

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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BUILDING A CHRISTIAN HOUSE

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It will be evident that what is on my spirit in relation to this meeting concerns the building of a house. God builds His own house and it is stable. I want to speak about wisdom building a house. It is a very fine house, wisdom's house, and I would like to apply it to how we build our houses, not with the bricks and mortar, but the moral and spiritual features that should attach to a believer's house. We all carry in our spirits the catastrophes that have come into households amongst us, and it is on my spirit to say some words that might give guidance in relation to principles as they are followed through that ought to result and, under the Lord's good hand, *will* result in stable households in the testimony.

Wisdom has built this house; she has hewn out her seven pillars. Seven suggests completeness, in Scripture. It is a very fine house as all our houses should be morally and spiritually, and perhaps too in hospitality which is associated with the fellowship of God's Son in its dignity. She has "slaughtered her cattle, she hath mingled her wine" - this house would be a very fine house to go into.- "she hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the summits ... Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither". It is a fine thing to have a house like this; you can bring persons into it and they are going to be safe, they are going to rejoice. There is happiness in this house because Christ is there. Wisdom has been made available to us to do this. If you read these sections of scripture it says, "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way", chap 8: 22. He used wisdom in building the planets and the earth, and the whole universe. In looking over some things I was attracted to a comment regarding the verses in chap 8: 25, 26: "Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth; while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the dust of the world", that God made the particles, the dust, before He constituted and made the worlds. He did it by Christ, "by whom also he made the worlds", Heb 1: 2.

Wisdom is proceeding, but wisdom has a companion. Most

houses are constituted with a husband and wife, but some are sisters alone and some brothers alone; but we can all draw on a Companion in relation to the establishment of our house, who can give us counsel. That is Christ. In a marriage we can draw on that wisdom, the wisdom of Christ to establish a household. "I wisdom dwell with prudence" - it is very fine to dwell with prudence. If you want to see how that works out in the New Testament, read about Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18. You will find them in the epistle to the Romans and Corinthians, and in 2 Timothy - three times Aquila is mentioned first, and three times Priscilla is mentioned first. There is equality and equivalence in a husband and wife. There is ability to draw on the resource from one another, "find the knowledge which cometh of reflection". That is a mature thought. When you are a child you do not have that knowledge that comes from reflection, but you get it as you grow up. You get the "knowledge which cometh from reflection", that is, well considered thoughts. Learn to discuss matters together. Those who are married have to learn that. There is the ability in a companion to discuss matters and to make use of the results. Young people who are here and are contemplating marriage; think about that, forming something that will remain. As we will see later, the storms will come, but we would all desire that our building will remain standing. It is a very fine thing to dwell with prudence, to reflect on things, even if you are alone in the house, to reflect on things. Do not act precipitately but reflect on things. Even as a young person who may not be married, but growing up and beginning to reflect: reflect on things, reflect on your decisions, reflect on them, call on Christ, "who has been made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and holiness and redemption", 1 Cor 1: 30. Christ is available to all and should be drawn upon. Christianity is a living system and deals with living persons; draw on resources that are available to you in Christ. Draw also on the resources that may be available to you amongst the saints of God. The whole matter that is on my heart is the establishment of a house which remains like wisdom's house where persons can be invited in and find safety. There is a tract by Mr Cutting, 'Safety, Certainty and Enjoyment'. It is a reality and it is found in Christ, and it is found in the saints and in the homes of the saints where there is food that abides. The Lord has drawn our attention today to food that is obnoxious, but this food in this house would be profitable. Let us see when we invite one another into our homes, and even if when we are not inviting one another in, but living as families or by ourselves, that the food we imbibe will build a constitution which will stand the pressures of life and anxieties of life.

These are divine principles - I am speaking in view of

preservation, and the setting out of principles which may be of guidance in relation to matters extant among the saints. It says in Ephesians, "even as the assembly is subjected to the Christ, so also wives to their own husbands in everything" - that is a very delicate relationship, it is not lording it over them, we will see that in Peter, it is not dictating, it is a sharing thought. Husbands are to "love your own wives, even as the Christ also loved the assembly". I do not think in scripture you ever find the woman being told to love the husband or the man, but you will find that the husband or the man is told to love his wife. It is a high standard of love to maintain in a house but it is a standard in view of preserving things. Then it says, "So ought men also to love their own wives as their own bodies: he that loves his own wife loves himself. For not one has ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as also the Christ the assembly" - it is the husband's responsibility to love his wife. That is natural love; marriage involves natural love. There may be more than that in it, but it is natural love and the husband has to maintain that love. This is a divine standard. Christ considers for His assembly, He purifies it by "washing of water by the word, that *he* might present the assembly to himself glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things". The husband has to love his wife and maintain her affections for himself, inviolate in a world where attractions may come, so that the marriage may be held together. You may have to work it out for yourself in the detail of your life, but divine principles remain, love remains and the standard as set out in this scripture is Christ and the assembly. How Christ has nourished and cherished His assembly in view of the day of presentation which will take place, indeed in principle it takes place each Lord's day when we experience the joy of union with Christ. So, "no one has ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, even as also the Christ the assembly" - I leave that word with you, the divine standard is to be seen in the husband here. He has to accept responsibility for loving his wife. Scripture does not allow any diversion from that; it is the husband's responsibility.

When we come to 1 Peter it is an abnormal situation, "wives, be subject to your own husbands, that, even if any are disobedient to the word, they may be gained without the word by the conversation of the wives". I do not think that the woman would be looked at here as marrying a man who was unconverted. In the days when Peter lived there were persons who got converted, the wife in this situation was converted and the husband was not, but the point of scripture is for the woman to seek to develop what will morally attract a husband, counting on God to work in this situation. It is also a word to all sisters, that to remain attractive they should cultivate the "conversation carried out in

fear". That is respectful behaviour, not fear of violence in the household. "Whose adorning let it not be that outward one of tressing of hair, and wearing gold, or putting on apparel; but the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price". Dear sister, the Lord would have us all, the sisters in particular - the young women too - to cultivate these moral ornaments. Take character from the Lord Jesus: "the hidden man of the heart" - that is Christ - "in the incorruptible ornament of a meek and quiet spirit". That does not mean to say that the woman submits to anything; it is the manner of her spirit. If she is related to the "hidden man of the heart", she is related to the Lord Jesus and she will develop a meek and quiet spirit and will stand by principles. She does not depart from principles to gain a husband; she remains by divine principles in order to gain her husband, counting on God. It may be she will not succeed, but God would bring about within her a reward or the comfort of her own heart, namely, Christ as the "hidden man of the heart". The pressures of life develop features of Christ. These dear sisters here have a very trying time in this situation, we would all be sympathetic with that and pray for any one like this that she may develop "in the incorruptible ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price". That is something that will go through, something that will be seen in the eternal day. It will go through into eternity after time has lapsed and flesh and blood condition has ceased, but she is doing this for her husband whom she had and who was unconverted. I suggest they would both be unconverted when they were married, but she was converted, came to Christ, and she seeks to win her husband. But, at the same time it is a good exercise for every sister to develop these features which are most attractive. Not only will your husband see you in your natural beauty, but he will see you in your moral beauty, beauty that belongs to what is going through into eternity, what is moral and spiritual. I do not think the question of Sarah "calling him lord" meant that he subjugated her; I think it means the idea of honouring him. You should always honour your husband.

I want to come on to this, "Ye husbands likewise, dwell with them according to knowledge, as with a weaker, even the female, vessel, giving them honour". That is the husband's responsibility; he is to love his wife. Now he is to dwell with her knowing that in certain aspects it is "according to knowledge, as with a weaker, even the female, vessel". It is a vessel that was taken out of the man, that is in subjection to him. No husband should ever abuse that position but in tenderness seek to nourish the feature of subjection in love,

maintaining love. It is the husband's responsibility to love his wife at all times. It says, "as also fellow-heirs of the grace of life" - that is very important. Adam and Eve are not the full example literally of marriage. "Fellow-heirs of the grace of life" - that is Christian marriage, persons who are in the light of the Lord Jesus as Saviour and Lord and are living their life in relation to Christ in glory and His interests here who find their life in the circle of the saints. They are not only enjoying natural life, but they are enjoying together spiritual life. You take up marriage in the Lord and you have a bond, not only in nature - that will finish one day, but a bond that is spiritual and it enters into the position of husband and wife that they become fellow-heirs of the grace of life. They can share exercises together; they have the same interests, the same Lord. They find your life in the same sphere, not in the things that belong to this world, but in a sphere of eternal life - life amongst the saints - and their whole aspect is related to the Lord's interest here. Natural love, natural joys are to be enjoyed, but there is more than nature, "fellow-heirs of the grace of life". That is Aquila and Priscilla: read about them, they staked their neck for Paul at one point (Rom 16: 4), and they considered for the testimony; they had the assembly in their house. Their whole life, the whole sphere of the life of the household, centred in the Lord's interest. It involves sacrifice to do that, to hold a household and build it in relation to the Lord's interest. There are things you cannot go in for and do not want to go in for in the world, there are things that you would not have in the house because you do not want to have them there. Young people have to be nourished and cherished with care, admonishing them, not causing bitterness in the lives and hearts of young people because they are going through struggles.

I come to Exodus, and what I had in mind was the fact that you need the manna daily. We are in the wilderness journey, all of us, and we need the manna daily. That is Christ, it is not Christ in His ministry, it is Christ as a Man and how He moved amongst men. How did the Lord move? I have been more and more impressed with the reality of His humanity, when He was here as a Man. It says in the synopsis, if you walked down the streets of Galilee at that time when He was alive, you would meet Him in passing as a Man in His life here, J N Darby, Synopsis Vol 3 p 198. You might have had to do with Him in business as a carpenter; what kind of attitude did the Lord have in His life here? He was here for the pleasure of God and He was in favour with God and men. You need the Scriptures every day; this manna is not to be kept overnight. Who is responsible in the house? It is the head of the house who is responsible to collect the manna and it is an absolute necessity, it is a divine principle, you need Christ every day, you need the

Scriptures every day. The husband, or the head of the house, must gather it in the morning. You have to gather it in the morning, but you have to share it with the household. In our own homes, the father, they say, is the breadwinner, he brings home sufficient to buy the food, he sees that everybody gets a portion. If you want to run a house according to one that the Lord can bless, you need Christ every day, you need the word of God. You need to begin the day with the word of God in prayer; everyone here should do that. Young people, you must begin the day with the word of God and in prayer yourself. If you are in a household you have the added advantage of the father, the head of the house, bringing in the manna. He may not be able to share it in the morning, he may be away before you are up, but he will share it with you sometime during the day to help you be established and meet the world that you have to pass through. We have to go out and be for God in the world as it is. The Lord moved in the world as it was in His time, and He was here for God in that world. He said, "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed", Isa 50: 4. We need instruction, every household needs instruction. To establish a house you need to abide by what I am saying, it is in Scripture; it is not my thoughts, it is in Scripture. You cannot hold the manna over until the morning, you must gather every working day. It says that on the Sabbath they carried it over. On the first day of the week we are usually all free to gather in the house, and you read the Scriptures together before going to the morning meeting. You are not going into the world to work, you might read a different scripture where you would impart some impression of what you are about to do, "this do in remembrance of me", Luke 22: 19. It is a wonderful thing to remember the Lord Jesus in the scene of His rejection. Some believers do not do that, but it is not right. Scripture says, "this do in remembrance of me". Every believer that loves the Lord would do that in remembrance of Him. When the Lord's day morning comes around, you sit at table and you read the scriptures. We are going to meet the Lord Jesus. We are privileged to remember Him in the scene where He has been rejected, amongst a company who treasure Him. You see the brethren come into the meeting; they belong to Christ. He calls us, "my brethren". We regard the saints as coming in as Christ's brethren; that is the privilege, more than responsibility, on the first day of the week; but on the weekdays it is definitely responsibility. The head of the house, the husband, has to secure something for the wife, for the family, whoever is in the house, and the head of the house should do it. Whoever is responsible must gather that food. We need the food, we need Christ, we need the word of God. There has to be some explanation given, some transference of

the impression of the scripture to the realities of life and what your family has to face as they go out into the world, to school or business. There needs to be some understanding passed on. God maintains this manna until they reach the land, "the children of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came into an inhabited land: they ate the manna until they came to the borders of the land of Canaan", Exod 16: 35. For us, that is what I have said, you eat the manna Monday to Saturday, and when you have come to the borders of the land on Lord's day morning you have Christ, "the old corn of the land", Josh 5: 11. It is Christ as indigenous to heaven. You are not going out to meet responsibility on Lord's day, you are going to remember the Lord Jesus and come into the blessedness of the privilege of His headship as He comes amongst us. He comes to us. Christ comes to us; He comes to hearts that are waiting for Him. He comes to hearts that He finds faithful, He comes to hearts who have been in households who are blessed, who have gathered the manna. There is a constitution formed in the believer that is pleasurable to the heart of Christ and in the service of God those impressions are released in an atmosphere of holy privilege where for the time being you can consider the work of God in your soul as being complete, at that moment, yielding to God the fragrance of what it will yield eternally.

Where we read in Luke's gospel is a very sobering matter. I speak with feeling, dear brethren, and sensitivity of the preciousness and the tenderness of what we have been speaking about, and not in an arbitrary or any hard or legal way. I do not want to convey that impression, but to put us all in touch with the Lord Jesus as persons who have proved the blessedness of the Spirit indwelling us so that our link with the Lord is maintained every day in quickening power by the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is a real matter; it is what we call organic, living. The Lord says to these persons, "why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" - is what I have been speaking about too difficult? Is it not possible in our households to run them in the way that Scripture suggests? I think the Lord will give you strength and guidance to run your home that way, and it will be established, founded on the rock. These principles that I have spoken about are rocks, they are fundamental, the pillars of wisdom's house. It does not tell us in Proverbs what it is founded on, but you can be assured that it is founded on the rock. What God establishes He established in Christ.

Storms will come, storms come in life to all of us; individually and household-wise, they come. The devil has in mind to break down the house, to break down the house of the believer: the relationship of

husband and wife, family, and father and mother too. He is out to destroy the relationship. But if you are founded on the rock, founded in Christ and He is your Counsellor, you will be able to withstand the stresses of life. These are real matters. We have all had experiences in life, the young people too have experiences in life, real experiences, real sorrows, real tragedies, real upsets, but Christ is the answer. The household is the answer too, if secured and kept for Christ. How challenging it is, but if we maintain a sense of love in the house, a sense of appreciation, a sense that everyone in that house is valuable, young or old, they are all valuable, they all belong to Christ; we want to hold them for Christ. You are building on the rock. Build your own house on the rock and you will find as the scripture says, "the stream broke upon that house and could not shake it". It is possible; it is seen amongst the saints too in large measure. I am not saying that it is not, but continuance in the path maintains a house in suitability to contain the storm. Your own house, your own dwelling place, if you do not maintain it the storm comes and down it comes. This thing gets blown away and that thing gets blown away because you have not maintained it. Morally you have to maintain your house and then, when the storms come, you have an anchor and that is in Christ, an anchor for the soul. You run to Him for shelter, you run to Him for guidance, and you will find that He will give you guidance in relation to your house and the devil will be thwarted. The Lord says that if you do not do as I say it is going to fall.

God allows things in the lives of men and women, and in nature and natural catastrophes in the wisdom of His ways, but it is to draw all to Himself. You will find that you can always say to somebody, 'Cry to God, speak to Him, and you will find that He is a God who hears', as Psalm 107: 28 suggests. How blessed it is to have One who hears and who never slumbers or sleeps; He is always there available. Christ is always available to you, not only as a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners. It begins that way, but, "there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother", Prov 18: 24. He is a friend who will impart His thoughts, His intimacy about all things that are dearest and most precious to His heart. He is available to every believer.

May the Lord bless these few words, for His Name's sake.

London

2nd April 2010

OUR SUBSTITUTE

Richard M Brown

Leviticus 4: 27-31

Acts 2: 32, 33

We have read of the sin-offering. I should say at the outset that what we have in these verses is a picture. The New Testament gives us the teaching; the Old Testament gives us the pictures which illustrate that teaching. I hope that, as we go through these verses together, we shall see that they point to something. I should say that they point to Someone, our Lord Jesus, and they point to the great and glorious work that He has done by which guilty sinners can be forgiven.

The first thing to notice is that this was the instruction that God gave for whenever an Israelite sinned. This is what he had to do. The very first thing it says is, "And if any one of the people of the land sin ... and be **guilty**". When we sin we become guilty in the sight of God. Someone might say, 'Is that serious? Does it matter that I have sinned?'. Men and women say that. But each of us needs to understand that if we have sinned, and we all have, we are guilty in the sight of God. What does it mean to be guilty? It means that God has something against us. It means there is something which we can be held accountable for. One of the most serious things about being a guilty sinner is that it brings in distance between us and God, and it makes us unfit for the presence of God. As guilty sinners we cannot come into God's presence, and the reason why that is so solemn is that if we die in that state, that position becomes fixed, and that means that we shall be shut out of the presence of God for ever. How solemn that is! As guilty sinners our sins stand between us and God. It *does* matter when we sin, because God has a holy nature that is offended by our sins.

The next thing to notice is that once an Israelite had sinned the only way in which that sin could be dealt with in a way that satisfied God, was by him bringing a sin-offering. It was no good if he were to say, 'I promise never to commit that sin again'. It was no good if he were to say, 'I am going to try and be good for the rest of my life', because even if he succeeded in not sinning for the rest of his life (which we know is not possible), it still would not take away, in the sight of God, the sins that he had already committed. We too need to understand that it does not matter whether you committed a particular sin yesterday, or whether the sin was committed last year, or whether it was fifty years ago, the passing of time can never wipe it out in the sight of God. It is important

to understand that the only way this Israelite could be right with God was by bringing the sin-offering that God instructed was to be brought. It was the only way. There was absolutely nothing else he could do to remove that sin other than to bring to God a sin-offering. So we need to understand that God has provided a way for us. He has provided a means through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ whereby our sins can be removed from His sight in a way that satisfies Him. The first thing I want you to understand, dear friend, is that nothing else will do. Nothing else will do but the way of salvation that God presents to you in the gospel today, in the Person and through the work of His beloved Son.

So God says, "And if any one of the people of the land sin through inadvertence". Inadvertence refers to something that was done carelessly, or something that was done in ignorance. It was a feature of the law that if someone sinned wilfully - that is the opposite to "inadvertence" - there was no forgiveness. It is solemn to think of it. There was no sin-offering for that man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath: he had to die, Num 15: 32-36. There was no sin-offering for the man who blasphemed the Name: he had to die, Lev 24: 11-14. If men or women sinned wilfully under the law, if they sinned with a high hand, there was no forgiveness. Now you think of our position. We have sinned carelessly. We have sinned in ignorance. There have been instances when we were ignorant of the fact that we were sinning. But we have done more than that, have we not? We have done things which we knew were not pleasing to God. We have sinned in defiance of Him. If we had been under the law there would have been no hope for us. The wonder of the glad tidings is that God is forgiving sins like that too. Sins that were committed carelessly - Jesus died for those ones; sins that were committed in ignorance - Jesus suffered for those ones too; but even those sins that we have committed in defiance of God - Jesus has suffered for those ones as well. Oh, the grace and mercy of God that He is offering forgiveness, free forgiveness, to persons who had no thought for Him, who had no interest in Him at all, and no consideration for His rights or for His holiness. God is offering free forgiveness today through the work of one blessed Man. I say again, oh, the mercy of God, how great it is!

So it says "if **his sin**, which he hath sinned, come to his knowledge". Now you notice that it emphasises that it is "his sin" here. It is mentioned twice in verse 28. The Israelite would have to understand that nobody else could offer an offering for his sin, neither could he bring a sin-offering for anyone else's. We should understand

that when it comes to the gospel preaching, it is a question between you and God. It is a question between me and God. It is your sins and God; and it is my sins and God. Each of us stands in our own responsibility to God. Each of us must settle with God for himself in relation to the things that we have done. I can tell you, dear young people, that others have prayed for you; others long for the salvation of your soul. Who knows what godly fathers and mothers go through on behalf of their children? But ultimately it is a matter between you and God. What would parents not do for their children? Yet when it comes to the salvation of their souls it is a matter between them and God. You personally must come to God in the way that He has provided. It is “his sin”; it is *your sins* that need to be settled between you and God Himself.

It says, “if his sin, which he hath sinned, **come to his knowledge**”. I wonder how it is between you and God. Let me ask you that simply. One of the purposes of the gospel is to exercise us about our relationship with God. Let me ask you, how is it between you and God? Is everything all right? I would plead with you to be honest about this. You cannot deceive God; but you can deceive yourself. Everything is “naked and laid bare to his eyes”, Heb 4: 13. He sees all. He knows what there is that may be lying upon your conscience. He knows what questions there may be going through your mind. But I can tell you that your soul is precious to Him. You may feel that your soul is not precious to anyone else. It *may not* be precious to you. But your soul is precious to God and He wants to save you. He wants to bless you. I ask you, how is it between you and God? There is no burden like a guilty conscience. God wants you to know that if there are sins upon your conscience, if there are matters that need to be settled, He has found a way. He is presenting you with a way through His beloved Son whereby you can not only be freely forgiven, but you can be established in a free and happy relationship with the blessed God Himself. I would urge you to consider the needs of your own soul. If God were to require your soul of you today, if you were to appear before God's judgment throne today, how would it be between you and Him? If there is anything outstanding between you and God, now is the opportunity to be saved. There is no better opportunity than the present moment to have your sins forgiven and to have everything settled, blessedly settled, with a God who is holy and righteous.

So He says, “if his sin, which he hath sinned, come to his knowledge, then he shall bring his offering, a goat”. Now, there is a very, very sweet and blessed principle that God brings out here. As guilty sinners we deserve His judgment. As guilty sinners we deserve

to die for the things that we have done. But what God is showing in these verses is that He is prepared to accept a substitute. He is prepared to accept Another in your place. As guilty sinners, as I said, we deserve nothing but the severest of God's judgment. And if God were to mete that out upon us you could not quarrel with it. But although that would be perfectly righteous, it would not be love. It would not be mercy. It would not satisfy the heart of the blessed God. On the other hand, if God were to say, 'Let us forget what you have done', that might be thought to be love, but it certainly would not be righteous. So the great question which the gospel addresses is, how is it that the righteousness of God can be satisfied in order that His mercy might flow freely towards the sinner? We stand as guilty before Him. There is no question about that. We deserve His judgment. There is no question about that. The question is how could God's rights be fully met in order that the desires of His heart, the desires of blessing for persons like you and me, might freely flow forth? The judgment must fall. If the judgment were in any way evaded God would not be perfectly righteous. But the glory of the gospel is that He is prepared to accept a substitute in your place. And, think of the wonder of this, that not only is God prepared, as a matter of principle, to accept a substitute in your place, but He has provided the Victim Himself. How blessed! I say again, oh the grace of God!

One thing that was to mark this goat was that it was to be "without blemish". We can understand that. You could not just offer anything to God. But where would you find someone without blemish? Does anyone here know anyone without any sins? Have you ever met anyone like that, any men or women, or boys or girls, who have never sinned? You see, you could not offer anything to God; but, thank God, there is one blessed Man of whom scripture says, "in him sin is not", 1 John 3: 5. He was the perfect Offering, and God is presenting Him to you tonight. Not only is God prepared, in principle, to accept another in your place, but He has provided the very One Himself: and that One is His beloved Son. "God will provide himself with the sheep for a burnt-offering", Gen 22: 8. Oh the mercy of God, that He would deliver up Jesus to suffering and death in the place of guilty sinners like you and me! We were the ones who had offended Him. Jesus was *always* pleasing to Him. We were the ones who despised God, and sinned against Him, not once or twice, but time and time again. Jesus is the One who could say, "I have glorified *thee* on the earth", John 17: 4. Yet the wonder of the gospel is that God would give Him up to die. God laid upon Him the sins of those who have put their faith in the Saviour in order that they might not perish, but that their sins might be forgiven.

Well might we refer to Him as “our Saviour God”, 1 Tim 2: 3. Oh how much He wants you to be saved, dear friend! How much He desires your blessing! I can tell you that He is concerned about you. He is concerned that you have not entered into the blessing that He has in mind for you. He is concerned that you are still at a distance from Him, and He is appealing to you tonight. He has given His Son to die for you. He has given the Lord Jesus to die in the place of guilty sinners in order that our sins, those sins that have offended Him, might be forgiven.

So the scripture says so beautifully that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”, 1 Tim 1: 15. No other man has ever come into the world with a purpose, but Jesus did. And what was that purpose? It was “to save sinners”. You think of Him leaving His home of light and love and glory and coming into a wicked world, a sad, dark world, where He knew that only sorrow and suffering awaited Him. Yet still He came. He was found amongst men. He came in order that guilty sinners like you and me might be saved. I can say that He came for you because you are a sinner, and I can say that He came for me because I am a sinner. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”. He had you in mind.

It is solemn to understand that it was not enough that He should come into the world if guilty sinners like you and I were to be saved. I say that with the greatest care and reverence. Men say that He was a good Man and He certainly was. Men say that He has left us an example, and He has certainly done that. But those things, blessed in their place, were not enough, if sinners like you and me were to be saved. What the scripture before us shows is this: if God is to be free to forgive the sinner, then another must bear the judgment. If Jesus was to be the Saviour of sinners, then He must die. How solemn that is! The hymn writer says:

No act of power could e'er atone,
No wonder-working word
Could, from the brightness of the throne,
Make love's sweet voice be heard.

If sinners ever were to know
The depths of love divine,
All Calv'ry's weakness and its woe,
Blest Saviour, must be Thine. (Hymn 431)

You may ask, 'He who had performed so many miracles for the healing and blessing of others, was there no act of power that could have saved

sinner like you and me? Was there nothing that He could have done on that line that would have effected our salvation?'. No. This very scripture before us brings out that if God is to be free righteously to forgive you your sins, then another must bear the judgment, and that is what Jesus did. The prophet says so feelingly that "Jehovah hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all", Isa 53: 6.

So He went on to the cross to meet God, to meet God in your place and mine, that He might work out with God the eternal blessing of our souls. How great He is! What a blessed Saviour Jesus is! Oh that we were able to speak more worthily of Him. Men could say, "He saved others, himself he cannot save", Matt 27: 42. He must go that way. Think of that longing prayer that went up to the Father, "My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me", Matt 26: 39. Do you think if it had been possible the Father would not have spared Jesus such terrible sufferings? Do you think if it had been possible God would not have found another way? The solemn fact, and it brings out how guilty we were, is that there was no other way. It was not possible but that Jesus should take the sinner's place Himself, and should receive from God what we as guilty sinners deserved. Blessed be His Name, He has done it! Blessed be His Name, He has taken it all upon Himself! Blessed be His precious Name, He has exhausted the judgment of God so that we might be forgiven!

So it says in verse 29 that the guilty Israelite "shall lay his hand on the head of the sin-offering". What a moment this would have been as they entered into the court of the tabernacle and here was this goat. Leviticus 16: 21 shows that the laying on of the hands involved the confession of sins. Here, the guilty Israelite, in bringing sin-offering, would have to say what it was for. He would understand that as he held his hand there his guilt was transferred to that goat. *He* stood before God as the guilty one. *He* was the one who had offended God, but as he held his hand there, and as he confessed his sin, so his guilt was taken off him and it was laid upon that goat. Solemn moment! But what does this mean for us? Just as the guilty Israelite had to lay his hand on the head of the goat, so I would appeal to you today that you might reach out in simple faith and lay hold of the Saviour for yourself. You dear young people, I appeal to you especially, that you might reach out and, as it were, lay your hand upon the Saviour, that you might confess your sins, that you might speak to God about them, that you might tell Him what it is that you have done, that you might understand that as you do that, so God will lift off you the burden of your sins and place them upon the head of His beloved Son. I would urge you to do it. How

important the confession of your sins is. How important it is that you speak to God about what you have done, because it is God that you have offended and it is only God that can forgive you. How important it is to lay hold of the precious Saviour for yourself in personal faith, and understand that all your guilt, all your responsibility, all your sins have been transferred to Him.

Now, think of what it means that Jesus should take the place of the guilty sinner before God. He now stands before God as the One who must answer to God for the sins that I have done. I am referring to what took place at the cross. With my sins upon Him, Jesus stands in the place of the sinner before God. As a consequence, there at the cross, God treated Him *as if He were the sinner!* He Himself was perfect. We would jealously guard the spotless character of our beloved Saviour. But, with my sins upon Him, He stood before God to answer to God for the things that I have done. And there at the cross Jesus bore every one of my sins *as if they were His own!* What matters these are! Think of the judgment of God falling upon Him! Think of God smiting Jesus! What for? For the things that I have done. "He was wounded for our transgressions", Is 53: 5. Who wounded Him? It was God. And why? For the sins that I have done. He was "bruised". Who bruised Him? It was God. And why? For my iniquities. Jesus received from God all that I as a guilty sinner deserved.

It says that, having laid his hand on the head of the sin-offering, he, the guilty Israelite, was to "slaughter the sin-offering". *He* was to slaughter it. Did you notice that? It was not the priest who put the goat to death. It was the guilty Israelite himself. What feelings would go through his mind as he raised the knife to slaughter this goat, as he looked at this innocent creature before him, and as he understood that this creature which had never sinned against God as he had, was going to have to die for his sin. This creature, who had never offended God as he, the guilty Israelite, had, would nevertheless have to suffer and die for what he had done. As I look to the cross, as I see the precious sufferings of the Lord Jesus, I understand that it was because of what *I have done* that He suffered like that. It is for the things that *I have done* that Jesus suffered in such a terrible way upon the cross. Sins which, as I have said, we commit so carelessly, sins that we commit wilfully, how terrible do these sins look when I see them upon my beloved Saviour, and I see the holy wrath of God poured out upon His blessed head.

So it says that he had to "slaughter the sin-offering" - notice this lovely reference - "at the place of the burnt-offering". The other side of it

is that Jesus offered Himself willingly to God. That is the burnt-offering. Why did He do that? Because He was thinking for God. Jesus offered Himself to God because He knew what was in God's heart; He knew the desires of blessing that God had; and He knew that unless another bore the judgment that we deserved, there could be no blessing for us. Jesus offered Himself willingly because He had you in mind. He offered Himself willingly because He knew that unless He did, you and I would have been lost for ever. Jesus offered Himself willingly because apart from His precious sacrifice we would have been without a spark of hope. Jesus offered Himself willingly because, having done so, in virtue of His precious sufferings and death, He has secured for us eternal blessing. What a Saviour! See how meekly He went to the cross! How patiently He bore all that was heaped upon Him. Blessed be His precious Name, through His mighty sacrifice He has exhausted the judgment of God so that there should be none left, *not one bit left*, for those who have put their trust in Him. How blessed that is! I appeal to everyone here: have you put your trust in the Saviour? Have you known what it is to confess your sins to God? Are you conscious that all is clear between you and God because of the work that Jesus has done?

So it says, "And the priest shall take of the blood thereof with his finger, and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt-offering, and shall pour out all the blood thereof at the bottom of the altar". This speaks of the blood of Jesus as satisfying the rights of God. It was poured out at the bottom of the altar. God looks upon that precious blood, and He says that the work has been done. The blood witnesses first of all to the fact that His life was truly given up, but it witnesses too to the fact that the work is completely finished. God says, 'There is nothing now to hinder Me coming out in full blessing. There is nothing now to hinder Me coming out in full forgiveness to those who avail themselves of His mighty sacrifice'. The pouring out of the blood in that way involves that it is entirely reserved for God - it cannot be taken up or used by any other. Thankfully we can appropriate the *result* of the outpouring. The scripture says, "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin", 1 John 1: 7. There is power, wondrous cleansing power, in that precious blood! We commend Him to you, the Saviour, and His precious blood.

Then we have the fat, and you will notice that the fat is burned in order that it might be "a sweet odour to Jehovah". We have often been reminded that the fat speaks to us of the excellence of the offering. The fat is something which only comes to light when the animal dies. I

speak carefully, I trust, in connection with the blessed, holy Person of our Lord Jesus, but just as there was something excellent about all His holy life, just as there was something morally excellent about His words, His ways and His precious walk, I think at the cross there was (words fail us) something superlatively excellent. I think it lies in this: all through His precious life He was wholly devoted to the will of God, but He was wholly devoted to the will of God during His life even while He was enjoying the sweetest of communion with His Father; but there upon the cross He was just as devoted to the will of God even while He was being forsaken by Him! I link that with the fat, the excellence of the offering. Think of the sweet odour that ascended to God as He looked down upon one blessed Man who was wholly for God, just as wholly for God even when God had forsaken Him. There has never been a Man like Him! The cross has been referred to as the moral wonder of the universe. Think of the sweet odour that ascended to God from the precious sacrifice of Jesus.

Then it says, "and the priest shall make atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him". It is very lovely that forgiveness comes in immediately after the reference to the "sweet odour". It reminds one of what John says, "your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake", 1 John 2: 12. If you will come to Him through repentance and faith, God will forgive your sins, not because you deserve to be forgiven, but He will do it for Jesus' sake. He will do it because there is one blessed Man who has so infinitely satisfied His heart in respect of the putting away of your sins. You say, 'I do not deserve to be forgiven'. That is true, dear friend. Many of us have wearied ourselves seeking something in ourselves that would merit God's forgiveness. You will never find it. But God will forgive your sins tonight not because you deserve it, though you need it, but He will do it for Jesus' sake. "I write to you, children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake". You draw near to God tonight, you mention that precious Name, and you will find you have immediate access to God. You mention the precious Name of Jesus and you will find that God is ready to hear you. If you ask Him to forgive you for Jesus' sake then God will do it. He will do it because He owes it to one blessed Man who "offered himself spotless to God", Heb 9: 14. God is doing honour to one blessed Man through every sinner that He receives in Jesus' Name. He is showing what He thinks of that blessed Man and of the work that He has done. And God is going to fill heaven with sinners saved by grace, for He will have an eternal witness to what His thoughts are of one blessed Man, and of His appreciation of His precious blood.

That is what led me to Acts 2. This is the answer on God's part to the work that Jesus has done. Peter says, "This Jesus has God raised up". You say, 'Which Jesus was that, Peter? Which Jesus is it that you are talking about?'. It is "this Jesus". He refers earlier to "Jesus the Nazaraean", v 22. The same blessed Man who was once here upon the earth, the same blessed Man who once took the sinner's place, that is the Jesus that God has raised up. That is the Jesus, the very same, who is now "exalted by the right hand of God". I know that you have heard the gospel before. I know that you are familiar with the terms of the gospel already, but think of the wonder of this, that there is a Man seated at the right hand of God tonight, and that that is the Man who was once "wounded for our transgressions". Think of the glory of this, that there should be a Man seated at the right hand of God, a Man where no man has ever been before, but not any man, but the same blessed Man who was once "bruised for our iniquities". You say, 'Where is He?'. There He is! Do you want to get God's view of Him? Just look up, and see the place that God has given to Him! Do you want to know that His work has satisfied God? Look at the place that God has given to Him? Do you want to know whether your sins have been fully dealt with in the sight of God? God has "highly exalted him", Phil 2: 9. He would not be there if anything had been left undone. He would not be there with your sins still upon Him. But the fact that God has raised Him from amongst the dead is the most powerful and outstanding testimony that you could have to God's delight in Him as a Person and His satisfaction with the work that He has done.

Then it says, "Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which ye behold and hear". Now here is something else which God has done to honour Jesus. He has not only given Him the highest place, He has not only put Him at His right hand - no other man could fill that place - but He has done more: He has made Jesus the Giver of the Holy Spirit. There is something else that God has in mind in the gospel, not only that your sins should be forgiven, but also that you might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now the Holy Spirit has been referred to as the greatest gift which even God could give. Whom is God going to entrust with the distribution of this precious gift? God is very interested in who receives the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is freely given, but He is not given to just anyone and everyone. Whom could God entrust with the administration of this wonderful gift? He has bestowed it upon the Lord Jesus, a further honour, a further testimony, to God's approbation of Him; that, having been "exalted by the right hand of God", He has also "received of the Father the promise of the

Holy Spirit". And what is He doing? He is pouring it out. "He has poured out this which ye behold and hear." I love some of these scripture expressions: "my blood, which is **poured out** for you", Luke 22: 20. You get some sense of the depth and fulness of divine love. He has "*poured out*" the Holy Spirit.

Now, the question, of course, that must be raised with each one of us is, have we received the Holy Spirit? Perhaps I could raise that with every person in this room, every man and woman, and every boy and girl too. Have you received the gift of the Holy Spirit? God from His side is ready to give, but have you received? It is possible to be a believer on the Lord Jesus and not have received the Holy Spirit. I do not say that that is normal, but it is possible. The question was once raised with certain persons: "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye had believed?", Acts 19: 2. Perhaps we could ask that of you, if you are a believer: did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed, or was it some time later, or are you perhaps not sure whether you have ever received the Holy Spirit? God would like to raise interest with you, and exercise, as to this wonderful gift that is available for every person who has had his sins forgiven. God desires that you might receive the Holy Spirit, and He would point you to the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus is the Giver of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of living water. God would point you to Him, and we would point you to Him, that if there be any doubt in your mind as to whether you have received the Holy Spirit, you might have to do with the Lord Jesus about it.

You will not get far without the Holy Spirit. Just to be very simple and plain about it, you will not even enjoy the forgiveness of your sins without the Holy Spirit, and you certainly cannot enjoy the love of God without the Holy Spirit. You have probably heard the brethren speaking about the assembly, and the Christian circle. Until you have received the Holy Spirit you remain outside the Christian circle as far as enjoyment is concerned. You can see how important it is that we should receive the Holy Spirit. Above all, the Holy Spirit links us with our beloved Saviour in the place where He is now. It is not only that He has been here and died for us, but He is now exalted. The Holy Spirit makes Him real to our souls, He brings His glory into our hearts and, especially, I think, He gives us some impression of God's thoughts about Him.

Oh what a Saviour He is, the Lord Jesus! Think of what he has suffered for us! Dear friends and brethren, He is commended to you in the glad tidings today. There is no reason why anyone here should not have his sins forgiven. I go back to the sin-offering again. It was the only thing that could remove that sin from the sight of God. There was

nothing else that could remove that guilty stain. And the only way to settle your sins with God tonight is through personal faith in the Saviour and in His precious blood. We commend Him to you on God's behalf, and trust that God may bless the word to each of our souls.

Malvern

9th May 2010

RETAINING IMPRESSSIONS

Ron D Plant

Luke 2: 27-35

John 21: 20-23

Revelation 3: 8-11

It is just a simple word that came to me as our brother spoke earlier today about this scripture in Luke, beloved brethren, where as to Simeon it says that "*he* received him into his arms". Scripture does not record that he ever let Him go. It never records, as far as I know, that he gave the Child back. Now we know of course as a matter of fact that he must have done because of subsequent history, but Scripture is very careful, especially Luke who writes with method and accuracy. He speaks about that. It just struck me, beloved brethren, what an important thing it is that, if in some way you have received such an impression of Christ, and I would think that everyone here has received an impression of Christ, it is a vital thing that you never let it go. Simeon was not an official priest; it speaks of him as "a man in Jerusalem". It is almost as if the official priest never came into sight at all because Simeon, who is "a man in Jerusalem", is there and it gives his qualifications, the fact that "he came in the Spirit", and that he was "just and pious, and the Holy Spirit was upon him". This man was in that condition as he came into the temple here. It is as if he supersedes the whole official system here, and he receives "the child Jesus" in his arms, and Scripture does not record that he let him go. My simple impression, beloved brethren, and it may seem very simple, is that.

There were others in Scripture who received a divinely given impression in their day that remained with them through the whole of their life. Moses was a man who, after dwelling behind the wilderness for forty years, where he looked after his father-in-law's sheep, received an impression as God appeared to him in the desert at the bush that was on fire and was not consumed. He turns aside to see it, and God spoke to him out of the bush, "loose thy sandals from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground", Ex 3: 5. The impression that remained with Moses all his life was a sense of the divine committal to the people. He never forgot it. And you may remember that when the people had sinned so grievously by building the golden calf and Jehovah's anger was burning against them, that Moses intercedes with God. Such was his impression that he had received at the bush, that God was in the midst of His people and He was not consuming them, that he stands before God there in the breach that their sin had created.

The psalmist very beautifully says, speaking of Jehovah, "And he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses, his chosen, stood before him in the breach", Ps 106: 23. He says, "blot me ... out", Ex 32: 32; the impression that he received at the beginning of his active spiritual life remained with him.

What was your impression, beloved? I believe that everyone here when they first had an impression of Christ had something that is distinctive to them. Every one has something that is a little different, it may be very different, but at least a little different from every other believer so that the glories of Christ are magnified everywhere. Here is Simeon and, as I say, he received the Child in his arms, and it is almost as though he never let Him go. Have you let impressions go, beloved? The enemy will be at you continually day in, day out in order to tempt you and persuade you to give up your impression of Christ; but, beloved, seek God's help that you might be preserved in it. It goes on to speak about what this Child would be, "a light for revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel". You could imagine Simeon holding the Child there. He speaks of what "this child" would be. The Gentiles were going to come into the full shining of God, and we are here tonight, beloved, as a result of what came out in this Child, the full blessing of God has come out to the Gentiles, "and the glory of thy people Israel"; the fulness of that awaits a time still to come. You may say, 'These are wonderful thoughts', and he is still holding the Child in his arms when he says, "this child is set for the fall and rising up of many in Israel". This brings out that there is the testing, moral side to the reception of the Lord Jesus but everything that God has is in Christ. So my simple word is, if you receive an impression of Christ, and perhaps you have received one today, seek God's help that you never let it go.

I read in John. This is slightly different but I was just impressed with this reference to "the disciple whom Jesus loved". John the writer never refers to himself by name. He refers to "that disciple whom Jesus loved" (v 7) and various variations of that, and so it is here, "the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also leaned at supper on his breast ... Peter, seeing him, says to Jesus, Lord, and what of this man?" I do not go into what lay behind Peter's question here, but Jesus says, "If I will that he abide until I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me", and immediately the word goes out that the Lord had said that he did not die, but Scripture carefully says that He did not say that. What He says is, "If I will that he abide until I come", that is not simply John, that is the character of man who was loved by Jesus, and that was John's impression which he cherished. My point in this is that if I want to be

preserved as loving Christ I shall need to be preserved in a sense of being loved by Christ. The one who is going to be preserved to the end, who is going to hold things to the end is not one who becomes overly occupied with his own love for Christ, but one who has the sense of being loved by Christ. That is just my impression there, beloved. He did not say that John would abide until He came, but I do believe that when the Lord Jesus comes there will be persons on earth who have been loved by Christ, and there will be a place on earth where He has been loved, and I would like to be part of that; I would like to hold on to that.

Now, just finally as to that scripture in Revelation recorded by John as to Philadelphia, where the Lord speaks about setting before them "an opened door, which no one can shut, because thou hast a little power, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I make them of the synagogue of Satan ..." and so on; "and shall know that I have loved thee". We were speaking recently about Rebecca in Sarah's tent and the time that we are in. It has been set on when in the type Rebecca comes to Isaac. The assembly typically fills the place that properly belonged to another, as Rebecca enters the tent that had been vacated following Sarah's death. We may say that it speaks of Israel's passing, and the assembly entering into an area of things in testimony which is not properly her own, because the assembly is a heavenly vessel. She enters into an area of things in the testimony that should have been filled by Israel, in response to Christ. She fills the position gloriously which belonged to another. It says of Rebecca, "and she became his wife, and he loved her", Gen 24: 67. That is a lovely touch. But what strikes me about this scripture is here, right at the end, where He says "and shall know that I have loved thee". I believe, beloved brethren, that we need to be preserved not in concentration upon our love for Christ, that will follow, but in the blessedness of Christ's love for us. I think that is where the secret to not letting go lies. I think that the departure of Ephesus from first love was not exactly their love for Christ but their sense of His love for them. I think that was the departure at Ephesus. But what I also wanted to draw attention to here is that it says, "because thou hast a little power ... and hast not denied my name". It does not say, 'because you *had* a little power'; it does not say, 'because you *did* not deny my name', but "hast not". It is as if the whole thing was carried right through. Now, beloved brother or sister, if you have found the grace to care for the testimony and for Christ at the present time, seek God's help that you might be maintained in it. It may only be a little, but it will be "a little power", and it will be an element in which you will still find a little grace not to deny His Name. It may be at

school, maybe at work, maybe in the local meeting; wherever it is, you will find grace not to deny His Name here. You may feel weak in it, you may be conscious of the difficulties of the day, but if you have been given grace for it so far, seek His grace that you might be maintained in it and do not let it go.

I suggest these things to the brethren; it is just an impression that it does not say of Simeon that he let the Child go; it does not say of Caleb that he ever died; it does not say of Daniel, who continued right the way through the captivity to the end, that he ever died. That is how these things are presented in the Scriptures. It is as if these things are mentioned in the way they are that we might be encouraged to see that it is not only a question of where we are now but of being sustained to the end. For His Name's sake.

Glasgow

3rd August 2010

DANIEL'S CAPTIVITY

Paul W Burton

Daniel 1: 1, 2, 8-16; 3: 1, 8-18, 24-27; 6: 4-11, 16-22

I think the exercises of Daniel and his companions have a certain counterpart to the exercises of Ruth that we considered earlier. Ruth was helped, through the sovereign work of God, to turn her back on her own country and the circumstances in which she was brought up and commit herself fully to the people of God, finding her inheritance in another sphere where the blessings of God were to be found. I trust there might be some stimulation in your heart to do the same - to move from the circumstances in which naturally you live your life to find your place in the area where God has purposed you for His blessing.

Daniel was brought up in the sphere of God's purpose. He was an Israelite and lived his early years in the land of promise. I think we could say from the exercises that are brought out in this book that Daniel valued his inheritance and that he loved the land. In the governmental ways of God, Daniel had to move from that land, where I am sure he would have wished to live his life, into another land altogether. He went into captivity. In that sense, his experience was the converse of Ruth's. I think both experiences are something the believer knows. I trust you might come to enjoy, value and appreciate the wonderful richness of the blessings that God has in His heart for you, and the realm in which those blessings are found. Then you find that you have to go back into this world where Christ is not, into a sphere that is alien to the believer and completely different to that which you have enjoyed of heavenly things. It is part of the ways of God and His wisdom enters into it. I cannot exactly explain why God should do that but we are to accept it. There is a sense in which we are in captivity. If you go to school, or if you go out to work, the time which you spend there is not exactly time you can spend doing what you want to do, even if what you want to do would be profitable with respect to the Lord's things. If you are at your employment it would not be right to sit at your desk all day reading your Bible, even though it might do you a lot of good in your soul. You have to do what somebody else asks you to do, as long as that does not impinge on your conscience before God. There is a certain amount of restriction in it and sometimes it might seem quite irksome. Sometimes you might feel really on fire for the Lord and you would really like to pursue His things and Monday morning comes and you have to take up something else. If you carry your exercises before God it will not be to your spiritual detriment, and from the examples of scripture there is something very distinctive that

God uses through the experience of captivity. If you look at the captives of scripture you get remarkable things coming out of such persons. You get remarkable things coming out of Daniel not only from the practical matters of life that he faced, of which we have read, but also in what God revealed to him. There is a striking correspondence between that which Daniel wrote of and that which John wrote in the Revelation, and perhaps it should be no surprise to us that John was in captive circumstances as well. There seems to be certain things that God does through captives, those who accept the position of restriction, that is distinctive. So do not be discouraged by things that seem to take a lot of time and from which there does not always seem to be much profit, because if you go through those experiences with God He will bring out something distinctive through them.

Daniel was taken out of one sphere and put into a completely different sphere which would not have been of his choosing. One of the first points with Daniel is that he accepted the ways of God in discipline. He did not fight against it; he did not get despondent and down-hearted about it. He felt very deeply what God had had to bring upon His people but it did not cast him down; he accepted it. He lived his life in this foreign land in a very profitable way. My exercise in reading of Daniel is to raise with us the exercise of how we are to be kept in a foreign land, in a place of captivity. That is the anomaly of the believer, our life is not here; it is somewhere else and everything connected with what is real and attractive to the believer is not here; yet we have to live here. It is a scene that would cast many things in the way of the believer to seek to divert him. You might ask, how then is a believer to be kept in this sphere? How was Daniel kept? If we look at Daniel's history he started off in this book as a young man and he lived right through the captivity without, as far as scripture records, ever going back to his land. For over seventy years Daniel lived in a completely foreign sphere without ever losing the true value of his inheritance or of his link with God. He faithfully served those under whom he was put in God's governmental ways and yet never lost sight of the pre-eminence of the claims of God. I think this is an exercise that many of us would feel: how can you go through life here with its pressures and difficulties, maintaining a righteous and faithful walk with a good testimony, yet holding to the supremacy of the claims of God despite all that Satan would subtly put in front of you?

I would like to reiterate something that we covered in the reading. One thing that I think is essential is that we have some impression of the pre-eminence of Christ. What does the Lord Jesus

mean to you? It is a very simple thing; it is something perhaps we often ask in the gospel. I think we need to go on asking it; what does Christ mean to me? Is He pre-eminent? I think it is important we come to some definite point, the earlier in our lives the better, when we acknowledge that Christ is everything. You might have aspirations in regard to what you want to do for a career, or for a husband or wife, or many other things but if, in the ways and the will of God, those things were never given to you, would you be happy? Is Christ enough for you? The reason I press this is because when tests and disappointments come and things become very contrary in our circumstances naturally, if Christ is everything to you, it will keep and hold you. I think many of us know what it is to drift at times; we may not always be kept in the living gain of our appreciation of the Lord Jesus but I do believe if you have come to some distinct appreciation in your soul of His pre-eminence it will preserve you. I think something of the exceeding preciousness of God's thoughts in relation to the land and Jerusalem must have been deeply engrained on Daniel's heart and soul which kept and sustained him through the years of captivity.

On being carried away into captivity, Daniel must have soberly considered what his life would be and the experiences through which he might have to pass. He seems to come quickly to the conclusion that, if he was to be preserved, as belonging to the people of God, and not become integrated into the Babylonish kingdom, he must keep himself from the things that would pollute him. He "purposed in his heart that he would not pollute himself with the king's delicate food". It was a deliberate decision that Daniel made. He accepted the governmental ways of God, he accepted his place in captivity, but he did not accept that he had to act like those around him, or take part in all the things that they did. He had the knowledge of better things and he would not pollute himself. You might say it was a small thing, the king's delicate food was not a thing of gross evil, as some of the things they had to face later were, but Daniel's purposing in his heart with his companions preserved them, enabling them to stand faithful when the tests got greater when the enemy came in and tried to break down their faithfulness to God. I think what greatly helped them was that at the outset they would not compromise in regard to the things that this world would offer. I would simply say to each one to purpose in your heart not to pollute yourself with the things of this world that will be to the detriment of your enjoyment of the spiritual and heavenly things, that may lead you to go against the injunctions and exhortations of scripture or may lead to coldness in your affection for Christ. It may not be a big thing but be assured that that one not very big thing will lead to another

not very big thing and so pollution will get in. Pollution spreads, and before you know it things have become contaminated well outside the area where the pollution first came. That is like the body and life of the believer; the world's things can enter in and contaminate. Daniel said, in our language, 'Christ is pre-eminent, nothing must take anything away from my link with Him and the things that I enjoy in His love'.

The next test we read of comes in chapter 3 in regard to the image of gold that Nebuchadnezzar had set up with the instruction that all were to fall down and worship it. You might say that is obviously quite wrong, not something we would do and perhaps you think it does not really affect us very much in this country. In some areas of the world these things do still literally happen and perhaps you think that no one is telling *you* to bow down before an image, but I think this image of gold would speak of the greatness, pride and achievements of man and his world. I suppose Nebuchadnezzar may have got the idea of his image from the previous chapter when Daniel had explained his dream to him when he saw a great image, "This image's head was of fine gold" (Dan 2: 32), and Daniel had said to Nebuchadnezzar "thou art this head of gold", v 38. I suppose Nebuchadnezzar had thought, 'That is very good, I will set up an image like that and all can worship it'. We live in a day that is marked by man's pride in his achievements. You can look at the world, its entertainment, its religion, its technology and science, and how proud man is of it. He would bow down to this knowledge and greatness to the point that man claims to be utterly independent of God. Man and man's world would replace every thought of God with this golden image. Whatever it is that you might have an interest in, whether it is in science, technology or sport or whatever, the pressure is to fall down before the pinnacle of man's achievements, independent of God. Of course man does not often stop to think that in all his achievements and his civilisation, the things that blight man's world are not diminishing. The prisons are not getting any less full, wars, strifes, famines and disasters are no different despite man's advancement in knowledge and technology. It is very seductive, and you might be very impressed by man's technology. We may have to use it as part of our responsibilities in this world, but do you bow down to it? I think that these things, which are part of this world, can very quickly become a large part of our life and it can draw you away, if you allow it, from the things of our Lord Jesus and from the preciousness of your link with Him. I contrast the simplicity of Christianity with the complicated nature of man's world. Your link with God through Christ in the power of the Spirit is a profound yet simple matter. The life of a believer as lived to God, a life of piety and dependence upon God to provide your needs

day by day is a very simple but precious thing and is in sharp contrast to the complexity of this world and its system. Is there not something very attractive in stepping aside from all the confusion, complications and inconsistencies of this world and enjoy your link with Christ in a sphere of things that will never fail. I would desire that the pre-eminence of Christ in our heart may preserve and keep us from being drawn into the things of this world and its system that men bow down to.

It was a considerable test to the faith of these men, but how beautiful is their answer. Nebuchadnezzar says, you are going to be thrown into the fiery furnace, and these men reply, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace" - maybe they had read Isaiah's prophecy, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned", Isa 43: 2. They laid hold of the promise of God. They come into Hebrews 11, not mentioned by name, but witnesses of those who could go through these things in the strength of their faith in God. Do you have that absolute confidence and faith that God will see you through? You do not have to compromise with this world; you do not have to rely on the world and its organisations. Men would say, 'If you join with us we will look after you and fight for your job for you'. God will take care of us and He can preserve your job if it is His will, but it is not for us to dictate what He will do. I can seek to walk in faith and dependence upon God but I cannot demand that God preserves me from certain things that may come upon me in this world; but we do know that God will be with us through the circumstances He passes us through. These men in Daniel say, "But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods". Prove that faith, that link with God, through the pressures of life here, not just as a theory, but something that you prove day by day with God. If we try to avoid the testings and sufferings, and sometimes we do, we will lose out because we will not prove the reality of what faith in God can do. How often we turn to God as a last resort - He should be the first and only resort for the believer.

I have often wondered where Daniel was in chapter 3. I am sure he did not fall down before the image, but he is not mentioned there. Daniel has his own test in chapter 6. Here the enemy has another try. Daniel is no longer a young man here; he was probably in his eighties by the time we come to chapter 6. He is an older man now - but still faithful. Think of the faithfulness of a man that had remained all these years, yet still the enemy tries to find a chink in Daniel's armour and interrupt his link with God. That is what the enemy is doing, seeing if he

can find one chink, something that would lead you one step away from dependence on God. You might think we do not have many lions' dens these days, but we have, "a roaring lion" who "walks about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5: 8); that is a reality. Thank God for the power that shuts the lion's mouth for those that depend upon Him. Paul proved that, "I was delivered out of the lion's mouth", 2 Tim 4: 17. It is very real; not just a Bible story we like to read as a child. Daniel's God is our God, His power and willingness to shut the lion's mouth is still there. The Lord said of his own, "I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matt 10: 16), you may say, 'Was that the wisest thing to do?'. You may not think the sheep would spend very long alive in the midst of wolves, but the Lord says, "As to those whom thou hast given me, I have not lost one of them", John 18: 9. Do you have trust in the Shepherd care of the Lord Jesus that sends you into an environment where, according to human wisdom and resources, you cannot possibly survive? Daniel's test was dependence on God. It is very subtle, it says, "whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, except of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions". Would not the enemy have suggested to Daniel that it would be worth compromising just for thirty days - 'It would not stop you praying Daniel; just do not be seen to be doing it for thirty days and everything will be fine. You have your place in the kingdom, the respect that you have amongst men, you should not throw all that away'. Sometimes the enemy would speak like that. Paul was willing to be a fool for Christ's sake. It is right that we should seek to have a good testimony amongst men in as far as it is possible, but not to the detriment of the claims of God upon us.

How well these men knew Daniel! They knew that in his faithfulness he would not stop praying, which is why they devised this decree. That is a remarkable testimony of Daniel. So, he goes very deliberately, with that same purpose of heart, as soon as he knew the decree was signed. It says, "he went into his house; and, his windows being open in his upper chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled on his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime". Such a man is owning that his link with, and dependence on, God comes before everything else. There is no other claim that can ever be greater or have priority over your link with God. Daniel "kneeled on his knees three times a day". If we can assume that he started this custom as soon as he came into captivity, and I think from his history we can suppose that he did, then Daniel would have prayed towards Jerusalem in excess of seventy four thousand times. What faithfulness, what committal, what desire he had, and here he is, some sixty eight years into his captivity living in a foreign land, with his

desire and feelings for what related to the purpose of God unchanged and undiminished. Daniel stood apart, not polluted, not diverted, not having lost his link with God, his outlook still towards Jerusalem. Do you still have that desire, that longing, that motivation for the things of God? In Philippians 3 Paul bursts out, “to know him, and the power of his resurrection”, v 10. Do you know him well enough yet? Paul would know the Lord Jesus far better than I do, I am assured of that. Paul was in prison, coming towards the end of his life, a life spent serving the Lord, yet the burning focus of his life was not to be released, but “to know him” - a desire undimmed by the trials and the sufferings that he had been through. Is that what you think about when you get up in the morning - is it “to know him”? Think of the experiences of the day through which you pass, troubling maybe, difficult sometimes, joyous other times, but through it all can you say: 'I have known Him a little better'? Have you gone through those circumstances with the Lord Jesus, just as the divine presence was known by those three men in the furnace? Daniel knelt and prayed. If there is one thing that will keep us in this world, in an environment that is hostile and completely alien to the believer, it is prayer.

I will quote again what we had in the reading but as it is rendered in the Authorised Version, “exhorted all with purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord”, Acts 11: 23. That verse encapsulates the committal of Daniel and Ruth.

May it be so for His Name's sake.

London

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