Identify His mouth, that it is Him that is speaking, and that will change you on your pathway. It will change you. It will change how you think; it will change the way you approach Scripture, ministry, everything. It will change the way you are formed.

I have always been impressed with the book of Genesis. It begins by man being placed in a garden where everything was good and wonderful. There was no rain, everything was nice; but the last verse, the last sentence of the book of Genesis ends, "he was put in a coffin in Egypt". If you go back and look at the book of Genesis you could say, 'There is the history of man'. God had everything in mind for man, gave it to him, and it was ruined because of sin. If you stay in that world, a world of famine, you will end up with your bones being in a casket in Egypt, in the world. They will stay there. That is the end of what is for God. But if you look a little closer at that story, dig a little deeper, you will see that those bones are Joseph's; and if you dig a little deeper you will find out that he gave a commandment that years later when the people came to leave Egypt they were to 'carry up my bones hence', chap 50: 25. And they do. They took Joseph's bones later on, quite a time later on, and the coffin, out of Egypt and into the land, a land of promise, the land where God would have them to be, Josh 24: 32. He is brought into that portion, you might say. It is very wonderful to think of the two types of man that you get in the book of Genesis. One is lost for ever; nothing for God, dead, lifeless - that is what poison produces. But there is another kind that goes on. That is what we touched on in the reading. God wants to dwell with men. The tabernacle of God is with men. There a living area where we can enjoy these things.

I just leave these thoughts with you and hope they can be some encouragement to each one of us and a challenge for us; that we identify the words we are listening to that we are using for our help and our guidance on the pathway that we are on.

For His Name's sake.

Indianapolis

23rd November, 2012

THE WAY OF REPENTANCE

D Andrew Burr

2 Corinthians 7: 10

Job 42: 1-6

Luke 24: 45-47

Acts 2: 36-38

I would like to say a simple word as to 'the way of repentance'. We sang about it: 'The way of repentance', Hymn No 257. What is the road along which repentance is found? Who is on it? And where does it go? Who made it? Maybe we have not thought about the question in exactly those terms.

The gospel is preached, beloved, because God has come out. God has come out in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has come where His creature man is found. He has come to sinners; He has come to a world full of sin. It is a long way to come because, as we all have found, man in his sin is a long way from God. In fact, the nature of the distance is such that the cleverest engineer could not make a way back. So the way of repentance has been laid by God Himself. He has made a way along which He Himself can first come out. His purpose in coming has been *to draw near to you*. I expect that on other occasions, perhaps in other preachings of the gospel, or maybe in some private reflection or prayer or waking thought, you have had the sense that God was near to you. This might not be the first time. You would not be the first person to say that there have been occasions when His nearness, His presence, has felt unwelcome. It is a sad thing that that should be: God is full of goodness, the source of all our blessings, the Creator of the world on which we live, the holder of our breath; but His presence has become unwelcome. The reason for that is that sin has taken us away from Himself. We want to hide; the sinner is actually quite glad that there is a distance. But God has covered that distance; He has not left the sinner a long way away. He has come and lived in the midst of people like us, in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He came into the world as light (John 12: 46), and of course that light revealed what the world was like, and it reveals what we are like; but it told the wonderful story of what God is like as well. If God has come into what was His and found it so corrupt and away from Himself, it would have been open to Him to come to cleanse it and to remove and subdue all manifestations of wills contrary to His own. There is a day in which He is going to do

that. I could have read a scripture in the Acts in which Paul uses that great truth to enjoin people to repent, Acts 17: 30.

But when God appeared in the person of Christ, it was in grace. "The grace of God which carries with it salvation for all men has appeared", Titus 2: 11. It appeared in the midst of a world of sin. It appeared to people whose hearts and lives are racked by that very thing. The Lord Jesus has come not simply to challenge that state of distance and darkness, but He has come to resolve it. He has come to make a way, come to allow God to reach out to guilty sinners in love; and in order to do that He came to die. It is not that the sentence of death lay upon Him; it lay on everyone else, but not Him. So, in submitting to the power of death, it was as taking the place of others. If He bore the penalty that was due to others, it must be that He has also borne the guilt that was due to them, that lay upon them. That is what the Lord Jesus has done. He has taken a place under the awful wrath and unsparing judgment of God and borne it all. He did that when He was here, and it was on that account that He died; and He lay in the heart of this very earth. Think of that, Jesus dying having borne God's judgment upon sin. That is what God has done. He has raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, a wonderful testimony that His work was accepted for whatever purpose it was done, and the Lord Jesus is now exalted at the right hand of God. Well, He is not here any more; but that does not mean, as some might imagine, that the distance at which man was from God has returned. It is not that God has paid just a passing visit and gone back to heaven leaving the earth to men to please themselves, to do their own will, to carry on in sin. The fact that God has drawn near in that glorious history of love demonstrates that He has come near to us and, although the Lord Jesus has returned to heaven, the presence of God is something that may be very easily found.

We might ask why the Lord Jesus came that way. Why was it necessary for somebody to die, what is this guilt that He bore, what had happened, who had done it? The fact is that the distance of which I have spoken can be explained as the immediate consequence of sin. It is sin that has done it. When I speak of sin I do not speak only of things of which you and I might be ashamed, judging against the yardstick of current morality; or just something of which those among whom I move would be surprised. I do not speak only of things that might bring public disgrace either for myself or for those whose company I keep. I speak about things that have been against God. That brings us to the

question that we need to think about. This is a God who has been offended by sin, but not a God whose claim can be ignored because He is a long way away. God has drawn near; and, if God has drawn near, the fact that I have offended against His holiness and against His rights has to be faced.

I read this passage in 2 Corinthians, but I will not go in detail into the background. There had been a scandal in Corinth, and a man had committed a sin that even the immoral Corinthians thought was objectionable; and the company had been scandalised because it was reputed in the city and abroad that the kind of thing this man was doing was tolerated by the Christian believers in Corinth. The company were all very outraged about that once it was pointed out to them, and took a very hard line about it. It was not perhaps simply because someone had been sinned against, which was true, but the company had been scandalised by what had happened. Their first reaction was to look at the matter as the world might look at something: how does this affect my reputation? How does this affect the standing in which I am considered to be by other people (who may be quite immoral themselves), who might disapprove of the things I have done? So it made the Corinthians angry and it made them grieved. But Paul says "the grief of the world works death". I read this partly to show that that is not the way of repentance: the way of repentance does not lead to death. In fact, on the contrary, you will find a verse in the book of the Acts 11: 18 where it says that it is repentance to life! It shows, does it not, that this way, the world's way, is not the way of repentance? It goes the opposite way; it goes down into a condition of despair. But the other reason I read this is simply to show that there is "grief according to God". And the point I wanted to make from this and also from the passage I read in Job is that repentance is something you arrive at in the presence of God; and that is why God has drawn near to us. He has drawn near to us so that we can be in His presence. You might say, 'Well, I am afraid to go into the presence of God; I know what He will say; I know He will condemn what I am and what I have done'. But God invites you to come! - even though that is all true, and He knows better than you that it is true. It is much more horrible to Him than it will ever appear to you, and yet He invites you to come into His presence. He has made a way of repentance, and those who come along it find themselves in the presence of God.

There are several things you will see in the presence of God. You

will see what He is, you will see what He requires, you will see how things appear to Him, you will see His standard, you will see how things that have been acceptable and pass to you do not pass at all to Him. You will also see how you are: God's light is the truest light there is! It does not cast any shadows and it shines in such a way that it lights up not only what you are outwardly, as we are here in this room, but it shines a light into your heart. You get the impression not only that God can see right inside you, but you get a clear view yourself of what you are inside. You will find the Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of God. There are two things you will find when you look at Him: the first is that He represents what God has sought from man, there is a perfection there that will draw you but at the same time challenge and, dare I say, condemn you. But then you will see that it is His mighty work that means that God can allow you to come into His presence, because He wants to talk to you about how that work might be to your advantage and your salvation. So it says here "grief according to God works repentance to salvation". The way of repentance goes on past the point of repentance, and if you travel along it in the right way you will come to salvation.

I read about this man Job, and a very remarkable man he was. He is remarkable to me because I compare him to Abraham. I think I am right in saying that he lived about the same time as Abraham. We hear a lot about Abraham; we hear about God's ways with him, and we hear about the call, and we hear about the way God blessed him, and how God gave him an inheritance and so on; but I do not think that we ever read in the history of Abraham of his being called to repent. I am not saying he did not repent, or was not repentant, but we do not get that story with Abraham. The story we get with Abraham is that he was taken up in grace, and he received blessings because he believed God. I make that point because it is important. I am presenting to you a wonderful story in the glad tidings, a wonderful proposal that God is making; that someone so glorious as the Son of God should have hung on Calvary's cross and borne the judgment of God to the sinner. I invite you to believe that, and I invite you to believe that God has accepted that work, and has put the Man who did it at His own right hand. You might say, 'That is so good; why would I refuse?'. It is, is it not? Why would you refuse? It is presented freely in the grace of God and it is simply presented for the obedience of faith. But the fact that this other man Job went through all that is in this book proves to us that simply to believe that offer, and to be minded to accept it is not enough by itself.

Job had lived a long time, and was a very good man, probably more upright than me. He had a relationship with God, and God liked him; he drew the attention of others to Job, but there was something that Job had to come to. The problem was that all this rightness in the heart, and life, and circumstances in the household of Job had made him proud; proud of himself. He was not only thankful to God for what God had given him, but proud of what he himself had done and what he himself was able to maintain. Alan McSeveney preached here the other week, and he made an interesting comment which maybe some of us remember; he said it does not say in the Bible that God sets himself against the drunkard, it does not say that He sets Himself against the drug abuser; but it does say that God sets Himself against the proud.

Job's three friends come and try to knock him down; they try to undermine his reputation and they try to undermine his faith; and they fail. Job stands in his integrity. But what comes out in the ways that God took with him, which were very severe, was that he really objected to what God was doing because he thought he was too good to deserve it. He thought he knew better than God about whether he deserved it or not; so he started questioning why God was doing things. In this verse 3, which may seem a bit strange, Job is echoing what God Himself had asked Job. Job is saying 'Well, that really is the question, is it not? Why did I say that, why did I say that the ways of God could not be discerned and that it is all very unfair; why did I say that? The reason I said it was that I was proud'. Job was nothing like the man we read about in Corinthians. There was no public scandal, no disgraceful immoral behaviour with Job: on the contrary! But he was proud of himself. What happens here is that at the end of these forty-two chapters he realises that he is now in the presence of God. So real is that to Job that he says he can see God. It is not only that he can see God, but he gets an entirely new look at himself and it is all turned to ashes. What he had taken a pride in belonged to his fallen condition, and it could never please God. He repents, and what that simply means is that, faced with a view of himself from a point of view from which he had never considered himself before - that is, God's point of view - his view of himself is turned upside down. He realises for the first time that, whatever his respectability and whatever his reputation, and however his righteousness might surpass that of these godless friends he had, he was a sinner in the sight of God. Beloved, that is what we have to come to in the gospel. The salvation of which I have spoken, the glorious work of the Lord Jesus of which I have spoken is not for

righteous persons; He says that (Matt 9: 13), but it is for sinners. The way of repentance was made for sinners: so come into the presence of God. Be as open with Him about what you are as He can already see. Acknowledge in the presence of God in relation to specific things you know you have done that you are a sinner in the sight of God, and that you need the Saviour that He has provided.

I go back to these passages in the New Testament because Job's repentance is quite remarkable in a way: he repented without having been presented with a Saviour. He cast himself on the mercy of God and he found it. He longed to find a Saviour; he says that, and Elihu talks to him about it. He asks if there is an umpire, someone who can mediate, someone who could pay a ransom, who could deliver his soul from going down into the pit. Job asks these questions and, if you read to the end of the book, they are not answered. But they are answered *now*. The glad tidings of repentance are preached on the basis of the work of Christ and on the basis of what He is in His Person. It says here in Luke 24 that repentance and remission of sins is preached in His Name. Beloved, there is no other Name. As Peter says in his preaching, "neither is there another name" (Acts 4: 12), but what a wonderful thing it is to come before God and feel that everything, even the things I would cling to, to the last resort, have turned to dust and ashes. They are worth nothing in the sight of God. In fact, they condemn me to be banished from that place forever. But now, remission of sins is preached in His Name, and you can confess things before God on the understanding, established by God in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, that if you confess your sins they *will* be put away. Therefore the barriers, the inhibitions that might lead me to withhold a true judgment of myself in the presence of God, can melt away because God provides not only the question which challenges what I am, but provides His answer to it. What a wonderful thing that is - repentance and remission of sins, preached in His Name. It lies at the heart of a full gospel. The full gospel is about Christ: He is the answer to the sins I discover in the presence of God; and I confess those sins to God in order to lay claim to His salvation.

I just add this verse in Acts because the way of repentance goes on a bit further. As I said, the way of repentance leads to life, according to Acts 11; the way of repentance leads to salvation, according to 2 Corinthians 8; and the way of repentance leads to the reception of the Holy Spirit. Is that not a wonderful thing that the God who has given His

Son does not stop at that wonderful gift but now He gives the Holy Spirit to be received by those who repent? They recognise that their power has gone. If it is there, it is the power to do what is wrong, and the power to offend God, and the power to keep themselves at a distance to Him. But God is offering a wonderful proposal, not only that you come into His presence but that God Himself will come and dwell in you. I no longer need to make any journeys: this is not something I need to reach out for, because God in His wonderful love and grace has sent the Holy Spirit to be received; and what the reception of the Holy Spirit means is that now He dwells in the heart of the believer; He dwells there. The presence of God becomes a constant assurance to me, not something I have to keep reaching out to; it is something I know within. God has come so near to me, not simply to be alongside me as He was in the Person of the Lord Jesus but to dwell in me. Of course, conditions in my soul must be right for the Holy Spirit to dwell. He can be grieved, He can be quenched, He can be hindered, but He would keep us in the way of repentance so that His power and His grace might be our enjoyment for the rest of our way down here. These things lie at the heart of the gospel. There is more to the gospel than believing the offer that God has made: the offer God has made is to people who are honest with Him about themselves. His goodness leads you to that honesty. It is not a matter of effort or contrivance, the goodness of God leads you there; and when you are there, it is not a place just to hide in, but to have everything out with God, knowing that He has already met everything that comes out and covers it in the work of salvation that He presented to you.

Well, beloved, may we be helped to find the power that comes from having to do with God and the salvation we receive practically from doing so. May He bless the word.

West Norwood

9th December 2012

COMMITTAL AND EXCESS

Philip J Walkinshaw

Psalm 118: 27

I will possibly read some other scriptures later but I was thinking, beloved friends and brethren, of the thought of committal and sacrifice, particularly as it relates to us as individuals. We have spoken much in the reading as to our households, the need for control and rule and headship. I was thinking of two things:

- First, that what we offer, what we sacrifice, should be irrevocable - "bind the sacrifice with cords"; so you do not take it off the altar: it is irrevocable.
- And, secondly, I was thinking that in Christianity there should be something of the spirit of excess; so it says, "up to the horns of the altar".

The divine intent, and my simple desire, would be to occupy each of our hearts with the Lord Jesus. This would be the purpose in ministry, I think, to draw the saints, draw each of our hearts, to Him. I suppose as we think of the altar we think of Him; typically the altar speaks to us of Christ. We can read of the pattern given to Moses: the altar, the altar of burnt offering, the brazen altar. How it would speak to our hearts of the Lord Jesus and the way He was prepared to suffer, the way He was prepared to go the whole way, the way He was irrevocably bound to the will and to the pleasure of His God and Father: "bind the sacrifice with cords". Think of the way that the Lord Jesus moved in devotion to the will of the Father: unswerving devotion, unswerving obedience. We spoke about the enemy being a defeated foe, and we sometimes say he was defeated at the cross, but I wonder if he was defeated in Gethsemane. He realised, I think, at that point that he was defeated when - as we understand - he brought all his armour, all his weapons, all his forces, all his agencies to bear on the Lord Jesus. He had tried already in the wilderness with all the temptations, all those things that you and I are so susceptible to: the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, the lust of the eyes. He uses these things because there is something in each of us that answers to them, but he found nothing in the Lord Jesus but perfect subjection, submission, obedience to the will of His God and Father, and to the words of scripture - "It is written", Matt 4: 4. The Lord

Jesus said three times, "It is written". Think of that, perfect manhood; and then we are taught that, in Gethsemane, the devil came back. It says he "departed from him for a time", Luke 4: 13. He came back in Gethsemane to seek to deflect the Lord Jesus from following the will of the Father, but I think it has been said that, at that very moment, the thought of His victory rose in the heart of Christ, JT vol 3 p453. He could say those words: "but then, not my will, but thine be done", Luke 22: 42. I think the enemy realised at that point that he was defeated. It did not stop him continuing his attack, using the hatred of man and the malice of man and all his forces against Him to take Him to the cross, but Jesus went that way as bound, bound with cords, the sacrifice bound with cords of love, I suppose. We read of that, "bands of a man, with cords of love", Hos 11: 4: seen perfectly in the Lord Jesus Himself; and it says, "up to the horns of the altar". Jesus went all the way.

I suppose in His life here what was seen was excess in every way. John says, "of his fulness we all have received, and grace upon grace", chap 1: 16. He could have just said "grace", but it is "grace upon grace", as it has been said like the waves in the ocean, never ending, JT vol 85 p90. What excess was seen in the life of the Lord Jesus, and then as He went to Calvary. He went all the way. The apostle says, "obedient even unto death", Phil 2: 8. He did not stop there: it says, "and that the death of the cross": I think that is "up to the horns of the altar". What power there was with the Lord Jesus as He moved into death. The psalmist says, "What ailed thee, thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou turnedst back?", Ps 114: 5. The horns of the altar speak to us of power, the power there was in that blessed Man to fulfil and complete the whole will of God. We have spoken of His almighty power, what was needed to complete and fulfil the will of God, and it was done in perfection by the Lord Jesus, and as I have said, the sacrifice was bound. We can read in the Old Testament of Abraham and Isaac; it says, "he bound Isaac", Gen 22: 9; he bound him and laid him on the wood. There was no resistance. In that sense, Jesus did not need to be bound physically, although they did bind Him, and they led Him out. Think of that; they led Him out to the cross, held there, not only by the nails, but by His love for you and His love for me. I trust each of us knows something of the love of Jesus in that way. Paul says, "the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me", Gal 2: 20. "Jehovah is God"; think of that, the Lord Jehovah is God. The Lord Jesus is the Son of God in His Person, "over all, God blessed forever" (Rom 9: 5), and yet He became a Man; He came into the very creation

that His hands had made in order that He might die on Calvary's cross for you and for me. The blood was put on the horns, was it not? The blood was put on the horns of the altar when the sacrifice was made. What wonderful incense arose at Calvary for God Himself. It says, "Jehovah smelled the sweet odour", when Noah sacrificed, Gen 8: 21. Think of God smelling: it is an active thought, not just that He smelt it but He smelled; what wonderful savour there was to the blessed God Himself as Jesus, even as having been forsaken, cried those words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", Matt 27: 46. I think we see the spirit of sacrifice and the spirit of committal fully, indeed to excess, in the Lord Jesus Himself.

I thought to read of the Hebrew bondman: may we turn to Exodus 21? The law had been given, and Israel in the flesh was incapable of keeping the law; and immediately we get "the judgments which thou shalt set before them. If thou buy a Hebrew bondman, six years shall he serve; and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in alone, he shall go out alone: if he had a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone. But if the bondman shall say distinctly," (that is, "bind the sacrifice with cords") "I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go free; then his master shall bring him before the judges, and shall bring him to the door, or to the door-post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl" (that is, "up to the horns of the altar"), v 2-6. Think of the excess seen in the Lord Jesus: "his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall be his bondman for ever". He became "obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross". And He is still serving, He is still serving in love, serving you, serving me on high, our great High Priest. What wonderful perfection, what wonderful support we see in the intercessory service of the Lord Jesus on high. It says, "and he hath given us light". What light there is in the Christian's soul as he comes to accept Jesus as Saviour. We realise the way He has gone for us in love, love to His God and Father, ascending love I think it has been spoken of; then horizontal love - his wife; and down-stooping love - the children "which God has given me", Heb 2: 13. His love endures to the end, 'Christ never gives up the service', one has said, 'for He never gives up the love', JND Collected Writings vol 27 p189. Think of the perfection of the Lord Jesus. Might it touch our hearts, beloved brethren, to commit ourselves to Him, make that sacrifice, as it were to bind it with cords

irrevocably, and to “bind it up to the horns of the altar”, so that in our pathway here there is something seen, perhaps of what marked the Lord Jesus when He was here. It can only be love for Him: only that can be the lever, the only motive in our souls to go this way, to follow Him, follow in His steps. We mentioned in the reading, that he was One “who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth”; who, “when suffering, threatened not; but gave Himself over into the hands of him who judges righteously; who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree”, 1 Pet 2: 22-24. What a Man He is, a Man who was prepared to sacrifice Himself, give Himself over irrevocably to the will of His God and Father, even though it meant suffering and death. Now how about you and how about me?

We have read about the Hebrew bondman, typically the Lord Jesus who went that way not on His own account but for others, but I thought about Ruth, and her wonderful committal in chapter 1. It says of Ruth and Orpah, “they lifted up their voice and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave to her”, v 14. Ruth bound the sacrifice with cords; she clave to Naomi. Naturally there was nothing attractive about Naomi I suppose, a poor widow woman. She speaks of having gone out full and she says, “the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and Jehovah has brought me home again empty”, Ruth 1: 20-21. She had, I think, a sense in her soul that, “Jehovah is God, and He hath given us light”; she heard that He had visited His people to give them bread (v 6), and she was going back; and she tells her daughters-in-law to go back to Moab. ‘Go back to a life of ease, do not commit yourself to me, I have got nothing for you’, she said. Outwardly that is so amongst the people of God; they have got nothing for you naturally, they have no paths of glory, which in any case lead only to the grave, but there is nothing outwardly to attract our hearts into the testimony, only love for the Lord Jesus. And it says, “Orpah kissed her mother-in-law”, and she went back. There was a certain affection with Orpah. What a challenge that is; we might love the Lord Jesus but do we love Him enough to cleave? “Ruth”, it says, “clave to her”. She clave to what she saw in Naomi of the people of God, and she said “thy people shall be my people”, think of that, “thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried”, v 16-17. I think that was excess on the part of Ruth, “up to the horns of the altar”. We know the history of Ruth, we know what blessing came in; she committed herself irrevocably to Naomi, when she went back to the land of Israel, went back to Bethlehem; and Ruth found the mighty man

of wealth. I wonder if we have all found the Lord Jesus as a Mighty Man of wealth. Beloved brethren, if we commit ourselves to the pathway of His will, commit ourselves in that sense to the local assembly, we will soon find the Mighty Man of wealth; we will find all the joy that we spoke about in the previous meeting, like the jailor who rejoiced with all his house, Acts 16: 34. We find in Boaz typically the Lord Jesus, the Mighty Man of wealth. There will be no lack; there will be no misgivings, no regrets. How often we have regrets, but as the poem says -

What has stript the seeming beauty
From the idols of the earth?
Not a sense of right or duty,
But the sight of peerless worth. (Ora Rowan)

Ruth saw that in Naomi. You might say, 'Well, how did she see it?'. It was God's work, no doubt. It says "when she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, she left off speaking to her", v 18. Might we all be steadfastly minded, to go along with the testimony as it might be publicly in widowhood in Christ's absence, and in rejection and reproach; yet the end is to find the Mighty Man of wealth, another Husband, One that will care for us, look after us, give us all that we need, both in the testimony and in the day to come. Well, how challenging these things are.

I thought about Jonathan, perhaps a little negatively, but we have the contrast with David in 1 Samuel 20. Saul was intent on killing David, and Jonathan said to David, 'Well, I will find out if it is really true: you go and hide by the rock and I will come and shoot arrows'. Verse 35 says, "And it came to pass in the morning that Jonathan went out into the field, to the place agreed on with David, and a little lad with him. And he said to his lad, Run, find now the arrows which I shoot. The lad ran, and he shot the arrow beyond him." When the lad came to the place Jonathan cried after the lad, "Is not the arrow away beyond thee?". I think it was beyond Jonathan: he was not able for it. He loved David, as Orpah love Naomi I suppose; there was a certain affection for David, real affection. How well David spoke of him, "Thy love to me was wonderful, passing women's love" (2 Sam 1: 26), and yet he did not go the whole way. He did not bind the sacrifice with cords, he did not go up to the horns of the altar, he fell short. It says, "Jonathan went into the city" (v 42); he went back to Saul. As we know, he fell with Saul on the mountains of Gilboa (1 Sam 31: 8), a desolate end for Jonathan, yet one who was typically a true believer, who truly loved the Lord. Then it

goes on, "The lad went, and David arose from the side of the south", v 41. That would remind us again of the Lord Jesus - "grace upon grace", favourable conditions today for the testimony. It says "they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded", v 41. Think of that, "David exceeded". That would be the excess, the love of the Lord Jesus; how great it is, greater than any love that we could ever speak of or contemplate. Paul says, "to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge", Eph 3: 19. I suppose that is the recompense, committing oneself irrevocably to the testimony and to the local assembly. It says, "David exceeded". Think of the preciousness of that, how the Lord Jesus excels in everything: He excels in devotion, He excels in obedience, He excels in subjection, He excels in love, He excels in power and glory and honour that will be seen in a day to come. One of the Psalmists says, "Jehovah ... how excellent is thy name in all the earth!", Ps 8: 1. What a day that will be, when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea", Hab 2: 14. Wonderful excess then of righteousness and equity as He rules and takes up His rights which have long been denied. Well, it is for you and me to commit ourselves to Him in the testimony as I have said, to "bind the sacrifice with cords" irrevocably, "up to the horns of the altar". It might call for certain loss naturally but I think if we have real affection for the Lord Jesus it will not exactly be a sacrifice. Mr Darby says a man would not count it a sacrifice to give up dross, (Collected Writings vol 16 p239); Paul says, "I ... count them to be filth, that I may gain Christ", Phil 3: 8. Think of that. If we have that sight of the Lord Jesus, that sight of peerless worth, the perfection of all that He is for us and to us, and with us, I think it will not exactly be a difficult matter, although it will involve perhaps sorrowful exercises. We have to deal with what we are naturally, and according to the flesh, but I think if we have that sight, that glimpse of the Lord Jesus and His love, we will be prepared for all that it involves irrevocably to be bound in that way to Him and to go in for what is excess.

Now, I come to the New Testament and, in Romans 12 Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service", v 1. Think of that. It has been said that once the body is placed on the altar you do not take it back; you bind it there in that sense, bind it there with cords, cords of love, as I said, no doubt seen perfectly in the Lord Jesus, but then what else would induce us to

do this but love for Him and the compassions of God? All that Paul spoke of in chapter 8; chapters 9, 10 and 11 really being a parenthesis. "I am persuaded" he says, "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", Rom 8: 38-39. Once your faith and trust is in the Lord Jesus you are bound to Him. We sing that, do we not?

He drew me with the cords of love,
And thus He bound me to Him. (Hymn 187)

So it is two-sided in that way. We might commit ourselves irrevocably to the Lord Jesus; perhaps we fail, and we try to take it back again. That is not the thought. I think on God's side, on the side of the Lord Jesus, we have something absolutely final, irrevocable, when we put our faith and trust in Him. We are bound to Him in that way, bound to Him forever. He will never give us up, the sheep, "those thou hast given me", John 17: 12. He says, "no one shall seize them out of my hand", John 10: 28, and He says in another place, "I have not lost one of them", John 18: 9. Think of that; once you are in the hand of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, the Mighty Man of wealth, you will never be let go. What a comfort that is! We might be weak, feeble and failing. Paul says, "present your bodies a living sacrifice". The altar, I think, speaks of surrender: we have to surrender ourselves to Him. There is an old hymn -

All to Jesus I surrender.

Well, what a test it is, but I think a brother said if we do not surrender then we lose the light. He has given us light; if we do not surrender we will lose the light. A solemn thing that is; so surrender, present your body, present my body, "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service". It might involve exercise; perhaps my body is not holy and acceptable, but the Spirit would no doubt work with me, as we lay hold of the objective thought, and then the Spirit would work in our souls and in our bodies that they might be holy and acceptable to God. "Put to death therefore your members" (Col 3: 5); "If, by the Spirit, ye put to death", the apostle says, Rom 8: 13. Think of that: it is severe and yet it results in something for God. Then he says, "be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God", Rom 12: 2. How testing these things are! Then he

goes on in the chapter and the thought of excess comes in, if we read down the list of things that he says, he always adds something: "he that teaches, in teaching; he that exhorts, in exhortation; he that gives, in simplicity; he that leads, with diligence, he that shows mercy, with cheerfulness", v 7, 8. Mr Coates says (vol 33 p88) that there may be many of these things we are not able to do, but we can show mercy with cheerfulness. Think of that: what does the Lord say to that lawyer who says, "He that showed him mercy", Luke 10: 37? He says, "Go, and do *thou* likewise". What excess was seen with the good Samaritan as he took up that poor, wounded man. "As to brotherly love, kindly affectioned towards one another: ... as to diligent zealouslyness, not slothful ... As regards hope, rejoicing", v 10-12. The thought of excess comes in in all these exhortations of the beloved apostle. I think it was seen in the apostle himself. He says to the Corinthians, 'If ye love me less, I will love you the more': what a spirit that was, the spirit of Christ. If we forget Him, He does not forget us; if we love Him less, He loves us still: how precious these things are, and seen worked out in a man of like passions to ourselves, one that not only paid his own debts, but paid those of others also. Paul says to Philemon, "If he have wronged thee anything ... put this to my account" (v 18), I will pay it. Can we do that to one another, beloved brethren; can we pay one another's debts? Think of that woman in 2 Kings 4; she had the pot of oil, and the vessels were filled; and the prophet says to her, "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy sons on the rest", v 1-7. She paid all her debts and lived on the rest. I suppose that will be Israel's portion, in a sense; but in Christianity there is to be the excess: we are to pay one another's debts. We are not only to have our own debts cleared and pay them, and be set up in righteousness, as Paul says in chapter 8: "that the righteous requirement of the law should be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to flesh but according to Spirit", v 4. But there is to be the excess, paying our own debts and paying others' also. It was seen in Paul; he took up the cause of one and another. Think of how he speaks of Onesimus, the slave that ran away; he says, "above a bondman, a beloved brother", Philemon 16. How precious to think of one another in that way - beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord. We have the Spirit given - a wonderful gift given - that we might enjoy these things and take them up. Take them up not in our own strength but in the strength of the blessed Holy Spirit. Even the Lord Jesus, here as Man, moved and acted in the power of the Spirit. It speaks of casting out demons by the finger - or the Spirit - of God, Luke 11: 20. He did not assume to do it in

His own strength. He could have done so of course: it says even the demons believe and tremble. They called out, "*Thou* art the Son of God" in one place and another (Luke 4: 41); but Jesus, as a lowly and dependent Man, took up the service in the power and strength of the Spirit: He said, "If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons", Matt 12: 28. Think of that - a perfect, lowly, subject Man! How much more, beloved brethren, should you and I take up these things in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Well, these are simple thoughts I had, brought to me as I contemplated that verse in Psalm 118. "Jehovah is God" - how great He is, God of the universe, One that made all things. "Without him not one thing received being that has received being", John 1: 3. That is you and me: everything in the universe received its being through the Lord Jesus, the One who is God. It says, "he has given us light"; so we have been given light and it is our responsibility to answer to it. How much light we have, how privileged we are. So it says, "Bind the sacrifice with cords" - irrevocably - "up to the horns of the altar". Surrender to the Lord Jesus

All to Jesus I surrender.

May it be the portion of us all; may the Spirit help us. May God bless the word.

Aberdeen, Scotland

23rd February 2013

EDITORS' NOTE

The following piece is one of five on the feasts of Jehovah which we will - space permitting - publish in sequence, if the Lord will. They have been translated from articles in *Le Messager Evangélique*.

THE SABBATH

John N Darby

Leviticus 23: 1-4

The great thought of all the feasts mentioned in this chapter is that God desires to surround Himself with His people, with happy and joyful beings, and He gives them to this end a meeting place at the tent of meeting.

God will not leave His people, Israel, as they are today dispersed among the nations; He will gather them on the earth to enjoy His rest in the midst of them. He will not have even one member of His church who does not enjoy His rest in glory. This will then be God's Sabbath. It speaks to us of the rest of the church in heaven, of the rest of Israel on earth, of the rest of creation in future blessing.

To facilitate the division of this chapter, I will remark that the Sabbath, the rest, occupies a distinct place; it is the great result of all; and each week God reminds Israel of it. From verse 4, we find the detail of the feasts, or the means God uses to gather His people and lead them to rest. (The formula "Jehovah spoke to Moses" always announces a new subject in the last four books of Moses.) The first is the Passover and the unleavened bread (v 5-8); the second, the wave offering of the sheaf of ears of corn and Pentecost (v 9-22); the third, the feast of jubilee (v 23-25); the fourth, the great day of atonement (v 26-32); the fifth finally, the feast of tabernacles (v 33-44). The Passover and the unleavened bread go together, as do the sheaf of ears of corn and Pentecost; the three last feasts are each separate. These seven feasts represent the perfection of God's ways to lead the people into His rest. The first thing in the mind of God, the rest of God with His people, is the last which will be accomplished.

The Sabbath was the rest of God Himself. On that day, God rested from all His work in creation. But man had no part at all in this rest; he was already fallen in sin when God visited Him for the first time. Only,

God was not satisfied to rest in Himself. He desired to have a people in His rest, but that was not possible with sin. To enjoy rest truly, there must not be a single thing remaining uncertain, or a single thought remaining which could not be shared together; it must be that the heart of man and the heart of God should be perfectly in accord. Renewed man can enjoy this rest before it is definitively fulfilled, but he will only enjoy it fully in resurrection. By faith, our hearts and our consciences are already at rest with God.

The Bible lays the heart of man completely bare, and certainly the result of this examination is not made to cheer us. Matthew 15 details for us what goes out of the heart of man. When it is emptied by the judgment of 'self', and by death, the new life that we possess in Christ fully enjoys the revelation that God has made of Himself. The apostle is also not afraid to say, "that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts, being rooted and founded in love ... and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge; that ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God", Eph 3: 17-19. And again, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us", Rom 5: 5. In fact, this will be the rest, when in the presence of God, like to His Son, we will fully enjoy His love and the relationship between the Father and the Son.

I add further the rest of the lower creation, as one sees in Hosea 2: 21-22. God desires that it should be blessed, so that all should enjoy the fulness of the blessing. The creation groans (Rom 8: 22) after this moment when everything will be united in Christ before God. Thus He will not miss a single link in the chain, from the highest blessing to that of the creation. Nothing will hinder the full manifestation of this blessing down to the lowest parts of the creation redeemed from the power of Satan, for all have participated in the fall of man.

The second mention of the Sabbath (Exod 16: 23) supposes the call of a people and a covenant between God and them. It is not the law but the promise, which is the first thought of the relationship of God with sinners. God gives the Sabbath to Israel *before the law*. He calls a people with whom He desires to surround Himself, redeemed between [the time when] the blood of the Passover lamb was put on the doors, and the arrival of Israel at Sinai. Until then all is the pure grace of God towards His people.

After the Sabbath, we find in our chapter the whole history of the

ways of God's grace right up to the millennial rest. In the short account of the ways of grace, set out between chapters 12 and 18 of Exodus, the Sabbath is given before Sinai; in chapter 16, the rest is connected with the manna, Christ. In chapter 17, we find the conflict which follows the water [being brought] from the rock, that is to say, the presence of the Holy Spirit.

At Sinai, where all the relations of God with Israel depend on the law, the Sabbath takes the same character; the man who breaks it is to be stoned, for the law always leads to the curse.

When the prophets come onto the scene later, grace begins to shine anew. The very fact of their testimony was a grace towards the people who had broken the law. Jehovah came to seek fruit of His vine and found nothing but sour grapes¹, but announced at the same time to the elect, by the prophets, the promises of God's grace as restoring the things that man had spoiled.

The glad tidings speak of a new creation, a new life, not a reparation, while the prophet said, "If thou ... call the sabbath a delight ... then shalt thou delight thyself in Jehovah", Isa 58: 13-14. The Sabbath therefore takes a different character in the gospel than the Sabbath in the law. God takes every possible care to bring to light the fact that He cannot find His rest in the midst of an unfaithful people and of sin. When the Messiah appears, His presence proves that all is in disorder. As David rejected ate the shewbread - when the true David is rejected, everything among the people is profaned, violated, broken, and the relationship between Jehovah and the Jews rendered impossible. For them, the Sabbath fell with the Messiah, and all was lost by their fault; but the Gentiles on their side had been delivered up to a reprobate mind. God could not therefore have any relationship with man; there had to be something new.

Then God establishes the rest of heaven and earth on the resurrection of Christ for He could enjoy nothing on the earth before this resurrection apart from the Person of Christ. As every blessing descends from heaven, it must be that Jesus should ascend there. He could not have a relation with men before that, John 20. From then on, the unbroken chain of blessing could extend right down to here on the part of the Father Himself.

¹ 'sour grapes' follows Isa 5: 2 in JND's French Bible - the French word here refers to the acid tasting juice of unripe grapes

In presenting the thought of the rest of God to you, I have touched a little on the means used by God to reach it. The resurrection of Christ places the new man before God, according to His power; and the blessing flows from there. The first link in the chain [is that], Christ glorified, is already ascended above all principality and power, while man on earth is deprived of all power. We see this in the case of Peter, who was made to deny the Lord whom he loved by a maid servant. What characterises the new man is that, laying hold by faith of the power of Him who is above, he gains the victory over Satan and finds himself set by faith between the power of faith in the heart and the power of Christ in heaven.

May God by His grace make us lay hold of the joy of the rest, before entering there. He who is the Centre of it, and who will be the glory of it, is already in this rest before the Father.

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